There are conflicting perspectives on whether subordinates will or will not aggress against an abusive supervisor. To address this paradox we develop a self-control model of retaliatory behavior, wherein subordinates’ self-control capacity and motivation to self-control influence emotional and retaliatory reactions to provocations by enabling individuals to override their hostile impulses. In Study 1, we demonstrate that self-control capacity, motivation to self-control (supervisor coercive power), and abusive supervision interact in such a way that the strongest association between abusive supervision and supervisor-directed aggression occurs when subordinates are low in self-control capacity and perceive their supervisor to be low in coercive power. In Study 2, we extend this finding, testing a moderated mediation model, wherein hostility toward a supervisor represents the hostile impulse resulting in retaliatory behavior, mediating the relation between abusive supervision and supervisor-directed aggression. Results from Study 2 indicate that self-control capacity allows individuals to regulate the hostile feelings experienced following abusive supervision, while self-control capacity and supervisor coercive power jointly moderate the tendency to act on one’s hostile feelings toward an abusive supervisor. We discuss implications for retaliatory behaviors at work.

When a subordinate is the target of abusive supervision—that is, subjected to verbal ridicule, yelling, or other forms of interpersonal mistreatment by a supervisor (Tepper, 2000)—the subordinate is presumably unable to retaliate in a similar fashion toward the abusive supervisor. As numerous researchers have pointed out, supervisors hold power over their subordinates; directly confronting an abusive supervisor can result in lost rewards, punishment, or counterretaliation (Aquino, Tripp, & Bies, 2006; Tepper, Carr, Breaux, Geider, Hu, & Hua, 2009). Given the potential for such aversive outcomes, engaging in supervisor-directed retaliation following abusive supervision seems an irrational choice that can ultimately make a bad situation worse.

Yet abused employees do retaliate: studies have consistently shown a substantial relation between abusive supervision and supervisor-directed aggression in different countries and organizational settings and with different research designs (Inness, Barling, & Turner, 2005; Liu, Kwan, Wu, & Wu, 2010; Tepper et al., 2009). Meta-analytic summaries of the literature suggest that the size of the relation between supervisor abuse and supervisor-directed aggression is substantial ($r_{corrected} = .62$;
95% CI, .50–.73 [Hershcovis & Barling, 2010]); one survey found 76 percent of employees engaged in at least one aggressive behavior toward a supervisor in the past year (Greenberg & Barling, 1999), while another found employees aggressed toward supervisors as or more often than toward coworkers or subordinates (Baron, Neuman, & Geddes, 1999). This implies the deterrent role of supervisor power may have been overemphasized.

Alternately, perhaps there is more to retaliation than supervisor power alone. Following the notion that supervisor power motivates individuals to control their behavior, we suggest that the issue of whether or not subordinates retaliate against an abusive supervisor is ultimately one of self-control. In turn, a self-control theory framework (Baumeister & Vohs, 2007) suggests that a focus on the deterrent role of supervisor power is incomplete in at least three ways. First, while supervisor power represents a type of motivation to self-control for subordinates, a focus on power alone overlooks a key ingredient in self-control—self-control capacity, or individual differences in the ability to restrain responses that are not aligned with one’s best interests. Considering both motivation and capacity to self-control, we suggest that an individual may resist aggressing against an abusive supervisor because he or she does not want to suffer consequences related to the supervisor’s power to reward or punish (i.e., motivation to self-control), or because he or she has the ability to restrain impulses to retaliate (i.e., self-control capacity). Thus, subordinates’ motivation and capacity to self-control jointly influence retaliatory responses; considering one without the other paints an incomplete picture of whether a subordinate will, or will not, retaliate.

Second, in a self-control theory framework, motivation to self-control can come in multiple forms, yet researchers have typically conceptualized supervisor power in a monolithic fashion: a supervisor either does or does not possess power over a subordinate, and the extent to which a supervisor possesses greater power should reduce deviant subordinate responses (e.g., see Aquino et al., 2006; Tepper et al., 2009). In keeping with the notion that motivation is driven by sensitivity to positive or negative stimuli (Elliot, 1999), two particularly relevant forms of power may serve to motivate subordinates to self-control: supervisory power to reward and supervisory power to punish subordinates for their behavior (French & Raven, 1959). We argue that these forms of power are not interchangeable and may not be equally effective mitigators of retaliatory responses (Baumeister, Bratslavsky, Finkenauer, & Vohs, 2001).

Finally, conceptualizing retaliatory behavior as a problem of self-control also highlights the fact that individuals experience an urge or impulse to retaliate that must be controlled and that self-control capacity can mitigate the extent to which they experience this urge. In particular, individuals with well-developed capacities for self-control may be able to modulate their emotional reaction—in particular, the extent to which they feel hostility toward their supervisor—which otherwise forms an impulse to retaliate that would need to be controlled (Gross, 2001). In other words, self-control capacity not only allows individuals to control their impulses, but can also influence the extent to which they experience impulses that need controlling.

Figure 1 outlines our self-control model of reactions to abusive supervision. Moving from right to left, we first suggest that retaliatory behaviors are exhibited when employees do not possess the individual ability to regulate their own behavior and when their situation does not afford them incentives (i.e., motivation) to regulate their behavior.

---

**FIGURE 1**

The Moderated Mediation Model

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![Diagram of the Moderated Mediation Model](image)
Moreover, the model also incorporates different types of motivation to self-control via both approach (i.e., supervisor reward power) and avoidance (i.e., supervisor punishment power) motivation mechanisms. Finally, we suggest that the impulse to engage in retaliatory behaviors—particularly hostility toward an abusive supervisor—can itself be mitigated by self-control capacity.

In proposing our self-control model of employee reactions to abusive supervision, our article makes a number of significant contributions to the literature. First, we provide a model based in self-control theory that explains why employees respond to abusive supervision with retaliatory behavior. In so doing, we reconcile theoretical frameworks that suggest supervisory power mitigates retaliatory responses with empirical results that suggest otherwise. More broadly, as outlined in our discussion, our self-control model also provides a way to theoretically integrate disparate and disconnected moderation findings in the literature by focusing on subordinates’ capacity and motivation to self-control as common themes underlying past moderation findings, while also advancing understanding of the psychological mechanisms underlying supervisor-directed aggression.

Second, our model significantly extends understanding of the important role that power may play in the abusive supervision literature. Prior work examining power has done so utilizing indirect proxies (e.g., hierarchical status [Aquino et al., 2006], turnover intentions [Tepper et al., 2009]); our work more directly assesses perceptions of power to provide an empirical test of the theoretical notion that supervisor power mitigates subordinate retaliatory behaviors. We also differentiate between a supervisor’s power to reward, and power to punish, subordinates. This advances understanding of, and appreciation for, the different forms supervisory power may take. As we shall see, such a distinction is of paramount importance in observing what types of motivators actually inhibit retaliatory responses. Third, by considering supervisory power in terms of the motivational component of self-control, we integrate the power literature with the broader self-control literature in a way that mutually enriches both. In particular, we illustrate how both the motivation to self-control and individual differences in self-control work in conjunction. Thus, our work provides important boundary conditions for both the supervisor power and self-control literatures.

Finally, as outlined prior to Study 2 below, our article also explores one possible candidate for what it is employees are regulating when confronted with abusive supervision. In particular, we situate interpersonal hostility as a mediating mechanism between abusive supervision and supervisor-directed aggression, with individual differences in self-control and situational motivators to self-control interacting to both restrain acting on hostile feelings and influence the extent to which hostile feelings are experienced. In so doing, our model is among the first to link the abusive supervision literature to the emotion literature and thereby contribute to understanding of discrete emotions in the workplace.

**ABUSIVE SUPERVISION AND SUPERVISOR-DIRECTED AGGRESSION**

By and large, most individuals do not, unprovoked, behave aggressively. Instead, actions such as supervisor-directed aggression are driven by aversive circumstances (Berkowitz, 1989). Although provocations come in different forms, interpersonal provocations are widely acknowledged to be the single most important antecedents of retaliatory aggression (Anderson & Bushman, 2002). Building on past research, we argue that abusive supervision, which includes behaviors such as ridiculing and humiliating subordinates publicly (Tepper, 2000), can be considered an interpersonal provocation. As such, supervisor abuse should increase aggressive responses. When provoked by their supervisors, employees should experience hostile affect and related action tendencies (Berkowitz, 1989). Once angered, provoked individuals are known to behave irrationally, disregarding the long-term consequences of their actions (Leith & Baumeister, 1996) in order to directly retaliate against and punish a provocateur (de Quervain et al., 2004). Coinciding with this literature is the observation that humans’ aggressive responses to threats to the self, such as those encapsulated in abusive supervision, are automatic, effortless, and well learned (MacDonald, 2008).

It thus follows that subordinates should naturally experience a desire to respond aggressively to an abusive supervisor. However, research on revenge and retaliation suggests that individuals tend to refrain from retaliating against high-status offenders because of fear of counterretaliation (Aquino et al., 2006). In particular, retaliating directly against a supervisor may result in an escalation in hostility.
and further abuse from a supervisor (Tepper et al., 2009). Yet to date, numerous studies have suggested that subordinates frequently directly retaliate against their abusive bosses (Hershcovis & Barling, 2010; Tepper & Almeda, 2012). To resolve this paradox, extant studies have explored boundary conditions on the relation between abusive supervision and supervisor-directed aggression. In a review of these findings, Tepper and Almeda (2012) suggested that whether subordinates retaliate against their abusive supervisor depends on their motivation and ability to follow tit-for-tat exchange principles. In particular, they suggested that sometimes subordinates may be motivated by concerns other than retaliation (e.g., a focus on goals other than negative reciprocity), while at other times subordinates may simply lack the ability to refrain from reciprocating negatively. In highlighting both ability and motivation as important factors in determining whether a subordinate reciprocates supervisors’ abusive treatment, Tepper and Almeda’s review is consistent with self-control theory tenets (Baumeister & Vohs, 2007), which highlight the role of self-control ability and motivation to self-control.

A SELF-CONTROL FRAMEWORK

Self-control is an individual’s overriding or restraining of habitual behaviors, urges, or emotions that would interfere with her/his long-term interests (Mischel, 1974). Baumeister and colleagues developed self-control theory to explain how human beings are able to suppress unwanted thoughts, force themselves to concentrate, get into or out of some emotion, change impulses, resist temptation, and persist in difficult tasks (Baumeister, Heatherton, & Tice, 1994). Self-control is widely considered to have developed from evolutionary pressures that arose from group living (Baumeister, DeWall, Ciarocco, & Twenge, 2005); in order to coexist with others, individuals must override primal, yet socially inappropriate, behaviors. As an important inner resource, self-control permits individuals to override short-term temptations and impulses (e.g., obtaining property by stealing) in order to act in accordance with long-term goals (e.g., being accepted by society [Myrseth & Fishbach, 2009]). As a result, self-control enables individuals to adapt to social and situational demands, resulting in physical and mental health, success, and high-quality interpersonal relationships (Baumeister et al., 1994; Tangney, Baumeister, & Boone, 2004).

In accordance with self-control theory, we posit abused subordinates are simultaneously confronted with two goals: first, a higher order of goal overriding their well-learned and habitual retaliatory reactions, one that is more distal and has delayed but potentially greater long-term benefits to the self (i.e., avoiding future punishment or obtaining future rewards); second, a lower-order goal of lashing out in anger and retaliating, which potentially offers smaller but relatively more immediate gratification (Harmon-Jones & Allen, 1998; Knutson, 2004). In the absence of self-control, individuals succumb to short-term temptations and engage in behaviors, such as retaliation that may potentially cause long-term damage to the self (Muraven & Slessareva, 2003).

Just as people need self-control to overcome potentially criminal desires (e.g., stealing money, harming competitors), victims of abusive supervision must exert self-control to override their hostile emotions and aggressive inclinations toward an abusive supervisor (Gottfredson & Hirschi, 1990). In this respect, prior research and theory (Baumeister & Vohs, 2007) suggest at least two ingredients that facilitate people’s ability to control impulses. The first represents individual differences in the capacity for self-control. For example, some people are better than others at delaying gratification; this capacity renders them more likely to follow social rules, persevere at work, hold their temper, and restrain themselves from behaving aggressively toward a provocateur (Tangney et al., 2004). Consequently, we would expect that individuals low in self-control capacity are more likely to give in to their desire for retaliation and react aggressively to supervisors’ abuse, while those high in self-control capacity are better able to overcome their vengeful impulses toward abusive supervisors. In line with this proposition, prior research has shown that individuals high in self-control capacity can counter their vengeful thoughts and behaviors (Bordia, Restubog, & Tang, 2008).

The second ingredient that facilitates ability to control impulses is motivation to exert self-control. Motivation to exert self-control represents any drive or inclination to refrain from giving in to urges or impulses (Baumeister & Vohs, 2007). A wide variety of factors can induce such motivation. For example, past studies have induced motivation to self-control through manipulating beliefs regarding the effectiveness of practice on performance
of the urge to retaliate: supervisors. In particular, motivation to self-control lies with the very source of their self-control capacity (for a review, see Baumeister and Vohs [2007]). In particular, aggression researchers have proposed that it is not self-control capacity itself but whether the capacity is employed when needed that matters for successfully overriding aggressive behaviors (Wilkowski & Robinson, 2008). Furthermore, motivation to self-control has been suggested to be able to compensate for and mobilize individuals’ self-control capacity, so that they can better utilize their limited resources to maximize their self-control performance (Muraven & Slessareva, 2003). In keeping with these arguments, researchers have shown that when an organization sanctioned aggressive behaviors, employees were less likely to behave aggressively (Inness, LeBlanc, & Barling, 2008). Research has also shown that even when self-control resources were depleted, once provided with incentives, individuals were able to perform tasks that required self-control (Baumeister et al., 2005).

In sum, self-control theory suggests that subordinates’ capacity and motivation to self-control jointly influence the relation between abusive supervision and supervisor-directed aggression. However, as yet, no prior studies have examined this possibility. Drawing from the literature reviewed above, we anticipate that when individuals possess neither sufficient self-control capacity nor the motivation to regulate their behavior, they will reciprocate supervisory abuse with abuse in kind. Furthermore, given that self-control capacity and motivation to self-control work jointly (Baumeister & Vohs, 2007), abused subordinates should be able to override their natural inclination to aggress against abusive supervisors when their motivation to self-control is high while self-control capacity is low, or when their self-control capacity is high while motivation to self-control is low.

**Supervisor Power: A Form of Subordinates’ Motivation to Self-Control**

In the workplace, one source of subordinates’ motivation to self-control lies with the very source of the urge to retaliate: supervisors. In particular, supervisors have control over desired resources and rewards as well as punishments and sanctions that can be bestowed upon subordinates. This is more broadly referred to as supervisory power, or a supervisor’s perceived capacity to influence others by providing resources or administering punishments (French & Raven, 1959). In representing access to resources subordinates desire (or punishments that subordinates fear), supervisory power represents a form of subordinates’ motivation to self-control, because engaging in aggression toward a supervisor presumably results in fewer rewards or greater punishment; consequently, abusive supervisors that possess such power provide motivation for subordinates to exert self-control and not retaliate.

In accordance with the above argument, it has been frequently suggested that supervisors’ power over subordinates motivates subordinates to control their natural inclination toward revenge (Aquino et al., 2006; Heider, 1958) or refrain from acting upon their motivation to directly retaliate (Tepper et al., 2009). Studies have shown that when subordinates gain power advantages, for example, by intending to leave the organization, they are more likely to engage in supervisor-directed aggression after experiencing abusive supervision (Tepper et al., 2009). Accordingly, we suggest that subordinates who perceive that their supervisors hold power over them should be motivated to control their inclination to directly retaliate; subordinates who do not perceive that their supervisors have power over them should possess no such motivation and, hence, should directly seek retribution against an aggressor (e.g., Aquino et al., 2006).

By using supervisor power to indicate subordinates’ motivation to self-control, and in accordance with the logic and literature discussed above on self-control capacity and motivation to self-control, we should expect a three-way interaction between abusive supervision, self-control capacity, and supervisor power. In particular, we anticipate that when individuals neither possess sufficient self-control capacity nor perceive that their supervisor has power, they will reciprocate supervisory abuse with abuse in kind. However, when individuals either have sufficient self-control capacity or perceive that their supervisor has power, they should be able to override their natural inclination to respond to abusive supervision with supervisor-directed aggression.

In addition to investigating supervisor power as a form of subordinates’ motivation to self-
control, we depart from previous treatments of supervisory power by incorporating a multifaceted view of supervisory power. According to French and Raven (1959), a powerful person can influence others by delivering either rewards or punishments. Distinguishing between rewards and punishments recognizes that they are conceptually distinct motivators. In particular, motivation is typically conceptualized as derived from a drive to approach positive outcomes or a drive to avoid negative outcomes (Elliot, 1999). In the leadership literature, this distinction between positive and negative forms of motivation has been conceptualized as perceived supervisor reward power and perceived supervisor coercive power (French & Raven, 1959). Supervisory reward power, or supervisors' control over valued outcomes, focuses on their ability to administer outcomes with positive valences, such as promotion, salary, and benefits; supervisory coercive power, or supervisors' ability to execute punishments, focuses on their ability to manipulate outcomes with negative valences, such as assigning unwanted tasks. We propose the following regarding the interaction of self-control capacity with the two types of supervisor power:

Hypothesis 1a. In a significant three-way interaction, the relation between abusive supervision and supervisor-directed aggression is strongest when subordinates neither have self-control capacity nor perceive that their supervisor has coercive power.

Hypothesis 1b. In a significant three-way interaction, the relation between abusive supervision and supervisor-directed aggression is strongest when subordinates neither have self-control capacity nor perceive that their supervisor has reward power.

Although different forms of supervisory power have been proposed, research examining how supervisory power mitigates employee antisocial responses has typically not conceptualized power as multifaceted. This may be problematic, given that all forms of power may not equally deter employees. We generally anticipate that individuals who perceive that their supervisors possess power (either reward power or coercive power) will be motivated to override their desires to retaliate against an abusive supervisor. However, negative information (such as punishment) tends to be more impactful than positive information (such as rewards). Generally referred to as the principle that “bad is stronger than good” (Baumeister et al., 2001), this effect—seen throughout a range of phenomena, including information processing, decision making, memory, emotion, reaction to events, learning, social interaction, close relationships, and so on—is thought to arise from evolutionary pressure: organisms are more likely to survive if they are attuned to “bad things” (Baumeister et al., 2001). Given that punishment is a form of negative reinforcement, while reward is the provision of positive reinforcement, it stands to reason that subordinates would pay more attention and give more weight to anticipated punishment than rewards. Accordingly, we expect that when both reward power and coercive power are considered, the motivational effects of coercive power should outweigh those of reward power. Accordingly, we hypothesize the following:

Hypothesis 1c. The three-way interaction between abusive supervision, self-control capacity, and supervisor coercive power (i.e., Hypothesis 1a) is stronger than the three-way interaction between abusive supervision, self-control capacity, and supervisor reward power in the prediction of supervisor-directed aggression (i.e., Hypothesis 1b).

### STUDY 1: METHOD

#### Procedure and Participants

We tested our hypotheses with data collected from a sample of participants recruited through advertisements posted to online forums (i.e., Facebook, Redflagdeals, and Slickdeals). Such Internet recruitment methods have been shown to have benefits over more traditional recruitment methods (e.g., samples drawn from specific organizations) for recruiting more diverse samples (Gosling, Vazire, Srivastava, & John, 2004). After learning about the participation requirements (e.g., completing three online surveys) and remuneration ($10), interested individuals were directed to complete an online screening questionnaire, assessing their demographic information; we sought full-time workers who interacted regularly with their supervisors and coworkers. At time 1, we assessed abusive supervision, impression management, perceived supervisor coercive power, and perceived supervisor reward power. At time 2, approximately one week after the completion of the time 1 survey, we assessed self-control capacity. Approximately one week following the completion of the time 2
survey, we assessed supervisor-directed aggression. We sent three reminder e-mails (one week apart) to individuals who had not completed surveys to maximize response rates (Dillman, 2000).

Although we do not know how many individuals viewed our study advertisement, 326 individuals fulfilled our study requirements (i.e., full-time employees who had regular contact with others at work) and were invited to participate in our study. Participants were sent a unique identifier code and links to our online surveys at three points in time. Two hundred thirty-five individuals responded to our invitation to the first survey (72% response rate), 219 individuals responded the second survey (94% retention rate), and 196 individuals responded the third survey (88% retention rate). Attrition analyses only showed that participants who completed the time 2 survey but not the time 3 survey reported more abusive supervision (2.29 vs. 1.66, t_{217} = 3.19, p < .01). Despite this significant difference, it is not readily apparent how such a difference might explain our results. Participants (45% male) were employed in industries such as computers and mathematics (12%), business and finance (10%), sales (9%), production (8%), education (7%), and health care support (7%). The remaining 49 percent of the sample were in different industries, including construction, social services, and the arts. The participants’ mean age was 32.56 years (s.d. = 8.28), and they worked an average 41.24 hours (s.d. = 7.14) per week. Participants had been employed in their current organization an average of 4.53 years (s.d. = 4.25), in their present position for 3.31 years (s.d. = 3.29), and with their current supervisor for 2.73 years (s.d. = 3.61).

Measures

**Abusive supervision.** We assessed abusive supervision with Tepper’s (2000) 15-item scale. Participants were instructed to indicate the frequency with which their supervisors performed behaviors such as “ridicules me” on a scale ranging from 1, “I can’t remember him/her ever using this behavior with me,” to 5, “he/she uses this behavior very often with me.”

**Supervisor coercive and reward power.** To assess supervisory power, we used Hinkin and Schriesheim’s (1989) four-item supervisor coercive power scale and four-item supervisor reward power scale. Participants responded using a scale from 1, “strongly disagree,” to 5, “strongly agree,” to items such as “my supervisor can increase my pay level” (reward power) and “my supervisor can give me undesirable job assignments” (coercive power).

**Self-control capacity.** We assessed self-control capacity with a 25-item scale (Ciaccotto, Tvenge, Muraven, & Tice, 2007). We instructed participants to indicate how they felt in general in response to statements such as “If I were tempted by something, it would be very difficult to resist” (1 = “not at all true of me,” 7 = “very true of me”).

**Supervisor-directed aggression.** We assessed supervisor-directed aggression with Mitchell and Ambrose’s (2007) ten-item scale. Participants indicated the frequency with which they had engaged in each behavior over the past year (1 = “never,” 7 = “daily”). Sample items included “said something hurtful to my supervisor at work.”

**Control variables.** We controlled for age (in years), tenure with supervisor (in months), and gender (0 = “male,” 1 = “female”) in our analyses, because past research has shown significant effects of these variables on supervisor-directed aggression (Mitchell & Ambrose, 2007). We also controlled for impression management, which we measured with Paulhus’s (1991) 20-item Impression Management Scale. Participants responded to statements such as “I sometimes tell lies if I have to” (1 = “not true,” 7 = “very true”).

Analytic Strategy

We tested our hypotheses with hierarchical multiple regression in SPSS 19.0. In the first step, we entered our control variables (age, tenure with the supervisor, gender, and impression management); main effects (e.g., abusive supervision, supervisor coercive power, supervisor reward power, and self-control capacity) were entered in the second step. We entered two-way interactions in the third step; the three-way interaction was entered in the fourth step. To reduce multicollinearity, we centered all lower-order terms used in interactions.

**STUDY 1: RESULTS**

To evaluate the distinctness of the key constructs, we conducted a confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) with AMOS 19.0. The results showed that the hypothesized five-factor model provided an acceptable fit to the data (χ² = 3,520.55, p < .01, RMSEA = .08, SRMR = .09; RMSEA values no higher than .08 and SRMR values no higher than .10 suggest an acceptable fit [Hu & Bentler, 1999]).
The hypothesized five-factor measurement model also yielded a significant improvement in chi-square over more parsimonious models in which we set the following items to load on a single factor: abusive supervision and coercive power ($\Delta \chi^2 = 661.58, p < .01$); abusive supervision and supervisor-directed aggression ($\Delta \chi^2 = 1.262.04, p < .01$); abusive supervision and self-control capacity ($\Delta \chi^2 = 1.923.79, p < .01$); self-control capacity and supervisor-directed aggression ($\Delta \chi^2 = 2.161.44, p < .01$); and coercive power and self-control capacity ($\Delta \chi^2 = 624.20, p < .01$). We also applied the CFA marker technique (Williams, Hartman, & Cavazotte, 2010) to test for the presence and magnitude of method effects, using a measure of perceptions of government environmental policies as a marker variable. Results indicated no significant variance attributable to method effects. In addition, Fornell and Larcker’s (1981) discriminant validity test also showed support for the discriminant validity of our constructs.

Table 1 presents the means, standard deviations, alpha reliability coefficients, and correlations of the measured variables. As in past findings, an examination of the zero-order correlations showed that abusive supervision was positively correlated with supervisor-directed aggression ($r = .73, p < .01$), a result within the range reported in prior meta-analyses (Hershcovis & Barling, 2010).

Table 2 presents the results of the hierarchical multiple regression analyses testing the interaction of abusive supervision, supervisor coercive power, supervisor reward power, and self-control capacity in prediction of supervisor-directed aggression. The additional proportion of the variance explained by the three-way interaction terms was significant ($\Delta R^2 = .03, p < .01$). More specifically, the three-way interaction of abusive supervision, self-control capacity, and supervisor coercive power was significant in predicting supervisor-directed aggression ($b = .23, p < .01$). The significant three-way interaction of abusive supervision, self-control capacity, and supervisor coercive power, depicted in Figure 2, indicated that the relation between abusive supervision and supervisor-directed aggression was strongest when supervisor coercive power was low and self-control capacity was low. These results provide support for Hypothesis 1a.

Tests of the simple slopes indicated that the relation between abusive supervision and supervisor-directed aggression was significant when supervisor coercive power was low and self-control capacity was low ($t = 9.00, p < .01$), and the strength of this relation was significantly stronger than it was under the other three conditions ($t = 3.21, 3.40, 4.00; all p < .01$). Simple slope tests also indicated that the relation between abusive supervision and supervisor-directed aggression was significant when supervisor coercive power was high and self-control capacity was low ($t = 7.05, p < .01$) and when supervisor coercive power was high and self-control capacity was high ($t = 3.07, p < .01$), but not significant when supervisor coercive power was low and self-control capacity was high ($t = 1.07, n.s.) Tests of simple slope differences indicated that the strength of the relation between abusive supervision and supervisor-directed aggression was significantly different between the high coercive power and low self-control capacity condition and the low coercive power and high self-control capacity condition ($t = 2.18, p < .05$), but not significantly different from the other conditions.

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**TABLE 1**

Descriptive Statistics, Zero-Order Correlations, and Alpha Reliability Coefficients, Study 1*

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</tbody>
</table>

* n = 196. The numbers in bold on the diagonal are alpha reliability coefficients. “Male” = 0, “female” = 1.

* p < .05

** p < .01
different between the high coercive power and low self-control capacity condition and the high coercive power and high self-control capacity condition ($t = 1.21$, n.s.), and between the low coercive power and high self-control capacity condition and the high coercive power and high self-control capacity condition ($t = -1.15$, n.s.).

Failing to support Hypothesis 1b, the three-way interaction of abusive supervision, self-control capacity, and supervisor reward power was not significant in predicting supervisor-directed aggression ($b = -.21$, n.s.). A usefulness analysis showed that the three-way interaction of abusive supervision, self-control capacity, and supervisor coercive power significantly contributed to the prediction of supervisor-directed aggression, going above all the other terms included in the final step of the regression analysis in Table 2 ($\Delta R^2 = .02$, $p < .01$). However, the three-way interaction of abusive supervision, self-control capacity, and supervisor reward power did not do so ($\Delta R^2 = .01$, n.s.). These results provide support for Hypothesis 1c.

### STUDY 1: DISCUSSION

Drawing upon self-control theory, we presented and found support for a model in which subordinates’ self-control capacity and motivation to self-control interact to determine whether they retaliate toward an abusive supervisor. In keeping with the idea that individuals need to possess either the capacity or the motivation to self-control, we found that subordinates are most likely to retaliate against abusive supervisors when they are low in both capacity and motivation to self-control. Operationalizing subordinates’ motivation to self-control in terms of power, we also found that coercive power had a relatively stronger impact on retaliation than reward power.

In Study 2, we sought to go beyond Study 1’s findings by further investigating the process through which abusive supervision elicits retaliation and the role of self-control in this process. In particular, we examined the mediating role of subordinates’ hostility toward supervisors because, as
stated earlier, victims’ hostile emotional reactions have been implied as a significant mechanism between perceived mistreatment and aggression (e.g., Averill, 1982). Hostility is a subjective feeling that ranges from mild irritation to intense fury (Spielberger, 1988), can reflect individuals’ reactions to objects such as a supervisor (Frijda, 1993), and is instrumental in guiding and constraining human behavior (Lazarus, 1991). We focus on hostility and not other negative emotions for two reasons. First, relative to other negative emotions, hostility is most likely to be elicited by interpersonal mistreatment (Lazarus, 1991). Second, hostility has been shown to be the primary driver of aggressive behaviors, above and beyond other negative emotions (Lee & Allen, 2002).

THE MEDIATING ROLE OF HOSTILITY: A MODERATED MEDIATION MODEL

Individuals often experience hostility when they perceive some demeaning offense or mistreatment to have been controlled by others (Lazarus, 1991), such as abusive supervision. Studies have shown that hostility is usually provoked when something illegitimate or contrary to what is expected occurs (Averill, 1982). As abusive treatment from supervisors violates expectations about how an individual should be treated (Folger, 1987), it can cause hostile emotional reactions from subordinates. Being regarded as a direct and substantial affront to individuals’ sense of self (Lian, Ferris, & Brown, 2012a), abusive supervision should create intense hostility toward supervisors (Lazarus, 1991).

Anger and hostility toward a supervisor should in turn energize angry behavioral expressions. Feelings of hostility have been theorized to justify aggressive retaliation and energize aggressive behaviors by increasing arousal levels (Anderson & Bushman, 2002). When asked about their anger experiences, fully half of the individuals reported that they felt a loss of control over a strong impulse to strike out at their aversive target (Carlson & Hatfield, 1992: 347). Given this connection, hostility and anger have been associated with subsequent aggressive behavioral responses to and direct revenge against a perpetrator (Averill, 1982), as antagonistic behaviors in the form of aggression may help remove an aversive stimulus that causes unpleasant feelings. Thus, we hypothesize:

Hypothesis 2. Hostility toward supervisors mediates the relation between abusive supervision and supervisor-directed aggression.

With that being said, some individuals are able to regulate and thus influence the emotions they ex-
percie (Gross, 2001). By reappraising the situation in favor of a nonhostile interpretation or deploying attention away from anger-provoking stimuli or thoughts, individuals may mitigate the extent to which they experience negative emotions (Wilkowski & Robinson, 2010). This regulation of emotion can be regarded as a particular form of self-control by which individuals deploy self-control resources as outlined above to override certain emotional reactions (Tice & Bratslavsky, 2000). In support of this view, recent neuro-imaging studies indicate that the brain regions that are activated when an individual is instructed to maintain or inhibit emotions are the same as those involved in effortful self-control (Ochsner & Gross, 2005). Therefore, we expected that when individuals hold available resources for self-control (i.e., self-control capacity) or are motivated to control hostile emotions (i.e., motivation to self-control), they should experience less hostility toward abusive supervisors. Notably, when operationalizing subordinates’ motivation to self-control in terms of supervisor power to reward or punish, we did not expect it to mitigate their hostile feelings toward abusive supervisors. In particular, given that supervisor power reflects motivation to self-control—here, to not engage in behaviors that might result in punishment (or lack of reward)—this should only apply to overt reactions, such as aggressive behaviors toward supervisors but not covert reactions such as feelings of hostility. Thus, we hypothesize:

Hypothesis 3. The relation between abusive supervision and hostility toward supervisors is moderated by self-control capacity: The relation is weaker when self-control capacity is high rather than low.

Even when experienced, hostility need not always lead a person to aggress against the source of an aversive experience. Researchers have posited that effortful control counteracts the inclination to act on hostile emotions (Wilkowski & Robinson, 2010). This accords with studies demonstrating that self-control can override aggressive tendencies (DeWall, Baumeister, Stillman, & Gailliot, 2007), and individuals with higher levels of self-control are less likely to report anger-driven aggressive behaviors (Rothbart, Ahdadi, & Evans, 2000). We therefore suggest that supervisor-directed aggression can be regarded as a result of failing to control urges brought about via hostility toward a supervisor. In accordance with previous arguments on self-control capacity and motivation to self-control, we suggest that when individuals are neither motivated (i.e., are expecting no punishment) nor in possession of the ability to control hostile feelings and aggressive impulses, they are the most likely to translate their hostile feelings toward their supervisor into supervisor-directed aggression. However, when they are either able or motivated to exert self-control, they should be less driven by their hostile feelings and thus able to resist acts of supervisor-directed aggression. Taking these ideas together, we propose a moderated mediation model in which hostility toward supervisors mediates the abusive supervision and supervisor-directed aggression relation, while self-control capacity and supervisor power moderates that mediation. More formally, we hypothesize:

Hypothesis 4. The relation between hostility toward supervisors and supervisor-directed aggression is strongest when subordinates neither have self-control capacity nor perceive their supervisor as having coercive power.

Hypothesis 5. The indirect relation between abusive supervision and supervisor-directed aggression through the mediating role of hostility toward supervisors is strongest when subordinates neither have self-control capacity nor perceive their supervisor as having coercive power.

Given the nonsignificant results in Study 1 regarding supervisor reward power, in Study 2, we did not make formal hypotheses regarding its interaction with self-control capacity. However, we still report tests of reward power’s moderating effects in the results below.

STUDY 2: METHOD

Procedure and Participants

Participants were recruited from the University of Waterloo’s alumni offices (1,721 alumni graduating 1970–99 were invited by e-mail) and advertisements posted in newspapers, online forums, public places (e.g., coffee shops), and commuter areas (e.g., bus stops). Participants were directed to complete the same online screening questionnaire used in Study 1 to assess demographic information and the frequency with which they interacted with other people at work. Qualified participants (full-time employees who had regular interactions with their supervisors/coworkers) were invited to complete three online surveys separated by approxi-
significantly younger (33.43 vs. 35.93, screening survey but not the time 1 survey were showed that participants who completed the survey to maximize response rates (Dillman, 2000). Participants received $10 as compensation.

Although we do not know how many individuals viewed our study advertisement, 563 individuals fulfilled our study requirements and were invited to participate. A total of 334 individuals completed the first survey (59% response rate), 255 individuals completed the second survey (76% retention rate); and 188 individuals completed the third survey (73% retention rate). Attrition analyses only showed that participants who completed the screening survey but not the time 1 survey were significantly younger (33.43 vs. 35.93, \( t_{561} = -3.29, p < .01 \)) than those who completed both surveys. Despite this significant difference, it is not readily apparent how such a difference might explain our results. Participants (49% male) were employed in industries including business and finance (17%), computers and mathematics (12%), education (8%), government (8%), sales (6%), and architecture and engineering (6%). The remaining participants (43%) were in other industries, including transportation, administrative support, and production. The participants’ mean age was 35.73 years (s.d. = 9.55), and they worked an average of 42.76 hours (s.d. = 7.12) per week. Participants had been employed in their current organization an average of 6.61 years (s.d. = 7.50), having worked in their present position for 4.18 years (s.d. = 5.73) and with their current supervisor for 3.15 years (s.d. = 4.49).

**Measures**

We assessed abusive supervision, supervisor coercive and reward power, self-control capacity, and supervisor-directed aggression with the same instruments used in Study 1.

**Hostility toward supervisors.** We assessed hostility toward supervisors by adapting the hostility subscale of the Positive and Negative Affect Schedule—Expanded Form (PANAS-X [Watson & Clark, 1994]). We instructed participants to “indicate to what extent you feel this way towards your supervisor” on a scale from 1, “very slightly or not at all,” to 5, “extremely.” Sample adjectives included “angry,” “hostile,” and “irritable.”

**Control variables.** We controlled for age, tenure with supervisor, and gender.

**Analytic Strategy**

As in Study 1, we used hierarchical multiple regression analysis with SPSS 19.0 to test our hypotheses. In addition, Edwards and Lambert’s (2007) approach was employed to examine moderation in the first and second stage of the mediated model. We used bootstrapping to test the significance of the indirect effects because of its advantages when dealing with the violation of normal distribution assumptions (Shrout & Bolger, 2002). We bootstrapped 1,000 samples to obtain bias-corrected confidence intervals (Edwards & Lambert, 2007).

**STUDY 2: RESULTS**

To evaluate the distinctness of the key constructs, we conducted CFAs using AMOS 19.0. The results showed that the hypothesized six-factor model provided an acceptable fit to the data (\( \chi^2_{1,937} = 4,114.01, p < .01 \), RMSEA = .08, SRMR = .09). The hypothesized six-factor measurement model also had a significant improvement in chi-square over other more parsimonious models in which we set the following items to load on a single factor: abusive supervision and coercive power (\( \Delta \chi^2_5 = 663.99, p < .01 \)); abusive supervision and supervisor-directed aggression (\( \Delta \chi^2_5 = 1,148.19, p < .01 \)); abusive supervision and self-control capacity (\( \Delta \chi^2_5 = 1,913.69, p < .01 \)); self-control capacity and supervisor-directed aggression (\( \Delta \chi^2_5 = 1,409.69, p < .01 \)); coercive power and self-control capacity (\( \Delta \chi^2_5 = 611.79, p < .01 \)); abusive supervision and hostility toward supervisor (\( \Delta \chi^2_5 = 683.39, p < .01 \)); self-control capacity and hostility toward supervisor (\( \Delta \chi^2_5 = 882.89, p < .01 \)); and hostility toward supervisor and supervisor-directed aggression (\( \Delta \chi^2_5 = 582.29, p < .01 \)). As in Study 1, a CFA marker test indicated no significant variance attributable to method effects, and Fornell and Larcker’s (1981) discriminant validity test also provided support for the discriminant validity of our constructs.

Table 3 presents the means, standard deviations, alphas, and correlations of the measured variables. An examination of the zero-order correlations showed that abusive supervision was positively...
correlated with supervisor-directed aggression \((r = .52, p < .01)\).

Table 4 presents the results of the hierarchical multiple regression analysis testing the interactive effect of abusive supervision and self-control capacity on hostility toward supervisors. As can be seen in Table 4, in the final step of the regression analysis, the interaction of abusive supervision and self-control capacity significantly predicted hostility toward supervisors \((b = .14, p < .05)\), and the additional variance explained by the two-way interaction terms was significant \(\Delta R^2 = .02, p < .01\). The interaction, depicted in Figure 3, indicated that the relation between abusive supervision and hostility toward supervisors was weaker when self-control capacity was high rather than low. These results provide support for Hypothesis 3.

Table 5 presents the results of the hierarchical multiple regression analyses testing the interaction of hostility toward supervisor, supervisor coercive power, supervisor reward power, and self-control capacity in prediction of supervisor-directed aggression. The additional variance explained by the three-way interaction terms was significant \(\Delta R^2 = .05, p < .01\). More specifically, the three-way interaction of abusive supervision, self-control capacity, and supervisor coercive power was significant in predicting supervisor-directed aggression \((b = .23, p < .01)\). The significant three-way interaction of hostility toward supervisor, self-control capacity, and supervisor coercive power, depicted in Figure 4, indicated that the relation between hostility toward supervisor and supervisor-directed aggression was strongest when supervisor coercive power was low and self-control capacity was low. These results support Hypothesis 4.

Tests of the simple slopes indicated that the relation between hostility toward supervisor and supervisor-directed aggression was significant when

### Table 4: Abusive Supervision and Self-Control Capacity Predicting Hostility toward Supervisors, Study 2a

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variables</th>
<th>Step 1</th>
<th>Step 2</th>
<th>Step 3</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Intercept</td>
<td>2.14** (.28)</td>
<td>1.65** (.25)</td>
<td>1.65 (.24)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age</td>
<td>-0.02** (.01)</td>
<td>.00 (.01)</td>
<td>0.00 (.01)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tenure</td>
<td>.00 (.00)</td>
<td>.00 (.00)</td>
<td>.00 (.00)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gender</td>
<td>0.01 (.12)</td>
<td>-0.04 (.10)</td>
<td>-0.05 (.10)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Abusive supervision</td>
<td>0.46** (.07)</td>
<td>0.41** (.07)</td>
<td>0.41** (.07)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Self-control capacity</td>
<td>-0.13** (.05)</td>
<td>-0.14** (.05)</td>
<td>-0.14** (.05)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Abusive supervision × self-control capacity</td>
<td>-0.14** (.05)</td>
<td>-0.14** (.05)</td>
<td>-0.14** (.05)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

\(\Delta R^2\) .04 .28** .02

\(n = 188\). Values are unstandardized regression coefficients; standard error estimates are in parentheses.

* \(p < .05\)

** \(p < .01\)

---

**Table 3: Descriptive Statistics, Zero-Order Correlations, and Alpha Reliability Coefficients, Study 2a**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variables</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>s.d.</th>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>5</th>
<th>6</th>
<th>7</th>
<th>8</th>
<th>9</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Age</td>
<td>35.73</td>
<td>9.55</td>
<td>.40**</td>
<td>.27**</td>
<td>.01</td>
<td>.02</td>
<td>.96</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Tenure</td>
<td>37.84</td>
<td>53.92</td>
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<td>.05</td>
<td>.06</td>
<td>.01</td>
<td>.19**</td>
<td>.93</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gender</td>
<td>0.51</td>
<td>0.50</td>
<td>.07</td>
<td>.00</td>
<td>.07</td>
<td>.03</td>
<td>.35**</td>
<td>.32**</td>
<td>.10</td>
<td>.94</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Abusive supervision</td>
<td>1.76</td>
<td>0.82</td>
<td>.27**</td>
<td>.01</td>
<td>.02</td>
<td>.96</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Supervisor coercive power</td>
<td>3.31</td>
<td>1.19</td>
<td>.05</td>
<td>.06</td>
<td>.01</td>
<td>.19**</td>
<td>.93</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Supervisor reward power</td>
<td>3.49</td>
<td>1.04</td>
<td>.08</td>
<td>.13</td>
<td>.05</td>
<td>.07</td>
<td>.24**</td>
<td>.85</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Self-control capacity</td>
<td>4.67</td>
<td>1.11</td>
<td>.29**</td>
<td>.03</td>
<td>.35**</td>
<td>.32**</td>
<td>.10</td>
<td>.94</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hostility toward supervisor</td>
<td>1.55</td>
<td>0.80</td>
<td>.20**</td>
<td>.04</td>
<td>.14</td>
<td>.54**</td>
<td>.05</td>
<td>.12</td>
<td>.35**</td>
<td>.94</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Supervisor-directed aggression</td>
<td>1.57</td>
<td>1.00</td>
<td>.19**</td>
<td>.01</td>
<td>.05</td>
<td>.52**</td>
<td>.11</td>
<td>.02</td>
<td>.36**</td>
<td>.60**</td>
<td>.95</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* \(n = 188\). “Male” = 0, “female” = 1. The numbers in bold on the diagonal are alpha reliability coefficients.

* \(p < .05\)

** \(p < .01\)
supervisor coercive power was low and self-control capacity was low ($t = 5.94$, $p < .01$), and the strength of this relation was significantly stronger than that of relations under the other three conditions ($t = 3.48, 3.65, 4.50; \text{all } p < .01$). Simple slope tests also indicated that the relation between hostility toward supervisor and supervisor-directed aggression was significant when supervisor coercive power was high and self-control capacity was low ($t = 2.20, p < .01$) but was not significant when supervisor coercive power was high and self-control capacity was high ($t = 0.70, \text{n.s.}$), and when supervisor coercive power was low and self-control capacity was high ($t = -0.08, \text{n.s.}$). However, tests of simple slope differences indicated that the strength of the relation between hostility toward supervisor and supervisor-directed aggression was not significantly different among these three conditions ($t = -0.54, 1.46, 0.63; \text{all } \text{n.s.}$). These results fully support Hypothesis 4.

However, as found in Study 1, results in Table 5 show that the three-way interaction of hostility toward supervisor, self-control capacity, and supervisor reward power was not significant in predicting supervisor-directed aggression ($b = .07, \text{n.s.}$). A usefulness analysis showed that the three-way interaction of hostility toward supervisor, self-control capacity, and supervisor coercive power significantly contributed to the prediction of supervisor-directed aggression, going over and above all the other terms included in the final step of the regression analysis in Table 5 ($\Delta R^2 = .03, p < .01$). However, the three-way interaction of hostility toward supervisor, self-control capacity, and supervisor reward power did not do so ($\Delta R^2 = .00, \text{\text{n.s.}}$).

The estimates shown in Tables 4 and 5 were used to conduct simple effects analyses to test the mediation and moderated mediation model: whether hostility toward supervisor mediates the relation between abusive supervision and supervisor-directed aggression (Hypothesis 2), and whether supervisor coercive power and self-control capacity moderate the mediating effects of hostility toward supervisor on the relation between abusive supervision and supervisor-directed aggression (Hypothesis 5). Table 6 provides the results of our mediation and moderated mediation analyses. As shown in Table 6, supporting Hypothesis 2, the indirect effect of abusive supervision on supervisor-directed aggression through hostility toward supervisor was significant ($p = .19, p < .01$). Table 6 also shows that the indirect effect of abusive supervision on supervisor-directed aggression through hostility toward supervisor was significantly stronger for individuals under the condition of low supervisor coercive power and low self-control capacity ($p = .77, p < .01$) than for those under the
TABLE 5
Three-Way Interaction between Hostility toward Supervisor, Supervisor Coercive Power, Supervisor Reward Power, and Self-Control Capacity Predicting Supervisor-Directed Aggression, Study 2*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variables</th>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Intercept</td>
<td>2.37** (.35)</td>
<td>1.68** (.30)</td>
<td>1.75** (.30)</td>
<td>1.69** (.29)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age</td>
<td>−0.02* (.01)</td>
<td>−0.00 (.01)</td>
<td>−0.00 (.01)</td>
<td>0.00 (.01)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tenure</td>
<td>0.00 (.00)</td>
<td>0.00 (.00)</td>
<td>0.00 (.00)</td>
<td>0.00 (.00)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gender</td>
<td>−0.07 (.14)</td>
<td>−0.10 (.12)</td>
<td>−0.14 (.12)</td>
<td>−0.18 (.12)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Abusive supervision</td>
<td>0.31** (.09)</td>
<td>0.28** (.09)</td>
<td>0.28** (.09)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hostility toward supervisor</td>
<td>0.49** (.09)</td>
<td>0.34** (.10)</td>
<td>0.45** (.10)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Supervisor coercive power</td>
<td>−0.01 (.06)</td>
<td>−0.02 (.06)</td>
<td>0.02 (.06)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Supervisor reward power</td>
<td>0.06 (.06)</td>
<td>0.01 (.07)</td>
<td>0.05 (.08)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Self-control capacity</td>
<td>−0.12* (.06)</td>
<td>−0.17* (.07)</td>
<td>−0.19** (.07)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hostility toward supervisor × supervisor coercive power</td>
<td></td>
<td>−0.14 (.08)</td>
<td>−0.18* (.09)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hostility toward supervisor × supervisor reward power</td>
<td></td>
<td>−0.16 (.09)</td>
<td>−0.10 (.12)</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hostility toward supervisor × self-control capacity</td>
<td></td>
<td>−0.24** (.09)</td>
<td>−0.33** (.09)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Supervisor coercive power × self-control capacity</td>
<td>0.01 (.05)</td>
<td>0.05 (.05)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Supervisor reward power × self-control capacity</td>
<td>−0.03 (.04)</td>
<td>0.01 (.05)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hostility toward supervisor × supervisor reward power × self-control capacity</td>
<td></td>
<td>−0.08 (.06)</td>
<td>−0.08 (.07)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hostility toward supervisor × supervisor coercive power × supervisor reward power</td>
<td></td>
<td>0.07 (.12)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Supervisor coercive power × supervisor reward power × self-control capacity</td>
<td></td>
<td>−0.03 (.10)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ΔR²</td>
<td>.04</td>
<td>.37**</td>
<td>.04*</td>
<td>.05**</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* n = 188. Values are unstandardized regression coefficients; standard error estimates are in parentheses. All lower-order terms used in interactions were centered prior to analysis.

* p < .05
** p < .01

other three conditions (high coercive power and high self-control capacity: p = .04, n.s., differences = [.04]−[.77] = −.73, p < .01; high coercive power and low self-control capacity: p = .17, p < .05, differences = [.17]−[.77] = −.60, p < .01; low coercive power and high self-control capacity: p = .01, n.s., differences = [.01]−[.77] = −.78, p < .01). Moreover, the indirect effect of abusive supervision on supervisor-directed aggression (mediated through hostility toward supervisor) was not significantly different among the other three conditions (differences between the condition of high coercive power and high self-control capacity and the condition of high coercive power and low self-control capacity = [.04]−[.17] = −.13; differences between high coercive power and high self-control capacity and low coercive power and high self-control capacity = [.04]−[−.01] = .05; differences between high coercive power and low self-control capacity and low coercive power and high self-control capacity = [.17]−[−.01] = .18; all n.s.).

Figure 5 shows the interaction between supervisor coercive power, self-control capacity, and the mediated effect of abusive supervision on supervisor-directed aggression through hostility toward supervisor. These findings support Hypothesis 5 and demonstrate that the indirect effect of abusive supervision on supervisor-directed aggression is strongest for those with low supervisor coercive power and low self-control capacity.

GENERAL DISCUSSION

We conducted two field studies to better understand when abusive supervision results in supervisor-directed aggression. By developing a self-control model, we suggested and found that subordinates’ self-control capacity and motivation to self-control work in tandem (Baumeister & Vohs, 2007): the absence of both capacity and motivation results in the strongest relation between abusive supervision and supervisor-directed aggression. In addition, in accor-
dance with the idea that bad is stronger than good (Baumeister et al., 2001), we found punishment-based motivation exerts a stronger effect than reward-based motivation. Finally, in Study 2, we also tested a moderated mediation model, demonstrating that hostility toward a supervisor mediates the relation between abusive supervision and supervisor-directed aggression, self-control capacity mitigates the hostile feelings experienced, and self-control capacity and coercive power together mitigate the tendency to act on hostile feelings.

Our article makes a number of contributions to the literature. At the broadest level, we present a novel model of retaliation based on self-control theory principles: that self-control is required for individuals to override urges to retaliate against those who treat them poorly, and that self-control capacity and motivation to self-control can influ-

![FIGURE 4](image)

**Three-Way Interaction Predicting Supervisor-Directed Aggression, Study 2**

![TABLE 6](image)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Interactions</th>
<th>$P_{MX}$</th>
<th>$P_{YM}$</th>
<th>$P_{YX}$</th>
<th>$P_{YM}P_{MX}$</th>
<th>$P_{YX} + P_{YM}P_{MX}$</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Zero coercive power, zero self-control capacity</td>
<td>0.41**</td>
<td>0.45**</td>
<td>0.28**</td>
<td>0.19**</td>
<td>0.47**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(1) High coercive power, high self-control capacity</td>
<td>0.26*</td>
<td>0.17</td>
<td>0.28**</td>
<td>0.04</td>
<td>0.32*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(2) High coercive power, low self-control capacity</td>
<td>0.56**</td>
<td>0.30</td>
<td>0.28**</td>
<td>0.17*</td>
<td>0.45**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(3) Low coercive power, high self-control capacity</td>
<td>0.26*</td>
<td>-0.02</td>
<td>0.28**</td>
<td>-0.01</td>
<td>0.27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(4) Low coercive power, low self-control capacity</td>
<td>0.56**</td>
<td>1.36**</td>
<td>0.28**</td>
<td>0.77**</td>
<td>1.05**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(1) and (2) differences</td>
<td>-0.30*</td>
<td>-0.13</td>
<td>0.00</td>
<td>-0.13</td>
<td>-0.13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(1) and (3) differences</td>
<td>0.00</td>
<td>0.19</td>
<td>0.00</td>
<td>0.05</td>
<td>0.05</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(1) and (4) differences</td>
<td>-0.30*</td>
<td>-1.19*</td>
<td>0.00</td>
<td>-0.73**</td>
<td>-0.73**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(2) and (3) differences</td>
<td>0.30*</td>
<td>0.32</td>
<td>0.00</td>
<td>0.18</td>
<td>0.18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(2) and (4) differences</td>
<td>0.00</td>
<td>-1.06*</td>
<td>0.00</td>
<td>-0.60**</td>
<td>-0.60**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(3) and (4) differences</td>
<td>-0.30*</td>
<td>-1.38*</td>
<td>0.00</td>
<td>-0.78**</td>
<td>-0.78**</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*a n = 188. $P_{MX}$ is the path from abusive supervision to hostility toward supervisor; $P_{YM}$ is the path from hostility toward supervisor to supervisor-directed aggression; $P_{YX}$ is the path from abusive supervision to supervisor-directed aggression.

*p < .05

**p < .01
ence the extent to which people both experience and act upon urges to retaliate. We believe that this focus on motivation to self-control, self-control capability, and (relatedly) the urge to retaliate can account for a number of disparate findings in the retaliation literature within a fairly parsimonious model. In particular, numerous past studies have examined seemingly disconnected moderators of the relation between abusive supervision and retaliatory behaviors (Tepper & Almeda, 2012). When these moderators are viewed within a self-control theory framework, however, a pattern emerges, in that they can be mapped onto self-control theory constructs.

For example, research has shown that high levels of subordinates’ conscientiousness and agreeableness mitigate the relation between abusive supervision and subordinates’ retaliation (Tepper, Duffy, & Shaw, 2001). Conscientiousness has been conceptualized as an indicator of self-regulatory ability (Wagner, Barnes, Lim, & Ferris, 2012), while agreeableness may reflect subordinates’ motivation to self-control to preserve relationships. More broadly, moderators that reflect a lack of self-control capacity (e.g., a history of aggression [Inness et al., 2005] or an external locus of control [Mitchell & Ambrose, 2012]) or the absence or presence of motivation to self-control (e.g., a person planning to leave a job [Tepper et al., 2009], a person fearing retaliation [Mitchell & Ambrose, 2012], or a person feeling he/she does not need to work closely with the perpetrator [Hershcovis, Reich, Parker, & Bozeman, 2012]) pervade the abusive supervision literature. Factors that influence the urge to retaliate have also been examined, such as the belief that people should retaliate against those who harm them (Mitchell & Ambrose, 2007) or that supervisory abuse is normative (Liu et al., 2010).

Aside from providing a general model for retaliation, our article integrates two seemingly contradictory theoretical models that have been advanced in explaining supervisor-directed aggression. On the one hand, theory on aggression and social exchange (Greenberg & Barling, 1999) suggests that abusive supervision is likely to elicit supervisor-directed aggression from subordinates. On the other hand, it is widely acknowledged that directly confronting a supervisor is an irrational act that can result in lost rewards and subsequent acts of revenge, punishment, or counterretaliation (Tepper et al., 2009). The model advanced in this article reconciles these two perspectives by positing that aggressive behavior toward supervisors is a function of motivational factors, self-control capacity, and their interaction. As a result, our research pro-
vides a more complete explanation for when abusive supervision is related to subordinates’ aggression directed at supervisors.

Our work contributes to the self-control literature by examining the largely neglected motivational component of self-control and expands the application of self-control theory to the abusive supervision literature. Past work on self-control has tended to focus on capacity or available resources for self-control; in accordance with recent theory (Baumeister & Vohs, 2007), our findings extend current thinking and research by demonstrating that the absence of self-control capacity or resources need not lead individuals to behave aggressively in response to abusive supervision. Given proper incentives (i.e., perceiving potential punishment from supervisors), individuals appear to be quite capable of mobilizing their inner resources to override their natural inclination to directly harm an abusive supervisor.

Interestingly, our findings may also help clear up recent mixed results regarding the main effect of self-control capacity on tendencies to engage in deviant behavior. In particular, although some studies have shown that reduced self-control capacity tends to increase individuals’ retaliatory reactions to abusive supervision (Thau & Mitchell, 2010), other studies have found otherwise (Lian, Ferris, & Brown, 2012b). Given that our framework suggests that self-control capacity and motivation to self-control jointly influence individuals’ reactions, such mixed findings are to be expected, depending on whether subordinates’ motivation to self-control is taken into account.

Our results also extend prior work that has suggested that supervisory power motivates subordinates to control their natural inclination toward revenge (e.g., Aquino et al., 2006) or refrain from acting upon their motivation to directly retaliate (Tepper et al., 2009). In contrast to prior work that has utilized indirect proxies for supervisor power, we directly measured supervisor power in the current set of studies. Moreover, following a multidimensional perspective, we conceptualized power in a more nuanced manner, differentiating supervisory reward power from supervisory coercive power. In accordance with prior theoretical arguments that indicate rewards and punishments are conceptually distinct motivators, our findings indicate that negative consequences or punishment are more effectual than rewards and positive outcomes in motivating individual self-control toward an abusive supervisor.

Finally, by examining hostility toward supervisors as a mediator of the relation between abusive supervision and supervisor-directed aggression, our work responds to recent calls for researchers to investigate how discrete emotions play roles in organizational context in general (Brief & Weiss, 2002) and in reactions to supervisors’ mistreatment in particular (Mayer, Thau, Workman, Van Dijke, & De Cremer, 2011). As suggested, research on how leaders can affect the emotions of subordinates is still early in its development (Brief & Weiss, 2002), and our work contributes to this literature by enriching understanding of the effects of negative leader behaviors on subordinates’ hostile reactions. Moreover, by examining the effects of hostility on aggression directed at perpetrators and self-control mechanisms as boundary conditions of the effects, our work also answers important questions about the production of hostile emotions in the workplace and improves understanding of the affect-outcome process.

**Limitations and Directions for Future Research**

Despite these contributions, some limitations to our work should be noted. First, because we did not employ random population sampling, the generalizability of our findings should be viewed with some caution. However, convenience sampling is typically problematic only when one is seeking to generalize findings to a specific population (Highhouse & Gillespie, 2009); otherwise, the central concern is whether or not a given sample is appropriate for the theory to be tested. Given our use of employed adults, we believe the latter to be the case. Despite this, future research may benefit from examining our model in other settings and populations. A second potential limitation of our research lies in the possibility that common source effects may have influenced our findings, owing to the fact that we tested our hypotheses using data collected from a single source. Given that our primary focus was on testing interactions, and interactive effects offer persuasive evidence against common source effects (Evans, 1985), such concerns may be minimized. Moreover, it is worth noting that the use of self-report data is generally considered to be the most valid approach when assessing perceptual outcomes and internal states, such as abusive supervision, feelings, and self-control (Chan, 2009). Notwithstanding these points, future studies might include multisource data.
Another limitation of our studies pertains to the causal direction of our findings. Coinciding with the dominant perspective in the abusive supervision literature, the model we tested implicitly suggests that abusive supervision is the antecedent of supervisor-directed aggression. However, the cross-sectional design of our studies does not allow such causal inferences. It is also plausible to argue that subordinates’ supervisor-directed aggression leads to abusive supervision (Aquino & Lamertz, 2004). Although it is hard to argue supervisor-directed aggression to be the antecedent of abusive supervision with the moderators and mediators found in our studies, we encourage future studies to use cross-lagged panel designs to untangle the causal relation between abusive supervision and supervisor-directed aggression.

In Study 2, we found self-control capacity mitigates subordinates’ hostile feelings toward abusive supervisors and subordinates’ aggressive reactions driven by hostile feelings. From an emotion regulation perspective, this is akin to saying that self-control capacity enabled both reappraisal to decrease negative emotional experiences (i.e., hostile feelings) and suppression to minimize negative emotion-expressive behaviors (i.e., supervisor-directed aggression [Gross, 2001]). Although a limitation of our work is that we did not directly assess the reappraisal and suppression strategies in our studies, our findings are consistent with past work that has suggested self-control enables individuals to reappraise a situation and interpret it in a non-hostile way (Anderson & Bushman, 2002), and to suppress tendencies toward. In terms of future research directions, the emotional regulation literature also suggests a potential negative consequence of suppressing emotions. In particular, suppressing hostility requires consumption of cognitive resources and reduces not only negative but also positive emotion-expressive behaviors (Gross, 2001). In other words, the consumption of limited cognitive resources to suppress negative behaviors may also decrease the resources available for other behaviors, such as performing well at work (Gross, 2001; Tice & Bratslavsky, 2000); the reduction of positive emotion-expressive behaviors may affect employees’ interactions with others at work, so that the employees support and help other less and even cause them stress (Gross, 2001). Although our article focuses on the positive effects of subordinates’ capacity and motivation to self-control in suppressing their hostility toward supervisors, future research could explore the downsides of this self-control process, such as its effects in decreasing job performance and organizational citizenship behaviors. Moreover, in Study 2 we found that individuals’ hostile emotions serve as important mechanisms in explaining their aggressive behavioral reactions to an abusive supervisor. Individuals’ emotions are dynamic and may fluctuate over time; thus, supervisors’ abusive treatment experienced at a certain moment can predict these emotions, which may drive spontaneous aggressive behaviors directed at supervisors (Weiss & Cropanzano, 1996). Future research could use an experience-sampling design to examine how our model applies at the intrapersonal level and therefore address the dynamic association be-
tween abusive supervision, hostility toward supervisor, and supervisor-directed aggression.

Finally, the self-control framework we propose here can be generalized to other forms of aggressive behaviors. For example, extant work has looked at subordinates’ harmful behaviors directed at organizations, coworkers, and family members (e.g., Hooiberg & Brass, 2006; Mitchell & Ambrose, 2007). In line with our self-control framework, individuals are most likely to engage in these behaviors when they do not possess the capacity and motivation to self-control. Although supervisor power is most relevant to retaliation toward supervisors, future studies may operationalize motivation to self-control according to the target of aggressive behaviors in their areas of interest (e.g., peer power). Relatedly, the self-control framework we propose here may only apply to overt but not to covert retaliatory behaviors, given that covert retaliatory behaviors are meant to be unobservable and thus unlikely to be influenced by supervisory power. In fact, it has been suggested that when overt retaliation is implausible because of supervisory power, subordinates are likely to restore exchange balances by engaging in covert retaliation, such as withholding organizational citizenship behaviors that may benefit their organization (Zellars, Pepper, & Duffy, 2002). Moreover, in accordance with displaced aggression theory (Dollard, Doob, Miller, Mowrer, & Sears, 1939), subordinates who must suppress aggression at work may redirect their retaliation toward less powerful targets (e.g., the broader organization, coworkers, family members). Future research may explore whether subordinates are more likely to engage in covert retaliation and/or displace aggression when their overt retaliation against an abusive supervisor is restricted at work.

**Practical Implications**

Our findings indicate that employees retaliate against abusive supervisors because either they lack sufficient self-control ability or their circumstances do not afford adequate motivation to engage in self-control. These results suggest specific steps that organizations or individual employees might take to counteract aggressive responses to abusive supervision—which, if allowed to continue, can spiral out of control and harm subordinate, third-party observer, and organization (Andersson & Pearson, 1999). First, our finding regarding the significant buffering effect of self-control capacity on subordinates’ hostile emotional and aggressive behavioral reactions suggests that organizations might implement selection procedures that directly assess self-control capacity. Although self-control capacity is conceptually related to common selection constructs such as conscientiousness (Wagner et al., 2012), self-control is best assessed with direct rather than proxy assessments. One alternative to implementing selection procedures takes advantage of the fact that self-control capacity is widely regarded to be a dynamic competency that can be developed with training and practice. For example, research has suggested that by engaging in self-control exercises, such as adhering to physical exercise programs or engaging in financial management training, people become better at self-control (for a review, see Baumeister, Gailliot, DeVall, and Oaten [2006]).

Second, our results also indicate that hostility drives retaliatory action. Although the implications regarding self-control capacity outlined above apply equally to hostility (given that self-control capacity was found to buffer the effect of abusive supervision on hostility), organizations and employees might take advantage of other techniques that assist individuals in directly dealing with their emotions. As one example, prior research has concluded that mindfulness training, or training individuals to be aware and attentive to their reactions as they occur, helps reduce hostility (Brown & Ryan, 2003). Thus, mindfulness training may help minimize the occurrence of feelings of hostility in response to abusive supervision, which our results indicate represents one way of minimizing the likelihood of retaliation.

Our findings indicate that organizations can also reduce subordinates’ engagement in destructive, vengeful behaviors by creating contexts that maximize individual motivation to self-control. In particular, our findings suggest that punishment or perceived potential negative consequences can be particularly effective at mitigating aggressive behaviors directed toward supervisors. A direct corollary of this finding is that steps should be taken to raise awareness among employees of the negative consequences of engaging in retaliatory actions against supervisors. More subtly, organizations might take advantage of social punishments by strengthening workplace norms for civil behavior through training or generating formal interventions to enhance worker civility (e.g., Leiter, Laschinger, Day, & Oore, 2011).

Finally, given that our model suggests abusive supervisors are provocateurs, the most straightforward route to reducing supervisor-directed aggres-
sion is to remove or alter aggressive supervisor behavior. Although speculative, research has provided preliminary support that our findings regarding self-control might generalize to supervisors, whose outbursts may stem from a provocation and the absence of either motivation or ability to regulate their own behavior (see Kiewitz, Restubog, Zagenczyk, Scott, Garcia, & Tang, in press). In this regard, organizations may similarly be advised to select individuals with high self-control capacity for supervisory positions, or to provide training to strengthen supervisors’ self-control capacity. Beyond self-control capacity, it seems prudent for organizations to affect supervisors’ motivation to self-control by informing them of the negative consequences of engaging in abusive acts (see Sutton, 2007).

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