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## **Jekyll and Hyde Leadership: Examining the Direct and Vicarious Experiences of Abusive and Ethical Leadership Through a Justice Variability Lens**

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## RESEARCH REPORT

## Jekyll and Hyde Leadership: Examining the Direct and Vicarious Experiences of Abusive and Ethical Leadership Through a Justice Variability Lens

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Drawing on uncertainty management theory and the nascent work on justice variability, we examine employees' *direct* and *vicarious* experiences of abusive supervision and ethical leadership. Conceptualizing the simultaneous display of abusive and ethical leadership styles as a form of justice variability, we suggest that a direct supervisor's ethical leadership exacerbates, rather than ameliorates, the detrimental effects of his/her abusive supervision on employees' emotional exhaustion and job performance. We further contend that a similar effect exists when employees vicariously experience leadership interactions involving their direct supervisor and higher level manager, whereby higher level managers' ethical leadership exacerbates the negative effects of their abusive supervision toward supervisors on those supervisors' employees' emotional exhaustion and job performance. We draw the contrast between the direct and vicarious experiences by theorizing justice uncertainty and linking-pin effectiveness uncertainty, respectively, as two distinct theoretical mechanisms that explain the two proposed destructive effects. Using a multisource and multiphase lagged field study and two vignette-based experiments, we find general support for our model. Our research advances the theories of justice variability, vicarious leadership and (in)justice, and supervisors' linking-pin role effectiveness. We also offer practical insights for managing "Jekyll and Hyde" leadership across organizational hierarchies.

**Keywords:** abusive supervision, ethical leadership, direct and vicarious justice variability, uncertainty management theory, exhaustion and performance


**Supplemental materials:** <https://doi.org/10.1037/apl0001251.supp>

I learned to recognise the thorough and primitive duality of man; I saw that, of the two natures that contended in the field of my consciousness, even if I could rightly be said to be either, it was only because I was radically both.

—Robert Louis Stevenson, *The Strange Case of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde*

As organizations become more aware of and attuned to issues of workplace (in)justice, the topics of abusive supervision and ethical leadership have gained considerable scholarly focus. Abusive supervision, defined as "the sustained display of hostile verbal and nonverbal behaviors, excluding physical contact" (Tepper, 2000, p. 178), is a form of leader injustice (Tepper, 2000). In contrast,

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methodology, project administration, resources, and writing—review and editing. Zhen Wang played a supporting role in conceptualization, data curation, investigation, and writing—review and editing and an equal role in formal analysis and methodology. Sherry E. Moss played a supporting role in conceptualization, methodology, project administration, and writing—review and editing and an equal role in data curation, investigation, and resources. John J. Sumanth played a supporting role in conceptualization, data curation, investigation, methodology, and writing—review and editing. Meng Song played a supporting role in conceptualization and writing—review and editing and an equal role in data curation and investigation.

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ethical leadership, defined as “the demonstration of normatively appropriate conduct through personal actions and interpersonal relationships, and the promotion of such conduct to followers through two-way communication, reinforcement, and decision-making” (Brown et al., 2005, p. 120), promotes justice (Koopman et al., 2019).

Recently, scholars have begun to examine the interplay between abusive supervision and ethical leadership and their effects on followers’ daily responses. Using a within-person study design, Bormann (2017) found that a leader’s ethical behavior on a given day produces a larger 1-day increase in an employee’s positive subjective attitude if the leader had acted abusively toward that employee the previous day, thereby concluding that “daily ethical leadership is a promising way to repair some of the harm caused by previous abusive supervision” (p. 599). Yet, followers typically experience numerous ongoing interactions with their leaders rather than isolated daily episodes, leading them to form overall perceptions of their leaders’ leadership styles (Yammarino et al., 2005). Further, ethical leadership can both precede and follow abuse, and leaders may oscillate between the two styles (Lin et al., 2016; McClean et al., 2021). We study how followers respond when faced with the combination of these two leadership styles.

We base our research on uncertainty management theory (Van den Bos & Lind, 2002), and its application to supervisor justice variability (between-leader differences in justice instability; Matta et al., 2017). Matta et al. (2017) demonstrated that followers’ experiences of supervisor justice variability (measured by daily variations in perceptions of supervisor fairness) had more negative effects on stress and dissatisfaction than injustice alone. We extend their work by theorizing and directly measuring leader behaviors that create employees’ subjective perceptions of justice variability. We posit that when employees experience abusive supervision (i.e., injustice), the addition of ethical leadership (justice) creates a violating effect (Gardner et al., 2017), heightening employees’ justice uncertainty and exacerbating the emotionally depleting effects of abusive supervision. This extension of Matta et al.’s (2017) work is important, as it allows researchers and practitioners to focus on behaviors that can be trained, developed, or deterred in leaders to limit employees’ perceptions of justice variability.

Further, while Matta et al. (2017) offered insights into the consequences of employees’ direct experiences of justice variability from their supervisors, research has not addressed whether *vicarious* experiences of justice variability are also consequential. With organizations increasingly adopting flatter hierarchies (Lord et al., 2017), many employees work in a dual-leader system where they become aware of how their direct supervisors interact with and are treated by higher level managers (the leaders are two levels above them). We thus also study how justice variability directed at employees’ supervisors by higher level managers impacts employees psychologically and behaviorally. Integrating uncertainty management theory with research on supervisors’ linking-pin role (Likert, 1961), we suggest that when managers abuse a supervisor, employees experience uncertainty about their supervisor’s ability to perform linking-pin role responsibilities (e.g., obtain valuable resources or privileges from the manager for the group; Graen et al., 1977). When that manager also displays ethical leadership toward the supervisor, the conflicting cues have a violating effect, exacerbating the employee’s uncertainty and increasing the detrimental impact of abusive supervision on employee exhaustion.

We further extend justice variability research by showing that followers’ negative subjective responses to such variability, which have been the focus of prior research, have key behavioral outcomes. Through the mechanism of emotional exhaustion, we theorize that employees’ direct and vicarious experiences of abusive and ethical leadership styles negatively affect all three forms of job performance included in Rotundo and Sackett’s (2002) taxonomy: task performance, citizenship behaviors, and counterproductive behaviors (see Figure 1).

In summary, we expand our understanding of leader justice variability by not only examining employees’ firsthand justice variability experiences from their supervisors’ abusive and ethical behaviors toward them but also employees’ vicarious experience of such variability from how higher level managers behave toward their supervisor. Importantly, we highlight the distinct mechanisms underlying the depleting effects of these two unique experiences: justice uncertainty for direct experiences and linking-pin effectiveness uncertainty for vicarious experiences, providing unique theoretical insights into how direct and vicarious justice variability impacts employees across three performance domains.

This focus on employees’ vicarious experiences of higher level managers’ treatment of lower level supervisors further extends the vicarious leadership and (in)justice literatures, which have centered on employees’ observations of coworker (un)fair treatment by direct supervisors (e.g., Dhanani & LaPalme, 2019). We offer a new, multilevel perspective for understanding vicarious experiences occurring in multileader, hierarchical organizational settings.

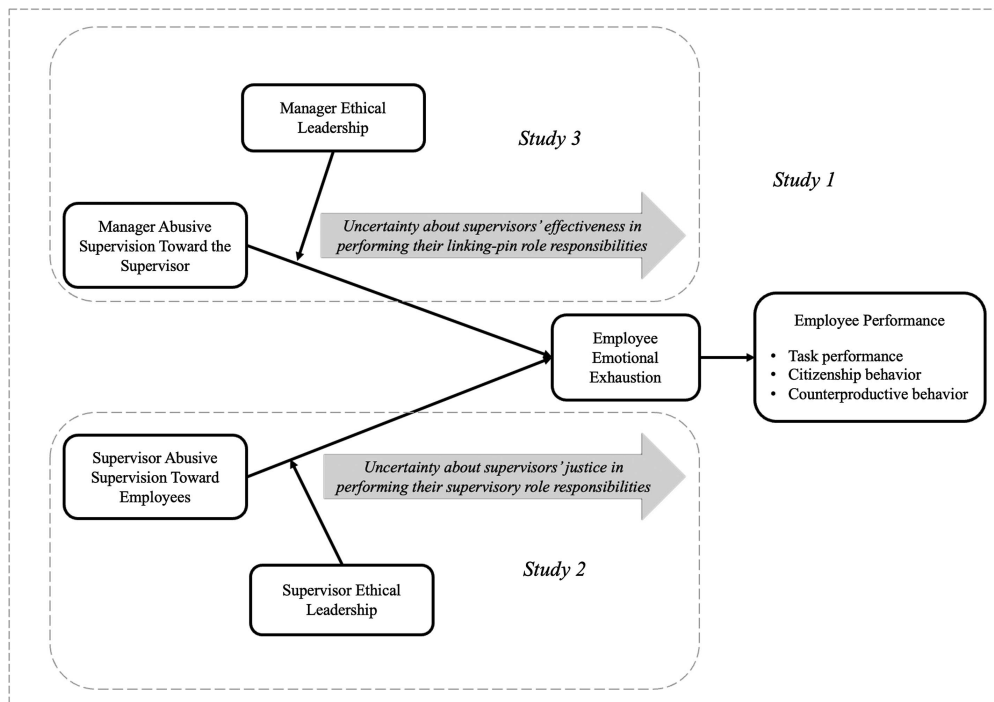
Our work also contributes to the small but growing literature on supervisors’ linking-pin role effectiveness. Prior research has used leader-leader exchange as a proxy for supervisors’ linking-pin role effectiveness (e.g., S. Zhang et al., 2022; Zhou et al., 2012). We theorize how abusive supervision and ethical leadership from higher level managers send relational signals that interactively impact employees’ uncertainty about their supervisor’s linking-pin effectiveness. This approach broadens our understanding of the factors shaping employees’ perceptions of their supervisors’ effectiveness in this crucial intermediary role.

## Theory and Hypothesis Development

### The Violating Effect of Supervisor Ethical Leadership

A core tenet of uncertainty management theory is that injustice can induce stress due to heightened uncertainty (Lind & Van den Bos, 2002). When experiencing abusive supervision, employees may doubt whether their supervisor would behave fairly in other supervisory capacities that demand distributive and procedural justice (e.g., performance evaluations), thus perceiving justice uncertainty. Conversely, when supervisors exhibit ethical leadership, it promotes justice, and when used alone, it should mitigate employees’ justice uncertainty. Yet, faced with a situation where a supervisor displays both abusive supervision and ethical leadership (i.e., justice variability), employees receive conflicting just and unjust signals, leading them to struggle to form a stable perception of their supervisor’s fairness or whether they will be treated justly or unjustly in the future (Matta et al., 2017, 2020). The detrimental joint influence of the supervisor’s abusive supervision and ethical leadership on employees’ justice uncertainty is thus stronger than when the supervisor practices abuse alone, which would instead

**Figure 1**  
*Research Model*



*Note.* We conducted three studies, including a field study (Study 1) to test the entire model, followed by two vignette-based experimental studies (Studies 2 and 3), which revalidated the interaction effects and directly tested the distinct explanatory mechanisms (as described in the grey arrows) for the lower and upper portions of the model. In Studies 2 and 3, due to institutional review board restrictions on our experimental design, we measured anticipated versus experienced emotional exhaustion.

foster greater certainty that employees would be treated unjustly. When experiencing justice uncertainty, employees repeatedly reevaluate fairness heuristics using controlled cognitive processing, an effortful process that consumes psychological resources (Lind, 2001). We thus contend that because a combination of abusive and ethical leadership styles intensifies perceptions of justice uncertainty, it further imposes a heavier toll on employees' psychological resources than does just abuse alone. These effects result in heightened emotional exhaustion, leading to our expectation of a violating effect wherein supervisor ethical leadership exacerbates the detrimental effect of supervisor abusive supervision on employee emotional exhaustion.

*Hypothesis 1:* Supervisor ethical leadership exacerbates the positive effect of supervisor abusive supervision on employee emotional exhaustion.

### The Violating Effect of Manager Ethical Leadership

Higher level managers may also exhibit both forms of leadership directed toward employees' supervisors. As many displays of abuse occur publicly over time (e.g., putting the person down in front of others), employees should have opportunities to observe their supervisor being abused by their manager, or if not observed directly, as conveyed from their supervisors or coworkers (e.g., supervisors may talk about the higher level managers' abusive supervision with

their trusted followers, and these followers further spread the incidents with other colleagues through gossip; Baer et al., 2018; Sun et al., 2023). Likewise, employees should have vicarious knowledge of the ethical leadership of higher level managers as such leaders speak about ethics to their organizations and praise people for ethical behavior in public (Schaubroeck et al., 2012).

While the skip-level effects of higher level managers' ethical leadership on employees have been theorized and observed (Schaubroeck et al., 2012), the skip-level effects of managers' abuse toward supervisors on those supervisors' employees have not been directly theorized or tested. That said, Mawritz et al. (2012) discovered a skip-level effect of managers' abuse toward employees' supervisors on employees' deviant behaviors after controlling for the supervisors' abuse toward those employees. This exploratory finding led them to note that:

Research on abusive supervision has only examined the effects of abuse on those who are the targets of the abusive behavior. The effects of the presence of abuse on all organizational members [e.g., supervisor] ... regardless of whether or not they are the victims of the abuse, should be examined. (p. 351)

However, insights into this topic are limited. Further, research has not assessed or theorized what occurs when the higher level manager displays both abusive and ethical leadership styles.

Supervisors play unique linking-pin roles in organizational hierarchies as conduits between higher level managers and employees

by securing information and resources from the managers and providing them to their employees (Likert, 1961). Employees thus care significantly about whether their supervisor can effectively perform their linking-pin role responsibilities (Graen et al., 1977). Integrating uncertainty management theory (Lind & Van den Bos, 2002) with the research on supervisors' *linking-pin* role (Likert, 1961), we suggest that managers' abuse toward supervisors increases employees' uncertainty about their supervisor's linking-pin role effectiveness. Four important lines of logic are relevant: (a) employees' vicarious experiences of others' leadership or injustice experiences directly affect themselves (Dhanani & LaPalme, 2019; J. L. Huang et al., 2015), (b) injustice can increase uncertainty (Lind & Van den Bos, 2002), (c) injustice conveys negative relational cues (Dunford et al., 2015; Walker et al., 2013), and (d) relational cues from the manager-supervisor dyad can shape employees' perceptions of supervisors' linking-pin role effectiveness (Venkataramani et al., 2010). This logic coalesces to support how the negative relational cues conveyed by managers' abusive supervision toward the supervisor would heighten employees' uncertainty about their supervisors' relationship with and level of influence with the manager and thus their linking-pin role effectiveness. In contrast, managers' ethical leadership toward the supervisor conveys positive relational cues, which, in isolation, would reduce uncertainty about their supervisors' linking-pin role effectiveness.

However, when used together, the contradictory relational signals sent by the two conflicting leadership styles challenge employees to make sense of the supervisor's relationship with the higher level manager and thus the supervisor's ability to effectively perform his/her linking-pin role. Managers' ethical leadership would thus heighten employees' uncertainty perceptions of their supervisor's linking-pin role effectiveness compared with when managers practice abusive supervision alone. When employees are uncertain as to whether their supervisor can successfully perform their role, they may be concerned about the team's and their own prospects and ability to effectively perform and achieve personal and collective goals. This concern caused by linking-pin effectiveness uncertainty would consume significant psychological resources, heightening emotional exhaustion (Lind, 2001; Matta et al., 2017).

*Hypothesis 2:* Manager ethical leadership exacerbates the positive effect of that manager's abusive supervision toward a supervisor on that supervisor's employees' emotional exhaustion.

## Performance Implications

Uncertainty management theory (e.g., Colquitt et al., 2012; Desai et al., 2011; Outlaw et al., 2019) suggests that the exhaustion triggered by uncertainty may negatively influence three forms of performance that map onto Rotundo and Sackett's (2002) taxonomy: task performance, voice (citizenship behavior), and organizational deviance (counterproductive behavior).

### Task Performance

Emotionally exhausted employees tend to take a defensive posture to conserve their remaining psychological resources. With reduced resources, these employees would tend to only comply with meeting basic job demands, rather than exceeding minimum expectations (Halbesleben & Wheeler, 2011). Further, they may also seek to find

fulfillment from outside the workplace to replenish their psychological resources (Zenger & Folkman, 2022), resulting in disengagement from their work, in turn decreasing task performance.

*Hypothesis 3a (b):* Supervisor ethical leadership (manager ethical leadership) exacerbates the effect of supervisor abusive supervision (manager abusive supervision toward the supervisor) on employee task performance via emotional exhaustion.

### Voice

Emotionally exhausted employees also avoid discretionary behaviors that consume substantial energy and/or involve risk, such as voice behaviors. Voice requires the expenditure of psychological resources to conceptualize and present an idea so that one's supervisor accepts it (Burris et al., 2022; Lam et al., 2019). Further, voice behaviors can be perceived as challenging the status quo, potentially leading supervisors or peers to view the employee as disloyal or confrontational, thus increasing the risk of negative repercussions (Burris, 2012; Isaakyan et al., 2021). Given the resource-consuming and risky nature of voice behaviors, exhausted employees tend to refrain from engaging in such behavior (Ng & Feldman, 2012).

*Hypothesis 4a (b):* Supervisor ethical leadership (manager ethical leadership) exacerbates the effect of supervisor abusive supervision (manager abusive supervision toward the supervisor) on employee voice behavior via emotional exhaustion.

### Organizational Deviance

Further, exhausted employees may not have sufficient psychological resources to properly self-regulate or control deviant behaviors (Chi & Liang, 2013; Deery et al., 2002; Thau & Mitchell, 2010). Organizational deviance, such as coming to work late without permission, is a way this withdrawal behavior manifests (Robinson & Bennett, 1995). By engaging in such behaviors, exhausted employees distance themselves from the stressors of work, protecting their remaining psychological resources (Krischer et al., 2010).

*Hypothesis 5a (b):* Supervisor ethical leadership (manager ethical leadership) exacerbates the positive effect of supervisor abusive supervision (manager abusive supervision toward the supervisor) on organizational deviance via emotional exhaustion.

## Overview of Studies

We started by testing the full model shown in Figure 1 using a field study of employees, their supervisors, and higher level managers from various U.S. industries who worked together in the same group. We then conducted two vignette-based experiments to (a) revalidate the violating effects of supervisors' and managers' ethical leadership (Hypotheses 1 and 2, respectively) and (b) directly test the two theorized psychological mechanisms (i.e., two forms of uncertainty). A vignette-based experimental design was used because an institutional review board (IRB) review disapproved any abusive behaviors being expressed toward participants. It would thus be implausible to have them report actual exhaustion, and so we asked them to report anticipated emotional exhaustion, which

captures the levels of psychological strain participants anticipated would result from the supervisors' or higher level managers' leadership behaviors. Individuals typically know what situations tend to be taxing on their psychological resources, and these anticipated situations have been shown to heighten emotional exhaustion in real work settings (e.g., LePine et al., 2005; Lim et al., 2021). Thus, both the actual emotional exhaustion assessed in the field study and the anticipated emotional exhaustion measured in the experimental studies provide an appropriate test of uncertainty management theory. The combination of the three studies enhances our confidence in the ecological, external, and internal validities of our research.

We described our sampling plan, all data exclusions, all manipulations, and all measures in this research, and we adhered to the *Journal of Applied Psychology* methodological checklist. All three studies received approval from an IRB. Study 1 received approval from Wake Forest University (IRB No. 0021992: "Trickle Down Leadership"), while Studies 2 and 3 were approved by the Stevens Institute of Technology (IRB No. 2024-008(N): "Jekyll and Hyde Leadership"). Data are available from the authors upon reasonable request. The design, hypotheses, and analysis of Study 1 were not preregistered, while those of Studies 2 and 3 were. Research materials (e.g., measures, vignettes, analyses, and preregistration) are available at [https://osf.io/4kfct/?view\\_only=f57de27d2f5d4fbe948fa8804dc511ab](https://osf.io/4kfct/?view_only=f57de27d2f5d4fbe948fa8804dc511ab).

## Study 1: Method

### Sample and Procedure

A group of 95 working professional MBA students at a southeastern U.S. university assisted with the data collection but did not serve as participants.<sup>1</sup> They identified groups at their workplace and presented prospective supervisors and a random selection of their employees (3–5) with an explanation of the study. Participants must have had (a) an immediate supervisor who had a higher level manager to whom they report and (b) opportunities to observe their supervisors' and higher level managers' interactions in the same group. The MBA students identified 81 supervisors and 346 employees as participants who provided consent to participate in two confidential emailed surveys at Time 1 (T1) and Time 2 (T2) separated by 6 weeks.

At T1, we sent an email containing the link to the first survey to the 346 employees and their 81 supervisors, with a total of 289 employees and 76 supervisors responding. At T2, we emailed the second survey to the 289 employees and 76 supervisors, with 259 employees and 70 supervisors completing them. Among the 259 employees, 10 did not provide T2 responses, and another eight did not have matched T1 supervisor data. Among the 70 supervisors, four did not provide matched performance ratings for another 19 employees. In sum, we excluded a total of 37 employee cases and four supervisor cases. Our final sample consisted of 222 employees (response rate: 64.2%) and 66 supervisors (response rate: 81.5%), who provided matched T1 and T2 data.

The 222 employees had an average age of 41.5 years ( $SD = 11.5$ ) and 44.1% were male, with an average tenure of 9.1 years ( $SD = 9.2$ ) at their current employer; 75.7% were White, 13.5% Black, 5.0% Asian, 3.6% Hispanic, and 1.8% other. Of the 66 supervisors, the average age was 41.6 years ( $SD = 12.4$ ), 53.4% were male, with an average tenure of 12.1 years ( $SD = 9.5$ ) at their current place of employment; 75.7%

were White, 12.1% Black, 4.5% Asian, 3.2% Hispanic, and 4.5% missing. In terms of rank, 18.1% identified themselves as "lower management/supervisory," 50% as "middle management," 21.2% as "executive/upper management," and 10.7% did not report. The 222 employees were nested under the 66 supervisors.

### Measures

We used a 7-point Likert scale (1 = *strongly disagree* to 7 = *strongly agree*) for all measures unless otherwise noted.

#### *Supervisor Abusive Supervision and Ethical Leadership (T1)*

Employees assessed supervisor abusive supervision using Mitchell and Ambrose's (2007) five-item measure (e.g., "My supervisor puts me down in front of others";  $\alpha = .91$ ). They assessed the supervisor's ethical leadership using Brown et al.'s (2005) 10-item ethical leadership scale (e.g., "My supervisor sets an example of how to do things the right way in terms of ethics,"  $\alpha = .92$ ). Given our focus on the group context, we aggregated ratings of abusive supervision (mean  $r_{wg} = .83$ ; the intraclass correlation coefficient (ICC) value was  $ICC1 = .19$  and  $ICC2 = .45$ ) and ethical leadership (mean  $r_{wg} = .84$ ,  $ICC1 = .21$ ,  $ICC2 = .47$ ) to the group level.

#### *Manager Abusive Supervision and Ethical Leadership (T1)*

Supervisors reported higher level manager abusive supervision ( $\alpha = .94$ ) and ethical leadership ( $\alpha = .95$ ) directed toward them using the same scales as described above.

#### *Emotional Exhaustion (T2)*

Employees reported emotional exhaustion using a four-item shortened measure of Maslach et al.'s (1996) exhaustion scale (e.g., Wayne et al., 2017; Y. Zhang et al., 2014). A sample item is "I feel used up at the end of the workday" ( $\alpha = .77$ ).

#### *Performance (T2)*

Supervisors assessed employees' task performance with Liden et al.'s (1993) four-item scale (e.g., "Rate the overall level of performance you observe for this employee"; 1 = *unacceptable* to 7 = *outstanding*;  $\alpha = .95$ ), voice with Van Dyne and LePine's (1998) six-item scale (e.g., "This employee speaks up in this group with ideas for new projects or changes in procedures at work";  $\alpha = .92$ ), and deviance with Bennett and Robinson's (2000) four-item scale (e.g., "This employee comes to work late without permission";  $\alpha = .82$ ; 1 = *never* to 7 = *always*).

<sup>1</sup> We would like to note that the data of this study were collected as part of a larger research project focused on understanding trickle-down leadership (i.e., interactions among followers, supervisors, and higher level managers working in the same group, as well as their implications for follower outcomes). There is a recently published article using the data (i.e., Moss et al., 2020). That said, the published article just used the employee data, whereas the current article used the matched data from both the employees and their supervisors. In addition, except supervisor ethical leadership, the variables used in the two articles do not at all overlap. Finally, the research questions investigated in the two articles are completely different.

## Controls

We included employees' age, gender, ethnicity, organizational tenure, and positive/negative affectivity as they may correlate with perceptions of leadership and influence exhaustion and/or performance (e.g., Alarcon et al., 2009; Duffy et al., 2002; Kaplan et al., 2009; Ng & Feldman, 2008, 2010; Purvanova & Muros, 2010). We conducted analyses with and without these controls (Sturman et al., 2022), yielding consistent results. We report the results with controls for a conservative test of our hypothesized relationships.

## Analytical Strategy

We conducted multilevel path analysis using *Mplus* to test our hypotheses. All effects were estimated simultaneously. We followed Preacher et al. (2010) to specify our multilevel model, using the group-level coefficients for moderation and contingent indirect effects. We followed Aiken and West (1991) to test and plot the moderating effects and conduct simple slope tests. We further calculated the indices of moderated mediation (IMM; Hayes, 2015) and reported the indirect effects of abusive supervision on the performance outcomes at high (+1 *SD*) and low (−1 *SD*) ethical leadership. We relied on the confidence intervals (CIs) obtained from the Monte Carlo simulation with 20,000 replications (Selig & Preacher, 2008). The index of moderated mediation or an indirect effect is significant if the 95% CI excludes zero.

## Study 1: Results

Table 1 presents the descriptive statistics and bivariate correlations among the study variables and other information, such as confirmatory factor analysis results. Table 2 summarizes path analytic results for hypothesis testing. Supervisor abusive supervision and ethical leadership were interactively related to exhaustion ( $\gamma = .23$ ,  $SE = .11$ ,  $p = .026$ ). Figure 2 suggests that the effect of supervisor abusive supervision on exhaustion was positive when supervisor ethical leadership was high ( $\gamma = .38$ ,  $SE = .16$ ,  $p = .015$ ), but not significant when it was low ( $\gamma = .01$ ,  $SE = .11$ ,  $p = .938$ ). Hypothesis 1 was thus supported. In support of Hypothesis 2, the interaction between manager abusive supervision toward the supervisor and manager ethical leadership was related to employee exhaustion ( $\gamma = .23$ ,  $SE = .06$ ,  $p = .000$ ). Figure 3 shows that the effect of manager abusive supervision on exhaustion was positive when manager ethical leadership was high ( $\gamma = .35$ ,  $SE = .06$ ,  $p = .000$ ), but not significant when low ( $\gamma = -.20$ ,  $SE = .15$ ,  $p = .175$ ).

Table 3 summarizes the results for moderation mediation effects. The indirect effect of supervisor abusive supervision on employees' task performance via exhaustion was negative when supervisor ethical leadership was high (estimate =  $-.11$ , 95% CI [ $-.268$ ,  $-.008$ ]), but not significant when low (estimate =  $-.00$ , 95% CI [ $-.071$ ,  $.067$ ]). A significant difference exists between these effects (IMM =  $-.07$ , 95% CI [ $-.169$ ,  $-.003$ ]). Likewise, the indirect effect of manager abusive supervision on task performance via exhaustion was negative when manager ethical leadership was high (estimate =  $-.09$ , 95% CI [ $-.196$ ,  $-.023$ ]), but not significant when low (estimate =  $.05$ , 95% CI [ $-.025$ ,  $.167$ ]). A significant difference also exists between these effects (IMM =  $-.06$ , 95% CI [ $-.134$ ,  $-.013$ ]). Hypotheses 3a and 3b were supported.

Further, the indirect effect of supervisor abusive supervisor on voice was negative when supervisor ethical leadership was high

(estimate =  $-.17$ , 95% CI [ $-.377$ ,  $-.020$ ]), but not significant when low (estimate =  $-.00$ , 95% CI [ $-.101$ ,  $.119$ ]). A significant difference exists between these effects (IMM =  $-.10$ , 95% CI [ $-.255$ ,  $-.005$ ]). Similarly, the indirect effect of managers' abusive supervision toward the supervisor on voice was negative when manager ethical leadership was high (estimate =  $-.15$ , 95% CI [ $-.316$ ,  $-.038$ ]), but not significant when low (estimate =  $.08$ , 95% CI [ $-.037$ ,  $.268$ ]). A significant difference also exists between these effects (IMM =  $-.10$ , 95% CI [ $-.217$ ,  $-.021$ ]). Hypotheses 4a and 4b were thus supported.

Finally, the effect of supervisor abusive supervisor on organizational deviance was positive when supervisor ethical leadership was high (estimate =  $.09$ , 95% CI [ $.003$ ,  $.225$ ]), but not significant when low (estimate =  $.00$ , 95% CI [ $-.086$ ,  $.082$ ]). A difference exists between these effects (IMM =  $.05$ , 95% CI [ $.0002$ ,  $.143$ ]). Likewise, the indirect effect of manager abusive supervision toward the supervisor on deviance was positive when manager ethical leadership was high (estimate =  $.08$ , 95% CI [ $.009$ ,  $.174$ ]), but not significant when low (estimate =  $-.04$ , 95% CI [ $-.138$ ,  $.023$ ]). A significant difference exists between these effects (IMM =  $.05$ , 95% CI [ $.005$ ,  $.114$ ]). Hypotheses 5a and 5b were supported. Next, we further validate the theorized violating effects in our model across two experimental studies.

## Study 2: Method

### Sample and Procedure

We recruited 200 participants from Prolific. Participants had to (a) be 18 years or older, (b) work full time, (c) have a formal supervisor, (d) be an English speaker in the United States or United Kingdom, and (e) have a Prolific approval rate of at least 95%. Each received \$2.00. We inserted one attention-check item (i.e., please select "2" here) to identify careless responses (Meade & Craig, 2012). No one failed the attention check. Of the participants, 48.5% were male, and 51.5% were female. The average age was 38.3 years ( $SD = 10.5$ ); the average organizational tenure was 7.0 years ( $SD = 6.9$ ). 11.5% had a high school diploma, 23.5% associate's degree, 39.0% bachelor's, and 26.0% graduate degree. Moreover, 83.0% self-identified as White/Caucasian, 9.5% Asian, 3.0% Black/African American, 0.5% Hispanic or Latino, and 4.0% other. The experiment used a 2 (supervisor abusive supervision: high vs. low)  $\times$  2 (supervisor ethical leadership: high vs. low) between-subjects design. We directed participants to the scenario where they were led to imagine themselves working in a team with the supervisor Pat and a few other employees. They were then randomly assigned to one of the four conditions.

### Manipulations

Following the practice established by prior studies (e.g., L. Huang & Paterson, 2017; Paterson & Huang, 2019), we constructed the scenarios for low and high ethical leadership based on the items in Brown et al.'s (2005) ethical leadership scale. We used Tröster and Van Quaquebeke's (2021) scenarios for high and low abusive supervision and modified them slightly to better align with Mitchell and Ambrose's (2007) items used in Study 1.

### Measures

We modified the ethical leadership ( $\alpha = .97$ ) and abusive supervision ( $\alpha = .99$ ) scales from Study 1 by changing the referent



**Table 1**  
*Descriptive Statistics and Bivariate Correlations Among Variables (Study 1)*

Variable	M	SD	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14
<b>Group level</b>																
1. Manager abusive supervision	1.53	1.03	—													
2. Manager ethical leadership	5.46	1.22	-.16	—												
3. Supervisor abusive supervision	1.58	0.77	.30*	.06	—											
4. Supervisor ethical leadership	5.36	0.80	-.35**	-.04	-.48**	—										
5. Employee emotional exhaustion	3.03	0.83	.16	.17	.29*	-.22	—									
6. Employee task performance	5.54	0.76	.03	.19	-.28*	.39**	-.26*	—								
7. Employee voice	5.14	0.94	.12	.14	-.24	.17	-.34**	.67**	—							
8. Employee deviance	1.60	0.65	-.04	-.18	.39**	-.07	.33**	-.60**	-.47**	—						
9. Employee gender	.54	0.37	-.03	-.14	-.00	-.00	-.23	.16	.08	-.20	—					
10. Employee age	40.88	8.38	.10	-.08	-.01	-.09	-.18	-.01	.02	-.14	.02	—				
11. Employee organizational tenure	8.48	6.47	.20	-.15	-.03	.00	-.24	-.03	-.04	-.15	.11	.62**	—			
12. Employee ethnicity	0.74	0.35	.07	-.02	-.31*	.14	-.15	-.06	-.02	-.08	.05	.09	.10	—		
13. Employee positive affectivity	5.43	0.54	.03	-.04	.00	.08	-.43**	.02	.10	-.06	.16	.04	.08	.00	—	
14. Employee negative affectivity	2.25	0.49	.03	.06	.39**	-.15	.25*	-.16	-.27*	.17	-.16	-.14	-.04	-.09	-.12	—
<b>Individual level</b>																
1. Supervisor abusive supervision	1.52	1.01	—													
2. Supervisor ethical leadership	5.37	1.15	-.52**	—												
3. Employee emotional exhaustion	2.96	1.26	.26**	-.30**	—											
4. Employee task performance	5.49	1.19	-.19**	.30**	-.17*	—										
5. Employee voice	5.08	1.27	-.16*	.17*	-.20**	.70**	—									
6. Employee deviance	1.58	0.97	.10	-.09	.11	-.61**	-.42**	—								
7. Employee gender	0.56	0.50	.01	.03	-.05	.12	.04	-.12	—							
8. Employee age	41.52	11.51	.07	-.13	-.17*	-.11	-.02	-.01	.03	—						
9. Employee organizational tenure	9.10	9.17	.04	-.08	-.08	-.05	-.01	-.06	.06	.62**	—					
10. Employee ethnicity	0.76	0.43	-.16*	.06	-.06	-.06	-.07	-.06	.08	.11	.09	—				
11. Employee positive affectivity	5.47	0.73	.01	.07	-.25**	-.00	.07	.06	.10	.09	.01	-.12	—			
12. Employee negative affectivity	2.21	0.70	.22**	-.13*	.31**	-.05	-.09	.01	-.05	-.15*	-.11	-.02	-.19**	—		

*Note.*  $N = 66$  groups,  $n = 222$  employees. For gender, male was coded as 0, while female was coded as 1. For ethnicity, non-White was coded as 0, while White was coded as 1. At the group level, employee gender refers to within-group employee participants' gender composition (% of female); age refers to within-group employee participants' age mean; organizational tenure refers to within-group employee participants' organizational tenure mean; and ethnicity refers to within-group employee participants' ethnicity composition (i.e., % of White). A confirmatory factor analysis of the two-factor model including manager abusive supervision and manager ethical leadership shows an acceptable fit with the data,  $\chi^2(89) = 175.56$ , root-mean-square error of approximation (RMSEA) = .12, comparative fit index (CFI) = .91, standardized root-mean-square residual (SRMR) = .06, and fits much better than a single-factor model,  $\chi^2(90) = 704.13$ , RMSEA = .32, CFI = .38, SRMR = .36,  $\Delta\chi^2(1) = 528.57$ ,  $p < .01$ . Further, the two-factor model including supervisor abusive supervision and supervisor ethical leadership shows a good fit with the data,  $\chi^2(89) = 202.98$ , RMSEA = .08, CFI = .92, SRMR = .06, and fits better than the single-factor model,  $\chi^2(90) = 512.78$ , RMSEA = .15, CFI = .71, SRMR = .13,  $\Delta\chi^2(1) = 309.80$ ,  $p < .01$ . Confirmatory factor analysis also demonstrates the distinctiveness of the three supervisor-rated performance outcomes (i.e., task performance, voice behavior, and organizational deviance): the three-factor model,  $\chi^2(74) = 147.22$ , RMSEA = .07, CFI = .95, SRMR = .05, fits the data better than the single-factor model collapsing the three factors into one factor,  $\chi^2(77) = 541.35$ , RMSEA = .17, CFI = .71, SRMR = .11,  $\Delta\chi^2(3) = 394.43$ ,  $p < .01$ . \*  $p < .05$ . \*\*  $p < .01$  (two-tailed).

**Table 2**  
Path Analytic Results for Hypothesis Testing (Study 1)

Variable	Employee emotional exhaustion		Employee task performance		Employee voice		Employee deviance	
	$\gamma$	SE	$\gamma$	SE	$\gamma$	SE	$\gamma$	SE
Control variables								
Employee gender	-.26	.22	.58**	.16	.16	.25	-.39*	.17
Employee age	-.01	.01	.01	.01	.01	.02	-.01	.01
Employee organizational tenure	-.02	.01	-.03	.02	-.03	.02	-.00	.01
Employee ethnicity	-.26	.24	-.44*	.17	-.45	.30	.19	.16
Employee positive affectivity	-.65**	.14	-.25	.16	-.19	.22	.15	.14
Employee negative affectivity	.08	.20	.04	.18	-.10	.23	-.14	.16
Managers' behaviors								
Manager abusive supervision	.08	.08	.26**	.08	.31**	.10	-.11	.08
Manager ethical leadership	.04	.06	.20**	.05	.20*	.08	-.18**	.05
Manager Abusive Supervision $\times$ Manager Ethical leadership	.23**	.06	.02	.06	.07	.08	-.04	.06
Supervisors' behaviors								
Supervisor abusive supervision	.20	.11	-.23	.14	-.36	.18	.44**	.15
Supervisor ethical leadership	-.17	.11	.38**	.12	.30	.20	.05	.10
Supervisor Abusive Supervision $\times$ Supervisor Ethical leadership	.23*	.11	-.04	.10	-.24	.14	.09	.10
Mediator								
Employee emotional exhaustion			-.29**	.11	-.45**	.16	.23*	.10
$R^2$	.084		.122		.179		.116	

Note.  $N = 66$  groups,  $n = 222$  employees. For gender, male was coded as 0, while female was coded as 1. For ethnicity, non-White was coded as 0, while White was coded as 1. All the demographic controls were operationalized at the group level: At the group level, employee gender refers to within-group employee participants' gender composition (% of female); age refers to within-group employee participants age mean; organizational tenure refers to within-group employee participants' organizational tenure mean; ethnicity refers to within-group employee participants ethnicity composition (i.e., % of White). Multilevel path analysis was the appropriate strategy for analyzing our model, evidenced by an intraclass correlation coefficient 1 of .18 for emotional exhaustion, .13 for task performance, .31 for voice behavior, and .14 for organizational deviance. Further, emotional exhaustion:  $F(65, 155) = 1.72, p = .004$ ; task performance:  $F(65, 155) = 1.48, p = .026$ ; voice behavior:  $F(65, 155) = 2.50, p = .000$ ; and organizational deviance:  $F(65, 155) = 1.57, p = .013$ , varied significantly across different groups. SE = standard error.

\*  $p < .05$ . \*\*  $p < .01$  (two-tailed).

from "My supervisor" to "Pat." We adapted the emotional exhaustion scale used in Study 1 to measure anticipated emotional exhaustion when imagining oneself working with Pat (e.g., "I would feel fatigued";  $\alpha = .97$ ). To measure justice uncertainty, we modified the four items used in Matta et al. (2017) as adapted from Colquitt

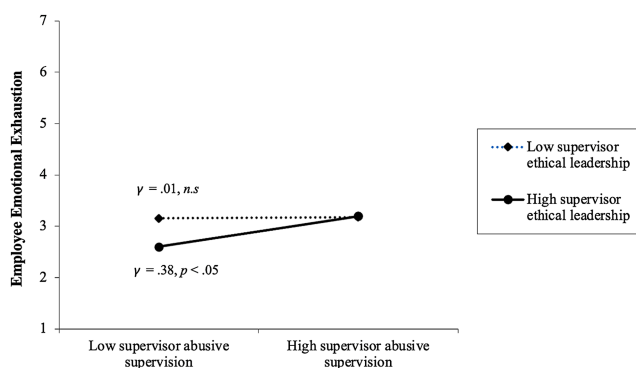
et al. (2012; e.g., "There's a lot of uncertainty about how fairly Pat would act";  $\alpha = .95$ ). We assessed all variables using a 7-point Likert-type scale (1 = *strongly disagree* to 7 = *strongly agree*).

## Study 2: Results

Table 4 shows the descriptive statistics and bivariate correlations among our variables. Table 5 shows the analysis of variance (ANOVA) results for hypothesis testing. As noted beneath the table, our manipulations of abusive supervision and ethical leadership were effective. We found a significant interaction effect of supervisor abusive supervision and ethical leadership on anticipated exhaustion,  $F(1, 196) = 31.53, p < .001, \eta^2 = .139$ . Figure 4 shows that at high ethical leadership, there was a significant difference in anticipated exhaustion between the participants in the low ( $M = 3.21, SD = 1.45$ ) and high ( $M = 5.94, SD = 1.10$ ) abusive supervision groups,  $diff_{(high-low)} = 2.73, F(1, 196) = 131.42, p < .001$ . At low ethical leadership, there was a significant, yet relatively smaller, difference between those in the low ( $M = 5.37, SD = 1.27$ ) and high ( $M = 6.19, SD = .90$ ) abusive supervision groups,  $diff_{(high-low)} = .82, F(1, 196) = 11.34, p = .001$ .

Supervisor abusive supervision and ethical leadership also interacted to influence justice uncertainty,  $F(1, 196) = 59.84, p < .001, \eta^2 = .234$ . Figure 5 shows that at high ethical leadership, there was a significant difference in justice uncertainty between those in the low ( $M = 2.28, SD = 1.23$ ) and high ( $M = 5.75,$

**Figure 2**  
The Violating Effect of Supervisor Ethical Leadership in Exacerbating the Detrimental Influence of Supervisor Abusive Supervision on Employee Emotional Exhaustion (Study 1)



Note. n.s. = not significant. See the online article for the color version of this figure.

**Table 3**  
Summary of Conditional Indirect Effects (Study 1)

Indirect effect or index of moderated mediation	Estimate	95% CI
Supervisor abusive supervision → emotional exhaustion → performance outcomes		
Task performance as the outcome		
Low supervisor ethical leadership	-.00	[-.071, .067]
High supervisor ethical leadership	-.11*	[-.268, -.008]
Index of moderated mediation	-.07*	[-.169, -.003]
Voice behavior as the outcome		
Low supervisor ethical leadership	-.00	[-.101, .119]
High supervisor ethical leadership	-.17*	[-.377, -.020]
Index of moderated mediation	-.10*	[-.255, -.005]
Organizational deviance as the outcome		
Low supervisor ethical leadership	.00	[-.086, .082]
High supervisor ethical leadership	.09*	[.003, .225]
Index of moderated mediation	.05*	[.0002, .143]
Manager abusive supervision → emotional exhaustion → performance outcomes		
Task performance as the outcome		
Low manager ethical leadership	.05	[-.025, .167]
High manager ethical leadership	-.09*	[-.196, -.023]
Index of moderated mediation	-.06*	[-.134, -.013]
Voice behavior as the outcome		
Low manager ethical leadership	.08	[-.037, .268]
High manager ethical leadership	-.15*	[-.316, -.038]
Index of moderated mediation	-.10*	[-.217, -.021]
Organizational deviance as the outcome		
Low manager ethical leadership	-.04	[-.138, .023]
High manager ethical leadership	.08*	[.009, .174]
Index of moderated mediation	.05*	[.005, .114]

Note. Values in the brackets reflect a 95% confidence interval (CI). Asterisks, along with the values presented in bold, indicate that 95% CI did not include 0, suggesting significant indirect effects or index of moderated mediation.

$SD = 1.28$ ) abusive supervision groups,  $\text{diff}_{(\text{high-low})} = 3.48$ ,  $F(1, 196) = 173.89$ ,  $p < .001$ . At low ethical leadership, a significant but relatively smaller difference was observed between the low ( $M = 4.98$ ,  $SD = 1.36$ ) and high ( $M = 5.54$ ,  $SD = 1.46$ ) abusive supervision groups,  $\text{diff}_{(\text{high-low})} = .56$ ,  $F(1, 196) = 4.36$ ,  $p = .038$ . We then dummy-coded abusive supervision (low = 0; high = 1) and ethical leadership (low = 0; high = 1). Using path analysis, we examined and found support for the interaction effect on anticipated exhaustion via justice uncertainty (estimate = 1.13, 95% CI [.726, 1.599]). In supplemental analyses, we ruled out alternative explanations for the mediation effect, including norm ambiguity (i.e., ambiguity about behavioral norms) and relational ambivalence (i.e., ambivalence about one's relationship with the supervisor; see Supplemental Tables S2.1 and S2.2).

### Study 3: Method

#### Sample and Procedures

We recruited a second sample of 200 participants from Prolific. Participants met the same criteria noted in Study 2, and each received \$2.00. We inserted the same attention-check item used in Study 2, and no participants failed the check. Of the participants, 53.5% were male, 46.0% female, and 0.5% nonbinary. Their average age was 40.0 years old ( $SD = 11.3$ ) and average organizational tenure was 8.1 years ( $SD = 7.4$ ). 15.5% had a

high school diploma, 21.0% associate's degree, 48.5% bachelor's degree, and 15.0% graduate degree. 85.0% self-identified as White/Caucasian, 7.5% Asian, 3.5% Black/African American, 1.0% Hispanic or Latino, and 3.0% other. The experiment used a 2 (manager abusive supervision: high vs. low)  $\times$  2 (manager ethical leadership: high vs. low) between-subject design. We directed participants to imagine themselves working in a team with the supervisor Pat, the higher level manager Chris, and group coworkers. After reading information about the supervisor and the manager, participants were randomly assigned to one of the four conditions.

#### Manipulations

We modified the manipulation text from Study 2 by changing the referent from "Pat" to "Chris," the higher level manager. We also modified the manipulation text from Study 2 to describe Chris's abusive supervision toward the supervisor, Pat.

#### Measures

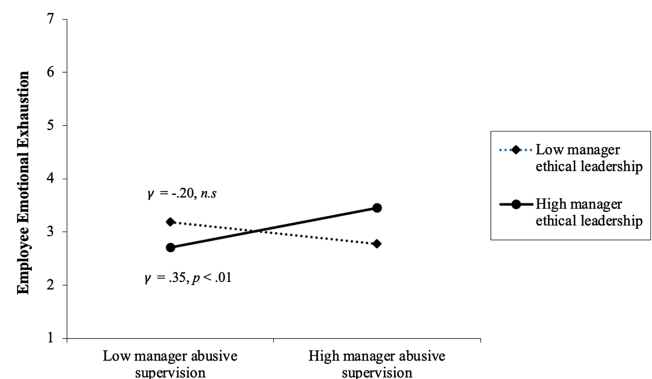
We modified the ethical leadership scale from Study 2 by changing the referent from "Pat" to "Chris" ( $\alpha = .97$ ). We also modified the abusive supervision scale from Study 2 to measure Chris's abusive supervision toward Pat ( $\alpha = .98$ ). We measured anticipated emotional exhaustion using the scale from Study 2 ( $\alpha = .96$ ). We assessed uncertainty about supervisors' linking-pin role effectiveness with five items (e.g., "I am not sure whether Pat can influence Chris to assign our team desired tasks";  $\alpha = .93$ ) using key supervisor role responsibilities identified from Graen et al. (1977) and Mumford (2002). We assessed all variables using a 7-point Likert-type scale (1 = *strongly disagree* to 7 = *strongly agree*).

### Study 3: Results

Table 4 shows the descriptive statistics and bivariate correlations among our variables. Table 6 shows the ANOVA results. As noted beneath the table, our manipulations of manager abusive supervision and ethical leadership were effective. We found an interaction effect

#### Figure 3

*The Violating Effect of Manager Ethical Leadership in Exacerbating the Detrimental Influence of Manager Abusive Supervision Toward the Supervisor on Employee Emotional Exhaustion (Study 1)*



Note. n.s. = not significant. See the online article for the color version of this figure.

**Table 4**  
Descriptive Statistics and Bivariate Correlations Among Variables (Studies 2 and 3)

Variable	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	1	2	3	4
Study 2						
1. Supervisor abusive supervision	0.49	0.50	—			
2. Supervisor ethical leadership	0.51	0.50	.02	—		
3. Justice uncertainty	4.62	1.93	.53**	-.32**	(.95)	
4. Anticipated emotional exhaustion	5.16	1.68	.53**	-.36**	.72**	(.97)
Study 3						
1. Manager abusive supervision	0.50	0.50	—			
2. Manager ethical leadership	0.50	0.50	.01	—		
3. Uncertainty about supervisors' linking-pin role effectiveness	4.49	1.34	.18**	-.33**	(.93)	
4. Anticipated emotional exhaustion	4.90	1.54	.29**	-.41**	.44**	(.96)

Note.  $N = 200$  for Study 2 and  $N = 200$  for Study 3. For supervisor (manager) abusive supervision, low condition was coded 0, and high condition was coded 1. Cronbach's  $\alpha$  estimates of the included variables are presented in parentheses along the diagonal line of the table.

\*\*  $p < .01$  (two-tailed).

of the two leadership variables on anticipated exhaustion,  $F(1, 196) = 11.30, p = .001, \eta^2 = .055$ . Figure 6 shows that at high ethical leadership, there is a significant difference in anticipated exhaustion between those in the low ( $M = 3.49, SD = 1.46$ ) and high ( $M = 5.03, SD = 1.23$ ) abusive supervision groups,  $\text{diff}_{(\text{high-low})} = 1.55, F(1, 196) = 34.58, p < .001$ . At low ethical leadership, there was a nonsignificant difference between those in the low ( $M = 5.36, SD = 1.44$ ) and high ( $M = 5.67, SD = 1.06$ ) abusive supervision groups,  $\text{diff}_{(\text{high-low})} = .30, F(1, 196) = 1.35, p = .247$ .

Results also suggest a significant interaction effect of the two leadership variables on uncertainty about the supervisor's linking-pin role effectiveness,  $F(1, 196) = 21.75, p < .001, \eta^2 = .100$ . Figure 7 shows that in the high manager ethical leadership condition, a significant difference exists in the levels of this form of uncertainty between those in the low ( $M = 3.40, SD = 1.30$ ) and high ( $M = 4.68, SD = 1.20$ ) manager abusive supervision groups,  $\text{diff}_{(\text{high-low})} = 1.29, F(1, 196) = 29.24, p < .001$ . In the low manager

ethical leadership condition, there was a nonsignificant difference between those in the low ( $M = 5.05, SD = 1.07$ ) and high ( $M = 4.78, SD = 1.17$ ) manager abusive supervision groups,  $\text{diff}_{(\text{high-low})} = -.28, F(1, 196) = 1.36, p = .245$ .

We also found support for the interaction effect of the two leadership styles on anticipated exhaustion via uncertainty about the supervisor's linking-pin role effectiveness (estimate = .45, 95% CI [.188, .785]). In supplementary analyses, we ruled out alternative explanations, including norm ambiguity ( $\alpha = .96$ ), relational ambivalence with the supervisor ( $\alpha = .94$ ), and justice uncertainty concerning the manager (e.g., "There's a lot of uncertainty about how fairly Chris would act,"  $\alpha = .93$ ; see Supplemental Tables S3.1 and S3.2).

## General Discussion

### Theoretical Implications

Uncertainty management theory (Van den Bos & Lind, 2002) and its application to justice variability (Matta et al., 2017, 2020) in the leadership domain have focused on employees' direct experiences of supervisors' (in)justice and not directly tested the leader behaviors driving such variability. We broaden understanding by showing how employees' direct experiences of their supervisors' inconsistent abusive and ethical behaviors (i.e., justice variability) significantly increase their exhaustion. Moreover, employees' vicarious experiences of their supervisors being treated inconsistently by their skip-level managers exert a similarly depleting effect. We identify key mechanisms, finding that the destructive impacts of these direct and vicarious experiences are driven by two distinct forms of uncertainty: (a) uncertainty about supervisors' justice in their supervisory role duties and (b) uncertainty about supervisors' effectiveness in their linking-pin role responsibilities, respectively.

Our findings further illuminate key behavioral outcomes. We find that employees' exhaustion mediates the relationship between their direct and vicarious experiences of abusive and ethical leadership (justice variability) across two levels (supervisor and manager) onto all three forms of performance outlined in Rotundo and Sackett's (2002) taxonomy: task performance, voice, and deviance. These effects extend beyond employees' self-reported psychological

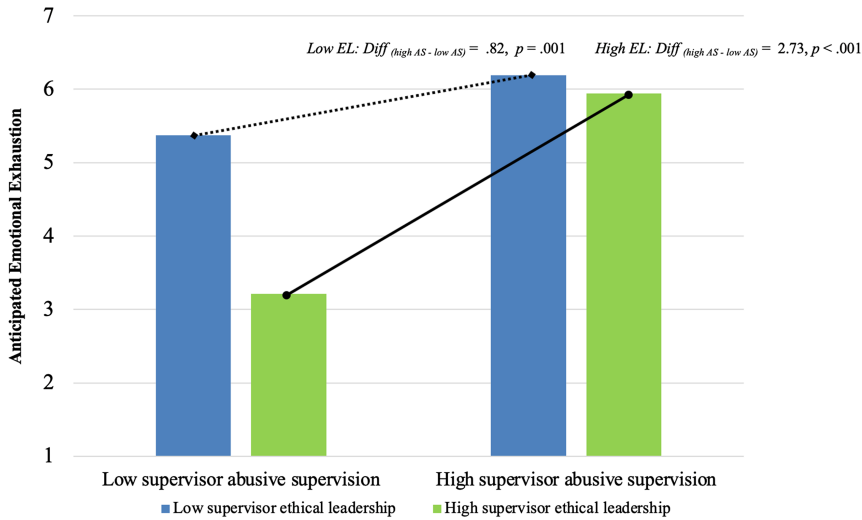
**Table 5**  
Two-Way Analysis of Variance Results for Hypothesis Testing (Study 2)

Variable	Anticipated emotional exhaustion		Justice uncertainty	
	<i>F</i>	$\eta^2$	<i>F</i>	$\eta^2$
Supervisor abusive supervision	108.72**	.36	114.88**	.37
Supervisor ethical leadership	50.62**	.21	43.29**	.18
Supervisor Abusive Supervision $\times$ Supervisor Ethical Leadership	31.53**	.14	59.84**	.23

Note.  $N = 200$ . Supervisor abusive supervision: 0 = low, 1 = high; supervisor ethical leadership: 0 = low, 1 = high. The ratings of supervisor ethical leadership in the high ethical leadership group ( $M = 5.09, SD = 1.43$ ) were significantly higher than those in the low ethical leadership group ( $M = 1.99, SD = 1.01$ ),  $F(1, 198) = 312.00, p < .001$ . Moreover, the ratings of supervisor abusive supervision in the high abusive supervision group ( $M = 6.16, SD = 1.10$ ) were significantly higher than those in the low abusive supervision group ( $M = 1.84, SD = 1.16$ ),  $F(1, 198) = 730.71, p < .001$ . Thus, the manipulations were effective.

\*\*  $p < .01$  (two-tailed).

**Figure 4**  
*The Violating Effect of Supervisor Ethical Leadership in Exacerbating the Detrimental Influence of Supervisor Abusive Supervision on Anticipated Emotional Exhaustion (Study 2)*



Note. EL = ethical leadership; AS = abusive supervision; Diff = difference. See the online article for the color version of this figure.

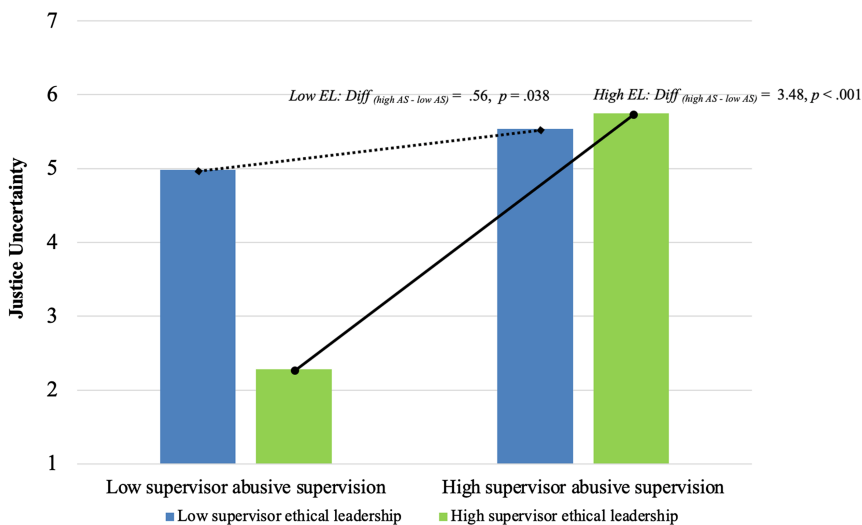
outcomes, the focus of prior research on justice variability (Matta et al., 2017).

Further, our findings open new avenues for research to advance the vicarious leadership and (in)justice literature. We expand focus from how supervisors treat employees' coworkers to how higher managers treat employees' supervisors. Unlike coworkers, supervisors serve crucial linking-pin roles, connecting their group to higher management. Thus, managers' justice variability toward supervisors creates a distinct psychological experience on employees, as it would potentially impact their personal outcomes more so

than when a peer is being abused. The mechanism of linking-pin role effectiveness uncertainty elucidates this unique experience.

We also extend research that has predominantly used supervisors' quality of exchange relationship with the higher manager, or leader-leader exchange as a proxy for their effectiveness as a linking-pin. We were motivated by research showing that even with high relationship quality, managers may still abuse a target, which sends negative relational signals (Lian et al., 2012; Tröster & Van Quaquebeke, 2021; Xu et al., 2015). Our Study 3 highlights the theoretical value of taking a behavioral perspective to understand

**Figure 5**  
*The Violating Effect of Supervisor Ethical Leadership in Exacerbating the Detrimental Influence of Supervisor Abusive Supervision on Justice Uncertainty (Study 2)*



Note. EL = ethical leadership; AS = abusive supervision; Diff = difference. See the online article for the color version of this figure.

**Table 6**

*Two-Way Analysis of Variance Results for Hypothesis Testing (Study 3)*

Variable	Anticipated emotional exhaustion		Linking-pin role effectiveness uncertainty	
	<i>F</i>	$\eta^2$	<i>F</i>	$\eta^2$
Manager abusive supervision	24.96**	.11	9.14**	.05
Manager ethical leadership	46.18**	.19	27.17**	.12
Manager Abusive Supervision $\times$ Manager Ethical Leadership	11.30**	.06	21.75**	.10

*Note.*  $N = 200$ . Manager abusive supervision: 0 = low, 1 = high; manager ethical leadership: 0 = low, 1 = high. The ratings of manager ethical leadership in the high ethical leadership group ( $M = 5.11$ ,  $SD = 1.16$ ) were significantly higher than those in the low ethical leadership group ( $M = 2.03$ ,  $SD = 1.05$ ),  $F(1, 198) = 389.76$ ,  $p < .001$ . Moreover, the ratings of manager abusive supervision toward the supervisor in the high abusive supervision group ( $M = 5.95$ ,  $SD = 1.15$ ) were significantly higher than those in the low abusive supervision group ( $M = 2.09$ ,  $SD = 1.32$ ),  $F(1, 198) = 485.15$ ,  $p < .001$ . Thus, the manipulations were effective. \*\*  $p < .01$  (two-tailed).

how leadership styles influence employees' perceptions of linking-pin role effectiveness. These findings complement existing approaches to conceptualizing and operationalizing supervisors' linking-pin role effectiveness and should inspire research to further broaden the nomological network of this construct.

### Practical Implications

Organizations should adopt all available HR tools (e.g., selection, training, rewards, and disciplinary actions) to prevent "Jekyll and Hyde" leadership, characterized by the simultaneous display of abuse

and ethical leadership. For example, organizations should provide training on effective self-regulation to leaders to mitigate potential displays of abuse following the enactment of ethical leadership. They should also prioritize selecting leaders with high self-control, who are more likely to exhibit consistent, fair leadership. Additionally, establishing reporting channels for employees to raise concerns about inconsistent leadership and creating protocols to hold leaders accountable are essential steps. Our research also highlights the impact of leader-leader interactions, showing that employees are also affected by the dynamics between supervisors and higher level managers. Organizations should thus address "Jekyll and Hyde" leadership at all levels to foster a more consistent and fair leadership environment.

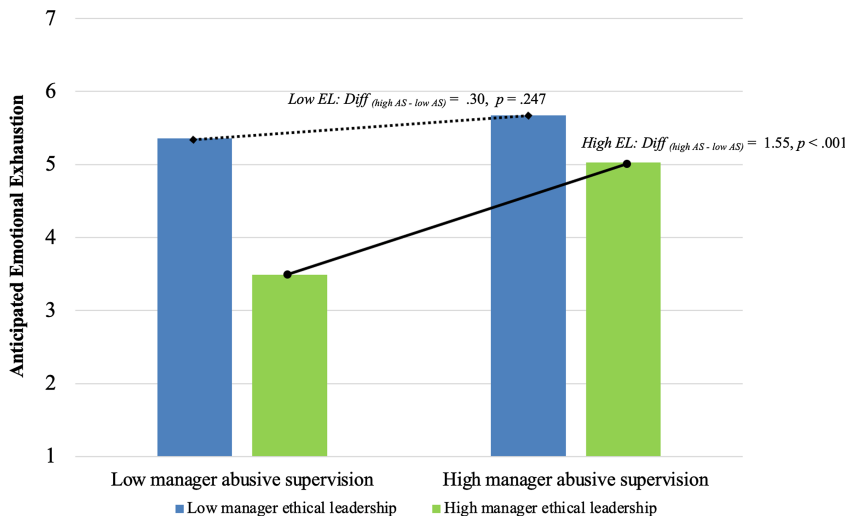
### Limitations and Future Directions

In Study 1, while using supervisors' reports of higher level managers' leadership styles provided a separate rating source that helps to reduce common methods bias, those ratings may not align with employees' perceptions of the managers. Yet, consistent results from Study 3 boost confidence in our findings. Moreover, while our performance outcomes cover three major forms of job performance, future research may consider additional outcomes influenced by exhaustion, such as creativity and proactive behaviors. Studies 2 and 3 were also limited due to study design restrictions imposed by the IRB to not put participants under stress. We used vignette-based experimental designs that necessitated measuring anticipated emotional exhaustion. However, we have noted theoretical reasons to support its validity in the vignette-based studies and also found results consistent with those of our field study.

In considering future research, researchers can explore other theoretical perspectives for the consequences of "Jekyll and Hyde" leadership beyond the justice variability and linking-pin effectiveness

**Figure 6**

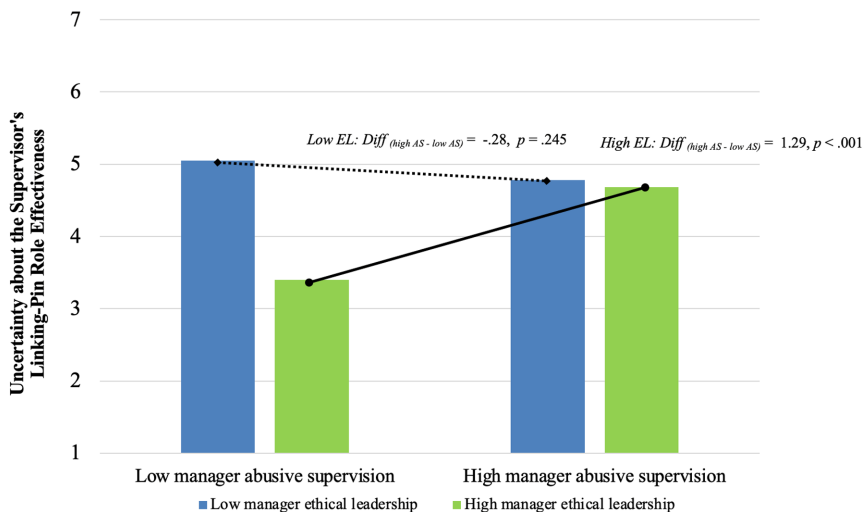
*The Violating Effect of Manager Ethical Leadership in Exacerbating the Detrimental Influence of Manager Abusive Supervision Toward the Supervisor on Anticipated Emotional Exhaustion (Study 3)*



*Note.* EL = ethical leadership; AS = abusive supervision; Diff = difference. See the online article for the color version of this figure.

**Figure 7**

*The Violating Effect of Manager Ethical Leadership in Exacerbating the Detrimental Influence of Manager Abusive Supervision Toward the Supervisor on Uncertainty About the Supervisor's Linking-Pin Role Effectiveness (Study 3)*



*Note.* EL = ethical leadership; AS = abusive supervision; Diff = difference. See the online article for the color version of this figure.

theories used in our study. The complex multilevel data such as our Study 1 also raise many interesting questions. Scholars can assess (a) whether supervisors socially learn from managers' "Jekyll and Hyde" leadership by adopting one leadership style, both, or neither and (b) whether a manager's use of both leadership styles interrupts the supervisor's social learning of either style. Scholars can also assess the consequences of the (in)congruent effects of managers' abusive supervision (ethical leadership) and supervisors' abusive supervision (ethical leadership) and the interactive effects of inconsistent leadership across leaders and levels. We did not hypothesize these effects given our research scope; however, we provide various exploratory results in our Supplemental Tables S1.1–S1.4 and Supplemental Figures S1.2–S1.3.

## Conclusion

We advance a comprehensive framework for understanding "Jekyll and Hyde" leadership by developing a model that integrates abusive and ethical leadership styles from two key sources: supervisors toward employees and higher level managers toward those employees' supervisors. We illuminate the distinct psychological mechanisms underlying these direct and vicarious experiences, demonstrating how they ultimately impair employees' job performance.

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