

Supervisory Abuse of High Performers: A Social Comparison Perspective

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Prior research linking employee performance to abusive supervision suggests that supervisors have instrumental and non-instrumental reasons for engaging in abuse while dealing with low performers in the workplace. Drawing on social comparison theory, we argue that high-performing subordinates can make supervisors envious, which in turn leads to abusive supervisory behavior. Furthermore, we hypothesize supervisor social comparison orientation as a key boundary condition for the indirect positive effect of subordinate performance on abusive supervision through supervisor envy; that is, supervisors are more likely to abuse high performers when the supervisors' social comparison orientation is high. A multi-source, multi-wave field study was conducted with data collected from supervisor-subordinate dyads ($N = 95$ supervisors and 385 subordinates). The data supported a positive indirect effect of employee performance on abusive supervision through supervisor envy. Moreover, the indirect effect was statistically significant for supervisors with high social comparison orientation but it was not significant for supervisors with low social comparison orientation. Implications of these findings for reducing abusive supervision are discussed.

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INTRODUCTION

We would all like to have leaders who are empowering, motivating, and fair, yet most people can remember times when they thought their leader or supervisor was being hostile or mean—engaging in what is known as abusive supervision (see Tepper, Simon, & Park, 2017 for a recent review). Besides being unpleasant for those who are the targets of such behaviors, abusive supervision is known to have wide-ranging detrimental effects on employees and organizations alike (e.g., Tepper, 2000; Zhang & Liao, 2015). If these behaviors on the part of supervisors have undesirable consequences, the question arises as to why do supervisors engage in such behaviors? Answering this question is important for advancing theory on abusive supervision and because understanding the causes of abusive supervision can help us develop interventions aimed at reducing or eliminating such destructive supervisory behaviors. To understand what causes abusive supervision some scholars have utilized a *trickle-down* perspective in which the maltreatment a supervisor exhibits stems from previous experiences with his/her own supervisor (e.g., see Liu, Liao, & Loi, 2012; Mawritz, Mayer, Hoobler, Wayne, & Marinova, 2012), while others have used a *victimization* perspective, which links abusive treatment to the actions and characteristics of subordinates who evoke the maltreatment (e.g., see Khan, Quratulain, & Crawshaw, 2017; Liang et al., 2016; Tepper, Uhl-Bien, et al., 2006).

Taking the victimization perspective on understanding abusive supervision, an emergent stream of research has focused on subordinates' job performance as an antecedent of abusive supervision (e.g., Tepper, Moss, & Duffy, 2011). The assumption, supported empirically in recent studies (Tepper et al., 2011; Walter, Lam, Van der Vegt, Huang, & Miao, 2015), is that low-performing employees are more likely to be victimized because low performance evokes abusive supervision through both impulsive supervisor motives which are automatic and subconscious, and strategic supervisory motives that are deliberate and have specific goals such as improving subordinate performance (Tepper, Duffy, & Breaux-Soignet, 2012). However, we use social comparison theory (Festinger, 1954) to offer new insights on this previously documented effect and propose a novel mechanism (i.e., a positive indirect path) through which high, rather than low, subordinate performance elicits abusive supervisory behavior. Specifically, we argue that the experience of feelings of envy, defined as “when a person lacks another’s superior quality, achievement, or possession, and either desires it or wishes that the other lacks it” (Parrott & Smith, 1993, p. 906) toward high performing subordinates by supervisors is what leads to their abusive behavior.

This perspective is novel given that high performers are typically the favorites of their supervisors. Stated differently, we argue that high performers may fall victim to abusive supervision because they may also make their supervisors

feel or look bad in the workplace. For example, high performers who garner the organization's (e.g., in particularly upper-level management) spotlight may intimidate or threaten the perceived superiority or hierarchical status of their immediate supervisors (see Khan, Moss, Quratulain, & Hameed, 2018 for a recent exception). Evidence suggests that supervisors, with the various advantages available to them in the workplace (for example, decision-making autonomy, access or control over valued rewards, or power to allocate valued resources; Vecchio, 2007; Yukl, 2012), can experience envy toward their subordinates (Hochwarter & Ponder, 2014; Yu, Duffy, & Tepper, 2018). Research on envy in the workplace (e.g., Duffy, Shaw, & Schaubroeck, 2008; Yu & Duffy, 2016) has focused on peer-to-peer directed envy (i.e., lateral envy) and subordinate-to-supervisor directed envy (i.e., upward envy), but with the exception of the work of Leheta, Dimotakis, and Schatten (2017) and Yu et al. (2018) research has tended to ignore supervisor-to-subordinate directed envy (i.e., downward envy). Thus, we extend the limited but growing body of research by proposing a novel mechanism through which a high performing subordinate provokes abusive supervision through the experience of feelings of envy.

The mechanism we propose is that social comparisons on the part of the supervisors can start a psychological process by which subordinates' high performance leads to abusive supervision by eliciting supervisors' envy. Yet, because individual differences in the general tendency to engage in social comparisons exists (Gibbons & Buunk, 1999b), it is likely that the psychological process by which social comparison elicits envy and, subsequently, abusive supervision, manifests itself differently for different supervisors. Therefore, we propose that supervisors' social comparison orientation, that is, the tendency to be engaged in social comparisons, moderates the effect of subordinate performance on abusive supervision through supervisor envy. Figure 1 presents an illustration of the proposed moderated mediation model.

This study contributes to theory and research on abusive supervision in several ways. First, we offer new insights to the previously documented findings on employee performance to the abusive supervision relationship which advocates that supervisors may have instrumental and non-instrumental motives or reasons to abuse their low-performing subordinates at the workplace. By doing so, we propose and develop a positive indirect path between subordinate performance and abusive supervision which suggests that subordinates' high performance could trigger abusive supervision as well. Second, we explain why this positive path occurs by proposing and examining an emotional mechanism, supervisor's envy towards high-performing subordinates, that is activated by the social comparisons supervisors make with their subordinates. By studying envy and integrating it into a model that explains abusive supervision, we respond not only to general calls for the examination of discrete emotions in organizational research (as opposed to examining

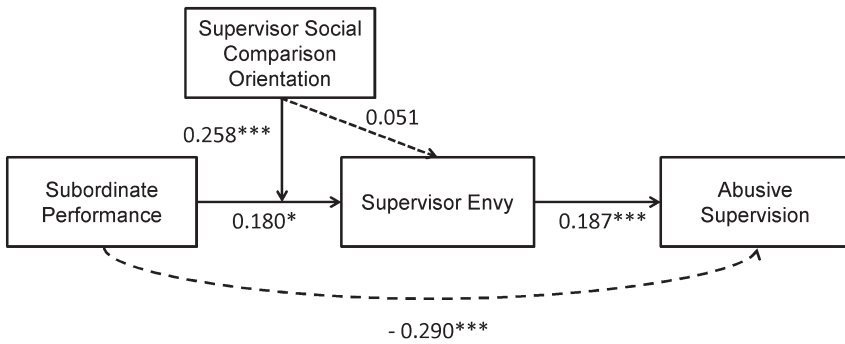


FIGURE 1. Conceptual model and path analysis results. *Notes:* Unstandardized path estimates are reported. Solid lines depict the hypothesized moderated mediation model and dashed lines indicate the relationship that are not hypothesized. Significant at: * $p < 0.05$; and *** $p < .001$.

broad affective states such as positive and negative affect; Brief & Weiss, 2002; Gooty, Gavin, & Ashkanasy, 2009; Kiewitz, Restubog, Shoss, Garcia, & Tang, 2016), but also to more recent calls for the inclusion of envy in organizational research, especially in studies of unethical behavior (e.g., Lee & Gino, 2016; Yu et al., 2018).

Finally, we not only address the “why” behind the positive path of employee performance on abusive supervision (i.e., envy), but we also identify a condition that determines “when” it will happen; that is, supervisor social comparison orientation. We propose and test a moderating effect of supervisors’ propensity to engage in social comparisons on the link between subordinate performance and supervisor envy and also on the indirect effect of subordinate performance on abusive supervision through supervisor envy. In fact, this moderating influence on the indirect effect should indicate under which conditions the negative overall relationships of subordinate performance and abusive supervision is not only diminished by the positive indirect effect through envy but eliminated altogether. Thus, we extend the underdeveloped line of inquiry that explores the victimization of high performers at the supervisor-subordinate dyad level (Khan et al., 2018) through the lens of social comparison theory.

THEORETICAL BACKGROUND AND HYPOTHESES DEVELOPMENT

Social Comparison Processes Influencing Abusive Supervision

Social comparison theory (Festinger, 1954) suggests that individuals make social comparisons in the workplace and utilize this information to form

self-evaluations which then influence their attitudes and behaviors at work (SCT; Festinger, 1954; Gibbons & Buunk, 1999b; Hu & Liden, 2013; Taylor, Buunk, & Aspinwall, 1990; Wood, 1989). Social comparison is described as “the process of thinking about information about one or more other people in relation to the self” (Wood, 1996, pp. 520–521) and is considered an “almost inevitable element of social interaction” (Brickman & Bulman, 1977). More specifically, people can engage in comparisons with those who are perceived to be just like them (i.e., unilateral comparison), better than them (i.e., upward comparison), or worse than them (i.e., downward comparison) (Dunn, Ruedy, & Schweitzer, 2012; Hakmiller, 1966; Hu & Liden, 2013; Lee & Gino, 2016).

The social comparison literature reveals that downward comparisons or comparing to worse-off others make people more confident about themselves and elicit more positive feelings (Hakmiller, 1966; Lyubomirsky & Ross, 1997). In contrast, upward comparisons or comparing to better-off others decrease an individual’s self-efficacy (Maslach, 1993) and reduce one’s positive self-image (Hu & Liden, 2013; Menon & Thompson, 2007). Ultimately, social comparisons affect an individual’s self-evaluation and can lead to emotions such as envy and anger, when those social comparisons are unfavorable to the individual (Lee & Gino, 2016; Lockwood & Kunda, 1997; Schaubroeck & Lam, 2004; Smith, Pettigrew, Pippin, & Bialosiewicz, 2012; Smith & Kim, 2007; Tesser, 1991). In this article we study envy because it is one of the negative emotions that occurs in leader-follower relationships (see Leheta, Dimotakis, & Schatten, 2017). Envy is defined as “an unpleasant and often painful blend of feelings characterized by inferiority, hostility, and resentment caused by a comparison with a person or group of people who possess something we desire” (Smith & Kim, 2007, p. 49). In addition, it is a negative emotion that has been tied to abusive supervision (see Yu et al., 2018). Therefore, we are interested in supervisors’ engagement in social comparisons with high performing subordinates, because these subordinates can be perceived as having certain advantages over their supervisors, as we explain in more detail below.

Although downward social comparisons typically lead to positive feelings, we argue that the opposite may be true with respect to high-performing subordinates. For example, it has been noted that “the experience of envy can occur when individuals [supervisors] experience even a single disadvantage relative to a comparison to other [subordinates]” (Cohen-Charash & Mueller, 2007, p. 666). Recently, Yu et al. (2018) argued that supervisory leaders may engage in social comparisons with their followers and experience envy towards them when supervisors perceive any disadvantage compared to their followers. Such comparisons are easily made given that supervisory leaders have control over certain organizational systems that provide them easy access to information related to their subordinates, such as performance

evaluations. In line with this, supervisory leaders are also in a position to observe their subordinate's interactions with others (for example, interactions with group members, i.e., peers or even with upper-level management) that provides further information on a subordinate's standing in the social context. Therefore, Leheta et al. (2017) argued that supervisory leaders can easily make comparisons with their subordinates in terms of desirable abilities, characteristics, and other resources, and can feel envy if they perceive themselves to be deficient in comparison (Smith, 2000; Smith & Kim, 2007). This argument is also supported by some work-blogging sites that express concern about the possibility of supervisors who have control over valued resources at work engaging in comparisons with their subordinates, resulting in felt envy towards them (Nickerson, 2014; "How to Battle Boss Envy," GovExec.com) but valued resources (e.g., salary) are not the only factor triggering envy. Envy can also be triggered by perceived career accomplishments or as a result of comparisons of individual attributes such as intelligence or attractiveness. Thus, supervisors can in fact feel envious towards subordinates who they perceive to have any type of advantages over them. It is our contention, therefore, that high performing subordinates are likely to be perceived as having potential advantages over supervisors, even if yet to be realized (e.g., career prospects), and thus be envied by supervisors. Subordinates with high performance may challenge their supervisor's image and sense of competence in the workplace and may lead supervisors to feel threatened by these high performers due to their heightened visibility in the workplace (Khan et al., 2018). Therefore, comparisons with high-performing subordinates may in effect make supervisors feel envious perhaps because of the high potential for advancement of these subordinates.

Specific emotions are known to be associated with differentiated action tendencies (e.g., Frijda, 1986; Roseman, Wiest, & Swartz, 1994), and work-related envy is thought to activate behavioral tendencies aimed at diminishing the envied person by harmful means such as social undermining (e.g., Duffy, Scott, Shaw, Tepper, & Aquino, 2012; Duffy et al., 2008). Supervisors are more likely to engage in abusive behaviors towards envied subordinates than towards those whom they do not envy, in order to "destroy the envied object or its possessor" (Elster, 1999, p. 39; Tai, Narayanan, & McAllister, 2012). Furthermore, envy at work has been specifically proposed to elicit "negativity and hostility toward others" (Tai et al., 2012, p. 108) who are envied (Duffy et al., 2008; Dunn & Schweitzer, 2006; Khan, Quratulain, & Bell, 2014; Lee & Gino, 2016). Finally, research shows that envy is associated with "the pernicious desire to deprive the envied of their advantage, even when this advantage has been gained through proper means" (D'Arms & Kerr, 2008; Leheta et al., 2017, p. 453).

Consistent with this, we propose that subordinate high performance elicits envy on the part of most supervisors which, in turn, makes it more likely that supervisors will engage in abusive behaviors towards these envied subordinates. Specifically, supervisors are more likely to feel envious towards those subordinates who display high levels of performance (compared to those who perform at a lower level) because they perceive them having superior personal qualities, social skills or career prospects or they feel threatened by them, and this experienced envy motivates supervisors to abuse or otherwise harm these subordinates in order to eliminate their perceived advantages (Tepper et al., 2012). Therefore, we predict:

Hypothesis 1a: Subordinate performance is positively related to supervisor envy.

Hypothesis 1b: Supervisor envy is positively related to abusive supervision.

Hypothesis 1c: There will be a positive indirect relationship between subordinate performance and abusive supervision through supervisor envy.

The literature on unethical behavior suggests that dispositional factors may influence an individual's choice to act unethically in the workplace (Lee & Gino, 2016). It follows that a supervisor's dispositional characteristics may influence their propensity to engage in abusive supervision towards their subordinates. Following social comparison theory, in the second hypothesis we proposed that supervisors engage in abusive supervision towards their high-performing subordinates because they envy them. The social comparison theory also posits that individuals vary in their propensity to engage in social comparisons, that is, social comparison orientation. Social comparison orientation is the extent to which one is "sensitive to the behavior of others and has a degree of uncertainty about the self, along with an interest in reducing self-uncertainty" (Gibbons & Buunk, 1999b, p. 138). It explains the tendency to be strongly engaged in social comparisons, to be motivated to know about others' opinions, feelings, and behaviors in related circumstances, and to be particularly sensitive in learning one's own standing in relation to others. We propose that social comparison orientation determines supervisors' sensitivity for feeling envy towards high-performing subordinates and therefore influences the extent to which they engage in abusive supervision towards those subordinates.

Pfeffer, Salancik, and Leblebici (1976) discussed the notion that social comparison orientation can augment the influence of environmental cues on affective reactions and an individual's behavior. They provided evidence that uncertainty increases social comparisons. This is consistent with the idea that a high relative to a low social comparison orientation individual is characterized by intensified feelings of uncertainty about his/her self and has a strong dependency upon others in the workplace to get his/her

self-evaluations (Gibbons & Buunk, 1999a; Lee & Gino, 2016). Van den Bos, Wilke, and Lind's (1998) study also provided support to this argument. They found that cancer patients who obtain higher social comparison orientation respond with stronger emotions when presented with information about other patients. Recently, Michinov and Michinov (2001) argued that a person with high (compared to low) social comparison orientation is more likely to engage in comparisons, which, in return, may intensify his/her experience of envy at the workplace, and amplify the likelihood of unethical behavior (Lee & Gino, 2016).

Based on the above arguments, we predict that the relationship between subordinate performance and supervisor envy depends on the supervisor's social comparison orientation, because people who are high in social comparison orientation are more likely to engage in comparisons with others (Gibbons & Buunk, 1999b; Gilbert, Giesler, & Morris, 1995; Hu & Liden, 2013; Michinov & Michinov, 2001; Steil & Hay, 1997; Thau, Aquino, & Wittek, 2007), view the world as a competitive jungle (Khan, Quratulain, et al., 2017), and are more likely to experience envy (Lee & Gino, 2016). Consequently, a supervisor's level of social comparison orientation will influence the levels of felt envy towards his/her high performing subordinates. Moreover, following the argument behind Hypothesis 2, we further propose that high social comparison orientation supervisors will be more likely to be engaged in strategically abusing their high-performing subordinates through their feelings of envy.

Hypothesis 2a: Supervisor social comparison orientation moderates the relationship between subordinate performance and supervisor envy such that the relationship between subordinate performance and supervisor envy is positive only when supervisor social comparison orientation is high.

Hypothesis 2b: Supervisor social comparison orientation moderates the indirect relationship between subordinate performance and abusive supervision through supervisor envy such that the mediated relationship between subordinate performance and abusive supervision is positive only when supervisor social comparison orientation is high.

METHOD

Research Context and Participants

To test our hypothesized moderated mediation model, we recruited a dyadic sample of supervisor-subordinate pairs at a *Fortune 500* multinational retail corporation. In this sample, supervisors were mid-level managers headquartered in the Anhui province of the People's Republic of China (PRC). Isenhour, Stone, Lien, Stone, and Lien (2012) argued that because China is

experiencing dramatic changes as one of the fastest-growing economies in the world, Chinese employees are more likely to engage in social comparisons to form self-evaluations, making it an ideal context for our study (Foley, Ngo, & Loi, 2016).

We communicated with the human resource department of the company to solicit their support for this study and their help in distributing electronic surveys. In order to reduce the potential effects of common method bias (Podsakoff, MacKenzie, Lee, & Podsakoff, 2003), data were collected at three different times from supervisors and their subordinates. On the first survey, supervisors were asked to rate their own social comparison orientation and their subordinate's performance, and to provide information on control variables. One month later, supervisors were asked to rate their feelings of envy towards their subordinate. Finally, a month after the second survey, subordinates were asked to rate their respective supervisors' abusive supervision. A total of 160 supervisors and 480 subordinates were asked to participate in this research. Data were collected from 99 supervisors (62% response rate) and 398 subordinates (82% response rate). Based on prior research using supervisor-subordinate dyadic data (Colquitt, Noe, & Jackson, 2002; Khan et al., 2018; Richardson & Vandenberg, 2005; Schneider, White, & Paul, 1998), we included only those groups in which two or more subordinates rated their respective supervisor. Consequently, our final sample consisted of a total of 95 supervisors and 385 subordinates with an average group size of 3.99 and a range from two to six.

Measures

Following Brislin (1980) and other research using Chinese samples (e.g., Ahmad, Tariq, Weng, Shillamkwese Samson, & Sohail, 2019; Butt, Tariq, Weng, & Sohail, 2019; Hongbo, Waqas, & Tariq, 2019; Yang, Chen, Choi, & Zou, 2000), we used the translation-back translation method to convert an English survey into Chinese. We enlisted two Chinese bilingual professors to convert the surveys from English to Chinese independently. We then used 20 subordinates of 4 supervisors (who were not included in the final sample) for a pretest and for constructive modification of the initial Chinese survey (Aryee & Chen, 2006). We used 5-point Likert scales (1 = "strongly disagree," to 5 = "strongly agree") to anchor responses from subordinates and supervisors for all variables except subordinate performance. The reliabilities of the scale scores, all of which are greater than 0.70, are provided in Table 1.

Abusive Supervision. To measure abusive supervision, we adopted the 15-item scale developed by Tepper (2000). Sample items of this scale include, "My supervisor doesn't give me credit for jobs requiring a lot of effort,"

TABLE 1
Intercorrelations, Descriptive Statistics, and Estimated Reliabilities among the Variables

Variables	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
1. Subordinate's gender	1.31	0.47	—								
2. Subordinate's age	2.22	0.64	-0.19*	—							
3. Subordinate's tenure with supervisor _{sub}	3.23	1.21	0.26**	-0.63**	—						
4. Supervisor's gender	1.58	0.49	0.12*	0.13*	-0.11*	—					
5. Supervisor's experience	2.51	1.17	-0.01	0.11*	-0.12*	0.30**	—				
6. Subordinate performance _{sup}	3.52	0.63	0.06	0.02	0.08	0.02	0.09	(0.75)			
7. Supervisor's envy _{sup}	3.30	0.96	0.01	0.01	0.04	-0.09	0.19**	0.15**	(0.72)		
8. Abusive supervision _{sub}	2.80	0.88	-0.07	0.03	-0.11*	0.19**	0.24**	-0.25**	0.22**	(0.93)	
9. Supervisor's SCO _{sup}	3.09	0.82	0.09	0.09	-0.12*	0.05	-0.01	-0.05	0.04	0.06	(0.80)

Notes: *N* = 95 supervisors and 385 subordinates; Significant at: **p* < .05; ***p* < .01; figures in parentheses are alpha internal consistency reliabilities; variables mentioned with subscript *sup* = rated by supervisors; Variables mentioned with subscript *sub* = rated by subordinates; SCO = social comparison orientation.

Subordinate gender was coded 1 = Male, 2 = Female.

Subordinate age was coded 1 = under 18 years, 2 = 19–25 years, 3 = 26–33 years, 4 = 34–41 years, 5 = 42–49 years, 6 = more than 49 years.

Subordinate's tenure with supervisor was coded 1 = less than 1 years, 2 = 1–2 years, 3 = 3–4 years, 4 = more than 4 years.

Supervisor gender was coded 1 = Male, 2 = Female.

Supervisor experience was coded 1 = less than 5 years, 2 = 6–10 years, 3 = 11–15 years, 4 = more than 15 years.

“My supervisor puts me down in front of others,” and “My supervisor expresses anger at me when he/she is mad for another reason.”

Social Comparison Orientation. To measure social comparison orientation, we adopted the 11-item scale developed by Gibbons and Buunk (1999b). Sample items include: “I always pay a lot attention to how I do things compared with how others do things,” “I am not the type of person who compares often with others (reverse coded),” “I always like to know what others in a similar situation would do,” and “I never consider my situation in life relative to that of other people” (reverse coded).

Supervisor Envy. To measure supervisor envy towards each of their subordinates (i.e., supervisors were asked to rate their envy towards each of their subordinates who were included in the study), we adapted the 9-item scale developed by Cohen-Charash (2009). Sample items include: “I lack some of the things that my subordinate has,” “I have a grudge (resentment, bitterness) against my subordinate,” “I want to have what my subordinate has,” and “I feel some hatred toward my subordinate.”

Subordinate Performance. To measure supervisor-rated subordinate performance, we adopted the four-item scale from Liden, Wayne, and Stilwell (1993). Items include, “My subordinate is superior to other subordinates that I have supervised before” with (1 *strongly disagree* to 5 *strongly agree*), “What is your personal view of your subordinate in terms of his or her overall effectiveness?” with (1 *very ineffective* to 5 *very effective*), “Rate the overall performance that you observe for this subordinate” with (1 *unacceptable* to 5 *outstanding*), and “Overall to what extent do you feel your subordinate has been effectively fulfilling his or her roles and responsibilities?” with (1 *not effectively at all* to 5 *very effectively*).

Control Variables. Shamir (2011) pointed out that the relationship between supervisor and subordinate may change over time. Hence, consistent with prior studies (Khan et al., 2018; Tariq & Ding, 2018; Tariq & Weng, 2018; Vogel et al., 2015; Walter et al., 2015), we controlled for subordinates and supervisors’ tenure (i.e., subordinate tenure with his/her supervisor and supervisor tenure with his/her organization). We also controlled for supervisor and subordinate gender because it might affect both the mediator and the outcome in our model. Gender-role socialization theory explains the different norms and roles for men and women (Eagly, 1987), with women usually portraying themselves as emotionally expressive and interpersonally connected, while men represent themselves as independent and self-reliant, which may produce differences in the reporting of workplace victimization between men and women.

ANALYTICAL STRATEGY

Given the multilevel nature of our moderated mediation model, the data collected to test our model included nesting that violates assumptions of the interdependence of observations required for ordinary least square regression analyses. Therefore, we used Mplus (Muthén & Muthén, 1998-2010) and conducted our analyses using a multilevel framework. Furthermore, we performed multilevel path analysis (MacKinnon, 2008) in order to test our proposed mediation and moderated mediation effects. Following the recommendations of Zhang, Zyphur, and Preacher (2009), we performed path analyses in the unconfliated multilevel modeling framework to avoid biased estimations of the indirect effects (Uy, Lin, & Ilies, 2017), which are often found in conventional multilevel modeling approaches (Preacher, Zyphur, & Zhang, 2010). We tested and reported mediation and moderated mediation through a test of the statistical significance of the indirect effect and its associated confidence interval (MacKinnon, 2008). Following the suggestions of Hofmann, Griffin, and Gavin (2000), we computed pseudo- R^2 values to provide an indication of effect size for the effects that we estimated.

To examine whether there were methodical differences between those who responded to all three waves and those who only responded to two of the waves, we followed the recommendations of Goodman and Blum (1996) and performed three multiple logistic regressions. For the first, we considered the survey timing (time 1 and time 2) as the dependent variables and supervisor's gender, age, social comparison orientation, and subordinate performance as the independent variables. For the second logistic regression, we considered the survey timing for time 2 and time 3 as the dependent variables and supervisor's gender, experience, social comparison orientation, envy, and subordinate performance as the independent variables. For the third regression, we considered the survey timing for time 1 and time 3 as the dependent variables and supervisor's gender, experience, social comparison orientation, envy, subordinate's gender, age, tenure and subordinate performance as the independent variables. We found all the logistic regression coefficients to be statistically non-significant.

We also examined the variable mean differences across time through three different *t*-tests. For the first, we calculated the mean differences of supervisor's gender, experience, social comparison orientation and subordinate performance between the time 1 and time 2 samples. For the second *t*-test, we calculated the mean differences of supervisor's gender, experience, social comparison orientation, envy, and subordinate performance between the time 2 and time 3 samples. For the third *t*-test, we calculated the mean differences of supervisor's gender, experience, social comparison orientation, envy, subordinate's gender, age, tenure, and subordinate performance between the

time 1 and time 3 samples. We found all three t mean differences to be statistically non-significant. Based on the findings of the three multiple logistic regressions and t -tests, we identified no substantial impact of respondents' attrition on the findings.

Before hypotheses testing, we computed intraclass correlation indices to examine the proportion of within- and between-unit variance for the dependent variable. When supervisor envy was the outcome, the null model indicated that 39 percent ($p < .001$) and 61 percent of the variance resided at the supervisor level and at the subordinate level, respectively. A null model with abusive supervision as the outcome indicated that 36 percent ($p < .001$) and 64 percent of the variance resided at the supervisor level and at the subordinate level, respectively. These results indicate that there is enough variance across levels of analysis to apply multilevel methods of analyses. They also show that supervisors experienced envy differently across their subordinates and that their abusive supervision had substantial variance across their subordinates.

RESULTS

Descriptive Statistics

The descriptive statistics (i.e., standard deviations, means, reliabilities and intercorrelations) are shown in Table 1. The correlations were in the expected directions. Subordinate performance was positively and significantly correlated with supervisor envy ($r = 0.15, p < .01$), and negatively correlated with abusive supervision ($r = -0.25, p < .01$). Supervisor envy was positively and significantly correlated with abusive supervision ($r = 0.22, p < .01$). The correlations suggest a sign reversal between direct and indirect effect of subordinate performance on abusive supervision, suggesting a possible suppression effect (Bedeian, 2014). The supervisor social comparison orientation was neither correlated with supervisor envy ($r = 0.04, ns$) nor with abusive supervision ($r = -0.05, ns$).

Table 2 presents the results of the mediation analysis demonstrating that supervisor perceptions of subordinate performance are positively related to supervisor envy ($\beta = 0.221, p < .01$). Thus, our Hypothesis 1a, proposing that subordinate performance is positively related to supervisor envy, was supported. Moreover, supervisor envy is positively related to abusive supervision ($\beta = 0.177, p < .001$). Thus, our Hypothesis 1b, proposing that supervisor envy is positively related to abusive supervision, was supported. To test the indirect positive effect proposed in Hypothesis 1c, we followed the distribution-by-product method to calculate the indirect effect and to generate the 95 percent confidence interval (CI) using a Monto Carlo simulation with 20,000

TABLE 2
Mediation Analysis Results

<i>Antecedents</i>	<i>Mediator: Supervisor Envy</i>			<i>Dependent Variable: Abusive Supervision</i>						
	<i>B</i>	<i>SE</i>	<i>t</i>	<i>LLCI</i>	<i>ULCI</i>	<i>B</i>	<i>SE</i>	<i>t</i>	<i>LLCI</i>	<i>ULCI</i>
<i>Main Effects</i>										
Subordinate performance	0.221	0.073	3.023**	0.105	0.334	-0.306	0.039	-7.899***	-0.370	-0.244
Subordinate's gender	-0.037	0.155	-0.241	-0.224	0.284	-0.126	0.103	-1.222	-0.297	0.049
Subordinate's age	0.111	0.132	0.838	-0.108	0.330	-0.103	0.089	-1.152	-0.251	0.042
Subordinate's tenure with supervisor	0.097	0.076	1.278	-0.023	0.227	-0.069	0.052	-1.342	-0.152	-0.016
Supervisor's gender	-0.492	0.152	-3.231**	-0.747	-0.248	0.348	0.102	3.402**	0.181	0.513
Supervisor's experience	0.284	0.062	4.560	0.181	0.388	0.145	0.043	3.334**	0.072	0.214
Supervisor SCO	0.063	0.080	0.791	-0.069	0.193	-	-	-	-	-
Supervisor envy	-	-	-	-	-	0.177	0.033	5.359***	0.122	0.229
<i>Indirect effects</i>										
Subordinate performance	-	-	-	-	-	0.039	0.015	2.634**	0.019	0.068
Abusive supervision (via Supervisor envy)	-	-	-	-	-	0.011	0.015	0.750	-0.011	0.038
Abusive supervision (via Supervisor SCO)	-	-	-	-	-	-0.267	0.039	-6.797***	-0.331	-0.203
Abusive supervision (via Supervisor envy)	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
<i>Total effects</i>	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-

Notes: *N* = 95 supervisors and 385 subordinates; Standardized regression coefficients are shown; LLCI = Lower level of the 95% confidence interval; ULCI = Upper level of 95% confidence interval; SCO = social comparison orientation.

Significant at:

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

replications (Seligman & Preacher, 2008). Results indicated that the indirect effect of subordinate performance on abusive supervision via supervisor envy was positive and significant, (i.e., $\beta = 0.039$ [95% CI = 0.019, 0.068]), supporting Hypothesis 1c.

Table 3 presents the results of multilevel path analysis of the moderated mediation model. Hypothesis 2a predicts that supervisor social comparison orientation (SCO) moderates the direct relationship between subordinate performance and supervisor envy such that the direct relationship between subordinate performance and supervisor envy is positive (only) when supervisor SCO is high. The path estimate for the interaction term between subordinate performance and SCO on supervisor envy was significant ($\beta = 0.258$, $p < .001$), providing support for Hypothesis 2a. To illustrate the nature of this interaction, following the recent studies (e.g., Khan et al., 2018; Mawritz, Greenbaum, Butts, & Graham, 2017; Tariq & Weng, 2018), we adopted the approach of Edwards and Lambert (2007) to plot first-stage moderating effects of supervisor SCO on the relationship between subordinate performance and supervisor envy. The results, shown in Figure 2, show that the relationship between subordinate performance and supervisor envy is significant only when supervisor social comparison orientation is high ($\beta = 0.407$, $p < .001$) and is not significant when supervisor social comparison orientation is low ($\beta = 0.14$, *ns*). This is exactly what we predicted in Hypothesis 2a.

Finally, to examine the conditional indirect effects of subordinate performance on abusive supervision via supervisor envy, we tested indirect effects across low and high levels of supervisor SCO (at $-1 SD$ and $+1 SD$). In doing so, we followed the distribution-by-product method to calculate the indirect effect and to generate the 95 percent confidence interval (CI) using a Monte Carlo simulation with 20,000 replications (Seligman & Preacher, 2008). The findings for the conditional indirect effects are shown in Table 4. As shown, the conditional indirect effects of subordinate performance on abusive supervision through supervisor envy at high levels of supervisor SCO is significantly different from zero ($\beta = 0.082$, 95% CI [0.031, 0.132]). In contrast, the conditional indirect effects of subordinate performance on abusive supervision through supervisor envy at low levels of supervisor SCO is not statistically significant ($\beta = -0.014$, 95% CI [-0.049, 0.020]). Thus, our prediction (Hypothesis 2b) was supported. Furthermore, the total effects of subordinate performance on abusive supervision across the paths, that is, the direct effect, and the indirect effect, is negative ($\beta = -0.256$, $p < .001$), which suggests that poor-performing subordinates are more likely to be subjected to abusive supervision than high-performing subordinates in general, but high-performing subordinates are prone to abusive supervision only when supervisor SCO is high.

TABLE 3
Multilevel Path Analysis Results (Moderated Mediation Model)

<i>Antecedents</i>	<i>Mediator: Supervisor Envy</i>			<i>Dependent Variable: Abusive Supervision</i>						
	<i>B</i>	<i>SE</i>	<i>t</i>	<i>LLCI</i>	<i>ULCI</i>	<i>B</i>	<i>SE</i>	<i>t</i>	<i>LLCI</i>	<i>ULCI</i>
Direct Effects										
Subordinate performance	0.180	0.083	2.169*	0.044	0.317	-0.290	0.057	-5.104***	-0.383	-0.196
Subordinate's gender	0.023	0.190	0.122	-0.289	0.335	-0.066	0.147	-0.451	-0.309	0.176
Subordinate's age	0.062	0.132	0.470	-0.156	0.280	-0.067	0.100	-0.670	-0.231	0.097
Subordinate's tenure with supervisor	0.069	0.081	0.846	-0.065	0.202	-0.097	0.050	-1.928	-0.179	-0.014
Supervisor envy	—	—	—	—	—	0.187	0.053	3.538***	0.100	0.274
Supervisor SCO	0.051	0.346	0.148	-0.518	0.621	—	—	—	—	—
Subordinate performance × supervisor SCO	0.258	0.071	3.652***	0.142	0.374	—	—	—	—	—

Notes: *N* = 95 supervisors and 385 subordinates; Standardized regression coefficients are shown; LLCI = Lower level of the 95% confidence interval; ULCI = Upper level of 95% confidence interval.

Significant at:

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

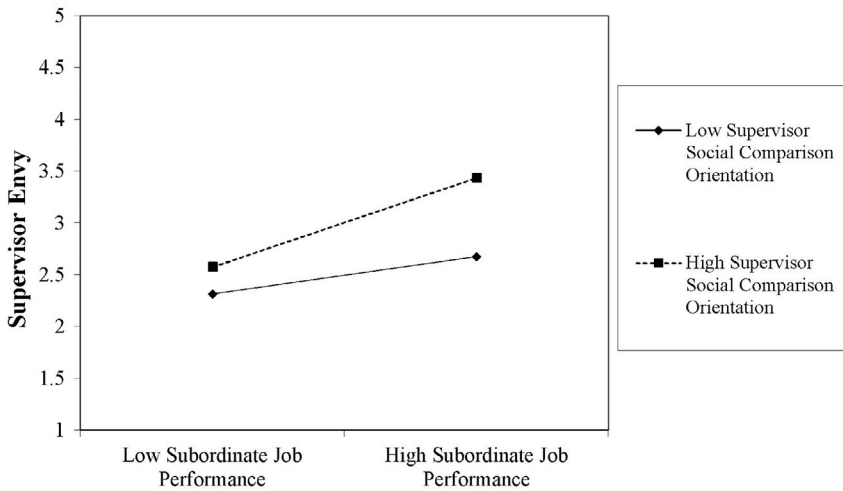


FIGURE 2. Interaction of subordinate performance and supervisor SCO on supervisor envy

DISCUSSION

Researchers have been exploring and taking an interest in abusive supervision (see Martinko, Harvey, Brees, & Mackey, 2013; Tepper et al., 2017 for recent reviews), but the antecedents of abusive supervision have not yet been fully identified (Khan et al., 2018; Liang et al., 2016; Tariq & Weng, 2018; Tepper, Duffy, Henle, & Lambert, 2006). While investigating the antecedents of abusive supervision, prior research revealed that poor-performing subordinates are of low utility to their supervisors, which may lead to abusive behaviors on the part of the supervisors (Tepper et al., 2011). In fact, Walter et al. (2015) demonstrated that poor-performing subordinates are strategically abused by their supervisors because of their low utility for a supervisor's own performance. In our study, we offer a new perspective to the previously documented research and make the argument that high-performing subordinates can also be the victims of abusive supervision. Grounding our theoretical development in social comparison theory, we propose a novel psychological mechanism through which high performers are subjected to abusive supervision via supervisors' feelings of envy towards them. Following this, we found support for the notion that high performers are also targets of abusive supervision by triggering supervisor envy, which leads to abuse. Moreover, taking a social comparison perspective, we also found that supervisors' social comparison orientation moderates this mediated relationship.

The notion that high performers evoke abusive supervision may seem counterintuitive from a victimization perspective because, in general, when

TABLE 4
Results of Indirect, Total, and Conditional Indirect and Total Effects of Subordinate Performance on Abusive Supervision

<i>Predictor</i>	<i>Mediator</i>	<i>Moderator: Supervisor SCO</i>	<i>Effect</i>	<i>LLCI</i>	<i>ULCI</i>
<i>Indirect effect</i>					
Subordinate performance	Supervisor envy		0.039*	0.019	0.068
<i>Total effect</i>					
Subordinate performance	Supervisor envy		-0.256***	-0.353	-0.159
<i>Conditional indirect effect</i>					
Subordinate performance	Supervisor envy	High	0.082**	0.031	0.132
		Mean	0.034*	0.004	0.064
		Low	-0.014	-0.049	0.020
<i>Conditional total effect</i>					
Subordinate performance	Supervisor envy	High	-0.208**	-0.315	-0.101
		Mean	-0.256***	-0.353	-0.159
		Low	-0.304***	-0.401	-0.207

Notes: $N = 95$ supervisors and 385 subordinates; LLCI = Lower level of the 95% confidence interval; ULCI = Upper level of 95% confidence interval; SCO = social comparison orientation.

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

subordinates are performing their best, supervisors should be pleased with them. However, our theory building based on social comparison theory along with the results of our study suggests that high-performing subordinates can elicit abusive supervision by making supervisors feel envy towards these high-performing subordinates, which threatens supervisor self-image. The theoretical arguments that we build suggest a novel mechanism explaining how subordinate performance and abusive supervision are related, that is, the positive indirect effect that diminishes the overall negative relationship and eliminates it altogether when supervisor SCO is high. Therefore, our findings add to the literature on the antecedents of abusive supervision by uncovering the indirect positive effect of performance on abusive supervision, based on social comparison theory. This indirect positive effect diminishes the overall negative relationship between subordinate performance and abusive supervision (which our findings did support) and can eliminate it altogether under certain conditions as our moderator analyses show.

Social comparison theory provides a solid framework for the argument that high-performing subordinates can be victims of supervisory abuse. Social comparison theory is a widely used framework in organizational behavior, including applications of equity theory (Greenberg, Ashton-James, & Ashkanasy, 2007), understanding the relationship between justice and antisocial behaviors (Thau et al., 2007), and examining how social comparisons impact individual as well as team effectiveness (Hu & Liden, 2013). Our findings contribute to this expanding literature by applying social comparison theory to abusive leadership behavior. Because supervisors who engage in social comparisons can hurt others in organizations, understanding the role of social comparisons in explaining leader abusive behavior is especially important.

Our findings add to the growing abusive supervision literature that suggests that abuse may be intentional and strategic (Ferris, Zinko, Brouer, Buckley, & Harvey, 2007). We add to the abusive supervision literature by arguing that high-performing subordinates can be challenging to supervisors as well, particularly when supervisors have high-social comparison orientation. For these supervisors, high performing subordinates can cause envy which then leads to abusive behavior in the workplace.

Finally, our study contributes to the leadership literature by identifying a supervisor-level moderator (i.e., supervisor social comparison orientation) of the relationship between employee performance and supervisor abuse, and this contributes to further understanding the antecedents of abusive supervision and victimization at the supervisor-subordinate dyad level. Specifically, we develop a framework to explain when and how supervisors abuse their high-performing subordinates. In particular, drawing on social comparison theory, we argue high-performing subordinates instill in supervisors a sense

of envy, which in turn leads to engaging in abusive supervision. Within a social comparison framework, we hypothesize social comparison orientation as a key boundary condition to outline the indirect positive effect of subordinate performance on abusive supervision through the mediator of supervisor envy. As our study is dyadic in nature, these relationships could be further examined within a leader-member exchange framework. For example, are leaders high in social comparison orientation more or less likely to make social comparisons with in-group or out-group members? Our findings suggest that leaders' social comparison orientation may limit the extent to which leaders reward their high-performing subordinates with a high quality leader-member relationship (in-group status).

Limitations, Future Directions and Practical Implications

The contributions of this research that we highlighted above must be viewed in light of its limitations. First, we conceptualized workplace envy as a result of certain advantages held by subordinates over their immediate supervisors (i.e., the dark side of envy), and ignored the potential constructive or positive behavioral side of workplace envy (see Khan, Bell, & Quratulain, 2017; Yu et al., 2018). For example, envy may sometimes instigate positive actions or impulses to improve oneself (e.g., see Cohen-Charash, 2009; Parrott, 1991; Yu et al., 2018) or the willingness to learn (Van de Ven, Zeelenberg, & Pieters, 2009). Thus, we call for future research to investigate the possible different behavioral consequences of workplace envy (i.e., leveling up or leveling down) when examining the relationship of high performing subordinates and abusive supervision. Moreover, we did not consider other theoretical relevant variables (e.g., supervisor's outcome dependence and interpersonal liking) that are important to other theoretical mechanisms (i.e., moral exclusion) that explain abusive supervision. Supervisors' outcome dependence and interpersonal liking were found to be two critical factors that have the capacity to determine the utility of a subordinate's perceived performance for his/her supervisor, and to decide whether or not that subordinate is included within his/her "scope of justice" (Walter et al., 2015). As a result, supervisors' outcome dependence and liking of a subordinate are key factors that may outweigh utility considerations and diminish the role of supervisors' envy.

Second, we measured abusive supervision only in terms of its frequency, based on previous studies (for example, Tepper, 2000; Zhang, Kwan, Zhang, & Wu, 2012), and not in terms of its intensity/severity. Hence, there is a possibility that intensity and frequency have dissimilar effects. For example, being subjected to the silent treatment from a supervisor may have fewer effects on employees than loud outbursts. Consequently, future research should measure abusive supervision in terms of both its frequency and intensity.

Furthermore, our study only measured variables on the individual level. We recommend measuring abusive supervision on a team level to further investigate its impact on employees because abusive supervision at the team level may be qualitatively different from the aggregate score of abusive supervision targeted at each team member. Furthermore, measuring supervisor abuse at the team level considers the effect of abuse on others that a particular individual may not experience personally. Witnessing abuse experienced by someone else may have a vicarious effect on an individual to the same degree as if it had happened to him or her personally.

Third, in our study, envy represents resentment by a supervisor because a subordinate possesses something (high performance) that the supervisor desires. Based on current study design, however, it may not be clear whether supervisors are themselves high performers, which would determine whether they desire to possess this quality. If a subordinate is perceived to be a much stronger performer relative to the supervisor, then the supervisor may very well envy him or her (especially if the supervisor has a strong social comparison orientation). However, if the supervisor is perceived to perform at a level that is equivalent or better than the subordinate, then there is little reason for the supervisor to feel envy. Therefore, future research should also include the supervisor's performance or evaluation of him/herself (e.g., the supervisor's self-esteem or self-efficacy) when examining the relationship between subordinate performance and supervisor envy.

Fourth, from the perspective of social comparison theory, we hypothesize an indirect positive path between employee performance and abusive supervision through supervisor envy. However, we did not examine the possible supervisor's downward comparisons with low performers, which might prompt positive feelings such as feelings of superiority, and subsequently prevent them from their abuse at the workplace. Thus, we call for future research to investigate both possible paths in the same study, that is, supervisor's downward comparisons with high performers which instigate negative feelings (e.g., envy) and supervisor's downward comparisons with low performers which instigate positive feelings (e.g., superiority, positive affect, self-efficacy).

Fifth, we cannot entirely rule out the suppressor effect with our cross-sectional self-reported data. The suppressor effect in particular appears to be present for the role of envy in the relationship of subordinate performance and abusive supervision. Our results suggest that inclusion of envy in the regression equation, concerning subordinate performance and abusive supervision, increased the coefficient of subordinate performance (from $\beta = -0.26$, $p < .05$ to $\beta = -0.30$, $p < .05$). Also, the signs of direct and indirect effect coefficients are in different directions. This suggests a case for suppression effect (Pandey & Elliott, 2010, p. 30). Hence, we may conclude that supervisor's envy

meets the criteria of a suppressor variable (MacKinnon, Krull, & Lockwood, 2000) when we consider the relationship between subordinate performance, envy, and abusive supervision. We did not remove envy from our model due to its theoretical importance to our research model (Pandey & Elliott, 2010). However, this suggests that future studies understand the role of other variables on our proposed framework.

Sixth, our study design was cross-sectional in nature, which limits us to rule out reverse-causality among our study variables. For instance, supervisor's envy might impact the performance ratings of the employees, which means envious supervisors might deliberately under-rate subordinates' performance and vice versa. The future studies may use experimental designs to establish causal order in our hypothesized relationships.

Finally, our study may have generalizability concerns because we collected our sample from a company headquartered in the People's Republic of China. Chinese employees have been found to be engaged in more social comparisons to form self-evaluations (Foley et al., 2016) than is found in other countries, making Chinese supervisors more likely to feel envy towards high-performing subordinates. Therefore, future research should examine the generalizability of our findings relative to other cultures.

There are several potentially fruitful areas for future research. First, it is important to explore the responses of high performers who have experienced abusive supervision. Currently, we only know the responses of low performers when they experience abusive supervision. While replicating the findings of Tepper et al. (2011), Walter et al. (2015) found that low performers decreased their performance in response to abusive supervision. Therefore, there is a need for future research to further examine why high performers are provocative targets for supervisors and to study the responses of high performers when they face abuse from their supervisors. Possible responses include high performers reducing their efforts in response to abusive supervision or deciding to leave their organization, both of which are very undesirable outcomes. Alternatively, because they are high performers, and presumably of value to the organization, they may respond by confronting their superior or by short-circuiting the chain of command and voicing concern to others higher up in the organization. Finally, it would be interesting for researchers to examine whether different *types* of abuse are targeted to low versus high performers (e.g., abusive behaviors aimed at increasing performance vs abusive behaviors aimed at diminishing subordinates' self- and social-images).

A second avenue for future research is to simultaneously model the multiple mechanisms that link high and low performance to abuse and explain why high and low performers become targets of abusive supervision. While we speculate that high performance triggers abusive supervision through envy and possibly disliking and threatened self-worth, while low performance

triggers abusive supervision through frustration, disliking, and low utility or outcome dependence, it would be interesting for future research to integrate the mechanisms that account for the positive and negative indirect effects in a single study. Doing so would enable researchers to compare their relative effects and possibly identify moderators that impact their relative importance. Therefore, to make a comprehensive model of abusive supervision, researchers could do both the things that we are suggesting here: model multiple pathways linking performance and abusive supervision and account for productive outcomes of abusive supervision.

Third, future research should investigate the possible curvilinear effect (inverted U-shaped) between employee performance and abusive supervision in studies where employee performance varies more widely than in our study (we did not find such an effect in our data). Previous work found that abusive supervisors targeted low performers (e.g., see Liang et al., 2016; Tariq & Weng, 2018; Tepper et al., 2011; Walter et al., 2015 a negative direct path between employee performance and abusive supervision). In contrast, our findings demonstrate that abusive supervisors not only targeted low performers but also abused high performers, that is, a positive indirect path between employee performance and abusive supervision through supervisor envy. Based on the above findings, we speculate that employees with very low and very high levels of job performance might instigate abusive supervision under certain conditions. Thus, it would be interesting for researchers to examine when there is a curvilinear (inverted U-shaped) relationship between employee performance and abusive supervision in samples where employee performance varies more widely than in ours.

Practical Implications

In practical terms, our study offers several implications for the management of employees in organizations. First, organizations must create an environment and culture in which social comparison is either discouraged or does not evoke envy in supervisors. Our findings support the novel mechanism explaining the relationship between employee performance and abusive supervision, that is, a positive indirect relationship between employee performance and abusive supervision through supervisor. We believe the new mechanism that we identified has important implications for practice, as high performance should be especially protected. For example, organizations should develop reward systems in which supervisors are encouraged for having high-performing subordinates. High performance should be protected and promoted through incentivizing supervisors. Tying supervisor rewards directly to the performance of their subordinates would eliminate the envy associated with social comparisons with high-performing subordinates. Second, social comparisons

may be avoidable in some situations (Lam, Van der Vegt, Walter, & Huang, 2011), such as when organizations develop and set supervisor-subordinate cooperative goals instead of competitive ones. Competitive goals encourage antisocial behaviors while cooperative goals have the capacity to diminish antisocial behavior in the workplace (Tariq & Weng, 2018; Wu et al., 2015). Furthermore, recent conceptual work has linked social comparisons with goal setting, suggesting that when employees with unmet performance goals compare themselves with coworkers who met their goals they might engage in interpersonal unethical behavior towards those coworkers because they envy their coworkers (Lee & Gino, 2016). Given that supervisors often set performance goals for their employees, tailoring goals to employees' capabilities has the potential to limit the negative effects of envy among coworkers. In line with this, organizations should also emphasize a collective identity, articulate a shared vision, and provide a common purpose between supervisors and subordinates, which can create attachment with each other rather than foster social comparisons (Lam et al., 2011).

Finally, based on our findings, it is important for supervisory leaders and organizations to understand that supervisory envy resulting from supervisor comparisons with his/her high-performing subordinates may be a risk factor for abusive supervision. Thus, organizations should arrange trainings to provide supervisors with a holistic understanding of supervisor-to-subordinate directed envy (i.e., downward envy). By doing so, organizations can be able to train their supervisory leaders to recognize and manage their own abuse at the workplace, for example, through mindfulness mediation practices. Moreover, downward envy can also be channeled through the formal and informal sources of self-improvement, such as learning from the envied, and leadership developmental opportunities (Yu et al., 2018).

CONCLUSION

There is no doubt that abusive supervision is a costly phenomenon (Khan et al., 2018), one that has a detrimental effect on the success and survival of organizations (Zhang et al., 2012). Our findings suggest that high performers can also experience abuse, which may be critical to the future of organizations, since these are the organization's most mobile and valuable, employees. Despite the fact that no one should have to endure abusive supervision, the consequences of abuse may be especially detrimental when an organization's high performers are subjected to it. Our study supported a moderated mediation model of abusive supervision that incorporates supervisor envy as a key mediator between subordinate performance and abusive supervision and identifies supervisor social comparison orientation as an important moderator. Taken together, our moderated mediation model explains how

supervisors' social comparisons may lead to feelings of envy towards high performers and eventually make high performers provocative targets for abuse. Importantly, our findings on the moderating role of supervisor social comparison orientation can be used to design interventions aimed at reducing social comparisons with subordinates and thus reduce or eliminate the abuse of high-performing employees.

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