Three essays on examining abusive supervision from the third party perspective

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**THREE ESSAYS ON EXAMINING
ABUSIVE SUPERVISION FROM THE
THIRD PARTY PERSPECTIVE**

**ZHIYU FENG
NANYANG BUSINESS SCHOOL
2020**

THREE ESSAYS ON EXAMINING ABUSIVE SUPERVISION FROM THE THIRD PARTY PERSPECTIVE

ZHIYU FENG

Nanyang Business School

A thesis submitted to the Nanyang Technological University
in partial fulfillment of the requirement for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy

2020

Statement of Originality

I hereby certify that the work embodied in this thesis is the result of original research, is free of plagiarised materials, and has not been submitted for a higher degree to any other University or Institution.

7 March 2020

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Zhiyu FENG

Supervisor Declaration Statement

I have reviewed the content and presentation style of this thesis and declare it is free of plagiarism and of sufficient grammatical clarity to be examined. To the best of my knowledge, the research and writing are those of the candidate with amendments, changes and improvements as suggested by me as the Supervisor. I confirm that the investigations were conducted in accord with the ethics policies and integrity standards of Nanyang Technological University and that the research data are presented honestly and without prejudice.

7 March 2020

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Fong Keng-Highberger

Authorship Attribution Statement

Please select one of the following; *delete as appropriate:

*(B) This thesis contains material from 1 paper (essay 2) which was presented at the 79th annual meeting of the Academy of Management in which I am listed as an author.

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The contributions of the co-authors are as follows:

- I developed the model, participated in the data collection, analyzed the data, and wrote up the manuscript.
- The second co-author provided suggestions and directions for this project and edited the manuscript.
- The third co-author edited the manuscript.
- The last co-author provided the data collection resources and participated in the data collection.

7 March 2020

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Date

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Zhiyu FENG

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Summary

A new line of research has recently adopted a third-party perspective on examining how witnessing the abusive supervision of coworkers (*coworker abusive supervision*) influences a third-party employee's reactions toward coworkers. However, this work tends to see the third party as an objective and independent observer who is not involved in the perpetrator-victim abuse interaction. Given a third-party employee's regular interactions with both the supervisor and coworkers in the workplace, it is of theoretical and practical importance to investigate how third-party employees are involved in the coworker abusive supervision encounter.

In my first essay, integrating moral exclusion theory, social comparison theory, justice theory, and attribution theory, I propose a three-phase third party's involvement model unraveling how a third-party employee can become involved as a non-independent bystander in the activation, appraisal, and response phases of coworker abusive supervision. My second and third essays build on the first essay by quantitatively testing parts of my proposed model.

Specifically, in my second essay, I present and test a moderated sequential mediation model delineating how high performers (i.e., third-party employees) may indirectly impact coworker abusive supervision and when they are more likely to experience shame and ostracism from their coworkers for doing so. Analyses of multistage, multisource, and multilevel data consisting of 195 subordinates nested within 39 supervisors supported my model. A high performer's relative task performance exerts a positive indirect effect on his/her

feelings of shame through coworker abusive supervision. Further, group competition climate alleviates this indirect effect by weakening the positive relationship between coworker abusive supervision and high performer shame. Finally, high performer shame is positively related to perceptions of being ostracized by their coworkers.

In my third essay, I test two competing explanations for a focal employee's (i.e., a third-party employee's) motivations to help coworkers who are abused: *an altruistically motivated helping view* versus *an egoistically motivated helping view*. According to the altruistically motivated helping view, employees who receive abusive supervision themselves would be better able to empathize with and affiliate with coworkers who are abused and, in turn, would be more inclined to help these abused coworkers in order to reduce their distress. By contrast, according to the egoistically motivated helping view, as employees' preferential treatment compared to their abused coworkers results in their guilt and shame, employees who receive less abusive supervision themselves would more likely help coworkers who are abused to relieve their negative mood states. Two experiment studies provided support for the altruistically motivated helping view.

CHAPTER 1: NON-INNOCENT BYSTANDERS: A MODEL OF THIRD-PARTY EMPLOYEES' INVOLVEMENT IN COWORKER ABUSIVE SUPERVISION (ESSAY 1)

ABSTRACT

A new stream of research has recently examined how observing the abusive supervision of coworkers (coworker abusive supervision) affects a third-party employee's reactions toward coworkers. Although this work extends extant research by adopting a novel perspective – a third-party perspective – on examining abusive supervision, it tends to portray the third-party employee as an objective and independent bystander, who is not a part of the perpetrator-victim abuse interaction. Drawing from moral exclusion theory, social comparison theory, justice theory, and attribution theory, we propose a three-phase third party's involvement model that unravels how a third-party employee can become involved as a non-independent bystander in the activation, appraisal, and response phases of coworker abusive supervision. Our conceptual model extends extant research on coworker abusive supervision and third party reactions to mistreatment by advancing our understanding of how a third-party employee can be a non-innocent bystander in the incident of mistreatment.

Keywords: abusive supervision, third party, attribution, emotion, workplace mistreatment

INTRODUCTION

Since its inception, abusive supervision (which is defined as “subordinates’ perceptions of the extent to which supervisors engage in the sustained display of hostile verbal and nonverbal behaviors, excluding physical contact” [Tepper, 2000: 178]) has been primarily examined from the victim’s perspective. Indeed, a significant body of research has accumulated over the past two decades, seeking to associate abusive supervision with a wide range of negative victim outcomes, including increased deviance and turnover intentions and decreased well-being and performance (for reviews, see Mackey, Frieder, Brees, & Martinko, 2017; Martinko, Harvey, Brees, & Mackey, 2013; Tepper, 2007; Tepper, Simon, & Park, 2017). Given that a greater number of employees can witness or learn about incidents of their coworkers being mistreated (Olson-Buchanan & Boswell, 2008; O’Reilly & Aquino, 2011; Skarlicki & Kulik, 2004; Skarlicki, O’Reilly, & Kulik, 2015), researchers have recently begun to explore the impact of abusive supervision on third-party employees (e.g., Harris, Harvey, Harris, & Cast, 2013; Mitchell, Vogel, & Folger, 2015; Priesemuth, 2013).

Researchers have shown that upon witnessing the abusive supervision of their coworkers (hereafter, *coworker abusive supervision*), third-party employees can become angry toward their supervisors and then motivated to exhibit supervisor-directed deviant behaviors and coworker-directed supportive behaviors (e.g., Mitchell et al., 2015; Priesemuth, 2013). They can also become content with coworkers’ abuse and then motivated to exhibit coworker-directed

hostile behaviors (e.g., Harris et al., 2013; Mitchell et al., 2015). Consistent with research on third party reactions to mistreatment (e.g., O'Reilly & Aquino, 2011; Skarlicki & Kulik, 2004; Turillo, Folger, Lavelle, Umphress, & Gee, 2002), this new stream of coworker abusive supervision research tends to conceptualize third-party employees (i.e., coworkers of the abused subordinate) as individuals who are neither the direct victim of abuse nor the perpetrator of abuse. That is, prior work tends to see the third-party employee as an objective and independent bystander who is neither subject to abusive supervision himself/herself nor responsible for abusive supervision, and instead who just exhibits reactions toward the victim (e.g., victim-directed supportive or aggressive actions [Harris et al., 2013; Mitchell et al., 2015; Priesemuth, 2013]) and the perpetrator (e.g., perpetrator-directed retributive actions [Skarlicki, Ellard, & Kelln, 1998; Skarlicki & Rupp, 2010; Umphress, Simmons, Folger, Ren, & Bobocel, 2013]).

However, research and popular press examples show this conceptualization of third-party employees is limited in two aspects. First, as one member in the team, the third-party employee may also experience abusive supervision himself/herself. Indeed, research has revealed that abusive supervision can be theorized as a collective phenomenon wherein subordinates experience and regularly witness the supervisor exhibiting abusive behaviors toward the entire team (Ogunfowora, 2013; Priesemuth, Schminke, Ambrose, & Folger, 2014). As such, the third-party employee may also be a target of abusive supervision like his/her victimized coworkers (Mitchell et al., 2015).

Second, although third-party employees are not the direct perpetrators of coworker abusive supervision, they can be an indirect cause of coworkers' abuse. For example, the co-founder of Apple Inc. – Steve Jobs – is famously tough with the people around him. Because of his passion for perfection and strong desire to work with only “A” players, he often abuses those subordinates who perform worse than their high-performing counterparts (Isaacson, 2012). In this case, while high-performing coworkers (i.e., third-party employees) are not the direct perpetrators of abusive supervision, they are indirectly responsible for their coworkers' abuse due to their exceptional abilities and performance. In another noteworthy example, U.S. president Donald Trump is portrayed to be surrounded by adulators (i.e., the third party) – reportedly holding a cabinet meeting in which everyone went around the table taking turns to praise him (Illing, 2018). Those who were not comparatively as flattering (e.g., his chief economic adviser, Gary Cohn, and his secretary of state, Rex Tillerson) were subject to his name calling, public denouncements, and eventually pushed out of office (Cassidy, 2018; Illing, 2018; Steinberg, 2018). Overall, these examples demonstrate that third-party employees can be the indirect cause of coworker abusive supervision.

Taken together, it follows that prior conceptualization of third parties overlooks the fact that third-party employees may also be an integral part of the perpetrator-victim abuse interaction which brings about and suffers from coworkers' abuse. To broaden the existing conceptualization of third parties, we develop a three-phase third party's involvement model, whereby we delineate

how a third-party employee as a non-independent bystander is involved in the activation, appraisal, and response phases of coworker abusive supervision. We build our model on the integration of moral exclusion theory (Opotow, 1990a, 1995), social comparison theory (Festinger, 1954; Mussweiler, 2003), justice theory (Cropanzano, Goldman, & Folger, 2003; Folger & Cropanzano, 2001), and attribution theory (Martinko, Douglas, Ford, & Gundlach, 2004; Shaver, 1985; Weiner, 1985, 1986).

Specifically, in the activation phase, we integrate social comparison theory (Festinger, 1954; Mussweiler, 2003) with moral exclusion theory (Opotow, 1990a, 1995) to delineate how third-party employees can evoke supervisors' abusive behaviors toward coworkers. By theorizing the third-party employee as an indirect perpetrator of coworkers' abuse, our research unravels third-party employees' involvement in the activation phase of coworker abusive supervision. In doing so, we extend extant literature that has primarily focused on third parties' responses to coworker abusive supervision by examining how third-party employees can be indirectly responsible for coworkers' abuse.

In the appraisal phase, we draw on justice theory (Cropanzano et al., 2003; Folger & Cropanzano, 2001) and attribution theory (Mikula, 1993, 2003; Shaver, 1985; Weiner, 1985, 1986) to account for how third-party employees and abused coworkers form their injustice appraisals of coworker abusive supervision, which in turn influence their attributed causal responsibility for coworkers' abuse. Specifically, we identify personal and situational factors, which reflect the dynamic relationships among the supervisor, the abused

coworker, and the third-party employee, to examine how third-party employees' interpersonal relationships with the supervisor and the abused coworker can influence their self-attributed responsibility for coworker abusive supervision as well as abused coworkers' attributed responsibility to third-party employees for their experienced mistreatment. By holding third-party employees responsible for coworkers' abuse, we extend prior research on third party reactions to mistreatment which tends to limit third-party employees' attributed responsibility to either the perpetrator (e.g., Mitchell et al., 2015; O'reilly & Aquino, 2011) or the victim (e.g., Mitchell et al., 2015), and prior research on abusive supervision which has primarily focused on victims' attributed responsibility to the perpetrator (e.g., Martinko, Harvey, Sikora, & Douglas, 2011; Oh & Farh, 2017).

In the response phase, we first examine how third-party employees and abused coworkers experience distinct emotions as a function of their attributions of coworker abusive supervision. We focus specifically on third-party employees' *shame* and *guilt* because both emotions are self-focused, thereby extending prior research which has mainly focused on other-focused emotions such as anger toward the supervisor (e.g., Mitchell et al., 2015) and *schadenfreude* toward the abused coworker (e.g., Xu et al., in press). As to abused coworkers' emotions toward the third party, our focus on *resentment* and *envy* is based on the recognition that both emotions are other-focused and occur when the other's advantage, compared to one's own disadvantage, is perceived as undeserved or unjustified (Feather & Sherman, 2002; Smith,

2000). By examining abused coworkers' reactions toward third parties, we extend extant literature that has mainly focused on abused coworkers' reactions toward the abusive supervisor (e.g., Oh & Farh, 2017) or themselves (e.g., Simon, Hurst, Kelley, & Judge, 2015). We finally examine how third-party employees and abused coworkers exhibit certain approach and avoidance behaviors driven by their emotional experiences. Taken together, we unveil how third-party employees as either an agent or a target become emotionally and behaviorally involved in the response phase of coworker abusive supervision.

In sum, we propose a theoretical model that depicts third-party employees' involvement in the processes underlying the emergence of, as well as the subsequent appraisal and emotional and behavioral responses to coworkers' abuse (see Figure 1). We build the activation phase of our model on theories of moral exclusion and social comparison, because the supervisor's abuse of specific subordinates is a moral exclusion process (Tepper, Moss, & Duffy, 2011; Walter, Lam, Van der Vegt, Huang, & Miao, 2015), whereby the supervisor makes social comparisons among subordinates in terms of moral exclusions factors to decide whom he/she is inclined to morally exclude from his/her scope of justice and is thus subsequently subject to his/her abusive behaviors. We build the appraisal phase of our model on theories of justice and attribution, because perceived abuse is fundamentally an evaluation of injustice (Tepper, 2000) and perceived injustice is also an assessment of attributions of responsibility (Martinko et al., 2004). We build the response phase of our

model on the literature which suggests that behavioral actions are motivated by emotions as a response to the eliciting event. As each theory informs a unique phase of the coworker abusive supervision process, integrating them can produce a comprehensive framework for understanding how third-party employees activate, appraise, and respond to coworkers' abuse. In the following sections, we detail third-party employees' involvement in the activation, appraisal, and response processes of coworker abusive supervision. We conclude with theoretical and practical implications, as well as directions for future research.

FIGURE 1
Theoretical Model

THIRD-PARTY EMPLOYEES' INVOLVEMENT IN THE ACTIVATION PHASE

The Role of Third Parties in Provoking Supervisor's Coworker Abuse

According to moral exclusion theory (Opotow, 1990a, 1995, 2001), subordinates are more likely to become targets for abusive supervision when they are morally excluded from supervisors' scope of justice (Tepper et al., 2011; Walter et al., 2015). Moral exclusion theory suggests that each person has a specified "scope of justice" that reflects his/her psychological boundary (Deutsch, 1974, 1985), within which "moral values, rules, and considerations of fairness apply" (Opotow, 1990a: 1). Subordinates who fall within the supervisor's scope of justice (i.e., moral inclusion) are perceived as deserving of fair and just treatment (Opotow, 1990a, 1990b, 1995); by contrast, those subordinates who fall outside of the supervisor's scope of justice (i.e., moral exclusion) are perceived as undeserving of fair and respectful treatment guided by moral values and rules (Opotow, 1990a, 1990b, 1995). Therefore, morally excluded subordinates become more likely candidates for the supervisor's abusive practices (Tepper et al., 2011; Walter et al., 2015).

According to moral exclusion theory (Hafer & Olson, 2003; Opotow, 1994), there are three main factors which can cause a certain target to become morally excluded from an agent's scope of justice: (1) perceived dissimilarity to the target, (2) conflict with the target, and (3) the utility of the target. Applying this theory to supervisor-subordinate interactions, a subordinate becomes a morally excluded target and, in turn, a victim of abusive behaviors when the

supervisor (1) evaluates the subordinate as dissimilar to him/her, (2) judges the subordinate as being in conflict with him/her, or (3) assesses the subordinate as being less useful for him/her. But the question is how the supervisor engages in these evaluations to guide whether he/she should place the subordinate inside or outside his/her scope of justice, and in turn decide whether he/she should exhibit abusive behaviors toward the subordinate?

Speaking to this question, social comparison theory (Festinger, 1954; Mussweiler, 2003) suggests that human evaluation is comparative in nature. When evaluating a particular target, people do not do so in a vacuum, but rather in a comparative manner (Kahneman & Miller, 1986). Indeed, people are inclined to compare “the evaluated target with a pertinent norm or standard to derive their comparative evaluation” (Mussweiler, 2003: 472). Given the ubiquity of social comparisons (Mussweiler, Ruter, & Epstude, 2004; Wood, 1996), supervisors’ evaluations regarding moral exclusion factors, including the dissimilarity to their subordinates, the conflict with their subordinates, and the utility of their subordinates, should also be comparative in nature. That is, supervisors tend to compare a given subordinate with other team members in terms of three moral exclusion factors to evaluate: (1) whether the subordinate is dissimilar to them (i.e., *relative dissimilarity*), (2) whether the subordinate is in conflict with them (i.e., *relative conflict*), and (3) whether the subordinate is useful for them (i.e., *relative utility*). According to moral exclusion theory (Opotow, 1990a), when a subordinate’s relative dissimilarity and relative conflict is high or his/her relative utility is low, the supervisor is more likely to

perceive this subordinate as unconnected to himself/herself, and in turn morally exclude this subordinate from his/her scope of justice.

Integrating social comparison theory with moral exclusion theory, we therefore propose that in work teams, supervisors would compare a third-party employee with other teammates to form their evaluations of the third-party employee's relative dissimilarity, relative conflict, and relative utility, which in turn affect the likelihood that they inflict abusive behaviors toward the third party's coworkers who are placed outside of their scope of justice. In this sense, a third-party employee can be involved in the perpetrator-victim abuse interaction as an indirect perpetrator of coworkers' abuse due to his/her low relative dissimilarity, low relative conflict, and high relative utility. Below we detail specific predictors under each moral exclusion comparison factor (i.e., third party's relative dissimilarity, third party's relative conflict, and third party's relative utility) that influence supervisors' abusive behaviors toward the third-party employee's coworkers.

Third parties' relative dissimilarity to the supervisor. The diversity literature suggests that work group members can differ from each other in terms of either the surface-level dimensions such as age, sex, and ethnicity, or the deep-level dimensions such as attitudes, beliefs, and values (e.g., Harrison, Price, & Bell, 1998; Harrison, Price, Gavin, & Florey, 2002). The former refers to *surface-level dissimilarity* whereas the latter refers to *deep-level dissimilarity*. As diversity research suggests that the demographic and attitudinal differences characteristic of supervisor-subordinate interactions can

directly influence social dynamics (e.g., integration, communication) and interaction quality (Harrison et al., 1998; Jackson et al., 1991; O'Reilly, Caldwell, & Barnett, 1989; Tsui & O'Reilly, 1989), we examine both surface-level dissimilarity and deep-level dissimilarity in the supervisor-subordinate interaction to investigate their roles in the supervisor's moral exclusion process. Based on the diversity literature as well as the foregoing logic derived from theories of social comparison and moral exclusion, we propose that supervisors would compare a third-party employee with his/her coworkers with respect to the surface-level dissimilarity and the deep-level dissimilarity to them, so as to form their evaluations of a third-party employee's *relative surface-level dissimilarity* and *relative deep-level dissimilarity*, respectively.

When a third-party employee is more similar to the supervisor in terms of demographics such as age, sex, and ethnicity than his/her coworkers, the supervisor would more likely place the third-party employee inside his/her scope of justice. This is because the similarity between the third-party employee and the supervisor regarding demographics would increase the supervisor's liking for and closeness with the third-party employee (Hafer & Olson, 2003; Liden, Wayne, & Stilwell, 1993; Wayne & Liden, 1995) and, in turn, trigger the supervisor's inclusion of the third-party employee within his/her scope of justice. In other words, the third-party employee's coworkers who are dissimilar to the supervisor with respect to demographics would more likely be excluded from the supervisor's scope of justice, which makes these coworkers are more subject to their supervisor's abusive behaviors. Moreover, as "moral exclusion

emerges from our innate tendency to differentiate objects” (Opatow, 1990a: 7), supervisors who demonstrate favoritism toward similar others are more likely to place third-party employees with low relative surface-level dissimilarity inside their scope of justice who are perceived as more connected to them (Brewer, 1999; Hewstone, Rubin, & Willis, 2002; Tajfel & Turner, 1979). By contrast, since the third-party employee’s coworkers with high relative surface-level dissimilarity are more likely to be perceived as unconnected to the supervisor (Deutsch, 1973; Williams & O’Reilly, 1998), supervisors who demonstrate derogation toward dissimilar others who are unconnected to them are inclined to place the third-party employee’s coworkers outside their scope of justice which, in turn, produces moral exclusion practices in the form of abusive supervision. Therefore, a third-party employee’s low relative surface-level dissimilarity to the supervisor would more likely evoke the supervisor’s abusive behaviors toward coworkers. Supporting these arguments, studies have shown that subordinates who are more demographically dissimilar from their supervisors than their coworkers are more likely in a situation of lower-quality subordinate-supervisor relationships (Brouer, Duke, Treadway, & Ferris, 2009; Liden et al., 1993).

In addition to the important role of relative surface-level dissimilarity in predicting supervisory mistreatment of coworkers, relative deep-level dissimilarity (i.e., the supervisor’s perception that his/her dissimilarity to the third-party employee, as compared to the third-party employee’s coworkers, in terms of attitudes, beliefs, and values) is also essential in this mistreatment

interaction. When a third-party employee is less dissimilar to the supervisor regarding attitudes, beliefs, and values, the supervisor would show more trust and demonstrate more favoritism toward the third-party employee (Hewstone et al., 2002; Schaubroeck & Lam, 2002). In this sense, the supervisor would be more likely to demonstrate derogation toward the third-party employee's coworkers who are more dissimilar to him/her, thereby resulting in the supervisor's moral exclusion of these dissimilar coworkers from their scope of justice and, in turn, the supervisor's abusive behaviors toward coworkers. In addition, as the supervisor is inclined to place those dissimilar subordinates who are unconnected to him/her outside his/her scope of justice (Deutsch, 1973; Williams & O'Reilly, 1998), the supervisor is more likely to morally exclude and then abuse the third-party employee's coworkers with high relative deep-level dissimilarity. Providing support for these arguments, Tepper et al. (2011) found that supervisors were inclined to abuse subordinates whom they perceived to be more dissimilar to them in terms of values and attitudes.

Proposition 1: Supervisor's coworker abuse is more likely to occur when a third-party employee's relative surface-level and deep-level dissimilarity to the supervisor is low.

Third parties' relative conflict with the supervisor. Conflict refers to "a process that begins when an individual or group perceives differences and opposition between itself and another individual or team about interests and resources, beliefs, values, or practices that matter to them" (De Dreu & Gelfand, 2008: 6). Since team members make contributions to the team via both

social inputs and task inputs (e.g., Forsyth, 1983), conflict in a team includes two types: relationship conflict and task conflict. Guided by the conflict literature and theories of social comparison and moral exclusion, we propose that supervisors would compare a third-party employee with his/her coworkers with respect to the relationship conflict and task conflict with them in order to derive a third-party employee's *relative relationship conflict* and *relative task conflict*.

Relationship conflict occurs when there are interpersonal incompatibilities between the supervisor and the third-party employee, typically including tension, animosity, and annoyance among them (Jehn, 1995). When third-party employees' relationship conflict with the supervisor is lower than their coworkers', the supervisor would more likely place third-party employees inside his/her scope of justice, while placing third-party employees' coworkers outside of his/her scope of justice. This is because third-party employees' low relative relationship conflict with the supervisor would increase the supervisor's satisfaction with and commitment to his/her relationship with third-party employees (Jehn, 1995; Simons & Peterson, 2000), which leads to the supervisor's positioning of the cooperative third-party employees into his/her scope of justice. By contrast, because of the supervisor's low satisfaction with and commitment to his/her relationship with third-party employees' coworkers, these coworkers who are seen as adversaries would be placed by the supervisor beyond his/her scope of justice, thereby encouraging the supervisor's exclusionary practices in the form of abusive behaviors toward coworkers.

Moreover, the supervisor's high relationship conflict with third-party employees' coworkers would promote the supervisor's antagonistic or sinister attributions for these coworkers' behaviors (Janssen, Van de Vliert, & Veenstra, 1999; Simon & Peterson, 2000), which can also encourage the supervisor's abusive behaviors toward them.

However, third-party employees' low task conflict with the supervisor would evoke less supervisory abusive behaviors toward their coworkers. Task conflict refers to the conflict between a third-party employee and his/her supervisor regarding the content of task being conducted, which typically includes disagreements in ideas, opinions, and viewpoints (Jehn, 1995). When a third-party employee's task conflict with the supervisor is low, the third-party employee would have low tendency to scrutinize the supervisor's task issues and also be less likely to engage in deep-level processing of the supervisor's task-related information (De Dreu & Weingart, 2003; De Dreu & West, 2001; Jehn, 1995). This would reduce the quality of decisions made by the supervisor. Nevertheless, the high task conflict of a third-party employee's coworkers with the supervisor would encourage coworkers' greater cognitive understanding of the task issues being performed by the supervisor, which in turn increases the supervisor's decision quality (Simons & Peterson, 2000). Given the high-quality decision-making is helpful for the supervisor's goal achievement at work, the supervisor would more likely position a third-party employee's coworkers inside his/her scope of justice and, in turn, reduce his/her abusive behaviors toward coworkers.

Proposition 2: Supervisor's coworker abuse is more likely to occur when a third-party employee's relative relationship (task) conflict with the supervisor is low (high).

Third parties' relative utility for the supervisor. Another factor influencing the supervisor's moral exclusion is the utility of the subordinate, or the extent to which the subordinate is evaluated as beneficial versus harmful for the supervisor's goals and interests (Hafer & Olson, 2003; Opatow, 1990a, 1995). In our theoretical framework, we focus on two types of subordinates' utility for the supervisor: direct utility and indirect utility. Specifically, we propose that supervisors would compare a third-party employee with his/her coworkers in terms of the direct utility and the indirect utility for them so as to derive a third-party employee's *relative direct utility* and *relative indirect utility*.

Direct utility refers to the degree to which a third-party employee is evaluated as beneficial or harmful for the supervisor's immediate goal achievement. For instance, by holding resources that are critical for the supervisor to attain his/her goals, a third-party employee is seen as possessing high direct utility for the supervisor. According to Emerson's (1962) power dependence theory, when the supervisor relies on third-party employees for his/her goal achievement, the supervisor's dependence on third-party employees is high. In this sense, an example of third-party employees' direct utility for the supervisor is *higher supervisor dependence on third parties* (cf. Guinote, 2004, 2007; Keltner, Gruenfeld, & Anderson, 2003). When supervisor dependence on

third-party employees is higher than supervisor dependence on third-party employees' coworkers, the supervisor relies more on third-party employees while depending less on third-party employees' coworkers to accomplish his/her goals. As such, the low utility of third-party employees' coworkers would position these coworkers outside the supervisor's scope of justice, which in turn encourages the supervisor to engage in abusive behaviors toward coworkers.

Another example of third-party employees' direct utility for the supervisor is third-party employees' high performance. In a team context, the supervisor is often considered as the representative of the team (Eisenberger et al., 2010). As such, the supervisor's goal is closely related to the team's goal. When a third-party employee is assessed as beneficial or harmful for the team's goal achievement, the third-party employee would be seen as directly influencing his/her supervisor's goal accomplishment. Therefore, a third-party employee's direct utility for the supervisor can also be represented by his/her direct utility for the team. Specifically, when third-party employees' performance is higher than their coworkers', third-party employees would be seen as making more contributions to the team performance (i.e., high utility for the team), thereby increasing their direct utility for the supervisor. Those coworkers with low performance, on the other hand, would be considered as having low direct utility for the supervisor because of their less contributions to the team performance. Due to their low direct utility for the supervisor, third-party employees' coworkers would more likely be placed outside the

supervisor's scope of justice, which in turn increases their experienced abuse. Providing support for this argument, research has shown that lower performers who are more likely to interfere with their supervisors' ability to accomplish goals put them at risk of supervisors' moral exclusionary practices in the form of abusive supervision (Tepper et al., 2011; Walter et al., 2015).

In addition to their direct benefits or harms for the supervisor, third-party employees can be indirectly beneficial or harmful for the supervisor's goal accomplishment. More specifically, third-party employees contribute to the supervisor's goal achievement in an indirect way, that is, benefiting or harming the social and psychological context that supports the supervisor's goal accomplishment (cf. Bolino & Turnley, 2005; Organ, 1997). We call this indirect benefit or harm for the supervisor's goal achievement as third-party employees' indirect utility for the supervisor. An example of third-party employees' high indirect utility for the supervisor is their team norm commitment. Team norms specify what team members can do or cannot do in a team context (cf. Cialdini & Goldstein, 2004; Cialdini, Kallgren, & Reno, 1991). Studies have shown that when presented with information about team norms, team members can reduce their engagement in counter-normative behaviors and promote their engagement in socially desirable behaviors (e.g., Kallgren, Reno, & Cialdini, 2000; Schultz, Nolan, Cialdini, Goldstein, & Giskevicius, 2007). For instance, when third-party employees follow the team norm, they would engage in fewer deviant behaviors which violate the legitimate interests of the team (Ilies, Peng, Savani, & Dimotakis, 2013;

Robinson & Bennett, 1995). As such, by following team norms, third-party employees can contribute to the maintenance and enhancement of a healthy team environment which facilitates the supervisor's goal achievement and, in turn, increases their indirect utility for the supervisor. By contrast, when third-party employees' coworkers violate the team norm, they would more likely engage in deviant behaviors, which can exert harm on the interests of the team. In such unhealthy team environment, the supervisor's goal achievement is more likely to be thwarted. As such, third-party employees' coworkers would have low indirect utility for the supervisor. Due to their low indirect utility for the supervisor, third-party employees' coworkers would more likely be positioned outside the supervisor's scope of justice, thereby increasing their experienced abuse.

Proposition 3: Supervisor's coworker abuse is more likely to occur when a third-party employee's relative direct and indirect utility for the supervisor is high.

Table 1 summarizes the main factors identified under each moral exclusion factor that predict supervisors' abusive behaviors toward third-party employees' coworkers. One more thing which needs to be noted is that we do not come up with specific propositions regarding the effect of combined moral exclusion factors (e.g., high relative dissimilarity and high relative utility, high relative direct utility and low relative indirect utility) on supervisors' coworker abuse for two reasons. First, combining those factors identified under each moral exclusion factor will generate a more complicated set of combinations

and corresponding propositions, which will violate our goal of theoretical parsimony (Bacharach, 1989). Second, according to the halo effect (Nisbett & Wilson, 1977), if people evaluate a person positively in one area, they may generalize the positive evaluation into other areas. Based on this logic, we expect supervisors' evaluation of third-party employees on one moral exclusion factor would bias their evaluation of third-party employees on other moral exclusion factors. For example, if third-party employees are evaluated by the supervisor as more similar to him/her, then the supervisor is more likely to place third-party employees into his/her scope of justice. This in turn will bias the supervisor's evaluation of third-party employees as being in less conflict with and being more useful for him/her. Therefore, the supervisor's comparative evaluation of third-party employees and their coworkers in terms of three moral exclusion factors would remain consistent, which reinforces the supervisor's decisions as to whether to abuse coworkers or not.

TABLE 1
Supervisor's Moral Exclusion Comparison Factors

Comparison Dimensions	Factors
Perceived dissimilarity to coworkers vs. third party	Deep dissimilarity (<i>e.g., attitudes, beliefs, and values</i>)
	Surface dissimilarity (<i>e.g., age, sex, ethnicity</i>)
Perceived conflict with coworkers vs. third party	Relationship-based conflict
	Task-based conflict
Perceived utility of coworkers vs. third party	Direct utility (<i>e.g., supervisor dependence on the third party, third-party performance</i>)
	Indirect utility (<i>e.g., third-party norm violation</i>)

THIRD-PARTY EMPLOYEES' INVOLVEMENT IN THE APPRAISAL PHASE

After witnessing the supervisor's abusive behaviors toward coworkers, third-party employees would form evaluations of coworkers' abuse to determine their subsequent responses. Given perceived abuse is fundamentally an appraisal of injustice (Tepper, 2000), we propose that third-party employees' appraisal of coworker abusive supervision is mainly centered on the injustice assessment. Moreover, given the attribution literature suggests that injustice appraisal is also a function of attributions of causal responsibility (Martinko et al., 2004), we specifically posit that third-party employees would center their injustice appraisals of coworker abusive supervision on assigning responsibility to a certain target. As prior research has elaborated on how third-party employees attribute responsibility for coworkers' abuse to either the supervisor (e.g., Mitchell et al., 2015; O'reilly & Aquino, 2011) or their abused coworkers (e.g., Mitchell et al., 2015), the focus of the present research is mainly on third-party employees themselves. More importantly, as a victim, the abused coworker may also make attributions for his/her experienced mistreatment. Given prior research has already explained how a victim of abusive supervision attributes responsibility to either the supervisor (e.g., Oh & Farh, 2017) or himself/herself (e.g., Liu, Liao, & Loi, 2012), the present research is primarily focused on the victim's (i.e., abused coworker's) attributed responsibility to third-party employees. The focus of third-party employees' and abused coworkers' attributed responsibility to third-party employees is consistent with

our interest in examining how third-party employees are involved in the appraisal phase of coworker abusive supervision. Below we consider both personal and situational factors that shape each party's attributed responsibility for coworker abusive supervision.

Third Party's Self-Attribution

According to attribution theory (e.g., Weiner, 1985, 1986), when assigning causal responsibility for an outcome, individuals can make internal attributions or external attributions. That is, whether individuals believe the cause of an outcome resides within themselves (internal attributions) versus resides outside themselves (external attributions), reflecting the locus of causality dimension of attribution theory (Weiner, 1986). Attribution theory suggests that the locus of causality dimension is mainly derived from consensus information (Martinko et al., 2004; Weiner, 1985, 1986). Specifically, attribution theory posits that “high consensus information leads to the development of attributions reflecting external causes for an event, while low consensus information leads to the development of attributions reflecting internal causes for an event” (Martinko et al., 2004: 57). Given consensus information compares a person with relevant others on the same dimension and within the same situational context (Ashkanasy, 1995; Martinko et al., 2004), we identify personal and situational factors, including (1) third parties' own mistreatment from the supervisor, (2) third parties' relationship closeness with the abused coworker, (3) team competition climate, and (4) team hostile climate, to examine how they influence the availability of consensus

information to third-party employees and in turn influence their self-attributed responsibility for coworker abusive supervision.

Personal factors. According to attribution theory (Martinko et al., 2004), the consensus information that is derived from people's comparison with others on the same dimension enables the development of attributions reflecting internal vs. external causes for an event. Therefore, when observing their coworkers being abused by the supervisor, third-party employees would compare their own treatment by the supervisor with that of their coworkers to engage in the attributional process. That is, whether third-party employees experience abusive supervision themselves can influence self-attributions for coworker abusive supervision. Specifically, if both third-party employees and their coworkers are subject to abusive supervision, this common mistreatment experience would reveal high consensus information to third-party employees that the supervisor treats subordinates in a same and unfair manner, which leads to third-party employees' attributions to factors outside of themselves (e.g., the supervisor). On the other hand, if third-party employees experience less mistreatment but their coworkers receive more mistreatment, the preferential treatment that third-party employees receive from the supervisor would result in low consensus information available to them that the supervisor tends to treat subordinates differently, which encourages third-party employees to develop attributional explanations reflecting internal causes. For instance, third-party employees may hold themselves responsible for coworker abusive supervision due to their exceptional performance or superior ability. Providing support for

this argument, research has revealed that high performers may experience discomfort and embarrassment for their high achievement, feelings associated with a strong sense of self-responsibility, because their outperformance poses a potential threat (e.g., supervisory abusive threat) to the low-performing person (e.g., Baumeister, Stillwell, & Heatherton, 1994; Cross, Coleman, & Stewart, 1993; Exline & Lobel, 1999).

Proposition 4: A third-party employee's self-attributions for supervisor's coworker abuse are more likely to occur when he/she experiences less mistreatment from the supervisor.

Third-party employees' self-attribution for coworker abusive supervision is not solely influenced by their relationships with the supervisor; it is also influenced by their relationships with abused coworkers. Prior research suggests that relationship closeness is associated with self-other overlap (i.e., including other in the self; Aron & Fraley, 1999). Therefore, third-party employees who witness their close coworkers being abused by the supervisor are more likely to identify and empathize with their coworkers. This empathy would encourage third-party employees to hold that their coworkers' mistreatment experience is misaligned with their deservingness of receiving fair and respectful treatment from the supervisor. As such, according to attribution theory (Martinko et al., 2004; Weiner, 1985, 1986), this low consensus information would lead third-party employees to attribute responsibility for coworkers' abuse to themselves. For example, third-party employees may blame themselves for not being able to prevent coworkers' abuse effectively,

because, as subordinates, they have limited power and influence to challenge their supervisors (Aquino, Tripp, & Bies, 2006; Farh & Chen, 2014). By contrast, as third-party employees who have less close relationship with abused coworkers tend to not sympathize with their coworkers, they would see their coworkers' mistreatment experience as aligned with their deservingness of being treated in an unfair manner. As such, this high consensus information would lead third-party employees to develop attributional explanations reflecting external causes (e.g., abused coworkers' low ability and poor performance).

Proposition 5: A third-party employee's self-attributions for supervisor's coworker abuse are more likely to occur when he/she has a close relationship with the abused coworker.

Situational factors. According to attribution theory (Martinko et al., 2004), the consensus information based on which people develop attributions reflecting internal vs. external causes for an event is derived from people's comparison with relevant others within the same situational context. Therefore, situational context factors which reflect team members' interpersonal relationships can influence people's interpretation of consensus information and in turn their attribution process. As such, we propose that in addition to individual factors, some team situational factors affect third-party employees' self-attribution for coworkers' abuse. A particularly salient situational factor is team competition climate, which refers to the extent to which team members perceive their rewards and recognition to depend on comparisons of their

performance with that of other team members (Brown, Cron, & Slocum, 1998; Kohn, 1992). When team competition climate is high, team members are sensitive to and concerned about their competence since they are aware that only team members who outperform others will be recognized and rewarded (Chen, Zhu, & Zhou, 2015). In such a competitive environment, team members would be encouraged to outperform others to gain rewards and recognition in the team. Therefore, when third-party employees in a team with high competition climate witness the supervisor's abusive behaviors toward their coworkers, they would see their coworkers' mistreatment experience as aligned with their deservingness of receiving less favorable treatment from the supervisor. Indeed, research has shown that a competitive work environment with much pressure may make the experience of contentment from other's mistreatment more likely to occur (Feather, 2006). As such, according to attribution theory (Martinko et al., 2004; Weiner, 1985, 1986), this high consensus information would lead third-party employees to attribute responsibility for coworkers' abuse to factors outside themselves.

By contrast, when a team has low competition climate, team members are less sensitive to their competence, thereby reducing the competition among team members. As third-party employees in such team with low competition climate tend to show concern for their coworkers, they tend to desire less mistreatment inflicted on their coworkers. Therefore, when observing their coworkers experience abuse, third-party employees would view their coworkers' mistreatment experience as misaligned with their deservingness of

being treated by the supervisor in a respectful manner. As such, this low consensus information would shape third-party employees' self-attribution for coworkers' abuse. For instance, third-party employees may think that they should have taken some actions to prevent supervisory abusive behaviors toward their coworkers.

Proposition 6: A third-party employee's self-attributions for supervisor's coworker abuse are more likely to occur when team competition climate is low.

Another team factor which can influence a third-party employee's self-attribution is team hostile climate. Team hostile climate emerges when team members feel antagonistic, untrusting, and aggressive toward other team members (Mawritz, Mayer, Hoobler, Wayne, & Marinova, 2012). Team hostile climate can offer a set of norms that guide how supervisors and subordinates approach their employment relationships within the team (Kuenzi & Schminke, 2009; Schneider, 1975). A team characterized by prevailing feelings of antagonism, mistrust, and aggression signals to third-party employees that hostile actions such as abusive behaviors are supported and likely even encouraged. Therefore, in a team with high hostile climate, third-party employees would feel supervisory abusive behaviors toward coworkers are aligned with the team hostile climate whereby every subordinate deserves abusive supervision. Based on attribution theory (Martinko et al., 2004; Weiner, 1985, 1986), we expect this high consensus information would lead third-party employees to attribute responsibility for coworkers' abuse to factors outside

themselves (e.g., supervisors should be responsible for their hostile behaviors which are triggered by team hostile norm).

In contrast, third-party employees in a team with low hostile climate would more likely make self-attributions for coworkers' abuse. This is because in such team context, cues are more available to third-party employees that supervisory abusive behaviors are not acceptable, and that considerate behaviors toward subordinates should be encouraged. As such, when third-party employees witness their coworkers experience abusive supervision, they would feel the supervisor's abusive behaviors toward their coworkers are not aligned with the team climate whereby every subordinate deserves supervisory favorable treatment. This low consensus information would in turn encourage third-party employees to wonder whether they have done something for causing coworker abusive supervision (e.g., their excellence results in supervisory abusive behaviors toward coworkers), thereby increasing third-party employees' self-attribution for coworkers' abuse. Taken above arguments together, we propose:

Proposition 7: A third-party employee's self-attributions for supervisor's coworker abuse are more likely to occur when team hostile climate is low.

Abused Coworker's Attribution to Third Party

We further apply attribution theory to the case of abused coworkers' attributed responsibility for their mistreatment experience to third-party employees. According to attribution theory (Martinko et al., 2004; Weiner,

1985, 1986), in addition to consensus information, consistency information can also influence the locus of causality dimension of attribution. Specifically, high consistency information reveals a target person's outcome remains stable over time (Martinko et al., 2004). As information that indicates the causes of an outcome remain stable over time leads to attributions characterized by stability such as ability and effort, high consistency information is more likely to be related to attributions to the target person (Kelley, 1973; Martinko & Thomson, 1998; Weiner, 1986). By contrast, low consistency information reveals a target person's outcome remains unstable over time. As information that indicates the causes of an outcome remain unstable over time leads to attributions characterized by instability such as luck and chance, low consistency information is more likely to be related to attributions to the factors outside the target person (Kelley, 1973; Martinko & Thomson, 1998; Weiner, 1986). Attribution theory therefore suggests that if abused coworkers attribute their experienced mistreatment to third-party employees' stable causes (e.g., exceptional ability), they are likely to hold third-party employees responsible for their experienced mistreatment. Conversely, if abused coworkers attribute their experienced mistreatment to third-party employees' unstable causes (e.g., luck), they are less likely to assign causal responsibility to third-party employees.

As consistency information which shapes people's internal vs. external attributions is evaluated within the situational context (Martinko et al., 2004), we identify interpersonal-relationship factors such as third parties' relationship

closeness with the supervisor and team situational factors such as team competition climate to examine how they can influence abused coworkers' interpretation of consistency information and, in turn, their attributed responsibility to third-party employees for their experienced abuse.

Personal factors. Abused coworkers' attributions to third-party employees for their experienced mistreatment are more likely if third-party employees have a close relationship with the supervisor. For instance, when third-party employees develop high quality leader-member exchange (LMX) relationships with the supervisor, they would receive more rewards, respect, and trust from the supervisor (Gerstner & Day, 1997; Graen & Uhl-Bien, 1995; Liden et al., 1993), but receive less supervisory abusive behaviors. Third-party employees' favorable treatment would lead abused coworkers to believe that it is third-party employees' high LMX that shelters third-party employees from supervisory abusive behaviors while bringing about supervisor abuse on them. Given LMX represents a general high quality supervisor-subordinate relationship which develops and lasts over long time (Gerstner & Day, 1997; Lian, Ferris, & Brown, 2012), abused coworkers would more likely view third-party employees' high LMX as a stable cause which results in third-party employees' less experienced abuse, but more supervisory abusive behaviors toward them. As such, abused coworkers would be inclined to attribute responsibility for their experienced mistreatment to third-party employees.

Proposition 8: An abused coworker's attributions for supervisory abusive behaviors to the third-party employee are more likely to occur

when the third-party employee has a close relationship with the supervisor.

Situational factors. Apart from affecting third-party employees' self-attribution, team competition climate also affects the abused coworker's attribution to third-party employees. As argued earlier, in a team with low competition climate, team members are under less pressure to outperform their coworkers, as their rewards and recognition are not necessarily contingent upon their relative performance to coworkers (Chen et al., 2015). As such, there are less competition among coworkers and third-party employees in terms of performance and ability. Therefore, when experiencing mistreatment themselves, abused coworkers are less likely to attribute their experienced mistreatment to third-party employees' stable characteristics such as high performance or exceptional ability, thereby reducing their attribution for experienced abuse to third-party employees.

However, when team competition climate is high, team members are encouraged to outperform others to gain rewards and recognition (Chen et al., 2015). As such, coworkers in a team with high competition climate tend to compete with third-party employees over winning rewards and recognition. In this sense, there are fierce competition among coworkers and third-party employees in terms of performance and ability. In a team with high competition climate, therefore, third-party employees' high performance and exceptional ability would cause abused coworkers to consistently receive abusive behaviors from the supervisor. This consistency can signal to abused coworkers that their

experienced mistreatment is not caused by factors inside themselves, but rather stems from third-party employees' stable attributes (e.g., high performance and exceptional ability). As such, abused coworkers are more likely to attribute responsibility for their experienced abuse to third-party employees. Taken together, we propose:

Proposition 9: An abused coworker's attributions for supervisory abusive behaviors to the third-party employee are more likely to occur when team competition climate is high.

TABLE 2
Third-Party's and Abused Coworker's Attributed Responsibility for Supervisor's Coworker Abuse and Their Predictors

Attributed Responsibility	Personal and Situational Factors
Third party's self-attribution	Personal factors (e.g., third party's own mistreatment from the supervisor, third party's relationship closeness with the abused coworker)
	Situational factors (e.g., team competition climate, team hostile climate)
Abused coworker's attribution to third party	Personal factors (e.g., third party's relationship closeness with the supervisor)
	Situational factors (e.g., team competition climate)

THIRD PARTY EMPLOYEES' INVOLVEMENT IN THE RESPONSE PHASE

Emotional Responses

Third-party employees' and abused coworkers' attributions of responsibility for coworker abusive supervision can shape their distinct

emotional experiences. Below we delineate how each party's attributions influence their respective emotional responses.

Third party's emotions toward self. When third-party employees attribute responsibility for coworker abusive supervision to themselves, they are more likely to experience feelings of shame and guilt. Shame is a painful feeling of humiliation or distress triggered by self-related aversive events (Ferguson & Stegge, 1998). Unlike shame, guilt is a painful feeling of distress and regret triggered by a transgression or self-attributed wrongdoing (Tignor & Colvin, 2019; Tracy & Robins, 2006). Another difference between shame and guilt is that the former is more directly about the *self*, whereas the latter is more directly about the *thing* done by people (Lewis, 1971; Tangney, Miller, Flicker, & Barlow, 1996).

In spite of these differences, shame and guilt are often viewed as more similar than different (Smith & Ellsworth, 1985). For instance, both emotions are self-focused (Lewis, 1993; Rozin, Lowery, Imada, & Haidt, 1999). More importantly, studies have identified the appraisal of self-attributed responsibility for a negative event as a defining feature of both emotions (e.g., Massi Lindsey, 2005; Schmader & Lickel, 2006; Siemer, Mauss, & Gross, 2007; Smith & Ellsworth, 1985; Weiner, Graham, & Chandler, 1982). Indeed, prior research has shown that both shame and guilt involve high appraisals of personal responsibility for committing a blameworthy action (Lickel, Schmader, Curtis, Scarnier, & Ames, 2005; Manstead & Tetlock, 1989; Smith & Ellsworth, 1985). Therefore, a third-party employee is more likely to

experience shame and guilt when he/she feels responsible for causing supervisory abusive behaviors toward his/her coworkers. Providing indirect support for these arguments, prior research has demonstrated that people's feelings of shame and guilt are more likely to occur "after they have personally committed a blameworthy act" (Schmader & Lickel, 2006: 45).

Proposition 10: A third-party employee is more likely to experience (a) shame and (b) guilt when he/she attributes responsibility for supervisor's coworker abuse to himself/herself.

Abused coworker's emotions toward third party. When abused coworkers attribute responsibility for their experienced abuse to third-party employees, they are more likely to experience other-focused emotions such as resentment and envy. Resentment is a negative emotion that can be elicited by experiencing injustice (Folger, 1987; Smith, 2000; Weiner, 1986). As Folger (1987: 204) noted, resentment is "an emotion with an outwardly directed target, an implicit accusation of wrongdoing". When abused coworkers hold third-party employees at least partly responsible for their experienced mistreatment, they tend to perceive third-party employees as the person who has committed blameworthy actions which bring about their bad experience. As such, abused coworkers' resentment is likely to be invoked toward third-party employees. Moreover, when abused coworkers perceive third-party employees to be an indirect cause of their mistreatment, they are more likely to see themselves as being harmed unjustly by third-party employees (cf. Haidt, 2003). In response

to this unjust treatment from third-party employees, abused coworkers are more likely to experience resentful emotion.

Like resentment, envy is also a negatively valenced emotion, which can be elicited by a subjective sense of injustice (Smith, Parrott, Ozer, & Moniz, 1994). However, different from resentment, envy is also accompanied by a sense of inferiority which is brought by one's focus on his/her own disadvantage. When comparing to third-party employees who are not abused, abused coworkers who are mistreated by the supervisor are more likely to envy those third-party employees who receive favorable treatment from the supervisor. Providing support for these arguments, studies have found that an employee's high relationship with the supervisor can elicit the envy feelings of his/her coworkers who have low relationship with the supervisor (e.g., Shi, Si, & Zhou, 2016). Combing the above arguments, we propose:

Proposition 11: An abused worker is more likely to experience (a) resentment and (b) envy when he/she attributes responsibility for supervisory abusive behaviors to the third-party employee.

Behavioral Responses

Emotions generally motivate some kinds of behavioral actions as a response to the eliciting event. That is, emotions can put people into a motivational state in which the tendency to engage in certain goal-related behaviors (e.g., confession, revenge, etc) increases (Haidt, 2003). These behavioral action tendencies can range from *avoidance-oriented behaviors* to

approach-oriented behaviors. Below we explain how each foregoing emotion is associated with the avoidance- or approach-behavioral responses.

Third party's behaviors. A third-party employee's shame would produce his/her avoidance-oriented behaviors. This is because shame leads people to insulate themselves from the shame-eliciting event, generating a motivation to hide, disappear, or escape (Lickel et al., 2005; Tangney, 1995; Wicker, Payne, & Morgan, 1983). Therefore, a third-party employee who experiences shame for coworkers' abuse would more likely engage in avoidance-oriented behaviors toward abused coworkers, such as alienation, psychological distance from coworker (e.g., increased sick leave and absenteeism), or physical distance from coworker (e.g., actual turnover).

Unlike shame, guilt predicts more approach-oriented behaviors. Given guilt involves a negative self-appraisal process whereby individuals realize that their previous transgressions lead to others' negative consequences (Tangney, 1990; Tracy & Robins, 2006), individuals who experience guilt are motivated to perform approach-oriented actions aimed to repair the damage caused by their transgressions as well as to compensate the victim (Schmader & Lickel, 2006). As approach-related responses such as confession and apology can repair the damage caused by the guilt-eliciting event (Lickel et al., 2005; Tangney et al., 1996; Wicker et al., 1983), third-party employees who feel guilty for coworkers' abuse would more likely engage in such approach-oriented behaviors as helping, apology, and confession.

Proposition 12: A third-party employee's shame is positively related to his/her avoidance-oriented behaviors toward abused coworkers (e.g., alienation, psychological distance, and physical distance).

Proposition 13: A third-party employee's guilt is positively related to his/her approach-oriented behaviors toward abused coworkers (e.g., helping, apology, and confession).

Abused coworker's behaviors. An abused coworker's resentment would elicit his/her approach-oriented behaviors toward third-party employees. This is because resentment involves a motivation to proactively attack or retaliate against the individual who is perceived as acting unfairly (cf. Haidt, 2003) or is accused of wrongdoing (Folger, 1987). Therefore, when abused coworkers experience feelings of resentment due to their attributed responsibility for their experienced abuse to third-party employees, they are more likely to engage in approach-oriented behaviors toward third-party employees such as aggression and revenge in order to redress their perceived injustice and transgressions.

Different from resentment, envy is associated with more avoidance-oriented behaviors. Given inferiority is inherent in the feelings of envy because of one's disadvantage (Smith, 2000), the envious person may have low self-evaluation. For people with low self-evaluation, they tend to leave the organization so as to maintain their personal images (Wiesenfeld, Brockner, & Thibault, 2000). Based on this logic, we expect abused coworkers who experience envy toward third-party employees are more likely to distance

themselves from third-party employees or leave the organization to enhance their self-evaluation. Moreover, given social comparison with others is often the trigger of envy (Duffy & Shaw, 2000), the envious people tend to take some actions to avoid the social comparison which can cause their painful feelings. For instance, studies have shown that envy can evoke responses including avoidance of the comparison person (Salovey & Rothman, 1991), ostracism of the envied person (Vecchio, 1995), and increased absenteeism (Duffy & Shaw, 2000). By doing so, the envious people can avoid direct confrontation of the envied person's advantage, thereby reducing the negative consequences resulted from feelings of envy. Therefore, we propose that abused coworkers' envy would invoke their avoidance-oriented behaviors including alienation behaviors toward third-party employees (e.g., ostracism toward the third-party employee), psychologically distancing behaviors toward third-party employees (e.g., low reliance on or reduced identification with the third-party employee), and physically distancing behaviors toward third-party employees (e.g., actual turnover). Taken together, we propose:

Proposition 14: An abused coworker's resentment is positively related to his/her approach-oriented behaviors toward the third-party employee (e.g., aggression and revenge).

Proposition 15: An abused coworker's envy is positively related to his/her avoidance-oriented behaviors toward the third-party employee (e.g., alienation, psychological distance, and physical distance).

TABLE 3
Emotional Experiences – Behavioral Actions Pathways

Emotional Experiences		Behavioral Actions
Third party's emotions toward self	Shame	Avoidance-oriented behaviors (<i>e.g., alienation, psychological distance, and physical distance</i>)
	Guilt	Approach-oriented behaviors (<i>e.g., helping, apology, and confession</i>)
Abused coworker's emotions toward third party	Resentment	Approach-oriented behaviors (<i>e.g., aggression and revenge</i>)
	Envy	Avoidance-oriented behaviors (<i>e.g., alienation, psychological distance, and physical distance</i>)

DISCUSSION

Theoretical Implications

Our conceptual framework offers several important theoretical contributions to the literatures on abusive supervision and third party reactions to mistreatment. First, we contribute to the abusive supervision literature by examining the effect of abusive supervision on third-party employees. The extant abusive supervision research has primarily examined how abusive supervision influences victims (e.g., for reviews, see Mackey et al., 2017; Martinko et al., 2013; Tepper, 2007; Tepper et al., 2017) or perpetrators (e.g., Liao, Yam, Johnson, Liu, & Song, 2018; Qin, Huang, Johnson, Hu, & Ju, 2018) (for exceptions, see Harris et al., 2013; Mitchell et al., 2015; Priesemuth, 2013). Our research extends this line of work by taking into account the larger social environment where abusive supervision occurs. Specifically, our research suggests that as an integral part of the workplace, third-party employees would engage in emotional and behavioral reactions to observed coworker abuse. For

instance, we propose that those third-party employees who become guilty try to help their abused coworkers. Our research therefore implies that apart from the victim, the third-party employee as another party in the workplace can effectively cope with abusive supervision. Moreover, our research proposes that third-party employees can be an indirect perpetrator of coworkers' abuse. By revealing how third-party employees can be a trigger of coworkers' abuse, our research uncovers one way that can be adopted by the organization to prevent the occurrence of abusive supervision in the workplace. Overall, our research provides a novel perspective (i.e., a third-party perspective) for the extant abusive supervision literature on how to cope with and prevent supervisory abusive behaviors in an effective way.

Second, we contribute to the emerging research on coworker abusive supervision by examining why coworker abusive supervision occurs. To the best of our knowledge, previous research has yet to investigate antecedents of coworker abusive supervision from a third-party perspective. Although prior work has begun to investigate abusive supervision from the third-party perspective (e.g., Harris et al., 2013; Mitchell et al., 2015; Priesemuth, 2013), this line of research tends to focus on outcomes of coworker abusive supervision by looking at third-party employees' emotional (e.g., anger and contentment) and behavioral (e.g., destructive or supportive behaviors toward coworkers) reactions to coworkers' abuse. Therefore, our research is among the first to showcase how third-party employees produce coworker abusive supervision. More specifically, our research integrates social comparison theory

with moral exclusion theory to delineate how supervisors' comparison of a third-party employee with his/her coworkers in terms of moral exclusion factors (i.e., perceived dissimilarity, perceived conflict, and perceived utility) influences the extent to which they abuse the third-party employee's coworkers. By taking into account the role of supervisors' comparison in their moral exclusion process underlying coworker abusive supervision, the present research also advances our understanding of the dynamic interplay among the perpetrator (i.e., supervisor), the victim (i.e., abused coworker), and the third-party employee in the coworker abusive supervision process.

Third, we contribute to the research on third party reactions to mistreatment in general and the research on coworker abusive supervision specifically by exploring how victims (i.e., abused coworkers) react to their experienced mistreatment by engaging in emotional and behavioral responses toward the third-party employee. Currently, researchers have primarily focused on a third-party employee's responses toward either victims (abused coworkers; e.g., Harris et al., 2013; Mitchell et al., 2015; Priesemuth, 2013) or the perpetrator (Skarlicki et al., 1998; Skarlicki & Rupp, 2010; Umphress et al., 2013). Our work therefore extends extant research by first demonstrating the ways abused coworkers respond to the third-party employee, thereby expanding the nomological network of coworker abusive supervision.

Fourth, while prior research on coworker abusive supervision tends to assume third-party employees are independent bystanders of coworkers' abuse (e.g., Harris et al., 2013; Mitchell et al., 2015; Priesemuth, 2013), we extend

this stream of research by viewing third-party employees as influential players in the perpetrator-victim abuse interaction. Our model not only unveils how a third-party employee's relative standing with respect to supervisors' moral exclusion factors (i.e., perceived dissimilarity, perceived conflict, and perceived utility) is a critical predictor of coworker abusive supervision, but also reveals how and when coworker abusive supervision leads third-party employees to experience self-focused emotions and abused coworkers to experience third party-focused emotions. Unlike other-focused emotions (e.g., third-party employees' anger toward the supervisor and contentment regarding coworkers' abuse) that previous coworker abusive supervision research has examined (Mitchell et al., 2015), our research centers on third-party employees' self-focused emotions, shame and guilt, which are associated with strong self-attributions of coworkers' abuse (Schmader & Lickel, 2006; Siemer et al., 2007; Smith & Ellsworth, 1985). Moreover, our research uncovers abused coworkers' emotions directed toward third-party employees, resentment and envy, which are related to their strong attributions of experienced abuse to third-party employees (Smith, 2000; Smith et al., 1994). By highlighting how and when third-party employees feel responsible or are blamed for coworker abusive supervision, our research suggests that the third-party employee is an integral part rather than an independent part of the work environment who brings about and suffers from coworker abusive supervision.

Fifth, our research contributes to the literature on third party reactions to mistreatment by broadening third-party employees' behavioral responses to

mistreatment and also incorporating victims' behavioral reactions toward third-party employees. Distinct from prior research which is only focused on third-party employees' approach-oriented behaviors (e.g., helping and punishment [Mitchell et al., 2015; Umphress et al., 2013]), our research shows that third-party employees also engage in avoidance-oriented behaviors, thereby expanding the spectrum of third parties' behavioral reactions toward victims. Furthermore, we suggest that in responding to coworker abusive supervision, victims (abused coworkers in our case) would also engage in approach- and avoidance-oriented behaviors. We posit in our conceptual model that abused coworkers exhibit both approaching (e.g., aggression) and avoiding (e.g., alienation) forms of behaviors toward third-party employees. Through delineating abused coworkers' behavioral reactions toward third-party employees, we demonstrate mistreatment can become contagious in that third parties who are observers of mistreatment can become a direct target of the mistreatment themselves, thus unveiling the dynamics of mistreatment in the workplace.

Future Research Directions

In spite of these theoretical contributions, we hope our conceptual framework stimulates further research on improving our model. First, although our research extends prior coworker abusive supervision research by incorporating abused coworkers' responses into our model, we have not considered supervisors' responses to their abusive behaviors. Future research could investigate: how do supervisors appraise their perpetrated behaviors? Will

they attribute responsibility for coworker abusive supervision to self or others (e.g., abused coworkers and third-party employees)? Will they feel shame or guilt for committing coworker abusive supervision? If so, will they engage in constructive behaviors to repair the relationship with abused coworkers? How will third-party employees perceive and appraise these emotional and behavioral responses enacted by supervisors? By answering these questions, future research would enrich our current conceptual framework and advance our understanding of the dynamic interplay among multiple parties (e.g., the supervisor, the abused coworker, and the third-party employee) in the coworker abusive supervision process.

Second, since our focus in the present research is on third-party employees' involvement in the coworker abusive supervision process, we only examine third-party employees' self-focused emotions such as shame and guilt and abused coworkers' third party-directed emotions such as resentment and envy. Future research that intends to go beyond the focus on third-party employees can explore other emotions. For instance, future research can examine third-party employees' other-focused emotions such as sympathy and *schadenfreude*. Third-party employees who attribute responsibility for coworkers' abuse to self may sympathize with abused coworkers, given sympathy is a possible reaction to other persons' misfortune (Feather & Sherman, 2002). Or third-party employees may experience *schadenfreude*, which reveals one's malicious pleasure at others' misfortune (Heider, 1958), even when they make self-attributions for coworkers' mistreatment. As to

abused coworkers' emotional reactions, future research can extend our focus on abused coworkers' other-directed emotions (i.e., third party-directed emotions) to examining self-directed emotions. For example, it is worth investigating whether fear would be elicited when abused coworkers attribute responsibility for their experienced mistreatment to third-party employees. As employees, abused coworkers have limited power to influence their colleagues – third-party employees. Therefore, when abused coworkers hold third-party employees responsible for their experienced abuse but have low coping ability to address this experienced threat posed by third-party employees, they would more likely experience fear, which is especially likely to be evoked when people assess low coping potential to tackle the threat (Oh & Farh, 2017; Roseman, 2013; Smith & Ellsworth, 1985).

Third, for the purpose of theoretical parsimony (Bacharach, 1989), our research chooses to focus only on the path linking emotional experiences to behavioral responses without identifying the boundary conditions for this emotion-behavior link. According to emotional regulation theory (Gross, 1998a, 1998b), the presence of person- and environment-regulating factors can alter individuals' behavioral response tendencies transited from their emotional experiences. Future research therefore can draw on emotional regulation theory to examine how personal and environmental factors can influence the effects of individuals' emotional experiences on their behavioral responses. For example, according to emotional regulation literature (e.g., Gross, 2001), individuals with high emotional regulation skills have the ability to forgo automatic processing

tendencies and are able to carry out more strategic behavioral patterns that will benefit the self and others (Mayer & Salovey, 1995). Therefore, abused coworkers who are high in emotional regulation skills would have the capacity to override their impulsive behavioral responses (e.g., aggression and revenge toward third parties) which can be triggered by their feelings of resentment when they hold third-party employees accountable for their experienced abuse. More research is therefore encouraged to explore these kinds of personal and situational factors that can shape the emotion-behavior transition process.

Practical Implications

Our conceptual model also generates interesting implications for managerial practice. First, our model demonstrates a third-party employee's relative high standing, which is derived from supervisors' comparisons in terms of moral exclusion factors (i.e., dissimilarity, conflict, and utility), could result in supervisory abusive behaviors toward coworkers. Regardless of when third-party employees attribute responsibility for coworkers' abuse to themselves or when abused coworkers attribute responsibility to third-party employees, both situations would engender negative workplace outcomes (e.g., third-party employees' alienation from abused coworkers and abused coworkers' aggression toward third-party employees). This proposition ought to serve as a warning to supervisors that they should not abuse subordinates based on their comparative evaluations regarding moral exclusion factors. Although those subordinates who have relative high standing in the team could be sheltered from their supervisors' abuse in the short term, they may ultimately experience

negative outcomes such as aggression and distance from abused coworkers. In this sense, both relative-high-standing subordinates and relative-low-standing subordinates could have negative workplace experiences resulted from supervisory abusive behaviors. Therefore, steps should be taken to minimize the occurrence of abusive supervision. For instance, supervisors should be encouraged to take more effective forms of leadership (e.g., servant leadership [Liden, Wayne, Zhao, & Henderson, 2008; Van Dierendonck, 2011]), rather than resorting to abusive supervision when leading a team.

Second, our model shows that when abused coworkers hold third-party employees responsible for their experienced abuse, they would more likely experience feelings of resentment and envy, which in turn evoke their aggression and distancing behaviors toward third-party employees. Although our model has unveiled some personal and situational factors which can weaken the positive effect of abused coworkers' attributions to third-party employees on their negative behaviors toward third-party employees, more direct ways should be adopted by supervisors to cope with the negative implications brought by abused coworkers' attributions to third-party employees for their experienced mistreatment. Studies have demonstrated that when subordinates make self-attributions (e.g., attribute abusive supervision to their low performance [Liu et al., 2012]), the negative impact of abusive supervision on subordinates can be mitigated. Therefore, supervisors can encourage subordinates to think more about themselves when trying to find reasons for their experienced abuse.

CONCLUSION

Drawing on moral exclusion theory, social comparison theory, justice theory, and attribution theory, we present a three-phase third party's involvement model of how a third-party employee as a non-independent observer is involved in the activation, appraisal, and response phases of coworker abusive supervision. We hope our conceptual work stimulates empirical examination of our propositions, and motivates organizational scholars to further explore into the field of abusive supervision from the third-party perspective.

**CHAPTER 2: IT'S LONELY AT THE TOP: A MULTILEVEL
INVESTIGATION OF WHY AND WHEN HIGH PERFORMERS FEEL
OSTRACIZED (ESSAY 2)**

ABSTRACT

While high performers make great contributions to their work groups, research has documented that they can also be targets of victimization from fellow group members. Drawing from moral exclusion theory and social comparison theory, we developed and tested a model delineating *how* high performers may indirectly provoke abusive supervisory behaviors towards coworkers (*coworker abusive supervision*) and *when* they are more likely to experience shame and ostracism from their coworkers for doing so. Analyses of multi-wave, multisource data supported our model. We found that an employee's *relative task performance* (i.e., an employee's task performance compared to the average task performance within a workgroup) exerted a positive indirect effect on his/her feelings of shame through coworker abusive supervision. Further, group competition climate moderated this indirect effect by weakening the positive relationship between coworker abusive supervision and an employee's feelings of shame. Finally, an employee's shame is positively related to perceived ostracism behaviors by their coworkers. Our study shows the potential negative emotional and behavioral consequences from the high performer's point of view, suggesting that a high performer may not always enjoy the benefits associated with his/her exceptional performance in the

workgroup. Rather, he/she can experience greater shame and perceived ostracism by their coworkers, interestingly except for when group competition climate is high.

Keywords: high performer, abusive supervision, relative task performance, shame, workplace ostracism

INTRODUCTION

You'd think I'd be happy

But I'm not

Everybody knows my name

But it's just a crazy game

Oh, it's lonely at the top – Randy Newman

High performers are individuals whose performance at work is relatively higher than their coworkers (Campbell, Liao, Chuang, Zhou, & Dong, 2017; Kim & Glomb, 2014; Schmitt, Cortina, Ingerick, & Wiechmann, 2003). Because of their exceptional abilities and performance, high performers enjoy more financial and social resources, namely higher salary, more promotion opportunities, higher social status, and more respect and recognition (Aguinis & O'Boyle, 2014; Anderson, John, Keltner, & Kring, 2001; Bauer & Green, 1996). While performing at high levels comes with desirable benefits, high performers may also experience negative consequences in the workplace. For example, recent research has shown that high performers can draw mistreatment from coworkers (e.g., victimization, interpersonal harming behaviors, and undermining behaviors) as their outperformance provokes coworkers' upward comparison and, in turn, triggers coworkers' envy or perceived threat from high performers to their own resources (Campbell et al., 2017; Jensen, Patel, & Raver, 2014; Kim & Glomb, 2014; Lam, Van der Vegt, Walter, & Huang, 2011).

Although this line of research has extended our knowledge of high performance effects by shifting our attention from the positive side of high performance to its negative side, this work has primarily focused on the more

overt and aggressive forms of coworker mistreatment towards high performers (e.g., victimization and undermining). Given high performers enjoy comparatively high-level social status in the workgroup (Magee & Galinsky, 2008) and they also bring benefits and increased resources to the workgroup (Campbell et al., 2017), it would create dangers for those coworkers when they engage in overt mistreatment towards high performers. For example, coworkers may gain fewer benefits from high performers and receive increased negative responses from people who are affiliated with high performers (Jensen et al., 2014). Moreover, as directly hurting high performers may also induce punishment from organizational authorities (Jensen et al., 2014), it is more risky for coworkers to engage in overt mistreatment towards high performers. Providing evidence for these arguments, research has suggested that because of dangers associated with overt victimization, high performers are more likely to experience covert victimization from coworkers (Jensen et al., 2014).

In the present research, we focus on one form of covert coworker victimization –*perceived workplace ostracism* by coworkers (hereafter, *felt ostracism*), which refers to the extent to which a high performer perceives that he/she is being ignored or excluded by coworkers at work (Ferris, Brown, Berry, & Lian, 2008). Different from overt mistreatment constructs such as victimization, interpersonal harming, and undermining, which represent the presence of negative interactions (e.g., yelling and making threats), ostracism represents the absence of positive interactions (e.g., being shut out of conversations and having one's greetings go unanswered). That is, unlike overt

mistreatment constructs, which engage the high performer in a social dynamic with negative attention and treatment, ostracism disengages the high performer from a social dynamic with positive attention and treatment. While overt mistreatment such as victimization and undermining involves negative social interactions, individuals prefer this kind of mistreatment simply because it acknowledges their existence and offers them some sense of control over the situations (Williams, 2001). Ostracism, on the other hand, is less preferred because it threatens the basic human needs for belonging, self-control, and living a meaningful existence (Williams & Zadro, 2005). Supporting this argument, O'Reilly and colleagues (2015) have demonstrated that compared to overt forms of mistreatment, the covert form of mistreatment such as ostracism has a stronger and more negative impact on employee's psychological and organizational well-being.

Given the more detrimental effect caused by ostracism for employees, we extend beyond prior research which tends to look at high performers' experienced overt mistreatment from coworkers by examining their experienced covert mistreatment from coworkers – felt ostracism. Specifically, we investigate *why* and *when* high performers feel ostracized in the workgroup, leaving them experience the feeling of “it's lonely at the top”. From the low-performing coworker's point of view, prior research has found that high performers' experienced mistreatment can be caused by low-performing coworkers' perceived threat from high performers to own resources (e.g., Campbell et al., 2017) and low-performing coworkers' envy (e.g., Kim &

Glomb, 2014). Departing from this line of research, our study examines the underlying mechanisms of why and when high performers experience mistreatment from the leader's and the high performer's own point of view, thereby providing a complete picture of the high performer victimization phenomenon.

First, existing research on high performer victimization has primarily focused on how coworkers of high performers make upward social comparisons between themselves and the high performer and, in turn, mistreat the high performer out of envy and perceived threat to finite resources (Campbell et al., 2017; Kim & Glomb, 2014). However, given the ubiquity of social comparisons in the workplace (Mussweiler et al., 2004; Wood, 1996), it is of importance to examine whether a high performer's outperformance can also trigger supervisors' social comparison between the high performer and his/her coworkers, and if so, how such social comparison influences supervisors' responses.

To answer this question, we draw from moral exclusion theory (Opotow, 1990a, 1995) and social comparison theory (Festinger, 1954; Mussweiler, 2003) to argue that a high performer's relatively high performance (i.e., a high performer's relatively higher task performance compared to the average task performance within a workgroup) would shield himself/herself from supervisors' abusive behaviors while evoking supervisors' abusive behaviors towards his/her coworkers (hereafter, *coworker abusive supervision*). This is because when comparing the high performer with his/her lower-

performing coworkers, supervisors would see those lower-performing coworkers are less useful for their goal achievement and are thus more likely to morally exclude lower-performing coworkers from their scope of justice, a psychological boundary separating targets that are perceived as deserving of fair and respectful treatment and those that are perceived as deserving of unfair and hostile mistreatment (Opotow, 1990a, 1995). Those lower-performing coworkers who fall outside supervisors' scope of justice, in turn, are more likely subject to supervisory abusive behaviors. In this sense, a high performer's relatively high performance would more likely trigger coworker abusive supervision. By examining a high performer's relative task performance as a predictor of supervisory abusive behaviors towards coworkers of the high performer, our study reveals the negative side of high performance from the supervisor's point of view, as opposed to the lower-performing coworker's point of view which was mainly adopted by prior research. Moreover, we contribute to the abusive supervision literature, which has exclusively focused on the outcomes of coworker abusive supervision (i.e., a focal employee's emotional and behavioral responses to his/her coworkers' abuse; Harris et al., 2013; Mitchell et al., 2015; Priesemuth, 2013), by identifying a high performer's relative task performance as a novel predictor of coworker abusive supervision.

Second, while extant research has advanced our understanding of coworkers' emotional (e.g., envy) and behavioral (e.g., victimization, interpersonal harming behaviors, and undermining behaviors) responses

towards high performers, we have limited knowledge of the ways higher performers respond to coworkers, particularly those who are abused because of their exceptional performance. To address this question, we again draw from moral exclusion theory and social comparison theory to further examine *how* and *when* a high performer may feel indirectly responsible for coworker abusive supervision due to his/her relatively higher performance. In the present research, we focus on high performers' emotional response – *high performer shame*, defined as a high performer's painful feeling of humiliation or distress (Schmader & Lickel, 2006; Tangney et al., 1996), to examine *how* responsible a high performer feels for coworker abusive supervision. We theorize that coworker abusive supervision which is instigated by a high performer's relatively high performance can trigger high performer shame that captures his/her self-attributed responsibility for causing coworkers' abuse (cf. Schmader & Lickel, 2006).

Given that the present research investigates a high performer's relative performance within the workgroup context, it is also critical to take into account how group situational factors may influence a high performer's felt responsibility for coworkers' abuse, thereby answering the question of *when* a high performer may feel responsible for coworker abusive supervision. We propose that *group competition climate* (the degree to which group members perceive their rewards and recognition to be dependent on their relative performance to that of the other group members; Brown et al., 1998; Kohn, 1992) is a particularly salient group situational factor that would impact the

relationship between coworker abusive supervision and high performer shame. Specifically, we theorize that when group competition climate is low, coworker abusive supervision would more likely elicit high performer shame. On the contrary, when group competition climate is high, the relationship between coworker abusive supervision and high performer shame would be mitigated. In contrast to other high performer victimization research that has found that high group cooperation climate benefits high performers by reducing the likelihood of coworkers' interpersonal harming behaviors (Lam et al., 2011), our study demonstrates that high group competition climate may also be beneficial for high performers in that it would reduce high performers' painful feeling of shame for coworkers' abuse. In addition, unlike other group competition climate research which reveals its negative impact on individuals such as increased stress (Fletcher, Major, & Davis, 2008), our study demonstrates a potential bright side to high group competition climate.

Finally, we move beyond extant research on high performer victimization, which has primarily focused on high performers' experienced overt mistreatment from coworkers (e.g., victimization and undermining), by examining high performers' perceived covert mistreatment from coworkers (i.e., felt ostracism) due to their feelings of shame for coworker abusive supervision which results from their relatively high performance. In doing so, our study shows the potential negative emotional and behavioral consequences experienced by the high performer from his/her own point of view, as opposed to the low-performing coworker's point of view, from which extant research

examines how the low-performing coworker displays negative emotional (e.g., envy; Kim & Glomb, 2014) and behavioral responses (e.g., victimization, interpersonal harming behaviors, and undermining behaviors; Campbell et al., 2017; Jensen et al., 2014; Kim & Glomb, 2014; Lam et al., 2011) towards the high performer. Taken together, we propose a moderated sequential mediation model, whereby the indirect effect of a high performer's relative task performance on his/her felt ostracism through coworker abusive supervision and subsequently high performer shame will be moderated by group competition climate. Figure 2 illustrates our hypothesized model.

FIGURE 2
Theoretical Model

Note: Shaded box presents group-level construct; white box presents individual-level constructs.

THEORY AND HYPOTHESES

In the following, we ground our predictions in the integration of moral exclusion theory and social comparison theory. Drawing from these two theories, we first predict an indirect effect of a high performer's relative task performance on his/her shame via coworker abusive supervision and also explain how group competition climate moderates this indirect relationship.

Next, we account for why a high performer's shame may lead to his/her felt ostracism by coworkers. Taken together, we develop a moderated sequential mediation framework to explain the "it's lonely at the top" phenomenon.

A High Performer's Relative Task Performance and Coworker Abusive Supervision

Drawing from social comparison theory, prior research on high performer victimization argued that high-performing employees can instigate their low-performing counterparts' upward social comparison and, in turn, mistreatment behaviors towards them (e.g., Campbell et al., 2017; Kim & Glomb, 2014; Lam et al., 2011). As social comparisons are ubiquitous (Mussweiler et al., 2004; Wood, 1996), we argue that supervisors may also engage in social comparison between high performers and their low-performing coworkers. By doing so, supervisors can get an accurate evaluation of their subordinates. Supporting this argument, social comparison theory suggests that human evaluation is comparative in nature (Festinger, 1954; Mussweiler, 2003). When people evaluate a certain target, they do not do so in a vacuum, but rather in a comparative manner (Kahneman & Miller, 1986). That is, supervisors are inclined to compare a given subordinate's task performance with other team members' to evaluate whether this subordinate's performance is low or high (i.e., relative task performance). Indeed, research has demonstrated the pervasiveness of social comparisons in the context of performance assessment. For example, leaders frequently compare employees with each other in terms of their accomplishments (Dunn, Ruedy, & Schweitzer, 2012) and publically

recognize a certain employee for his/her outstanding achievements (e.g., an employee of the month award; Garcia & Tor, 2007). Therefore, rather than assuming supervisors' evaluations of subordinate task performance occur in a vacuum, we draw from social comparison theory to argue that this evaluation process takes place in a social context. Specifically, we propose that in work teams, supervisors would compare a given subordinate's task performance (e.g., a high performer's task performance) with other teammates' to form their performance evaluations, that is, utility evaluations.

Moral exclusion theory suggests that one of the main precursors to morally excluding a target includes the utility evaluation for the target (Hafer & Olson, 2003; Opatow, 1994). According to moral exclusion theory, each person has a specified "scope of justice" that reflects the psychological boundary of his/her moral community (Deutsch, 1974, 1985). A person treats those who fall within his/her specified scope of justice (i.e., moral inclusion) fairly and justly, and uses moral values and rules to guide his/her behaviors toward them (Opatow, 1990a, 1995). Conversely, a person sees those who fall outside a person's scope of justice (i.e., moral exclusion) as undeserving of fairness, justice, and treatment guided by moral values and rules (Opatow, 1990a, 1995). Consequently, morally excluded targets become likely candidates for hostile acts and mistreatment (Opatow, 1990a, 2001), such as rudeness (Opatow, 2001) and abusive supervision (Tepper et al., 2011; Walter et al., 2015).

Drawing from moral exclusion theory, prior research has found that compared to high-performing subordinates, low-performing subordinates who

exhibit low utility in terms of benefitting their supervisors' goal achievement fall outside their supervisors' scope of justice, and are more likely to be abused (Hafer & Olson, 2003; Tepper et al., 2011; Walter et al., 2015). Although this line of research has demonstrated the role of low performers in activating supervisors' abusive behaviors towards them, this work did not take into account the role of social comparison in the moral exclusion process, whereby a low-performing subordinate's utility evaluation is derived from his/her relative task performance (i.e., through comparing the low-performing subordinate's task performance with those high-performing subordinates'), rather than from his/her absolute task performance (i.e., the low-performing subordinate's own task performance).

To shed lights on the role of a high performer in impacting his/her supervisors' social comparison and moral exclusion processes and in turn their abusive behaviors towards coworkers, we draw from social comparison theory and moral exclusion theory to propose that a high performer's relative task performance positively relates to coworker abusive supervision. When a high performer's task performance is relatively higher than his/her coworkers' (i.e., a high performer's relative high task performance), supervisors are more likely to perceive the high performer's coworkers as not beneficial to their goal attainment. According to moral exclusion theory (Opotow, 1990a, 1995), the low utility of these relatively low-performing coworkers positions them outside their supervisors' scope of justice and, therefore, makes them more likely to encounter supervisory abusive behaviors. This is because compared to the high

performer, low-performing coworkers “are more likely to make supervisors look bad, interfere with their capacity to accomplish their work, and take up more of their time addressing the fallout poor performance causes” (Tepper et al., 2011: 282). In contrast, when a high performer’s task performance is relatively lower than his/her coworkers’ (i.e., a high performer’s relative low task performance), supervisors are more likely to perceive the high performer’s coworkers as useful to their goal attainment. Consistent with moral exclusion theory, the high utility of these relatively high-performing coworkers positions them inside their supervisors’ scope of justice and, consequently, shields them from their supervisors’ abuse. Based on these arguments, we propose:

Hypothesis 1: A high performer’s relative task performance is positively related to coworker abusive supervision.

The Indirect Effect of a High Performer’s Relative Task Performance on High Performer Shame via Coworker Abusive Supervision

Shame, a painful feeling of humiliation or distress triggered by self-related aversive events (Ferguson & Stegge, 1998), is theorized to occur after people “have personally committed a blameworthy act” (Schmader & Lickel, 2006: 45). Since, in shame, the self is the focus of evaluation (Lewis, 1971), prior research has identified the appraisal of self-responsibility for committing a blameworthy act as a defining feature of shame (e.g., Schmader & Lickel, 2006; Siemer et al., 2007; Smith & Ellsworth, 1985). For example, in an experimental design where participants were exposed to a stressful task followed by a negative feedback manipulation regarding their performance, participants who

blamed their “poor” performance on themselves were positively associated with feelings of shame (Siemer et al., 2007). Similarly, in an experiment where subjects were asked to recall past experiences associated with such emotions as anger, fear, and shame, a strong sense of self-responsibility was associated with subjects’ shame. As such, we turn to shame as reflective of the extent to which high performers feel responsible for the abusive supervision of their coworkers.

While high performers might not always observe the incidents of workplace mistreatment first-hand, they must be sufficiently aware of the mistreatment event happened on their coworkers to trigger a response (cf. O’Reilly & Aquino, 2011). As such, high performers who are exposed to coworkers’ abuse would respond to this mistreatment event in a certain way. Given perceived abuse is fundamentally an evaluation of injustice (Tepper, 2000), and that perceived injustice is also a function of making attributions of responsibility (Martinko et al., 2004), we propose that in response to coworkers’ abuse, high performers would make attributions of responsibility for its occurrence.

Specifically, we expect that high performers may feel partially responsible and, hence, have feelings of shame regarding the abusive supervision of their coworkers for several reasons. First, high performers may feel shame regarding their coworkers’ abuse, since their relative high performance may have indirectly contributed to the abuse of their peers as argued above in Hypothesis 1. In other words, high performers may conclude that they should be blamed for low-performing coworkers’ experienced abuse.

Supporting our contention, research has suggested that outperformers can experience feelings of discomfort or embarrassment for their high achievement, because their outperformance poses a threat (e.g., supervisory abusive threat in our case) to the lower performing person (e.g., Baumeister et al., 1994; Cross et al., 1993; Exline & Lobel, 1999). Second, high performers may feel shame for not being able to prevent or address coworker abuse effectively, since, as subordinates, they have limited power and influence to challenge their supervisors (Aquino et al., 2006; Farh & Chen, 2014). Relatedly, in the mistreatment literature, Spencer and Rupp (2009) found that employees may feel ashamed when they witness a customer behaving offensively toward their coworkers. As employees, they feel powerless to challenge the customer and, consequently, accept the blame for their inability to rectify the customer transgression. Integrating the above theorizing with Hypothesis 1 suggests that a high performer's relative task performance engenders coworker abusive supervision, which in turn leads to the high performer's felt shame. Thus, we hypothesize:

Hypothesis 2: A high performer's relative task performance is indirectly related to his/her shame through coworker abusive supervision.

The Moderating Role of Group Competition Climate

An implicit assumption for the above positive relationship between coworker abusive supervision and high performer shame is that high performers experience shame for coworkers' abuse, because, across all situations, high performers believe coworkers are undeserving of hostile treatment. However,

moral exclusion theory suggests that whether an actor believes a target deserves respectful or fair treatment is influenced by whether the actor includes or excludes this person from his/her scope of justice (Brockner, 1990; Opatow, 1999a, 1995). Furthermore, moral exclusion theory highlights three main precursors to exclusion. In addition to the aforementioned precursor of the low utility of the target, two other factors which promote exclusion include perceived dissimilarity to and conflict with the target (Hafer & Olson, 2003; Opatow, 1994). We draw from moral exclusion theory (Opatow, 1990a, 1996) and social comparison theory (Festinger, 1954; Mussweiler, 2003) to propose group competition climate as a salient boundary condition. Group competition climate boosts the degree to which a high performer has conflict with coworkers and sees them as having low utility and being dissimilar, thereby decreasing a high performer's likelihood of experiencing shame for coworker abusive supervision.

Group competition climate reflects the extent to which employees perceive organizational rewards to depend on comparisons of their performance with that of their coworkers (Brown et al., 1998). When a group has a highly competitive climate, group members are more prone to engage in social comparison (Festinger, 1954; Kohn, 1992; Mussweiler, 2003). Group members' awareness that their performance is compared with that of their coworkers "is likely to increase their sensitivity and concerns about their competence" (Brown et al., 1998: 90), and also to reinforce their understanding that the employees who outperform them will be recognized and rewarded (Chen et al., 2015).

Given supervisors have limited resources to allocate among subordinates (e.g., time, reward, promotion opportunities, and emotional support), high group competition climate will lead to an increase in intragroup conflict (Boies & Howell, 2006). Under this high pressure, a zero-sum environment that encourages group members to outperform each other to gain limited resources is likely to arise. In such a group environment, a high performer may perceive coworkers as dissimilar and having low utility in order to play up his/her own unique value. There is also likely to be greater conflict between a high performer and coworkers due to their having to compete over limited resources. Therefore, high performers in a highly competitive group climate will exclude abused coworkers from their scope of justice and perceive coworkers' abuse as "acceptable, appropriate, or just" (Opotow, 1990a: 1). As such, high performers are less likely to take responsibility for their coworkers' abuse and consequently experience less shame.

In contrast, when a group has a low competition climate, the social comparison process is less salient in the group, thus reducing the competition among group members (Festinger, 1954; Kohn, 1992; Mussweiler, 2003). Moreover, group members are also under less pressure to outperform their coworkers, since their rewards and recognition are not necessarily contingent upon their relative performance to coworkers under low competition climate (Chen et al., 2015). Hence, high performers in groups with low competition climate will see less of a need to stand out from their peers. They will then experience less intragroup conflict with coworkers (Boies & Howell, 2006) and

be less likely to regard coworkers as having low utility and being dissimilar. As such, high performers in a low group competition climate will place abused coworkers inside their scope of justice and, in turn, are more prone to perceive coworkers' abuse as undeserving and unfair. The perceived unfair treatment inflicted on abused coworkers who are inside high performers' scope of justice will activate high performers' self-blame (cf. Opatow, 1990a) and shame for reasons summarized earlier. Based on these arguments, we hypothesize:

Hypothesis 3: Group competition climate moderates the positive relationship between coworker abusive supervision and a high performer's shame, such that the relationship is stronger when group competition climate is low than when it is high.

Implications for a High Performer's Felt Ostracism

The above section suggests that group competition climate helps to determine when high performers morally include or exclude abused coworkers from their scope of justice by moderating the relationship between coworker abusive supervision and high performer shame. In this section, we further explore the behavioral implications of this effect by examining the relationship between high performer shame and his/her felt ostracism from coworkers (i.e., a high performer's perception of feeling excluded by coworkers; Ferris et al., 2008). As our study emphasizes the group context with respect to coworker abusive supervision, shame and felt-ostracism provide validating cues regarding a high performer's negative social experience in his/her group.

Shame is commonly seen as the most self-reflective emotions, with consequent self-evaluations related to blameworthiness, uselessness, powerlessness, and worthlessness (Barrett, 1995; Claesson & Sohlberg, 2002; Gilbert & Andrews, 1998; Nathanson, 1992; Tangney, 1999; Tomkins, 1995). Arguably, high performers who experience shame for coworker abusive supervision may blame themselves for their part in the abuse (e.g., high relative task performance) and their inability and powerlessness to prevent the mistreatment. As a result, shameful high performers are more likely to assume that others harbor justifiable negative attitudes about them (Tangney et al., 1996). Consequently, they experience low self-esteem (Claesson & Sohlberg, 2002; Tangney & Fischer, 1995; Tangney et al., 1996) and feel they are unattractive to others (Gilbert, 2003). Therefore, an absence of approval and recognition from coworkers can be particularly salient for shame-ridden high performers (Gilbert, 2003). Indeed, studies show that shame can result in a sense of isolation, loneliness, and being rejected or ignored in the face of social interactions (Claesson, Birgegard, & Sohlberg, 2007; Claesson & Sohlberg, 2002; Katz, 1997; Lekberg, 2000; Nathanson, 1992; Retzinger, 1998; Tangney, 1995). Likewise, we argue that a high performer's felt shame can prompt him/her to feel excluded by coworkers for aforementioned reasons. Felt ostracism leads a high performer to feel "being avoided at work, being shut out of conversations, or having one's greetings go unanswered at work" (Ferris, Chen, & Lim, 2017: 317). In addition, felt ostracism reinforces behavioral evidence regarding a high performer's self-perceived negative social experience

in a group (Ferris et al., 2008; Ferris, Lian, Brown, & Morrison, 2015; Robinson, O'Reilly, & Wang, 2013; Williams, 2007).

Drawing on these arguments, we propose that high performers who experience shame regarding the abusive supervision of their coworkers are more likely to perceive workplace ostracism from their coworkers. Combining these arguments with those delineated in Hypotheses 1-3, we propose a moderated sequential mediation relationship:

Hypothesis 4: Group competition climate moderates the positive indirect effect of a high performer's relative task performance on his/her felt ostracism via coworker abusive supervision and his/her shame, such that the indirect effect is stronger when group competition climate is low than when it is high.

METHOD

Participants and Procedures

To test our hypotheses, we collected data from part-time Master of Business Administration (MBA) students, who had full-time jobs and took classes on weekends at a large university in Eastern China. In our initial contact with these MBA students, we provided a general overview of our study (e.g., participants, multi-wave and multisource data collection, etc.), and asked them to randomly choose at least three subordinates who reported directly to them to participate in our field survey study. We compensated each MBA student with 75 RMB (approximately US\$12) for his/her participation as well as his/her subordinates' participation. All participants in our study had full-time jobs in

diverse industries (e.g., finance, insurance, construction, health care, information technology, and media). By recruiting participants from multiple industries, we can increase the generalizability of our findings and avoid the contextual constraints related to limited industries (Rousseau & Fried, 2001; Yam, Klotz, He, & Reynolds, 2017). Before their participation, all of our participants were guaranteed that their responses to the survey would be kept strictly confidential and would only be used for research.

We collected multi-wave, multisource data in two waves. At Time 1, we distributed separate questionnaires to 39 supervisors (i.e., MBA students) and their 218 subordinates. Both subordinates and supervisors answered demographic related survey questions. In addition, supervisors rated their abusive behaviors toward subordinates and also provided task performance ratings for their subordinates. We received responses from 205 subordinates and their 39 supervisors, yielding response rates of 94.04% and 100%, respectively. At Time 2, approximately one month after Time 1, we redistributed questionnaires to the same 205 subordinates. This time subordinates provided ratings of group competition climate, experienced shame, and workplace ostracism from coworkers. We finally received responses from 196 subordinates at Time 2, yielding a response rate of 95.61% from subordinates who completed the survey at Time 1. To improve the response rates during this two-stage survey process, a research assistant reminded all participants to complete questionnaires on time.

After matching supervisor responses with subordinate responses and excluding cases with missing data, we obtained a final sample of 195 subordinates nested within 39 supervisors (an average of 5 subordinates per supervisor). For the subordinate sample, 50.5% were women and 65.5% held a bachelor's degree. Their age distribution included the following: 12.4% were below 25 years old, 74.2% were between 25 to 35 years old, and 13.4% were above 35 years old. The average organizational tenure of these subordinates was 5.28 years ($SD = 4.97$). For the supervisor sample, 38.5 % were women and 61.5 % held a bachelor's degree. Their age distribution was: 2.6% were below 25 years old, 79.5% were between 25 to 35 years old, and 17.9% were above 35 years old. Their average organizational tenure was 5.21 years ($SD = 4.09$). The 195 subordinates who comprised the final sample did not differ from the 10 participants who did not respond at Time 2 in terms of their demographics such as age ($t = .49, p = .622$) and gender ($t = -.35, p = .723$), but differed in terms of education ($t = 2.90, p = .004$) and organizational tenure ($t = -2.44, p = .016$).

Measures

We followed Brislin's (1986) translation and back-translation procedures to translate all measures that were originally in English into Chinese and verify the measures' content validity. Unless otherwise noted, all measures were rated on a 7-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 7 (strongly agree).

High performer relative task performance (Time 1). We measured subordinate task performance using Farh and Cheng's (1997) 4-item scale. This scale has once been verified in a Chinese context (Chen, Tsui, & Farh, 2002). Supervisors were asked to evaluate their subordinates' task performance on items, such as "The performance of this subordinate always meets supervisor's expectations" ($\alpha = .88$). Following Campbell et al. (2017) and Kim and Glomb (2014), we operationalized a high performer's relative task performance by centering the focal employee's (i.e., the high performer's) task performance to the mean of each group in our Hierarchical Linear Modeling (HLM) analyses.

Coworker abusive supervision (Time 1). We used Mitchell and Ambrose's (2007) 10-item measure to assess abusive supervision. Supervisors were asked to rate their abusive behaviors toward subordinates on items, such as "I often ridicule this subordinate" and "I often blame this subordinate to save my embarrassment" ($\alpha = .76$). We chose supervisor-rated abusive supervision over subordinate-rated abusive supervision because our arguments hinge on supervisors' social comparisons among subordinates' task performance, which engender their abusive behaviors toward subordinates. Therefore, compared with subordinate-rated abusive supervision, supervisor-rated abusive supervision can better reflect his/her abuse toward subordinates, which we argue, are influenced by his/her comparative evaluations of subordinates' task performance. In accordance with Peng et al. (2014), we operationalized coworker abusive supervision by averaging supervisors' ratings of their abusive behaviors toward each coworker of the focal subordinate in the work group

(excluding supervisors' rating of their abusive behaviors toward the focal subordinate, namely the high performer).

Group competition climate (Time 2). We measured group competition climate using the 4-item scale developed by Brown et al. (1998). Subordinates were asked to report their perceptions of group competition climate by responding to items, such as "In my group, everybody is concerned with finishing at the top" and "The amount of recognition you get in this group depends on how your performance compares with others' performance" ($\alpha = .76$). We aggregated subordinates' responses to create the group competition climate at the group level. This aggregation was justified by an average $r_{wg(j)}$ value of .80 (LeBreton & Senter, 2008), along with an ICC(1) value of .08, $F_{(38, 156)} = 1.43$, $p = .067$, which is considered a medium effect (Bliese, 2002; LeBreton & Senter, 2008). The relatively low ICC(2) value of .30 might be due to the small numbers of subordinates per group (Bliese, 2000). However, this low ICC(2) value should not restrain aggregation if it is justified by theory and other aggregation indices (Chen & Bliese, 2002).

High performer shame (Time 2). Shame was measured with the 4-item scale developed by Lickel et al. (2005). Following Mitchell et al. (2015), we asked the focal subordinate (i.e., the high performer) to rate the extent to which he/she experienced shame (e.g., *ashamed*, *humiliated*, *disgraced*, and *embarrassed*; $\alpha = .91$) as a consequence of his/her supervisors' abusive behaviors toward coworkers on a 7-point scale (1 = *Not at all*, 7 = *Extremely*).

High performer felt ostracism (Time 2). We measured workplace ostracism using the 10-item scale developed by Ferris et al. (2008). Subordinates were asked to report how often they experience workplace ostracism from their coworkers by responding to items, such as “My coworkers ignored me at work” and “My coworkers refused to talk to me at work” ($\alpha = .98$). Responses were rated on a 7-point scale (1 = *Never*, 7 = *Always*).

Analytical Strategy

Prior to hypotheses testing, we first conducted a series of multilevel confirmatory factor analyses (MCFAs) to confirm the hypothesized five-factor structure of task performance, abusive supervision, shame, group competition climate, and workplace ostracism, while also accounting for the nested structure of our data (Muthen, 1994).

Next, we applied two-level Hierarchical Linear Modeling (HLM2) analyses with the software HLM 6.08 (Raudenbush, Bryk, Cheong, & Congdon, 2004) to test our hypotheses, because our data has a nested nature and our variables reside at different levels. We group-mean-centered task performance to match our theory, making it an index of the high performer’s relative task performance. Moreover, we tested the cross-level moderating effect of group competition climate in Hypotheses 3 and 4 using the group-mean-centering technique on coworker abusive supervision to separate the cross-level from between-group interaction and to avoid detecting a spurious cross-level interaction effect (Hofmann & Gavin, 1998). For the rest of the analyses, we adopted the grand-mean-centering technique to reduce the

potential collinearity between Level-2 intercept and slope terms, and to model the potential influences of both within-group and between-group variances (Hofmann & Gavin, 1998; Mathieu & Taylor, 2007).

Following prior research (e.g., Lam, Huang, & Chan, 2015; Walter et al., 2015), we drew on the procedures outlined by Krull and MacKinnon (2001) to test our moderated sequential mediation model described in Hypotheses 4. We derived 95% confidence intervals (CIs) around the population values of conditional indirect effects using Selig and Preacher's (2008) Monte Carlo method (for similar approaches, see Lorinkova, Pearsall, & Sims, 2013; Walter et al., 2015; Zhou, Wang, Chen, & Shi, 2012). This method is considered better than traditional methods (e.g., the Sobel test) in that it ameliorates power problems caused by non-normal sampling distributions of an indirect effect (MacKinnon, Lockwood, & Williams, 2004; Preacher, Zyphur, & Zhang, 2010). Moreover, in accordance with Huang et al. (2016), we used Hayes's (2015) index of moderated mediation to test whether there are significant differences between the conditional indirect effects.

RESULTS

Preliminary Analyses

The descriptive statistics, level 1 correlations, and reliabilities of the variables included in our study are displayed in Table 1.

TABLE 4
Means, Standard Deviations, Reliabilities, and Level 1 Correlations among Variables

Variables	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	1	2	3	4
1. High performer relative task performance (T1)	.00	.78				
2. Coworker abusive supervision (T1)	1.49	.45	.12	(.76)		
3. High performer shame (T2)	3.50	1.49	.01	.13 [†]	(.91)	
4. High performer felt ostracism (T2)	2.22	1.24	-.09	-.08	.20**	(.98)
5. Group competition climate (T2)	4.26	.60	.00	-.07	.03	-.05

Notes. $N = 195$. Pairwise deletion is used. Level 2 variable (i.e., group competition climate) was assigned down to Level 1 for calculating correlations. The correlation coefficients summarize bivariate correlations at Level 1 and should be interpreted with caution since they cannot account for the nested nature of our data and may not accurately reflect the relationships among variables. Reliability estimates (Cronbach alpha coefficients) are presented along the diagonal in parentheses.

[†] $p < .1$. * $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$. *** $p < .001$.

As shown in Table 2, the results of MCFAs reveal that the hypothesized five-factor model fit the data well ($\chi^2_{(908)} = 1,368.36$, CFI = .91, TLI = .90, RMSEA = .05, SRMR_(within) = .08, SRMR_(between) = .31) and significantly better than the four alternative models, providing support for the discriminant validity of our measures.

TABLE 5
Comparisons of Factor Structures

Models	$\chi^2(df)$	$\Delta\chi^2(\Delta df)^a$	CFI	TLI	RMSEA	SRMR _(within)	SRMR _(between)
1. Five-factor model	1368.36(908)		.91	.90	.05	.08	.31
2. Four-factor model (combing coworker abusive supervision and task performance)	1631.96(916)	263.60(8)***	.86	.85	.06	.09	.31
3. Three-factor model (combing coworker abusive supervision and task performance, and collapsing shame and workplace ostracism)	2213.06(922)	844.70(14)***	.74	.72	.09	.12	.35
4. Two-factor model (combing coworker abusive supervision, task performance, and group competition climate, and collapsing shame and workplace ostracism)	2392.41(926)	1024.05(18)***	.71	.69	.09	.13	.32
5. Single-factor model	3067.78(928)	1699.42(20)***	.57	.54	.11	.17	.44

Notes. df = degrees of freedom; CFI = comparative fit index; TLI = Tucker-Lewis index; RMSEA = root mean square error of approximation; SRMR = standardized root mean square residual.

^a All models were compared with Model 1.

*** $p < .001$.

To justify HLM2 as the appropriate analytic technique for our multilevel data, we ran several null models for coworker abusive supervision, shame, and a high performer's felt ostracism. The results showed that although there was minimal between-group variance for shame ($\chi^2_{(38)} = 36.58, p > .500$; ICC(1) = .003) and a high performer's felt ostracism ($\chi^2_{(38)} = 43.43, p = .251$; ICC(1) = .04), there was substantial and significant between-group variance for coworker abusive supervision ($\chi^2_{(38)} = 1336.95, p < .001$; ICC(1) = .87). Given the substantial portion of between-group variance in coworker abusive supervision and the fact that we investigated cross-level interactions involving group competition climate, HLM2 is appropriate to use to test our hypotheses.

Hypotheses Testing

The main effect of a high performer's relative task performance on coworker abusive supervision (H1). Hypothesis 1 proposed that a high performer's relative task performance is positively related to coworker abusive supervision. As shown in Table 3, a high performer's relative task performance had a positive effect on coworker abusive supervision ($\gamma = .08, p = .039$), which provides support for Hypothesis 1.

TABLE 6
Hierarchical Linear Modeling Results

Variables	Coworker abusive supervision		High performer shame				High performer felt ostracism	
	γ	<i>SE</i>	γ	<i>SE</i>	γ	<i>SE</i>	γ	<i>SE</i>
Intercepts	1.47***	.07	3.49***	.10	3.49***	.10	2.23***	.10
Level 1 variables								
High performer relative task performance	.08*	.04	-.03	.12	-.17	.13	-.02	.12
Coworker abusive supervision			.47*	.18	4.00**	1.24	-1.79*	.79
High performer shame							.19*	.07
Level 2 variable								
Group competition climate					.04	.18	-.11	.15
Cross-level interaction								
Coworker abusive supervision × Group competition climate					-2.46*	.95	1.58†	.90
Pseudo- R^{2a}	.08		.02		.04		.14	

Notes. $N = 195$ (Level 1); $N = 39$ (Level 2). In order not to reduce statistical power, employee gender, age, education, and tenure were not included in the final data analysis because they were not significantly associated with coworker abusive supervision, high performer shame, and high performer felt ostracism (Becker, 2005).

^a Pseudo- R^2 is calculated based on proportional reduction of error variance due to predictors in the models of Table 3 (Snijders & Bosker, 1999).

† $p < .1$. * $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$. *** $p < .001$.

The indirect effect of a high performer's relative task performance on shame via coworker abusive supervision (H2). Hypothesis 2 proposed coworker abusive supervision mediates the relationship between a high performer's relative task performance and his/her shame. To test this hypothesis, we used Selig and Preacher's (2008) Monte Carlo method to estimate the confidence interval for the mediation effect. The results indicated that the indirect effect of a high performer's relative task performance on shame via coworker abusive supervision was significant (indirect effect = .04, 95% CI = .001, .089). Therefore, Hypothesis 2 receives support.

The moderating effect of group competition climate (H3). Hypothesis 3 predicted that group competition climate would weaken the positive effect of coworker abusive supervision on third party shame. As shown in Table 3, the interaction of coworker abusive supervision and group competition climate on high performer shame was significant ($\gamma = -2.46, p = .014$). Following Aiken and West (1991), we plotted this significant interaction effect and conducted simple slope tests to further interpret it. Figure 2 reveals that when group competition climate was low (one standard deviation below the mean), coworker abusive supervision was significantly and more positively related to high performer shame ($\gamma = 5.62, p = .002$) than when group competition climate was high (one standard deviation above the mean) ($\gamma = 2.38, p = .027$). Thus, Hypothesis 3 receives support.

FIGURE 3
The interactive effect of coworker abusive supervision and group competition climate on high performer shame

The moderated sequential mediation model (H4). Hypothesis 4 proposed a moderated sequential mediation model, which predicts the moderating effect of group competition climate on the indirect link between a high performer's relative task performance and his/her felt ostracism via coworker abusive supervision and subsequently shame. To test this moderated sequential mediation effect, we adopted Krull and MacKinnon's (2001) procedure to compute estimates of the conditional indirect effect of a high performer's relative task performance on his/her felt ostracism at low and high values of group competition climate. We derived 95% CI around the population values of this conditional indirect effect using Selig and Preacher's (2008) Monte Carlo method. The results reveal that the indirect effect of a high performer's relative task performance on his/her felt ostracism via coworker

abusive supervision and shame was significant when group competition climate was low (indirect effect = .08, 95% CI = .001, .222), but was not significant when group competition climate was high (indirect effect = .03, 95% CI = -.001, .103). The index of moderated mediation (Hayes, 2015) was -.04 (95% CI = -.1053, -.0001), suggesting that these two conditional indirect effects were significantly different from each other. These results therefore provide strong support for Hypothesis 4.

DISCUSSION

Drawing from moral exclusion theory and social comparison theory, we developed and tested a moderated sequential mediation model to delineate the process of *how* and *when* high performers feel ashamed for coworker abusive supervision, resulting in their perceived ostracism from abused coworkers. Using multisource, multilevel, and multi-wave field data, our results show that a high performer's relative task performance was positively related to coworker abusive supervision, which in turn elicited the high performer's feelings of shame. In addition, when group competition climate was low, coworker abusive supervision was more likely to result in a high performer's shame for coworkers' abuse. Finally, our results revealed that the indirect effect of a high performer's relative task performance on his/her perceived ostracism from coworkers via coworker abusive supervision and his/her feelings of shame was stronger when group competition climate was low than when it was high, thereby corroborating our moderated sequential mediation model. Overall, these

findings offer important theoretical and practical implications and valuable directions for future research.

Theoretical Implications

First, our study contributes to the high performer victimization literature. Although recent years have seen a growing number of studies on examining how one's performance level influences one's social experience at work, "efforts to identify predictors of individual high performance have eclipsed understanding its consequences" (Campbell et al., 2017: 845). By investigating how and when high performance leads to high performers' felt ostracism, we add to the extant limited literature on high performer victimization. More importantly, we move beyond this stream of research by investigating how high performance can evoke responses from different parties beyond coworkers – leader and high performer him-/herself. Existing research has shown that high performance can stimulate coworkers' emotional reactions such as envy (Kim & Glomb, 2014) and their subsequent behavioral reactions such as mistreatment towards high performers (Campbell et al., 2017; Jensen et al., 2014; Lam et al., 2011). Departing from this work, our study demonstrates high performance can instigate leaders' mistreatment towards coworkers of the high performer and, in turn, trigger the high performer's shame and felt ostracism. By taking into account both leaders and high performers' own responses to high performance, our study proposes a novel research perspective to unveil nuances in the high performer-coworker-leader interface.

Our study also contributes to the abusive supervision literature in several ways. First, we contribute to the emerging work on coworker abusive supervision by expanding its nomological network. To the best of our knowledge, research has yet to examine high performer antecedents of abusive supervisory behaviors towards employees. Extant studies have primarily drawn on moral exclusion theory to account for the relationship between a subordinate's own individual task performance and abuse from his/her supervisor (e.g., Tepper et al., 2011; Walter et al., 2015). Given that in a work group, high performers interact regularly with both the abusive supervisor and the abused low-performing workmates, it is crucial to uncover whether high performers can also fuel coworker abusive supervision. Relatedly, research has shown the ubiquity of social comparison in the workplace (Greenberg, Ashton-James, & Ashkanasy, 2007) as well as the prevalence in adopting social comparison to form performance evaluations (Chun, Brockner, & De Cremer, 2018; Greenberg et al., 2007; Klein, 2003). Our research further spotlights the role that social comparison plays in the moral exclusion process when unpacking the relative task performance–abusive supervision relationship.

Our study also contributes to the literature on third party reactions to mistreatment in two primary ways. First, we extend this stream of research by treating third parties (i.e., high performers in this research) as influential players in the perpetrator-victim abuse interaction. Previous coworker abusive supervision studies appear to assume that third parties (i.e., the focal employees who witness or are aware of coworkers' abuse) are independent observers of

coworker abuse (e.g., Harris et al., 2013; Mitchell et al., 2015; Priesemuth, 2013). Our findings not only reveal that a high performer's relative task performance is a critical antecedent of coworker abusive supervision, but also demonstrate how and when coworker abusive supervision leads high performers to experience shame and ostracism. Distinct from *other-directed* emotions (anger toward the supervisor and contentment regarding the coworker abuse) examined by previous coworker abusive supervision research (Mitchell et al., 2015), this study centers on shame, a *self-directed* emotion, which is related to strong attributions of self-blame (Siemer et al., 2007; Smith & Ellsworth, 1985). By highlighting when high performers are more or less likely to feel shame for coworker abusive supervision, our study suggests that the high performer as a third party is actually an integral part of the social context (i.e., work environment) that brings about and suffers from coworker abusive supervision.

Moreover, the present research also advances our understanding of how high performers' (i.e., third parties') emotional reactions (i.e., shame) and their perceived behavioral consequences (i.e., felt ostracism) to coworkers' abuse are manifested in groups. The findings uncover group competition climate as a salient boundary condition that determines the extent to which high performers experience shame, which in turn impacts their perceived ostracism from coworkers. Thus, this research contributes to the literature on third party reactions to mistreatment in general, and more specifically, on coworker abuse, which has mainly focused on individual level factors including third party's

moral identity (O'Reilly, Aquino, & Skarlicki, 2016; Skarlicki & Rupp, 2010), concern for first party (De Cremer & Van Hiel, 2006), and interactional justice perceptions (Spencer & Rupp, 2009). We also answer the call for multilevel research on third party reactions to mistreatment (Skarlicki et al., 2015).

Finally, our study contributes to the workplace ostracism literature. Extant research on workplace ostracism has examined the antecedents of workplace ostracism through either *the interdependence lens*, whereby individuals' interdependence on their coworkers and supervisors influence whether they are subject to ostracism, or *the victimization lens*, whereby individuals' personality characteristics influence whether they are more vulnerable to be ostracized (for review, see Ferris et al., 2017). Adopting a unique *self-focused emotion lens*, our research extends this work by investigating a high performer's shame as an antecedent of his/her felt ostracism. Therefore, our study contributes to extant research on the antecedents of workplace ostracism by proposing a novel research perspective to unveil the occurrence of ostracism in the workplace.

Limitations and Future Research Directions

In spite of these theoretical contributions, our study has some limitations that also provide opportunities for future research. First, we used supervisors' ratings of abusive supervision to operationalize coworker abusive supervision. A potential limitation of this operationalization lies in the possibility that supervisors might not provide accurate ratings of abusive supervision because of their social desirability bias (Lin, Ma, & Johnson, 2016). However, prior

research shows that the influence of social desirability on self-reports is limited (e.g., Moorman & Podsakoff, 1992; Ones, Viswesvaran, & Reiss, 1996; Spector, 2006). Further, since our arguments with respect to Hypothesis 1 hinge on supervisors' comparative assessments of subordinates' performance impacting their decision to abuse coworkers, supervisors' self-rated abusive supervision (as opposed to subordinate-rated abusive supervision) can better align with our theorizing and reflect supervisors' own intentions to abuse subordinates. Yet future research can still benefit from collecting data from subordinates on coworker abusive supervision. For instance, scholars can ask subordinates to rate their own abusive supervision and/or to provide ratings of perceived coworkers' abuse, depending on the purpose and focus of their research. For example, if one is interested in how high performer sycophancy impacts self versus coworker abusive supervision, collecting abusive supervision data from various sources can create a more well-rounded picture of this under-explored phenomenon.

Second, our study focuses on an emotion factor, namely shame, as the outcome of coworker abusive supervision. However, we surmise other emotions, such as *schadenfreude*, which reveals one's malicious pleasure at others' misfortune (Heider, 1958), might be experienced by high performers in response to coworkers' abuse when group competition climate is high. Feather (2006) posited that if a person is considered deserving of mistreatment, a sense of contentment (e.g., *schadenfreude*) may be experienced by the third-party employee, because he/she desires to "denigrate or cut down the focal person"

(Mitchell et al., 2015: 1042). Although the arguments in our research is grounded in high performers' responsibility for coworkers' abuse, to which emotions such as shame are more relevant, we encourage researchers to explore other emotions, such as schadenfreude, to enrich the breadth of high performers' emotional reactions to coworkers' abuse.

Third, our study focuses on high performers' emotional (shame) and their perceived coworkers' behavioral (felt ostracism) reactions to coworker abusive supervision. Although it is important to explore high performers' reactions after the occurrence of coworkers' abuse, it is also important to examine the victims' (i.e., low-performing coworkers) intentions in their response to the situation, where they are subject to abusive supervision while high performers are exempt from supervisory abuse. For instance, future researchers could investigate: how do low-performing victims perceive and behave toward high performers? Will they be envious or angry towards high performers? Will they resort to high performers for help or advice? Or will they retaliate against less powerful high performers as opposed to supervisors? By answering these questions, we can integrate both high performers and low performers' responses in the same model to advance our understanding of the dynamic interplay among high performers, low performers, and supervisors in the high-performer-provoking abusive supervision process.

Practical Implications

Our study also generates interesting implications for managerial practice. First, we have demonstrated how a high performer's relative high

performance results in supervisory abuse toward coworkers, which increases his/her shame and perceived ostracism from abused coworkers when group competition climate is low. This finding ought to serve as a warning to leaders that they should not abuse subordinates based on their performance evaluations. Although those subordinates who are high in task performance are sheltered from their leaders' abuse in the short term, they may ultimately experience mistreatment (e.g., ostracism) from abused low performers (i.e., tall poppy syndrome). In this sense, both high performers and low performers will have negative workplace experiences (whether directly or indirectly) due to supervisory abuse. Therefore, steps should be taken to minimize the occurrence of abusive supervision. For instance, leaders should discard the misconception about the potential instrumentality of abusive supervision (i.e., using abusive supervision to elicit subordinates' high performance). This is not only because research has shown no support for abusive supervision's potential instrumentality (e.g., Walter et al., 2015), but also because abusive supervision can actually engender a series of harmful personal consequences (see Mackey et al., 2017; Martinko et al., 2013; Tepper, 2007; Tepper et al., 2017). Therefore, when designing leaders' promotion and reward programs, organizations should not only value whether or not performance goals are reached, but also, *how* goals are reached. Therefore, leaders will not resort to abuse when trying to elicit high performance from their subordinates, but will look to positive and more effective forms of motivation, such as authentic leadership (Avolio &

Gardner, 2005) and servant leadership (Liden et al., 2008; Van Dierendonck, 2011).

Another implication of our study is related to group competition climate. Competitive climates are associated with both positive (e.g., increased organizational performance; Sauers & Bass, 1990) and negative (e.g., decreased helping behaviors; Kohn, 1992) outcomes. Our research informs managers of important contingency effects of group competition climate. We found that when group competition climate is low, high performers who have high relative task performance are more likely to perceive ostracism behaviors from abused coworkers, demonstrating the salient role low group competition climate plays in the “tall poppy syndrome.” These findings serve as a warning to managers of the potentially negative effect that low group competition climate can have on high performers. We would not encourage managers to foster a highly competitive climate within the group, because of the potential negative implications of high group competition climate on individuals (e.g., reduced job satisfaction and organizational commitment; Fletcher et al., 2008) and the growing trend of organizations promoting cooperation climates (Campbell et al., 2017). Rather, we do recommend that managers should foster an organizational climate which honors and responds constructively to the success of employees.

CONCLUSION

Building upon theories of moral exclusion and social comparison, we theorized and demonstrated that a high performer’s relative task performance

was positively associated with his/her feelings of shame through coworker abusive supervision. Further, the positive indirect effect of a high performer's relative task performance on his/her felt ostracism via coworker abusive supervision and then high performer shame was stronger when group competition climate was low compared to when group competition climate was high. Taken together, these findings constitute contributions to the understanding of high performer victimization, abusive supervision, third party reactions to mistreatment, and workplace ostracism. We hope that this study will stimulate further exploration into the high-performing victim phenomenon.

**CHAPTER 3: ALTRUISTIC OR EGOISTIC? TESTS OF COMPETING
EXPLANATIONS OF EMPLOYEES' MOTIVATION TO HELP
ABUSED COWORKERS (ESSAY 3)**

ABSTRACT

The present research tests two competing explanations for employees' motivations to help abused coworkers: *an altruistically motivated helping view* versus *an egoistically motivated helping view*. According to the altruistically motivated helping view, when witnessing the abusive supervision of their coworkers (observed coworker abusive supervision), employees who receive abusive supervision themselves (employees' own abusive supervision) would be better able to empathize with and affiliate with abused coworkers and, in turn, would be more inclined to help these abused coworkers in order to reduce their distress. By contrast, according to the egoistically motivated helping view, as employees' preferential treatment compared to their abused coworkers results in their guilt and shame, employees who receive less abusive supervision themselves would more likely help abused coworkers so as to relieve their negative states (guilt and shame). Two experiment studies supported the altruistically motivated helping view. Study 2 found that the interaction between the observed coworker abusive supervision and employees' own abusive supervision was mediated by altruistically motivated variables (empathy and affiliation motivation), but not egoistically motivated variables (guilt and shame).

Keywords: abusive supervision, altruistic and egoistic motivations, affiliation motivation, emotion, helping behavior

INTRODUCTION

As argued earlier, numerous studies have found evidence of the detrimental implications of abusive supervision for employee outcomes, including decreased well-being, increased deviance, and reduced performance (for reviews, see Mackey et al., 2017; Martinko et al., 2013; Tepper, 2007; Tepper et al., 2017). A close look at this stream of research shows that researchers to date have primarily examined abusive supervision from the victim's perspective (e.g., Aryee, Chen, Sun, & Debrah, 2007; Lian et al., 2012; Tepper, Henle, Lambert, Giacalone, & Duffy, 2008), though an emerging, albeit limited, research has begun to investigate abusive supervision from the perpetrator's perspective (e.g., Liao et al., 2018; Qin et al., 2018).

As mistreatment by the supervisor rarely happens in isolation in a group (Duffy, Ganster, Shaw, Johnson, & Pagon, 2006; O'Reilly & Aquino, 2011; Skarlicki & Kulik, 2004; Skarlicki & Rupp, 2010), researchers have recently started examining how abusive supervision influences employees who observe coworkers being abused (i.e., a third-party employee). For instance, Mitchell et al. (2015) and Priesemuth (2013) have demonstrated that observing the abusive supervision of their coworkers (hereafter, *observed coworker abusive supervision*) can lead employees to help the abused coworkers (e.g., coworker support). By contrast, Harris et al. (2013) and Xu et al. (in press) have shown that observed coworker abusive supervision can also lead employees to less likely help but harm the abused coworkers (e.g., coworker abuse). Therefore, although this new stream of research extends the abusive supervision literature

by turning from the *victim-centric perspective* to the *third-party-centric perspective*, it is less clear when employees would engage in behaviors intended to help their abused coworkers.

Past research indicates that people's reactions to others' mistreatment or injustice are influenced by their own experienced mistreatment or injustice (e.g., Colquitt, 2004; De Cremer & Van Hiel, 2010; Duffy et al., 2006; Kray & Lind, 2002; Skarlicki & Kulik, 2004; Spencer & Rupp, 2009; van Prooijen, Ståhl, Eek, & van Lange, 2012). For example, Kray and Lind (2002) showed that people experience greater empathy for others' injustice when they personally have experienced high-level injustice. Spencer and Rupp (2009) demonstrated that third-party employees exposed to coworkers treated unfairly by customers experience more guilt when they are personally treated fairly by customers. This work therefore suggests that people indeed consider their own personal experiences when interpreting the mistreatment experiences of others. However, the extant research on observed coworker abusive supervision fails to take a third-party employee's own abusive supervision (hereafter, *employee's own abusive supervision*) into account when examining his/her responses to coworkers' abuse. Given observers of abusive supervision might or might not have received abusive supervision themselves (Mitchell et al., 2015), it is important to uncover whether an employee's own extent of abusive supervision alters his/her helping behaviors toward abused coworkers (hereafter, *coworker-directed help*).

Therefore, the present research seeks to examine how observed coworker abusive supervision and employee's own abusive supervision jointly influence employee's coworker-directed help. Speaking to this research agenda, the literature provides competing theoretical predictions. On the one hand, according to the altruistically motivated view of helping (Batson et al., 1989, 1991; Batson, Duncan, Ackerman, Buckley, & Birch, 1981), as shared mistreatment experiences lead to more empathy and trigger more affiliation motivation, employees who are subject to abusive supervision themselves are more likely to empathize with and affiliate with coworkers who are abused and, in turn, are more inclined to help these abused coworkers in order to reduce their distress. Thus, employee's own abusive supervision would strengthen the link between observed coworker abusive supervision and coworker-directed help via empathy and affiliation motivation.

On the other hand, according to the egoistically motivated view of helping (Cialdini & Kenrick, 1976; Cialdini et al., 1987), employees who are less abused are more likely to help abused coworkers, since their favorable treatment compared to abused coworkers elicit their guilt and shame. To relieve these negative mood states, employees would engage in more helping behaviors toward their abused coworkers. Therefore, employee's own abusive supervision would weaken the link between observed coworker abusive supervision and coworker-directed help via guilt and shame. Figure 4 displays our theoretical model.

In the sections that follow, we first discuss views of altruistically motivated helping and egoistically motivated helping. Next, we present the theoretical bases for the competing predictions: when an employee's own abusive supervision is high, the employee will be altruistically motivated to help abused coworkers; by contrast, when an employee's own abusive supervision is low, the employee will be egoistically motivated to help abused coworkers. We then report results of two experiments designed to test our competing hypotheses. We finally conclude with discussions of the theoretical and practical implications of our findings, as well as propositions of future research directions.

FIGURE 4
Theoretical Model

THEORY AND HYPOTHESES

Altruistically versus Egoistically Motivated Helping View

There is an ongoing debate among researchers about people's motivation for helping. Batson and colleagues' (Batson et al., 1981, 1989, 1991) altruistically motivated view of helping posits that people help others because of their desire to reduce others' distress or increase others' welfare. Whereas one's own welfare may be increased through this altruistically motivated helping, "personal gain must be an unintended by-product and not the goal of the behavior" (Batson et al., 1981: 291). According to this view, employees help abused coworkers because they feel empathy for their coworkers' plight and want to increase their coworkers' welfare. In contrast, Cialdini and colleagues' (Cialdini & Kenrick, 1976; Cialdini et al., 1987) egoistically motivated view of helping suggests that people's motivation to help is driven by their desire to gain personal benefits (e.g., increased self-esteem or self-satisfaction) or to avoid personal pain (e.g., negative mood). Thus, the idea is that the ultimate goal of helping is to increase the helper's own welfare (Cialdini et al., 1987). According to this view, employees help abused coworkers because they want to alleviate their own negative mood states, such as guilt and shame, which are induced by witnessing coworkers being abused (cf. Cialdini & Kenrick, 1976).

All in all, both the altruistically motivated helping perspective and the egoistically motivated helping perspective can explain the main effect of observed coworker abusive supervision on coworker-directed help. To conduct a comparative test of the foregoing two perspectives, a first step is to "identify a boundary condition that would lead to opposing predictions for either of" these

two perspectives (Thau & Mitchell, 2010: 1011). We propose that employee's own abusive supervision can offer a fair comparative test of the altruistically vs. egoistically motivated helping perspective.

The Positive Effect of Employee's Own Abusive Supervision

Employees observing their coworkers being abused might also experience varying levels of supervisory abuse themselves, because supervisors tend to mistreat subordinates in the same team to different extents (Farh & Chen, 2014; Mitchell et al., 2015; Schaubroeck, Peng, & Hannah, 2016). Research posits that supervisors' differentiated mistreatment can provide individual employees with information that contributes to their appraisals of their own or others' mistreatment. For example, Peng et al. (2014) found that coworkers' experiences of abuse influenced employees' performance responses to their own abuse by the supervisor via the quality of exchange relationships they perceived with coworkers and the supervisor, respectively. This work suggests that when employees observe their coworkers being abused, they may use this information to make sense of their own mistreatment by the supervisor (Peng, Schaubroeck, Chong, & Li, in press). Applying this logic to our case, we expect employees who observe their coworkers being abused may also use the information regarding their own mistreatment to facilitate their appraisals of coworkers' mistreatment. Indeed, providing indirect support for our arguments, Kray and Lind (2002) found that third-party employees' reactions to their coworkers' injustice experience depended on their own injustice experience. Therefore, as we elaborate below, employee's own abusive supervision may

interact with observed coworker abusive supervision in predicting his/her emotional and behavioral responses to coworkers' abuse.

As argued earlier, the altruistically motivated helping perspective predicts that employee's own abusive supervision would strengthen the relationship between observed coworker abusive supervision and coworker-directed help. When employees are receiving abusive supervision themselves, they might feel more empathy toward coworkers who are also receiving abusive supervision. This is because the common experiences of being abused enhance empathy, which refers to "an other-oriented emotional response congruent with the perceived welfare of another person" (Batson et al., 1988: 52). Consistent with this argument, Batson et al. (1995) suggested that, due to a special relationship, such as similarity or attachment, one person tends to value the welfare of another person, and that the first person is more likely to experience empathic feelings of compassion and sympathy when the latter person's welfare is threatened. According to the empathy-altruism theory of helping (Batson et al., 1981, 1991), people's empathic concern for others can result in their altruistic motivation to help. Drawing on this theory, we therefore argue that more-abused employees who feel empathy for their abused coworkers are more likely to help abused coworkers in order to relieve their distress and increase their welfare.

The common mistreatment experiences among abused employees and abused coworkers would also increase employees' motivation to affiliate with their abused coworkers. Compared to less-abused employees, more-abused

employees are more invested in interactions with abused coworkers (cf. De Dreu & Van Kleef, 2004; Van Kleef et al., 2008) because of their affective attachment to abused coworkers, thereby enhancing their tendency to affiliate with abused coworkers to form a sense of closeness between them and their abused coworkers. Given a close relationship increases people's inclination to value others' welfare (Batson et al., 1995), abused employees who are motivated to affiliate with their abused coworkers would more likely engage in help behaviors to increase their abused coworkers' welfare. Taken together, we hypothesize the following:

Hypothesis 1. Employee's own abusive supervision will strengthen the positive relationship between observed coworker abusive supervision and coworker-directed help.

Hypothesis 2. The interaction between observed coworker abusive supervision and employee's own abusive supervision on coworker-directed help will be mediated by empathy (Hypothesis 2a) and affiliation motivation (Hypothesis 2b).

The Negative Effect of Employee's Own Abusive Supervision

Contrary to the altruistically motivated helping account of employee's own abusive supervision, the egoistically motivated helping perspective predicts that employee's own abusive supervision would weaken the relationship between observed coworker abusive supervision and coworker-directed help. When employee's own abusive supervision is low, employees are more likely to experience negative mood states, such as guilt and shame, upon

seeing their coworkers being abused. This is because employees are receiving preferential treatment compared to their abused coworkers, which produces a state of positive inequity (cf. Brockner, Davy, & Carter, 1985), thereby inducing employees' feelings of guilt and shame (Baumeister et al., 1994). According to the negative mood state relief theory of helping (Cialdini, Darby, & Vincent, 1973; Cialdini & Kenrick, 1976), people who are exposed to experiences that increase negative mood states (e.g., guilt and shame) would seek to relieve these negative states through helping behaviors. Drawing on this theory, we thus argue that less-abused employees are more likely to help their abused coworkers to relieve their own negative feelings of guilt and shame. Providing indirect support for these arguments, Brockner et al. (1985) demonstrated that coworker layoffs can cause feelings of guilt in the survivors, and that these survivors in turn increase their work output in order to reduce their sense of remorse or guilt. Based on these arguments, we hypothesize the following:

Hypothesis 3. Employee's own abusive supervision will weaken the positive relationship between observed coworker abusive supervision and coworker-directed help.

Hypothesis 4. The interaction between observed coworker abusive supervision and employee's own abusive supervision on coworker-directed help will be mediated by guilt (Hypothesis 4a) and shame (Hypothesis 4b).

OVERVIEW OF STUDIES

We conducted two studies to test our theoretical model. In Study 1, we provided a preliminary test of Hypotheses 1 and 3 by manipulating both observed coworker abusive supervision and employee's own abusive supervision, and measuring employees' intended coworker-directed help behaviors. In Study 2, in addition to replicating the results of Study 1, we also tested the mediating mechanisms in our theoretical model using the same experimental design as used in Study 1. Taken together, these two studies provide evidence for the internal validity of our conclusions.

STUDY 1 METHOD

Participants and Procedure

We recruited 960 U.S.-resident participants from Amazon's Mechanical Turk (www.mturk.com) to participate in our study in exchange for US\$0.65. After excluding participants who did not finish our survey, we obtained a final sample of 932 participants (50.8% male; $M_{\text{age}} = 38.17$ years, $SD_{\text{age}} = 11.95$). Participants were randomly assigned to read one of four scenarios (adapted from Farh & Chen, 2014). Participants were asked to imagine they were members of a research and development team with a total of four team members, including one team leader and three subordinates (i.e., the participant and two coworkers). Participants were told that the team was struggling to meet the deadlines set by the team leader for launching new products and that the team's progress was a bit slow.

In each scenario, participants were presented with a set of four e-mails sent to them by their team leader and their coworkers. The e-mail messages

contained our manipulation of high versus low observed coworker abusive supervision, and high versus low employee's own abusive supervision. The complete contents of the manipulations are shown in Appendix A. After reading the scenario, participants completed the measure of coworker-directed help and manipulation checks.

Manipulating observed coworker abusive supervision. The manipulation of observed coworker abusive supervision contained a single e-mail message from the team leader sent to the entire team, and two additional e-mail messages sent from and addressed to team members only (i.e., team leader was not included). In the *high observed coworker abusive supervision* condition, the team leader attributed current challenges in meeting deadlines to the team's failures and publicly ridiculed the participant's two coworkers. Following the team leader's e-mail message, participants also received two e-mails from their coworkers, who complained about how difficult the team leader was to work with and narrated abusive experiences with the team leader. The team leader's and two coworkers' e-mails collectively illustrated a situation in which the participant (i.e., the focal employee) both observed the team leader's abusive behaviors toward the two coworkers in the group e-mail, and heard about the individualized abuse experienced by two coworkers.

In the *low observed coworker abusive supervision* condition, the team leader attributed existing challenges in meeting deadlines to some mistakes made by the team early on in the process, but noted that mistakes happens all the time and that challenges are a part of the learning process. In the e-mail, the

team leader also encouraged the team to stay focused and committed to figuring out how to get their work done, as well as appreciated the input of the participant's two coworkers. Participants were then presented with two e-mails from their coworkers, who shared their enjoyable experiences working with the team leader. The three e-mails jointly painted a situation where the participant (i.e., the focal employee) both observed the team leader interacting with two coworkers in a neutral tone and heard about the neutral but respectful treatment two coworkers received from the team leader.

Manipulating employee's own abusive supervision. Participants (i.e., focal employees) received a personalized e-mail message from the team leader. In the *high employee's own abusive supervision* condition, the team leader acknowledged the difficulties encountered by the team in meeting deadlines, and expressed negative and belittling comments on the focal employee's contributions and competence. In the *low employee's own abusive supervision* condition, the team leader acknowledged the team's slow progress in meeting deadlines. However, instead of expressing a personal attack, the team leader addressed with the focal employee in a neutral, respectful tone.

Measures

Coworker-directed help. We assessed employees' desires to help their coworkers using the three-item shortened version of the scale developed by Williams and Anderson (1991) (e.g., "I would go out of way to help Casey and Riley"). Participants were asked to respond on a 7-point scale ranging from 1 = *not at all* to 7 = *very much* ($\alpha = .93$).

Manipulation check. To measure employee's own abusive supervision, participants were administered a five-item measure of abusive supervision from Mitchell and Ambrose (2007) (e.g., "J.P. ridicules me"). Participants were asked to respond on a 7-point scale ranging from 1 = *strongly disagree* to 7 = *strongly agree* ($\alpha = .95$). To measure observed coworker abusive supervision, we employed a referent-shift adaptation of the items. Participants were asked to respond to items, such as "J.P. tells Casey and Riley that their thoughts or feelings are stupid", on a 7-point scale ranging from 1 = *strongly disagree* to 7 = *strongly agree* ($\alpha = .99$).

STUDY 1 RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Manipulation Checks

Participants in the high observed coworker abusive supervision condition ($M = 5.95$, $SD = 1.53$) rated team leaders' abusive behaviors toward coworkers higher than those in the low observed coworker abusive supervision condition ($M = 1.72$, $SD = 1.36$; $t(930) = 44.65$, $p < .001$; Cohen's $d = 2.93$). Further, participants in the high employee's own abusive supervision condition ($M = 5.23$, $SD = 1.46$) rated team leaders' abusive behaviors toward themselves higher than those in the low employee's own abusive supervision condition ($M = 1.97$, $SD = 1.42$; $t(930) = 34.69$, $p < .001$; Cohen's $d = 2.28$). These results therefore indicate that our experimental manipulations were successful.

Hypothesis Testing

We conducted a 2 (high observed coworker abusive supervision vs. low observed coworker abusive supervision) $\times$ 2 (high employee's own abusive

supervision vs. low employee's own abusive supervision) analysis of variance on coworker-directed helping behavior to test our competing hypotheses – Hypotheses 1 and 3. As shown in Table 7, we found a significant two-way interaction ($F(1, 928) = 46.04, p < .001, \text{partial } \eta^2 = .05$). As illustrated in Figure 5, simple effect analyses indicated that in the low observed coworker abusive supervision condition, participants in the low employee's own abusive supervision condition ($M = 4.83, SD = 1.39$) reported greater coworker-directed help than those in the high employee's own abusive supervision condition ($M = 3.94, SD = 1.61; p < .001; \text{Cohen's } d = .60$). However, in the high observed coworker abusive supervision condition, participants in the high employee's own abusive supervision condition ($M = 5.38, SD = 1.27$) reported greater coworker-directed help than those in the low employee's own abusive supervision condition ($M = 4.99, SD = 1.45; p < .05; \text{Cohen's } d = .28$). This combination of findings provides support for Hypothesis 1, that high employee's own abusive supervision strengthens the relationship between observed coworker abusive supervision and coworker-directed help, but not for Hypothesis 3.

TABLE 7
Analysis of Variance Results for Coworker-Directed Help (Study 1)

Variable	<i>F</i>	η^2
Observed coworker abusive supervision	72.48***	.07
Employee's own abusive supervision	7.39**	.01
Observed coworker abusive supervision $\times$ Employee's own abusive supervision	46.04***	.05

** $p < .01$. *** $p < .001$.

Overall, Study 1 provides support for the altruistically motivated helping view and shows that employees who experience abusive supervision themselves are more likely to engage in helping behaviors directed toward those coworkers who are abused. These results cannot be explained by the egoistically motivated helping view. If employees who are abused had based their decisions to help abused coworkers on egoistical considerations, then the less negative mood states (e.g., empathy) elicited by the common mistreatment experiences between employees and abused coworkers should make employees' helping behaviors toward abused coworkers less likely. We extend these findings in Study 2 by directly measuring and testing the underlying mechanisms of altruistically versus egoistically motivated helping view.

FIGURE 5
Interactive Effect of Observed Coworker Abusive Supervision and Employee's Own Abusive Supervision on Coworker-Directed Help (Study 1)

STUDY 2 METHOD

Participants and Procedure

We recruited 976 U.S.-resident participants from Amazon's Mechanical Turk (www.mturk.com) to participate in our study in exchange for US\$0.65. After excluding participants who did not finish our survey, we finally obtained a sample of 941 participants (38.9% male; $M_{\text{age}} = 35.57$ years, $SD_{\text{age}} = 11.33$). Participants were randomly assigned to read one of four scenarios, which were similar to those used in Study 1. Following the scenarios, participants were asked to complete manipulation checks, the measures of empathy, affiliation motivation, guilt, and shame, and their intended help behaviors toward coworkers.

Manipulating observed coworker abusive supervision. The manipulation of observed coworker abusive supervision involved the same set of e-mail messages as used in Study 1.

Manipulating employee's own abusive supervision. Likewise, the manipulation of employee's own abusive supervision contained the same set of e-mail messages as used in Study 1.

Measures

Employee empathy. Employee empathy toward coworkers was measured using Batson et al.'s (1995) four-item scale. They were asked to indicate the extent to which they felt such emotions as sympathetic, compassionate, softhearted, and tender toward their coworkers on a 7-point scale ranging from *1 = not at all* to *7 = extremely* ($\alpha = .96$).

Employee affiliation motivation. We measured employee affiliation motivation using Van Kleef et al.'s (2008) five-item scale. Participants were asked to indicate the extent to which they agreed with such item as "I feel close to Casey and Riley" on a 7-point scale ranging from *1 = strongly disagree* to *7 = strongly agree* ($\alpha = .95$).

Employee guilt. We used O'Keefe and Figgé's (1999) four-item scale to measure employee guilt. Participants were asked to report the extent to which they felt such emotions as guilty, remorseful, regretful, and sorry for the team leader's treatment on their coworkers on a 7-point scale ranging from *1 = not at all* to *7 = extremely* ($\alpha = .92$).

Employee shame. We adopted O'Keefe and Figgé's (1999) four-item scale to measure employee shame. Participants were asked to indicate the extent to which they felt such emotions as ashamed, humiliated, disgraced, and embarrassed for the team leader's treatment on their coworkers on a 7-point scale ranging from *1 = not at all* to *7 = extremely* ($\alpha = .97$).

Coworker-directed help. Participants were asked to report their intended help behaviors toward coworkers based on the seven-item full scale developed by Williams and Anderson (1991) (e.g., "I would go out of way to help Casey and Riley" and "I would assist Casey and Riley with their work (when not asked)"). Participants were asked to respond on a 7-point scale ranging from *1 = not at all* to *7 = very much* ($\alpha = .95$).

Manipulation check. The same measures of coworker ($\alpha = .99$) and employee ($\alpha = .96$) abusive supervision manipulation checks were used as in Study 1.

STUDY 2 RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Manipulation Checks

Participants in the high observed coworker abusive supervision condition ($M = 5.68$, $SD = 1.83$) rated team leaders' abusive behaviors toward coworkers higher than those in the low observed coworker abusive supervision condition ($M = 1.58$, $SD = 1.25$; $t(917) = 39.59$, $p < .001$; Cohen's $d = 2.62$). Furthermore, participants in the high employee's own abusive supervision condition ($M = 5.18$, $SD = 1.58$) rated team leaders' abusive behaviors toward themselves higher than those in the low employee's own abusive supervision condition ($M = 1.79$, $SD = 1.26$; $t(914) = 35.96$, $p < .001$; Cohen's $d = 2.38$). These findings thus suggest that our experimental manipulations were successful.

Hypothesis Testing

As shown in Table 8, results from a 2 (high observed coworker abusive supervision vs. low observed coworker abusive supervision) $\times$ 2 (high employee's own abusive supervision vs. low employee's own abusive supervision) analysis of variance indicated that there was a significant observed coworker abusive supervision $\times$ employee's own abusive supervision interaction in predicting coworker-directed help ($F(1, 930) = 63.84$, $p < .001$,

partial $\eta^2 = .06$). As shown in Figure 6, simple effect analysis indicated that in the low observed coworker abusive supervision condition, participants in the low employee's own abusive supervision condition ($M = 4.85$, $SD = 1.27$) reported greater coworker-directed help than those in the high employee's own abusive supervision condition ($M = 3.80$, $SD = 1.54$; $p < .001$; Cohen's $d = .75$). Nevertheless, in the high observed coworker abusive supervision condition, participants in the high employee's own abusive supervision condition ($M = 5.03$, $SD = 1.19$) reported greater coworker-directed help than those in the low employee's own abusive supervision condition ($M = 4.68$, $SD = 1.32$; $p < .05$; Cohen's $d = .28$). These results therefore provide strong support for Hypothesis 1, that high employee's own abusive supervision accentuates the relationship between observed coworker abusive supervision and coworker-directed help, but not for Hypothesis 3.

TABLE 8
Analysis of Variance Results for Coworker-Directed Help (Study 2)

Variable	<i>F</i>	η^2
Observed coworker abusive supervision	36.88***	.04
Employee's own abusive supervision	16.24***	.02
Observed coworker abusive supervision $\times$ Employee's own abusive supervision	63.84***	.06

*** $p < .001$.

FIGURE 6
Interactive Effect of Observed Coworker Abusive Supervision and Employee's Own Abusive Supervision on Coworker-Directed Help (Study 2)

To test Hypotheses 2 and 4, we followed Edwards and Lambert's (2007) bootstrapping-based analytic approach and used Hayes's (2013) statistical software to test for a conditional indirect effect. Coworker-directed help was entered as the dependent variable, observed coworker abusive supervision as the independent variable, employee's own abusive supervision as the first-stage moderator, and employee empathy, employee affiliation motivation, employee guilt, and employee shame as the mediators simultaneously to control for each other's effect. As shown in Table 9, the results showed that the indirect effect of observed coworker abusive supervision on coworker-directed help via

employee empathy was stronger when employee's own abusive supervision was high (coefficient = .96, $SE = .09$, 95% CI = .78 to 1.15) than when it was low (coefficient = .50, $SE = .06$, 95% CI = .38 to .63). The index of moderated mediation (Hayes, 2015) revealed that the difference between the two coefficients was significant (coefficient = .46, $SE = .08$, 95% CI = .31 to .62), providing support for Hypothesis 2a. Similarly, the indirect effect of observed coworker abusive supervision on coworker-directed help via employee affiliation motivation was stronger when employee's own abusive supervision was high (coefficient = .55, $SE = .07$, 95% CI = .42 to .70) than when employee's own abusive supervision was low (coefficient = .01, $SE = .05$, 95% CI = -.09 to .11). The index of moderated mediation (Hayes, 2015) revealed that the difference between the two coefficients was significant (coefficient = .54, $SE = .09$, 95% CI = .38 to .72). These findings therefore provide support for Hypothesis 2b.

However, the results do not support Hypothesis 4a and 4b. The indirect effect of observed coworker abusive supervision on coworker-directed help via employee guilt was not significant, regardless of when employee's own abusive supervision was low (coefficient = -.001, $SE = .05$, 95% CI = -.10 to .10) or high (coefficient = -.001, $SE = .04$, 95% CI = -.08 to .09). Moreover, the index of moderated mediation (Hayes, 2015) revealed that the difference between the two coefficients was not significant (coefficient = .0001, $SE = .01$, 95% CI = -.02 to .02). Likewise, the indirect effect of observed coworker abusive supervision on coworker-directed help via employee shame was not significant,

regardless of when employee's own abusive supervision was low (coefficient = $-.06$, $SE = .06$, 95% CI = $-.17$ to $.06$) or high (coefficient = $-.06$, $SE = .06$, 95% CI = $-.18$ to $.06$). The index of moderated mediation (Hayes, 2015) further indicated that the difference between the two coefficients was not significant (coefficient = $-.002$, $SE = .01$, 95% CI = $-.02$ to $.01$).

Taken together, Study 2's results strongly support Hypotheses 1, 2a, and 2b, and demonstrate that observed coworker abusive supervision was more strongly related to coworker-directed help when employee's own abusive supervision was high rather than low. Likewise, observed coworker abusive supervision was more strongly related to employee empathy and affiliation motivation when employee's own abusive supervision was high rather than low. Employee's own abusive supervision moderated the first stage of the indirect effect of observed coworker abusive supervision on coworker-directed help via employee empathy and affiliation motivation, respectively, supporting moderated mediation. Overall, these results provide consistent evidence of the altruistically motivated helping explanation of when and why employees are motivated to help abused coworkers.

TABLE 9
Conditional Indirect Effects for Coworker-Directed Help (Study 2)

Hypothesis	Indirect Effect Path	Level of Moderator	Indirect Effect	95% CI
H2a	Observed coworker abusive supervision → Empathy → Coworker-directed help	Low	.50	[.38, .63]
		High	.96	[.78, 1.15]
		Difference	.46	[.31, .62]
H2b	Observed coworker abusive supervision → Affiliation motivation → Coworker-directed help	Low	.01	[-.09, .11]
		High	.55	[.42, .70]
		Difference	.54	[.38, .72]
H4a	Observed coworker abusive supervision → Guilt → Coworker-directed help	Low	-.001	[-.10, .10]
		High	-.001	[-.08, .09]
		Difference	.0001	[-.02, .02]
H4b	Observed coworker abusive supervision → Shame → Coworker-directed help	Low	-.06	[-.17, .06]
		High	-.06	[-.18, .06]
		Difference	-.002	[-.02, .01]

GENERAL DISCUSSION

The aim of the present research was to examine whether an altruistically or egoistically motivated helping view better accounts for whether third-party employees are more or less likely to help coworkers who are being abused. The altruistically motivated help view predicts that if employees are being abused by their supervisor, then they would be more likely to help fellow coworkers who are also being abused by their supervisor; experiencing the same

mistreatment would increase employees' empathy and affiliation motivation, which in turn would lead them to help abused coworkers. The egoistically motivated helping view predicts that if employees are not being abused, then they would be more likely to help fellow coworkers who are being abused; these employees would experience negative emotions, such as guilt and shame, because they are being treated more favorably by their supervisor than their coworkers, and thus help their coworkers more to relieve their feelings of guilt and shame. Across two experimental studies, the results supported for the altruistically motivated helping view—employees helped their abused coworkers more when they themselves were also abused by the supervisor because sharing this negative experience with their coworkers increased their empathy and affiliation motivation.

Theoretical Implications

Our research makes a number of significant contributions to the literature. First, to the best of our knowledge, we are among the first to introduce the debate on altruistically versus egoistically motivated helping from social psychology into the abusive supervision literature. Specifically, our research takes a step toward reconciling these conflicting views by introducing employee's own abusive supervision as an *inference test factor* (Platt, 1964). In the abusive supervision context, we found support for the altruistically motivated view of helping but not for the egoistically motivated view of helping. This finding is consistent with previous research in social psychology (e.g., Batson et al., 1989), though prior research has not tested the competing

views of helping in the victimization context. By detecting the true motivation held by employees to help their victimized coworkers, we exclude the plausible alternative explanation –employees’ self-interest-oriented motivation – for employees’ motivated helping behaviors toward their victimized coworkers.

Second, we echo the extant injustice research by showcasing the “misery loves company” phenomenon in the victimization literature. Although a number of studies in the field of injustice have demonstrated that people who are exposed to injustice victims are more likely to experience victim empathy or guilt when they are personally receiving injustice treatment (e.g., Kray & Lind, 2002; Spencer & Rupp, 2009), little research has examined whether this phenomenon also exists in the victimization field in general, and the abusive supervision field specifically. Given observed mistreatment is fundamentally an assessment of injustice (Oh & Farh, 2017; O’Reilly & Aquino, 2011), people who observe others being mistreated and therefore evaluate this kind of mistreatment as unfair would also experience empathy when they are personally subject to mistreatment behaviors. Our research uses two experiment studies to directly test this idea in the abusive supervision context. Furthermore, we extend prior research, which has depicted an incomplete picture of third parties’ responses to others’ mistreatment experience, by comprehensively investigating how third-party employees who are exposed to their coworkers’ mistreatment demonstrate emotional and behavioral responses when they also experience supervisory mistreatment.

Third, our research contributes to the abusive supervision literature in several ways. The vast majority of research has exclusively examined abusive supervision from the victim's perspective (for reviews, see Mackey et al., 2017; Martinko et al., 2013; Tepper, 2007; Tepper et al., 2017). Although recent years have seen a growing number of studies that examine abusive supervision from the third party's perspective (e.g., Harris et al., 2013; Mitchell et al., 2015; Priesemuth, 2013), this topic of research is still in its infancy. We move this literature forward by examining the effects of witnessing coworkers' abusive supervision on third-party employees' helping behavior toward their abused coworkers, which has not been directly examined previously. Moreover, we extend this stream of research by viewing third-party employees not just as independent bystanders in the perpetrator-victim abuse interaction, but as active participants who share a relationship with the victim and the perpetrator and might or might not be victims themselves. This is because abusive supervisors are likely to simultaneously abuse multiple team members working under them (Mitchell et al., 2015; Priesemuth et al., 2014). Therefore, by investigating when and why third-party employees help their coworkers in response to abusive supervision, our research helps move the abusive supervision literature in multiple new direction.

Fourth, the present research advances our understanding of third-party employees' emotional reactions after witnessing their coworkers' being abused. While existing research has examined third-party employees' emotional responses to coworkers' abusive supervision, this work has primarily focused

on third-party employees' *other-directed emotions*, such as anger toward the supervisor and contentment about coworkers' experienced abuse (Mitchell et al., 2015). Distinct from this line of research, our research also looks at *self-directed emotions*, such as shame and guilt, along with other-directed emotions, such as empathy. By integrating both self-directed emotions and other-directed emotions into the same model, we expand the spectrum of third-party employees' emotional reactions to observed coworker abusive supervision. We further examine whether third-party employees' own level of abusive supervision influences the emotions that they experience upon viewing their coworkers being abused.

Fifth, our research brings a fresh perspective to the study of third-party employees' responses to others' mistreatment. Extant literature in this area has primarily examined how others being mistreated can influence third-party employees' responses, such as perpetrator-directed retributive reactions (e.g., Skarlicki et al., 1998; Skarlicki & Rupp, 2010; Umphress et al., 2013), without considering third-party employees' own mistreatment in shaping their experiences of and responses to others' mistreatment. Our research extends the extant work by illuminating the joint effects of third-party employees' experienced mistreatment and their observed coworker mistreatment on their own emotional and behavioral responses toward their coworkers, thus demonstrating a new approach to investigating third-party employees' reactions to coworkers' mistreatment.

Limitations and Future Research Directions

Despite these theoretical contributions, our research has some limitations that provide opportunities for future research. First, we measured the mediators (empathy, affiliation motivation, guilt, and shame) and the dependent variable (coworker-directed help) from the same source at the same stage in Study 2. A potential limitation of this research design lies in the possibility that common method bias might have confounded our findings. Therefore, future research may benefit from collecting multi-stage, multi-source data for these variables. Further, although our two experimental studies help to address concerns about internal validity, they may raise concerns about the external validity of our findings. Given that scenarios cannot fully reflect the real life workplace situation in which employees can observe and experience abusive supervision in person, future research would benefit from replicating our findings in the field by conducting a time-lagged field study.

Second, our research mainly focused on emotional factors (i.e., empathy, shame, and guilt) as the mechanisms underlying employees' likelihood of helping their coworkers who are being abused. Although these emotional factors help provide a comparative test of two different theories – the altruistically vs. the egoistically motivated view of helping – future research can explore other potential mechanisms. For instance, prior research suggests that “identification defines the social exchange relationship with others, which in turn influences extra-role behavior” (Liu, Zhu, & Yang, 2010: 192). People who identify with others (e.g., the organization, the supervisor, etc.) may engage in extra-role behaviors toward others as a reciprocity of the social

exchange with others (e.g., Blader & Tyler, 2009; Liu et al., 2010). Therefore, future research can examine whether employees' identification with coworkers influences how much they help to coworkers who are mistreated.

Practical Implications

Our research also has important implications for managerial practice. First, our research shows that witnessing abusive supervision can make employees feel empathy toward abused coworkers, particularly when employees have themselves been mistreated. As empathy has been theorized as “a way of knowing another's affect” (Wispel, 1986: 316) and trying to “live the attitudes of the other” (Rogers, 1951: 29), employees who empathize with abused coworkers may go through the same negative experiences (e.g., fear [Simon et al., 2015] and stress [Duffy, Ganster, & Pagon, 2002]) as their abused coworkers. In this sense, abusive supervision can trigger a cycle of negative consequences among victims and bystanders. These findings underscore the importance for managers to control the incidents of abusive supervision in the organization (Mitchell et al., 2015).

Second, we have demonstrated that some employees are more likely to help fellow coworkers who are abused, and that this constructive reaction is mainly elicited from those employees who are also abused. In other words, employees who are less abused are less likely to support their abused coworkers. This finding ought to serve as a warning to managers that they should take actions to foster a compassionate and supportive work environment (Mitchell et al., 2015), whereby employees are willing to help each other when

someone is in a distressful situation. For instance, managers can communicate the importance of coworker support in order to encourage employees to show concern for other teammates. Moreover, managers can also cultivate shared values among employees to enhance team cohesion, as in a cohesive team, team members are more likely to help with each other (Liang, Shin, & Chiang, 2015).

CONCLUSION

The debate among altruistically motivated helping view and egoistically motivated helping view has been heated in the field of social psychology. By introducing these competing views into the abusive supervision literature, the present research conducts a comparative test of third-party employees' altruistic versus egoistic motivation to help abused coworkers. Across two experiment studies, our results provide support for the altruistically motivated helping view and show that employees who are more abused are more likely to emphasize and affiliate with abused coworkers and, in turn, to help them. Taken together, these findings constitute contributions to the understanding of abusive supervision and third-party employees' reactions to mistreatment. We hope that our research will serve as a stepping stone for future research seeking to examine abusive supervision from the third-party perspective and to account for how third-party employees can act as a non-independent bystander in the abusive supervision interaction.

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APPENDIX

Scenario Manipulation (Essay 3)

Imagine that you are working at ABC Inc. for the past three years. Within ABC, you work in a Research & Development (R&D) team. The team contains a total of 4 team members, including one team leader (J. P.), and three subordinates (Casey, Riley, and you).

Recently, your team has been experiencing a very busy time because you need to launch many new products.

Given that the team's progress has been a bit slow, your team is struggling to meet the deadlines set by your team leader J. P..

Scenario Manipulation of High Observed Coworker Abusive Supervision

One day morning, you came in for work and *received the following email from J. P., addressed to the entire team (you, Casey, and Riley):*

From: Your team leader J. P.
To: You, Casey, and Riley
Subject: Obstacles along the way
Sent: Yesterday evening

Hi everyone,

I know you all have been facing some challenges in meeting deadlines to ensure our team launches all new products on time. Well, I guess these problems are the price you have to pay for the critical mistakes that the team made early on in the process.

I want to remind you that timely launch of all our new products is extremely important for the company. So it's time to stop screwing around and stay focused and committed to figuring out how to get your work done.

Also, Casey and Riley, I found your most recent ideas about improvements to our new products pretty stupid. Please spend some time and provide useful suggestions – I don't want to waste my time and energy reading half-baked idea.

J. P.

A few hours later, you also *received emails that were sent to you and the rest of team members (excluding your team leader, J. P.) from Casey and Riley, respectively.*

From: Your coworker Casey
To: You and Riley
Subject: Last few weeks ...
Sent: This afternoon

Hi folks,

Just wanted to say that it's been a real challenge working under J. P.. I realize that our progress as a team has been slow, but is it OK for J. P. to send nasty emails questioning my value add to this team?

Also, in our last brainstorming meeting, J. P. gave me no credit for my ideas. Why does J. P. keep blaming me for everything that's not working? I hope I will never have to deal with someone like J. P. again!

Casey

From: Your coworker Riley
To: You and Casey
Subject: Last few weeks...
Sent: This afternoon

Hi both,

I have to agree with Casey – as a leader, J. P. has violated all my expectations. From the first day, J. P. has been nothing but rude and condescending.

J. P. has also made a habit of ignoring my emails for no reason at all, and then blames me for not delivering fast enough. How I can get done with my work while I am waiting for J. P.'s response? It's really awful to be working under someone like J. P.

Riley

Scenario Manipulation of Low Observed Coworker Abusive Supervision

One day morning, you came in for work *and received the following email from J. P., addressed to the entire team (you, Casey, and Riley):*

From: Your team leader J. P.
To: You, Casey, and Riley
Subject: Obstacles along the way
Sent: Yesterday evening

Hi everyone,

I know you all have been facing some challenges in meeting deadlines to ensure our team launches all new products on time. This is in part because of some mistakes that the team made early on in the process. But this sort of thing happens all the time, so don't worry.

I want to remind you that timely launch of all our new products is extremely important for the company. Therefore, it's really important to stay focused and committed to figuring out how to get your work done. Challenges are simply part of the process!

Also, Casey and Riley, I found your most recent ideas about improvements to our new products right on target. I really appreciate your useful suggestions and am looking forward to your new ideas.

Best regards,
J. P.

A few hours later, you also *received emails that were sent to you and the rest of team members (excluding your team leader, J. P.) from Casey and Riley, respectively.*

From: Your coworker Casey
To: You and Riley
Subject: Last few weeks ...
Sent: This afternoon

Hi folks,

Just wanted to say that it's been a pretty stress-free experience working under J. P. Even though our progress as a team has been slow, J. P.'s feedback to me on yesterday's presentation was right to the point.

Also, in our last brainstorming meeting, J. P. made sure to acknowledge the ideas that I brought to the table. You guys agree that having a straight-shooting leader like J. P. is great? I hope I will have more chances to work with someone like J. P. in the future!

Casey

From: Your coworker Riley
To: You and Casey
Subject: Last few weeks...
Sent: This afternoon

Hi both,

I have to agree with Casey – as a leader, J. P., has neither violated nor surpassed my expectations. From the first day, J. P. has been more or less fair about my work and about the ideas that I bring to the team.

J. P. has also been pretty good about responding to my emails. I would also like to work with someone like J. P. in the future.

Riley

Scenario Manipulation of High Employee's Own Abusive Supervision

Later in the day, you *received the following email from J. P., addressed to you personally.*

From: Your team leader J. P.
To: You
Subject: Work Progress
Sent: A few minutes ago

Hi,

I realize you've been working hard over the past few weeks. I know it hasn't been a productive time for the team, and progress has been slow towards our upcoming deadline.

From what I've observed, your ideas have been pretty lousy and stupid and have little potential to be successful. I question the value you add to the team and your ability to deliver high quality work—don't bring the team down, okay? Please spend more time and effort on your work.

J. P.

Scenario Manipulation of Low Employee's Own Abusive Supervision

Later in the day, you *received the following email from J. P., addressed to you personally.*

From: Your team leader J. P.
To: You
Subject: Work Progress
Sent: A few minutes ago

Hi,

You've been working hard over the past few weeks. I know it hasn't been a productive time for the team, and progress has been slow towards our upcoming deadline.

Nonetheless, from what I've observed, you contribute a lot of useful ideas to the team effort, and I can see the many ways you positively influence the team's outcome. I really appreciate your time and effort spent on the work.

Best regards,
J. P.