The Role of Mindfulness in Response to Abusive Supervision

James P. Burton
Northern Illinois University
College of Business
Department of Management
Barsema Hall
DeKalb, IL 60115
(815) 753-6315
jburton@niu.edu

Larissa K. Barber
San Diego State University
Department of Psychology
College of Sciences
San Diego, CA 92182
(619) 594-4439
lbarber@sdsu.edu

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Abstract

Purpose. We explored whether trait and state mindfulness alters the relationship between abusive supervision and interactional justice perceptions, which then predicts supervisor-directed retaliation.

Design. Study 1 examined these relationships among 230 employees using a cross-sectional survey design. Study 2 further examined these relationships among 263 undergraduate students using a scenario-based, experimental laboratory study.

Findings. In Study 1, counter to predictions, individuals who were higher in trait mindfulness were most likely to view an abusive supervisor as unfair. Exploratory analyses suggested that this effect was isolated to the mindfulness dimension of being highly attentive to moment-to-moment experiences. Study 2 replicated this effect with state mindfulness (specifically, attention to one's present moment).

Originality/Value. Little research has been done on how mindfulness affects perceptions of and reactions to abusive supervisors. We expected mindfulness could reduce the negative effect of supervisor abuse on interactional justice perceptions, as well as the effect of interactional injustice on retaliation. However, within the context of abusive supervision, training individuals to become more mindful may actually predict lower levels of interactional justice, resulting in more supervisor-directed retaliation.

Practical Implications. Organizations should consider how mindfulness interventions might not always be useful—and potentially counterproductive—for affecting perceptions of and reactions to some stressful work situations like abusive supervision.

The Role of Mindfulness in Response to Abusive Supervision

There has been an explosion of research in the construct of abusive supervision since its inception twenty years ago. Abusive supervision is defined as employee perceptions of the sustained display of supervisory hostile verbal and nonverbal behavior directed at the employee, excluding physical conduct (Tepper, 2000). We currently know much about the outcomes of employee perceptions of abusive supervision (Mackey, *et al.*, 2017). However, evidence on intervention strategies that help employees effectively cope with abusive supervisors is sparse (Tepper *et al.*, 2017). Finding ways to limit the negative effects of abusive supervision is important due to the substantial personal and financial costs associated with abusive supervision (Tepper *et al.*, 2006).

One popular intervention for helping individuals cope with stressful situations in their work environment has been mindfulness (Glomb *et al.*, 2011). Mindfulness describes a mental state related to focused attention and awareness on present experiences (Sutcliffe *et al.*, 2016). Though mindfulness can reduce negative reactions resulting from the experience of injustice (Long and Christian, 2015), it is unclear how mindfulness affects injustice perceptions arising from abusive supervision. That is, we know mindfulness influences employee *reactions* to injustice (i.e., emotional reactions and rumination), but how might mindfulness change *perceptions* of injustice in the work environment?

To answer this question, we build on previous work demonstrating a link between abusive supervision, interactional justice, and retaliation behavior (Tepper, 2000). Grounded in social exchange theory, we expect that mindfulness will not only influence the relationship between injustice and retaliation, but also weaken the relationship between supervisor abuse and injustice perceptions (see Figure 1) because mindfulness should allow employees to evaluate

abusive supervision in a nonjudgmental way that is nonthreatening to the self (Glomb *et al.*, 2011). This study not only informs theory and research in abusive supervision and interactional justice, but also adds to the limited literature on mindfulness in organizations (Dane, 2011). In this paper, we conduct two studies that examine how both trait and state mindfulness affects employee perceptions of interactional justice associated with abusive supervision, which in turn affects supervisor-directed retaliation. Using a combination of field and experimental designs, our research is the first to examine the buffering effect of mindfulness on abusive supervision, interactional justice, and retaliation.

Insert Figure 1 here

The Benefits of Mindfulness

Although there are many definitions of mindfulness, a common theme is that mindfulness represents focused attention, both internally and externally, on present-moment events (Sutcliffe *et al.*, 2016). Mindfulness can be a momentary state condition or, over time, individuals can develop trait-like mindfulness (Dane, 2011). For this paper, we adopt the definition provided by Shapiro *et al.* (2006) who note that mindfulness is the "process of intentionally attending moment by moment with openness and nonjudgmentalness" (p. 378). Although research on mindfulness in organizations is limited, such explorations have shown promising effects. Mindfulness can enhance individual performance (Dane and Brummel, 2014), creativity (Ostafin and Kassman, 2012), and job satisfaction (Hülsheger *et al.*, 2013). In addition, mindfulness can reduce burnout and stress (Roche *et al.*, 2014), retaliation (Long and Christian, 2015) and improves both emotional and behavioral self-regulation (Brown and Ryan, 2003). In the sections

that follow, we propose that interactional justice acts as a mediator between supervisor abuse and employee retaliation directed at the supervisor and that mindfulness influences both justice perceptions associated with abusive supervision, as well as retaliatory reactions to injustice.

Abusive Supervision and Retaliation – The Mediating Role of Interactional Justice

Tepper (2000) argued that the negative outcomes resulting from abusive supervision are most likely when the abuse from the supervisor is viewed as unfair. This is because fairness perceptions arise from perceived violations of social exchange relationships, which are motivated by personal or self-interest according to social exchange theory (Lawler and Thye, 1999). The supervisor-employee relationship is a key social exchange relationship in organizations that tends to follow rules regarding expectations for reciprocity in terms of fair treatment. Although justice perceptions can take many forms, interactional justice is particularly salient for employee reactions toward the supervisor whereas procedural and distributive justice inform reactions toward the broader organization (Cropanzano *et al.*, 2002). Interactional justice represents the perception that abuse from the supervisor was undeserved or disrespectful based on the employee's behavior (Bies and Moag, 1986), which reflects a social exchange violation. Following this violation, employees are motivated to "even the score" with retaliation directed toward the supervisor (Cropanzano *et al.*, 2002). Replicating past studies (Burton and Hoobler, 2011) and meta-analytic research suggesting that interactional justice is central to linking abusive supervision and employee behavior (Mackey *et al.*, 2017), we argue that interactional justice perceptions mediate the relationship between abusive supervision and supervisor-directed retaliation.

Hypothesis 1: The relationship between abusive supervision and supervisor-directed

retaliation will be mediated by employee interactional justice perceptions.

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Reducing Retaliation via Self-Regulatory Processes – The Moderating Role of Mindfulness

Abusive supervision is conceptualized as a negative social exchange relationship where bad behavior from the supervisor increases the desire of the subordinate to reciprocate unfavorable treatment (Peng *et al.*, 2014). However, employees do not always engage in behaviors that would lead to a negative reciprocity norm (i.e., retaliation). Researchers have integrated self-regulatory theory into social exchange frameworks to explain why some employees resist the urge to reciprocate negative behavior (Long and Christian, 2015). Though much of this research has focused on individual differences in self-regulation (and more specifically, trait self-control capacity), one promising intervention for improving self-regulatory processes in response to abusive supervision may be mindfulness because it can influence individual responses to negative events (Sutcliffe *et al.*, 2016). Although mindfulness has been shown to reduce negative cognitive and emotional reactions resulting from the experience of organizational injustice (Long and Christian, 2015), we are aware of no research examining how mindfulness affects evaluations of the central social exchange relationship. That is, the existing literature suggests that mindfulness helps employees with *reactions* to injustice, but does mindfulness also alter employees' *perceptions* of injustice in response to abusive supervision?

This research question is important because mindfulness interventions are intended to affect two key self-regulatory processes (i.e., core versus secondary). The abusive supervision literature has been limited to investigations surrounding *secondary self-regulatory processes*, which are oriented toward controlling one's thoughts, feelings, or behaviors in response to negative work events (Glomb *et al.*, 2011). For example, having high self-control capacity can help reduce the tendency for people to retaliate when experiencing abusive supervision (Lian *et al.*, 2014) and reduce job stress in reaction to abusive supervision (McAllister *et al.*, 2018).

Another example is that mindfulness helps workers control negative thoughts and emotions that arise from injustice experiences, which in turn can reduce retaliation (Long and Christian, 2015). Therefore, we propose that mindfulness might be a key moderator that affects the link between interactional justice and retaliation.

>*Hypothesis 2: Mindfulness will weaken (moderate) the positive relationship between employee interactional injustice perceptions and supervisor-directed retaliation.*

The key contribution of this research beyond past studies, however, is the focus on how mindfulness might also affect *core self-regulatory processes.* Core self-regulatory processes focus on the perceptual or self-awareness side of self-regulation (rather than controlling). Examples include decoupling the self from work experiences, slowing down information processing of events, and increasing nonjudgmental awareness of their physiological reactions (Glomb *et al.*, 2011). We anticipate that these core self-regulatory processes are particularly important for evaluations of the social exchange relationship (unfair treatment evaluations) following abusive supervision. Specifically, mindfulness might influence how employees interpret abusive supervision given that mindfulness reduces relevance of the "self" when evaluating negative events (Shapiro *et al.*, 2006; Sutcliffe *et al.*, 2016). Self-interest is a key characteristic of social exchange relationships (Lawler and Thye, 1999), which suggests that abusive supervision might be viewed as a threat to the self (i.e., disrespectful treatment suggests low value or worth in the relationship). Indeed, experimental work shows that even experiencing a hypothetical abusive supervision situation can lower state self-esteem (Burton and Hoobler, 2006). Therefore, the relevance of the self could change interactional justice perceptions of abusive supervision. In other words, the lens through which the employee views abusive

supervision as a violation of social exchange relationships changes under conditions of high mindfulness; events are viewed objectively as merely a passing phenomenon that is less relevant to the self (Van Gordon *et al.*, 2014).

In fact, research has demonstrated that mindfulness helps individuals decenter the self from negative events and cognitively reappraise the events in more positive terms (Garland *et al.*, 2015). This externalizing of negative events should then result in taking things less personally (Arch and Craske, 2006; Sutcliffe *et al.*, 2016), which we expect then lowers evaluations of disrespect following abusive supervision. Thus, we argue that mindfulness weakens the link between abusive supervision and interactional justice. In addition, we argue that mindfulness will moderate the mediating relationship of interactional justice on abusive supervision and employee retaliation.

> *Hypothesis 3: Mindfulness will weaken (moderate) the positive relationship between employee perceptions of abusive supervision and interactional injustice.*

> *Hypothesis 4: The indirect effect of interactional justice on the positive relationship between abusive supervision and employee retaliation will be moderated by employee mindfulness.*

We conducted two studies to test our hypotheses. The first study was conducted with full-time employed individuals from a variety of industries. The second study further examined these relationships, but with the advantage of using an experimental laboratory-based scenario that standardized environmental stimuli (i.e., level of abusive supervision) across participants.

Methods (Study 1)

Participants were full-time employed individuals registered with Amazon's MTurk, which is an acceptable method of collecting data with working adults (Cheung *et al.*, 2017). Data

were collected via two on-line surveys two weeks apart to separate the measurement of the independent and dependent variables which helps to address common method variance issues (Conway and Lance, 2010). At time 1, 745 participants answered questions regarding their trait mindfulness, supervisors (i.e., abuse), and various demographic variables in exchange for $0.50 for a completed survey. At the end of the survey, individuals could sign up with an email address to participate in the second survey administered two weeks later.

Prior to emailing the second survey at time 2 ($n = 613$ agreed to be contacted for the second survey), we eliminated all individuals who would not be able to answer the questions at time 2. We removed all respondents who were not current working (i.e., no abusive supervisor), self-employed (i.e., no abusive supervisor), worked less than 20 hours a week (participants who initially volunteered were told we were interested in employees who worked more than 20 hours a week), or had worked less than six months with their current supervisor (our measure of abuse asked them to rate their supervisor's behavior over the past six months). Due to concerns regarding a lack of effort when answering surveys (Huang *et al.*, 2015), we also removed all individuals who answered any of the two quality check items incorrectly, took less than two minutes to complete the first survey, or had duplicate IP addresses. These steps resulted in a final time 1 sample of 370 eligible individuals. The individuals who were sent the second survey did not differ significantly from the individuals who were not sent the second survey on gender, age, or work experience.

At time 2, we received 243 responses (66% response rate). During this survey, individuals answered questions regarding the fairness of their supervisor as well as their level of supervisor-directed retaliation in exchange for $1.00. After removing all individuals who answered any of the three data quality control items incorrectly, our final sample was 232. Of

these individuals, 45.3 percent were women and averaged 37.56 (SD = 10.72) years of age. In addition, the participants averaged 16.94 (SD = 10.69) years of work experience, 40.49 (SD = 12.30) hours of work a week, and 4.19 (SD = 3.28) years with their current supervisor. Approximately twenty-two percent of the participants worked in the management, business or financial industry. About nineteen percent worked in the science, engineering, or computing industry. The remaining participants were employed in healthcare (9.9%), sales (12.5%) or other professions (36.6%).

Measures

  Abusive supervision. Tepper's (2000) scale was used to measure employee perceptions of abusive supervision over the past six months. The fifteen items (1 = strongly disagree; 7 = strongly agree) were averaged to form our measure of abuse (α = .96).

  Trait mindfulness. Because we were examining employee perceptions of abuse over the past six months, we focused on participants' general tendency for mindfulness, rather than a current state of mindfulness. We utilized thirty-one items (1 = never or very rarely true; 5 = very often or always true) developed by Baer *et al.* (2006) to measure trait mindfulness. Consistent with past research using this scale, we averaged the items to form our measure of trait mindfulness (α = .94).

  Interactional justice. Participants used four items to measure fair treatment from their supervisor over the past six months (1 = strongly disagree; 7 = strongly agree; Colquitt, 2001; α = .94).

  Supervisor-directed retaliation. The frequency of supervisor-directed retaliation over the past six months was measured with nine items (1 = not at all; 7 = quite often; Mitchell and Ambrose, 2007; α = .92).

Control variables. To control for alternative explanations to our findings, we measured participant negative affectivity and gender since these are likely to influence evaluations of and reactions to abuse (Aquino and Thau, 2009; Bettencourt and Miller, 1996). Ten items (1 = not at all; 7 = very much; Watson *et al.*, 1988) were averaged to form our measure of negative affectivity ($\alpha = .94$). The results of the hypothesis tests were similar without the control variables included.

Results

All analyses were checked for violations of the assumptions of the normal error regression model. Based on a variety of analyses (e.g., studentized deleted residuals, cook's distance test, DFBETAS, etc.), two cases were shown to be abnormally influencing the results and were removed, leaving a final sample of 230. All means, standard deviations, and correlations are reported in Table 1. Consistent with past research, we found that abusive supervision was negatively related to interactional justice ($r = -.73$, $p < .001$) and positively related to supervisor-directed retaliation ($r = .46$, $p < .001$). In addition, we found that employee trait mindfulness was negatively related to employee ratings of abusive supervision ($r = -.23$, $p < .001$) and retaliation ($r = -.19$, $p < .001$), but positively related to interactional justice ($r = .24$, $p < .001$).

Insert Table 1 here

A confirmatory factor analysis was conducted to assess the fit of the overall measurement model. Several measures had a large number of items, so we utilized parcels to address concerns regarding the ratio of estimated parameters to sample size (Little *et al.*, 2002). Parcels were

created for constructs with nine or more items by spreading the highest and lowest loading items across the parcel (Landis *et al.*, 2000). A four-factor model (χ^2 = 159.78, CFI = 0.98, TLI = 0.98, RMSEA = 0.06, SRMR = 0.04) with abusive supervision, mindfulness, interactional justice, and retaliation loading separately fit the data well.

Hypothesis 1 proposed that interactional justice will mediate the relationship between abusive supervision and supervisor-directed retaliation. We tested this hypothesis using the PROCESS macro (Model 4) developed by Hayes (2013). This macro tests for mediation by examining 95% bias-corrected confidence intervals created via 5,000 bootstrapping estimates. Results demonstrated that interactional justice fully mediated the relationship between abusive supervision and supervisor-directed retaliation when controlling for gender and negative affectivity. Specifically, the indirect effect of abusive supervision through interactional justice predicting employee retaliation was significant (*indirect effect* = .13, CI [.05, .23]) whereas the direct effect of abuse on retaliation was not significant in the presence of interactional justice (*direct effect* = .06, CI [-.03, .16]). Hypothesis 1 was supported.

Hypothesis 2 proposed that mindfulness would moderate the relationship between interactional justice and retaliation. Hypothesis 3 proposed that employee mindfulness will moderate the relationship between abusive supervision and interactional justice perceptions. Hypothesis 4 proposed that interactional justice would mediate the relationship between abusive supervision and supervisor-directed retaliation and that this mediation would be moderated by employee mindfulness. To test these hypotheses, we utilized Hayes' (2013) PROCESS macro (Model 58). This macro allows us to test both the mediating and moderating (stage 1 and stage 2) effects in our model. Although mindfulness moderated the relationship between abusive

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supervision and interactional justice (β = -.29, p < .01), it did not moderate the relationship between interactional justice and retaliation (β = .08, p > .10). Hypothesis 2 was not supported.

Given the results did not support second stage moderation, we ran a separate PROCESS macro (Model 7) that focused on first stage moderation. Partially supporting hypothesis 3, the results of our analyses demonstrated that mindfulness moderated the relationship between abuse and justice perceptions (β = -.29, p < .01). However, the direction of the interaction was opposite to our prediction. When examining the interaction (see Figure 2), justice evaluations of individuals with high levels of mindfulness were more strongly impacted by abuse than individuals with low levels of mindfulness. In partial support of hypothesis 4, mindfulness moderated the mediation link between abusive supervision, interactional justice, and supervisor-directed retaliation. However, the results indicated that these relationships were stronger among high mindfulness individuals (please see Table 4). In fact, when examining the Johnson-Neyman test (Hayes and Matthes, 2009) we found a significant relationship between abusive supervision and justice perceptions for individuals with mindfulness ratings at 1.77 or higher (on a 5 point scale). Below 1.77, the relationship between abusive supervision and justice was not significant. Therefore, even a small amount of mindfulness negatively altered justice perceptions associated with abusive supervision.

Exploratory Analyses

Given that the results from our study demonstrated that individuals with high mindfulness are most likely to view the abusive supervisor as unfair, we conducted exploratory analyses examining subcomponents of our mindfulness measure (Baer *et al.*, 2006). *Describing* (M = 3.62, SD = .85, α = .91) involves labeling one's internal experiences. *Acting with awareness* (M = 3.76, SD = .87, α = .92) refers to attending to one's present moment. *Nonjudging of inner*

experience ($M = 3.58$, $SD = .90$, $\alpha = .93$) involves a non-evaluative attitude toward one's

thoughts and feelings. Finally, *nonreactivity to inner experience* ($M = 3.15$, $SD = .74$, $\alpha = .86$)

refers to a person allowing their thoughts and feelings to come and go.

We conducted the same PROCESS analyses as described above (i.e., Model 7) for each

of the subcomponents of mindfulness while controlling for the other subcomponents. Results

demonstrate that when controlling for all other subcomponents of mindfulness, the only

significant results were for *acting with awareness*. Specifically, individuals who were highly

attentive to their moment-to-moment experiences were the most sensitive to abusive supervision.

Given the unexpected findings in Study 1, we sought to replicate these findings in a

second study. We focused specifically on the finding that attentiveness to moment-to-moment

experiences may increase injustice perceptions of abusive supervision. Therefore, we

manipulated state levels of mindfulness by focusing on attention to the present moment in Study

2. We also used a lab-based scenario to manipulate consistent levels of the environmental stimuli

(i.e., level of abusive supervision) across conditions for our participants.

Methods (Study 2)

Participants were 327 undergraduate students at a large university in the Midwestern

United States who were enrolled in a junior or senior-level required business course. They were

offered extra credit to complete an online study that asked them to watch a video and "play the

part" of an employee depicted in a scenario that has been used in past research to manipulate

perceptions of abusive supervision (Burton and Hoobler, 2006).

We employed a 2 x 2 (No Video/Mindfulness Video x Positive/Abusive Supervisor)

design. Participants were first randomly assigned into one of two conditions. In the first

condition, participants watched a 5-minute video on mindful breathing that encouraged them to

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focus their attention on the present moment. Past research has shown that even brief training can create state mindfulness in research participants (Arch and Craske, 2006). Following the completion of the video, participants answered questions about their current state of mindfulness. In the second condition, participants skipped the video and went directly to questions regarding their current level of mindfulness. Following this, subjects were randomly assigned to one of two additional conditions involving a scenario which depicts an employee working for a small café on a college campus (Burton and Hoobler, 2006). In the positive supervisor condition, participants played the role of an employee who makes a recommendation to the supervisor for a process improvement and is encouraged and rewarded for their efforts by their supervisor. In the negative condition, participants played the role of an employee who makes the same process suggestion, but this time the supervisor acts abusively towards them. Following the reading of the scenario, participants rated the supervisor in terms of abuse and fairness.

Given concerns about lack of effort when answering surveys (Huang *et al.*, 2015), we included several items that directed a specific answer. Answering any of these questions incorrectly resulted in elimination from the study. The final sample consisted of 263 individuals (36.5% female) who averaged 21.67 ($SD = 2.41$) years of age. The participants, on average, had worked for a total of 4.88 years (S$D = 2.78$). There were no significant differences for gender, age, or work experience between the participants who were kept for the study and those who were eliminated.

Measures

Abusive supervision. A shortened version of Tepper's (2000) scale was used to measure the effectiveness of our scenario manipulation. The six items (1 = strongly disagree; 7 = strongly agree) were averaged to form the abusive supervision composite ($\alpha = .97$).

State mindfulness. Based on the results of Study 1, we were interested in how attention to moment-to-moment experiences influences the relationships in our study. Therefore, we utilized three items (Over the past five minutes…*I actively explored my experience in the moment*; *I felt that I was experiencing the present moment fully*; *I felt closely connected to the present moment*; 1 = not at all; 5 = very well) from Tanay and Bernstein (2013) to measure the effectiveness of our video manipulation. We averaged the items to form our composite of mindfulness (α = .80).

Interactional justice and intended retaliation. We used the same measures that were used in Study 1. Participants were instructed to answer the questions assuming they were the employee depicted in the scenario. We included four items from Colquitt (2001) to assess interactional justice (α = .97) and nine items from Mitchell and Ambrose (2007) with modified instructions (e.g., please indicate how likely is it that you will engage in the following behaviors in the near future) to focus on intended supervisor-directed retaliation (α = .94).

Control variables. We controlled for participant negative affectivity, perceptions of scenario realism, and gender. Five items (1 = not at all; 7 = very much; Watson *et al.*, 1988) were averaged to form a composite measure of negative affectivity (α = .86). Given that we used written scenarios for abusive supervision experiences, we also controlled for whether participants believed the scenario situation was realistic using one item developed by Fedor *et al.* (2001): "I believe the scenario I read could happen (or has happened) to me or someone I know" (1 = strongly disagree; 7 = strongly agree; M = 5.97, SD = 1.20).

Results

We first examined whether our scenario manipulation influenced participant ratings of abusive supervision. As expected, an independent samples t-test demonstrated that individuals

who were in the abusive supervisor condition rated their supervisor significantly more abusive (M = 5.72, SD = 1.04) than individuals in the positive supervisor condition (M = 1.76, SD = 1.14), $t(261)$ = -29.47, p < .001. Next, we examined whether the video the participants viewed induced feelings of mindfulness, specifically attention to the present moment. As expected, we found significant differences between participants who watched the video (M = 3.69, SD = .91) and those who did not watch the video (M = 3.41, SD = .91) for attention to the present moment, $t(261)$ = -2.42, p < .05.

To test our hypotheses, we utilized the same PROCESS macros from Study 1. However, in Study 2, we used experimental manipulations (i.e., No Video/Video and Positive/Abusive Supervision conditions) in our models. Consistent with Study 1, interactional justice mediated the relationship between the abusive supervision condition and intended retaliation. Also replicating Study 1, mindfulness moderated the relationship between abusive supervision and interactional justice, but not the relationship between interactional justice and retaliation. Individuals who watched the video (high attention to the present moment) viewed the abusive supervisor in the scenario as more unfair (see Table 2 and Figure 2). Consistent with Study 1, the link between abusive supervision and interactional injustice was stronger for individuals in the high attention to the present moment condition, which subsequently predicted more intended supervisor-directed retaliation.

Insert Table 2 and Figure 2 here

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Discussion

Mindfulness has been shown to have a positive effect on a variety of outcomes in organizations (Sutcliffe *et al.*, 2016). However, past research has emphasized how mindfulness might improve stress and well-being outcomes in organizations rather than employee interactional justice perceptions. When examining mindfulness within the specific context of abusive supervision and interactional justice in this set of studies, mindfulness appeared to come with a psychological cost rather than a benefit. In our studies, when someone with high trait or state mindfulness experienced an abusive supervisor, they were *more* likely to view that supervisor as unfair, which in turn predicted more retaliation. Exploratory analyses in Study 1 and the results from Study 2 demonstrated that this effect is largely driven by the tendency to be attentive to moment-to-moment experiences among individuals high in mindfulness. Perhaps abusive supervision is especially severe and salient when one is highly observant of current feelings and experiences. Finally, across both studies, mindfulness did not moderate the relationship between injustice and retaliation. Though mindfulness predicted *perceptions of* abuse (i.e., lower justice perceptions), it did not affect worker *reactions to* these injustice perceptions with respect to supervisor-directed retaliation.

Our findings have important practical and theoretical implications. First, one of the driving forces to conduct this research was to find practical avenues that individuals can use to cope with abusive supervisors. At this point, there has been little experimental research done on coping with abusive supervisors, especially in the context of workplace deviance (Tepper *et al.*, 2017). Based on previous research and theory regarding how mindfulness improves self-regulatory processes (Glomb *et al.*, 2011; Long and Christian, 2015), we expected training individuals on how to be more mindful could reduce the negative effects of supervisor abuse on

interactional justice perceptions, as well as mitigate the link between interactional justice and retaliation. However, our research demonstrates that within the context of abusive supervision, mindfulness does not reduce retaliatory reactions to interactional injustice.

Additionally, our results indicate that training individuals to become more mindful had an unexpected negative affect on core self-regulatory processes (Glomb *et al.*, 2011) related to evaluations of injustice. We observed that mindfulness actually enhanced the link between abusive supervision and interactional injustice, which in turn predicted higher reports of supervisor-directed retaliation. This was unexpected given that mindfulness is supposed to increase non-judgmental awareness of events rather than heighten them. That is, mindfulness should increase both attention and acceptance of experiences (Brown and Ryan, 2003). Yet, exploratory results on specific mindfulness dimensions showed that our surprising effects were isolated to awareness of moment-to-moment experiences (attention only). Thus, we caution organizations to consider how mindfulness interventions might not always be useful—and potentially counterproductive—for how employees may perceive and manage some stressors like abuse from supervisors.

An implication of our findings is that future research may need to focus on training the abusive supervisor to reduce the instances and negative consequences of abuse in the organization. For example, training leaders to be more mindful may help them develop more compassion for themselves and for others (Reb *et al.*, 2015) which could lead to less abuse and greater employee well-being (Scott *et al.*, 2010). This type of training for leaders could be done online and with very little cost to the organization (Fish *et al.*, 2016). Thus, mindfulness could still be beneficial to the problem of abusive supervision in organizations, perhaps just not with respect to reducing retaliatory behaviors in response to injustice perceptions among subordinates.

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Finally, future research could explore what employee characteristics or experiences may positively or negatively influence self-relevancy perceptions among highly attentive mindful individuals. For example, subordinates who have high levels of compassion may view abusive supervision in a different light. Specifically, these individuals may understand the reasons the supervisor is acting abusively (e.g., stress at home, pressure from his/her own boss, etc.) and therefore have a compassionate attitude toward the supervisor. This could then influence the extent to which the abusive supervisor is seen as self-relevant or unfair.

Limitations

The findings of this research should be viewed in light of its limitations. First, in Study 1 all of the measures where collected from the same source. However, we did separate the measurement of our variables by two weeks, removed careless responders, and collected data from a diverse sample of working adults (Podsakoff *et al.*, 2012). Given that we are examining employee views on abuse and justice, it was also appropriate to collect this data using self-report methodology. However, future research could attempt to replicate our findings using multi-source data when theoretically appropriate.

A second potential limitation of our research is the use of written scenarios in Study 2 asking participants to react to a hypothetical situation. However, the particular written scenario has been shown to accurately manipulate abusive supervision perceptions (Burton and Hoobler, 2006). We also used this methodology in Study 2 because it maintained a consistent level of abusive supervision across participant conditions (i.e., same level of high abusive supervision and same level of low abusive supervision). This approach also allowed us to focus on the attention to the present moment facet of mindfulness.

Conclusion

While there have been many studies that have demonstrated the benefits associated with mindfulness, we find that mindfulness was not helpful in the context of abusive supervision. Across two studies, individuals with high levels of mindfulness reported lower levels of interactional justice in response to abusive supervisors than those with low levels of mindfulness. This finding was driven by the "attentiveness" dimension of mindfulness at both the trait and state level. Although mindfulness can be a useful intervention for aiding employees with stress management, future research must continue to examine contexts where mindfulness may not be helpful to individuals.

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Table 1: Means, Standard Deviations, and Correlations – Study 1 and Study 2

Variable	Mean	SD	1	2	3	4	5	6
1. Abusive Supervision	1.83 (3.81)	1.10 (2.26)	- -	.03	-.88*	.60*	.51*	-.04
2. Mindfulness	3.54 (3.58)	.64 (.92)	-.23*	- -	.01	.00	-.04	.11
3. Interactional Justice	5.93 (3.76)	1.24 (2.25)	-.73*	.24*	- -	-.59*	-.46*	.04
4. Retaliation	1.30 (1.76)	.64 (1.00)	.46*	-.19*	-.49*	- -	.40*	-.13*
5. Negative Affect	1.65 (2.86)	.90 (1.40)	.44*	-.50*	-.32*	.46*	- -	-.05
6. Gender	- -	- -	-.02	.02	.01	-.01	-.04	- -

$*p < .05$

Note. Study 1 correlation coefficients on the bottom of the diagonal and Study 2 correlations are reported on the top of the diagonal.
Study 1 descriptive statistics are reported on the top row, with Study 2 information reported on the bottom row in parentheses.

Table 2: The Mediating Effect of Interactional Justice and Moderating Effect of Mindfulness (Stage 1 Moderation Only) – Study 1 and Study 2[a]

	Study 1[b]		Study 2	
	Interactional Justice	Retaliation	Interactional Justice	Retaliation
Gender	.05	-.02	.07	-.22*
Negative Affectivity	-.09	.20*	-.08	.10*
Scenario Realism	- -	- -	-.03	-.01
Abusive Supervision[c]	-.82*	.06	-3.63*	.22
Mindfulness[d]	.07	- -	.01	- -
Abs. x Mind.[e]	-.29*	- -	-.71*	- -
Interactional Justice	- -	-.16*	- -	-.19*
Total R^2	.55*	.33*	.71*	.38*

Indirect Effect of Abusive Supervision through Interactional Justice for High and Low Mindfulness[f]

Low Mindfulness	- -	.10 (.04, .19)	- -	.61 (.32, .95)
High Mindfulness	- -	.16 (.06, .30)	- -	.75 (.40, 1.13)
Direct Effect	- -	.06 (-.03, .16)	- -	.22 (-.14, .59)
Index of Moderated-Mediation	- -	.05 (.01, .12)	- -	.13 (.02, .30)

*$p <.05$, $n = 230$ (Study 1) or $n = 263$ (Study 2)

[a] Direct effects are unstandardized coefficient estimates from the final regression equations.

[b] All independent variables centered prior to analyses.

[c] Abusive Supervision = Employee Perceptions of Abusive Supervision (Study 1) or Abusive Supervision Condition: 1 = Positive Supervisor; 2 = Abusive Supervisor (Study 2)

[d] Mindfulness = Trait Mindfulness (Study 1) or Mindfulness Condition: 1 = No Video; 2 = Mindfulness Video (Study 2)

[e] Abs. x Mind. = Interaction between Abusive Supervision and Mindfulness (Study 1) or Interaction between Abusive Supervision and Mindfulness Conditions (Study 2)

[f] Indirect effects were tested for significance using 95% bias-corrected confidence intervals from 5,000 bootstrap estimates.

Figure 1: Proposed Model
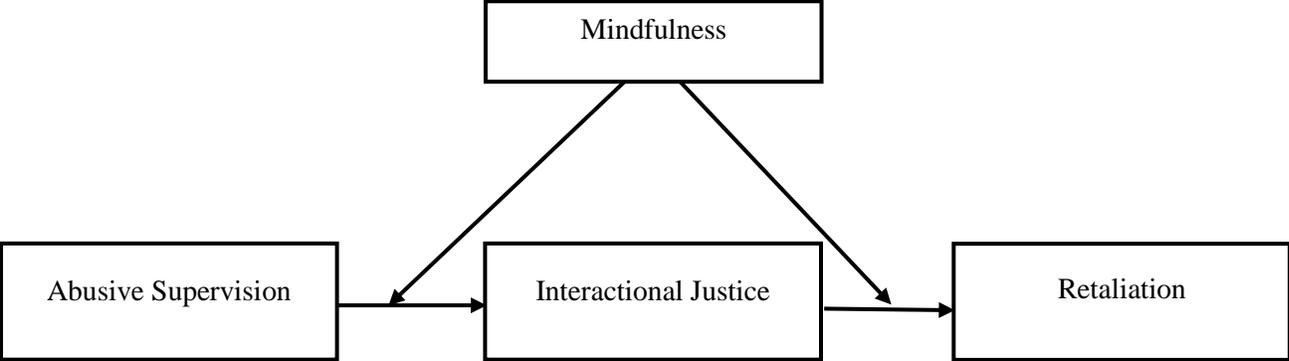
Figure 2: The Moderating Role of Mindfulness on the Relationship between Abusive Supervision and Interactional Justice