

# A cross-cultural examination of subordinates' perceptions of and reactions to abusive supervision

RYAN M. VOGEL<sup>1\*</sup>, MARIE S. MITCHELL<sup>2</sup>, BENNETT J. TEPPER<sup>3</sup>,  
SIMON L. D. RESTUBOG<sup>4</sup>, CHANGYA HU<sup>5</sup>, WEI HUA<sup>6</sup> AND JUI-CHIEH HUANG<sup>7</sup>

<sup>1</sup>*Penn State Erie, The Behrend College, Erie, Pennsylvania, U.S.A.*

<sup>2</sup>*Terry College of Business, University of Georgia, Athens, Georgia, U.S.A.*

<sup>3</sup>*Fisher College of Business, The Ohio State University, Columbus, Ohio, U.S.A.*

<sup>4</sup>*College of Business and Economics, The Australian National University, Canberra, ACT, Australia*

<sup>5</sup>*Department of Business Administration, National Chengchi University, Taipei City, Taiwan*

<sup>6</sup>*International Perspective Pte Ltd, Singapore*

<sup>7</sup>*National Taipei University of Business*

## Summary

This manuscript explores cross-cultural differences in reactions to perceived abusive supervision. Based on an integration of fairness heuristic theory with principles about cross-cultural differences in the importance of hierarchical status, we theorize that subordinates from the Anglo culture perceive and react to abusive supervision more negatively than subordinates from the Confucian Asian culture. The predictions were tested within two field studies. Study 1 results show that culture moderated the direct effect of perceived abusive supervision on interpersonal justice and the indirect effects of perceived abusive supervision (via interpersonal justice) on subordinates' trust in the supervisor and work effort. The negative effects of perceived abusive supervision were stronger for subordinates within the Anglo versus the Confucian Asian culture; subordinates from Anglo culture compared with Confucian Asian culture perceived abusive supervision as less fair. Perceived abusive supervision indirectly and negatively influenced subordinates' trust in the supervisor and work effort. Study 2 replicated the findings from Study 1 and extended them to show culture (Anglo vs. Confucian culture) moderated the effects because it influences subordinates' power distance orientation. Copyright © 2014 John Wiley & Sons, Ltd.

**Keywords:** culture; cross-cultural management; abusive supervision; interpersonal justice; power distance orientation

The increasing trend of globalization has drawn research attention to how culture affects business practices and leadership effectiveness (Javidan, Dorfman, de Luque, & House, 2006). It is widely accepted that culture plays an important role in shaping leader–follower interpersonal dynamics (Brislin, 2000; Hofstede, 1980). Much of the cross-cultural leadership research that has progressed has examined cultural differences in the effects of positive and effective leader behavior (see Tsui, Nifadkar, & Ou, 2007, for a review). This research shows that subordinates from different cultures view some positive leader behaviors (i.e., charisma and transformational leadership) similarly, while the effects of other leader behaviors do not generalize across cultures. For instance, an empowering leadership style seems to strongly motivate subordinates from the Anglo culture (i.e., the U.S.A.), but it is less effective in motivating subordinates from other countries and cultures (Robert, Probst, Martocchio, Drasgow, & Lawler, 2000; Triandis, 2002).

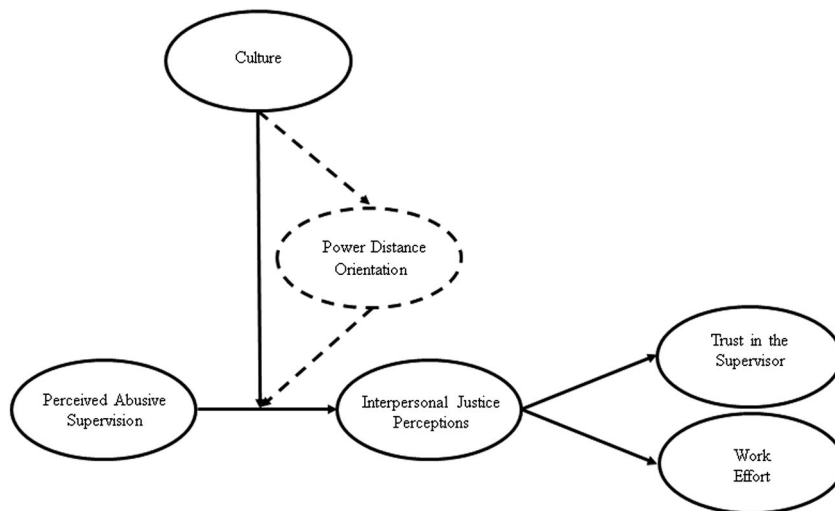
Although researchers have developed considerable knowledge about cross-cultural differences in reactions to positive leadership behaviors, the depth of knowledge on cross-cultural effects related to negative and hostile leadership behaviors is far more limited (Martinko, Harvey, Brees, & Mackey, 2013; Tepper, 2007). This is surprising, as research

\*Correspondence to: Ryan M. Vogel, Penn State Erie, The Behrend College, 265 Burke Center, 5101 Jordan Road, Erie, PA 16563. U.S.A.  
E-mail: rmv13@psu.edu

has demonstrated that not all leaders engage in positive behaviors toward their subordinates (Martinko et al., 2013). Some leaders interact with their subordinates using hostile and negative behaviors, such as ridiculing, lying to, stealing ideas from, and ignoring subordinates (Tepper, 2000). These types of behaviors are known as abusive supervision, defined as subordinates' perceptions of the extent to which supervisors engage in the sustained display of hostile verbal and nonverbal behaviors (Tepper, 2000). Subordinates negatively react to abusive supervision because supervisors who treat their subordinates with hostility are perceived to violate social norms of appropriate interpersonal conduct (see Martinko et al., 2013 and Tepper, 2007, for reviews) and, specifically, fairness rules associated with treating others with respect and dignity (Tepper, 2000).

We question whether abusive supervision behaviors are perceived as similarly unfair from subordinates across different cultures. Different cultures highlight dissimilar norms about interpersonal interactions, such as those that prescribe how supervisors should treat subordinates. For instance, the Anglo/Western culture (e.g., U.S.A.) emphasizes norms that would suggest that abusive supervision is highly unfair and inappropriate. By contrast, the Confucian Asian culture emphasizes hierarchical status differences and legitimizes the use of hostility by those in authority against the less powerful as a necessary means of maintaining control and social order (Bond, 2004; Hofstede, Hofstede, & Minkov, 2010). Therefore, it is possible for subordinates from the Confucian Asian culture to view abusive supervision as more interpersonally fair compared with subordinates from the Anglo culture. If this is the case, the strength of subordinates' reactions to perceived abusive supervision likely differs across cultures.

The purpose of our study is to develop and test a theoretical model that explains how culture influences subordinates' perceptions of and reactions to abusive supervision (see Figure 1). Based on an integration of fairness heuristic theory (Lind, Kulik, Ambrose, & de Vera Park, 1993; Tyler & Lind, 1992) with principles about cross-cultural differences in the importance of hierarchical status (e.g., Bond, 2004; Hofstede et al., 2010; Tyler, Lind, & Huo, 2000), we argue that culture shapes the heuristic subordinates use when interpreting supervisory behavior. In particular, culture is theorized to affect subordinates' assessments about the fairness of abusive supervision and, accordingly, the level of trust subordinates hold in their supervisor and the level of effort they put into task behavior. Specifically, we suggest that within Confucian Asian culture, subordinates' heuristics will suggest that abusive supervision behaviors are more acceptable and, therefore, perceived abusive supervision will be viewed as more fair, which will suggest that these leaders are more trustworthy and these subordinates should exert more effort



Note. Dashed lines represent relationships tested in Study 2.

Figure 1. Theoretical model

into their work. In contrast, within Anglo/Western culture, subordinates' heuristics will suggest abusive supervision behaviors are unacceptable and inappropriate and, therefore, perceived abusive supervision will be viewed as less fair, which will suggest that these leaders are less trustworthy and these subordinates should exert less effort into their work. Additionally, we propose that the reason why culture affects subordinates' perceptions of and reactions to abusive supervision is because culture directly influences subordinates' orientation toward hierarchical power differences (i.e., power distance orientation). Our theoretical model positions power distance orientation as the proximal mechanism by which the distal moderator, culture, impacts fairness perceptions about abusive supervision.

Our study provides meaningful contributions to the literature. For example, our work extends the literature that has examined the cross-cultural effects of leadership behaviors. Tsui et al. (2007) pointed out that although some leadership behaviors have shown varying cross-cultural effects, many behaviors, such as transformational and charismatic leadership, do not. To this point and germane to our study, Kirkman, Chen, Farh, Chen, and Lowe (2009) found that transformational leadership was perceived as similarly fair by subordinates across different cultures. Scholars (e.g., Kirkman et al., 2009; Tsui et al., 2007) have suggested that researchers refine the theoretical basis to better explain why certain leader behaviors are more positively received than others. We address this call by integrating fairness heuristic theory (Lind, 2001; Lind et al., 1993) with principles about cross-cultural differences (e.g., Bond, 2004; Hofstede et al., 2010; Tyler et al., 2000) to provide a lens explaining why subordinates do not view abusive supervision behaviors similarly across cultures. In particular, we suggest that culture provides a basis for the acceptability of authority that sensitizes subordinates to and thereby blunts the negative effects of perceived abusive supervision. Thus, our work suggests that abusive supervision is perceived differently from other positive leadership behaviors (i.e., charismatic leadership and transformational leadership). Accordingly, abusive supervision is not simply the inverse of positive leadership behaviors.

Further, our research highlights an important clarification to models examining the influence of culture on how subordinates respond to perceived abusive supervision and, perhaps, to leadership behaviors more generally. To date, much of the work on abusive supervision has focused on cultural value orientations (e.g., Lian, Ferris, & Brown, 2012; Lin, Wang, & Chen, 2013; Liu, Kwan, Wu, & Wu, 2010; Wang, Mao, Wu, & Liu, 2012), and all of this work has focused on samples of subordinates from within a single country. Thus, our knowledge of the consequences of abusive supervision is limited to a within-culture understanding of the phenomenon. Similarly, most of the research examining cultural effects with respect to organizational justice has been limited to examining the effects from data collected in one country (see Shao, Rupp, Skarlicki, & Jones, 2013). Of the studies examining between-country effects, "cultural values theorized to explain the differences in justice effects were not always explicitly included in the theoretical models and the subsequent empirical analyses. Thus, it is unclear whether national culture or something else (e.g., economic development, history, or politics) explains the cross-country differences in justice effects" (Shao et al., 2013, p. 264).

Our research addresses these issues by focusing on understanding between-country differences in reactions to perceived abusive supervision. Culture researchers (e.g., Tsui et al., 2007) have suggested that researchers must consider the overall property of the culture concept—that individuals' cultural orientations derive from host countries or specific groups. Culture shapes the beliefs, opinions, attitudes, and perceptions of its inhabitants and, therefore, shapes the degree to which individuals adopt certain cultural values (Hofstede, 1980; Triandis, 1994). We contend that culture forms the basis of whether individuals accept particular values that influence the nature of leader-subordinate interactions. A focus only on cultural value orientations assumes the values studied are prescribed within a particular country of origin. However, that may or may not be the case (Brewer & Venaik, 2014). By conducting a cross-cultural test, we are better able to understand the distal influence of country culture on the adoption of particular cultural orientations and thereby build knowledge about the extent to which abusive supervision shows differential effects both between- and within-culture. Our research addresses this issue with an examination of the cross-cultural effects of perceived abusive supervision in two studies of working adults from different countries of origin.

## Theory and Hypothesis Development

In their relational model of authority, Lind and Tyler (Lind, 2001; Tyler, 1998; Tyler & Lind, 1992) argued that subordinates' fairness perceptions are heavily dependent on the quality of the treatment they receive from their supervisor. Lind and Tyler specified that individuals have a fundamental need to be treated with respect and dignity and to feel that they belong. Among the many sources of information available to subordinates about whether they are being treated fairly, none are more influential than the quality of the treatment received from supervisors. Relational principles of justice suggest that supervisor treatment signals to subordinates their social standing within the workgroup. Being treated by supervisors in a respectful manner is considered fair because it suggests the subordinate is a valued workgroup member; being treated in a hostile or disrespectful manner is considered less fair because it marginalizes subordinates, leaving them to feel excluded from the workgroup (e.g., Ashforth, 1997; Penhaligon, Louis, & Restubog, 2009). Therefore, subordinates' interpersonal interactions with supervisors directly influence subordinates' perceptions of interpersonal justice (defined as the degree to which subordinates are treated with respect, politeness, and dignity; Bies & Moag, 1986).

Abusive supervision has been found to violate individuals' expectations of respectful social interaction (Cropanzano, Rupp, Mohler, & Schminke, 2001), which is why subordinates perceive abusive supervision as unfair (Aryee, Chen, Sun, & Debrah, 2007; Burton & Hoobler, 2011; Lian et al., 2012; Rafferty & Restubog, 2011; Tepper, 2000). Justice principles (Bies, 2001; Bies & Moag, 1986; Lind, 2001) suggest that when subordinates perceive interpersonal treatment to be unfair, they feel little obligation to reciprocate benefits to the supervisor. Research supports these ideas. For example, when subordinates perceive abusive supervisor behavior as unfair, they are less likely to engage in prosocial behavior and more likely to act aggressively (e.g., Aryee et al., 2007; Burton & Hoobler, 2011; Rafferty & Restubog, 2011). A key underlying assumption of these arguments, however, is that abusive supervision is considered to be a violation of interpersonal norms by *all* subordinates. We question whether that is the case among subordinates from different cultures.

Fairness heuristic theory (Lind, 2001; Lind et al., 1993) extended the relational model of authority and suggests that fairness assessments are shaped by behavioral norms. Subordinates take into account norms about the acceptability of certain behaviors to understand their surroundings and, specifically, to determine whether their supervisor's behavior toward them is fair (van den Bos, 2001). Because cultures differ in the extent to which hierarchical status differences are emphasized and the extent to which hostile treatment toward those in subsidiary positions is appropriate (Bond, 2004; Hofstede et al., 2010), we theorize that culture influences subordinates' assessments of and reactions to perceived abusive supervision.

### *The impact of culture on perceptions of and reactions to abusive supervision*

Culture involves shared conventions, language, assumptions, and other rules of engagement held by a group of people (Triandis, 1994). Culture guides individuals' sense-making, helping them cope with problems of external adaptation and internal integration because group behavioral assumptions and norms are based on the group's history of what are valid and effective ways to perceive, think, and feel about situations and problems (Schein, 1990). In this way, culture "imposes a set of lenses for seeing the world" (Triandis, 1994, p. 13) and shapes common interpretations of events. This shared outlook leads to consistent patterns of social behavior, communication, and expectations among individuals of a culture (Hofstede, 1980). Accordingly, culture shapes the behavioral norms and standards within a particular group.

Culture and its emphasis (or lack thereof) on hierarchical status differences are particularly relevant to how subordinates perceive their supervisor's behavior. For instance, the Confucian Asian culture (i.e., China,

Singapore, Taiwan) emphasizes hierarchical status differences as a way of maintaining social order (Hofstede et al., 2010; Markus & Kitayama, 1991). Within that culture, status differences provide self-meaning and guide behavior (Zhang, 1999). People within the Confucian Asian culture understand that high-status individuals (i.e., supervisors) receive more benefits than and hold social control over lower-status individuals (i.e., subordinates). Additionally, norms within the Confucian Asian culture legitimize hostile and exploitive supervisor treatment toward subordinates (Hofstede, 1983; Hofstede et al., 2010); high-status individuals are often expected to use controlling, aggressive, and restrictive tactics to effectively manage their subordinates (Chao, 1994; Chiu, 1987; Sharabi, 1977; Stewart et al., 1999; Tjosvold & Hui, 2001). Because of these expectations, those in lower-status positions “are less attuned to unfairness committed by authority figures because they perceive these actions as part of their role-defined privilege” (Li & Cropanzano, 2009, p. 793). As such, abusive supervision would be viewed as less inconsistent with cultural norms, as aggressive and hostile supervisor behavior is a legitimate way supervisors manage and control subordinates (Tyler et al., 2000).

In contrast, cultures that deemphasize hierarchical status differences, such as the Anglo culture (e.g., Australia, U.S.A.), stress the importance of individual rights, regardless of one’s hierarchical position. For example, the Anglo culture emphasizes personal needs (such as individual identity and success) and egalitarianism among individuals of differing ranks and status (Hofstede, 1980; Markus & Kitayama, 1991). Open and participative interaction between high- and low-status individuals is the norm (Hofstede, 1983). Consequently, subordinates expect individuals of authority (i.e., supervisors) to not disparage them or treat them with hostility; instead, they expect supervisors to treat them with respect and dignity (Hofstede et al., 2010; Tyler et al., 2000). Thus, abusive supervision is a glaring violation of societal norms of appropriate interpersonal conduct within the Anglo culture (Tyler et al., 2000).

In sum, culture prescribes norms about how supervisors should treat subordinates. Individuals rely on standing social norms about appropriate interpersonal conduct to determine whether the treatment they receive from their supervisors is fair (van den Bos, 2001; Lind, 2001; Rawls, 1971). Subordinates, therefore, consider cultural norms in their assessments of their supervisor’s behavior toward them. Confucian Asian culture emphasizes hierarchical status differences, deference to authority, and the legitimacy of supervisors’ hostility toward subordinates; Anglo culture deemphasizes status differences and highlights the importance of treating subordinates with respect and dignity. Therefore, subordinates from Confucian Asian culture should assess abusive supervision as more interpersonally fair than those from Anglo those from culture, as subordinates from Anglo culture should perceive abusive supervision as a violation of their social norms.

*Hypothesis 1:* Culture will moderate the relationship between perceived abusive supervision and interpersonal justice, such that the relationship will be more strongly negative for subordinates from the Anglo culture than for subordinates from the Confucian Asian culture.

Fairness heuristic theory (Lind, 2001; Lind et al., 1993) underscores the utility of fairness assessments. The theory proposes that all employees face a fundamental social dilemma at work: on the one hand, employees want to be included and accepted within their workgroup; on the other hand, being part of any social group can invite the possibility of mistreatment and rejection. This dilemma places employees in a tenuous and uncertain position, which focuses their attention to whether they can trust their supervisor not to take advantage of them. Trust is needed, as trust is defined as an individual’s willingness to be vulnerable to the actions of another based on positive expectations about the intentions or behavior of the other person (Mayer, Davis, & Schoorman, 1995; Rousseau, Sitkin, Burt, & Camerer, 1998).

Yet, continually monitoring the trustworthiness of an authority figure is a difficult task because this information can be ubiquitous, at best. It would be challenging to consider every factor in the exchange relationship that would suggest whether the supervisor is worthy of trust (Cropanzano et al., 2001). Consequently, fairness heuristic theory proposes that subordinates rely heavily on their justice perceptions. Subordinates’ fairness assessments serve as a cognitive shortcut about whether they can trust their supervisor. According to Lind (2001), “when people think about fairness, they think about where they stand in long-term, enduring relationships” (p. 80). Justice perceptions



provide the basis of subordinates' decisions to invest in their relationship with the supervisor. It is in this way that fairness perceptions serve as a heuristic for trust.

Interpersonal justice perceptions, in particular, provide a strong basis for an understanding of whether the supervisor can be trusted. Interpersonal justice perceptions reflect subordinates' assessment of whether the supervisor has behaved in a way that suggests the subordinate will continue to be treated in a non-biased manner and as a legitimate member of the workgroup (Cropanzano et al., 2001). Conversely, subordinates who view their supervisor's treatment as less fair would be less likely to believe that their supervisor would treat them appropriately into the future, and, consequently, these subordinates would likely not trust their supervisor. These arguments suggest that the influence of perceived abusive supervision on subordinates' trust in their supervisor will reflect their assessment of the interpersonal fairness of their supervisors' behavior.

Subordinates, however, consider the cultural context in their fairness assessments about their supervisor's behavior (i.e., abusive supervision), and their fairness assessments serve as the basis of their trust in the supervisor. We have argued that abusive supervision will be assessed as more interpersonally fair for subordinates from the Confucian Asian culture because this culture legitimizes status differences and supervisor hostility toward subordinates. Comparably, abusive supervision will be assessed as less interpersonally fair for subordinates from the Anglo culture because this culture places emphasis on egalitarianism and respectful supervisory behavior. Because subordinates from Confucian Asian culture find abusive supervision as more interpersonally fair than subordinates from Anglo culture, abused subordinates from Confucian Asian culture compared with those from Anglo culture should be more likely to trust their supervisors.

*Hypothesis 2(a):* The negative indirect effect of perceived abusive supervision on subordinates' trust in the supervisor (via interpersonal justice perceptions) will be moderated by culture, such that the indirect effect will be stronger for subordinates from the Anglo culture than for subordinates from the Confucian Asian culture.

Fairness heuristic theory (Lind, 2001; Lind et al., 1993) also predicts that fairness assessments are an important predictor of whether subordinates choose to respect their supervisor's orders and engage in constructive work effort—subordinates' willingness to exert a great deal of time, energy, and resources to get their job accomplished well (Yeo & Neal, 2004). Subordinates who assess their supervisor's behavior as fair view their supervisor's directives as more legitimate (Lind et al., 1993). Consequently, these subordinates feel obligated to invest in the future of the work relationship with their supervisor and achieve task-oriented goals (Lind, 2001). By contrast, subordinates who assess their supervisor's behavior as less fair would not feel as obligated to provide the supervisor, organization, or workgroup with beneficial behavior. These subordinates would, instead, question their supervisor's motives, and they would likely have misgivings about whether the supervisor has these subordinates' best interests in mind. Consequently, these subordinates would be less motivated to exert constructive effort.

These arguments suggest that the influence of abusive supervision on subordinates' work effort will reflect their assessment of the interpersonal fairness of their supervisors' behavior. Because culture is theorized to influence the extent to which abusive supervision impacts interpersonal justice perceptions, it will indirectly influence the extent to which abusive supervision will influence subordinates' work effort. For subordinates from the Confucian Asian culture, abusive supervision will be assessed as more interpersonally fair, which means that these subordinates will be more likely to exert effort in their work. For subordinates from Anglo culture, abusive supervision will be assessed as less interpersonally fair, which means that these subordinates will be less likely to exert effort in their work.

*Hypothesis 2(b):* The negative indirect effect of perceived abusive supervision on subordinates' work effort (via interpersonal justice perceptions) will be moderated by culture, such that the indirect effect will be stronger for subordinates from the Anglo culture than for subordinates from the Confucian Asian culture.

# Study 1

## *Method*

### **Data collection procedures**

To test our predictions, data were collected from working MBA students in two Anglo countries (Australia and the U.S.A.) and two Confucian Asian countries (Singapore and Taiwan). We collected data from working MBA students for several reasons. First, it allowed us to survey individuals from a wide cross-section of organizations in each country, thereby increasing the generalizability of the study's findings. Second, this strategy allowed us to minimize differences in job level, social class, and relative income across cultural regions (Tsui et al., 2007). Third, our approach permitted us to avoid some of the difficulties associated with translation and back translation presented in cross-cultural research (Brislin, 2000). Specifically, because all of the MBA programs from which we recruited participants were taught in English, we administered surveys to each country's participants in this language. We felt confident using this approach given research demonstrating that bilingual working respondents' answers are similar whether they respond to survey instruments in their native language or English (Zander et al., 2011). To ensure respondents adequately understood the survey instrument, we asked them to report the extent to which they understood the English of the survey on a 4-point scale ranging from "I did not understand any of the survey" to "I understood the entire survey." Only six respondents indicated that they understood less than the entire survey, and these data points were removed prior to the analyses, following previous studies (e.g., Kirkman & Shapiro, 2001). Sample sizes for each country ranged from 175 (U.S.A.) to 301 (Singapore). We removed approximately 2 percent of respondents who indicated that they most strongly identified with a culture other than that where they were currently located because cultural identity shapes individuals' perceptions, attitudes, and behaviors (Hofstede et al., 2010). In particular, we removed several non-Anglo respondents from the Anglo sample and several non-Confucian Asian respondents from the Confucian Asian sample. Our final sample included 951 respondents who had complete data on our study variables.

### **Participants**

Following extensive cross-cultural research (e.g., House, Hanges, Javidan, Dorfman, & Gupta, 2004), we grouped the respondents into two cultural groups: Anglo and Confucian Asian cultures. The Anglo culture region included 363 respondents from the U.S.A. and Australia; the Confucian Asian culture region included 588 respondents from Taiwan and Singapore. In the Anglo culture region, 55.1 percent of respondents were male, and their average age was 31.54 years ( $SD=9.88$ ), average tenure with their organization was 4.77 years ( $SD=5.61$ ), and average tenure with their supervisor was 2.44 years ( $SD=2.81$ ). The Anglo sample was 35.6 percent middle management, 20.1 percent first-line management, and 32.9 percent indicated that they were not managers. Respondents were also asked to report the gender and approximate the age of their supervisors. Anglo supervisors were 63.3 percent male and were an average age of 44.03 years ( $SD=10.05$ ). The Confucian Asian sample was 47.3 percent male, and their average age was 33.99 years ( $SD=10.35$ ), average tenure with their organization was 6.42 years ( $SD=7.98$ ), and average tenure with their supervisor was 3.38 years ( $SD=4.70$ ). The Confucian Asian sample was 20.3 percent middle management, 27.5 percent first-line management, and 45.8 percent were not managers. The supervisors of the Confucian Asian sample were 66.3 percent male and were an average age of 41.97 years ( $SD=8.79$ ). Following procedures of other cross-cultural studies (e.g., Spector et al., 2004, 2007), culture was coded into a dummy variable. The variable representing culture was coded 0 for the Anglo region and 1 for the Confucian Asian region.

### **Measures**

*Perceived abusive supervision* was assessed with Tepper's (2000) 15-item measure. Respondents indicated their agreement about their immediate supervisor's behavior (e.g., my boss . . . "Ridicules me" or "Puts me down in front of others") on a 7-point scale (1 = *strongly disagree*, 7 = *strongly agree*). Using a 7-point scale to assess our measures

further ensured that we reduced response and language bias across respondents of different cultures (Harzing et al., 2009). Reliability was assessed using the composite reliability index (CRI; Fornell & Larcker, 1981). CRI was .96 in the Anglo culture and .97 in the Confucian Asian culture. *Interpersonal justice* was assessed with Colquitt's (2001) five-item measure. Respondents indicated their agreement on a 7-point scale (1 = *strongly disagree*, 7 = *strongly agree*) (e.g., "My supervisor treats me with dignity" or "My supervisor treats me with respect"). CRI was .93 in the Anglo culture and .92 in the Confucian Asian culture. *Trust in the supervisor* was assessed with Tepper and Henle's (2011) three-item measure. Respondents indicated their agreement on a 7-point scale (1 = *strongly disagree*, 7 = *strongly agree*) (e.g., "I trust my supervisor to look out for my best interests" or "I can count on my supervisor to protect my interests"). CRI was .95 in the Anglo culture and .93 in the Confucian Asian culture. *Work effort* was assessed with Brockner, Grover, Reed, and DeWitt's (1992) three-item measure. Respondents indicated their agreement on a 7-point scale (1 = *strongly disagree*, 7 = *strongly agree*) about the amount of effort they exert at work (e.g., "I put a lot of effort into my work" or "I try as hard as I can to perform my job well"). CRI was .87 in the Anglo culture and .83 in the Confucian Asian culture.

*Controls.* Research has shown that trait negative affectivity can influence how abusive supervision is perceived by subordinates (Tepper, Duffy, Henle, & Lambert, 2006). Consequently, we controlled for subordinates' trait negative affectivity in our analyses. On a 5-point scale (1 = *not at all*, 5 = *extremely*), participants indicated the extent to which they typically experienced each of the emotions (e.g., distressed, upset, hostile, and irritable) over the prior few months. CRI was .86 in the Anglo culture and .88 in the Confucian Asian culture. Further, because gender impacts reactions to abusive supervision (Restubog, Scott, & Zagenczyk, 2011), we controlled for subordinates' gender (1 = *male*, 2 = *female*). Finally, we controlled for subordinates' perceptions of distributive and procedural justice in predicting outcomes of interpersonal justice because organizational justice research suggests that considering other facets of justice is important when examining subordinates' reactions to perceived mistreatment and interpersonal injustices (see Colquitt, Greenberg, & Zapata-Phelan, 2005, for a review). On Colquitt's (2001) four- and seven-item measures, respectively, participants indicated their agreement with items on a 7-point scale (1 = *strongly disagree*, 7 = *strongly agree*) (e.g., "My outcomes (pay, recognition, promotions) reflect the effort I have put into my work" for distributive justice; "Procedures that are used to make decisions in my organization are applied consistently" for procedural justice). CRI values were .95 for distributive justice and .86 for procedural justice in the Anglo culture, and .93 for distributive justice and .86 for procedural justice in the Confucian Asian culture.

In addition and consistent with previous work on perceptions of and reactions to abusive supervision (e.g., Mitchell & Ambrose, 2007; Tepper et al., 2009), we controlled for subordinates' tenure with their supervisor. Further, research suggests that traditionalist values associated with age are important in Confucianism (Farh, Earley, & Lin, 1997; Farh, Hackett, & Liang, 2007). In particular, age is a reflection of status-orientation within relationships, and thus, it is likely that the older a supervisor, the more likely the subordinate will respect and have deference toward the supervisor. Thus, we controlled for supervisors' age in our analyses.

### **Analytical strategy**

Despite our care in ensuring all respondents understood the English language of the survey instrument, the possibility remained that some items were interpreted differently across cultures (Bond, 2004; Tsui et al., 2007). Prior to testing the hypotheses, we assessed whether our scales displayed measurement invariance across cultures using multi-group confirmatory factor analyses in Mplus version 5.1 (Muthén & Muthén, 2007).

Following procedures outlined by Vandenberg and Lance (2000), we compared a model in which factor loadings, correlations, and error variances of the seven measured constructs (perceived abusive supervision, interpersonal justice, trust in the supervisor, work effort, distributive justice, procedural justice, and negative affectivity) were constrained to be equivalent across groups to a model in which factor loadings were allowed to be freely estimated. Equivalence of the measurement models across cultures is supported if the constrained model is not a significantly worse fit to the data than the unconstrained model. Fit of the models was assessed using the chi-square value,



comparative fit index (CFI), McDonald non-centrality index ( $Mc$ ), and root mean square error of approximation (RMSEA). The significance of change in measurement model fit was evaluated with differences in the  $Mc$ . Meade, Johnson, and Braddy (2008) showed that changes in  $Mc$  are not sensitive to sample size, and cut-off values used to assess model differences vary according to the numbers of factors and items, thereby avoiding limitations associated with the comparison of differences in other indices (e.g., chi-square difference tests).

The hypotheses were tested using Edwards and Lambert's (2007) path analytic procedures for evaluating moderated indirect effects. Further, we bootstrapped 1000 samples to produce bias-corrected standard errors and confidence intervals (MacKinnon, Lockwood, Hoffman, West, & Sheets, 2002). The significance of the indirect effects was evaluated with RMediation procedures, as described by MacKinnon and his colleagues (MacKinnon, Fritz, Williams, & Lockwood, 2007; MacKinnon, Lockwood, & Williams, 2004).

## Results and discussion

### Tests of measurement invariance

In an investigation of the cross-cultural validity of the Tepper (2000) abusive supervision measure, Hu, Wu, and Wang (2011) demonstrated partial invariance in samples of working individuals from the U.S.A. and Taiwan. They concluded that the measure was appropriate for use in cross-cultural comparisons about the interrelationships of perceived abusive supervision and other variables because it displayed strong configural invariance, partial metric invariance, and partial scalar invariance. In our measurement invariance tests, results indicated that both the constrained model ( $\chi^2=2743.87$  [974],  $p < .001$ ; CFI=.93;  $Mc=.92$ ; RMSEA=.06) and unconstrained model ( $\chi^2=2721.42$  [956],  $p < .001$ ; CFI=.93;  $Mc=.92$ ; RMSEA=.06) provided a reasonable fit to the data. The difference between these models was not significant (cf. Meade et al., 2008, p. 586;  $\Delta Mc = .002$ , # factors = 7, # items > 30,  $ns$ ). Because the fit of the unconstrained, hypothesized model did not significantly change when constraining the items to load onto their respective factors, we concluded that the measures exhibited adequate measurement invariance across culture regions and were suitable for testing our hypotheses (Cheung & Rensvold, 2002).

### Correlations and descriptive statistics

Table 1 provides the descriptive statistics and correlations among the variables of the study. As indicated by significant correlations with the dummy-coded culture variable, the means for some of our study's variables were significantly

Table 1. Descriptive statistics and correlations among variables in Study 1.

Variables	Mean	SD	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
1. Perceived abusive supervision	2.54	1.25	—									
2. Culture <sup>a</sup>	0.62	0.49	.27	—								
3. Interpersonal justice	5.07	1.06	-.63	-.17	—							
4. Trust in the supervisor	4.57	1.33	-.51	-.11	.72	—						
5. Work effort	5.53	0.93	-.11	-.13	.20	.14	—					
6. Distributive justice	4.26	1.23	-.25	.04	.36	.41	-.05	—				
7. Procedural justice	4.22	0.91	-.30	-.04	.52	.51	.11	.52	—			
8. Negative affectivity	1.81	0.65	.25	.08	-.23	-.18	.02	-.17	-.15	—		
9. Subordinate gender <sup>b</sup>	1.50	0.50	.04	.07	-.07	-.07	.07	-.05	-.10	.11	—	
10. Tenure with the supervisor	3.04	4.12	.14	.11	-.09	-.06	.03	.04	-.01	-.09	.02	—
11. Supervisor age	42.81	9.38	.06	-.11	-.06	-.12	.05	-.03	.02	-.13	-.02	.38

Note:  $N=951$ .

<sup>a</sup>Variable dummy-coded 0 = Anglo culture, 1 = Confucian Asian culture.

<sup>b</sup>1 = male, 2 = female. Correlations greater than |.06| are significant at  $p < .05$ , and those greater than |.08| are significant at  $p < .01$ .

different between cultures. For example, the mean of perceived abusive supervision was greater in the Confucian Asian culture than the Anglo culture. Furthermore, interpersonal justice, trust in the supervisor, and work effort were greater in the Anglo culture than in the Confucian Asian culture.

### Hypothesis tests

Table 2 shows the path analysis results. Hypothesis 1 predicts that culture will moderate the relationship between perceived abusive supervision and interpersonal justice such that the effects will be more strongly negative for subordinates in the Anglo than for subordinates in the Confucian Asian culture. The results indicate that the perceived abusive supervision  $\times$  culture interaction term was significant on interpersonal justice ( $b = .22, p < .001$ ). We examined the form of the interaction by plotting the relationship between perceived abusive supervision and interpersonal justice at values of the moderator representing each culture (i.e., 0 representing the Anglo culture and 1 representing the Confucian Asian culture; Cohen, Cohen, West, & Aiken, 2003). The plot of the interaction in Figure 2 shows that the perceived abusive supervision—interpersonal justice relationship—was more strongly negative for subordinates in the Anglo culture ( $b = -.66, p < .001$ ) than for subordinates in the Confucian Asian culture ( $b = -.44, p < .001$ ). Further, the difference in the strength of these relationships was significant ( $\Delta b = .22, p < .001$ ). Thus, Hypothesis 1 was supported.

Hypothesis 2 predicts that the negative indirect effect of perceived abusive supervision on (a) trust in the supervisor and (b) work effort will be moderated by culture, such that the indirect effects will be stronger for subordinates in the Anglo culture than for subordinates in the Confucian Asian culture. To evaluate this hypothesis, we decomposed the effects of perceived abusive supervision on the dependent variables into simple effects, through the mediator (see Table 3). The results indicate that the indirect effect of perceived abusive supervision on subordinates' trust in the supervisor was stronger negative for subordinates in the Anglo ( $\rho = -.45, p < .001$ ) than for subordinates in the Confucian Asian culture ( $\rho = -.30, p < .001$ ). The difference in the strength of the indirect effects was also significant ( $\Delta\rho = .15, p < .01$ ), supporting Hypothesis 2(a). Further, the results show that the indirect effect of perceived abusive supervision on subordinates' work effort was stronger negative for subordinates in the Anglo ( $\rho = -.14, p < .001$ ) than for subordinates in the Confucian Asian culture ( $\rho = -.09, p < .001$ ). The difference in

Table 2. Study 1 path analysis results.

Variable	Interpersonal justice		Trust in the supervisor		Work effort	
	<i>b</i>	95% CI	<i>b</i>	95% CI	<i>b</i>	95% CI
Negative affectivity	-.13**	[-.24, -.04]	.01	[-.09, .12]	.09	[-.03, .19]
Subordinate gender <sup>a</sup>	-.07	[-.17, .04]	-.02	[-.15, .09]	.16**	[-.04, .27]
Tenure with the supervisor	.00	[-.01, .01]	.01	[-.01, .03]	.01	[-.00, .03]
Supervisor age	-.00	[-.01, .00]	-.01***	[-.02, -.01]	.00	[-.01, .01]
Perceived abusive supervision	-.66***	[-.77, -.56]	-.10***	[-.16, -.04]	.02	[-.05, .08]
Culture <sup>b</sup>	.05	[-.09, .16]	-.01	[-.12, .12]	-.20***	[-.33, -.08]
Perceived abusive supervision $\times$ culture	.22***	[-.09, .36]				
Distributive justice			.12***	[.06, .18]	-.12***	[-.17, -.07]
Procedural justice			.21***	[.13, .29]	.09*	[.00, .18]
Interpersonal justice			.68***	[.59, .77]	.21***	[.12, .30]
$R^2$	.42***		.54***		.09***	

Note:  $N = 951$ .

<sup>a</sup>1 = male, 2 = female.

<sup>b</sup>Variable dummy-coded 0 = Anglo culture, 1 = Confucian Asian culture. Table values are path estimates from the estimated model. Statistical significance is based on a two-tailed test.

\* $p < .05$ ; \*\* $p < .01$ ; \*\*\* $p < .001$ .

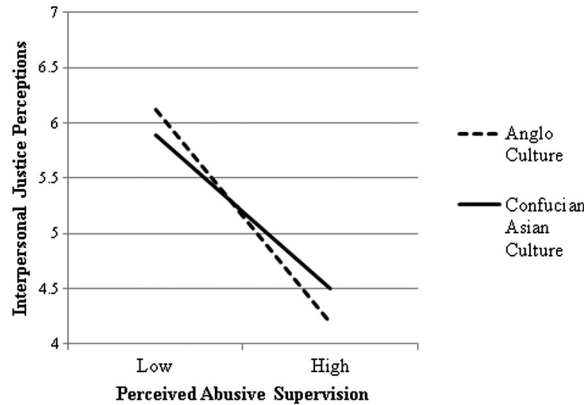


Figure 2. Study 1 interaction between perceived abusive supervision and culture on subordinates’ interpersonal justice perceptions

Table 3. Study 1 indirect effects from perceived abusive supervision to trust in the supervisor and work effort.

Dependent variable	Culture	X → M		M → Y		Indirect effects (X → M * M → Y)	
		<i>b</i>	95% CI	<i>b</i>	95% CI	<i>b</i>	95% CI
Trust in the supervisor	Anglo	-.66***	[-.77, -.56]	.68***	[.59, .77]	-.45***	[-.54, -.37]
	Confucian Asian	-.44***	[-.52, -.36]	.68***	[.59, .77]	-.30***	[-.37, -.25]
	Difference	.22***	[.09, .36]	—	—	.15**	[.06, .25]
Work effort	Anglo	-.66***	[-.77, -.56]	.21***	[.12, .30]	-.14***	[-.21, -.07]
	Confucian Asian	-.44***	[-.52, -.36]	.21***	[.12, .30]	-.09***	[-.15, -.05]
	Difference	.22***	[.09, .36]	—	—	.05**	[.02, .09]

Note: *N* = 951. Table values are path analytic coefficients. X = perceived abusive supervision; M = interpersonal justice perceptions; Y = dependent variable.

\**p* < .05; \*\**p* < .01; \*\*\**p* < .001.

the strength of the indirect effects was also significant ( $\Delta p = .05, p < .01$ ), supporting Hypothesis 2(b). Overall, Hypothesis 2 was supported.

**Comparison model tests**

To rule out alternative explanations for our study findings, we compared our hypothesized model to alternative models that might explain the relationships among the variables. In particular, we compared the hypothesized model to a moderated-direct effects model, in which the direct effects of perceived abusive supervision on the dependent variables were moderated by culture, and a first- and second-stage moderated-mediation model, in which the relationships between interpersonal justice and the dependent variables were moderated by culture. None of the interaction terms of the alternative models were significant; thus, it was concluded that our hypothesized model was a better fit to the data than these alternatives.

To rule out whether distributive justice or procedural justice played mediating roles in the model, we also evaluated the moderated indirect effects of perceived abusive supervision on the dependent variables, as mediated by distributive and procedural justice. We followed the same procedures outlined earlier to test the significant differences in the strength of the indirect effect from perceived abusive supervision to the dependent variables across cultures. Results of these tests indicated that the indirect effects did not vary across

cultures (for perceived abusive supervision and trust in the supervisor: through distributive justice,  $\Delta\rho = .03$ , *ns*, through procedural justice,  $\Delta\rho = .02$ , *ns*; for perceived abusive supervision and work effort: through distributive justice,  $\Delta\rho = .03$ , *ns*, through procedural justice,  $\Delta\rho = .01$ , *ns*). Thus, the findings show that culture did not moderate the indirect effects of perceived abusive supervision on the dependent variables as mediated by distributive and procedural justice. Overall, this provides further support for our hypothesized model in which interpersonal justice is the mechanism explaining why abusive supervision has different effects across cultures.

### **Examination of common method variance bias**

Because our data were collected at one time using a common method (i.e., surveys), common method variance (CMV) may present a bias to the correlations among the variables in our study (cf. Podsakoff, MacKenzie, & Podsakoff, 2012). We attempted to address this issue by adopting design features that have been argued to reduce CMV (Podsakoff et al., 2012), such as ensuring the anonymity of responses and separating the measurement of the predictor and criterion variables in terms of their position on the survey instrument. However, to empirically test the possibility that CMV biased our results, we utilized procedures involving latent variable analyses and a marker variable (Williams, Hartman, & Cavazotte, 2010). These procedures model the extent to which the latent variables of a theoretical model share variance with a theoretically unrelated latent marker variable; the marker variable should only share variance with the substantive variables because of CMV. Following Williams et al.'s (2010) procedures, we conducted a series of model comparison tests to establish whether CMV was present, whether it evenly or unevenly affected the substantive variables, and whether the presence of CMV biased the correlations among the variables in our model.

For a marker variable, we used three items from the Pugh, Hickson, Hinings, and Turner (1968) measure of organizational formalization (e.g., "My organization has a large number of written rules and policies"). The correlations between the marker variable and our model's variable were low; only two correlations were above .10 (with abusive supervision,  $-.13$ ; with work effort,  $.17$ ). To establish whether CMV was present in the data, a model in which the indicators of the substantive variables were specified to load onto the latent marker variable was compared with a model in which the indicators of the substantive variables do not load onto the marker variable. Williams et al. (2010) suggested that if the results of a chi-square difference test indicate the fit of these models is not significantly different, then CMV is said to not exist in the data. The results of this test indicated that CMV was not present ( $\Delta\chi^2 = .03$ ,  $\Delta df = 1$ , *ns*), providing evidence that CMV did not present a bias to our data or results.

### **Discussion**

The results of Study 1 lend support for our hypotheses. The findings show that perceived abusive supervision had a stronger negative effect on interpersonal justice among subordinates from the Anglo culture than those from the Confucian Asian culture. These cross-cultural differences in fairness perceptions explained the differences in effects of perceived abusive supervision on subordinates' trust in the supervisor and work effort; the indirect effects of perceived abusive supervision on these variables were stronger negative for subordinates from the Anglo culture than those from the Confucian Asian culture. Overall, these results support the pattern suggested by fairness heuristic theory and the idea that culture affects subordinates' fairness assessments about their supervisor's behavior, and their fairness perceptions, then, influence their trust in their supervisor and work effort. Moreover, the finding that the mean of perceived abusive supervision was significantly greater in the Confucian Asian culture than the Anglo culture lends credence to the idea that these behaviors are more normative in the Confucian Asian culture; supervisors in this culture may be more apt to use these behaviors as a means of managing their subordinates.

Although this study provides support for our predictions, there are empirical and theoretical limitations to address. For example, the data for Study 1 were collected at one point in time. While empirical analyses indicated that CMV did not exist in the Study 1 data, scholars contend that time-separated data reduces percept-percept inflations

reflective in CMV and strengthens causal inferences (Doty & Glick, 1998; Podsakoff et al., 2012). Indeed, Ostroff, Kinicki, and Clark (2002) noted that this approach has the advantage of reducing CMV effects by up to 30 percent. Another limitation is that we did not directly assess the psychological mechanism underlying the moderating effects of culture. Although we found cross-cultural differences in the hypothesized effects, it is important to model and test the individual-level mechanism because there are other possible explanations—each differing across cultures—that could be driving the results (Tsui et al., 2007). We argued that abusive supervision is viewed as more interpersonally fair within the Confucian Asian culture because this culture emphasizes status differences and hostility toward subordinates, whereas it is viewed as less interpersonally fair within Anglo culture, which deemphasizes status differences and highlights the importance of egalitarianism among the ranks (Hofstede et al., 2010). Thus, our theory articulates that abusive supervision should be perceived as fairer in the Confucian Asian culture because Confucian Asian subordinates have stronger beliefs than Anglo subordinates about the appropriateness of treatment of subordinates based on status differences. However, we did not specifically measure or evaluate the effects of culture on subordinates' beliefs about status differences, which is called power distance orientation (PDO, an individual's acceptance and belief about the legitimacy of and unequal distribution of power in social relationships; House et al., 2004). Study 2 addressed these limitations. We evaluate PDO as a mediator of the distal interactive effects of culture in our model and use a time-separated data collection design. The mediator and dependent variables were collected 3 weeks after we collected the independent variable, moderator, and control variables.

## Study 2

Theory suggests that culture exhibits strong effects on individuals' beliefs about the appropriateness of power differences (Hofstede, 1980; House et al., 2004). These beliefs are shaped and reinforced through observation of and participation in one's culture. Norms are emphasized in rules and regulations and nurtured through social relationships, such as between teachers and students or parents and children (see Hofstede et al., 2010, for a review). Because Confucian Asian culture emphasizes status differences (e.g., being treated with hostility from individuals in authority and deference to individuals in authority), individuals from this culture should expect and believe that status differences in hierarchical relationships are appropriate (e.g., Chiu, 1987; Ryan, 1985). Because the Anglo culture emphasizes individualism and respectful interactions among individuals of any status, individuals from this culture should more likely expect equality and not embrace status differences (e.g., Rees & Porter, 1998; Triandis, 2002). To this point, research has demonstrated mean differences in PDO between the Confucian Asian and Anglo cultures (e.g., Brockner et al., 2001; House et al., 2004). In short, research has established that culture directly influences individuals' PDO and that individuals from the Confucian Asian culture, compared with those from the Anglo culture, are more likely to hold a high PDO.

We, therefore, predict culture (Confucian Asian culture compared with Anglo culture) will influence subordinates' acceptance of hierarchical status differences (i.e., PDO), which will then influence subordinates' reactions to abusive supervision. Subordinates from cultures that emphasize hierarchical differences (i.e., the Confucian Asian culture) will be more likely to embrace status differences reflected in a high PDO and, therefore, will be more likely to assess abusive supervision as more interpersonally fair. Conversely, subordinates from cultures that emphasize egalitarianism between ranks and individual rights (i.e., the Anglo culture) will be less likely to embrace status differences, reflected in a low PDO, and, therefore, will be more likely to assess abusive supervision as less interpersonally fair. Therefore, culture is theorized to explain subordinates' level of PDO and why PDO affects subordinates' evaluations of abusive supervision as more or less interpersonally fair.

*Hypothesis 3:* The moderating effect of culture on the relationship between perceived abusive supervision and subordinates' interpersonal justice will be mediated by PDO.



Cultural norms influence the degree to which subordinates embrace a PDO, which influences how interpersonally fair abusive supervision is perceived by subordinates. We further suggest that PDO will mediate the moderating effect of culture on the cross-cultural differences in the indirect effects of perceived abusive supervision on subordinates' trust in the supervisor and work effort (via interpersonal justice). In particular, because subordinates from the Confucian Asian culture have a greater PDO, they will be more likely to assess abusive supervision as more interpersonally fair and will be more likely to trust their supervisor and feel obligated to exert effort in their work. Conversely, because subordinates from the Anglo culture have a lower PDO, they will be more likely to assess abusive supervision as less interpersonally fair and less likely to trust their supervisor and exert greater effort in their work.

*Hypothesis 4(a):* The moderating effect of culture on the negative indirect effect of perceived abusive supervision on subordinates' trust in their supervisors (via interpersonal justice perceptions) will be mediated by PDO.

*Hypothesis 4(b):* The moderating effect of culture on the negative indirect effect of perceived abusive supervision on subordinates' work effort (via interpersonal justice perceptions) will be mediated by PDO.

## *Method*

### **Data collection procedures**

We collected data from working MBA students in the U.S.A. (representative of the Anglo culture) and Taiwan (representative of the Confucian Asian culture) via two online surveys that were separated by 3 weeks in time. At Time 1, we assessed participants' demographic information, perceptions of abusive supervision, negative affectivity, and PDO. At Time 2, we assessed their interpersonal, distributive, and procedural justice perceptions, trust in the supervisor, and work effort. As with Study 1, we asked respondents to rate the extent to which they understood the English of the surveys. Every respondent indicated that they fully understood the language contained in the surveys. The final sample included 278 respondents who had complete data on our study variables.

### **Participants**

The sample from the U.S.A. included 69 respondents; the remaining 209 respondents were from Taiwan. In the U.S. sample, 50.7 percent of respondents were male, and their average age was 30.12 years ( $SD=4.88$ ), average tenure with their organization was 4.33 years ( $SD=3.82$ ), and average tenure with their supervisor was 2.09 years ( $SD=1.70$ ). The sample from the U.S.A. was 24.6 percent middle management, 20.3 percent first-line management, and 4.4 percent indicated that they were not managers. Supervisors from the U.S.A. were 69.6 percent male and were an average age of 44.38 years ( $SD=8.49$ ). The Taiwanese sample was 26.8 percent male, and their average age was 35.51 years ( $SD=8.88$ ), average tenure with their organization was 7.29 years ( $SD=6.89$ ), and average tenure with their supervisor was 3.80 years ( $SD=4.30$ ). The Taiwanese sample was 20.6 percent middle management, 27.3 percent first-line management, and 47.8 percent were not managers. The supervisors of the Taiwan sample were 62.2 percent male and were an average age of 44.89 years ( $SD=9.51$ ). Once again, we dummy-coded the variable representing the culture of the respondent; this variable was coded 0 for respondents from the Anglo culture (i.e., the U.S.A.) and 1 for respondents from the Confucian Asian culture (i.e., Taiwan).

### **Measures**

The same measures and control variables used in Study 1 were used in Study 2. These measures showed nearly identical reliabilities to those found in Study 1, and so, they were deemed acceptable for further use in this study.

*Power distance orientation* was assessed with the six-item measure by Dorfman and Howell (1988) (e.g., “Managers should make most decisions without consulting subordinates” and “Managers should not delegate important tasks to subordinates”). CRI was .68 in both countries.

### Analytical strategy

Because the sample from the U.S.A. was small, we were unable to adequately test for measurement invariance of our model. However, based on the results of the invariance tests in Study 1 and the reliabilities of the measures used in these samples, in addition to the evidence for cross-cultural validity of the abusive supervision measure as demonstrated by Hu *et al.* (2011), the measures were deemed sufficient for hypothesis testing.

Once again, we tested our hypotheses using Edwards and Lambert’s (2007) path analytic procedures for evaluating complex moderated indirect effects. Hypotheses 3 and 4 include the mediation of the first stage of a moderated-mediation model, similar to the overall model depicted by Grant and Berry (2011). To test whether the proximal PDO mediated the effects of distal culture on the relationship between perceived abusive supervision and interpersonal justice perceptions, we added terms to the model representing the following: (i) the effect of culture on PDO; (ii) the direct effect of PDO on interpersonal justice; and (iii) the interaction between perceived abusive supervision and PDO in predicting interpersonal justice. We also controlled for the direct effects of the culture interaction by including terms representing the effect of culture and its interaction with perceived abusive supervision in the equation predicting interpersonal justice (Edwards & Lambert, 2007). Finally, we bootstrapped 1000 samples to produce bias-corrected standard errors and confidence intervals (MacKinnon *et al.*, 2002), which were used in significance testing.

## Results and discussion

### Correlations and descriptive statistics

Table 4 shows the descriptive statistics and correlations among the variables of the study. Following a similar pattern to Study 1, we found that the means for some of our study’s variables were significantly different between the two

Table 4. Descriptive statistics and correlations among variables in Study 2.

Variables	Mean	SD	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11
1. Perceived abusive supervision	2.32	1.09	–										
2. Culture <sup>a</sup>	0.75	0.43	.17	–									
3. Power distance orientation	2.98	0.77	.09	.34	–								
4. Interpersonal justice	5.07	1.08	–.62	–.31	–.15	–							
5. Trust in the supervisor	4.61	1.23	–.54	–.08	–.03	.77	–						
6. Work effort	5.71	0.80	–.20	–.20	–.16	.38	.22	–					
7. Distributive justice	4.22	1.40	–.29	.11	.09	.39	.44	.09	–				
8. Procedural justice	4.35	1.02	–.31	–.08	–.08	.53	.55	.29	.48	–			
9. Negative affectivity	2.47	1.28	.06	–.75	–.22	.08	–.06	.11	–.26	–.07	–		
10. Subordinate gender <sup>b</sup>	1.67	0.47	.04	.22	.06	–.14	–.05	–.08	.00	–.11	–.15	–	
11. Tenure with the supervisor	3.38	3.88	.13	.19	.09	–.15	–.07	.03	.02	.04	–.17	.08	–
12. Supervisor age	44.76	9.24	.01	.02	.08	–.06	–.05	.02	.07	.02	.01	.10	.34

Note:  $N = 278$ .

<sup>a</sup>Variable dummy-coded 0 = Anglo culture, 1 = Confucian Asian culture.

<sup>b</sup>1 = male, 2 = female. Correlations greater than |.11| are significant at  $p < .05$ , and those greater than |.15| are significant at  $p < .01$ .

cultures. In particular, consistent with the idea that abusive supervision is more normative in the Confucian Asian culture, the mean of perceived abusive supervision was greater in the Confucian Asian culture (i.e., Taiwan sample) than the Anglo culture (i.e., U.S. sample). Interpersonal justice and work effort were greater in the Anglo culture than the Confucian Asian culture. The correlation between the culture dummy variable and PDO was in the expected direction (cf. House et al., 2004). Specifically, PDO was greater among Confucian Asian respondents than Anglo respondents.

### Hypothesis tests

Tables 5 and 6 show the results of the path analyses for the models predicting interpersonal justice and the dependent variables (subordinates' trust in the supervisor and work effort). Hypothesis 1 predicts that culture will moderate the relationship between perceived abusive supervision and interpersonal justice such that the effects will be more strongly negative for subordinates in the Anglo than for subordinates in the Confucian Asian culture. As indicated in Step 1 of Table 5 (i.e., a model without the hypothesized mediator of the interaction, PDO), the perceived abusive supervision  $\times$  culture interaction term was significant on interpersonal justice ( $b = .31, p < .001$ ). A simple slopes analysis indicated that the effect of perceived abusive supervision on interpersonal justice was more strongly negative for subordinates in the Anglo culture ( $b = -1.11, p < .001$ ) than for subordinates in the Confucian Asian culture ( $b = -.48, p < .001$ ), and the form of this interaction was similar to the form of the interaction found in Study 1 (shown in Figure 2). The difference in the strength of these values was also significant ( $\Delta b = .62, p < .001$ ), supporting Hypothesis 1.

Hypothesis 2 predicts that the negative indirect effect of perceived abusive supervision on (a) trust in the supervisor and (b) work effort will be moderated by culture, such that the indirect effects will be stronger for subordinates in the Anglo culture than for subordinates in the Confucian Asian culture. To evaluate this hypothesis, we decomposed the effects of perceived abusive supervision on the dependent variables into simple effects, through the mediator, interpersonal justice. The results of these analyses indicate the indirect effect of perceived abusive supervision on subordinates' trust in the supervisor was stronger negative for subordinates in the Anglo culture ( $\rho = -.79, p < .001$ ) than for subordinates in the Confucian Asian culture ( $\rho = -.35, p < .001$ ). The difference in these indirect effects was also significant ( $\Delta \rho = .45, p < .01$ ). Further, the results indicate the indirect effect of

Table 5. Study 2 path analysis results on interpersonal justice perceptions.

Variable	Step 1		Step 2	
	<i>b</i>	95% CI	<i>b</i>	95% CI
Negative affectivity	-.05	[-.15, .05]	-.05	[-.15, .06]
Subordinate gender	-.13	[-.33, .07]	-.12	[-.32, .07]
Tenure with the supervisor	-.01	[-.03, .02]	-.01	[-.04, .01]
Supervisor age	-.00	[-.01, .01]	-.01	[-.02, .01]
Perceived abusive supervision	-.79***	[-.95, -.63]	-.74***	[-.93, -.55]
Culture <sup>a</sup>	-1.21***	[-1.67, -.76]	-1.08***	[-1.57, -.58]
Perceived abusive supervision $\times$ culture	.31***	[.12, .49]	.26*	[.06, .47]
Power distance orientation			-.03	[-.16, .14]
Perceived abusive supervision $\times$ power distance orientation			.13*	[.01, .25]
$R^2$	.46***		.48***	

Note:  $N = 278$ .

<sup>a</sup>1 = male, 2 = female.

<sup>b</sup>Variable dummy-coded 0 = Anglo culture (i.e., U.S. sample), 1 = Confucian Asian culture (i.e., Taiwan sample). Table values are path estimates from the estimated model. Statistical significance is based on a two-tailed test.

\* $p < .05$ ; \*\* $p < .01$ ; \*\*\* $p < .001$ .

Table 6. Study 2 path analysis results on trust in the supervisor and work effort.

Variable	Trust in the supervisor		Work effort	
	<i>b</i>	95% CI	<i>b</i>	95% CI
Negative affectivity	.06	[−.07, .17]	.02	[−.08, .14]
Subordinate gender	.08	[−.13, .29]	−.02	[−.20, .18]
Tenure with the supervisor	.01	[−.03, .03]	.02	[−.00, .04]
Supervisor age	−.01	[−.01, .01]	.00	[−.01, .01]
Perceived abusive supervision	−.12*	[−.22, −.02]	.02	[−.08, .13]
Culture <sup>a</sup>	.44*	[.05, .83]	−.07	[−.40, .28]
Power distance	.05	[−.08, .19]	−.08	[−.20, .04]
Distributive justice	.08*	[.00, .16]	−.05	[−.12, .02]
Procedural justice	.20**	[.07, .34]	.12*	[.00, .22]
Interpersonal justice	.72***	[.61, .83]	.25***	[.12, .37]
<i>R</i> <sup>2</sup>	.62***		.17***	

Note: *N* = 278.

<sup>a</sup>Variable dummy-coded 0 = the Anglo culture (i.e., U.S. sample), 1 = the Confucian Asian culture (i.e., Taiwan sample). Table values are path estimates from the estimated model. Statistical significance is based on a two-tailed test.

\**p* < .05; \*\**p* < .01; \*\*\**p* < .001.

perceived abusive supervision on subordinates' work effort was stronger negative for subordinates in the Anglo culture ( $\rho = -.28, p < .001$ ) than for subordinates in the Confucian Asian culture ( $\rho = -.12, p < .001$ ). The difference in these indirect effects was also significant ( $\Delta\rho = .16, p < .01$ ). These results support Hypotheses 2(a) and 2(b).

Hypothesis 3 predicts that PDO will mediate the interactive effect of culture on the perceived abusive supervision—interpersonal justice relationship. As seen in Step 2 of Table 5, we added terms representing the effect of PDO and the interactive effect of perceived abusive supervision and PDO to the model. The results indicated that the direct effect of the country dummy variable on PDO was significant ( $b = .61, p < .001$ ; not shown in the table), supporting the notion that country culture has strong effects on individuals' PDO. In particular, this strong positive effect demonstrates that subordinates' PDO was significantly greater in the Confucian Asian culture than in the Anglo culture. The results further showed that the perceived abusive supervision  $\times$  PDO term was significant on interpersonal justice ( $b = .13, p < .05$ ). To investigate the form of the PDO interaction, we plotted the effects of perceived abusive supervision on interpersonal justice at values one standard deviation above and below the mean of PDO (Cohen et al., 2003). Figure 3 shows that the effects of perceived abusive supervision on interpersonal justice were stronger negative when PDO was low ( $b = -.84, p < .001$ ) than high ( $b = -.64, p < .001$ ). The difference in these values was also significant ( $\Delta b = .20, p < .05$ ). Thus, the form of this interaction mirrors that of the interaction between perceived abusive supervision and culture demonstrated in Study 1.

To determine whether the distal moderating effect of culture carried through its effects via PDO, we computed the indirect moderating effect of culture using PRODCLIN procedures (MacKinnon et al., 2004, 2007). The results indicated that this product term was significant ( $\rho = -.08, p < .05$ ), supporting our prediction that PDO mediates the effect of culture on the perceived abusive supervision—interpersonal justice relationship. A simple slopes analysis of this indirect interactive effect of culture (through PDO) indicated the perceived abusive supervision—interpersonal justice relationship was stronger for subordinates in the Anglo culture ( $b = .51, p < .001$ ) than for subordinates in the Confucian Asian culture ( $b = -.39, p < .001$ ), and the difference in these values was also significant ( $\Delta b = .12, p < .05$ ). Altogether, these results support Hypothesis 3.

Hypothesis 4 predicts PDO will mediate the interactive effect of culture on the indirect relationship between perceived abusive supervision and the dependent variables, (a) trust in the supervisor and (b) work effort. To determine whether the culture interaction effect carried through to the dependent variables, we computed the indirect interactive effects of culture (through PDO) on the indirect effects of perceived abusive supervision on the dependent variables. As shown in Table 7, the indirect effect of perceived abusive supervision on trust in the supervisor was stronger for subordinates in the Anglo culture ( $\rho = -.37, p < .001$ ) than for subordinates in the Confucian Asian culture

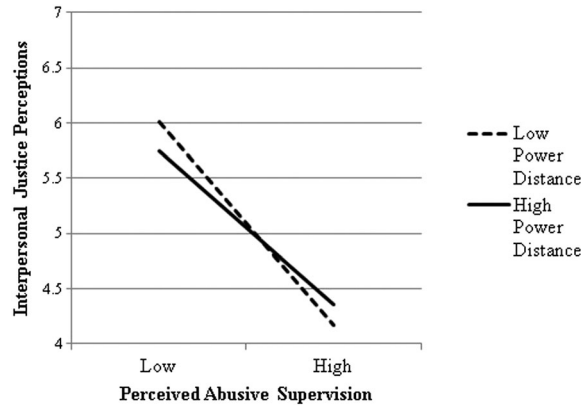


Figure 3. Interaction between perceived abusive supervision and subordinates' power distance orientation on subordinates' interpersonal justice perceptions

Table 7. Study 2 indirect effects from perceived abusive supervision to trust in the supervisor and work effort.

Dependent variable	Culture	X → M		M → Y		Indirect effects (X → M * M → Y)	
		<i>b</i>	95% CI	<i>b</i>	95% CI	<i>b</i>	95% CI
Trust in the supervisor	Anglo	-.51***	[-.69, -.34]	.72***	[.61, .83]	-.37***	[-.54, -.25]
	Confucian Asian	-.39***	[-.62, -.23]	.72***	[.61, .83]	-.28***	[-.46, -.17]
	Difference	.12*	[.02, .26]	—	—	.09*	[.01, .20]
Work effort	Anglo	-.51***	[-.69, -.34]	.25***	[.12, .37]	-.13***	[-.22, -.06]
	Confucian Asian	-.39***	[-.62, -.23]	.25***	[.12, .37]	-.10***	[-.19, -.04]
	Difference	.12*	[.02, .26]	—	—	.03*	[.01, .08]

Note: *N* = 278. Table values are path analytic coefficients. X = perceived abusive supervision; M = interpersonal justice perceptions; Y = dependent variable.  
 \**p* < .05; \*\**p* < .01; \*\*\**p* < .001.

( $\rho = -.28, p < .001$ ), and the difference in these effects was significant ( $\Delta\rho = .09, p < .05$ ). Similarly, results showed that the indirect effect of perceived abusive supervision on work effort was stronger for subordinates in the Anglo culture ( $\rho = -.13, p < .001$ ) than for subordinates in the Confucian Asian culture ( $\rho = -.10, p < .01$ ), and the difference in these effects was significant ( $\Delta\rho = .03, p < .05$ ). This suggests that the moderating effects of culture are mediated by PDO and carry through their effects via interpersonal justice and on the dependent variables. Altogether, these results demonstrate full support for Hypothesis 4.

**Discussion**

Study 2 replicated the Study 1 results and extended our model to consider the mechanism explaining why culture impacts subordinates' reactions to perceived abusive supervision. Culture directly influences subordinates' PDO, and consequently, it is because of PDO that culture influences the extent to which subordinates assess perceived abusive supervision as more or less fair. Accordingly, culture and PDO shape the strength of subordinates' reactions (i.e., trust and work effort) to perceived abusive supervision.



## General Discussion

Our work presented a theoretical model integrating fairness heuristic theory (Lind, 2001; Lind et al., 1993) with principles about cross-cultural differences (e.g., Bond, 2004; Hofstede et al., 2010; Tyler et al., 2000) to explain how culture impacts subordinates' perceptions of and reactions to abusive supervision. We argued that culture is the lens by which individuals view and interpret social interactions. Accordingly, culture affects how subordinates evaluate their supervisor's interactions with them. We theorized that because subordinates from the Confucian Asian culture believe that status differences and the use of hostility are normative and legitimate aspects of social control, these subordinates would perceive abusive supervision as more interpersonally fair compared with subordinates from the Anglo culture, where egalitarian and respectful supervisor treatment is normative.

The findings from two empirical studies support our predictions. Our work demonstrates how culture impacts subordinates' heuristic about the fairness of supervisory treatment and explains why perceived abusive supervision differentially influences subordinates' trust in the supervisor and the extent to which they exert effort in their work. Subordinates from the Confucian Asian culture, compared with those from the Anglo culture, were more likely to view abusive supervision as interpersonally fair. Interpersonal fairness perceptions serve as a heuristic that, then, influence the degree to which subordinates trust their supervisors or question whether they can trust their supervisors. Similarly, interpersonal fairness perceptions serve to motivate (or not) an obligation to follow supervisory directives. Subordinates who found abusive supervision as more interpersonally fair (those from Confucian Asian culture with a stronger PDO) were more likely to trust in their supervisor and engage in constructive effort at work. Comparably, subordinates who found abusive supervision as less interpersonally fair (those from the Anglo culture with a weaker PDO) were less likely to trust their supervisor and less willing to exert constructive effort at work.

### *Theoretical implications*

Our study contributes to the literatures on abusive supervision, leadership, and cross-cultural management. Scholars have given a great deal of attention to understanding which leadership styles are more effective among subordinates from different cultures and which have greater effects on subordinate outcomes across cultures. Much of this work focuses on respectful, charismatic, or even directive styles that are prototypical of "effective" leadership (see Kirkman, Lowe, & Gibson, 2006; Lawler, Walumbwa, & Bai, 2008, for reviews). However, not all individuals in authority exemplify effective leadership, and instead, some are quite hostile with their subordinates and engage in abusive supervision (Martinko et al., 2013; Tepper, 2007). Additionally, research suggests that workplace incivility, hostility, and abuse are most prevalent among individuals who hold power and authority within organizations (e.g., Cortina, Magley, Williams, & Langhout, 2001; Pearson & Porath, 2005). This work shows that abusive supervision and other forms of hostility are perceived as a violation to standing social norms and, consequently, are highly detrimental to employee functioning (Tepper, 2007). Our work, however, demonstrates that cultural prescriptions about appropriate supervisory interactions with subordinates differ across cultures. Thus, culture in general and PDO more specifically shape the heuristic subordinates use to assess whether abusive supervision is more or less fair, impacting their trust in their supervisor and willingness to exert productive work effort.

What this means is that the context in which subordinates are embedded influences the nature of how subordinate perceive and react to certain leader behaviors. Unlike more positive leadership behaviors, such as charismatic and transformational leadership (see Tsui et al., 2007), abusive supervision does not generalize across cultures. In particular, our study shows that abusive supervision is assessed differently in terms of interpersonal fairness by subordinates across different cultures. This result differs from research on more positive leadership behavior, which has shown that some positively oriented behaviors are viewed similarly across cultures (cf. Kirkman et al., 2009).

Our results show, however, that the norms and values of the prevailing country culture shape subordinates' orientation toward status differences (i.e., PDO). In doing so, culture forms the basis of the acceptability of authority's hostile actions and sensitizes subordinates to abusive supervision, thereby blunting its negative effects. Accordingly, perceived abusive supervision cannot be considered the inverse of positive leadership behavior.

Our research also highlights an important clarification to existing models on culture and abusive supervision. Much of the work conducted on the influence of culture focuses on value orientations and testing the effects of value orientations with samples only from subordinates from one country (e.g., Lian et al., 2012; Lin et al., 2013; Liu et al., 2010; Wang et al., 2012). However, scholars have argued that a focus solely on value orientations, particularly if testing the effects from only one country, does not provide a true cross-cultural examination and, therefore, does not build our understanding of whether *culture* influences how subordinates assess their supervisors' behavior. In short, focusing only on value orientations does not offer insight on whether the subordinates within a particular country culture accept particular values. Our work addresses this issue and shows that country culture shapes subordinates beliefs and perceptions of abusive supervision, which explains the differential effects on important work attitudes (i.e., organizational justice and trust) and behavior (i.e., work effort) between cultures.

Along these lines, our study's findings call for more clarification on what *perceived* abusive supervision means to employees outside the Anglo culture. Although our findings correspond with the work of Hu et al. (2011), who found the Tepper (2000) abusive supervision measure shows equivalent measurement properties across cultures, our results move beyond these measurement properties and focus on the cross-cultural nomological validity of the abusive supervision construct and its primary measure. The results of our studies show that abusive supervision was reported to a greater extent by Confucian Asian subordinates than Anglo subordinates, which supports our arguments that abusive supervision is more normative in the Confucian Asian culture. The consequence of abusive supervision being more acceptable, however, is that its negative effects on beneficial outcomes for organizations are tempered in the Confucian Asian culture. This raises the possibility that subordinates from different cultures may perceive the particular behaviors of the abusive supervision construct differently. Tepper (2000) identified the construct as "abusive" supervision, implying that the behaviors listed within the measure would be considered abusive by all subordinates. The results of our study suggest that the behaviors depicted in Tepper's measure may not be viewed as highly abusive by all subordinates. For example, Anglo subordinates are likely to perceive a supervisor taking credit for their work as highly inappropriate. In contrast, not giving due credit to a subordinate in the Confucian Asian culture may be the general expectation and, thus, may not elicit such a strong negative reaction (Hu et al., 2011). An important next step, then, is to understand what is considered "abusive" among subordinates of different cultures.

Lastly, our study extends the organizational justice literature, which theorists contend has traditionally focused on the consequences of justice and limitedly considered justice as a dependent variable (cf. Scott, Colquitt, & Zapata-Phelan, 2007). The results of our study suggest that cultural norms are important to consider, particularly with regard to the construction of interpersonal fairness perceptions. Our study shows that abusive supervision is considered as more interpersonally fair (i.e., more normative) within the Confucian Asian culture than in the Anglo culture. Culture shapes subordinates' justice perceptions, which impact subordinates' attitudes about the supervisor and behavior.

### *Limitations and directions for future research*

Our research should be considered in light of some limitations. First, our study focused only on two cultures and did not examine other regions of the world (notably, South Asia, South America, Latin America, Europe, and Africa). When conducting a multi-country data collection effort, some trade-offs are necessary. We sought to collect data from a large enough sample of individuals in each of the countries and from several countries in each of the cultures so that our theory and findings might be generalizable at least within these cultures. We concede that there could be

factors unique to other cultural regions that impact the extent to which subordinates perceive and react to abusive supervision. Study 2 showed that the interactive effects of culture in our model could be explained by cross-cultural differences in PDO. However, because PDO only partially mediated the moderating effects of culture, it is possible that other cultural orientations that are known to vary across individuals (e.g., individualism, collectivism, uncertainty avoidance, and traditionalism) might also explain some of the variance in the effects. Moreover, recent research has highlighted the role of attribution in subordinates' reactions to abusive supervision (e.g., Burton, Taylor, & Barber, 2014). Because culture is known to have an impact on the attributional styles employed by individuals (Markus & Kitayama, 1991; Morris & Peng, 1994), it is possible that in addition to the effects of PDO, cross-cultural differences in attribution can also explain the effects of our model. Using a larger sample of cultures, future research might explore the generalizability of our model and findings and pit them against these theoretically possible alternatives.

Second, our data collection strategy precludes us from making strong causal inferences among the study variables. However, we framed our model and hypotheses following theory about the development and consequences of individuals' justice assessments (Lind et al., 1993). Further, the ordering among the variables in our baseline mediation model has been supported by the results of several empirical studies, to include experimental designs (e.g., van den Bos, Wilke, & Lind, 1998; Tepper, 2000). Regardless, future research should employ longitudinal designs and model the change in these variables in order to strengthen the confidence of our findings.

Despite these limitations, our research provides a foundation for future research. For example, we theorized about the cultural implications on subordinates' interpersonal justice perceptions. We concede that it may be possible for culture to impact other forms of fairness assessments (e.g., distributive and procedural justice) and to impact different outcome variables. In considering differing forms of fairness, our supplemental tests indicated that culture did not moderate the effects of abusive supervision on outcomes via distributive and procedural justice. Still, the effects of culture in shaping distributive and procedural justice judgments may differ when considering other forms of supervisor behavior that are more relevant to distributive and procedural justice rules. For instance, culture may impact distributive and procedural judgments in terms of fairness perceptions about supervisors' rewards allocation behaviors for subordinates from cultures that emphasize group-gain norms over equity norms, as may be argued is the case in more collectivistic rather than individualistic cultures.

Additionally, our work highlights the need for future research to study what may be considered "abusive" across different cultures and, specifically, within the Confucian Asian culture. As we explained earlier, researchers should dig deeper into the nature of employees' perceptions to understand what is considered "abusive" versus more normative supervisory behavior across cultures. There may be some behaviors that are considered abusive in other cultures but are seemingly more benign in the Anglo culture. It is critical for researchers to firmly comprehend the cultural context of the setting in which they are conducting their studies. Thus, if researchers are interested in understanding what constitutes and what are the consequences of "abusive" leader behavior, it may be important to conduct pilot work that will help them better understand the set of behaviors that truly violate norms for appropriate supervisory conduct in a given culture.

### *Implications for practice*

Our research suggests that culture blunts the negative effects of perceived abusive supervision. Abusive supervision is perceived by subordinates from the Confucian Asian culture as more fair than by subordinates from the Anglo culture. Organizational decision makers may interpret this finding to suggest that abusive supervision is permissible in countries emphasizing Confucian Asian culture. However, we would caution managers from doing so. A notable finding across the samples of our study and in our results is that abusive supervision negatively relates to all the variables examined across subordinates from the differing cultures. That is, abusive supervision negatively related to interpersonal justice and indirectly and negatively related to trust in the supervisor and work effort from subordinates from both Confucian Asian and Anglo cultures; the effects were more strongly negative, however, for

subordinates within the Anglo culture. Thus, abusive supervision is not an effective means of managing employees in any culture. Our results simply suggest that it is *more normative* within the Confucian Asian culture than within the Anglo culture.

Our findings, however, highlight an important aspect to consider when organizations set up training programs for employees positioned in cross-cultural contexts. It would be useful for employees to understand the norms associated with countries that embrace Confucian Asian culture compared with those represented in Anglo culture. Although subordinates within Confucian Asian culture may be more accepting of power differences and a bit more sensitized to abusive supervision behaviors, subordinates from Anglo culture are not and would perceive these behaviors as a strong violation of social norms associated with supervisor–subordinate relations. The results of our study suggest that supervisors within Confucian Asian culture engage in abusive supervision more so than supervisors within Anglo culture. Thus, subordinates from Anglo culture and/or who hold a weaker PDO and who take assignments in countries that emphasize Confucian Asian culture may have a tougher time acclimating to these environments.

Additionally, it would be useful to educate supervisors about the differences across cultures so that they understand how to adjust their style accordingly. Even if subordinates from Confucian Asian culture and those who adopt a stronger PDO are less negatively affected by abusive supervision, our results show that abusive supervision is overall negatively received by subordinates from either Confucian Asian or Anglo culture. Consequently, we would advise supervisors to engage in leadership behaviors that generalize positively with subordinates across cultures, such as charismatic leadership or transformational leadership (see Tsui et al., 2007). Moreover, organizations should adopt training programs that will emphasize more positive leadership interactions with their subordinates so that leaders can learn the value of them. Doing so will help create effective working relationships among supervisors and their subordinates.

## *Conclusion*

Our study explains why culture impacts subordinates' perceptions of and reactions to abusive supervision. We theorized and found that abusive supervision is more normative in the Confucian Asian culture than the Anglo culture, and as a consequence, subordinates in the Confucian Asian culture perceived abusive supervision as more interpersonally fair. This effect explains why abusive supervision holds a weaker negative effect on subordinates' trust in their supervisor and work effort. Our study highlights the importance of understanding cultural differences and how that context influences supervisor–subordinate dynamics.

## **Author biographies**

**Ryan M. Vogel** (PhD, University of Georgia) is an assistant professor of Management in the Sam and Irene Black School of Business at Pennsylvania State University-Erie. His research focuses on person-environment fit and misfit and the dynamics surrounding supervisor-subordinate interpersonal relationships.

**Marie S. Mitchell** (PhD, University of Central Florida) is an associate professor of Management in the Terry College of Business at the University of Georgia. Her research focuses on abusive, destructive, and unethical behavior in organizations to understand the consequences of these behaviors, and which factors make them more likely.

**Ben Tepper** (PhD University of Miami) is a Dean's distinguished professor of Management and Human Resources in the Fisher College of Business of The Ohio State University. His research centers on managerial leadership, employee well-being, and the performance of prosocial and antisocial work behavior.

**Simon Lloyd D. Restubog** (PhD, University of Queensland, Australia) is a professor of Management and Organizational Behavior at The Australian National University. His research interests include career development, destructive leadership, and psychological contracts.

**Changya Hu** (PhD, University of Georgia) is a professor of Business Administration at the National Chengchi University in Taiwan. Her research interests include mentoring, abusive supervision, work stress, and measurement equivalence/invariance.

**Wei Hua** (PhD, University of California at Los Angeles) worked as a faculty member of organizational behavior and human resource management in Singapore from 2004–2012. Currently, she lives with her daughter in her hometown in China.

**Jui-Chieh Huang** earned his doctoral degree from the National Taiwan University of Science and Technology. He is an assistant professor of the Department of Business Administration at the National Taipei University of Business. His current research interests are workaholism and employee well being.

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