# ABSTRACT

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| Title of Dissertation: | WHY ARE LEADERS PERCEIVED AS ABUSIVE: EVALUATING THE DEFINITION OF ABUSIVE LEADERSHIP WITH AN EXPERIMENTAL EXAMINATION COMPARING HARMFUL LEADER INTENTIONS, BEHAVIORS, AND THE FREQUENCY OF LEADER ACTIONS |
| | Benjamin R. Levine, Doctor of Philosophy, 2020 |
| Dissertation directed by: | Dr. James A. Grand, Department of Psychology |

Abusive leadership, subordinates' perceptions of the extent to which supervisors engage in systematic and repeated hostile behaviors that violate the interests of the organization, subordinates, or both, is a widespread issue with far reaching consequences. It is consequently vital for organizations to monitor and neutralize these behaviors, to improve the lives of individual employees and their overall company performance. Unfortunately, research on abusive leadership is muddled as many researchers have coined their own terms for similar behaviors and phenomena. The lack of clarity and agreement on the definition is a continual source of friction in this research area, and it presents a roadblock for practitioners seeking to reduce abusive leadership. The current research leveraged an experimental methodology to critically examine and refine the definition of abusive leadership through testing its three core assumptions. Drawn from the three core assumptions, three factors, leader intentions, the frequency of exposure to leader behavior, and the harm caused by leader behavior, were included to provide the first experimental test of the influence of each factor on perceptions of abusive leadership. A longitudinal design was utilized to model the influence of frequency of exposure, and leader intentions and the harm of leader behaviors were specifically manipulated in the study. Across five trials, 208 participants completed tasks and interacted with videos of a confederate leader. After each trial, participants provided ratings of their perceptions of the leader's abusiveness. Results from a repeated measures ANOVA and an HLM growth model suggested strong support for the influence of leader intentions, harm of leader behaviors and frequency of exposure on perceptions of abusive leadership. Guidance for updating the definition of abusive leadership, theoretical and practical implications of the study, as well as future directions are also discussed.

# WHY ARE LEADERS PERCEIVED AS ABUSIVE: EVALUATING THE DEFINITION OF ABUSIVE LEADERSHIP WITH AN EXPERIMENTAL EXAMINATION COMPARING HARMFUL LEADER INTENTIONS, BEHAVIORS, AND THE FREQUENCY OF LEADER ACTIONS

by

Benjamin R. Levine

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Advisory Committee:
Grand, James A. Ph.D., Chair
Hanges, Paul J. Ph.D.
Wessel, Jennifer L. Ph.D.
Lemay, Edward P. Ph.D.
Shapiro, Debra L. Ph.D., Dean's Representative

# Table of Contents

# List of Tables

# List of Figures

**Why are Leaders Perceived as Abusive: Evaluating the Definition of Abusive Leadership with an Experimental Examination Comparing Harmful Leader Intentions, Behaviors, and the Frequency of Leader Actions**

Although the classic research literature has assumed the prevalence of abusive leadership to be a low base rate phenomenon (Aryee et al., 2007), many researchers believe it to be a widespread issue with far reaching consequences (c.f. Asland et al., 2009; Burke, 2006; Hogan, Raskin & Fazzini, 1990). However, the majority of leadership research almost exclusively focuses on positive aspects of leadership, while the negative areas, such as abusive leadership, remain significantly under-researched in organizational psychology (Dihn et al., 2014). A facet of the more general destructive leadership, abusive leadership reflects subordinates' perceptions of the extent to which leaders engage in systematic and repeated hostile behaviors that violate the interests of the organization, subordinates, or both (Aasland et al., 2009; Einarsen, Aasland, & Skogstad, 2007; Krasikova, Green, & LeBreton, 2013; Tepper, 2000)

Abusive leadership impacts nearly 15% of US workers and results in substantial costs (Tepper, 2007). Costs, including diminished employee well-being and quality of work-life, often spill over to home lives, (Schat, Frone, & Kelloway, 2006), while abusive leadership also results in financial losses for US corporations estimated in the billions (Tepper, Duffy, Henle, & Lambert, 2006). Profits are lost, for example, as individual and organizational performance suffers, competent and talented employees withdraw from the organization, and the organizational culture becomes tainted. Abusive leadership is also negatively correlated with many desirable

follower outcomes and behaviors (e.g. well-being, performance, attitudes toward the leader) and positively correlated with undesirable outcomes (e.g. turnover, counterproductive work behaviors) (Schyns & Schilling, 2013). In addition, even minor acts of abusive leadership may incur substantial harm if they are not counteracted immediately and become chronic (Duffy et al., 2002). It is consequently vital for organizations to monitor and neutralize these behaviors, to improve their overall company performance and also the lives of individual employees.

Unfortunately, research on abusive supervision is muddled as many researchers have coined their own terms for similar behaviors and phenomena. For example, 'abusive supervision' (Tepper, 2000), 'petty tyranny' (Ashforth, 1994), the 'dark side of leadership' (Conger, 1990), 'toxic leadership' (Lipman-Blumen, 2005), and 'impaired managers' (Lubit, 2004) all share similar features, including intimidating or humiliating subordinates, outright neglect, goal prevention, or even encouraging employees to engage in illegal or counterproductive behaviors. To this end, the definition of abusive leadership has emerged as a central topic of disagreement (c.f. Einarsen et al., 2007). A large body of research defines abusive leadership in the eye of the beholder, such that the perceiver categorizes leaders as abusive or not based upon whether or not the leader intended to cause harm through their actions (e.g. Tepper, 2000; 2007). A separate group of researchers (e.g. Einarsen et al., 2007) completely reject the focus on intent. Instead, these researchers suggest focusing entirely on the outcome of leader behaviors. The lack of clarity and agreement on the definition is a continual source of friction in this research area. Additionally, the lack of agreement surrounding the definition presents a roadblock

for practitioners seeking to reduce abusive leadership. Specifically, practitioners can't be expected to reduce the occurrence of something we do not fully understand. Therefore, the abusive leadership literature, as well as practitioners, employees and organizations, would benefit from an investigation to illuminate the nature of this phenomenon to settle these larger disagreements and provide clarity on the definition.

The purpose of this paper is thus the critical examination and refinement of the definition of abusive leadership through testing its three core assumptions. The three assumptions, all of which relate to the perception of abusive leadership, consider 1) the manner by which a follower's perceptions of leader intent activate perceptions of abusive leadership, 2) the frequency of abusive behavior as an indicator of abusive leadership, and 3) the impact of the degree of harm caused by a leader's behavior on perceptions of abusive leadership. In order to facilitate this examination, an experimental study was designed and conducted to investigate how each of the three core assumptions (intent, frequency, and degree of harm) related to perceptions of abusive leadership. This paper begins with an overview of the current state of abusive leadership research after which the disagreements and key assumptions will be further scrutinized and examined. Finally, the experimental study will be presented and discussed.

**A Note on Abusive Terminology**

A key feature of the definition of abusive leadership is subjective perception. In their review, Tepper and colleagues (2017) highlight criticisms that research in this area is often not explicit in acknowledging the focus on perceptions of abuse as opposed to objective indicators of abusive behavior (see Chan & MCallister, 2014;

Martinko et al., 2013). By relying on Tepper's (2000) definition of abusive leadership, this paper will avoid adding the word "perceived" when referring to abusive leadership; however, and unless otherwise noted, the present research acknowledges and operates from the presumption that abusive leadership is a perception. A distinction should also be made between abusive leadership *behaviors* and abusive leadership more generally. Abusive behaviors can be any harmful leader behavior not related to the leadership task (Thoroughgood et al., 2012), whereas abusive leadership is limited to the instances which include follower-targeted influence (Schyns & Schilling, 2013).

## Current Perspectives on Abusive Leadership

Abusive leadership can be defined as subordinates' perceptions of the extent to which supervisors engage in systematic and repeated hostile behaviors that violate the interests of the organization, subordinates, or both (Aasland et al., 2009; Krasikova, Green, & LeBreton, 2013; Tepper, 2000). Abusive leadership behaviors are often described as actions that intimidate, belittle or humiliate subordinates in public (Aryee et al., 2007). Examples of these types of hostile leader behaviors include, but are not limited to, public criticism, belittling or shaming, loud and angry tantrums, rudeness, inconsiderate actions, and coercion (Bies, 2000; Bies & Tripp, 1998). Subordinates often view abusive leaders and their behaviors as a "social toxin" poisoning the subordinates' professional and personal lives.

Abusive leadership is often differentiated from other types of destructive leadership by focusing on the leader's intention to cause harm (Krasikova, Green, & LeBreton, 2013; Tepper, 2007). More specifically, a leader may only be considered

abusive if subordinates perceive the leader's repeated actions or behaviors as harmful or intending to cause harm (Tepper, 2007). An act may qualify someone as an abusive leader in the eyes of one subordinate, but not in others. Intent refers to the attribution a subordinate makes regarding the leader's behavior. For example, when a leader berates a subordinate for poor performance in front of the rest of the team, that subordinate (and other team members) can attempt to determine what the leader intended by that behavior. Feasibly, an individual could perceive this as a typical leader behavior designed to motivate the team and individual with no intention of harm, and thus not consider the behavior abusive. However, another individual may view this behavior as harmful to the individual being berated and the social fabric of the team. Since the person perceives the leader as acting with intention to harm the subordinate and team, the leader's behavior may be classified as abusive. Intention therefore represents a lynchpin in distinguishing abusive leaders from other types of leadership.

Research on abusive leadership initially focused entirely on the consequences of abusive leadership (Tepper, Simon, & Park, 2017). As noted previously, abusive leadership has been linked to a wide range of dysfunctional and harmful outcomes for subordinates, leaders and organizations (Mackey et al., 2015, Schyns & Schilling, 2013). While this still remains a topic of interest, more contemporary research has also begun to examine the antecedents and the emergent process of abusive leadership (Tepper, Simon, & Park, 2017; Zhang & Liao, 2015). In the following sections, these current perspectives on abusive leadership are outlined. Research concerning the consequences and previous models of abusive leadership are also described. Lastly,

following the general review of the abusive leadership literature, the three assumptions at the heart of the definition of abusive leadership will be presented and discussed.

The focus of the current research is perceptions of abusive leadership. Although the majority of abusive leadership research defines abusive leadership as a *subjective perception,* in line with Tepper's (2000) definition, researchers typically operationalize and study abusive leadership as a *behavior*. This contradiction is one of the largest criticisms of the research space (see Tepper, Simon, & Park, 2017). To date, the literature has not explored the antecedents and consequences of perceptions of abusive leadership. Therefore, while the focus and studies of the current research remains perceptions of abusive leadership, the review of the abusive leadership literature will outline extant research that focuses on abusive behaviors.

**Antecedents of Abusive Leadership Behavior**

To date, extant work examining antecedents of abusive leadership has tended to focus on either employee characteristics that may engender abusive leader reactions (Tepper, 2007; Tepper et al., 2017; Zhang & Bednall, 2016) or resource depletion explanations that consider the characteristics of a leader (Waldman et al., 2018). With respect to the latter focus, Tepper and colleagues (2017) have grouped work examining the characteristics of leaders that contribute to abusive behavior into three categories: social learning, identity threat, and self-regulation impairment. Social learning explanations are grounded in Bandura's (1973) social learning theory and suggest that leaders learn which behaviors and attitudes are appropriate by observing their environment. Over time, they may come to believe that abusive

behaviors are acceptable and rewarding. Second, identity threat explanations suggest that leaders may be more likely to abuse subordinates when they experience direct threats to their identity as a leader, their sense of power and control, or their competence to fulfil their responsibilities (Tepper et al., 2017). As individuals gain power in organizations, threats are not uncommon. For example, research suggests that holding positions of power increases reactivity to competence threats (Fast & Chen, 2009). Finally, self-regulation perspectives focus on the ways people manage thoughts and emotions as then engage behaviors to accomplish goals (Baumeister et al. 1998, Schmeichel & Baumeister 2004). When self-regulation works properly, people are able to monitor and modify their behavior (Carver 1979, Carver & Scheier 1982). However, self-regulatory functions consume resources such as mental energy and willpower. The workplace often puts a continuous strain on these personal resources, which can lead to self-regulation failures or lapses resulting in abusive leader behaviors.

Overall, research in the antecedent space is particularly relevant for practitioners who aim to eliminate or manage the effects of abusive supervisors. For example, Krasikova and colleagues (2013) conducted a large review of antecedents and describe specific factors and indicators that potentially lead to the emergence of abusive leadership. These factors range from leader characteristics to organizational context. The researchers contend that many of the proposed mechanisms accounting for abusive leadership are either initiated when a leader's goal is blocked or created as a result of the leader's blocked goal (Krasikova et al., 2013). Goal blockage occurs

when a leader's own goals are blocked or obstructed by individual team members, the team or the organization.

Independently, Padilla, Hogan, and Kaiser (2007) identified the "toxic triangle," which classifies three sources that enable destructive leadership behaviors. Although they focused specifically on more general destructive leadership, the antecedents they identified are also relevant to abusive leadership. The three sides of the toxic triangle are (1) destructive leaders, (2) susceptible followers, and (3) conducive environments. These three dimensions represent three factor dimensions that theoretically contribute to the emergence of abusive leadership.

The first dimension, destructive leaders, includes five critical leader factors: charisma, personalized use of power, narcissism, negative life themes, and an ideology of hate. The second dimension, susceptible followers, describes characteristics of followers that perpetuate destructive leadership. They separate these types of followers into two groups, conformers and colluders. Conformers comply out of fear while colluders actively participate in a destructive leader's agenda. Both are motivated by self-interest, but with different concerns. Conformers try to minimize the consequences of resisting, while colluders seek personal gain through association. The final domain concerns the situation that contains leaders, followers, and their interactions. The researchers identified four situational factors that contribute to destructive leadership: instability, perceived threat, absence of checks and balances and institutionalization, and cultural values.

In a separate line of research, the influence of organizational justice as a potential antecedent of abusive leadership has been examined (Bies and Tripp,

2005; Colquitt et al., 2001; Klaussner, 2014). Specifically, researchers have proposed that when leaders perceive injustice from higher-level leaders, and when injustice is un-reconciled, they will be more likely to engage in abusive leadership behaviors when interacting with their own subordinates. Furthermore, justice perceptions also have important implications for subordinate outcomes. A group of researchers have proposed that perceptions of abusive supervision originate as perceptions of supervisory injustice that evolve throughout leader-follower interactions (Klaussner, 2014; Mackey, Frieder, Brees, & Martinko, 2017). Similarly, subordinates who experience long-term abusive supervision may conclude that their organization has not done an adequate job of developing or enforcing procedures that discipline abusers or protect targets of abuse (i.e. believe that the organization lacks procedural justice, Tepper, 2007). Although organizational injustice and abusive leadership are conceptually related, the two constructs have distinct consequences and antecedents and thus are considered sufficiently differentiated (Bies, Tripp, & Shapiro, 2017; Tepper, 2007).

More recently, researchers have begun investigating the relationship between specific leader personality traits and the emergence of abusive leadership (Camps, Stouten, & Euwema, 2016; Waldman et al., 2018). For example, a study conducted by Waldman and colleagues (2018) suggested that increased supervisor narcissism was related to increased abusive supervision. Further research on personality and abusive supervision aims to provide a more in-depth understanding of how individual differences drive the emergence of abusive leadership. Overall, research in the antecedent space is still in its nascent stages, but interest in this area has increased

exponentially in the past 10 years (Tepper, Simon, & Park, 2017), shedding important light on a variety of factors and mechanisms that influence abusive leadership emergence.

**Consequences of Abusive Leadership Behavior**

Meta-analytic reviews of abusive leadership research have identified six broad outcomes in which abusive supervision impacts subordinates: organizational justice perceptions, workplace behavior, attitudes, performance, well-being, and family-related outcomes (Martinko et al., 2013; Tepper, 2007; Zhang & Liao, 2015). Although organizational justice was discussed previously as an antecedent of abusive leadership, some research suggests this effect may also operate in the reverse such that abusive supervision decreases perceptions of organizational justice (Zhang & Liao, 2015). Specifically, researchers have documented that abusive supervision reduces perceived support from supervisors (Shoss, Eisenberger, Restubog, & Zagenczyk, 2013). Moreover, when employees are victims of abuse, they tend to report unjust procedures in their organization (Blader & Tyler, 2009; Tepper, 2000). Consequently, perceptions of organizational justice and abusive leadership appear to exhibit a reciprocal relationship.

Abusive supervision has also been strongly linked to subordinates' negative workplace behaviors. These behaviors include deviance or counterproductive work behaviors in retaliation to the organization or peers for failure to prevent abusive leadership (Bowling & Michel, 2011). Subordinates may even directly retaliate against their supervisors (Mitchell & Ambrose, 2012; Thau & Mitchell, 2010). Previous research has also suggested that abusive leadership negatively impacts

subordinates work related attitudes (Bowling & Michel, 2011; Hobman, Restubog, Bordia, & Tang, 2009; Kernan, Watson, Chen, & Kim, 2011; Tepper, 2000). Because leaders tend to be viewed as representatives of the larger organization (Levinson, 2009), subordinates often perceive abusive supervisors as representative of a larger toxicity in the organization. Consequently, subordinates who experience abusive supervision often report lower job satisfaction and organizational commitment, and higher turnover intentions (Burris, Detert, & Chiaburu, 2008). Furthermore, subordinates experiencing abusive leadership also demonstrate reduced organizational citizenship behavior (Aryee, Chen, Sun, & Debrah, 2007; Zellars, Tepper, & Duffy, 2002) and work engagement (Harris, Harvey, & Kacmar, 2011).

In addition to its effect on attitudinal outcomes and perceptions, abusive supervision has also been linked to adverse behavioral and health consequences for subordinates. For example, some employee performance has been shown to decrease following experiences of abusive leadership (Harris, Kacmar, & Zivnuska, 2007; Xu, Huang, Lam, & Miao, 2012). Additionally, a negative relationship between abusive supervision and subordinate well-being has also been observed and tied to the depletion of psychological coping resources (Zhang & Liao, 2015). As subordinates experience abuse over time, mental resources become depleted, and subordinates become unable to effectively manage stress (Thau & Mitchell, 2010), which negatively impacts overall well-being (Chi & Liang, 2013). In a study of working adults Tepper (2007) found that subordinates who perceived their supervisors as more abusive were more likely to quit their jobs. Even for subordinates who remained in their organization, abusive supervision was associated with lower job and life

satisfaction, lower affective commitment, and higher work-family conflict and psychological distress (Tepper, 2007).

Subordinates faced with managing abusive supervision report experiencing a host of psychological issues, including increases in depression, anxiety and anger (Hobman et al., 2009; Restubog, Scott, & Zagenczyk, 2011; Tepper, Moss, Lockhart, & Carr, 2007) and reductions in self-esteem (Farh & Chen, 2014; Hobman et al., 2009; Jian, Kwan, Qiu, Liu, & Yim, 2012). Consequences of abusive leadership can even manifest as damage to physical well-being. For example, individuals who experience abusive leadership are more likely to report problematic drinking (Bamberger & Bacharach, 2006) and even insomnia (Rafferty, Restubog, & Jimmieson, 2010). The negative effects of abusive supervision have further been shown to spill over from the workplace to employees' personal lives (Michel, Kotrba, Mitchelson, Clark, & Baltes, 2011). For example, employees who experience abusive supervision are more likely to exhibit undermining behaviors with family members (Hoobler & Brass, 2006), display aggression to members of their family (Restubog et al., 2011), and demonstrate increased work family conflict (Wu, Kwan, Liu, & Resick, 2012). In sum, abusive supervision has been shown to adversely impact employees through several avenues with significant consequences for employees both in and outside the workplace.

**Model Explanations of Abusive Leadership**

While much of the research detailed above presents important factors leading to and consequences of abusive leadership behaviors, an important step in reducing abusive leadership involves understanding the process by which it emerges and

persists. Research has suggested that propagating abusive supervision come from three sources: (1) personal experience or personality traits (e.g., leaders with higher self-interest or entitlement engage in higher rates of abusive leadership; Cross, Hardin, & Gercek-Swing, 2011; Whitman, Halbesleben, & Shanine, 2013); (2) actions of higher-level leaders, whereby supervisors take out their aggression with higher-level managers on their own subordinates (Hoobler & Hu 2013; Tepper et al., 2006); and (3) subordinates' personalities or behaviors (e.g. poor or deviant subordinate performance; Lian et al., 2014; Simon et al., 2015; Tepper, Moss, & Duffy, 2011). The following section represents a brief overview of current models of abusive leadership and their proposed explanations for the rise of abusive actions. In general, many such models take a leader-centric view, excluding the follower's perspective and role in abusive leadership emergence. Furthermore, these models often do not explicate the core components of abusive leadership of interest to the present research (i.e. frequency, intent perceptions, and degree of harm). As such, following examination of the existing models of abusive leadership below, the paper will briefly highlight how these key features can be incorporated to further improve the clarity and precision of abusive leadership theory.

A first class of models describing abusive leadership adopts a self-regulation perspective. Self-regulation models of abusive leadership are largely based on ego depletion theory which posits that repeated efforts to self-regulate may exhaust the finite pool of psychological resources and result in self-regulation impairment or failure (Baumeister et al. 1998). Self-regulation impairment models argue that the complexity inherent in leadership roles requires substantial mental resources (Wang,

Sinclair, & Deese, 2010, Yam, Fehr, Keng-Highberger, Klotz, & Reynolds, 2016). As these resources become depleted, the ability to self-regulate is impaired, which may result in some supervisors unable to suppress impulses to act counter-normatively towards subordinates (Tepper et al., 2017). These relationships are believed to be weaker when supervisors are higher in trait self-control (Pundt, 2014) and mindfulness (Liang et al., 2016).

For example, Collins and Jackson (2015) advance attentional resource capacity and self-regulation as key mechanisms underlying abusive leadership. Their proposed model aims to explain the process by which the depletion of psychological resources leads to destructive leadership. The authors posit that as task difficulty increases, a leader's attentional resource capacity may become overwhelmed, resulting in self-regulation impairment and destructive leadership. Conversely, constructive leadership arises when task difficulty is low because self-regulation is effective and unencumbered. Their model centers on the context-appropriate balanced attention model (MacCoon et al., 2004), and describes a limited capacity selective attention mechanism that regulates cognitions and behaviors. Overall, this framework suggests that when attention resource capacity is reached, self-regulation falters, especially during demanding tasks, and increases the likelihood of destructive leader behaviors.

Liang and colleagues (2016) also utilized a self-control framework to explain when and why supervisors abuse poor performing subordinates. The researchers argued that poor performing subordinates instill in supervisors a sense of hostility toward the subordinate. The hostility in turn leads to abusive behaviors. Within their

self-control framework, poor subordinate performance is more likely to lead to abusive supervision when either the magnitude of the hostility experienced by the leader is higher, or when the translation of hostility into abusive supervision is unconstrained. Across three studies, Liang and colleagues demonstrated that subordinate poor performance was positively related to supervisor hostility and that subordinate hostility also was positively related to abusive supervision.

Interaction models, a second class of explanatory models, rely on the interactions between leaders and subordinates to explain abusive supervision. Klausner (2014) presents a dyadic process model that explains the emergence of abusive supervision as an escalating process of supervisor–subordinate interaction. Based on a social exchange framework, the model draws on the organizational justice and behavioral ethics literatures to explain abusive supervision as the process by which subordinates perceive supervisor injustice and respond to the injustice (e.g. by engaging in deviant behaviors), and leaders then respond to inadequate subordinate performance with abusive behaviors. According to the model, the interaction between leaders and subordinates, through which they respond to the actions of one another, perpetuates and escalates abusive leadership behaviors.

Distinctly, identity threat models suggest that leaders are more likely to abuse subordinates when they experience threats to their identity as a leader, their sense of power, or their competence (Johnson et al., 2012; Tepper, Simon, & Park, 2017; Wang, Harms, & Mackey, 2015). These models contend that when individuals are prevented from experiencing a social identity, they may turn to hostile behavior as a reparative strategy (Tedeschi & Felson, 1994). In positions of power, leaders often

face the pressure to prove they are worthy, which may make them more sensitive to threats, and thereby more likely to engage in abuse.

The final group of abusive leadership models considers social learning mechanisms (Liu, Liao, & Loi, 2012). According to social learning theory (Bandura, 1973; 1986), individuals learn appropriate behaviors and attitudes partly through observing their environment, and particularly the behaviors of role models. For example, Mawritz and colleagues' (2012) trickle down model suggests that abusive supervision is the result of supervisors modeling the behavior of their managers. These authors tested this prediction with a sample of 1400 subordinates and 295 supervisors. Abusive behaviors enacted by managers were found to "trickle down" to supervisors (leaders one hierarchical level down an organizational structure), who then served as poor behavioral models for subordinates. Specifically, abusive manager behavior was positively related to abusive supervisor behavior, which was positively related to work group interpersonal deviance. Their model suggests that higher-level abusive manager behavior indirectly impacts employees two hierarchical levels below the manager through its effect on abusive supervisor behavior. Social learning models have also been posited more recently as distal explanations for other models of abusive leadership emergence, wherein social learning facilitates other mechanisms, such as losing self-control or perceiving identity threat (Tepper, et al., 2017).

Finally, many of the proposed mechanisms are not entirely independent of one another. For example, Tepper and colleagues (2017) suggest that leaders may learn abusive behaviors from upper-level management that can result in impaired self-

regulatory functioning. This self-regulatory impairment can also be impacted by identity threat, in which supervisors who feel their identity is threatened may experience further depletion of cognitive and affective resources that make them more sensitive to threats. While each group of models highlighted above section provides some useful insight, before further models are advanced, the definition of abusive leadership should be tested and refined to clarify the underlying mechanisms behind this construct.

## Hypothesis Development

Five hypotheses will be proposed in the following section. Each of the hypotheses revolve around the central assumptions at the heart of the definition of abusive leadership. The first assumption proposes that abusive leadership arises out of an intent based perceptual mechanism whereby followers interpret the intent of leader actions to classify a person as an abusive leader. The second assumption holds that leaders are only considered abusive if their behaviors are systematic and repeated (i.e., they occur frequently). This represents the supposed sustained and repeated nature of abusive leadership. The final assumption, which is the subject of considerable disagreement, contends that the outcome of leader behavior, as in the degree of harm caused by the behavior, is utilized by followers to classify leaders as abusive instead of leader intentions. This line of thinking suggests that as the harm caused by a behavior increases, followers will perceive the leader as more abusive.

However, these assumptions are theoretical in nature and are not derived from explicit experimental findings. While there remains a significant amount of disagreement in the literature, it is prudent to first experimentally examine the three critical assumptions on which the definition of abusive leadership rests. Furthermore, the relative importance of each factor to perceptions of abusive leadership is theoretically suggested rather than experimentally understood. This paper represents a first step in experimentally examining the importance of each of these factors. If the assumptions concerning their role in perceptions of abusive leadership sustain experimental examination, more weight can be given to their significance as core components of the construct. Conversely, if these assumptions do not stand up to

examination, the definition of abusive leadership may need to be revisited and revised.

Of note, the construct of abusive leadership and its three core components of intent, frequency, and harm were originally derived from the sexual assault, sexual harassment, domestic violence and abusive relationships literature (Tepper, 2000). However, even Tepper (2000) made only a glancing reference to this research area when defining the construct of abusive leadership and remains one of the sole abusive leadership researchers to even attempt to leverage the body of knowledge generated by the domestic violence and sexual assault literatures. Contemporary abusive leadership research often relies unknowingly on a body of findings derived from this research space. Understanding this etiology is thus relevant to the discussion of abusive leadership and advancing our understanding of this construct for organizations. Consequently, relevant research from the domestic violence/sexual assault space will also be described during the discussion of the core assumptions of abusive leadership.

**Leader Intentions**

Individuals often make sense of other's behavior through perceptions of the other person's intentions (Thomas & Pondy, 1977). Often called attributions, perceptions of others' intentions shape our interpretation and reaction to their behavior (Ferris et al., 1995). Intentions are essential because the actual behaviors can only be interpreted if underlying intentions are identified first (Dienesch & Liden, 1986). Attribution theory (Heider, 1958) is commonly cited to describe how individuals interpret other's intentions and behaviors. It suggests that people behave

as “naïve psychologists” with an innate desire to understand outcomes that are important to them. Heider (1958) proposed that individuals go through several levels of attributions during this process. The first level is causal attribution, where individuals attempt to interpret if the cause of the treatment was due to the person or the situation. At the second level, intention attribution, the individual attempts to interpret whether the person intended their behavior. Lastly, at the third level, motive attribution, the individual attempts to interpret why the person intentionally engaged in the behavior. Attribution theory asserts that individuals search for causes of their own and others’ behavior at each level through making and testing hypotheses (Dasborough & Ashkansay, 2002). When the causes of important outcomes are ambiguous and are not immediately obvious, individuals tend to engage in a detailed search process for underlying motives and intentions (Weiner, 1985). Outcomes that might initiate a detailed search in an organizational context include being reprimanded by a supervisor (Kvavilashvili & Ellis, 1996).

Causal attributions and intentions can be separated into different types. Three dimensions of causality are commonly utilized, locus of causality, stability, and control (McAuley, Duncan & Russell, 1992). These three dimensions are also related to Heider’s (1958) levels of attribution. The locus of causality dimension reflects the internal-external distinction. It concerns whether the cause resides within or is external to the attributor (McAuley, Duncan & Russell, 1992). Stability, the second of Weiner’s (1972) dimensions, refers to whether the cause is invariant or changeable (McAuley, Duncan & Russell, 1992). Finally, the control dimension concerns

whether the actor had control over the cause or if it was uncontrollable (McAuley, Duncan & Russell, 1992; Weiner, 1985).

In the realm of leadership, leader intentions are central pieces of information utilized in relationships between leaders and followers (Gerstner & Day, 1997; Howell & Hall-Merenda, 1999). Followers try to interpret leader motives and intentions because intentions can be used to differentiate between different types of leaders and categorize the leader's behaviors (Dasborough & Ashkansay, 2002). Schyns and Schilling (2013) even argue that leader behavior can only impact followers when those individuals are able to perceive and interpret the motives behind the leader behavior. Those attributions also influence whether a follower will continue to follow a leader (Dienesch & Liden, 1986). However, the attributions individuals form are not always an objective assessment of reality (Dobbins & Russell, 1986; Jones & Nisbett, 1971). For one, the nature of the leader-follower relationship can influence the kinds of attributions individuals make about leader behavior (Bitter & Gardner, 1995). Furthermore, individuals may have difficulty accurately interpreting leader intentions (Dasborough & Ashkansay, 2002) and may therefore incorrectly categorize the leader or leader's behavior (Bies, Tripp, & Shapiro, 2016).

In the domestic violence space, researchers have documented that the intent of the abuser activates the victim's perceptions of the abuse (Thoresen & Øverlien, 2009). If the victim understood the abuser's intentions to be good, or against his or her better knowledge, they were less likely to perceive the person as abusive. Furthermore, if the victims did not perceive harmful intentions, they were less likely

to categorize the leader as abusive. Acknowledging this relationship, researchers have also suggested that measurement of abuse should account for the offender's intent and the victim's perceptions (Logan, Walker, & Cole, 2015). Overall, harmful intentions are strongly tied to perceptions of abuse in the domestic violence literature and are believed to activate the perception of abuse (Sedlak, 1988; Thoresen & Øverlien, 2009).

Thus, in the realm of abusive leadership, leader intentions should strongly influence perceptions of abusive leadership, such that leaders will be considered more abusive when they express harmful intentions:

Hypothesis 1: Leaders will be considered more abusive when they express harmful intentions than when they do not express harmful intentions.

**Harm of Leader Behavior**

A group of researchers in the destructive leadership space have defined destructive leadership in terms of the leader's objective behavior (e.g. Duffy et al., 2002) and resisted the inclusion of leader intentions into the definition of abusive leadership. They claim that regardless of the assigned label, harmful behaviors should always be harmful (Einarsen, Aasland, and Skogstad, 2007). Therefore, regardless of the leaders stated or implied intentions, these researchers argue that if a leader engages in an action that results in harm, that behavior and that leader should be considered abusive.

There is similar precedence in the sexual harassment/domestic violence literatures for focusing only on the harmful outcome of behaviors. For example, it's estimated that over 50% of women in organizations experience unwanted and

offensive sex behaviors at work (Fitzgerald et al., 1988; Schneider, Swann, & Fitzgerald., 1997). However, fewer than 50% of those women who report unwanted and offensive sexually harassing behaviors label those incidents as sexual harassment (Barak, Fisher, & Huston, 1992; Fitzgerald et al., 1988; Gutek, 1985). This discrepancy naturally raises questions concerning whether individuals who label these incidents as sexual harassment would experience more negative outcomes than individuals who do not (Munson, Miner, & Hulin, 2001). Labeling reflects the belief that one has been sexually harassed. It was proposed that labeling an incident as sexual harassment would be meaningfully related to a number of harmful work outcomes as compared to individuals who did not label similar incidents as harassment (Dansky & Kilpatrick, 1997; Fitzgerald et al., 1997; Schneider et al., 1997; Sommers, 1995). Separately, a group of researchers predicted that the experience of sexual harassment was sufficient to trigger negative outcomes regardless of the assigned label (Magley et al., 1999). The results of several studies suggest that labeling an action as sexual harassment bears no relationship to harmful outcomes. Instead, the level of harassment itself was strongly related to negative job outcomes (job satisfaction, psychological well-being and other health factors, Magley, Hulin, Fitzgerald, & DeNardo, 1999; Munson, Miner, & Hulin, 2001) whether or not the individual experiencing the behavior uses the label sexual harassment.

While a group of abusive leadership researchers continue to argue that harm, rather than intentions, is the key indicator of abusive leadership, these contentions

have never been experimentally examined. Consequently, Hypothesis 2 will explicitly examine and test this second assumption of the abusive leadership definition:

Hypothesis 2: Leaders will be considered more abusive when their behaviors harm subordinates than when their behaviors do not harm subordinates.

One of the largest disagreements among researchers in the abusive leadership domain centers on the importance of intent in both perceptions and definitions of abusive leadership. The majority of researchers (see Krasikova, Green & LeBreton, 2013; Tepper, 2000; Tepper, 2007; Tepper, Simon, & Park, 2017) argue that follower perceptions of a leader's intent can be uncoupled from the outcome of leader behaviors. This line of thinking contends that followers will always attribute intent to a leader's actions and that the follower's perception of leader intent is derived from leaders simply enacting a behavior, not the eventual outcome. Therefore, instead of relying on the outcome for classification purposes, this research suggests that followers classify leaders as abusive based upon their perceptions of the leader's intent to cause harm through their actions. Thus, these researchers maintain that intent perceptions represent the critical mechanism for defining abusive leadership. Their contentions rely heavily on information processing perspectives that suggest individuals will utilize their perception of the actor's intentions to make sense of the situation (Fiske, 1980), such that when an actor is perceived as intending to harm the perceiver, the actor is considered an abusive leader.

In contrast, some conceptualizations argue that leader intent does not matter for perceptions of abusive leadership (e.g., Einarsen, Aasland, and Skogstad, 2007). This work contends that only the outcome of an action and the extent to which it is

harmful makes an act and leader abusive. This line of thinking suggests that including intent in the definition of abusive leadership creates an artificial barrier for an operational definition since it is difficult to quantify leader intent in the real world (Rayner, Hoel, & Cooper, 2002). Some researchers therefore exclude intent from their examinations and focus instead on the harmful outcome of leader behaviors to differentiate it from other types of leader behaviors (i.e. Liu, Liao, & Loi, 2012). In sum, these competing perspectives disagree on the fundamental definition of abusive leadership. The first treatment (intent matters) emphasizes *perceived abuse* as a critical definitional element and suggest that this perception cannot be separated from actual abuse, whereas the second treatment (harm of outcome only) holds that the focus should be on actual abuse as this may differ from perceived abuse (Martinko, Harvey, Sikora, & Douglas, 2011).

This disagreement also represents one of the most notable limitations and critiques of abusive leadership research, as researchers do not always specify whether they are focusing on employee appraisals or objective identifiers of abusive leadership (Chan & McAllister, 2014; Martinko et al., 2013). That is, empirical research on abusive leadership often does not differentiate between a leader who engages in harmful behavior from a leader who is perceived as abusive by a subordinate. Unfortunately, this imprecision makes it difficult to determine the circumstances under which an individual may be considered an abusive leader or when a leader's abusive actions will translate into negative outcomes (Tepper, Simon, & Park, 2017). Most models of abusive supervision do not even account for the possibility that a follower's subjective perception of their leader may differ from the

objective outcome of the leader's behaviors. These models are also agnostic as to whether a follower must believe they have been abused for that abuse to translate into negative outcomes. However, in the sexual harassment literature, researchers have found that targets of behaviors that fit the definition of sexual harassment experience injury irrespective of whether or not they believed their experience constituted harassment (Magley et al., 1999; Munson et al., 2001). Consequently, it is unclear whether the same could be true of followers who are the target of more general abuse forms of abuse by leaders.

To date, no study has pitted these competing perspectives against one another by explicitly examining whether perceptions of leader intent or the magnitude of harm caused by the outcome of a leader's behavior are critical to follower perceptions of abusive leadership or negative follower outcomes. Instead, perceptions are either excluded from definitions or function as an underlying assumption of abusive leadership, where researchers assume that followers need to perceive leader's intention as harmful in order to categorize someone as an abusive leader. For example, abusive leadership is purported to exclude accidental or negligently harmful leadership since those types of leaders do not act with harmful intent (Tepper, 2000; 2007). Thus, the first two hypotheses seek to directly explore whether follower perceptions of leader intent sync with objective harmful outcomes of leader behavior and begin to experimentally test the assumptions behind this disagreement.

**Frequency of Leader Behavior**

Whereas there is disagreement with respect to the importance of leader intent among researchers, the abusive leadership literature is unequivocal with its handling

of the frequency of leader behaviors: leaders are only considered abusive if their hostile behaviors are sustained and repeated (Aasland et al., 2009; Einarsen, Aasland, & Skogstad, 2007; Schyns & Schilling, 2013; Tepper, 2007). These researchers argue that one-off behaviors would therefore not be considered abusive leadership.

The significance of frequency as a defining feature of abusive leadership also derives from the domestic violence and sexual harassment literatures, in which abuse was characterized as sustained and enduring since it is likely to continue until the relationship is terminated, by the target or abuser, or the abuser modifies their behavior (Jezl, Molidor, & Write, 1996; Shepard & Campbell, 1992). Tepper (2000) contends that abuse persists over time because targets may feel powerless to take action or leave the relationship, especially if the abuser intersperses normal behavior with abusive behavior (Walker, 1979; 2017), and abusers often fail to take responsibility for their abusive action or modify it. Furthermore, the general domestic violence literature conceptualizes abuse as a pattern of behaviors over time rather than singular incidents, since it is the pattern of behaviors that entraps the target and results in sustained harm (Kelly & Westmorland, 2016). Researchers have demonstrated that increased frequency of domestic violence is related to significant increases in all types of harmful outcomes (physical, psychological, etc., Munson et al., 2001). Kelly and Westmorland (2016) also argue that only by looking at the full pattern of behaviors can abuse truly be understood as focusing on one-off instances often mischaracterizes the phenomenon and ignores the larger pattern of behaviors, interactions, and harmful outcomes.

In this sense, theorizing in the abusive leadership literature is in lockstep with its origins in the domestic violence space. These types of relationships endure (i.e. increase in frequency) because followers often feel powerless to take corrective action, are often dependent in some way on the leader, and/or leaders fail to recognize or take responsibility for their abusive actions (Walker, 1979; 2017; Wolfe, 1999). The power dynamic also perpetuates these relationships, since targets often have little power, compared to the abusive boss, to end the relationship or behaviors. While researchers often claim that increased frequency results in greater perceptions of abuse and worse outcomes (see Tepper, 2007) that belief has never been empirically tested. Instead, the abusive leadership literature implicitly assumes that more frequent abuse (i.e., a repeated pattern of behavior over time) results in stronger perceptions of abusive leadership.

Consistent with the above description, the proposed mechanism through which frequency of abusive leader actions abuse is analogous to that of a graded threshold/dosage effect. Specifically, in which multiple acts of abusive behavior must be experienced for an individual to perceive a leader as abusive and after which further exposure to the abusive behavior continues to strengthen perceptions of the leader as abusive. In this sense, the definition for frequency of abusive leadership does not refer to specifically to the passage of time, but rather a pattern of harmful behavior experienced over time (Tepper, 2000; 2007). Therefore, examining the effects of frequent abusive leader behavior should not be operationalized as time per se, but rather the number of exposures to abusive leadership.

An intriguing implication of the conceptualization of frequency as exposure considers whether and how perceptions of abuse following a single versus continued exposure to leader harm might differ. Hypotheses 1 and 2 of the present study propose to examine the "average" effects of harm and don't account for exposure in any way. This approach is largely consistent with traditional studies of abusive leadership in which the amount of exposure to abusive leader actions is not directly examined. However, to the extent that the experience of abusive leadership is understood as an unfolding trajectory in which perceptions of abuse are sensitive to continued exposure to a harmful leader, examining perceptions of abuse following one exposure versus repeated exposures to harmful leader behavior is important for elucidating the foundational assumption of frequency in the definition of abusive leadership. Consequently, the third and fourth hypotheses are designed to examine the experiential trajectory of exposure to harmful leader behaviors and its influence on perceptions of abusive leadership. Notably, Hypothesis 3 evaluates whether a single exposure of harmful behavior, even a one-off behavior, is sufficient to change an individual's perceptions of abusive leadership (cf., Aasland et al., 2009; Einarsen, Aasland, & Skogstad, 2007; Schyns & Schilling, 2013; Tepper, 2007). In contrast, Hypothesis 4 directly examines the effects of repeated exposure to harmful leader behavior and the extent to which perceptions of abuse continue to increase following subsequent adverse interactions.

Hypothesis 3: Perceptions of abusive leadership will increase after a single exposure to harmful leadership behavior.

Hypothesis 4: Perceptions of abusive leadership will continue to increase as individuals are exposed to additional harmful leader actions.

**Harm of Leader Behavior as a Moderator**

While current conceptualizations of abusive leadership contend that behaviors must occur multiple times to classify a leader as abusive, the information processing literature indicates that extremely negative and harmful behaviors may only need to occur once in order to allow the perceiver to accurately perceive the intentions of the actor (Baumeister, Bratslavsky, Finkenauer, & Vohs, 2001; Fiske, 1980), especially if the perceiver has experience with those types of behaviors. Less extreme events are often harder to categorize and therefore require more exposure to accurately classify. The roots of this effect can be found in a phenomenon termed positive-negative asymmetry, which suggests that bad information about a stimulus person carries more weight and has a larger impact on impressions than good or neutral information (Baumesiter et al., 2001; Peeters & Czapinski, 1990). This relationship has been demonstrated in a variety of domains. Of specific relevance to the current study, in the realm of impression formation and people categorization, researchers have demonstrated that bad information has a stronger impact and carries more weight in impression formation than good information (e.g. Feldman, 1966; Hodges, 1974; Wright, 1991). Hamilton and Huffman (1971) suggested that negative information is more distinctively useful than good information because good behavior is more common, and therefore it is more important and revealing to find out about negative information. To be categorized as good, a person is required to exhibit "good" behaviors consistently, whereas to be considered "bad", a person need only exhibit

one or a few acts since most people are not consistently bad (Skowronski & Carlston, 1989). Furthermore, research has suggested that perceptions of individuals who have consistently exhibited positive behaviors can be overridden by one powerful negative action, and that the negative impression of a person who has exhibited one negative behavior is not easily overridden even by multiple positive behaviors (Riskey & Birnbaum, 1974; Skowronski & Carlston, 1992). While positive information will not be included in the current study, this research suggests that extremely negative information is often the most diagnostic and influential in shaping individuals' perceptions of others.

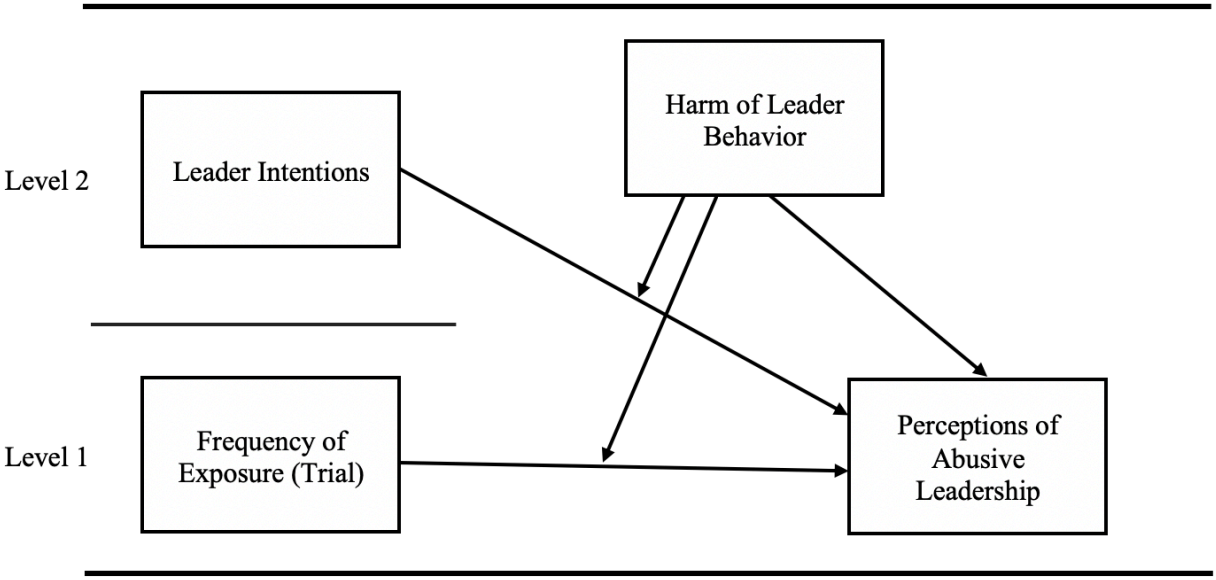
In the context of abusive leadership this suggests that extremely negative or harmful abusive actions (i.e., behaviors with extremely harmful outcomes) may allow followers to categorize leaders as more abusive without a sustained or repeated pattern of negative behaviors or even knowledge of the leader's intentions. Extremely harmful outcomes should therefore be critically diagnostic and help followers classify a leader as more abusive more quickly. As such, I contend that harm of the outcome (whether the behavior is objectively harmful or not) will moderate the relationship intent and perceptions of abusive leadership:

> Hypothesis 5: The relationship between intent and perceptions of abusive leadership will be moderated by the degree of harm of an action. When behaviors are harmful, leaders will be viewed as more abusive regardless of their expressed intentions. However, when leader behaviors do not result in harm, followers will perceive their leaders as increasingly abusive only if the leader expresses harmful intentions.

**Summary**

The relationships predicted by Hypotheses 1, 2, and 5 are summarized in Figure 1. Hypothesis 1, depicted by the main effect of leader intentions on abusive leadership, suggests that leaders will be considered more abusive when they express harmful intentions. In Hypotheses 2, illustrated by the main effect of harm of leader behavior on perceptions of abusive leadership, it is predicted that leaders will be considered more abusive when then engage in harmful behaviors. Hypothesis 3 suggests that perceptions of leader abusiveness will increase even after only one exposure to a harmful leadership behavior. Hypotheses 4 predicts an interaction between the harm of leader behaviors and frequency of abusive behavior on perceptions of abusive leadership. Finally, Hypothesis 5 suggests an interaction between leader intentions and the harm of leader behaviors on perceptions of abusive leadership.

Figure 1. Depiction of the main effects and interactions between Intent, Harm, and Frequency on Perceptions of Abusive Leadership. Frequency is a Level 1 (within-person) predictor, Intent and Harm are Level 2 (between-person) predictors.



# METHODS

## Pilot Studies

A key purpose of this research is the refinement and critical examination of the definition of abusive leadership through testing its three core assumptions. The main experimental study was designed to test the five proposed hypotheses and relationships shown in Figure 1. Prior to this examination, three pilot studies were conducted. The first pilot study was designed to examine the perceived harm caused by a range of common abusive leader behaviors to provide support for using a specific abusive leader behavior in the main experimental study. Two additional pilot studies were also conducted to facilitate design of the main experiment. The second pilot study was conducted to inform the dependent variable for the experimental study, whereas the third pilot study was conducted to evaluate the efficacy of the experimental study manipulations.

### Pilot Study 1

The purpose of the first pilot study was twofold: (1) to further contribute to the abusive leadership literature by establishing the degree of harm caused by different abusive leader behaviors and (2) justify the degree of harm caused by the abusive behavior that was included in the laboratory experiment. Currently, researchers simply list behaviors that constitute abusive leadership and asks individuals to indicate the extent to which they agree their leader engages in each behavior (see Bies, 2000; Bies & Tripp, 1998; Tepper, 2000; 2007). While this provides a baseline understanding of the degree to which a real supervisor may be perceived as abusive by employees, it makes experimental manipulation more

difficult because follower perceptions of the degree of harm caused by specific behaviors is unknown. We can approximate which behaviors are likely to be more harmful than others, but no study has specifically investigated follower perceptions of these different leader behaviors.

**Participants**

205 participants were recruited through Amazon's Mechanical Turk for the first pilot study. Participants were exclusively from the USA, 54% female, and 66% Caucasian. The average age was 29 years and ranged from 18 to 66. Captcha verification as well as requiring participants to type out a short paragraph was utilized to protect against automated responding. Participants were compensated $1.66 for their participation.

**Procedure**

Participants were informed that the purpose of the study was to examine the relative harm caused by a range of abusive behaviors. After providing their consent, participants were presented with 15 leader behaviors and asked to rate the degree of harm each behavior would cause to a subordinate if the behavior was performed by a leader. Participants rated the degree of perceived harm caused by the leader behaviors using a scale ranging from 1 (not harmful) to 7 (extremely harmful). Each behavior was presented one at a time. The behaviors included in the rating exercise were adapted from Tepper's (2000) abusive leadership scale, plus three additional items considered for the experimental manipulation of the current research ("the leader takes away the subordinate's resources [materials to do their job]", "the leader takes away the subordinate's compensation [their pay]", and "the leader expresses their

intention to harm the subordinate"). The study concluded with a series of demographic questions and debriefing form.

**Results**

The results and full list of rated behaviors are provided in Table 1. The average rating for all 15 leader behaviors was at or above the midpoint of the 7-point scale, indicating that respondents thought each behavior was at least moderately harmful. Of significance to the present study, the specific behaviors "leader expresses intent to harm the subordinate" ($M$ = 6.6, SD = 1) and "leader takes away the subordinate's compensation (their pay)" ($M$ = 6.5, SD = 1) both received the highest overall ratings of harm. Two other behaviors, "leader ridicules subordinate in public" and "the leader exhibits extreme aggression were also rated above a six ($M$ = 6.3 for both items). The average rating of harm for the remaining behaviors ranged between 3.9 and 5.9 on the seven-point scale. Overall, these results lend support to the proposed manipulations of the experimental study. Specifically, they suggest that individuals tend to perceive expressing the intention to do harm and taking away compensation as extremely abusive leader behaviors.

Table 1. Pilot Study 1 Abusive Behaviors and Mean Harmfulness Ratings ($n$ = 205)

| Behavior | Mean Rating | Variance |
|---|---|---|
| Leader Ridicules the Subordinate in Private | 4.8 | 2.2 |
| Leader Ridicules the Subordinate in Public | 6.4 | 1.0 |
| Leader takes away subordinate's resources (materials needed to do their job) | 5.7 | 1.6 |
| Leader takes away subordinate's compensation (their pay) | 6.5 | 1.0 |
| Leader throws a tantrum | 4.6 | 2.7 |
| Leader acts arrogantly | 3.9 | 1.9 |
| Leader acts condescendingly | 4.2 | 1.8 |
| Leader takes credit for the subordinate's work | 5.2 | 1.9 |
| The leader blames the subordinate for their own (the leader's) mistakes | 5.8 | 1.7 |
| The leader isolates the subordinate by discouraging interaction between team members | 5.3 | 1.9 |
| The leader exhibits favoritism and gives preferential treatment to other team members, but not this subordinate | 5.0 | 2.0 |
| The leader lies to the subordinate | 5.3 | 2.1 |
| The leader deceives the subordinate | 5.5 | 1.8 |
| The leader exhibits extreme aggression towards the subordinate | 6.3 | 1.3 |
| The leader expresses their intention to harm the subordinate | 6.6 | 1.0 |

*Note.* Response scale ranged from 1 (Not at all Harmful) to 7 (Extremely Harmful)

## Pilot Study 2

The primary goal of the second pilot study was to inform the development of the dependent variable measure used in the experimental study, perceptions of abusive leadership. However, the most commonly utilized measure of perceived abuse in the literature asks individuals to rate the frequency with which their leader engages in a range of 15 abusive behaviors (Tepper, 2000). In the current experimental study, only one harmful leader behavior was utilized, and the number of times participants saw that behavior was also controlled. Therefore, the current study could not utilize Tepper's (2000) measure of perceived abuse. Furthermore, we aimed

to hide the true nature of the experimental study throughout the procedure. To accomplish that, it was necessary to hide the dependent measure in a larger scale of more general leadership characteristics. Consequently, items were included covering three types of leader (good, bad, and abusive) and the second pilot study was conducted to ensure that the selected leader characteristics accurately represented individual's conceptualization of good, bad, and abusive leadership.

**Participants**

A total of 142 participants were recruited through Amazon's Mechanical Turk for the study. The participants ranged in age from 20 to 66 ($M$ = 33 years) and were 44% Female and 75% Caucasian. Captcha verification, as well as requiring participants to type out a short paragraph was utilized to protect against automated responding. Participants were compensated $1.33 for their participation.

**Procedure**

Participants were instructed that the purpose of the study was to investigate differences between generally bad (ineffective or negative), abusive, and good (positive or effective) leaders. Participants were informed that the investigators were developing a scale for use in a separate study that the goal was to determine how different leader descriptors are perceived. A total of 24 leader characteristic and attributes were selected for inclusion from the ethical leadership (Resick, Michelson, Dickson, & Hanges, 2009), leader liking (Martinko et al., 2018; Muhammad, 2014) and abusive leadership literatures (Tepper, 2000; see Table 2). After completing informed consent, participants were presented with the 24 leader characteristics

individually and asked to classify them as indicative of good, abusive, or bad leaders. The study concluded with a series of demographic questions and debriefing form.

Table 2. Leadership Characteristics Included in Pilot Study 2

| Positive (Good) | Abusive | Negative (Bad) |
|---|---|---|
| Honest | Abusive | Cold |
| Trustworthy | Anxious | Crooked |
| Modest | Harmful | Upsetting |
| Team Builder | Hostile | Irritating |
| Compassionate | Arrogant, | Unlikable |
| Empowering | Deceitful | Ineffective |
| Encouraging | Volatile | Disagreeable |
| Competent | Aggressive | Incompetent |

**Results**

A representativeness rating was calculated for each of the 24 leader characteristics by examining the proportion of times participants categorized each characteristic as either good, bad, or abusive leadership. The full pool of 24 characteristics and the tally for the number of times they were placed into each category is listed below in Table 3. In general, participants were often in agreement with respect to their categorization of good leadership behaviors, with 100% of participants identifying Honest, Team Builder, Encouraging, and Competent as indicative of good leadership. The attributes Unlikable (94%), Ineffective (96%), Incompetent (93%) and Disagreeable (95%) were all most frequently categorized as Bad leadership. The attributes for the Abusive category were still agreed upon by the majority of participants, but results were less conclusive. A majority of participants

categorized the attributes Abusive (86%), Volatile (60%), Harmful (88%), and Hostile (74%) as representative of Abusive Leadership.

For purposes of the final experimental study, the four characteristics most commonly sorted into each category were selected for the final DV, resulting in 12 total leader characteristics included in experimental study. A cutoff of 80% agreement was utilized to select the characteristics. Four characteristics were selected from each category to ensure that there was enough variation within and across each category, but that the scale was not overly long and tedious for participants to complete, since they would be required to complete the scale after each trial in the experimental study. Additionally, some of the bad and abusive characteristics, such as "Aggressive" and "Deceitful" were seen as almost equally representative of both categories and thus were not very diagnostics of individual's perceptions.

Table 3. Leader Characteristics Categorization Results from Pilot Study 2 ($n$ = 142)

| **Behavior** | **Tally** | | | **Final Classification** |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| | Good | Abusive | Bad | |
| **Honest** | **142** | 0 | 0 | **Good** |
| **Abusive** | 1 | **122** | 19 | **Abusive** |
| Cold | 2 | 11 | 129 | NU |
| Trustworthy | 142 | 0 | 0 | NU |
| Anxious | 4 | 8 | 130 | NU |
| Crooked | 1 | 87 | 54 | NU |
| Modest | 132 | 1 | 9 | NU |
| **Harmful** | 5 | **125** | 12 | **Abusive** |
| Upsetting | 2 | 42 | 98 | NU |
| **Team Builder** | **142** | 0 | 0 | **Good** |
| **Hostile** | 1 | **105** | 36 | **Abusive** |
| Irritating | 2 | 15 | 125 | NU |
| Compassionate | 142 | 0 | 0 | NU |
| Arrogant | 2 | 13 | 127 | NU |
| **Unlikable** | 2 | 7 | **133** | **Bad** |
| Empowering | 139 | 1 | 2 | NU |
| Deceitful | 4 | 73 | 65 | NU |
| **Ineffective** | 1 | 4 | **137** | **Bad** |
| **Encouraging** | **142** | 0 | 0 | **Good** |
| **Volatile** | 6 | 89 | 47 | **Abusive** |
| **Disagreeable** | 0 | 7 | **135** | **Bad** |
| **Competent** | **142** | 0 | 0 | **Good** |
| Aggressive | 15 | 77 | 55 | NU |
| **Incompetent** | 1 | 9 | **132** | **Bad** |

*Note.* NU stands for "Not used in the final dependent variable measure of leader characteristics". Tally shows the total number of times each characteristic was classified as good, bad, or abusive across all participants.

## Pilot Study 3

Pilot Study 3 was designed to test the video manipulations for the experimental study. The leader intention manipulations described below were manipulated in a series of videos presented to participants. Participants were assigned

to either a purposeful or accidental leader intent conditions. Eleven videos of a confederate leader were recorded, five for each condition (one video per trial), and one bassline introductory video that was identical for each condition. The third pilot study was conducted to ensure that the purposeful intent videos were viewed as abusive and that the accidental intent conditions were not viewed as abusive.

**Participants**

A total of 93 participants were recruited through Amazon's Mechanical Turk for the study. The participants ranged in age from 19 to 68, with a mean age of 35, and were 35% Female and 72% Caucasian. Captcha verification, as well as requiring participants to type out a short paragraph was utilized to protect against automated responding. Participants were compensated $1.66 for their participation.

**Procedure**

The videos of the confederate playing the role of the leader in the experimental study were piloted on Amazon's Mechanical Turk to ensure the manipulations had the desired effects. The videos were presented as video messages, exactly as described in the experimental manipulation below. Participants were told that the researchers were investigating perceptions of a previously recorded video of a leader. Study participants were randomly assigned into an accidental versus purposeful leader intention condition. Regardless of condition, all participants first watched a baseline leader welcome video. The baseline video did not contain any information about any possible harm the leader did to a subordinate or their intention to do harm; it simply introduced the individual on the video as the leader. Study participants then watched the five leader videos assigned to their condition. After

each video, they rated the leader on the 12 leader characteristics identified in Pilot Study 2. After watching the final video, participants also rated the overall believability of the leader, leader realism, and the leader's intention to harm.

**Results**

As illustrated in Table 4 below, the leader in the accidental intent video condition was not considered abusive and ratings of leader abusiveness increased only slightly across time periods. Similar to the accidental intent video, raters in the purposeful intent condition did not consider the leader to be abusive in the baseline video. However, beginning with the first message from the leader indicating purposeful intent, perceived abusiveness increased after each progressive video, culminating in an average perceived abusiveness rating across all participants of 6.4 on a 7 point scale (SD = 1.15). This value indicates that the majority of participants felt the leader in the purposeful intent conditions was extremely abusive by the fifth exposure to the leader's message of intent.

The manipulation of leader intent thus appeared to be very effective. In the intent to harm conditions, the leader was on average perceived as intending to harm (6.8 on a 7 point scale, SD = 0.45), while in the accidental intent condition, the leader was not viewed as intending to harm (2.1 on a 7 point scale, SD = 1.83). Overall, the pilot study demonstrated that leaders in the harmful intent condition were categorized as abusive, while leaders in the accidental conditions were not. Across the harm and accidental conditions, participants rated the leader as unbelievable and unrealistic, as shown in Table 4 below. One potential explanation for the low ratings could the video's setting. The videos were recorded in the lab space where the experimental

study would take place. The leader wore large bulky headphones that each participant in the experimental study would also wear. However, the participants in this pilot study all engaged with the videos on their personal computers. In the experimental study, the participants' context will be identical to the leader (they will wear the same headphones and participate in the same space). Those alterations should increase believability and realism in the experimental study. While the leader was viewed as relatively unbelievable, the manipulations had the desired effect (leaders in the harmful intent condition were considered abusive, and leaders in the accidental condition were not) and appeared to be successful. Since the believability of the leader was expected to increase in the laboratory study, and the manipulations were successful, it was decided to move forward with the videos in the experimental study.

Table 4. Pilot Study 3 Results

| | Time | Intent | Accident |
|---|---|---|---|
| **Perceived Abusiveness** | 0 | 1.4 | 1.65 |
| | 1 | 5.2 | 1.75 |
| | 2 | 6.05 | 1.8 |
| | 3 | 6.1 | 1.9 |
| | 4 | 6.3 | 2 |
| | 5 | 6.4 | 2.1 |
| **Average Leader Believable** | | 2.9 | 4.3 |
| **Average Leader Realistic** | | 2.8 | 4.4 |
| **Leader Intends to Harm** | | 6.8 | 2.1 |

## Experimental Study

The main experimental study was designed to test Hypotheses 1-5. The specific hypotheses refer to the relationship between follower perceptions of leader intent, frequency of leader behaviors, degree of harm caused by leader behaviors, and

perceptions of abusive leadership. This study involved a controlled laboratory-based experiment that manipulated leader intention and the degree of harm caused by leader behaviors.

**Participants**

208 Participants were recruited through the University of Maryland paid participant pool. The demographic distribution for the final set of participants was 70% female, 35% Caucasian, 24% Black or African American, and 25% Asian or Asian American. The average age was 21, with a range from 18 to 61 years old.

**Procedure**

Participants were run individually using a computerized experiment. However, participants were told they were participating in a team task and were in a room with three to five other participants. Research assistants welcomed participants to the lab and explained a cover story in which individuals were told they would be participating in a study to examine virtual team interactions. Participants were informed that the study was being conducted in multiple lab spaces simultaneously and that they would be assigned to a team consisting of participants that were not in the room with them. Each participant was instructed they had been randomly assigned to one role on the team, either the team leader or a functional role. However, all participants were actually assigned the same role, that of "reviewer", and were given exactly the same tasks. Research assistants explained that the study was simulating an advertisement agency team. Each participant's job was to review requests for advertisements sent to their team and approve or deny the request based on a series of criteria provided to them (full experimental task is presented in Appendix A). At the

conclusion of the introduction, the research assistant reiterated that each participant could make up to $10 for completing the study, though it was the team leader that would ultimately assign compensation based upon the team's task completion.

The randomizer always informed the participant that they were assigned the role of the "reviewer" on Jason's team. The task explained that "Jason" their team leader, could send the participants video messages in order to provide feedback and updates during the trials. Participants were shown an example of the notification message that indicated a message had been received and would be automatically opened by the system. After the role was assigned, the participants read through detailed instructions covering their task requirements, goals, and compensation structure. They were informed that they would review 10 requests each trial, and that the study would consist of five trials. For each request reviewed, they would be compensated $0.20, and by reviewing all 50 requests they would earn the $10 compensation for the study. The earnings would be tracked on screen and they would be informed of the amount they earned after each trial. Participants then completed an exemplar task where they were walked through a request and either approved or denied it. They were then asked to respond to an open ended question where they provided their understanding of their role and tasks. Once the participant indicated that they understood their role and tasks, the trials began.

Participants were sent a video message from their leader before each trial. The video message differed slightly depending upon their assigned experimental condition (described below). Participants received a notification on screen when a message from the leader was ready, after which the video message automatically opened and

played. Subtitles were included every time a video was played to ensure that participants could both hear and see the text of the leader's message (scripts of all video messages used are included in Appendix B). All participants received the same introductory message from the leader prior to the start of the trials, at which point all participants rated the leader on a series of 12 characteristics including perceptions of abusive leadership.

After reporting their baseline perceptions of the leader, the experimental trials began. Similar to the introductory trial, prior to beginning their tasks each participant was sent a video from their leader. They then completed their task work, and finally the leader informed them of their compensation for that trial. After the participant was notified of their compensation, they again rated their leader on the same 12 characteristics. This pattern continued for the five trials regardless of the participants' condition. At the conclusion of the fifth trial, participants were informed of the total amount of compensation earned in the study. The participants then completed a series of demographic and supplemental questionnaires.

Once the participants completed all of the supplemental questionnaires, they reached a screen that informed them to raise their hand and announce to the research assistant that they were finished. The research assistant then brought the participant individually into a side room, where they were debriefed, informed of the study deception, and disclosed the true nature and purpose of the study. The research assistant explained that the leader was an actor, that the videos were pre-recorded, and that the leader's actions were exclusively part of the experimental manipulation and were not a reflection on the participant or their actions. Furthermore, participants

were notified that they would receive the full $10 for participating regardless of what the participant was told they would receive during the trials. At that point, participants were provided an opportunity to ask questions and express any concerns associated with their participation. Once all of the participant's questions had been answered, the research assistant asked the participant if they understood that the leader was a confederate, the leader's actions were based solely on the experimental condition, and that they be would receiving the full $10. Once the participant indicated that they understood and had no further questions, they were sent back to their computer terminal. At the computer, the participant completed a series of questions where they indicated that they understood the leader was a confederate, the leader's actions were entirely dependent on the experimental condition, and they would receive all $10 for their participation.

During the debriefing, research assistants also gauged whether or not the participants were suspicious of the leader and the manipulations. Although an exact count cannot be provided, the researcher logs indicate that the majority of participants believed the manipulations and were not suspicious of the leader. After the participant indicated that they understood all three pieces of the debriefing, they were presented with a virtual debriefing form to read through. Once they finished reading the form, they returned to the research assistant, who paid the participant and handed them a hard copy of the debriefing form. Participants were asked to keep the true purpose of the task confidential to ensure the validity of the study manipulations.

**Experimental Manipulations**

The study employed a 2 (leader intent: purposeful intent to harm, no intent to harm) x 2 (magnitude of harm: no harm, harmful) fully factorial design. Factors were manipulated between-person and all participants were randomly assigned to one of the four conditions. Note that frequency of leader actions was not manipulated. Instead, the impact of frequency was examined by interpreting changes in perceptions of abuse across the five study trials. The study manipulations were introduced in the pre-trial videos and in the task work during each trial. Regardless of their assigned condition, each participant watched the same welcome video with the leader's introduction prior to trial 1. The introductory video was designed to provide a neutral baseline interaction with the leader and serve as an exemplar for the video notification process.

Once the trials began, participants saw a video specific to their assigned intent manipulation before every trial (five intention videos in total). For the conditions in which the leader intended to harm participants, the leader expressed the intention to harm by purposefully initiating a system change that prevented the participant from completing their task work and resulted in the participant being unable to earn all their compensation. In the no intent condition, the leader informed the participant that they had accidentally initiated a system update that could prevent them from completing their task work and cause them to lose compensation. In the no intent condition, the leader reiterated that they did not intend to harm the participant.

Degree of harm was manipulated by changing whether the participant was actually "harmed" by the leader's actions described in the videos. In the no harm condition, regardless of what the participant watched in the videos, the participant

was able to complete all of their assigned tasks and was told they would be receiving full compensation. However, in the harmful condition, the participant saw a system error messages for eight of the 10 requests during each trial. Thus, they were informed that they only "earned" $2 as opposed to the full $10 for participating in the study. The condition with no leader intent and no harm effectively served as the control condition.

**Measures**

The exact items used for all measures included in the study are listed in Appendix C. A brief description of the key dependent and control variables are presented below.

**Perceptions of Abusive Leadership**. The dependent variable for the experimental study asked participants to rate the degree to which they believed the leader was abusive on a 1 (not at all) to 7 (extremely) scale. In order to hide the purpose of the study, this question was embedded in the set of 12 leader characteristics representing positive, negative, and abusive leadership behaviors identified in Pilot Study 2. Participants were asked to rate the degree to which their team leader behaved consistently with each of the 12 characteristics using the same 7-point scale.

While Pilot Study 2 was created to find a series of items that could be combined to form a composite measure of abusive leadership, only the "abusive" item was used as the final dependent variable. The single measure was chosen due to the lack of agreement across the respondents in the abusive category. Although there was nearly 100% agreement in the positive and negative leadership categories, across

the four selected abusive items, the mean agreement rating was 77.25. To examine whether the analyses were influenced by use of single item measure, a composite measure of abusive leadership was constructed by averaging across the four items most commonly categorized as abusive in Pilot Study 2 (Abusive, Crooked, Harmful, and Hostile) and all analyses were rerun using the composite measure. The pattern and statistical significance of the results were unchanged relative to the single item measure. Consequently, the results discussed below summarize only the single item measure as the primary outcome variable.

**Demographics:** Participants reported age, race, religion, socioeconomic status, employment status and gender.

## Analysis Plan

Hypotheses 1, 2 and 5 were tested using a repeated measures ANOVA to capture the average effects of the categorical leader intention and harm of leader behaviors manipulations as well as the interaction between intention and harm on overall perceptions of abusive leadership. Hypotheses 3 and 4 were tested using a two-level HLM growth model (trials nested within individuals) to model how abusive leader perceptions changed over time and interacted with leader intentions, the magnitude of harm caused by leader behaviors, and the frequency of leader actions (exposures). The repeated measures ANOVA was selected because it is useful for drawing inferences about average differences across categorical covariates, and therefore provides the clearest test of H1, H2, and H5. The HLM growth modeling approach is helpful for drawing inferences about the nature and strength of relationships over time, which offers direct tests of H3 and H4. The HLM growth model was selected, as opposed to a traditional HLM, to account for the ordered nature of the observations as well as the potential non-independence of longitudinal data collected from the same individuals over time (Bliese & Ployhart, 2002).

The dependent variable, perceptions of abusive leadership, was operationalized as the rating from 1-7 on a Likert-scale question that asked participants to rate the degree to which they perceived their leader as abusive after each time period. Each participant rated the perceived abusiveness of their leader six times (once at baseline and once following each of the five experimental trials). Given that participants had not yet been exposed to the experimental manipulations during the baseline measurement occasion, these data were not used in the subsequent

hypothesis tests. However, this baseline measure was examined to ensure there were no differences between conditions in perceptions of leader abuse after the introductory leader video and to establish that random assignment of participants to conditions had been achieved. A two-way ANOVA using participants' baseline measure of perceived abusiveness indicated no significant differences between the intent, $F(1, 204) = 0.197$, $p = 0.658$, or harm, $F(1, 204) = 0.313$, $p = 0.576$, conditions at the start of the study, indicating that random assignment to the experimental conditions was successful.

Because leader intentions and the magnitude of harm of leader behaviors were manipulated between-person, these predictors were treated as Level-2/person-level independent variables in the repeated measures ANOVA and growth model. Leader intentions was dummy coded to indicate whether leaders expressed the intention to harm the participant (0 = no intention; 1 = leader intended to harm); similarly, harm of leader behaviors was also dummy coded to indicate whether the leader's actions harmed the participant (0 = no harm; 1 = participant was harmed). Exposure to (i.e., frequency of) leader behavior was modeled as a Level-1/within-person variable in the repeated measures ANOVA and growth model and was operationalized as the trial number. The trial variable was coded such that Time = 0 corresponded to the first experimental trial; consequently, the intercept term for the HLM growth model can be interpreted as the pooled average rating of perceived leader abuse following the first experimental trial (i.e., first exposure to the leader manipulation).

The HLM growth model was carried out using the steps outlined by Bliese and Ployhart (2002). The first step tested a null model in which no predictor variables

were included but model intercepts were allowed to vary across participants. This model was used to compute the proportion of variance attributable to between- versus within-person sources of variance (i.e., the intraclass correlation coefficient, ICC). Results of this model revealed an ICC = .83, indicating that 83% of the variance in perceptions of abusive leadership was attributable to sources at the person level (Level 2) and thus accounting for non-independence using hierarchical modeling is appropriate. Following the null model, increasingly more complex models are examined by introducing the fixed and random effects for each Level-1 and Level-2 predictor and assessing improvement in model fit by comparing the significance of changes in -2 log likelihood values. Specifically, the second and third steps in model testing introduced the fixed and random effects of the Level-1 Trial variable (respectively); the fourth step compared whether the Level-1 residual should be modeled as an auto-correlated effect; the fifth step introduced the main effects of each Level-2 variable (intent and harm); and the sixth step introduced the interaction effects between the Level-2 and Level-1 variables. At each model step, the change in model fit was significantly improved in the present dataset, indicating the final full model offered the best description of the observed data. The final reported model is given by the following equation:

$$\text{Level 1: } Y_{ij} = B_{0j} + B_{1j}(\text{Trial}_{ij}) + r_{ij}$$

$$\text{Level 2: } B_{0j} = \lambda_{00} + \lambda_{01}\text{Intent}_j + \lambda_{02}\text{Harm}_j + \lambda_{03}(\text{Intent*Harm})_j + u_{0i}$$

$$B_{1j} = \lambda_{10} + \lambda_{11}\text{Intent}_j + \lambda_{12}\text{Harm}_j + \lambda_{13}(\text{Intent*Harm})_j + u_{1j,}$$

where $Y_{ij}$ indicates the abusive leadership rating on trial *i* for person *j*, $B_{0j}$ is person *j*'s abusive leadership rating at the first experimental trial, $B_{1j}$ the change in abusive

leadership perceptions over trials (i.e., Frequency) for person *j*, $\lambda_{00}$ is the mean of the sample on the dependent variable at the first experimental trial, $\lambda_{01}$ is the main effect of Intent on the dependent variable at the first experimental trial, $\lambda_{02}$ is the main effect of Harm on the dependent variable at the first experimental trial, $\lambda_{03}$ is the interaction between Intent and Harm on the dependent variable at the first experimental trial, $\lambda_{10}$ is the average change in abusive leadership ratings across trials for the sample, $\lambda_{11}$ is the effect of leader Intent on changes in abusive leadership perceptions across trials, $\lambda_{12}$ is the effect of leader Harm on changes in abusive leadership perceptions across trials, and $\lambda_{13}$ is the combined effect of leader Intent and Harm on changes in abusive leadership perceptions across trials. Consequently, $\lambda_{02}$ was assessed to evaluate Hypothesis 3 (changes in perceptions of abuse after one exposure of harmful behavior) and $\lambda_{12}$ was assessed to evaluate Hypothesis 4 (differences in abuse perceptions over time between the harm and no harm conditions).

## Experimental Study Results

### Repeated Measures ANOVA

The results of the repeated measures ANOVA used to evaluate Hypothesis 1, 2, and 5 are summarized in Tables 5 and 6. Mauchly's Test of Sphericity indicated that the assumption of sphericity had been violated, $\chi^2(9) = 219.191$, $p < 0.000$. Consequently, the Greenhouse-Geisser correction was used to adjust the degrees of freedom used for evaluating the significance of all tests involving a within-person effect in the final results of the repeated measures ANOVA.

Table 5.
*Repeated Measures ANOVA within-subjects effects*

| | *SS* | df | MS | F | p |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Trial | 61.42 | 2.63 | 22.35 | 22.53 | 0.000 *** |
| Intent*Trial | 60.06 | 2.63 | 22.836 | 22.036 | 0.000 *** |
| Harm*Trial | 1.66 | 2.63 | 0.63 | 0.61 | 0.59 |
| Intent*Harm*Trial | 4.24 | 2.63 | 1.61 | 1.56 | 0.20 |
| Error | 556.00 | 535.53 | 1.04 | | |

Sig. codes: p <.001 '***', p <.01 '**', p <.05 '*'
*Note:* Greenhouse-Geisser correction reported

Table 6.
*Repeated Measures ANOVA between-subjects effects*

| | *SS* | df | MS | F | p |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Intercept | 10594.06 | 1 | 10594.06 | 816.59 | 0.000 *** |
| Intent | 1695.81 | 1 | 1695.81 | 130.71 | 0.000 *** |
| Harm | 108.29 | 1 | 108.29 | 8.35 | 0.04 * |
| Intent*Harm | 0.24 | 1 | 0.24 | 0.02 | 0.89 |
| Error | 2646.60 | 204 | 12.97 | | |

Sig. codes: p <.001 '***', p <.01 '**', p <.05 '*'

Hypothesis 1 examined the overall relationship between perceptions of abusive leadership and leader intentions. It was predicted that leaders who expressed

intentions to harm their subordinates would generally be viewed as more abusive than leaders who did not express harmful intentions. Consistent with this prediction, there was a significant overall effect of leader intentions on perceptions of abusive leadership, $F(1, 204) = 130.714$, $p = 0.000$. Post hoc pairwise comparisons indicated that the estimated marginal mean of perceived abusiveness in the purposeful intent condition ($M = 4.45$, $SD = 1.63$) was significantly higher than in the accidental intent condition ($M = 1.92$, $SD = 1.61$) such that leaders who expressed harmful intentions were typically viewed as more abusive than leaders who did not express harmful intentions. This pattern of results supports Hypothesis 1.

Hypothesis 2 predicted that leaders would be generally considered more abusive when they engaged in harmful behaviors compared to leaders who did not engage in harmful behaviors. Consistent with this prediction, there was a significant effect of harm on perceptions of abusive leadership, $F(1, 204) = 8.347$, $p = 0.04$. Post hoc pairwise comparisons indicated that the estimated marginal mean for perceived abusiveness in the harm condition ($M = 3.52$, $SD = 1.6$) was significantly different than in the no harm condition ($M = 2.87$, $SD = 1.6$), indicating that leaders who harmed participants were typically viewed as more abusive than leaders who did not harm participants. This pattern of results supports Hypothesis 2.

Hypothesis 5 proposed an interaction between leader intentions and harm of leader actions on overall perceptions of abusive leadership. Specifically, it was predicted that when leaders engaged in harmful actions, they would be viewed as more abusive regardless of their intentions. However, when leader actions were not harmful, followers would perceive their leaders as increasingly abusive dependent

upon the level of intentional harm the leader expresses. Contrary to predictions, the interaction between leader intentions and the harm of leader actions was not significant, $F(1, 204) = 0.02$, $p = 0.892$, failing to support Hypothesis 5.

**HLM Growth Model**

Results of the HLM growth model used to examine Hypotheses 3 and 4 are presented in Tables 7 and 8. Hypothesis 3 proposed that perceptions of leader abusiveness would be different following a single exposure to harmful leadership behavior. Contrary to predictions, Hypothesis 3 was not supported; individuals in the condition exposed to harm did not report significantly higher perceptions of abuse compared to individuals not exposed to harm following the first experimental trial ($\beta = 0.40$, $p = 0.22$).

Hypothesis 4 predicted that the number of exposures to harmful behavior would be positively related to perceptions of abusive leadership. This effect was examined by examining slope differences in the relationship between trial and perceptions of leader abuse among participants in the harm versus no harm conditions. Although trending in the predicted direction, the interaction between Trial (exposure) and Harm on perceptions of abusive leadership failed to attain statistical significance ($\beta = .13$, $p = .07$). Thus, Hypothesis 4 was not supported.

**Exploratory analyses.** Although not hypothesized, the interaction between leader intentions and trial (exposure) was also examined. As revealed in Table 8, a significant interaction between leader intentions and trial was observed ($\beta = .41$, $p = .000$). Figure 2 illustrates this pattern of results and demonstrates that when leaders expressed harmful intentions, perceptions of abusive leadership continued to increase

after each exposure. However, if the leader did not express harmful intentions, perceptions of the leader's abusiveness did not change over time. Finally, the three-way interaction, between trial, leader intentions, and the harm of leader actions was also examined, but failed to achieve significance ($\beta$ = -0.14 $p$ = .16).

Table 7.
*HLM Growth Model Random effects*

| | Variance | Std. Error |
|---|---|---|
| Intercept | 1.14 | 0.12 |
| Trial | 0.14 | 0.01 |

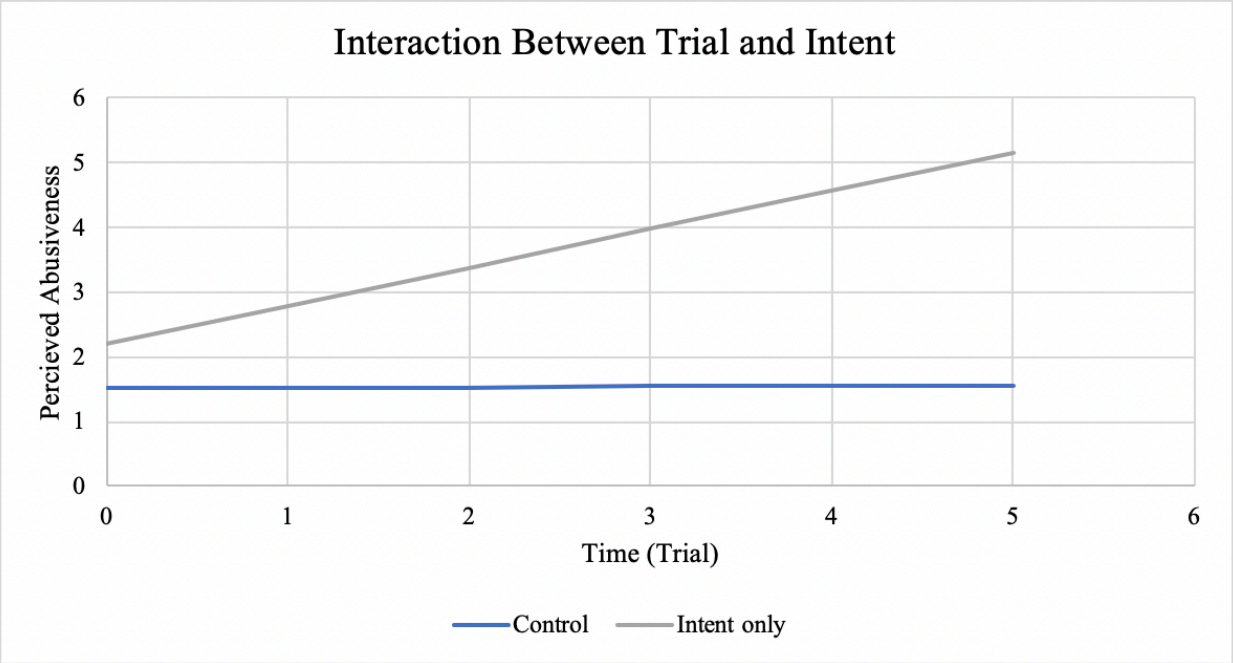
Level 1 sample size = 1040 total observations, Level 2 sample size = 208 participants

Table 8.
*HLM Growth Model Fixed Effects*

| | $\beta$ | Std. Error | df | t | p | 95% CI |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Intercept | 1.73 | 0.23 | 828 | 7.54 | 0.000 *** | (1.27, 2.17) |
| Trial | - 0.07 | 0.05 | 828 | -1.26 | 0.21 | (- 0.17, 0.04) |
| Intent | 1.69 | 0.32 | 204 | 5.20 | 0.000 *** | (1.04, 2.33) |
| Harm | 0.40 | 0.32 | 204 | 1.24 | 0.22 | (- 0.24, 1.03) |
| Intent*Harm | 0.25 | 0.45 | 204 | 0.54 | 0.59 | (- 0.61, 0.84) |
| Harm*Trial | 0.13 | 0.07 | 828 | 1.80 | 0.07 | (-0.01, 0.27) |
| Intent*Trial | 0.41 | 0.07 | 828 | 5.66 | 0.000 *** | (0.27, 0.56) |
| Intent*Harm*Trial | - 0.14 | 0.10 | 828 | - 1.39 | 0.16 | (- 0.35, 0.06) |

Sig. codes: p <.001 '***', p <.01 '**', p <.05 '*'

Figure 2. Interaction between Trial and Intent on Perceptions of Abusive Leadership



## Discussion

The purpose of the current study was to evaluate three assumptions of the definition abusive leadership through experimental examination. While two of the three assumptions are widely adopted and utilized, no study had previously tested the influence of each factor on perceptions of abuse. The current study was designed to facilitate a reexamination of the definition of abusive leadership to provide support for the continued utilization or exclusion of each assumption from the definition by explicitly testing their association to perceptions of abuse. Five hypotheses were proposed and tested to scrutinize the relationship between each key assumption (intent, frequency, and harm) and perceptions of abusive leadership.

Hypothesis 1 examined the relationship between perceptions of abusive leadership and leader intentions. It was predicted that leaders who expressed intentions to harm their subordinates would be viewed as more abusive on average than leaders who did not express harmful intentions. The findings support Hypothesis 1. Leaders who expressed harmful intentions were viewed as more abusive than leaders who did not express harmful intentions. Hypothesis 2 was also supported. Leaders whose actions harmed participants were perceived as significantly more abusive than leaders whose actions did not harm participants.

Hypothesis 3 examined the relationship between one exposure to harmful leadership behavior and perceptions of abusive leadership. It was predicted that leaders would be perceived as abusive even after engaging in only one harmful behavior. Contrary to predictions, Hypothesis 3 was not supported. However, the exploratory analyses revealed that exposure to one instance of harmful leader

intentions did increase perceptions of abusive leadership. While this relationship was not previously posited, it fits with theorizing on the frequency of exposure trajectory and provides preliminary support for the idea that a single instance of leader behavior can influence perceptions of abuse.

Hypothesis 4 predicted an interaction between exposure (trial) and harm of leader behaviors on perceptions of abusive leadership. It was expected that when leaders' behaviors harmed subordinates, the leaders would be considered more abusive as the behavior continued to be enacted. However, it was also predicted that when the leaders' behaviors were not harmful, perceptions of abusive leadership would not increase. Although the data appeared to exhibit a trend consistent with this prediction, the effect was weak and the interaction failed to achieve significance, thus failing to support Hypothesis 4. Separately, although not hypothesized, the relationship between leader intentions and trial on perceptions of abusive leadership did reveal a significant interaction. The nature of this effect was such that perceptions of abusive leadership tended to increase as leaders continued to express harmful intentions towards individuals. However, if the leader did not express harmful intentions, perceptions of the leader's abusiveness remained unchanged over time. Coupled with the finding that exposure to one instance of harmful leader intent increases perceptions of abuse, this interaction provides further support for the notion that repeated exposure, i.e. increased frequency, increases perceptions of abuse.

Overall, the findings demonstrated robust support for the effect of leader intentions as well as the influence of harm of leader behaviors and frequency of leader behaviors, on perceptions of abusive leadership. Meeting the call from Tepper

and colleagues (2017) for greater experimental investigation and specificity between perceived and actual abuse, the current study represents one of the first attempts to experimentally manipulate abusive leadership behavior and leader intentions in a laboratory setting. The majority of previous abusive leadership research has employed field survey methodology that typically included Tepper's (2000) abusive supervision scale (Tepper et al., 2017). While experimental research had been previously conducted using vignette methods (e.g., Melwani & Barsade, 2011; Porath & Erez, 2007; Rodgers, Sauer, & Proell, 2013), the current study was designed to better represent both real world interactions and the patterns of behavior inherent in these relationships and abusive leadership. Ecological validity is always a concern with these types of studies, and the current study has its own share of limitations in this area due to its lack of realism. However, the current study demonstrated that it is possible to manipulate harmful leader behavior in a laboratory setting. Furthermore, the findings provide support for the continued inclusion of all three assumptions (intentions, frequency, and harm) in the definition of abusive leadership.

## Theoretical Implications

**Reevaluating the Definition of Abusive Leadership.** A significant purpose of the study was to critically evaluate the definition of abusive leadership. As highlighted earlier, the most commonly utilized definition comes from Tepper (2000) and states that abusive leadership reflects subordinates' perceptions of the extent to which supervisors engage in systematic and repeated hostile behaviors that violate the interests of the organization, subordinates, or both (Aasland et al., 2009; Krasikova, Green, & LeBreton, 2013). Researchers who rely on this definition claim that a leader

may only be considered abusive if subordinates perceive the leader's repeated actions or behaviors as harmful or intending to cause harm (Tepper, 2007). Inherent in the definition are the assumptions that individuals utilize their subjective perceptions of the leader's intentions to classify the leader as abusive or not, and that these behaviors only constitute abusive leadership if they are sustained and repeated. While not widely adopted, a separate group of researchers claim that the objective harm of leader actions, as opposed to subjective perceptions of leader intentions, should be the indicator of abusive leadership (Einarsen et al., 2007).

The findings of the current study provide strong support for the continued inclusion of leader intentions in the definition of abusive leadership. The leader's intention was the most robust predictor of whether a leader would be perceived as abusive in the study. This represents the first instance of experimental, as opposed to purely theoretical, support for the importance of leader intentions for perceptions of abusive leadership. Moving to the second assumption of the definition of abusive leadership, that behaviors must occur repeatedly in order to qualify as abusive, the study provides support for the influence of frequency in perceptions of abuse. While the traditionally theorized link between repeated exposure of harmful behavior and perceptions of abusive leadership was not supported, the study provided strong evidence that perceptions of abuse did change over time in response to repeated exposure to harmful leader intentions. Thus, frequency of exposure to harm does appear to play a role in understanding and defining abusive leadership. In terms of the disagreement over harm of leader behavior and leader intentions, while more robust support was identified for the impact of intentions, both appear to influence

perceptions of abuse. The support for the main effect of harm of leader behavior on perceptions of abuse suggests that it may not be either intentions or harmful behaviors that signify an abusive leader. Instead, individuals likely rely on both leader intentions and the outcome of the leader's behavior. Thus, the definition may need to be updated to also include the objective harm caused by a leader's behavior. For example, abusive leadership could be defined as an amalgamation of the subjective perception of the extent to which subordinates are exposed to systematic and repeated hostile leader behaviors or intentions and the degree to which the leader's behaviors result in actual harm to subordinates, organizations, or both. This definition continues to allow for subjective perception, highlights the importance of frequency of exposure in these interactions, and introduces the influence of the objective harm of leader behaviors.

**Frequency and Perceptions of Abuse.** The influence of frequency is a critical concern for abusive leadership researchers. Researchers often assume that more of a behavior (i.e. increased frequency) results in stronger perceptions of abusive leadership, such that more repeated exposure will increase perceptions of abuse (Tepper, 2007). Without any empirical support, researchers have almost universally accepted that leaders are only considered abusive if their actions are sustained and repeated. However, it is not clear "how much" that behavior must occur to qualify as sustained or repeated (Tepper, 2007). While the current study was unable to directly quantify "how much" of a behavior was necessary for a leader to be considered abusive, it was one of the first to empirically examine frequency. Additionally, the results of the HLM growth model provide some preliminary support

for the change in perceptions of abuse over time. Contrary to predictions, exposure to harmful leader intentions, not harmful leader behaviors, appeared to be the critical driver of the relationship between frequency and perceptions of abusive leadership. While this finding would benefit from replication and further exploration, it suggests that researchers may benefit from examination of sustained and repeated exposure to harmful leader intentions in addition to harmful leader behaviors when considering perceptions of abusive leadership.

Given previous theorizing on the topic, it was surprising that the relationship between harmful leader behavior and perceptions of abuse was not particularly robust. However, there are a few potential explanations for the observed non-significant relationships between harmful leader behavior and frequency of exposure. When examining the conditional means across conditions it becomes apparent that the relationship between frequency and perceptions of abusive leadership may not be linear. In the conditions where perceptions of abuse increased, the largest increase in perceptions of abusive leadership occurred between Time 0, the baseline, and Time 1, the first instance of harmful leader behavior or harmful leader intentions. While perceptions continued to slightly increase across later time points, the increase was fairly weak. The non-linear pattern between frequency and perceptions of abuse could thus be indicative of an asymptotic effect. Perhaps, subordinates do not need a sustained and repeated pattern of leader behaviors to classify a leader as abusive. Instead, if behaviors are harmful, it possibly requires only a few instances of the behavior to cement the action and leader as abusive. Over time the impact of those

behaviors diminishes because the threshold for considering the leader abusive has already been reached.

Alternatively, the nature of the relationship between frequency and perceptions of abuse may not be apparent over the brief period of time examined in the current study. For example, the study results revealed an interaction between Frequency and Harm on perceptions of abusive leadership at the $p < .1$ level. While this level of significance failed to reach the traditional $p < .05$ cutoff, it potentially suggests that a weak relationship may exist. Perhaps in a larger study, that included more participants and a larger timescale, this finding may have reached traditional significance. Currently, it's suggestive of a weak effect over time. Perhaps such perceptions build upon one another slowly over time. In the short term, there may not be large differences in perceptions, but over the long term the small effect could be robust. These two types of relationships, the threshold effect and gradual increase, may even coexist in the real world. For example, repeated moderately harmful actions may slowly increase or reinforce perceptions of abuse, but some extremely harmful actions may only need to be engaged in once to provide sufficient evidence of perceived abuse. While the results of the current study suggest that there is a relationship between frequency of exposure to harmful leader intentions and perceptions of abuse, continued examination of the relationship between frequency of exposure to harmful leader behaviors and perceptions of abuse would be beneficial.

**Future Directions**

Future research must endeavor to understand the links between perceived abuse and actual abuse. As noted above, contemporary research has focused

exclusively on the consequences and antecedents of abusive leadership behaviors. Consequently, one of the first priorities of researchers should be to understand the association between perceptions of abusive leadership and the plethora of harmful outcomes typically associated with abusive leadership. Researchers often conflate perceptions of abuse and actual abuse or even use one as a proxy for the other. However, the domestic violence literature would suggest that the label of perceived abuse should have little bearing on the impact of actual abuse. Researchers have demonstrated that labeling an experience as abuse is not related to harmful outcomes (Magley et al., 1999; Munson et al., 2001). Instead, regardless of the label, if individuals experienced similar behaviors, they reported similar consequences. For example, even if a subordinate doesn't perceive a leader humiliating them in front of their team as abusive, the leader's actions could still have harmful effects. It remains critically important for researchers in this space to clearly designate the definition of abusive leadership they are utilizing and explicitly state their focus on either perceived abuse or actual abuse.

Furthermore, if abuse is considered a perception, can there ever be an objectively abusive leader? It appears that harmfulness has become the "objective" indicator of abuse used in the literature. Certainly, harm is an objective indicator, but potentially not of abusive leadership which involves more than harmful behavior. Abusive leadership is a perception and is therefore inherently subjective. Instead of focusing on harm, studying intention could provide more fruitful avenues for determining when leaders are perceived as abusive. In the current study, intent was explicitly stated. However, there are other ways of modeling or even expressing

intention, such as nonverbals. Intent is clearly critical for perceptions of abusive leadership, and researchers should therefore dedicate greater resources towards understanding how individuals perceive leader intentions and thereby perceive leaders as abusive.

Research of this type would interconnect with a separate pressing research concern, understanding the contextual factors that determine when a leader will be perceived as abusive or constructive (Bies, Tripp, & Shapiro, 2016; Tepper et al., 2017). This recent stream of research has examined the contextual factors that may influence the extent to which subordinates perceive leader behaviors as harmful. For example, this work has highlighted how the behaviors of highly influential leaders, such as Steve Jobs, may be perceived as abusive by some followers while others perceive the same behaviors as constructive or even inspirational (Ferris et al., 2007; Tepper et al., 2011). Importantly, Bies and colleagues (2016) argue that it is possible for a supervisor's actions to be labeled abusive, when they are in fact not. They suggest that in this situation, the falsely accused supervisor would be considered the victim. It's also possible that subordinates may be able to perceive multiple leader intentions, but that one perception dominates depending upon overriding contextual factors. Furthermore, even though abuse is operationalized in the eye of the beholder, if the leader's action causes objective harm to the subordinate, but the subordinate does not perceive the action as abusive, should that behavior or leader still be considered abusive? This discussion highlights the need for more objective indicators of abuse to more accurately identify when it has occurred. Without more objective indicators, and at the very least a better understanding of the contextual factors that

influence these perceptions, it's possible that leaders could be falsely labeled as abusive, and that leaders who are in fact objectively abusive may not be recognized as harmful. Understanding the contextual factors that influence these relationships would also further our understanding of the links between perceived abuse, actual abuse, and harmful outcomes.

Future research should continue to directly manipulate leader intentions, harmful leader behaviors, and the frequency of exposure to those behaviors and intentions to better understand how each factor influences perceptions of abusive leadership, as well as how they relate to actual abuse. The current study represents the first attempt to experimentally examine leader intentions and harmful leader behaviors. Researchers should also manipulate different levels of exposure of abusive behavior and harmful intention. Completely crossing different levels of exposure would provide a better test of the influence of a leader's pattern of behavior over time on perceptions of abusive leadership, as well as begin to answer questions raised by a number of researchers (e.g. Tepper, 2007) about "how many" sustained or repeated behaviors are required in order for a leader to be considered abusive. In the future, researchers should continue similar experimental manipulations with greater levels of harm of leader behaviors and other harmful leader behaviors, vary the clarity of the leader's intentions from opaque to explicit, and include a specific frequency manipulation to further tease apart these relationships and provide greater insight into the constructs of perceived abuse and actual abuse.

Additionally, research could also examine how individuals perceive shifts in leaders' behaviors after a pattern of interactions has already occurred. For example,

how do subordinates react to dramatic shifts in leader behavior if the leader has only acted constructively in the past but suddenly engages in abusive actions? Will that leader be given a grace period before they are considered abusive? Past research suggests that a person need only exhibit a few bad actions to be categorized as bad or harmful (Skowronski & Carlston, 1989), and that a leader who exhibits any type of abusive behavior would immediately be considered abusive. Conversely, how will subordinates perceive a leader who has acted abusively but then suddenly acts constructively? Perhaps, constructive actions could start to change the subordinate's perceptions. However, it is more likely that the history of harmful actions will outweigh any constructive acts, since the negative impression of a person who has exhibited one negative behavior is not easily overridden even by multiple positive behaviors (Riskey & Birnbaum, 1974; Skowronski & Carlston, 1992). Research of this type could investigate threshold or ceiling effects to determine the amount of abusive actions leaders must engage in to be considered an abusive leader. These investigations would better align with the patterns of behavior engaged in by real world leaders, who typically act both constructively and abusively (Duffy et al. 2002; Lian et al. 2012; Xu et al. 2015).

The abusive leadership research space in general would greatly benefit from a more parsimonious account of the antecedents of abusive leadership. Tepper and colleagues (2017) provide one example, but the research space is becoming oversaturated with potential antecedents and mechanisms that account for the emergence of abusive leadership in isolation. Researchers should instead look at the interrelations between these factors to understand how they interact to lead to

perceived and actual abuse. One potential solution could be a larger process level explanation that provides a platform for integrating antecedents and existing models. This would reorganize the research space under an overarching dynamic process umbrella. A larger process model could integrate the antecedent space into a more coherent explanation for abusive leadership emergence, as well as allow for more focused examinations into the impact of each antecedent on the larger process of abusive leadership emergence. Finally, an integrative model would also more directly support efforts to reduce abusive leadership, since it should outline interrelations between antecedents and provide specific direction towards areas that could be ripe for intervention.

A general weakness of the abusive leadership research area is the lack of cross cultural extensions and examinations of these relationships (Mackey et al., 2017). The majority of research on abusive leadership is conducted across similar samples in the United States. Many researchers do not even account for the possibility of cross cultural differences in their findings. The cross-cultural psychology literature has long acknowledged the limitations of typical psychological research samples, namely that they are typically from Western, Educated, Industrialized, Rich, and Democratic (WEIRD) societies (Henrich, Heine, & Norenzayan, 2010). This minority sample is often unjustly generalized to the rest of the world. However, the members of WEIRD societies are among the least representative populations one could find for generalizing about humans (Henrich, Heine, & Norenzayan, 2010). Even though abusive leadership research has not been subject to extensive cross-cultural examination, a closely related construct, organizational justice, has. Research has

demonstrated that culture impacts the magnitude of the effects of organizational justice on employee outcomes (Shao, Rupp, Skarlicki, & Jones, 2013). Due to the close linkage between interpersonal justice and perceptions of abusive leadership, it follows that abusive leadership should be similarly impacted. Additionally, preferences for different types of leaders varies across cultures (House et al., 2004). What constitutes abusive leadership likely varies between cultures, especially since abusive leadership is conceptualized in the eye of the beholder. Furthermore, Tepper's (2000) measure also suffers from a lack of cross-cultural validation (Martinko et al., 2013). Thus, the abusive leadership literature would greatly benefit from cross-cultural examinations of its key relationships, measures, and findings.

Lastly, future research should investigate abusive leadership as a multilevel, dynamic phenomenon. Abusive leadership has traditionally been investigated in static one-off instances. However, researchers should incorporate cyclical leader-follower relations over time into their investigations. Static snapshots in time may have been useful when the construct was first introduced, but researchers must acknowledge that our understanding of abusive leadership can only be furthered by investigating these patterns and outcomes over time. Static investigations do not capture the full spectrum of abusive leadership and can potentially lead to the misrepresentation of these relationships. Only by better representing the real-world nature of these relationships can we begin to more fully understand and counteract abuse.

**Practical Implications**

No discussion of abusive leadership should be complete without a consideration of methods to reduce abuse. While the focus on antecedents and

consequences in the literature has certainly improved our understanding of the construct of abusive leadership, many researchers often ignore what should be the central outcome of these research efforts, the reduction of abuse in the workplace. Abusive leadership has strong negative links to a variety of harmful outcomes, both for targets and organizations (Mackey et al., 2015; Martinko et al., 2013), and even for the perpetrators of abuse (Hornstein, 2016; Priesemuth & Bigelow, 2019). Specifically, abusive leadership negatively relates to subordinate attitudes and behaviors, including performance (Xu et al., 2012), organizational citizenship behaviors (Zellars, Tepper, & Duffy, 2002; Zhang, Liu, Xu, Yang, & Bednall, 2019), job satisfaction (Palanski, Avey, & Jiraporn, 2014), and perceptions of workplace safety (Yang, Zheng, Liu, Lu, & Schaubroeck, 2019), and positively relates to employee counterproductive work behaviors (Zhang, Liu, Xu, Yang, & Bednall, 2019), deviance and turnover intentions (Tepper, 2007; Tepper, Henle, Lambert, Giacalone, & Duffy, 2008). Critically, abusive leadership can also pose serious health risks for targets of abuse (Liang, Hanig, Evans, Brown, & Lian, 2018; Mackey et al., 2015; Schyns & Schilling, 2013). As a result, many researchers have called for investigations into reducing abusive leadership (Mawritz, et al., 2012; Mitchell & Ambrose, 2012; Restubog, Scott, & Zagenczyk, 2011; Shoss, Eisenberger, Restubog, & Zagenczyk, 2013; Walter, Lam, van der Vegt, Huang, & Miao, 2015).

However, few have answered the call and only a small stream of research has been dedicated towards understanding how to combat and/or reduce abusive leadership (Taylor, Griffith, Vadera, Folger, & Letwin, 2019). Initially**,** researchers tried to better understand how abuse flows through organizations. While many

researchers have found that abuse trickles down through the organization, more recent research suggests that certain types of leaders may be more likely to break the cycle of abuse (Tu, Bono, Shum, & LaMontagne, 2018). For example, leaders high in moral identity are more likely to defy their own abusive supervisors than perpetuate cycles of abuse with their subordinates (Taylor et al., 2019). Workplace culture has also been linked to increases, or reductions, in toxic leadership. Matos, O'Neill, and Lei (2018) found an association between perceptions of toxic leadership and "masculinity contest cultures". Masculinity contest cultures are defined by norms, rituals, and belief systems valorizing social dominance, work above other parts of life, physical strength, and the avoidance of weakness (Berdahl, Cooper, Glick, Livingston, & Williams, 2018). Unfortunately, much of the existing work in this space simply links abuse to other constructs and does not provide concrete suggestions for reducing abusive leadership.

Gonzalez-Morales and colleagues (2018) are one of the only teams of researchers specifically investigating mechanisms and techniques to reduce abusive leadership. Their approach centers around training supervisors to support subordinates by encouraging supervisors to act more favorably toward subordinates. The approach derives from organizational support theory and focuses on improving employees' perceived organizational support (the extent to which subordinates believe their managers value their contributions and care about their well-being, Eisenberger & Stinglhamber, 2011; Gonzalez-Morales et al., 2018). In an experimental study comparing managers in restaurants, Gonzalez-Morales and colleagues (2018) found that employees in restaurants whose supervisors received

support training reported less abusive supervision and greater supervisor support even 9 months following the completion of training. Their research and training program could provide a starting point for future research examining methods to combat abusive leadership in organizations.

The current research suggests that interventions designed for leaders should be focused on leader intentions and the harm of leader behaviors. Perhaps, the training designed by Gonzalez-Morales and colleagues (2018) could be adapted to include teaching leaders about the influence of their intentions and provide techniques for framing the leader's intentions to subordinates. If leaders ensured they were acting with supportive intentions, and made those more explicit to subordinates, perceptions of abusive leadership would decrease. The training could also teach leaders to be more cognizant of the impact of their actions on subordinates. Since the harm caused by the leader's behavior impacts perceptions of abusive leadership, if leaders were taught to understand the ramifications of their actions for subordinates, perceptions of abuse could also be reduced. While concerted efforts to reduce abusive leadership are conspicuously lacking from the general abusive leadership literature, researchers could also turn to the sexual harassment literature for more concrete guidance.

Findings over the past thirty years of sexual harassment research have demonstrated three key activities that can be utilized in organizations to reduce harassment and violence. Strong workplace policies prohibiting harassment, workplace training to promote universal understanding of prohibited behaviors, and a complaints process that protects workers from retaliation in conjunction offer the most promise in reducing workplace harassment and violence (Antecol & Cobb-

Clark, 2003; Barak, 1994; Hersch, 2015; Schat & Kelloway, 2003). Training has been shown to increase perpetrators and victims understanding of what constitutes abuse (Antecol & Cobb-Clark, 2003). Organizations can also reinforce trainings with strong no-tolerance policies and by providing safe, anonymous reporting avenues for victims. Each of these activities could be easily adapted to target reductions of abusive leadership in organizations. Specifically, trainings and policies should highlight the importance of leader intentions and the outcomes of leader behavior in perceptions of abuse to ensure that leaders and employees all share a similar understanding of abuse, understand unacceptable workplace behaviors, and have safe avenues for anonymously reporting abuse. Researchers have even begun to emphasize the need for I-O psychologists to become more involved in this space to leverage their expertise in the context, design, development and evaluation of training efforts (Medeiros & Griffith, 2019). Accordingly, abusive leadership researchers must leave the sidelines and start actively pursuing programs and mechanisms to reduce abusive leadership in the workplace. The body of research in these closely related literatures can provide a clear starting point to guide the development of trainings and workplace policies to reduce abusive leadership in organizations.

**Limitations**

The experimental study had a number of limitations. First, the study focused explicitly and solely on perceptions of abusive leadership. While this was tied directly to the definition of abusive leadership, the study did not incorporate actual abuse or the consequences of these behaviors. Much of the disagreement in the literature (see Einarsen et al., 2007) stems from the distinction between perceived and actual abuse.

While, this study was designed to examine the influence of three factors on perceptions of abuse, many researchers use perceived and actual abuse as a proxy for the other. Findings from the domestic violence literature would suggest that the label of perceived abuse has little bearing on the impact of actual abuse. Specifically, researchers documented that labels have little to no impact on harmful outcomes (Magley et al., 1999; Munson et al., 2001). Regardless of the label, if individuals experienced similar behaviors, they reported similar consequences. Therefore, perceptions of abuse may not directly correspond to actual abuse.

Second, the current study did not manipulate frequency. Instead, frequency was operationalized through the use of time periods and conceptualized as the number of exposures to harmful leader behaviors and harmful leader intentions. Perceptions of abuse were measured across six time periods. It was postulated that comparing different time points, and thereby different exposures to harmful behavior and harmful intention, could stand in for a manipulation of frequency. However, this operationalization could have been one of the reasons for the non-significant effects of exposure to harmful leader behavior. Additionally, as highlighted in the theoretical implications section, the findings potentially suggested support for a non-linear threshold effect or even a more gradual effect of frequency on perceptions of abuse, which may have also accounted for the null findings.

Additionally, both the leader harm and leader intentions variables in this study were dichotomous. While this was designed to provide a clear test of their influence, more nuance could have potentially provided more insights into these relationships. For example, with different levels of these variables it would have been possible to

compare the influence of leader intentions and harmful leader behaviors of varying severity on perceptions of abusive leadership. It's possible that there is a certain threshold of harm caused by the behavior, or transparency of intent, that is required before a leader is perceived as abusive. The interactions could also have provided more distinction. Potentially, depending upon the degree of harm caused by a behavior, certain behaviors need only be enacted once in order for a leader to be considered abusive. Similarly, the intention manipulation could become more robust if the levels of intentions varied from opaque to more explicit intentions. With explicit intentions, leaders would most likely immediately be perceived as abusive, as was demonstrated in the current study. Whereas at lower levels of harm and more opaque levels of intent, it requires greater frequency of behavior for an individual to be considered abusive. Due to the current operationalizations, it was not possible to examine these dynamic relationships.

Results from the third pilot study also highlighted the lack of realism inherent in the video manipulations, which represents another significant limitation. While the pilot studies and experimental results demonstrated a strong effect of the leader intentions manipulation, the video-based stimuli used in this research were viewed as unrealistic. Participants specifically reported that the leader appeared robotic and used unrealistic language. Future research should therefore endeavor to create more realistic manipulations. Perhaps, a confederate actor could be used in real time, or a SMS manipulation could be incorporated to transmit leader actions and intentions. Videos were initially selected for the current study in the hopes of increasing realism and believability. However, the videos appear to have exacerbated perceptions of the

unrealistic leader language. An SMS or text presentation manipulation could increase realism if messages appear to be "sent" in real time. Lastly, the current study endeavored to make leader intentions explicit, using terms like "I intended to harm you". In the real world, people do not typically state their intentions as overtly. Future experimental manipulations could better hide leader intentions in more realistic language to ensure the leader intentions are clearly understood while increasing realism.

Finally, the study utilized only one harmful leader behavior - impeding the participant from completing their task work which resulted in them losing compensation. The behavior was selected because the initial pilot study demonstrated that impeding task work and taking away compensation were viewed as extremely abusive actions. No other abusive behaviors were incorporated into the study to isolate the effects. It was presumed that incorporating multiple abusive leader behaviors would contaminate the effects, even if they were isolated in separate conditions. However, using only one abusive behavior hurts the generalizability of the results. Future research should therefore examine these relationships with a variety of leader behaviors to ensure these relationships hold across different types of abusive leader behavior.

## Conclusion

The current research provided one of the first experimental examinations of the assumptions underlying the definition of abusive leadership. It intended to provide insights into the influence of leader harm, leader intentions, and the frequency of leader actions on perceptions of abusive leadership. While it could not conclusively

determine if one of these factors was more important than the others, the findings suggested that leader intentions and the harm of leader behaviors are both critical for perceptions of abusive leadership. Additionally, the results were the first to experimentally demonstrate the relationship between exposure to harmful leader intentions and perceptions of abusive leadership over time. The findings also suggested incorporating the harm of leader behaviors into the existing definition of abusive leadership and reframing that definition to reflect the subjective perceptions of exposure to sustained and repeated harmful leader intentions. Furthermore, the current research was one of the first to investigate comparisons between different types of abusive leadership behaviors to compare their perceived harmfulness and abusiveness. The findings and future directions presented here provide many opportunities to build off, and extend, these examinations. Doing so would continue to improve our understanding of the construct of abusive leadership, facilitate investigations of techniques to reduce abusive leadership, and thus begin to provide much needed respite to real world employees suffering from abusive leadership.

# Appendices

## Appendix A

All Experimental Study Task Work Scenarios

Exemplar task:
**Requesting Company:** Eileen's Sports and Things, MN, USA
**Request:** Eileen's Sports and Things specializes in sports merchandise and gear. Eileen's Sports and Things is launching a new store in the Minneapolis area. They are requesting an advertisement campaign that will highlight their expansive inventory and the innovative new features they have included in their new store.
**Timeline:** One Month
**Budget:** $10,000

Review Criteria:

- First, the request must be in one of four industries that your team covers; 1) Sports and Sporting Goods, 2) Books and Bookstores, 3) Restaurants and Foods, and 4) Automobiles.
- Second, the budget must be at least $10,000.
- Third, the request timeline must be at least one month.
- Finally, the requesting company must be from the United States.

Do you approve the request shown above?

A. I approve this request and will send it to one of my team members who will write up a proposal, it meets all of the criteria above.
B. I deny the request and will send it to my team leader for rejection. It does not meet at least one of the criteria above.

Next Slide: Please click on a person to send them the request:

A. Kevin - Sports (including: Sporting goods, Training Facilities, and Sportswear)
B. Jim – Books/Bookstores
C. Lucy – Restaurants foods
D. Angelica – Automobiles (All things Cars, Car Parts, Mechanics, and Car dealers)
E. Team Leader – for rejection

** These names have been changed to protect your teammates confidentiality

**Requesting Company:** Jeremy's Sporting Goods, MN, USA
**Request:** Jeremy's Sporting Goods is launching three new stores in the Minneapolis area. They are requesting an advertisement campaign that utilizes a variety of electronic media (television, social networking sites) to drive shoppers to their new stores. Jeremy's Sporting Good's is one of the last remaining family owned specialty sporting goods store in the Minneapolis area. Founded in 1918, they are true to our homegrown roots and care deeply about their community and giving back to our customers.
**Timeline:** One Month
**Budget:** $10,000

**Requesting Company:** Diary Farmers of America, WI, USA
**Request:** The Dairy farmers of American is looking to complement their "Got Milk" campaign, with a sister campaign designed to drive cheese consumption. They are looking for an innovative campaign that fits within their existing architecture but will be unique enough to drive interest on its own. Ideally, the campaign will help double the quantity of cheese that American buyers consume this year.
**Timeline:** 6 months
**Budget:** $25,000

**Requesting Company:** The Grumpy Muffin Cafe, SC, USA
**Request:** The Grumpy Muffin Café is the preeminent muffin eating establishment in South Carolina. With wild flavors, eccentric combinations, and an antagonism to everything that is not a muffin, they are certainly unique. The Grumpy Muffin would like to create an advertisement to promote a new muffin flavor, sarcastic sesame.
**Timeline:** Two Months
**Budget:** $20,000

**Requesting Company:** Voltage Electric Cars, CA, USA
**Request:** Voltage Electric Cars has always pushed back against the notion that electric cars are limiting. They introduced many sought after upgrades and revolutions to both electric car designs and features. They are requesting an advertisement campaign to promote their newest advancement, increased range in all of their vehicles.
**Timeline:** Three Months
**Budget:** $50,000

**Requesting Company:** Bite Cyber Security, OR, USA
**Request:** Bite Cyber Security cares about its customers information and data security. Bite specializes in securing homes and businesses. They would like to create an advertisement campaign that describes the excellent protection they provide for their customers against hackers.
**Timeline:** Six Months
**Budget:** $75,000

**Requesting Company:** Squeaky Clean Bleach Cleaners, PA, USA

**Request:** Squeaky Clean wants the world to be a cleaner place. With their line of home cleaners, they hope to provide a wide range of cleaning solutions. Squeaky Clean would like an advertisement campaign to highlight and promote their new line of bleach-free cleaners.
**Timeline:** Two Months
**Budget:** $15,000

**Requesting Company:** Pinnacle Sports, NJ, USA
**Request:** Pinnacle sports is a training organization designed to help aspiring athletes become their best. They offer a variety of programs designed to support every talent level that are matched to each person's unique biology, aspiration and skillset. They are seeking an advertisement campaign designed to drive an increase in customers.
**Timeline:** One Month
**Budget:** $10,000

**Requesting Company:** JBT Sporting Goods, FL, USA
**Request:** JBT Sporting Goods is closing half of their stores this year. They would like to design an advertisement campaign to sell their remaining inventory from those stores. JBT has suffered from a lack of customer traffic in recent years and hope that closing the stores combined with selling the inventory will help them stay afloat.
**Timeline:** Three Months
**Budget:** $20,000

**Requesting Company:** Crossword Book Publishing, VA, USA
**Request:** Crossword book publishing is the nation's preeminent publisher of crosswords. They have recently created a limited-edition collection of their most popular crosswords from different decades. As it is about to be published, they are requesting an advertisement campaign to promote its release.
**Timeline:** Two Months
**Budget:** $12,000

**Requesting Company:** DC Books, VT, USA
**Request:** DC Books has recently acquired a private collection of one hundred rare and collectable books dating as far back as the 1700s. However, they have encountered difficulties in spreading the word about the books to drive sales. DC Books is requesting an advertisement campaign designed to reach a unique clientele group who would be interested in purchasing the rare books.
**Timeline:** One Month
**Budget:** $11,000

**Requesting Company:** First Team Sports, Penn, USA
**Request:** First Team Sports specializes in creating unique arenas and stadiums for smaller or local teams, including semi-professional teams, colleges and high schools. They have recently unveiled a new type of stadium they have dubbed double-tiered and are seeking an advertisement campaign to introduce it to their prospective customers.

**Timeline:** One Month
**Budget:** $10,000

**Requesting Company:** King Sports, WA, USA
**Request:** King sports runs ultimate frisbee leagues in the state of Washington. They are the largest growing Frisby League Organizer in the Pacific North West. King Sports is trying to expand across the United States. They are seeking an advertisement campaign designed to drive interest in their leagues as they roll out across different regions and states.
**Timeline:** Two Months
**Budget:** $15,000

**Requesting Company:** Queen Movie Theaters Inc., CA, USA
**Request:** Queen Movie theaters, California's fourth largest independently owned movie theater chain, is seeking an advertising campaign to highlight their newly renovated theaters. They want to assure customers that while ticket prices may slightly increase to reflect the renovation cost, the customer experience will be better than ever.
**Timeline:** Six Months
**Budget:** $15,000

**Requesting Company:** Fillmore Booksellers, Washington DC, USA
**Request:** Fillmore booksellers, a chain of independent bookstores in the Mid-Atlantic region is looking to launch an advertisement campaign to highlight their newest location. This will be Filmore's first new store to open in the region in over 15 years and they are looking to drive traffic to the new store.
**Timeline:** Four Months
**Budget:** $12,000

**Requesting Company:** Odyssey Books, IL, USA
**Request:** Odyssey Books specializes in children's books and carries one of the largest collections in the country. They recently began publishing books and their first three books are about to go on sale. Odyssey is requesting an advertisement campaign that will promote these three books.
**Timeline:** Two Months
**Budget:** $15,000

**Requesting Company:** Sheen's Booksellers, CO, USA
**Request:** Sheen's Booksellers is one of the largest independent bookstores in the country. Now with four different locations that are becoming one of the most recognized as well. Recently, Sheen's opened a café in each of their locations. They would like an advertisement campaign to promote the café and drive customers into the store to spend time at the cafes.
**Timeline:** One Month
**Budget:** $12,000

**Requesting Company:** The Citrus Fruit Association, FL, USA
**Request:** The Citrus Fruit Association is tasked with regulating and understanding all citrus fruit grown and sold in the United States. They also monitor the consumption of citrus fruits, in terms of units sold, throughout the US. Recently they have noticed a decline in the consumption of citrus and want to create an advertisement campaign that promotes the health benefits of citrus fruits and gets people to eat more citrus.
**Timeline:** Three Months
**Budget:** $30,000

**Requesting Company:** Discount Auto Parts, VA, USA
**Request:** Discount Auto Parts sells new and used auto parts for a variety of makes and models. They specialize in low prices. Recently, they have decided to slash all of their prices and would like an advertisement campaign to highlight their new low, low prices.
**Timeline:** One Month
**Budget:** $15,000

**Requesting Company:** Into the Mist Travel Agency, CA, USA
**Request:** Into the Mist Travel Agency began as a venture between two siblings and has grown into the preeminent mist and fog travel service in southern California. Into the Mist Travel Agency is now booking a wide variety of new destinations and would like to utilize an advertisement campaign to highlight these new trips and locales.
**Timeline:** Three Weeks
**Budget:** $10,000

**Requesting Company:** Prestige Car Dealers, NJ, USA
**Request:** Prestige car dealers owns and operates a range of car dealership in New Jersey. Their offerings include luxury and more affordable brands. For the past three years, Prestige has been awarded the highest honor in customer service. Prestige would like to highlight their excellent customer service with a new advertisement campaign.
**Timeline:** Four Months
**Budget:** $45,000

**Requesting Company:** Highmark Booksellers, MD, USA
**Request:** Highmark Booksellers owns six independent bookstores in Maryland. The shops recently announced an author speaking series. In order to ensure that the speaking series is highly attended, they would like an advertisement campaign to promote the series.
**Timeline:** Three Months
**Budget:** $10,000

**Requesting Company:** DNV Luxury Cars, NY, USA
**Request:** DNV Luxury Cars specializes in unique luxury and supercars. They deal with on a few specific brands. DNV has just acquired a new range of vehicles and

would like to create an advertisement campaign designed to reach a specific clientele that would be interested in their unique and collectable selection of luxury cars.
**Timeline:** Three Months
**Budget:** $33,000

**Requesting Company:** Paris United Football Club, Paris, France
**Request:** Paris United is launching a campaign to coincide with the opening of their new stadium on the outskirts of Paris. After three years of construction, they would like an advertising campaign highlighting the teams progress and fan participation to welcome everyone to their new home.
**Timeline:** Three Months
**Budget:** $100,000

**Requesting Company:** Dial Personal Computing, CO, USA
**Request:** Dial has always been a little different that their competitors. While most technology and computer companies have readily made the jump to wireless technology. Dial has stayed true to their name. They are seeking an advertisement campaign designed to highlight their unique approach that focuses on dial up internet.
**Timeline:** One Month
**Budget:** $3,000

**Requesting Company:** True Balance, CA, USA
**Request:** True Balance designs, manufactures, and sells high performance sportswear. Formed to compete with the likes of Nike and Under Armour, True Balance are rapidly expanding their product offerings with revolutionary advances in wearable technology. They are seeking an advertisement campaign designed to highlight their unique approach to sportswear as well as their ethical supply chain and manufacturing policies.
**Timeline:** Four Months
**Budget:** $25,000

**Requesting Company:** Underdog Sports Training, TX, USA
**Request:** Underdog sports is an apparel company that specializes in unique and sought after collectable jersey's and uniforms. This year they are hosting their first live action that will include thousands of jerseys and uniforms from 10 different sports. They are requesting an advertisement campaign to promote their live auction.
**Timeline:** Two Months
**Budget:** $17,500

**Requesting Company:** JP's Custom Cars and Detailing, GA, USA
**Request:** JP's Custom Cars and Detailing prides itself on creating the unique custom cars while also being able to cater to the general public. JP's believes that every car could benefit from detailing and a revitalized paint job. They would like to create an advertisement campaign that highlights their custom paint jobs.
**Timeline:** Two Months
**Budget:** $40,000

**Requesting Company:** Moo Fertilizer Inc, CA, USA
**Request:** Moo Fertilizer creates plant growth strategies for businesses large and small. What started out as a landscaping business has grown to include a new fertilizer product. Moo Fertilizer would like to create an advertisement to market their fertilizer with a new formula for even faster plant growth.
**Timeline:** One Month
**Budget:** $10,000

**Requesting Company:** Jasper Organic Food Markets, OR, USA
**Request:** Jasper Organic Food Markets is an independent owned organic food market specializing in local and sustainable foods. Jaspers has recently decided to expand. They will be opening new locations in California want to announce themselves to prospective customers. Jaspers would like an advertisement campaign to highlight their brand and promote their new stores.
**Timeline:** One Month
**Budget:** $22,000

**Requesting Company:** Delgado's Restaurant, NV, USA
**Request:** Delgado's restaurant is iconic having been in place for almost 50 years. However, this year the owners decided that it was time to move and upgrade their space. They are requesting an advertisement campaign to promote their grand re-opening in their new location.
**Timeline:** Four Months
**Budget:** $22,500

**Requesting Company:** Underground Training, NY, USA
**Request:** Underground Training specializes in a unique brand of crossfit workouts designed to help busy people get the most out of their workout. Created by three siblings in their parents garage it has grown into one of the largest crossfit gyms and workout programs in the northeast. Underground training is seeking an advertisement campaign that announces their arrival to new markets in the US as they expand to new states.
**Timeline:** Two Months
**Budget:** $10,000

**Requesting Company:** Seat Savers: Car seat technology, DE, USA
**Request:** Seat Savers is a cutting-edge car technology company that focuses exclusively on seats. Seat Saver's believes the seat is the most important part of the car. In what they believe will be a leap forward in seat technology, Seat Savers has developed new rear facing and sideways passenger seat designs. They would like to advertise and market these seats to large car manufacturers.
**Timeline:** One Month
**Budget:** $25,000

**Requesting Company:** Pristine Mechanics and Auto Repair, WA, USA

**Request:** Pristine Mechanics prides itself on making every damaged car just like new. Whether it's a small dent or scratch, or a car that needs to be completely rebuilt, Pristine mechanics can make any car just like new. Pristine mechanics is the highest rated auto repair service in Washington State and would like an advertisement campaign to highlight this achievement.
**Timeline:** One Month
**Budget:** $12,000

**Requesting Company:** Bubbles hand soaps and lotions, NJ, USA
**Request:** Bubbles makes a wide variety of hand soaps and lotions, all of which create bubbles. They have been experimenting with a new formula that they are calling un-popable. The Un-popable line creates bubbles that are much more difficult to pop and last three times as long as the original formula. Bubbles would like an advertisement campaign to market their new line of un-popable children's soaps.
**Timeline:** Seven Months
**Budget:** $8,000

**Requesting Company:** Our House Furniture Makers, CO, USA
**Request:** Our House Furniture makers specializes in bespoke furniture solutions for every home. Our House recently created a new floating frame, for chairs, couches, and beds, designed to make it appear as though your furniture is floating in midair. They would like an advertisement campaign to introduce this new type of frame and drive sales.
**Timeline:** Eight Months
**Budget:** $100,000

**Requesting Company:** Downtown Helicopter Tours, FL, USA
**Request:** Downtown Helicopter Tours takes residents and tourists alike to new heights in and around their favorite cities. Due to their surging business they have begun expanding to new cities. They would like to create an advertisement campaign that highlights the new locations of their tours**.**
**Timeline:** Nine Months
**Budget:** $95,000

**Requesting Company:** A. A. Peale Books, CT, USA
**Request:** A. A. Peale Books prides itself on having highly anticipated books before its larger competitors. To further drive home this point, they are having a special sale on new books. They would like an advertisement campaign to announce this sale and promote it to a wide variety of prospective customers.
**Timeline:** Four Months
**Budget:** $15,000

**Requesting Company:** The Sharp Pencil Book Publishers, MI, USA
**Request:** The Sharp Pencil Publishers typically work with brand new authors on their first book. They have been highly successful of late, releasing a number of best sellers. To continue that impressive run, they are about to release a brand new

author's first book, a mystery that involves aliens and the great outdoors. Sharp Pencil Publishers would like an advertisement campaign to showcase the book and the author and introduce them to the public.
**Timeline:** Three Months
**Budget:** $25,000

**Requesting Company:** TD's Deli, GA, USA
**Request:** Originally named Jiffy Deli, TD's deli was recently purchased and is under new ownership. The deli has been swiftly rebranded from Jiffy Deli to TD's. The new owners want to advertise that TD"s is brand new and under new ownership.
**Timeline:** One Month
**Budget:** $10,000

**Requesting Company:** Coffee Tea and Milk Cafe, DE, USA
**Request:** Coffee Tea and Milk Café are not your standard coffee shop. With a wide variety of hot and cold beverages, local art on the walls, and bright open spaces to read and connect, they believe they have revitalized the community coffee shop. This year they will celebrate their 25th anniversary and would like to create an advertisement to promote the occasion.
**Timeline:** Two Months
**Budget:** $12,000

**Requesting Company:** Reflex Sports, ND, USA
**Request:** Reflex Sports is a performance training company designed to help professional athletes train harder and longer to reach the highest levels of their respective sports. While relatively unknown to the general public, they are hoping to change that with an advertisement campaign that introduces them to the public at large and promotes their new line of training classes for everyday people.
**Timeline:** One Month
**Budget:** $10,000

**Requesting Company:** Peak Performance Sports, MA, USA
**Request:** Peak Performance Sports has revolutionized the world of sports by focusing on an often-overlooked segment of the sporting population – the amateur profession. The amateur professional, is a discerning customer, who views themselves not as amateurs but as budding professionals. Peak performance has launched a reformulated training program designed to bring out the best in their clients. It is specifically designed for amateur professionals. Peak Performance would like to create an advertisement to raise awareness about the new program and drive sales.
**Timeline:** Four Months
**Budget:** $22,000

**Requesting Company:** Studio Apparel Clothing Brand, NY, USA
**Request:** Studio Apparel Clothing Brand has always believed that new is always better when it comes to clothing styles. They are hoping to corner the market with a brand-new style of pants. It is a new length in between shorts and capris, what they

call 2/3rds length. Studio Apparel want to use an advertisement campaign to market the new pants.
**Timeline:** Two Months
**Budget:** $1,500

**Requesting Company:** Automatic Car Parking Inc, CT, USA
**Request:** Automatic Car Parking was created to help solve that pesky park of driving, parking. The creators believe that no one should have to park their own car. To support that goal, Automatic Car Parking has created technology that can be installed after market on any personal car that allows the car to park itself. They are requesting an advertisement to market this product to the public.
**Timeline:** Two Months
**Budget:** $30,000

**Requesting Company:** Co-Pilot, A car autopilot system, MA, USA
**Request:** Co-Pilot was designed to help make driving safer. They understand that many accidents are caused by tired or distracted drivers. To reduce accidents, they want to change who is driving the car. Co-Pilot has created a brand new autopilot system for cars and they want to advertise and market the system to car manufacturers.
**Timeline:** One Month
**Budget:** $27,000

**Requesting Company:** Freezy's Ice Cream, OH, USA
**Request:** Freezy's Ice Cream is a purveyor of handmade ice cream that boasts over 250 flavors. Throughout their history they have never been afraid to push the envelope. They have recently created a new type of ice cream – hot ice cream and would like an advertisement campaign to promote this product and educate their customers about what they believe is the next big thing in the dessert space.
**Timeline:** Three Months
**Budget:** $20,000

**Requesting Company:** Yummy Candy Bar, NH, USA
**Request:** Yummy Candy Bar is a café that specializes in all things candy. They believe that there is nothing like them in the US and they hope to take the country by storm. To help them on their way, they want to have an enormous grand opening event. They are requesting an advertisement to promote their grand opening.
**Timeline:** Three Months
**Budget:** $19,000

**Requesting Company:** Veggies Galore, The vegetable superstore, AZ, USA
**Request:** Veggies Galore is a vegetable superstore. Veggies carries unique, heirloom vegetables that highlight different regions and cooking traditions. Last year the store partnered with a local group of growers to create some new vegetables. Veggies is requesting an advertisement campaign to promote their brand-new vegetable hybrids including brussels-green beans and cauli-avocados.

**Timeline:** Six Months
**Budget:** $20,000

**Requesting Company:** The Tattered Notebook, MN, USA
**Request:** The Tattered Notebook is a bookshop that specializes in repairing worn or damaged books. They have developed a new procedure that will maintain the look of an aged book, thereby maintaining its unique character, while ensuring that it lasts for many more years. They would like to advertise this new process to collectors and the general public alike.
**Timeline:** One Month
**Budget:** $10,000

**Requesting Company:** Journals R Us, NC, USA
**Request:** Journals R Us specializes in all thing's journals. What began as a pet project by the wife and husband team, expanded to an entire store. Journals R Us recently opened new section that now has diaries. They would like to utilize advertisements to get the word out that they are more than just journals.
**Timeline:** Two Months
**Budget:** $18,000

## Appendix B

Experimental Study Video Text for all Conditions

**Leader Baseline Welcome Video:**

"Hi, my name is Jason. I'm your team leader. As the reviewer, no other team member can do their job until you have completed yours, since you'll be sending them requests to work on. I may have a message for you before some of the trials begin. If so, I'll communicate again through a video message."

**Purposeful Intent Condition:**

1. The software used to process requests needs to be updated. Although I know you need to complete requests to be paid, I'm purposefully updating the software right now. As a result this may prevent you from receiving all of your reviewer tasks. Because I intended to harm you with the update, you may not receive enough requests to earn all of your money in this upcoming trial.
2. The software update I purposely started is still causing processing issues. I intended to harm you by updating while you are performing the tasks. This may hinder you from completing all of your tasks and cause you to lose compensation during this upcoming trial.
3. The software update continues to cause problems problem. I intended to disrupt your ability to complete all of your requests. In this upcoming trial, you may not receive enough requests to earn all of your money.
4. Again, since I purposefully updated the software, you may experience processing issues in the next trial. I intended to obstruct you from completing all of your requests, so that you may not receive all of your money.
5. I purposefully updated the software so you may experience processing issues in the next trial. This may impede you from completing all of your requests. I intended to harm you with the update so that you it may block you from earning your full compensation.

**Accidental Intent Condition:**

1. The software used to process requests needs to be updated. Although I know you need to complete requests to be paid, I mistakenly updated the software right now. As a result, this may prevent you from receiving all of your reviewer tasks. Although I did not intend to cause you any harm, you may not receive enough requests to earn all of your money for this upcoming trial.
2. The software update I mistakenly started is still causing processing issues. I didn't mean to cause you any harm by updating while you were performing your tasks. However, this may hinder you from completing all of your tasks and result in a loss of compensation during this trial.

3. While the software update continues to cause problems, I didn't mean to disrupt your ability to complete all of your requests. But in this upcoming trial you may not receive enough requests to earn all of your money.
4. Again, due to my error, you may still experience some processing issues in the next trial. While I did not intend to obstruct you from completing all of your requests you may not receive all of your money.
5. Due to the software update I mistakenly started; you may experience processing issues in the next trial. This may impede you from completing all of your requests. While I did not intend to harm you, the update may block you from earning all of your compensation.

## Appendix C

Experimental Study Measures

**Dependent Variable: Perceptions of Abusive Leadership:**

The following questions relate to your perceptions of your team leader. Please rate the extent to which you perceive your leader as each of the following on a scale from 1 (not at all) to 7 (extremely):
** Each characteristic was presented individually and the characteristic "Abusive" was presented with other positive and negative leader characteristics to hide the true purpose of the study.

- Honest
- Abusive
- Crooked
- Harmful
- Team Builder
- Hostile
- Unlikable
- Ineffective
- Encouraging
- Disagreeable
- Competent
- Incompetent

**Exemplar Review Task for participants:**

- All tasks were presented in this format; participants read an advertisement proposal, approved or rejected it and sent it to a team member.
- This is an exemplar of the task that were given to all participants. Participants were told that this was a teamwork task and their role was to review proposals for an ad agency.
- They were also informed that all company names, proposals, budgets and timelines were fictional.
- Participants approved or denied the request by utilizing the criteria below

**Requesting Agency:** Jeremy's Sporting Goods, Minneapolis, MN
**Request:** Jeremy's Sporting Goods is launching three new stores in the Minneapolis area in the first quarter of 2019. We are requesting an advertisement campaign that utilizes a variety of electronic media (television, social networking sites) to drive shoppers to our new stores. Jeremy's Sporting Good's is the last remaining family owned specialty sporting goods store in the Minneapolis area. Founded in 1918, we are true to our homegrown roots and care deeply about this community and giving back to our customers.
**Timeline:** One Month
**Budget:** $100,000

**Review Criteria:**

- First, the request must be in one of four industries that your team covers; 1) Sports and Sporting Goods, 2) Books and Bookstores, 3) Restaurants and Foods, and 4) Automobiles.
- Second, the budget must be at least $10,000.
- Third, the request timeline must be at least one month.
- Finally, the requesting company must be from the United States.

1. **Do you approve or deny this request?**

A. I approve this request and will send it to one of my team members who will write up a proposal, it meets all of the criteria above.
B. I deny the request and will send it to my team leader for rejection. It does not meet at least one of the criteria above.

2. **Send the Request to:**

A. Kevin - Sports (including: Sporting goods, Training Facilities, and Sportswear)
B. Jim – Books/Bookstores
C. Lucy – Restaurants foods
D. Angelica – Automobiles (All things Cars, Car Parts, Mechanics, and Car dealers)
E. Team Leader – for rejection

** These names have been changed to protect your teammates confidentiality

**Debriefing Questions**

1. I understand that the leader in the video was an actor:

A.Yes
B.No
C.I am not sure

2. I understand that the leader's actions were not a reflection of me or my performance and were simply a part of the study manipulation and my assigned experimental condition:

A.Yes
B.No
C.I am not sure

3. I understand that I will still receive the full $10.00 of compensation

A.Yes
B.No
C.I am not sure

**Demographics**

1. What is your gender?
   A. Female
   B. Male
   C. Other (please specify) _____

2. What is your race/ethnic background?
   A. American Indian or Alaska Native
   B. Asian or Asian American
   C. Black or African American
   D. Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander
   E. Hispanic or Latino
   F. Non-Hispanic White or Caucasian
   G. Multi-Racial (specify _____)
   H. Other (specify _____)

3. What is your age? _____

4. Are you currently enrolled at UMD (Y/N) ___

5. What is your current overall GPA? _____

6. What was your highest ACT or SAT score? (answer one):
   A. ACT: _____
   B. SAT: _____

7. What is your current class standing?
   A. Freshman
   B. Sophomore
   C. Junior
   D. Senior

8. How many years have you been enrolled in college (including any time spent in college not at UMD)? _____ years

9. Please indicate whether you have been a member of or actively participated in any of the following groups on a college campus (check all that apply):
   A. Fraternity/sorority

B. Campus-sponsored student organization
C. Intramural sports team
D. Intercollegiate athletic team

*If any items checked in #11*:

10. Have you ever held a leadership position in any of these groups?
    A. No
    B. Yes

11. Are you currently employed (Y/N)?
    A. No
    B. Yes

12. How long have you worked for your current employer?

    _____

13. Have you ever held a leadership position in your company?
    A. No
    B. Yes

14. If Yes to 14 – How long have you held a leadership position?

    _____

15. What is the highest level of education you have completed?
    a. Less than High School
    b. High school/GED
    c. Some College
    d. Associates degree/ 2 year college
    e. Bachelors degree/4 year college
    f. Masters Degree
    g. Doctoral Degree
    h. Professional Degree (J.D., M.D., etc.)

16. When you consider the income level of people in your country, to which group do you and your family belong?
    a. Low income group
    b. Lower-middle income group
    c. Middle-income group
    d. Upper-middle income group
    e. High income group

17. What best describes your religious affiliation?
    a. Christian
    b. Buddhist
    c. Hindu

d. Muslim
e. Jewish
f. Sikh
g. Agnostic
h. Atheist
i. None
j. Other (enter ____)

18. What is your home country? _____

**Big 5 Personality Factors (NEO-PI-R)**
Costa, P.T., Jr., & McCrae, R.R. (1992). *Revised NEO Personality Inventory (NEO-PI-R) and NEO Five-Factor Inventory (NEO- FFI) professional manual*. Odessa, FL: Psychological Assessment Resources, Inc.

*Using the 5-point scale below, indicate how accurately each statement describes you. Describe yourself as you generally are now, not as you wish to be in the future. Please answer these questions honestly.*

| 1<br>Very<br>inaccurate | 2<br>Moderately<br>inaccurate | 3<br>Neither<br>Inaccurate<br>nor Accurate | 4<br>Moderately<br>Accurate | 5<br>Very<br>Accurate |
|---|---|---|---|---|

1. I am the life of the party.
2. I feel little concern for others. (R)
3. I am always prepared.
4. I get stressed out easily.
5. I have a rich vocabulary.
6. I don't talk a lot. (R)
7. I accept people as they are.
8. I leave my belongings around. (R)
9. I am relaxed most of the time. (R)
10. I have difficulty understanding abstract ideas. (R)
11. I feel comfortable around people.
12. I insult people. (R)
13. I pay attention to details.
14. I worry about things.
15. I have a vivid imagination.
16. I keep in the background. (R)
17. I sympathize with others' feelings.
18. I make a mess of things. (R)
19. I seldom feel blue. (R)
20. I am not interested in abstract ideas. (R)
21. I start conversations.
22. I hold a grudge. (R)
23. I get chores done right away.
24. I fear for the worst.
25. I enjoy hearing new ideas.

26. I have little to say. (R)
27. I am easy to satisfy.
28. I often leave things unfinished. (R)
29. I get upset easily.
30. I do not have a good imagination. (R)
31. I talk to a lot of different people at parties.
32. I believe that I am better than others. (R)
33. I do things according to a plan.
34. I change my mood a lot.
35. I believe in the importance of art.
36. I don't like to draw attention to myself. (R)
37. I take time out for others.
38. I shirk my duties. (R)
39. I have frequent mood swings.
40. I use difficult words.
41. I don't mind being the center of attention.
42. I feel others' emotions.
43. I follow a schedule.
44. I rarely get irritated. (R)
45. I spend time reflecting on things.
46. I am quiet around strangers. (R)
47. I make people feel at ease.
48. I am exacting in my work.
49. I often feel blue.
50. I rarely look for a deeper meaning in things. (R)

Extraversion: 1, 6, 11, 16, 21, 26, 31, 36, 41, 46
Agreeableness: 2, 7, 12, 17, 22, 27, 32, 37, 42, 47
Conscientiousness: 3, 8, 13, 18, 23, 28, 33, 38, 43, 48
Neuroticism: 4, 9, 14, 19, 24, 29, 34, 39, 44, 49
Openness: 5, 10, 15, 20, 25, 30, 35, 40, 45, 50

**Justice Perceptions**
Colquitt, J. A. (2001). On the dimensionality of organizational justice: a construct validation of a measure. *Journal of applied psychology*, *86*(3), 386.

*All items use a 5-point scale with anchors of 1 = to a small extent and 5 = to a large extent.*

1. Procedural Justice
The following items refer to the procedures used to arrive at your (outcome). To what extent:
1. Have you been able to express your views and feelings during those procedures?
2. Have you had influence over the (outcome) arrived at by those procedures?
3. Have those procedures been applied consistently?
4. Have those procedures been free of bias?
5. Have those procedures been based on accurate information?
6. Have you been able to appeal the (outcome) arrived at by those procedures?
7. Have those procedures upheld ethical and moral standards?
- measures from Thibaut and Walker, 1975, and Leventhal (1980)

Distributive justice
The following items refer to your (outcome). To what extent:
1. Does your (outcome) reflect the effort you have put into your work?
2. Is your (outcome) appropriate for the work you have completed?
3. Does your (outcome) reflect what you have contributed to the organization?
4. Is your (outcome) justified, given your performance?
- measures from Leventhal (1976)

Interpersonal justice
The following items refer to (the authority figure who enacted the procedure). To what extent:
1. Has (he/she) treated you in a polite manner?
2. Has (he/she) treated you with dignity?
3. Has (he/she) treated you with respect?
4. Has (he/she) refrained from improper remarks or comments?
-Measures from Bies & Moag, 1986)

Informational justice
The following items refer to (the authority figure who enacted the procedure). To what extent:

1. Has (he/she) been candid in (his/her) communications with you?
2. Has (he/she) explained the procedures thoroughly?
3. Were (his/her) explanations regarding the procedures reasonable?
4. Has (he/she) communicated details in a timely manner?
5. Has (he/she) seemed to tailor (his/her) communications to individuals' specific needs?
-measures from (Shapiro et al., 1994)

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