

The Influence of Autonomy and Supervisor Political Skill on the Use and Consequences of Peer Intimidation in Organizations

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Based on social influence theory, we develop a model in which the use of peer intimidation by Machiavellian employees results in greater promotability ratings by supervisors. However, consistent with interdependence theory, we expect that this process is qualified by job autonomy and the political skill of the supervisor making the promotability rating. Based on a sample of 204 supervisor–subordinate dyads, we find that peer intimidation mediates the Machiavellianism–promotability relationship when supervisor political skill is low rather than high, and when job autonomy is high rather than low, thereby yielding a pattern of moderated mediation, and supporting the hypotheses. These results suggest that job autonomy and supervisor political skill represent key interdependent mechanisms that regulate the effectiveness of social influence attempts made with intimidation in organizations.

Intimidation is an impression management tactic that involves the strategic use of interpersonal force to signal one's power and gain behavioral acquiescence to create a desired image in the minds of others (Bolino & Turnley, 1999, 2003a, 2003b; E. E. Jones, 1990; E. E. Jones & Pittman, 1982). Although one might intuitively expect that intimidation of colleagues would be neither tolerated nor rewarded by superiors, past research suggests that the use of intimidation tactics in the workplace can successfully generate favorable evaluations (Bolino & Turnley, 2003b; Harris, Kacmar, Zivnuska, & Shaw, 2007). Consistent with social influence theory (Forgas & Williams, 2001; Levy, Collins, & Nail, 1998), intimidators may leave observers with the impression that, relative to peers, they are capable, efficient, and dominant (Friedland, 1976; Gardner, 1992). Because managers tend to recommend promotions for those employees who are perceived as capable and influential (Shore, Barksdale, & Shore, 1995; Yun, Takeuchi, & Liu, 2007), employees who intimidate others may unfortunately be seen as more powerful and likely to advance in the organization.

However, as with all social influence attempts, the interaction context may influence the extent to which intimidation occurs, and whether it successfully influences supervisors' impressions. Interdependence theory (Rusbult & Van Lange, 2003) explains how interpersonally relevant traits and elements of the situational structure shape the outcomes associated with social interactions. Consistent with this theory, we expect that autonomy (Morgeson & Humphrey, 2006) is an important situational affordance that grants employees prone to peer intimidation the opportunity to more frequently express aggressive behaviors. However, we also expect that supervisors with high political skill (Ferris, Treadway, Brouer, & Munyon, 2012; Ferris et al., 2005) are better able to recognize peer intimidation as attempts at impression management and understand its negative impact on the larger organizations. Thus, autonomy is a situational condition that enables greater levels of intimidation from employees who are inclined to use this tactic, but supervisor political skill is an interpersonal trait that buffers the effectiveness of intimidation on promotability ratings.

To test these ideas, we developed the model depicted in Figure 1. Consistent with past research, we expect that Machiavellian employees are motivated to employ intimidation toward peers at work (Bolino & Turnley, 2003a). Machiavellian employees working in situations of high autonomy have both the motivation and the opportunity for higher levels of intimidation to be expressed. In turn, intimidation of peers influences supervisors' perceptions of the intimidator, who is seen as more capable and promotable. However, we expect that this social influence attempt is more likely to fail if the supervisor is politically skilled, and thus capable of sensing and discounting impression management tactics.

This study is intended to make several contributions to theory and research on impression management in organizations. First, the study elaborates on the personal characteristics (i.e., Machiavellianism) and job characteristics (i.e., autonomy) that elicit intimidating behavior, which is important because intimidation has received far less research attention than other impression management tactics designed to yield positive, integrative outcomes (Bolino & Turnley, 2003a). Second, our study makes a novel contribution because we are examining *indirect* consequences of influence attempts; we expect that intimidation directed toward peers will result in making a favorable impression on the supervisor who is not the direct target of these behaviors. As a workplace behavior, intimidation involves the strategic use of interpersonal force to gain behavioral

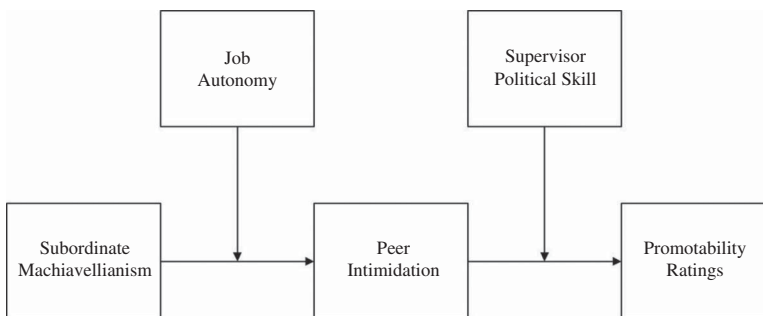


FIGURE 1 Conceptual moderated mediation model linking Machiavellianism to promotability ratings through intimidation, moderated by job autonomy and supervisor political skill.

acquiescence from others (E. E. Jones, 1990; E. E. Jones & Pittman, 1982). As recently noted by several researchers, the intimidation–performance evaluation link is poorly understood and inconsistent, indicating the need for more empirical work examining the processes by which aggressive behaviors influence supervisor-engineered subordinate outcomes (Bolino, Kacmar, Turnley, & Gilstrap, 2008; Harris et al., 2007; Higgins, Judge, & Ferris, 2003).

Third, we consider how *supervisors'* political skill impacts the success of intimidation attempts. This is an important issue to explore given past research that shows that intimidation can certainly backfire (e.g., Turnley & Bolino, 2001; Yukl & Tracey, 1992), but the circumstances that cause intimidation to fail are not well articulated. Most organizational research on impression management treats the targets of tactics as passive recipients in the process, focusing instead on the qualities of the employee making the influence attempt (e.g., Harris et al., 2007; Treadway, Ferris, Duke, Adams, & Thatcher, 2007; Turnley & Bolino, 2001). In contrast, we submit that supervisors play a critical role in this process. Supervisors are responsible for rule enforcement in most organizations (March, Schulz, & Zhou, 2000) and evaluating perceived disruptive or self-interested counterproductivity (Rotundo & Sackett, 2002). Whereas considerable evidence exists documenting the favorable impact of subordinate political skill on desired outcomes (Ferris, Treadway, Brouer, et al., 2007; Jawahar, Meurs, Ferris, & Hochwarter, 2008; Treadway et al., 2007), the role of the supervisor's political skill in identifying and discrediting political behavior has not been explored in past research. This is an important oversight because we do not know if the effects of IM tactics identified in past research hold if the supervisor is politically skilled as well. We believe that supervisors who are capable of recognizing the instances and impact of such influence attempts will be moved to sanction those that engage in assertive behaviors, thereby disrupting the link between negative IM behaviors and career outcomes for the subordinate.

Last, our model predicts promotability ratings, a criterion that has been linked to political skill (Gentry, Gilmore, Porter, & Leslie, 2012) and performance evaluations (Jawahar & Ferris, 2011) but rarely studied in impression management research. Only Thacker and Wayne (1995) examined promotability ratings as an outcome of impression management tactics, but their focus was on upward intimidation directed at the supervisor rather than at peers. Given that the objective of many social influence attempts is to improve one's social standing and advance one's career in the organization (Feldman & Weitz, 1991), more research is needed to understand when hard impression management tactics, like intimidation, result in improved chances to receive promotions at work.

THEORETICAL FOUNDATIONS AND HYPOTHESIS DEVELOPMENT

Intimidation and Social Influence Theory

As a hard tactic (Falbe & Yukl, 1992), intimidation involves forcefulness and is intended to differentiate the employee who uses it; the desired outcome is to set the employee apart from others by generating attributions of strength and dominance. Thus, intimidation is different from soft influence tactics, like ingratiation, self-promotion, or exemplification, which are designed to present the employee as more affable, harmless, and trustworthy. In differentiating oneself from others,

intimidation is seen as an instrumental mechanism that can subdue, control, or sideline peers who might otherwise pose obstacles to advancement (Bolino, 1999).

The effects of intimidation and other impression management tactics are typically explained in terms of social influence theory (Forgas & Williams, 2001; Levy et al., 1998). Social influence theory is a macrotheory of psychology that describes the qualities that enable one to influence others, the ways in which social influence attempts unfold, and the consequences of social influence on others (Levy et al., 1998). Consequently, research on organizational impression management has drawn on this perspective to account for the antecedents and consequences of influence tactics expressed in the workplace (e.g., Harris et al., 2007). According to the theory, impression management tactics like intimidation can elicit two evaluative processes in the target, which dramatically influence target reactions to such attempts: normative activation of a target's associations, beliefs, and values about the "right" type of employee behavior; and an affective evaluation process, which triggers the target's emotional response. Thus, some employees preferentially engage in intimidation throughout their interpersonal exchanges in the workplace in order to elicit favorable normative and affective reactions from the target.

Consistent with such assertions, aggressive intimidation can be used to craft a social identity of competence, dominance, and strength that allows the intimidator to be seen by some as impressive and successful (Tedeschi, 2001; Tiedens, 2001). This process explains why intimidators, who seek to differentiate themselves with assertive aggression, can nevertheless be seen as high-potential employees, effective performers, and likeable people under some circumstances (Bolino & Turnley, 2003a; Turnley & Bolino, 2001; Wayne, Liden, Graf, & Ferris, 1997). Consistent with this pattern of findings and social influence theory, we suggest that peer intimidation may result in social influence that leaves supervisors with the impression that the intimidator is capable, efficient, and worthy of rewards, like promotions.

Machiavellianism, Intimidation, and Promotability Ratings

Little research has examined the antecedents of intimidation, but one key individual difference of interest in this literature is Machiavellianism (Bolino & Turnley, 2003b; Bratton & Kacmar, 2004; Ferris et al., 2002). Machiavellianism is an individual difference that involves a propensity to engage in manipulative behavior, to distrust others, and to desire status and power for oneself (Christie & Geis, 1970; Dahling, Kuyumcu, & Librizzi, 2012; Dahling, Whitaker, & Levy, 2009; D. N. Jones & Paulhus, 2009), proclivities that spring from a desire to zealously promote one's own self-interests. In the workplace, Machiavellianism is associated with a strong desire for career advancement; Machiavellian employees are characterized by a focus on external accomplishments, especially those that are financial or status-oriented in nature (McHoskey, 1999), which translates into a tendency for Machiavellian employees to tend to feel dissatisfied with their current positions and eager to move up within the organization (e.g., Hunt & Chonko, 1984; D. N. Jones & Paulhus, 2009). Previous research has also compellingly demonstrated that individuals with high Machiavellianism are prone to engage in opportunistic behavior (e.g., Sakalaki, Richardson, & Thépaut, 2007) and to use aggressive interpersonal influence tactics to secure extrinsic objectives (Becker & O'Hair, 2007; Bolino & Turnley, 2003b). Some previous research shows that the need for power, a central component of Machiavellianism (Dahling et al., 2009),

has been found to be predictive of intimidation (Mowday, 1978). Consequently, there is ample reason to expect that employees with high Machiavellianism will seek to be seen as promotable and will employ tactics like intimidation to this end.

Although exceptions exist in the literature (Thacker & Wayne, 1995), the bulk of the past research suggests that the use of intimidation tactics in the workplace can successfully generate favorable evaluations. For example, aggressiveness directed at supervisors has been found predictive of supervisor ratings of performance (Bolino & Turnley, 2003a; Wayne et al., 1997). Moreover, meta-analytic results indicate that intimidation is positively related to extrinsic outcomes including promotions (Higgins et al., 2003). Of importance, however, as noted by some researchers, very little research has investigated the influence of coworker-directed aggression on personal work-related objectives (Higgins et al., 2003; Turnley & Bolino, 2001). This as an important, yet underresearched, area as deviant behaviors toward coworkers are on the rise (e.g., Baron, 2004; Porath & Erez, 2007).

Machiavellian employees are thought to leverage the use of IM tactics to create an image of competence, particularly in the eyes of those who control organizational rewards and can provide one with a means for personal gain. Thus, these employees will engage in short-term exploitative “instrumental aggression” of colleagues in the name of influencing supervisor perceptions of personal efficacy (Bratton & Kacmar, 2004). Such tactics are used to elicit compliance on the part of those being aggressed against and are meant to enhance one’s ability to successfully carry out job requirements and effect personal advancement. Naturally, such behaviors are often considered socially undesirable to coworkers (Yukl & Tracy, 1992) and lead to coworker anger and frustration (Turnley & Bolino, 2001). Despite coworker displeasure with aggressive individuals who make threats, forcefully manipulate colleagues, and use competitive rather than cooperative strategies, Machiavellian employees may nonetheless leave supervisors with the impression that they are capable, efficient, and engaged through social influence (Falbe & Yukl, 1992). As a result, and based on social influence theory, managers may feel compelled to recommend for promotion Machiavellian intimidators who appear to be competent performers (Yun et al., 2007).

Because intimidation can function as a form of social influence that leads to favorable employment outcomes (Bolino & Turnley, 2003a; Wayne et al., 1997), the interrelationships between Machiavellianism, intimidation, and promotability ratings imply a mediated relationship. Machiavellian employees are motivated to enhance their power and status by seeking advancement in their careers by any means possible (Christie & Geis, 1970), which establishes our expectation for a direct relationship between Machiavellianism and promotability ratings. However, peer intimidation is a primary behavioral mechanism through which Machiavellian employees attain advancement (Bolino & Turnley, 2003a) as intimidation can result in successful social influence and interpersonal gains in organizations (e.g., Wayne et al., 1997). Consequently, we expect that intimidation is the more proximal behavioral predictor of promotability ratings and that intimidation will mediate the relationship between Machiavellianism and promotability ratings.

H1: The positive relationship between subordinate Machiavellianism and promotability ratings by the supervisor will be mediated by peer intimidation.

Interdependence Theory and the Roles of Autonomy and Supervisor Political Skill

Social influence attempts occur in a context of interpersonal dynamics, which means that elements of the situation and characteristics of the target of the influence attempt can augment or attenuate the extent to which social influence tactics are successful. Consistent with this idea, although some research shows that intimidation can lead to positive outcomes, other studies show that intimidation has negative effects on personal outcomes (Falbe & Yukl, 1992; Thacker & Wayne, 1995). The mixed findings concerning intimidation strongly imply that the effects of intimidation on performance-related criteria are complex and likely dependent on many situational moderators.

Interdependence theory (Rusbult & Van Lange, 2003; Van Lange & Rusbult, 2012) provides a useful framework for predicting the outcomes associated with social influence attempts based on the challenges and opportunities present in social situations, and the cognitions and motives of the interaction target. Originally developed by Thibaut and Kelley (1959), interdependence theory is a broad theory of social psychology that concerns the way that interaction partners come to perceive each other in interpersonal situations. Specifically, the theory predicts that the outcome of an interaction is a function of (a) the situation in which they are embedded; (b) the needs, cognitions, and motives of the first interaction partner; and (c) the needs, cognitions, and motives of the second interaction partner. Two elements of the theory are particularly important. First, the theory emphasizes the importance of *situational affordances*, which are elements of the situation that enable or inhibit specific interactive behaviors. Situational affordances are critical to consider because they dictate what sorts of interpersonal tactics might be expressed and what tactics might be effective in generating desired outcomes.

Second, the theory describes a *transformative process* wherein the objective aspects of the interaction dynamic (referred to as the “given situation”) are transformed due to the interaction partners’ traits, motives, attributions, and social norms to yield a social reality that actually shapes behavior (referred to as the “effective situation”). For example, an employee may be an objectively poor performer, but if he utilizes skilled self-presentation tactics with his supervisor that allow him to appear competent, the resulting social reality that will impact subsequent decisions is the perception that the employee is capable. However, both interaction partners’ traits, motives, attributions, and social norms influence this social reality; if the supervisor is able to see through the self-presentation attempt, the resulting social reality that will shape outcomes is a more accurate evaluation of the employee as incompetent.

Consistent with interdependence theory, we tested the moderating role of a key situational affordance and an interpersonal trait that should impact the expression and effectiveness of intimidation. First, we focused on job autonomy, the amount of discretion inherent in one’s job (Hackman & Oldham, 1976), as a contextual affordance that greatly influences the opportunity to express aggressive behavior. In organizational settings, autonomy reflects the extent to which a job allows for independence in selecting the methods used to perform and accomplish work activities, the pacing and scheduling of task accomplishment, and how work is coordinated with other employees (Hackman & Oldham, 1976). Interdependence theory stresses similar situational features, in particular the basis and mutuality of dependence between the two interaction partners (Van Lange & Rusbult, 2012).

Much work design research has demonstrated that job autonomy positively influences affect, internal motivation, and proactive behavior (e.g., Grant & Ashford, 2008; Morgeson & Campion,

2003). However, some have noted that increased latitude with respect to the methods used to meet objectives may also prompt behaviors that deviate from organizational rules or alienate others in the workplace (Kaiser & Hogan, 2007). Moreover, empirical work has demonstrated that higher levels of conflict are associated with increased incidents of personal counterproductive work behaviors among those with high, but not low, autonomy (Fox, Spector, & Miles, 2001), suggesting that autonomous discretion may moderate the expression of aggressive workplace behaviors.

Although no research exists specifically investigating the moderating influence of autonomy on social influence tactics, researchers have found that highly structured work environments constrain the expression of Machiavellian behavior (Sparks, 1994). Consistent with interdependence theory, autonomous situations may activate more Machiavellian behavior as individuals inclined to coercion and intimidation strive to consolidate power and structure in an open-ended environment where they have the discretion to choose how they interact with others to carry out day-to-day responsibilities. Based on this rationale, we predict that job autonomy should moderate the influence of Machiavellianism on intimidation.

H2: The relationship between Machiavellianism and peer intimidation will be moderated by job autonomy such that this positive link is stronger for those with more job autonomy than those with less autonomy.

Our second extension of interdependence theory concerns supervisors' political skill, a key interpersonal trait that should enable supervisors to more accurately interpret social information and accurately perceive others' motives. Existing research indicates that managerial attributions of employee motives can play a significant role in a manager's recommendation decisions. Allen and Rush (1998) found that altruistic attributions for behavior were relevant for predicting supervisory ratings of performance and reward recommendations, whereas instrumental attributions (i.e., behavior exhibited for impression management purposes) were unrelated to employee outcomes. More recently, Lam, Huang, and Snape (2007) found that subordinate feedback-seeking behavior was related to ratings of job performance only when supervisors attributed feedback seeking to performance enhancement rather than impression management motives. Similarly, organizational citizenship behaviors that supervisors attribute to self-serving motives are associated with supervisor anger and lower subsequent performance ratings (Halbesleben, Bowler, Bolino, & Turnley, 2010) and negative reward allocation decisions (Yun et al., 2007). Taken together, these studies suggest that supervisors do make attributions for employees' motives for on-the-job behavior and that these evaluations influence their reactions. To extend the results of these studies, we argue that the differential ability to identify and interpret aggressive behavior as political can influence managerial perceptions of subordinate intent, in turn playing a critical role in a manager's decision-making process.

Whereas considerable evidence exists documenting the favorable impact of *subordinate* political skill on desired outcomes (Ferris, Treadway, Perrewé, et al., 2007; Jawahar et al., 2008; Treadway et al., 2007), the role of the *supervisor's* political skill in identifying and discrediting political behavior has not been explored in past research. This is an important oversight because we do not know if the effects of influence tactics identified in past research hold if the supervisor is politically skilled as well. We submit that supervisors who are capable of recognizing the instances and impact of such influence attempts will be moved to sanction those that engage in assertive behaviors, thereby disrupting the link between intimidation and favorable outcomes for

the subordinate. As defined, political skill represents the capacity to read and understand people and workplace dynamics, and to act upon such knowledge to influence workplace outcomes (Ferris et al., 2005; Ferris et al., 2012). Highly politically skilled individuals constantly monitor the organizational milieu for politically oriented behavior, effectively interpret social cues, and accurately attribute the behavioral motivations of others. Because these individuals more easily comprehend political behavior and attribute social information, they are more likely to attend to instances of intimidation, correctly attribute employee motives to self-serving instrumental purposes, and understand the negative influence of such behaviors on the social context of the broader organization (Bratton & Kacmar, 2004).

H3: The relationship between peer intimidation and supervisor ratings of promotability will be moderated by supervisor political skill such that this positive link is weaker for those with supervisors higher in political skill than those with supervisors less political skilled.

As a consequence of integrating social influence theory with interdependence theory, our proposed model (Figure 1) is an instance of moderated mediation (Edwards & Lambert, 2007; Muller, Judd, & Yzerbyt, 2005). If H1 is supported, peer intimidation will mediate the influence of subordinate Machiavellianism on supervisor promotability ratings in accordance with social influence theory. Moreover, consistent with interdependence theory, job autonomy and supervisor political skill should also conditionally influence the indirect effect of Machiavellianism on promotability ratings, providing support for H2 and H3. Based on our integrative theoretical rationale, that the aggressive tactics of Machiavellian employees should be less effective when the job offers less autonomy and when the supervisor is more politically skilled, we expect that the indirect effect of Machiavellianism on promotability ratings will become nonsignificant when the job is lower in autonomy and the supervisor has high political skill. Consequently, we propose the following hypothesis:

H4: Job autonomy and supervisor political skill will moderate the positive and indirect relationship between Machiavellianism and supervisor ratings of promotability (through peer intimidation) such that intimidation will mediate the indirect effects when job autonomy is high and supervisor political skill are low, but not when job autonomy is low and supervisor political skill is high.

METHOD

Participants and Procedure

Subordinate participants were 273 employed MBA students from a midsize university in the Midwestern region of the United States who received extra-credit and a monetary incentive for their participation in the study. All participants worked at least part time (25 hr per week) and completed measures designed to assess Machiavellianism, the extent to which they engage in intimidation behaviors directed at peers (work colleagues at the same hierarchical level), work autonomy, and demographic information. Upon survey completion, subordinates completed a consent form permitting the researchers to contact their supervisors to collect data on supervisor political skill, promotability ratings of the focal employee, and demographics. Subordinates

whose supervisors did not complete surveys were excluded from further analysis. Supervisors responded to 204 surveys, yielding a response rate of 74.7%.

The average age of the subordinate (supervisor) participants was 31.5 (45.3) years old, with a mean tenure of approximately 33.8 (68.1) months, working an average of 34.4 (45.4) hours per week. The sample was 61.1% (42.7%) female and 88.9% (88.8%) Caucasian, 6.5% (8.5%) African American and 4.5% (2.7%) classified themselves as Asian American, Hispanic American, or Other.

Measures

Unless otherwise noted, all study variables were assessed with a 5-point Likert-type response scale with anchors ranging from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 5 (*strongly agree*).

Machiavellianism

Subordinate Machiavellianism was assessed with the 16-item Machiavellian Personality Scale (Dahling et al., 2009). In addition to demonstrating convergent, discriminant, and criterion-related validity, this scale demonstrates acceptable levels of reliability ($\alpha = .79$). A sample item from the Machiavellian Personality Scale reads, "I am willing to be unethical if I believe it will help me succeed."

Intimidation

Subordinate reports of intimidation were measured using the five-item intimidation subscale ($\alpha = .84$) of Bolino and Turnley's (1999) Impression Management Tactics scale. A sample item reads, "Use intimidation to get colleagues to behave appropriately." Responses were on a scale ranging from 1 (*never behave this way*) to 5 (*often behave this way*).

Job Autonomy

Job autonomy was assessed with Spreitzer's (1995) three-item Autonomy subscale ($\alpha = .92$) from the Spreitzer Empowerment Questionnaire. A sample item reads, "I have considerable opportunity for independence and freedom in how I do my job."

Supervisor Political Skill

The 18-item Political Skill Inventory ($\alpha = .91$) was used to assess self-reported supervisor political skill (Ferris et al., 2005). A sample item from the Political Skill Inventory reads, "I am particularly good at sensing the motivations and hidden agendas of others."

Promotability Ratings

Supervisors rated their target subordinates' promotability with Harris, Kacmar, and Carlson's (2006) seven-item measure ($\alpha = .90$). A sample item reads, "If I had to select a successor for my position, it would be this employee."

Age, gender, and tenure have been used as covariates in a number of studies measuring impression management and influence tactics (Morrison, 1994; Suliman, 2007) and are believed to be important demographic variables that affect influence processes and effectiveness (Ferris et al., 2002). As such, supervisor and subordinate age, supervisor and subordinate gender, and supervisor and subordinate tenure are used as controls in the moderated mediation analyses of this research.

RESULTS

Confirmatory Factor Analyses of Existing Scales

All measures used in the current study were from established, well-validated scales. However, prior to assessing the model, confirmatory factor analyses (CFA) were conducted on the items of each of the scales to ensure expected factor structure and factor form in the current sample. The CFAs were performed in Mplus v 4.21 (Muthén & Muthén, 2007) using maximum likelihood estimation. For CFA model assessment, we followed the recommendations of Bandalos and Finney (2001) and Hall, Snell, and Foust (1999) by creating parcels to serve as indicators in the CFA analysis. Four parcels were formed for Machiavellianism—one each for amorality, desire for status, desire for control, and distrust of others. Four parcels were formed for supervisor political skill—one each representing networking ability, interpersonal influence, social astuteness, and apparent sincerity (Ferris et al., 2005). Two parcels each were rationally formed for intimidation and promotability ratings, based on secondary factor item loadings (Hall et al., 1999). Last, we let the three items pertaining to job autonomy serve as indicators of its respective construct rather than form parcels from these items. CFA indicated that all items and parcels positively and significantly loaded on their intended factor and demonstrated a high degree of simple structure, acceptable reliabilities, and adequate fit indices, $\chi^2(80) = 211.87, p < .001$; CFI = 0.93, RMSEA = 0.08, SRMR = 0.07. We compared our obtained fit indices against alternative models to ensure the relative viability of our a priori model (Lance & Vandenberg, 2002). Specifically, we tested two competing models against our model—a common factor model, in which all parcels loaded on a single latent construct and a three-factor model wherein Machiavellianism and intimidation served as one factor, political skill and promotability ratings constituting a second factor, and a third factor reflecting job autonomy. Results indicate that the five-factor model displayed significantly better fit to the data than either the common factor, $\Delta\chi^2(10) = 556.67, p < .01$, or three-factor models, $\Delta\chi^2(7) = 82.11, p < .01$.

Moderated Mediation Model Testing

Table 1 presents bivariate correlations, means, standards deviations, and alpha reliabilities for all study variables. As indicated in Table 1, the bivariate relationship between Machiavellianism and intimidation was positive and significant ($r = .33, p < .01$) as was the link between intimidation and supervisor ratings of promotability ($r = .43, p < .01$).

TABLE 1
Means, Standard Deviations, and Correlations of All Variables

Study Variables	M	SD	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11
1. Machiavellianism	2.33	0.43	(.79)										
2. Intimidation	1.57	0.70	.33**	(.89)									
3. Job autonomy	4.04	0.97	.06	-.05	(.92)								
4. Supervisor political skill	4.16	0.48	.03	-.07	.05	(.89)							
5. Promotability ratings	3.78	0.75	.18**	.43**	.29**	.01	(.86)						
6. Subordinate age	31.59	7.68	-.25**	-.18**	.02	-.01	-.06	—					
7. Subordinate gender	1.61	0.49	-.15*	-.04	.14	.10	.03	-.06	—				
8. Subordinate tenure	33.82	38.55	-.17*	-.04	.14	.10	-.04	.39**	-.01	—			
9. Supervisor age	45.29	10.09	-.01	-.01	.12	.04	-.10	.22**	.30	.30**	—		
10. Supervisor gender	1.41	0.50	-.01	.03	.06	.03	-.01	-.17*	.21**	-.19**	-.02	—	
11. Supervisor tenure	68.07	73.04	.13	-.10	.14	.02	-.18*	.04	.03	.33**	.47**	.04	—

Note. Reliabilities reported in parentheses. Tenure reported in months.

* $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$.

Prior to focal analyses, all continuous variables were mean-centered (Aiken & West, 1991). Table 2 presents the results for the mediating effect of intimidation on the Machiavellianism–promotability link (H1). We tested the indirect effect of intimidation on the Machiavellianism–promotability relationship using Preacher and Hayes (2008) SPSS macro that incorporates the Sobel test and bootstrapped confidence intervals in the estimation of indirect effects. Machiavellianism was positively related to intimidation behaviors, as indicated by the significant unstandardized regression coefficient ($B = .73, t = 5.20, p < .01$). Furthermore, intimidation was positively associated with supervisor ratings of promotability, controlling for Machiavellianism ($B = .33, t = 6.37, p < .01$). Last, intimidation was found to mediate the positive relationship between Machiavellianism and supervisor ratings of promotability (.24), supporting H1. The Sobel two-tailed test of significance, which assumes a normal distribution, demonstrated that the mediating effect was significant ($z = 4.01, p < .01$). Moreover, the bootstrap results corroborated the Sobel test as the bootstrapped 95% confidence interval around the indirect effect did not contain zero (.13, .38; Table 2).

Table 3 presents the results for our moderator hypotheses (H2). H2 postulated that the relationship between Machiavellianism and intimidation would be moderated by job autonomy such that this positive link is stronger for those with more autonomy. As shown in Table 3, results indicate the interactive term for Machiavellianism and intimidation was significant ($B = .55, t = 2.30, p < .05$). Using procedures outlined by Aiken and West (1991), the observed interaction was plotted at 1 standard deviation above and below the mean of Machiavellianism to examine the form of the moderated relationship. Figure 2 illustrates that, as expected, there is a stronger positive slope describing the relationship between Machiavellianism and intimidation for those with more autonomy. The slope of the regression line for those with lower levels of autonomy was not significantly different from zero, $t(3, 202) = 1.22, ns$. Conversely, simple slopes were significantly different from zero for those with more autonomy, $t(3, 203) = 3.21, p < .01$.

H3 stated that the relationship between intimidation and supervisor ratings of promotability would be moderated by supervisor political skill such that this positive link is weaker for those with supervisors higher in political skill. As shown in Table 3, this interaction was significant ($B = -.15, t = -3.67, p < .01$). Plotting the interaction (Figure 3) indicates that, as expected, the positive link between intimidation and promotability is weaker for subordinates who have supervisors higher in political skill. Simple slopes analysis demonstrated that the slope of the regression line for those with higher levels of political skill did not differ from zero, $t(3, 202) = 1.09, ns$. However, for those with lower levels of political skill, the simple slope was significantly different from zero, $t(3, 201) = 3.85, p < .01$.

Although the results support the hypothesized moderating effects of job autonomy and supervisor political skill, they do not directly assess the moderated mediation model illustrated in Figure 1 (H4). As such, we examined the indirect effect of Machiavellianism on promotability ratings through intimidation at three levels of both moderators—the mean, 1 standard deviation above the mean, and 1 standard deviation below the mean.

To test this model, we employed an SPSS application provided by Preacher, Rucker, and Hayes (2007) that integrates moderator and moderated mediation hypotheses, implements the recommended bootstrapping procedures for calculating indirect effects, and provides an analytical method for probing the significance of conditional indirect effects at different values of the moderator variables. As shown in Table 4 and confirmed by bootstrap confidence intervals, the indirect

TABLE 2
Regression Results for Simple Mediation (H1)

<i>Variables</i>	B	SE	t	P
Promotability Ratings regressed on Machiavellianism	.31	.11	2.75	.01
Intimidation regressed on Machiavellianism	.73	.14	5.20	.01
Promotability Ratings regressed on Intimidation, controlling for Machiavellianism	.33	.05	6.37	.01
Promotability Ratings regressed on Machiavellianism, controlling for Intimidation	.08	.11	.71	.48

	Value	SE	LL 95% CI	UL 95% CI	z	P
Indirect effect and significance using normal distribution	.24	.06	.12	.35	4.01	.01
Sobel						
	<i>M</i>	<i>SE</i>	LL 95% CI	UL 95% CI		
Bootstrap results for indirect effect	.24	.06			.13	.38
Effect						

Note. Unstandardized regression coefficients reported. Bootstrap sample size 5000. LL = lower limit; CI = confidence interval; UL = upper limit.

TABLE 3
Regression Results for Moderator Effects (H2 and H3)

Predictor	B	SE	t	p
DV – Intimidation				
Constant	.07	.06	1.10	.27
Machiavellianism	.77	.16	4.81	.00
Autonomy	-.01	.09	-.13	.89
Machiavellianism × Autonomy	.55	.24	2.30	.02
Supervisor gender	.04	.14	.31	.76
Supervisor age	.01	.01	.05	.95
Supervisor tenure	-.01	.01	-2.41	.02
Subordinate gender	.07	.15	.41	.68
Subordinate age	-.01	.01	-1.36	.17
Subordinate tenure	.01	.01	1.32	.19
DV – Promotability ratings				
Constant	.01	.04	.24	.83
Machiavellianism	.06	.11	.50	.61
Autonomy	.27	.06	4.45	.00
Machiavellianism × Autonomy	.28	.16	1.79	.08
Intimidation	.27	.05	5.47	.00
Supervisor Political Skill	.04	.06	.80	.42
Intimidation × Supervisor Political Skill	-.15	.04	-3.67	.00
Supervisor gender	-.08	.09	-.94	.34
Supervisor age	.01	.05	.27	.78
Supervisor tenure	-.01	.01	-1.61	.11
Subordinate gender	.13	.09	1.45	.15
Subordinate age	.01	.01	.46	.65
Subordinate tenure	-.01	.01	-1.29	.20

Note. Unstandardized regression coefficients reported. Bootstrap sample size 5000.

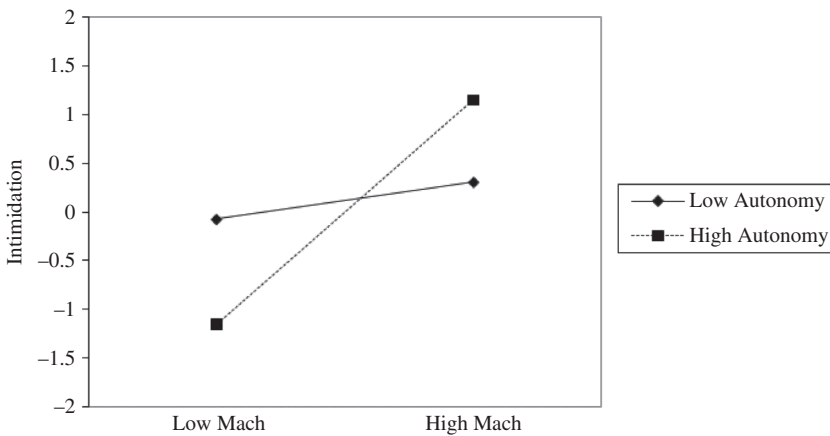


FIGURE 2 Interaction of Machiavellianism (Mach) and autonomy on peer intimidation (H2).

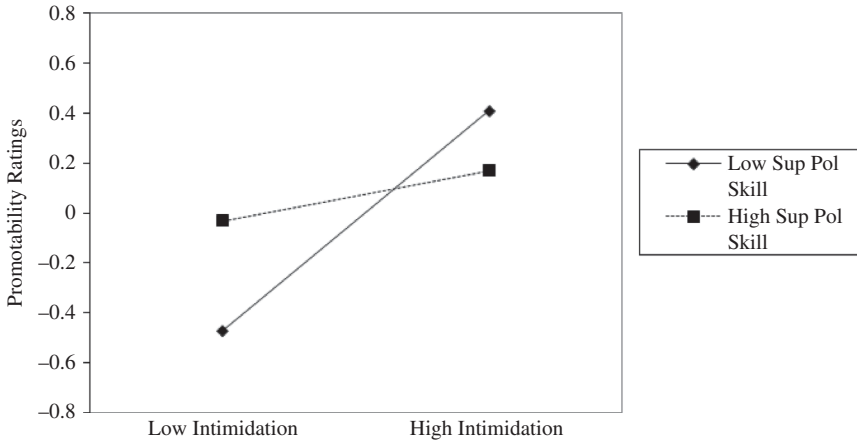


FIGURE 3 Interaction of peer intimidation and supervisor political (sup pol) skill on promotability ratings (H3).

TABLE 4
Regression Results for Conditional Indirect Effects (H4)

<i>Autonomy</i>	<i>Supervisor Political Skill</i>	<i>Boot Indirect Effect</i>	<i>Boot SE</i>	<i>Boot z</i>	<i>Boot p</i>
-1 SD (-.74)	-1 SD (-.79)	.13	.09	1.40	.16
-1 SD (-.74)	<i>M</i> (-.01)	.08	.06	1.36	.17
-1 SD (-.74)	+1 SD (.79)	.04	.04	1.10	.27
<i>M</i> (.00)	-1 SD (-.79)	.28	.07	3.82	.01
<i>M</i> (.00)	<i>M</i> (-.01)	.18	.05	3.40	.01
<i>M</i> (.00)	+1 SD (.79)	.28	.07	3.27	.01
+1 SD (.74)	-1 SD (-.79)	.42	.11	3.74	.01
+1 SD (.74)	<i>M</i> (-.01)	.28	.08	3.50	.01
+1 SD (.74)	+1 SD (.79)	.14	.07	1.83	.06

Note. Unstandardized regression coefficients reported. Bootstrap sample size 5000.

effect of Machiavellianism on promotability ratings through intimidation was significantly different from zero at 1 standard deviation above the mean of job autonomy (+.74) and 1 standard deviation below the mean of supervisor political skill (-.79); however, this indirect effect was not significant at 1 standard deviation below the mean of autonomy and 1 standard deviation above the mean of supervisor political skill. As such, H4 was supported. Job autonomy and supervisor political skill moderated the positive and indirect relationship between Machiavellianism and supervisor ratings of promotability through intimidation when autonomy was high and supervisor political skill was low, but not when autonomy was low and supervisor political skill was high.

DISCUSSION

Intimidation is a hostile, differentiating form of impression management that can paradoxically result in positive perceptions of dominance and promotability. We tested a model of social influence that demonstrated when intimidation is likely to occur and to succeed as a social influence tactic. Our results show that Machiavellian employees do intimidate peers and that this tactic can contribute to favorable career outcomes, such as promotability, which aligns with social influence theory. However, our integration of interdependence theory in the form of autonomy and supervisor political skill demonstrates that job contexts and the characteristics of influence targets play critical roles in disrupting this process. Specifically, we found that (a) less autonomy restricts the expression of threatening intimidation directed at colleagues, and (b) politically skilled supervisors are better able to attend to, and interpret, such acts, and that coercive intimidation attempts are nonrewarded when evaluating the potential of their employees.

Contributions to Theory and Research

These findings advance the literature on social influence and impression management in several respects. Specifically, our results illustrate that intimidation is a key mechanism underlying the Machiavellianism—promotability association, which is an important finding given the lack of research on intimidation in organizations. A second major contribution of this study is that we investigated the influence of job autonomy as an important contextual enabler of intimidation. Whereas most research has identified the generally positive benefits of on-the-job independence (e.g., Grant & Ashford, 2008; Morgeson & Campion, 2003), our results indicate that such latitude may allow some employees to put a personal agenda ahead of the interests of the larger social group and positive organizational functioning. Last, our study filled a void in the literature by incorporating the abilities of the supervisor into existing models of impression management. Most research on impression management has focused instead on the abilities of the subordinate (e.g., Treadway et al., 2007), whereas we have shown that supervisors vary in their ability to decipher influence attempts and that politically skilled supervisors are likely to discount peer intimidation tactics when forming perceptions of an actor's promotability. Our results underscore the importance of considering subordinate personality, contextual factors, and the role of the supervisor on intimidation directed at peers and promotability ratings. Likewise, studies examining the intermediate environmental mechanisms linking subordinate personality and impression management to individual outcomes should integrate social influence theory (Forgas & Williams, 2001; Levy et al., 1998) with the Interdependence perspective (Rusbult & Van Lange, 2003) in the interest of more fully specifying the complement of influences on important job-related criteria.

Practical Implications

Our findings have several implications for research and practice. For example, our results indicate that organizations should develop strategies that limit the potential for forceful interpersonal pressure tactics. The most obvious mechanism to minimize the influence of employees who tend toward threatening behavior is to screen them out at the selection phase or during the succession process. Problematically, such inclinations may often coexist with positive social skills such as

self-confidence or stress tolerance (Hogan & Hogan, 2001; Hogan & Kaiser, 2005). As such, standardized personality assessments may not detect coercive tendencies. More detailed and extensive background checks may be required to uncover explicit acts of workplace intimidation.

In addition, organizational decision makers must be made aware that promotion decisions can be contaminated by impression management attempts, potentially disrupting the utility of an organization's promotion system. Because intimidation can influence human resource processes and decisions independent of substantive contribution, the criteria used to make important personnel decisions should be carefully scrutinized for specificity and applicability. Moreover, accountability for those making promotion decisions should be increased. If vague criteria of questionable relevance (e.g., a "hard-charging" personality) are used to assist in promotion decisions, an organization runs the risk of staffing its managerial and executive ranks with its most politically oriented individuals rather than its most competent employees.

Our results also indicate that organizations would do well to assist in the development of supervisor political skill. Researchers studying applications of political skill argue that effective supervisors exercise social perceptiveness when dealing with interpersonal interactions in the workplace (Ferris, Perrewé, Anthony, & Gilmore, 2000). In other words, good managers need to be able to discriminate between political and nonpolitical behavior and know how to monitor behavior depending on the demands of a specific context. As advocated by organizational politics scholars, the development of political skill may be accomplished through organizational training efforts that focus on both content and process issues (Ferris et al., 2000).

Limitations and Future Research Directions

Although our findings have important implications for understanding social influence via intimidation in organizations, there are several limitations of our results that should be noted. First, our data are cross-sectional, and the effects of negative IM behaviors likely accrue over a long time span. Further, actual promotion decisions are relatively rare, which led us to focus on promotability ratings instead in this study. Our results would be strengthened by taking into account the effects of negative IM tactics on promotability ratings over time and by measuring actual promotion decisions in future research. Our focus on MBA students also likely resulted in higher mean promotability ratings than might be observed in other samples of participants with fewer accomplishments, although we expect that our findings would fully generalize to other samples.

Based on our findings and limitations, we see several other important directions for future research. First, future research should focus on more specific, dimension-level relationships between Machiavellianism, political skill, and impression management tactics (e.g., other dimensions, such as supplication) as these relationships are understudied and likely explain other important work outcomes. Second, more research is needed on intimidation in particular to identify different predictors of this behavior and its consequences when directed at targets other than peers, such as subordinates or even supervisors (e.g., Gallagher, Harris, & Valle, 2008). Third, although we examined the autonomy experienced by the Machiavellian intimidator in this study, our results may also be dependent on the level of autonomy experienced by their peers. Peers with high autonomy, or who are able to work independently from the focal Machiavellian, may be able to avoid social interactions that create opportunities for intimidation

to occur. Future research could test this possibility as another relevant situational affordance, consistent with interdependence theory (Van Lange & Rusbult, 2012). Last, this study relied on subordinate self-reports of peer intimidation to assess the moderating influence of supervisor political skill on the intimidation–promotability association. However, to more directly assess whether highly politically skilled supervisors indeed discount aggressive political behavior when making promotability decisions, supervisor ratings of peer intimidation may be more appropriate. As such, future research should incorporate peer intimidation ratings collected from supervisors to more accurately assess these links and ensure generalizability of our findings.

Conclusion

The present study responds to a relative dearth in the impression management research literature, namely, a lack of empirical guidance with regard to who engages in peer intimidation, which workplace characteristics exacerbate the frequency of their expression, and how the differential ability to detect motives influences supervisors' promotability ratings of subordinates who engage in peer-directed aggression. These results should be helpful to both researchers and practitioners alike; however, future research should extend the current research by investigating other important antecedents and consequences of workplace intimidation.

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