

RESEARCH REPORT

Hostile Climate, Abusive Supervision, and Employee Coping: Does Conscientiousness Matter?

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The current study draws on the transactional theory of stress to propose that employees cope with hostile work environments by engaging in emotion-based coping in the forms of organization-directed deviance and psychological withdrawal. Specifically, we propose that supervisors' hostile organizational climate perceptions act as distal environmental stressors that are partially transmitted through supervisors' abusive actions and that conscientiousness moderates the proposed effects. First, we hypothesize that supervisor conscientiousness has a buffering effect by decreasing the likelihood of abusive supervision. Second, we hypothesize that highly conscientious employees cope differently from less conscientious employees. Among a sample of employees and their immediate supervisors, results indicated that while hostile climate perceptions provide a breeding ground for destructive behaviors, conscientious individuals are less likely to respond to perceived hostility with hostile acts. As supervisor conscientious levels increased, supervisors were less likely to engage in abusive supervision, which buffered employees from the negative effects of hostile climate perceptions. However, when working for less conscientious supervisors, employees experienced the effects of perceived hostile climates indirectly through abusive supervision. In turn, less conscientious employees tended to cope with the stress of hostile environments transmitted through abusive supervision by engaging in acts of organization-directed deviance. At the same time, all employees, regardless of their levels of conscientiousness, tended to cope with their hostile environments by psychologically withdrawing. Theoretical and practical implications are discussed.

Keywords: hostile climate, abusive supervision, deviance, employee coping, conscientiousness

Aversive social situations, such as aggression (e.g., Dietz, Robinson, Folger, Baron, & Schulz, 2003; Glomb & Liao, 2003), incivility (e.g., Andersson & Pearson, 1999), and social undermining (e.g., Duffy, Ganster, Shaw, Johnson, & Pagon, 2006) among coworkers, as well as acts of deviance directed at colleagues and the organization itself (e.g., Robinson & O'Leary-Kelly, 1998) are pervasive in the workplace and create stressful work environments when they occur (Restubog, Scott, & Zagenczyk, 2011; Tepper, 2007). When these aversive situations become commonplace in an organization, a hostile organizational climate, characterized by consistent acrimonious, antagonistic, and suspicious feelings

among coworkers can emerge (Mawritz, Mayer, Hoobler, Wayne, & Marinova, 2012). Organizational climates provide a set of norms that guide how managers and employees approach their employment relationships within the organization (Kuenzi & Schminke, 2009; Schneider, 1975). Therefore, hostile climates can provide a breeding ground for hostile behavior in the workplace, which can have a detrimental impact on organizational survival and success (Tepper, Duffy, Henle, & Lambert, 2006).

However, not all organizational members react to hostility by engaging in hostile behavior. There are likely to be differences in how supervisors and employees react to and cope with perceived hostile climates. For example, following several highly publicized incidents of workplace hostility, an investigation by the U.S. Postal Service Commission on a Safe and Secure Workplace (2000) found that a work environment characterized by negative feelings and routine rude and disrespectful interactions contributed to the hostile behaviors of postal employees. This same report also suggested that the personality characteristics of employees played a role in determining who engaged in hostile behaviors and who refrained from such acts. Empirical research is needed to shed light on the individual differences that explain how and why people respond differently to perceived hostile climates. To do so, we

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point to conscientiousness as a personality trait that provides insights into how supervisors and employees respond to hostile work environments.

The current study seeks to address two research questions. First, are the distal effects of perceived hostile climates transmitted to employees, in part, through the abusive actions of supervisors? Second, do highly conscientious supervisors and employees respond to perceived hostile climates differently from those lower in conscientiousness? Highly conscientious individuals tend to think before acting and abide by ethical principles, whereas less conscientious individuals tend to be less disciplined in their actions and less focused on moral obligations (Colquitt, Scott, Judge, & Shaw, 2006; Costa & McCrae, 1992; Moon, 2001). We propose that supervisor conscientiousness moderates the first stage of the indirect relationship between perceived hostile climates, abusive supervision, and employee coping. We expect that highly conscientious supervisors are less likely to react to perceived hostility by engaging in abusive supervision (i.e., subordinates' perceptions of hostile verbal and nonverbal supervisor behaviors; *Tepper, 2000*), thereby buffering employees from the stress of organizational hostility. In contrast, we propose that less conscientious supervisors model hostile climate norms and engage in abusive acts that provide environmental stressors for employees. According to the transactional theory of stress (*Lazarus & Folkman, 1984, 1987*), people react to environmental stressors by engaging in emotion-based coping. As a hostile climate is a type of affective climate (*Mawritz et al., 2012*), we examine two forms of emotion-based coping: organizational deviance and psychological withdrawal. We propose that employee conscientiousness moderates the second stage of the indirect relationships between hostile climate perceptions, abuse, and coping. We suggest that highly conscientious employees are more likely than less conscientious employees to cope with the distal stress of perceived hostile work environments transmitted through abusive supervision by psychologically withdrawing as opposed to engaging in deviance. *Figure 1* presents a model of the hypothesized relationships.

By addressing these questions, the current study seeks to contribute to the evolution of the hostile climate construct by demonstrating that hostile climate perceptions beget abusive supervision and employee deviance and psychological withdrawal. However, because of their self-control, integrity, and sense of moral obligation (*Roberts, Chernyshenko, Stark, & Goldberg, 2005*), highly conscientious supervisors disrupt this process by buffering employees from the effects of hostile climate perceptions. Additionally, highly conscientious employees interrupt the influence of hostile climate perceptions by engaging in emotion-based coping in the form of psychological withdrawal as opposed to organizational deviance. As such, our research contributes new insights into the factors that promote or inhibit supervisors from engaging in abusive behavior. At the same time, this study highlights the importance of conscientiousness for understanding differences in coping patterns among employees working in hostile environments.

Hostile Climate Perceptions, Abusive Supervision, and Employee Coping

Organizational climates, representing shared perceptions of organizational policies, practices, and procedures (*Reichers & Schneider, 1990*), have been found to be an important indicator of workplace behaviors (*Carr, Schmidt, Ford, & DeShon, 2003; Kuenzi & Schminke, 2009*). Research has also demonstrated that work units develop affective tones when members consistently form similar affective reactions to their environment (e.g., *Barsade, 2002; Bartel & Saavedra, 2000; George, 1990, 1995*). These affective tones provide a basis for the formation of affective climates, which represent patterns of interactions and social relations among unit members that shape the behavioral tendencies of the unit and/or its members (*Carr et al., 2003; Choi, Price, & Vinokur, 2003; Ostroff, 1993*).

Hostile climates are a type of affective climate that emerge when employees feel envious, untrusting, and aggressive toward

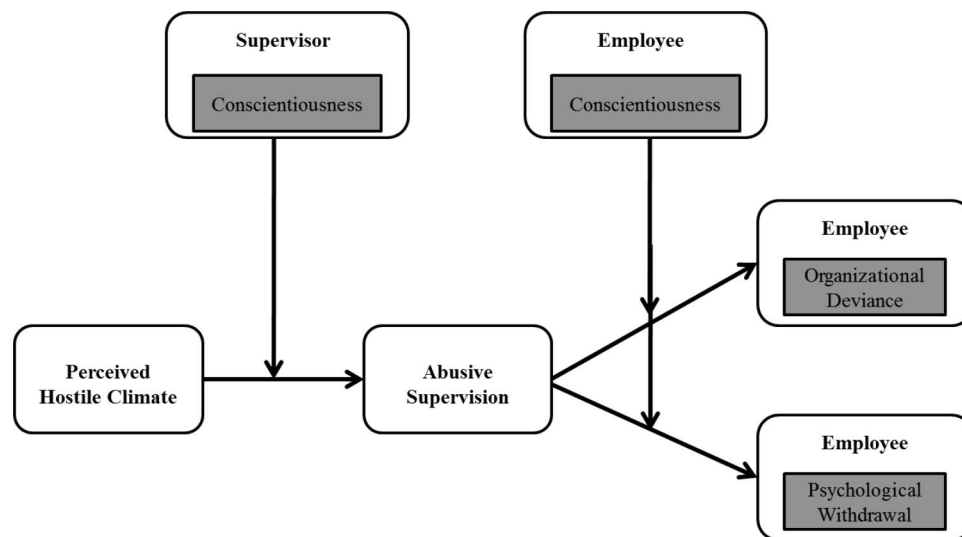


Figure 1. Model of hypothesized supervisor-employee relationships.

other organizational members (Mawritz et al., 2012). We propose that supervisor hostile climate perceptions function as an antecedent to abusive supervision and employee coping. We further expect that abusive supervision creates a salient environmental stressor for employees that transmits the distal effects of perceived hostile environments and prompts the need for employees to emotionally cope.

Social information processing theory (SIP; Salancik & Pfeffer, 1978) and social learning theory (SLT; Bandura, 1977, 1986) provide theoretical bases for understanding the link between perceived hostile climates, abuse, and employee coping. According to SIP, individuals look to those around them for cues regarding behavioral expectations and then adapt their behaviors to those expectations. Consistent with this theory, context has been found to play an important role in shaping leader behaviors (e.g., Flannery & May, 2000; Treviño, Weaver, Gibson, & Toffler, 1999), as leaders tend to enact behaviors that are consistent with the expectations of their environments (Lord & Smith, 1999). According to SLT, people learn by observing the behaviors of role models and emulating those behaviors (Bandura, 1977, 1986). To determine that behaviors are acceptable in a given situation, individuals make judgments of observed behaviors based on the consequences received and mimic behaviors believed to have positive consequences. Accordingly, prior research has found that negative workplace conditions—such as abuse from upper level managers (Mawritz et al., 2012), aggressive norms (Restubog et al., 2011), and work group antisocial behavior (Robinson & O’Leary-Kelly, 1998) and aggression (Glomb & Liao, 2003)—prompt abusive supervision and destructive employee behaviors.

Organizations characterized by pervasive feelings of envy, mistrust, and aggression signal to members that hostile behaviors are supported and perhaps even encouraged. For example, hostile climates have been found to enhance relationships between abusive supervision and work group interpersonal deviance by providing cues to employees that indicate abusive behaviors are supported (Mawritz et al., 2012). When employees perceive hostility in their work environments and interact with leader role models who are hostile to their subordinates, they learn that abusive behaviors are socially accepted whereas considerate behaviors are not. Therefore, we expect that the availability of both hostile cues and abusive role models in perceived hostile environments will encourage supervisors to engage in abusive behaviors toward their employees.

For employees, however, we expect that perceived organizational hostility is a distal environmental stressor partially transmitted through the abusive actions of their immediate supervisors. That is, employees must deal with the distal effects of perceived hostile climates by coping with the proximal effects of abusive supervisors. According to Lazarus (1991), stressors occur when “internal or external demands are appraised as taxing or exceeding the resources of the person” (p. 112). Research has suggested that aversive situations, such as climates characterized by work pressure (e.g., Hemingway & Smith, 1999; Newton & Keenan, 1987) and abuse (Restubog et al., 2011), create environmental stressors. Furthermore, Lazarus and Folkman (1984, 1987) suggested that the mechanisms individuals use to cope with stressors are influenced by their cognitive appraisals of the stressors. First, when faced with a potential stressor, an individual determines if the stressor is threatening (i.e., harms personal growth) or challenging

(i.e., promotes personal growth). Second, the individual determines if he or she needs to take action to eliminate the stressor (problem-based coping) or to minimize the negative emotional impact of the stressor (emotion-based coping; Lazarus, 1995; Lazarus & Folkman, 1984, 1987).

Employees tend to view the condescending and disparaging treatment of abusive supervisors as attempts to thwart their success (Duffy, Ganster, & Pagon, 2002) and, thus, as threatening stressors. Likewise, the spitefulness, bitterness, and mistrust inherent in perceived hostile climates can create perceptions that colleagues are continuously trying to undermine their success. Accordingly, in response to perceived hostile climates and the associated abusive supervision, employees engage in coping behaviors to manage these threatening stressors.

Stress researchers have suggested individuals engage in problem-focused coping when they believe they can effectively address the stressor, whereas individuals use emotion-focused coping when the stressor is viewed as less controllable (Folkman, Lazarus, Gruen, & DeLongis, 1986). Because employees often do not possess the power to change climates (Kuenzi & Schminke, 2009; Schneider & Reichers, 1983) or to punish abusive supervisors (Shapiro, Boss, Salas, Tangirala, & Von Glinow, 2011), we focus on employees’ emotion-based coping.

Previous research has found that employees cope with workplace stressors in general (e.g., Krischer, Penney, & Hunter, 2010; Spector & Fox, 2002) and abusive supervision stressors in particular (e.g., Mitchell & Ambrose, 2007; Skarlicki & Folger, 1997; Tepper, Henle, Lambert, Giacalone, & Duffy, 2008) by acting aggressively toward their organization. These types of actions are captured by the concept of organizational workplace deviance, which includes behaviors that violate organizational norms with the intention of damaging the firm (Bennett & Robinson, 2000). Subordinates may emotionally cope with perceived hostile climates and abusive supervision by venting their negative emotions through deviant actions that harm their organizations (e.g., stealing from the organization) or deviant behaviors that allow them to avoid their supervisors or their work situation (e.g., taking long breaks, coming to work late).

Research on coping strategies has also indicated that individuals psychologically distance themselves from stressful situations as a means of emotionally coping with stressors (Folkman et al., 1986; Kahn, Wolfe, Quinn, Snoek, & Rosenthal, 1964; Keaveney & Nelson, 1993; Pearlman & Schooler, 1978). As such, employees may cope with the stress of perceived hostile work environments and abusive supervision by psychologically withdrawing from their work. Psychological withdrawal reflects employee acts that provide a mental escape from work (Hulin, 1991). For example, engaging in behaviors such as spending time working on personal matters rather than work-related issues, shirking work responsibilities, cyberloafing, or excessively socializing may allow abused subordinates to mentally escape from and alleviate the negative emotions associated with their stressful work environments. These actions are less blatant than overt acts of deviance and less likely to create negative consequences, such as termination or suspension (Tepper, Duffy, & Shaw, 2001). Thus, we expect that organization-directed deviance and psychological withdrawal are two ways

in which employees emotionally cope with the stress of perceived hostile climates and abusive supervision.

The Moderating Effects of Supervisor and Employee Conscientiousness

Conscientiousness captures tendencies to be hardworking and self-disciplined (Costa & McCrae, 1992; Goldberg, 1990) and encompasses proactive facets involving achievement striving and dutifulness and inhibitive facets involving a rules orientation (e.g., self-control, traditionalism) and orderliness (Roberts et al., 2005). Highly conscientious individuals tend to persist when faced with challenges (Mount & Barrick, 1998), abide by ethical principles, and closely adhere to moral obligations (Colquitt et al., 2006; Costa & McCrae, 1992; Moon, 2001). Their actions are usually well planned, as they tend to carefully assess their work environments and cautiously consider possible consequences before taking action (Costa & McCrae, 1992; John & Srivastava, 1999). In contrast, employees lower in conscientiousness tend to be less self-disciplined (Renn, Allen, & Huning, 2011; Steel, 2007), are more impulsive (John & Srivastava, 1999), and have little concern for whether their work adheres to moral standards (Moon, 2001).

Given these attributes, we propose that supervisor conscientiousness moderates the relationship between perceptions of hostile climates and abusive supervision (i.e., Stage 1 of the mediation), such that highly conscientious supervisors disrupt the flow of perceived hostility to employees whereas less conscientious supervisors enhance these effects. Because highly conscientious supervisors have high levels of self-control, tend to abide by ethical principles, and adhere to moral obligations, they are less likely to allow perceived hostility to instigate their engagement in abusive supervision than those lower in conscientiousness. As such, highly conscientious supervisors partially buffer employees from the stress of perceived hostile climates by not engaging in abusive supervision. In contrast, less conscientious supervisors exhibit weak inhibitive tendencies, less self-discipline, and little attention to moral obligations. As supervisor conscientiousness levels decrease, they are increasingly likely to conform to the hostile cues inherent in perceived hostile climates and role model abusive behaviors. Thus, less conscientious supervisors partially transmit the stress and hostility at the organization level to their employees by engaging in abusive behaviors. Therefore, we hypothesize the following:

Hypothesis 1: The indirect effects of hostile climate perceptions on employee organizational deviance (1a) and psychological withdrawal (1b) through abusive supervision are moderated by supervisor conscientiousness, such that the relationship between perceived hostile climates and abusive supervision is weaker for highly conscientious supervisors, weakening the indirect effects on employees.

We also expect that highly conscientious employees cope with perceived hostile environments differently from less conscientious employees. Prior studies have found that highly conscientious individuals respond in a less destructive manner to a perceived injustice (e.g., Cullen & Sackett, 2003), psychological contract breach (e.g., Orvis, Dudley, & Cortina, 2008), or abusive supervisor (e.g., Tepper et al., 2001) than do less conscientious individuals. When confronted with perceived mistreatment, the depend-

able, reliable, and inhibitive tendencies of highly conscientious individuals (Cullen & Sackett, 2003; Roberts et al., 2005) prevent them from responding in ways that compromise their integrity (Tepper et al., 2001).

In organizations with perceived hostile climates, highly conscientious supervisors are unlikely to become abusive supervisors, thereby buffering employees from much of the stress inherent in these environments and minimizing the need for emotion-based coping. In contrast, less conscientious supervisors are likely to transmit stress by engaging in abusive behaviors that prompt a need for employees to cope. In turn, we expect that employee conscientiousness moderates the second stage of the mediation relationship between hostile climate perceptions, abuse, and employee organizational deviance, such that highly conscientious employees refrain from deviance as a way of emotionally coping with the stress of perceived hostility and abusive supervision. Highly conscientious employees have strong inhibitive tendencies that deter destructive behavior. Their thoughtful and planned nature drive them to consider the consequences of deviant behavior, and their concern for moral obligations preclude them from engaging in behaviors that violate their integrity. Alternatively, less conscientious employees do not possess these same inhibitive tendencies. Because of their impulsive natures and lack of concern for moral obligations, less conscientious employees are less likely to consider the negative consequences of reacting with hostility and more likely to engage in deviance to cope with the stress of perceived hostile climates and abuse. Therefore, we hypothesize the following:

Hypothesis 2: The strength of the mediated relationship between hostile climate perceptions and employee organizational deviance through abusive supervision varies by supervisor conscientiousness (Stage 1) and employee conscientiousness (Stage 2) such that the indirect effects are (a) weaker when supervisor conscientiousness is high regardless of the level of employee conscientiousness, (b) weaker when supervisor conscientiousness is low and employee conscientiousness is high, and (c) stronger when supervisor and employee conscientiousness are low.

The self-disciplined, dependable, and honest natures of highly conscientious employees prevent them from engaging in overt acts of deviance. Nevertheless, they still have a need to emotionally cope with the hostility and abuse they experience. Although psychological withdrawal may be harmful to organizations by reducing productivity and firm profitability (e.g., Sagie, Birati, & Tziner, 2002), psychologically withdrawing from the work situation enables conscientious employees to cope with hostile climate perceptions and abusive supervisors without outwardly damaging the organization and compromising their integrity. In other words, their high conscientiousness may prevent them from acting overtly deviant but may not inhibit them from engaging in any harmful behaviors that allow them to emotionally cope. Their harmful acts may surface in less egregious forms than those of less conscientious employees. As such, we expect that employee conscientiousness moderates the second stage of the mediation relationship between hostile climate perceptions, abusive supervision, and employee withdrawal, such that highly conscientious employees are more likely than those lower in conscientiousness to cope with the

stress of hostility and abuse by psychologically withdrawing. Thus, we propose the following:

Hypothesis 3: The strength of the mediated relationship between hostile climate perceptions and employee psychological withdrawal through abusive supervision varies by supervisor conscientiousness (Stage 1) and employee conscientiousness (Stage 2) such that the indirect effects are (a) weaker when supervisor conscientiousness is high regardless of the level of employee conscientiousness, (b) stronger when supervisor conscientiousness is low and employee conscientiousness is high, and (c) weaker when supervisor and employee conscientiousness are low.

Method

Sample and Procedure

Participants were recruited from upper level, undergraduate management courses at a northeastern university and a midwestern university in the United States. To be eligible for participation, individuals had to have worked for their current organization 20 or more hours per week and with their supervisor for a minimum of 6 months. Interested individuals were asked to invite their immediate supervisors to participate by completing a brief questionnaire. Participating students received extra course credit. The invitation was presented to a total of 900 students; complete sets of responses were received from 221 pairs, for a response rate of 24.6%. Employee participants were predominantly female (55%), with a mean age of 24 years and an average of 2.5 years of experience with their organization. Supervisors were also predominantly female (59%), with a mean age of 38 years and an average of 8 years of experience with their organization.

Employee participants were instructed to go to a secure website to complete the survey at a time and location of their choice. These participants relayed similar instructions to their supervisors. To determine if employee and supervisor surveys were completed by different people, we verified that IP addresses were different for the employee and corresponding supervisor surveys. In addition, to ensure accurate responses and minimize socially desirable responding, statements regarding confidentiality and anonymity were clearly stated.

Measures

Supervisor hostile climate perceptions. We assessed supervisors' perceptions of hostile organizational climates using five items adapted from Buss and Perry's (1992) Aggression Questionnaire ($\alpha = .89$). The scale was altered to reference general levels of hostility in organizations. A sample item is "In my organization, people often feel eaten up with jealousy." Focusing specifically on supervisors' perceptions allowed us to use a key informant approach to assessing the organization's hostile climate whereby ratings of an organizational-level variable are provided by a single respondent with broad knowledge of the organization (see Covin & Slevin, 1989; Oldham & Hackman, 1981; Spell & Arnold, 2007). To gauge the representativeness of supervisors' perceptions, we asked employee participants to complete the climate perceptions measure and found acceptable levels of interrater

agreement ($r_{wg} = .79$) and reliability through intraclass correlations ($ICC_1 = .79$, $ICC_2 = .88$), $F(221, 442) = 2.94$, $p \leq .01$. All participants responded using a 7-point response scale ranging from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 7 (*strongly agree*).

Abusive supervision. Employees rated abusive supervision using Tepper's (2000) 15-item measure, rated on a 7-point response scale ranging from 1 (*never*) to 7 (*always*; $\alpha = .94$). A sample item is "My boss tells me I'm incompetent."

Employee organizational deviance. Supervisors rated the extent to which employees engaged in deviance within the past year using Bennett and Robinson's (2000) 12-item measure ($\alpha = .95$). A sample item is "[The employee] takes property from work without permission." Responses for these items were made along a 7-point response scale ranging from 1 (*never*) to 7 (*daily*).

Employee psychological withdrawal. Employees rated psychological withdrawal using Rusbult, Farrell, Rogers, and Mainous's (1988) five-item scale ($\alpha = .94$). A sample item is "I care very little about what happens to this company as long as I get a paycheck." Responses for these items were made on a 7-point response scale ranging from 1 (*never*) to 7 (*always*).

Supervisor and employee conscientiousness. Employees and supervisors completed an eight-item, adjective-based measure of conscientiousness (Saucier, 1994; employees $\alpha = .84$; supervisors $\alpha = .86$). Sample adjectives include *efficient*, *organized*, and *systematic*. Respondents used a 7-point response scale ranging from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 7 (*strongly agree*).

Controls. We controlled for employee age, gender, and tenure with their organization to minimize potential biases associated with demographic differences and job experience.

Analytical Approach

To test our moderated mediation hypotheses, we used a macro created by Hayes (2013) that is an extension of Preacher, Rucker, and Hayes' (2007) moderated mediation macro. Hayes' macro employs a bootstrapping procedure to determine 95% bias corrected confidence intervals (CIs) for the conditional direct and indirect effects at various levels of the moderators (Preacher & Hayes, 2008; Shrout & Bolger, 2002). Specific to our analysis, 5,000 iterations (with replacement) were used.

Results

Prior to testing the hypothesized relationships, we conducted confirmatory factor analyses. The chi-square for the six-factor model was statistically significant, indicating poor model fit; however, root-mean-square error of approximation and comparative fit index values indicated the model fit the data well. In addition, a chi-square difference test indicated the six-factor model fit the data better than the alternative models that were tested (see Table 1).

Table 2 summarizes the zero-order correlations among the study's variables. Hypothesis 1 (H1) proposed that supervisor conscientiousness moderates Stage 1 of the mediation of hostile climate perceptions on employee deviance (H1a) and psychological withdrawal (H1b) through abusive supervision. We first tested the extent to which supervisor conscientiousness moderated the hostile climate perceptions to abuse relationship using hierarchical regression. As summarized in Table 3, the addition of the Supervisor Conscientiousness $\times$ Hostile Climate Perceptions interaction

Table 1
Results for Confirmatory Factor Analysis

Model	χ^2	df	$\Delta\chi^2(\Delta df)$	CFI	RMSEA
Hypothesized 6-factor model	116.34**	62		.98	.06
5-factor model (deviance and withdrawal combined)	343.08**	67	226.74 (5)	.89	.14
5-factor model (hostile climate and abusive supervision combined)	426.10**	67	309.76 (5)	.85	.16
3-factor model (deviance, withdrawal, hostile climate, and abusive supervision combined)	1,032.76**	74	916.42 (12)	.61	.24
1-factor model	1,354.87**	77	1,238.53 (15)	.48	.28

Note. $n = 221$. All alternative models were compared to a hypothesized 6-factor model. CFI = comparative fit index; RMSEA = root-mean-square error of approximation.

** $p \leq .01$.

in Step 3 of the analyses explained a significant amount of incremental variance in abusive supervision ($b = -.10$, $p \leq .01$, $\Delta R^2 = .03$). We then conducted simple slopes analyses to interpret the effects. As shown in Figure 2, the slope became steeper as conscientiousness changed from medium ($b = .04$, $p \leq .01$) to low (-1 SD; $b = .10$, $p \leq .01$) and became flatter as conscientiousness changed from medium to high ($+1$ SD; $b = -.01$, ns).

Next, we conducted moderated mediation analyses to examine the indirect effects of hostile climate perceptions on employee emotion-focused coping conditional upon supervisor conscientiousness (see Table 4). Results indicated that the indirect effect of hostile climate perceptions on employee organizational deviance through abuse decreased as supervisor conscientiousness increased from 4.43 (-1 SD; point estimate = .06; 95% CI [.01, .12]) to 5.47 (mean; point estimate = .02; 95% CI [-.01, .05]) to 6.51 ($+1$ SD; point estimate = -.02; 95% CI [-.06, .01]). Similarly, the indirect effect of hostile climate perceptions on employee psychological withdrawal through abuse decreased as supervisor conscientiousness increased from 4.43 (-1 SD; point estimate = .08; 95% CI [.02, .16]) to 5.47 (mean; point estimate = .03; 95% CI [-.01, .07]) to 6.51 ($+1$ SD; point estimate = -.03; 95% CI [-.07, .01]). At mean levels of supervisor conscientiousness and higher, the indirect effects of hostile climate perceptions on employee coping were no longer statistically significant. Therefore, Hypotheses 1a and 1b were supported.

Hypotheses 2 and 3 proposed that the indirect effects of hostile climate perceptions on employee organizational deviance (H2) and psychological withdrawal (H3) were conditional on both supervisor (at stage 1) and employee (at stage 2) conscientiousness. We first tested the extent to which employee conscientiousness moderated the abusive supervision to deviance relationship using hierarchical regression. As summarized in Table 3, the addition of the Employee Conscientiousness $\times$ Abusive Supervision interaction in step 3 explained significant incremental variance ($b = -.11$, $p \leq .05$, $\Delta R^2 = .01$). We then conducted moderated mediation analyses to determine if the indirect effects were conditional upon both supervisor and employee conscientiousness (see Table 4). For highly conscientious supervisors, the indirect effects of hostile climate perceptions on employee deviance were not statistically significant at any level of employee conscientiousness (low: point estimate = -.02; 95% CI [-.07, .01]; medium: point estimate = -.02; 95% CI [-.05, .00]; high: point estimate = -.01; 95% CI [-.04, .00]). In contrast, for low conscientious supervisors, the indirect effects of hostile climate perceptions on employee deviance were statistically significant at low (point estimate = .06; 95% CI [.02, .14]) to medium (point estimate = .05; 95% CI [.01, .10]) levels of employee conscientiousness but not at high levels (point estimate = .03; 95% CI [.00, .09]). Therefore, Hypothesis 2 was supported.

Table 2
Zero-Order Correlations and Descriptive Statistics

Variable	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
1. Empl age	—								
2. Empl gender ^a	-.13	—							
3. Empl tenure ^b	.68**	-.06	—						
4. Perc hostile clim	.06	.13	.01	(.89)					
5. Abusive spvn	-.06	.05	.06	.11	(.94)				
6. Org deviance	-.04	.09	-.03	.25**	.53**	(.95)			
7. Psych withdr	-.15*	.04	-.11	.16*	.38**	.27**	(.94)		
8. Spvr con	.10	-.03	.01	-.27**	-.25**	-.45**	-.10	(.86)	
9. Empl con	.05	-.11	.04	-.02	-.39**	-.39**	-.28**	.44**	(.84)
<i>M</i>	24.00	1.55	2.47	2.93	1.62	1.42	2.90	5.47	5.44
<i>SD</i>	7.70	0.50	4.26	1.51	0.81	0.80	1.22	1.04	.99

Note. $n = 221$. Cronbach's alphas are in parentheses on the diagonal. Empl = employee; Perc hostile clim = perceived hostile climate; spvn = supervision; Org = organizational; Psych withdr = psychological withdrawal; Spvr = supervisor; con = conscientiousness.

^a 1 = male, 2 = female. ^b Number of years employee has worked at the organization.

* $p \leq .05$. ** $p \leq .01$.

Table 3
Regression Analyses Testing the Moderating Effects

Variable	Abusive spvn (b)			Org deviance (b)			Psych withdr (b)		
	Step 1	Step 2	Step 3	Step 1	Step 2	Step 3	Step 1	Step 2	Step 3
Step 1									
Empl age	-.02	-.01	-.01	.00	.01	.01	-.02	-.02	-.02
Empl gender ^a	.07	.05	.06	.14	.06	.07	.05	-.09	-.10
Empl tenure ^b	.03	.03	.03	.00	-.02	-.01	-.01	-.02	-.02
Step 2									
Perc hostile clim		.03	.05		.06*	.05		.13*	.14**
Spvr con		-.18**	-.17**		-.22**	-.21**		.15	.15
Abusive spvn					.41**	.35**		.46**	.54**
Empl con					-.08	-.08		-.24**	-.25**
Step 3									
Perc Hostile Clim × Spvr Con			-.10**						
Abusive Spvn × Empl Con						-.11*			.15
R ²	.02	.08	.11	.01	.41	.43	.02	.21	.22
F	1.38	3.63**	4.41**	.64	21.43**	19.61**	1.58	7.91**	7.30**
ΔR ²		.06	.03		.40	.01		.19	.01
F _{inc}		6.89**	7.74**		36.71**	4.45*		12.41**	2.62

Note. $n = 221$. spvn = supervision; Org = organizational; Psych withdr = psychological withdrawal; Empl = employee; Perc hostile clim = perceived hostile climate; Spvr = supervisor; con = conscientiousness.

^a 1 = male, 2 = female. ^b Number of years employee has worked at the organization.

* $p \leq .05$. ** $p \leq .01$.

Next, we used hierarchical regression to test the moderating effects of employee conscientiousness on the abusive supervision to employee psychological withdrawal relationship. As summarized in Table 3, the addition of the Employee Conscientiousness × Abusive Supervision interaction in step 3 did not explain a statistically significant amount of incremental variance in psychological withdrawal ($b = .15$, ns , $\Delta R^2 = .01$). Although supervisor conscientiousness moderated the perceived hostile climate to abusive supervision relationship (Stage 1 moderation), employee conscientiousness did not moderate the abusive supervision to psychological withdrawal relationship (Stage 2 moderation). Therefore, Hypothesis 3 was not supported. Instead, the findings revealed that employees across all levels of conscientiousness used psychological withdrawal to cope with the stress of perceived hostile climates transmitted through abusive supervision.

Discussion

Findings from the current study suggest that the distal effects of hostile organizational environments are partially transmitted to employees through the abusive behaviors of their immediate supervisors. However, supervisor conscientiousness plays a pivotal role in this process. As supervisor conscientiousness increased, the connection between hostile climate perceptions and abusive supervision weakened. By not engaging in abusive behaviors, highly conscientious supervisors disrupted the flow of hostility to employees, buffering them from the proximal stress of abusive supervision and much of the distal stress of hostile climate perceptions. Therefore, employees did not need to engage in emotion-focused coping. In contrast, less conscientious supervisors amplified the flow of hostility to employees by being increasingly likely to engage in abusive behaviors. Employees then needed to emotionally cope with the distal stress of hostile climate perceptions transmitted through the proximal stress of abusive supervision. In turn, less conscientious employees tended to cope with the stress of hostile environments transmitted through abusive supervision by engaging in acts of organization-directed deviance. At the same time, all employees, regardless of their levels of conscientiousness, tended to cope with their hostile environments by psychologically withdrawing.

This study contributes to the evolution of the hostile climate construct by providing evidence of its detrimental effects on the behaviors of organizational members. Perceived hostile climates promote destructive acts by signaling to supervisors that abuse is acceptable and instigating the transfer of hostility from supervisors to subordinates. Hostile climates are a form of affective climate that captures antagonistic feelings within organizations and exists when members feel envious, untrusting, and aggressive toward their colleagues (Mawritz et al., 2012). As such, our examination of hostile climate perceptions differs from recent work that has

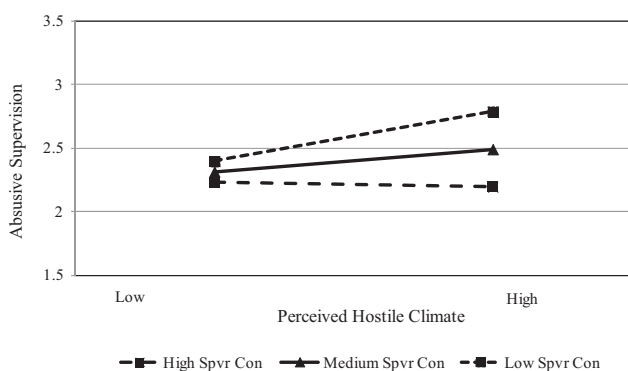


Figure 2. Plot of the relationship between perceived hostile climate and abusive supervision at three levels of supervisor conscientiousness. Spvr Con = supervisor conscientiousness.

Table 4

Bootstrap Analyses of the Conditional Direct and Indirect Effects of Perceived Hostile Climate

Variable	Direct effects				Indirect effects			
	PE	SE	LLCI	ULCI	PE	SE	LLCI	ULCI
Organizational deviance								
Low spvr con (4.43)	.25	.05	.15	.35	.06	.03	.01	.12
Medium spvr con (5.47)	.10	.03	.03	.16	.02	.01	-.01	.05
High spvr con (6.51)	-.06	.04	-.14	.02	-.02	.02	-.06	.01
Low spvr con (4.43)								
Low empl con (4.45)	.29	.05	.19	.39	.06	.03	.02	.14
Medium empl con (5.44)	.25	.05	.15	.35	.05	.02	.01	.10
High empl con (6.43)	.21	.07	.07	.35	.03	.02	.00	.09
High spvr con (6.51)								
Low empl con (4.45)	.01	.06	-.11	.13	-.02	.02	-.07	.01
Medium empl con (5.44)	-.03	.04	-.11	.06	-.02	.01	-.05	.00
High empl con (6.43)	-.06	.05	-.15	.03	-.01	.01	-.04	.00
Psychological withdrawal								
Low spvr con (4.43)	.24	.09	.07	.41	.08	.04	.02	.16
Medium spvr con (5.47)	.14	.06	.03	.25	.03	.02	-.01	.07
High spvr con (6.51)	.05	.07	-.10	.19	-.03	.02	-.07	.01

Note. Bias-corrected confidence intervals (CIs) are set at 95% from the bootstrap analyses with 5,000 bootstrap resamples. PE = point estimate; LLCI = lower level confidence interval; ULCI = upper level confidence interval; spvr = supervisor; empl = employee; con = conscientiousness.

examined aggressive norms in relation to abuse (e.g., Restubog et al., 2011). Whereas aggressive norms represent hostile attitudes or behaviors toward other organizational members, hostile climate perceptions represent pervasive feelings of envy and mistrust among coworkers that manifest in hostile interactions (Mawritz et al., 2012). In other words, hostile climates capture a phenomenon in which negative affective tones act as a catalyst for negative affective, cognitive, and behavior reactions. This is an important distinction that highlights the importance of affective forms of organizational climate, particularly when they are negative in nature.

Our study also expands upon Mawritz and colleagues' (2012) work that examines hostile climates as an enhancer of abusive supervision and work group deviance relationships by construing hostile climate perceptions as a trigger of destructive acts. Our findings indicate that hostile climate perceptions create aggressive cues that encourage supervisors to engage in hostility in the form of abusive supervision and create stressful environments for employees.

This research also contributes to the abusive supervision literature by suggesting that neither environmental factors nor individual differences alone provide a complete understanding of why supervisors are abusive toward their employees. Rather, both environmental factors and the leaders' personal characteristics matter. Our findings suggest that perceived hostile environments provide cues regarding the appropriateness of hostile and antagonistic behaviors throughout the firm. Then, through social learning and social information processing, supervisors may view abusive behavior as an acceptable leadership tactic. At the same time, individual characteristics of supervisors may cause them to act upon those cues differently. In perceived hostile climates, highly conscientious supervisors are less likely to give in to norms of hostility, role-model abusive behaviors, and engage in mistreatment toward their subordinates than are less conscientious supervisors.

By refraining from abusive behaviors, highly conscientious supervisors buffer employees from the stress created by hostile climate perceptions. In contrast, less conscientious supervisors transmit the stress of perceived hostile climates to their employees through abusive supervision. Therefore, conscientiousness traits provide insights into how supervisors react to their hostile environments.

Our findings also contribute to the transactional theory of stress by providing a nuanced understanding of how employees emotionally cope with the stress of perceived hostile climates and abusive supervision. Prior studies have linked abusive supervision to organizational deviance (e.g., Mitchell & Ambrose, 2007; Tepper et al., 2008); we extend these findings by demonstrating that how employees cope with abusive supervision depends upon their conscientiousness traits. Less conscientious employees tended to respond to the stress of perceived hostile work environments and abuse by engaging in organization-directed deviance, while highly conscientious employees did not. Moreover, while we expected highly conscientiousness employees to be more likely to respond to abusive supervision with psychological withdrawal than less conscientious employees, our results indicated that abused employees working in hostile climates tended to psychologically withdraw from their work, regardless of their levels of conscientiousness.

Practically, our findings offer a clearer picture as to why abusive behaviors occur in organizations and how to potentially mitigate these detrimental behaviors. Organizations need to recognize when members embody feelings of hostility toward one another, and they need to take action to reduce these feelings in order to mitigate the spread of abusive behaviors. Incorporating assessments of hostile climates into ongoing climate surveys would provide important diagnostic information that could be used to identify current or potential trouble areas. Organizations could then work with employees to better understand and reduce negative feelings among organizational members.

Furthermore, the relationship between conscientiousness and job performance has been well documented (Barrick & Mount, 1991; Hurtz & Donovan, 2000; Oh, Wang, & Mount, 2011); yet, our findings suggest that organizations may garner additional benefits from employing highly conscientious individuals. For example, highly conscientious employees are less likely than those lower in conscientiousness to react to perceived hostile climates with hostile, destructive actions. In addition, our results suggest that organizations that experience difficulty in reducing hostility among members given the nature of their business may find it useful to select highly conscientious individuals for supervisory roles to lessen the negative effects of hostile climates.

The implications of our study should be taken in light of its limitations. First, the study is cross-sectional; therefore, the direction of causality is inconclusive. Our hypothesized model is consistent with research suggesting organizational climates act as predictors of individual workplace behaviors (Carr et al., 2003; Kuenzi & Schminke, 2009) and with research on the transfer of unfavorable behaviors in organizations (e.g., Aryee, Chen, Sun, & Debrah, 2007). Because of formal power and positional authority arrangements, the actions of individuals at higher levels of the organizational hierarchy are likely to predict the behaviors of those at lower levels (Yukl, 1998). However, we acknowledge employee behaviors may flow upward and influence the actions of their supervisors (Yukl & Fable, 1990). In addition, although research has suggested organizational context has an effect on supervisor behaviors (e.g., Coglisier & Schriesheim, 2000; Green, Anderson, & Shivers, 1996), these behaviors may also influence organizational climates (e.g., Schminke, Ambrose, & Neubaum, 2005; Zohar & Luria, 2004). As such, future research should use longitudinal designs to more fully examine the causal order of relationships.

Our approach to measuring hostile climates is another limitation. We used a key informant assessment approach, relying exclusively on supervisors' ratings (e.g., Covin & Slevin, 1989; Oldham & Hackman, 1981; Spell & Arnold, 2007). Yet, the extent to which supervisor perceptions are reflective of the shared perceptions of other members is unclear. Future research should examine reactions to hostility at the unit level of analysis.

Another limitation is that we did not measure the underlying information processing or social learning mechanisms linking hostile climate perceptions to abuse or the extent to which employees experience stress when in hostile environments. Moreover, in the current study, we proposed that abuse partially mediates relationships between hostile climate perceptions and employee coping, conditional upon both supervisor and employee conscientiousness. Future research should examine additional explanatory mechanisms that may be at play. Finally, although we controlled for employee age, gender, and the number of years the employee had worked for the organization, it may have been beneficial to control for supervisor and/or employee negative affectivity, as the relationships we examined may be influenced by dispositional affect.

A largely unexplored yet important question is whether employees react differently to abusive supervision based on their personality traits (e.g., Tepper et al., 2001). Our results suggest that conscientiousness is one important trait to consider. Future research should examine additional traits that could influence employee reactions—personality traits such as emotional stability, or motivational traits such as personal mastery or competitive excel-

lence (Heggestad & Kanfer, 2000). Also, the current study focused on employee emotion-focused coping to hostile climate perceptions and abusive supervision. Yet, some employees may cope with hostility and abuse in problem-focused ways, which should be examined in future research.

In conclusion, hostile climate perceptions are distal environmental stressors that are transmitted or blocked by the actions of immediate supervisors based on their level of conscientiousness. In turn, less conscientious employees are more likely to cope with the stress of hostility and abuse in more overtly destructive manners than those higher in conscientiousness. Given the potentially destructive effects of hostility, our findings are important to both theory and practice.

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