

# Supervisor social comparison orientation and abusive supervision: A dual-path model

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## Abstract

Abusive supervision is prevalent in hospitality, harming employees and organizations. Integrating social comparison theory (SCT) and self-regulation theory (SRT), this study explores how supervisor social comparison orientation (SCO) leads to abusive supervision via rumination and reflection, with ethical climate as a moderator. Using multi-source, three-wave data from 146 supervisor-subordinate teams in Chinese hotels, results show SCO induces abusive supervision through rumination (strengthening) and reflection (weakening). Ethical climate moderates the rumination-abusive supervision link.

## 1. Introduction

Abusive supervision involves sustained hostile verbal/nonverbal behaviors, with severe impacts in hospitality. Prior research focuses on outcomes, neglecting antecedents. This study fills the gap by integrating SCT and SRT, examining SCO as a trigger, rumination/reflection as parallel mediators, and ethical climate as a moderator.



## 2. Literature Review and Hypotheses

- Hypothesis 1:** Supervisor SCO is positively related to rumination.
- Hypothesis 2:** Supervisor SCO is positively related to reflection.
- Hypothesis 3:** Rumination mediates the SCO-abusive supervision relationship.
- Hypothesis 4:** Reflection mediates the SCO-abusive supervision relationship.
- Hypothesis 5:** Ethical climate negatively moderates the rumination-abusive supervision link.
- Hypothesis 6:** Ethical climate positively moderates the reflection-abusive supervision link.

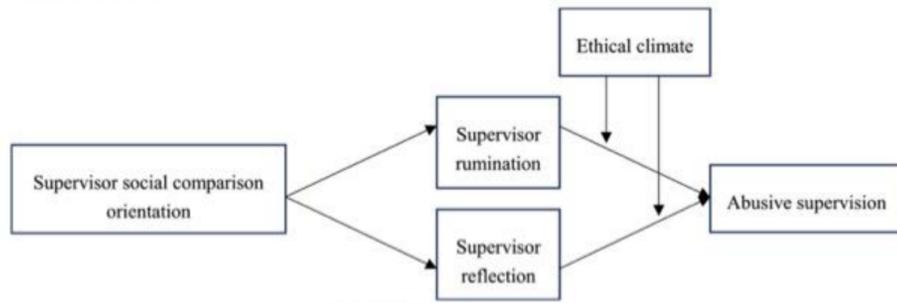


Fig. 1. Conceptual model.

## 3. Method

- Sample:** 146 teams (568 subordinates) from Chinese hotels; 44.52% female supervisors, 35.74% female subordinates; average supervisor age 37.90, subordinate age 34.70.
- Measures:** SCO (11-item scale), rumination/reflection (12-item scales each), ethical climate (7-item scale), abusive supervision (5-item scale); 5-point Likert scale.
- Data Aggregation:** Justified by  $r_{wg}$  (.86/.90), ICC[1]=.28, ICC[2]=.60.

## 4. Results

- Reliability/Validity:** AVE > .50, CR > .70, Cronbach's alpha > .70.
- Correlations:** SCO positively correlates with rumination ( $r=.39$ ,  $p<.01$ ) and reflection ( $r=.31$ ,  $p<.01$ ); rumination positively correlates with abusive supervision ( $r=.52$ ,  $p<.01$ ), reflection negatively ( $r=-.44$ ,  $p<.01$ ).

Table 1. Descriptive statistics, reliability, validity, and correlation analysis.

Variables	Mean	SD	CR	AVE	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
1. Supervisor Gender	.55	.50										
2. Supervisor Age	3.10	.84			.18*							
3. Supervisor-subordinate Relationship Tenure	3.11	.56			.04	-.01						
4. SCO	3.06	.84	.95	.86	.01	-.07	.07					
5. Rumination	3.46	.90	.96	.89	.07	-.09	-.16	.39**				
6. Reflection	3.16	.83	.95	.85	-.06	-.02	.11	.31**	-.04			
7. Ethical Climate	4.18	.85	.96	.79	-.11	-.02	-.04	.26**	.29**			
8. Abusive Supervision	2.11	.81	.97	.88	.20**	-.02	-.16	.06	.52**	-.44**	-.31**	

- CFA:** Five-factor model fits best ( $\chi^2=501.14$ ,  $df=179$ ,  $RMSEA=.056$ ,  $SRMR=.024$ ,  $CFI=.98$ ,  $TLI=.97$ ).

Table 2. Comparison of measurement models.

Models	$\chi^2$	df	$\Delta\chi^2$	$\chi^2/df$	RMSEA	SRMR	CFI	TLI
Hypothesized Five-Factor Model	501.14	179		2.80	.056	.024	.98	.97
Four-Factor Model	2052.39	183	1551.25**	11.22	.134	.102	.87	.85
SCO + Rumination	2195.12	183	1693.98**	12.00	.139	.124	.86	.84
Four-Factor Model	4232.53	183	3731.39**	23.13	.197	.184	.72	.67
Rumination + Abusive Supervision	4376.10	183	3874.96**	23.91	.201	.176	.71	.66
Four-Factor Model	2323.40	183	1822.26**	12.70	.143	.145	.85	.83
SCO + Abusive Supervision	2476.54	183	1975.40**	13.53	.149	.137	.84	.82
Ethical Climate + Rumination	2154.04	183	1652.90**	11.77	.138	.105	.86	.84
Four-Factor Model	2643.77	183	2142.63**	14.45	.154	.164	.83	.80
Ethical Climate + Reflection	9587.13	189	9085.99**	50.73	.296	.254	.34	.27

- Hypothesis Testing:** Hypotheses 1-5 supported; Hypothesis 6 not supported. Rumination ( $p=.19$ , 95% CI [.11,.28]) and reflection ( $p=-.12$ , 95% CI [-.22,-.05]) mediate the SCO-abusive supervision link. Ethical climate negatively moderates rumination-abusive supervision ( $B=-.19$ ,  $p<.01$ ).

Table 3. Unstandardized coefficients and standard errors of model path analyses.

Variables	Simple Mediation Model			Moderated Mediation Model		
	Model 1 Rumination B (SE)	Model 2 Reflection B (SE)	Model 3 Abusive Supervision B (SE)	Model 4 Rumination B (SE)	Model 5 Reflection B (SE)	Model 6 Abusive Supervision B (SE)
Supervisor Gender	.16 (.15)	-.13 (.14)	.23* (.10)	.16 (.15)	-.13 (.14)	.16* (.08)
Supervisor Age	-.08 (.08)	.02 (.08)	-.01 (.06)	-.08 (.08)	.02 (.08)	.01 (.05)
Supervisor-subordinate Relationship Tenure	-.30* (.13)	-.14 (.14)	-.07 (.09)	-.30* (.13)	-.14 (.14)	-.02 (.08)
SCO	.43*** (.08)	.31*** (.09)	-.00 (.06)	.43*** (.08)	.31*** (.09)	.02 (.05)
Rumination			.44*** (.06)			.51*** (.06)
Reflection			-.39*** (.07)			-.26*** (.07)
Ethical Climate						-.36*** (.08)
Rumination * Ethical climate						-.19*** (.07)
Reflection * Ethical climate						.08 (.08)
R <sup>2</sup>	.20	.11	.43	.20	.11	.62

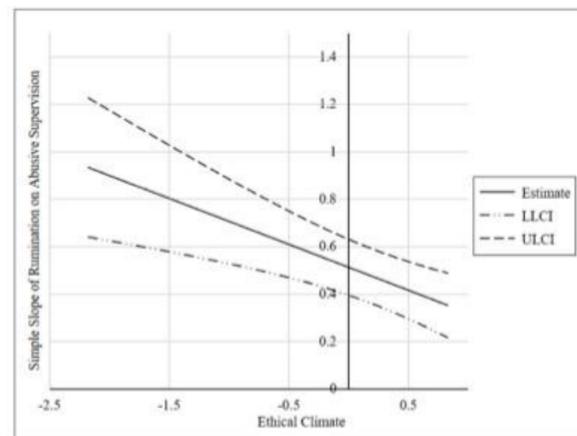


Fig. 2. Region of significance for the simple slope of rumination on abusive supervision. Note: Estimate = The estimate of the simple slope of rumination on abusive supervision; LLCI = Lower limit of confidence interval; ULCL = Upper limit of confidence interval.

## 5. Discussion

- Theoretical Contributions:** Develops dual-path model for abusive supervision; extends SCT/SRT; highlights individual-organizational ethics interplay.
- Practical Implications:** Encourage team-focused practices, structured reflection, mindfulness interventions, and strong ethical climate.
- Limitations:** Ethical climate measured only by supervisors; future research could include multi-level evaluations.

## 6. Conclusion

This study reveals how SCO leads to abusive supervision via rumination and reflection, emphasizing internal cognitive processes and ethical climate's role. It enriches SCT/SRT and provides practical insights for fostering healthier workplace environments.

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