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Why do some followers remain silent in response to abusive supervision? A system justification perspective

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ABSTRACT

This study investigates how the system justification motive manifests in employees' voice/silence behavior at the workplace. It also explores the moderating effects of system justification on the linkage between abusive supervision and voice/silence behavior for blue- and white-collar employees. The field study generated responses from 905 employees in Turkey. Multi-group analysis reveals that the moderating effect of system justification motives varies by occupational class. In particular, the impact of abusive supervision on silence becomes more salient when white-collar employees endorse higher system justification motives. However, in the blue-collar sample, the absence of a moderating effect could be attributed to the strong main effect of system justification motives. The current study adds to the extant literature by applying a system justification perspective to voice and silence behavior by collar differences at work. It also provides important implications for managers in dealing with workplace mistreatment affecting all occupational groups, mainly when blue-collar employee silence is endemic and regulatory policies are inadequate.

1. Introduction

The recent emphasis on voice behavior in management research focuses on the fundamental question of "When and why do employees raise their voice or remain silent?" particularly when confronted with abusive supervision practices (Shahjehan & Yasir, 2016). Most earlier studies have been conducted in contexts with supportive laws, policies, and discourses that seek to combat abusive supervision at work (Kiewitz, Restubog, Shoss, Garcia, & Tang, 2016; Xu, Loi, & Lam, 2015). This study deepens the previous literature by considering what happens to employee responses in a context (i.e., Turkey) that offers relatively loose ceremonial and residual regulatory (legal, policy, and discourse-level) protection against abusive supervision. While Turkish society has become more aware of psychological abuse in relationships, workplace mistreatment remains a silent epidemic (Aytac et al., 2011), and laws still lag in protecting employees who suffer from abusive supervision and discrimination (Ozatalay and Doğuç, 2018; Küskü, Aracı, & Özbilgin, 2021;).

This research explores how the system justification motive manifests in employees' behavioral intentions. The system justification theory stipulates that individuals are encouraged to believe that existing social engagements are legitimate, just, and reasonable. More interestingly, the individuals who suffer most from the existing social order are the least likely to demand, challenge, reject, or transform it (Jost, Banaji, & Nosek, 2004). We could ask whether the expressions of voice or silence reactions to abusive supervision change concerning the system justification motives of those individuals.

Furthermore, this study examines the differential effect of occupational class (i.e., blue-/white-collar) in those relationships. We specifically address whether the effects of perceptions of abusive supervision and system justification motives on voice/silence behaviors vary between blue-collar who are offered less regulatory protection against abusive supervision and white-collar who are afforded more robust regulatory protections and sophisticated HR policies against abusive supervision (Della Porta, 2015; International Labor Organization [ILO], 2018; Mellor & Kath, 2011).

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To understand the persistence of workplace misbehavior, the current study contributes to the discussion of voice or silence responses by adopting a system-justifying perspective and provides a psychological explanation for why individuals may downplay or justify abusive supervision and may keep silent (Restubog, Scott, & Zagenczyk, 2011; Tepper, 2007). To the extent that organizational leaders are accepted as representatives of the system, employees might tend to justify the behaviors of organizational leaders and ignore their faults (Breevaart, Wisse, & Schyns, 2022; Proudfoot & Kay, 2014; Van der Toorn, Tyler, & Jost, 2011). In this vein, this study sheds light on how system justification motives could be used to understand employee behavior better and to explore the perceptions of supervisors' abusive behavior in order to spark a more significant research stream into system justifications and employee behaviors (Thomas & Harris, 2021). Second, this work provides insight into the dynamics of voice or silence behavior by occupational class. Blue-collar worker silence is worrying, as such workers are subject to considerable symbolic and psychological violence in business and society in Turkey (Erbil & Özbilgin, 2023). The findings may help shape HR practices that support blue-collar workers to regain their voice as prosocial behavior by unpacking the factors underlying blue-collar employee silence.

1.1. Contextual background

The emergence of blue-collar workers in Turkey dates back to the sugar, textile, and glass factories established in the 1920s as part of national efforts to modernize the Turkish economy and support its industrialization. Blue-collar employees, hailed as heroes of Turkish modernization, have lost considerable prestige and power with economic liberalization, which led to the privatization of many factories in a process that started in the 1980s and gained speed in the last five years with widespread privatization and extensive factory closures in Turkey (Erbil & Özbilgin, 2023). The falling from grace of blue-collar employees happened simultaneously with the rise of white-collar employees in Turkey. While the social respectability and prestige of blue-collar work declined, white-collar work emerged as socially desirable in Turkey. The Supreme Court of Turkey (Rule No. 2012/36446, Decision No. 2014/27623, Date: 23.09.2014) decreed that employers should treat white- and blue-collar employees equally in the terms and conditions of their work, such as pay, holiday, and other entitlements. Although there is no legal distinction between white- and blue-collar employees in the labor code, the traditional split between them persists in Turkish social and business life, where there is little social mixing between white- and blue-collar workers. In terms of educational attainment, blue-collar workers have lower levels of educational attainment than white-collar employees in Turkey. Blue-collar employees perform manual labor jobs, while white-collar employees usually perform duties in office settings (Ersoy, Born, Derous, & van der Molen, 2011). Despite ceremonial equality in law, the chasm between blue- and white-collar employees remains broad and is complicated by Turkey's cultural codes and market and political forces (Bozkurt, 2019; Buğra, 2008; Erbil & Özbilgin, 2023).

While Turkey had a reportedly less hierarchical culture in the early 2000s (Aycan, 2001), studies identify that it has a hierarchical culture in which high power distance, dependence, and acceptance of authority are widely standard (Berkman & Özen, 2008; Ersoy et al., 2011). This period has seen the emergence of a hierarchy of status and prestige between social perceptions of blue- and white-collar employees, the latter gaining respectability while the former are losing out on social standing. Most blue-collar employees are reported to be seeking new employment due to poor working conditions in Turkey. Furthermore, there is a widely held belief that blue-collar employee participation in decision-making is undervalued by management. Value systems also vary depending on the status of the employees, even in predicting work-related outcomes. At the same time, the type of work also matters for the social standing of white-collar workers (Sarac, Meydan, & Efil,

2017). In this highly hierarchical context, blue-collar employees are more likely to accept uneven power relations with their supervisors and show loyalty to authority, compared with those in less hierarchical work cultures (Kabasakal & Bodur, 2002). In line with this, scholars argue that blue-collar workers in the Turkish work context depend on and care more about their relationships with supervisors than white-collar employees, who enjoy more autonomy at work (Ersoy et al., 2011). Therefore, exploring the relationships among abusive supervision, system-justifying motives, and employee behavior seems particularly important in this cultural context.

2. Theoretical framework and hypothesis development

2.1. Perceptions of abusive supervision and employees' voice and silence behaviors

Voice is defined as "any attempt to change, rather than to escape from, an objectionable state of affairs" (Hirschman, 1970, p. 30). Differently from Hirschman's (1970) conceptualization, Van Dyne and LePine (1998) and Van Dyne, Ang, and Botero (2003) conceptualized voice as deliberate and proactive employee behavior to verbally express opinions to individuals who might act based on these ideas. Stemming from Van Dyne and LePine (1998)'s definition, voice refers to "informal and discretionary communication of ideas, suggestions, concerns, problems, or opinions about work-related issues, with the intent to bring about improvement or change" (Morrison, 2023, p. 80). Therefore, it is regarded not only as a response to unsatisfying conditions at work but also as a basic form of extra-role discretionary behavior (Morrison, 2014, 2023).

Employee silence is "the intentional withholding of work-related ideas, information, and opinions" (Van Dyne et al., 2003, p. 1363). While some literature views silence and voice as extremes of the same continuum (Frazier & Bowler, 2015), some posits silence and voice as two distinct constructs with different forms, antecedents, and motives (Brinsfield, 2013; Morrison, 2014; Van Dyne et al., 2003). Brinsfield (2013, p. 115) states, "Voice and silence may indeed be two sides of the same coin, but to fully understand the nature of the coin, it is necessary to examine both sides." Following these arguments, this research posits that silence and voice might co-exist in a duality (Shahjehan & Yasir, 2016).

Leadership influences employees' voices and silence as discretionary behavior (Van Dyne et al., 2003). Abusive supervision is "subordinates' perceptions of the extent to which supervisors engage in the sustained display of hostile verbal and nonverbal behaviors, excluding physical contact" (Tepper, 2000, p. 178). Research evidence on abusive supervision and subordinate behavior at the workplace established that abusive supervision relates to adverse outcomes such as employee deviance (Martinko, Harvey, Brees, & Mackey, 2013), counterproductive work behavior, and aggression (Fischer, Tian, Lee, & Hughes, 2021). The leader may affect how employees express their ideas and opinions, and abusive supervisors are arguably more likely to create a climate of fear, discouraging followers' voice behavior (Kish-Gephart, Detert, Treviño, & Edmondson, 2009). This is mainly because leaders have the authority to manage reward and punishment distribution in the organization. This power over and dependency on employees make the leader more critical of voice behavior.

The previous studies demonstrated that perceived abusive leadership hurts employee voice behavior (Li & Zhu, 2016; Pandey, Nambudiri, Selvaraj, & Sadh, 2021; Peng, M Schaubroeck, Chong, & Li, 2019; Wang & Jiang, 2015), increases followers' avoidance of interaction with their supervisors (Peltokorpi, 2017), and decreases employees' voice behavior through the feelings of shame and fear (Peng et al., 2019) and followers' interactional justice perceptions (Wang & Jiang, 2015; Wu, 2020).

Equity theory (Adams, 1963) asserts that individuals' motivation in any social exchange is determined by their perception of fair treatment

in that exchange relationship. Individuals compare their relationships regarding investment and outcomes with others (Van Dierendonck, Le Blanc, & Van Breukelen, 2002) and then respond to eliminate perceived inequities. In this vein, employees' perceptions of how well their supervisor treats them could affect their attitudes and behavior. Accordingly, if an employee experiences abusive supervision and mistreatment, they may feel inequity, violating their expectations for fair treatment (Liang et al., 2021). To maintain a balance in their relationships (Gervasi, Faldetta, Pellegrini, & Maley, 2022) with the supervisor, abused employees may engage in less proactive, prosocial behavior and withhold positive voice behavior in the organization. Thus, using voice or silence in response to an inequitable situation would help those individuals resolve the inequity and restore balance in their relationships (Kingsley Westerman, Spates, Reno, Jenkins, & Hye Eun, 2017). So we propose that individuals subjected to abusive supervision may engage in less voice behavior.

Hypothesis 1. There is a negative relationship between employees' perceptions of abusive supervision and voice behavior.

In line with studies displaying that positive forms of leadership are likely to support voice, negative forms of leadership have been reported to foster silence (Morrison, 2023). A large body of recent research revealed that abusive supervision relates to employee silence (De Clercq, Jahanzeb, & Fatima, 2021; Jain, Srivastava, & Cooper, 2021; Khan & Khan, 2021; Wang, Hsieh, & Wang, 2020). Most research on silence behavior has been grounded in the conservation of resources theory (COR) (Hobfoll, 1989). Accordingly, individuals have limited personal resources regarding time and physical and emotional energy. When people's resources are threatened, they become stressed and want to safeguard them to avoid future resource loss (Hobfoll, 1989). As abusive supervisors intimidate and manipulate employees (Tepper et al., 2009), they may consume employees' cognitive and emotional resources. Thus, employees engage in self-protective behaviors for their self-interests (Whitman, Halbesleben, & Holmes IV, 2014; Xu et al., 2015). By linking the COR theory to abusive supervision, researchers found that employees who perceive abusive supervision react with defensive silence or defensive passing to preserve their remaining resources (De Clercq et al., 2021; Özbilgin, Erbil, Baykut, & Kamasak, 2023), as remaining silent may help employees to conserve their remaining resources (Hobfoll & Shirom, 2000). Thus, it seems reasonable to assume that abusive leadership is a resource-draining situation that directs employees to avoid this relationship and remain silent.

Hypothesis 2. There is a positive relationship between employees' perceptions of abusive supervision and silence behavior.

2.2. System justification and employees' voice and silence

Jost and Banaji (1994) developed the system justification theory to explain why members of some groups endorse negative stereotypes of themselves and express more favorable attitudes toward depriving out-group members. The theory has addressed many outcomes, including stereotyping, prejudice, and perceptions of entitlement and fairness (see Jost, 2019, for a review). The main argument of this theory is that "people are motivated to defend, justify and bolster the social status quo, including the existing social, economic, and political systems, institutions and arrangements even at the expense of their personal and group interests" (Jost & Banaji, 1994, p. 2; Jost et al., 2004). Individuals rationalize their beliefs and attitudes about the status quo by engaging in system justification, endorsing power holders' legitimacy, and showing insensitivity to the system's faults (Thomas & Harris, 2021, p. 5). Paradoxically, the system-justifying tendencies are strongly endorsed by disadvantaged-group members. Those individuals internalize the inequality and view the existing social system as legitimate and justified (Jost et al., 2004).

This motive, however, is not unique to disadvantaged-group

members, and these ideologies are also endorsed by high-status or advantaged group members (Jost & Hunyady, 2003). Among members of advantaged groups, system justification is positively associated with self-esteem, perceived legitimacy, in-group favoritism, and psychological well-being, indicated by decreased depression and neuroticism (Jost & Hunyady, 2003, 2005; Jost & Thompson, 2000). In contrast, members of disadvantaged groups display more out-group favoritism, in-group ambivalence, depression, neuroticism, lower self-esteem, and decreased entitlement (Jost & Hunyady, 2003, 2005). Indeed, the perception of legitimacy in the social system satisfies basic needs to reduce uncertainty, manage threats, and affiliate with others (Jost, Ledgerwood, & Hardin, 2007; Jost & Hunyady, 2005). Through serving a palliative function, justifying the system decreases individuals' negative affect and increases satisfaction with their situation and the societal status quo (Jost & Hunyady, 2003, 2005).

As the system justification theory proposes that subordinates are motivated to justify the groups or individuals who control those systems or have power within the system (Van der Toorn et al., 2011), employees' motivation to justify the system could relate to their voice and silence behavior at the workplace. People are more likely to justify social, economic, and political systems when they are exposed to system threats (e.g., Van der Toorn, Jost, & Loffredo, 2017), perceive system inescapability (e.g., Laurin, Shepherd, & Kay, 2010), and feel powerless or dependent on the system (e.g., Van der Toorn et al., 2011). In their experimental study, Proudfoot, Kay, and Mann (2015) found evidence that when employees face unfavorable and weak labor market conditions (i.e., scarcity of job alternatives), they are more likely to minimize or ignore the problems of their organizations than those faced with a more favorable labor market. These previous findings might provide specific insights into employees' voice and silence behavior in organizations. Employees' system justification motives can boost their preference for the status quo, encouraging them to ignore unpleasant features of their organizations (Proudfoot & Kay, 2014), making them rationalize policy changes and less likely to react if they perceive them as unchangeable (Laurin et al., 2010). In this vein, one would argue that the system-justifying tendency to deny the presence of organizational and leadership-related problems may lead to less voice behavior and more silence behavior.

Hypothesis 3. There is a negative relationship between employees' system justification motives and their voice behavior.

Hypothesis 4. There is a positive relationship between employees' system justification motives and their silence behavior.

Nevertheless, the system justification motives may also moderate the relationship between perceptions of abusive supervision and employees' voice/silence behavior. Given that system-justifying ideologies might prevent individuals from perceiving stress by convincing them that the social context is stable, predictable, and just (Jost & Hunyady, 2003), individuals' perceptions of unfair events and their behavioral responses to the events might be influenced by those beliefs. More specifically, the effect of abusive supervision perceptions on employees' voice and silence behavior may depend on employees' motivation to justify the system.

The literature also argues that system-justifying motivations can be a stressor and can be a resource (Jost & Hunyady, 2003). System justification motives can enhance stress when challenged (Pacilli, Spaccatini, Giovannelli, Centrone, & Roccato, 2019). When individuals with stronger system-justifying motives face an explicitly unfair event, they perceive the situation as particularly stressful, as it challenges their belief that the system is fair (Eliezer, Townsend, Sawyer, Major, & Mendes, 2011; Pacilli et al., 2019). As a resource, endorsing a higher system justification motive can buffer stress by helping individuals to perceive their social situation as predictable and stable. Studies addressing the moderating impact of system justification motives have demonstrated their "palliative effects" (Jost & Hunyady, 2003; Osborne,

Jost, Becker, Badaan, & Sibley, 2019) and suggested that when individuals experience unfair events, stronger system-justifying motivations function as a critical factor and lead to better well-being, reduced moral outrage, and reduced tendency to engage in collective action (Levine, Basu, & Chen, 2017; Solak, Tamir, Sümer, Jost, & Halperin, 2021; Suppes, Napier, & van der Toorn, 2019; Vargas-Salfate, Paez, Khan, Liu, & Gil de Zúñiga, 2018; Wakslak, Jost, Tyler, & Chen, 2007). Thus,

Hypothesis 5. System justification motives moderate the relationship between abusive supervision perceptions and voice/silence behavior, in such a way that those relationships would be stronger in employees with higher system justification motives.

We further argue that the moderating role of system justification motives (as a palliative function or stress inducer) depends on other factors, such as the occupational class of the employees.

2.3. The role of occupational class (blue- and white-collar) on the moderated relationships

Blue- and white-collar employees are hierarchically regarded in social and work settings, where the former are viewed as a lower-status group, and the latter are accepted as a high-status group (Cohen & Hudecek, 1993; Sarac et al., 2017). The Bureau of Labor Statistics (cited in Cowan & Buchanan, 2011, p. 20) defines traditional blue-collar employees as “those employed in the craft, service, custodial, construction, repair, fabricator, and factory occupations.” Blue-collar employees have limited compensation opportunities compared with white-collar employees, who enjoy higher wages (e.g., Harris & Locke, 1974).

As individuals belonging to different interconnected micro and macro social systems compose the status quo, it is argued that rationalization spreads from one system to another (Wakslak, Jost, & Bauer, 2011). System justification operates similarly in smaller social systems, including hierarchical dyadic relations. Given that people justify the social systems they are highly dependent on (or controlled by), subordinates are also motivated to justify the groups or individuals who control those systems or have power within the system (Van der Toorn et al., 2011). With this notion, the legitimation processes should also be elicited in a supervisor–employee relationship at the workplace. The current study proposes that the interactive effects of system justification motives and perceptions of abusive supervision on voice/silence behaviors vary for blue- and white-collar employees. This difference mainly depends on how the process of system justification operates in rationalizing their positions as advantaged or disadvantaged in different workgroups of organizations. Depending on their occupational status, employees’ exhibitions of system-justifying patterns of responses would change concerning how they justify their positions when faced with mistreatment at work.

It is noted that the feelings of economic dependence are higher for low-income employees (Brief, Brett, Raskas, & Stein, 1997). This exchange process could increase their dependency on supervisors and organizations. The perceived system dependence intensifies individuals’ rationalization to justify and defend the prevailing system (Proudfoot & Kay, 2014). Furthermore, individuals are more likely to defend the prevailing system’s flaws when the number of exit alternatives is small (Laurin et al., 2010). As there are few employment and career opportunities for blue-collar employees compared with their white-collar counterparts (Ates, Sozen, & Yeloglu, 2014; Hennequin, 2007; Kayhan-Kuzgun, 2021; Royer, Waterhouse, Brown, & Festing, 2008), their feeling of inescapability intensifies the rationalization to justify and defend their system. Compared with those with higher status, individuals with lower status have less personal control (Proudfoot & Kay, 2014). They are more likely to experience supervisory control over their work, criticism from supervisors, and threatening comments (Zegers de Beijl, 1990). In line with this, low-status individuals are less willing to participate in system-challenging protest activities (Jost et al., 2012, 2017) and

engage in less extra-role behavior in response to mistreatment (Aquino & Douglas, 2003; Aquino, Galperin, & Bennett, 2004).

In terms of leadership practices, an experimental study reveals that when people depend on an authority figure, they appraise more legitimacy (measured by trust and confidence) and voluntarily defer to and empower the authority (Van der Toorn et al., 2011). It is worth noting that, rather than admitting that the system is unfair or that power is undeserved, subordinates are more likely to see authority persons as deserving of their position, since they rely on them for favorable outcomes over which they have no control. In other words, employees appraise legitimacy for the wrongdoing of power holders even when this behavior is harmful to them. Supporting this, Troester & Van Quaquebeke, 2021 showed that subordinates abused by their superiors blame themselves for the abuse.

The relational model of authority (Tyler & Lind, 1992) may account for the voice/silence behavior of white-collar employees endorsing system justification motives when exposed to abusive supervision. This model argues that individuals’ perceptions of their status significantly impact how they identify themselves and respond to situations. Accordingly, individuals pay attention to how authority figures treat them because it signals their acceptance by superiors and affirms their self-esteem (Potipiroon & Rubin, 2018). Regarding workplace relationships, white-collar employees are expected to be respected and appreciated by their supervisors (Wu, 2020). They are more likely to experience a loss of social esteem in exposure to supervisors’ unfair treatment (Potipiroon & Rubin, 2018).

Given that high-status individuals are more concerned with maintaining their status and self-view and receiving fair treatment than those with lower status (Blader & Chen, 2011), white-collar employees would show relatively less tolerance and consider abusive supervision less acceptable (Wu, 2020). Supporting this, Potipiroon and Rubin (2018) yielded that occupational status groups respond differently to justice, so that compared with lower-status employees, higher-status employees internalize injustice less and react more strongly when they perceive injustice. Thus, the effects of system justification motives and perceptions of abusive supervision on voice/silence behaviors are expected to differ for blue- and white-collar employees.

We believe system justification motives would be resources and have a palliative function among blue-collar employees experiencing abusive supervision. When they justify the system, they can perceive the abusive supervision as less stressful and provide more excuses (Breevaart et al., 2022), as they are more prepared to face such an unfair situation. Therefore, it is assumed that abused blue-collar employees with stronger system justification motives could engage in less voice and more silence behavior. Similarly, abused white-collar employees with stronger system justification motives could also engage in less voice and more silence behavior. Though the direction of the relationships mentioned above is assumed to be similar in blue- and white-collar employees, the magnitude of these proposed relationships might change depending on the occupational class. We expect those relationships to be more pronounced for blue-collar employees due to higher internalization of system-justifying motives among low-status groups (Jost et al., 2004). Hence,

Hypothesis 6. The negative relationship between abusive supervision and voice and the positive relationship between abusive supervision and silence would be stronger in blue-collar employees with higher system justification motives than in white-collar employees with higher system justification motives.

In line with the arguments above, the proposed model is depicted in Fig. 1.

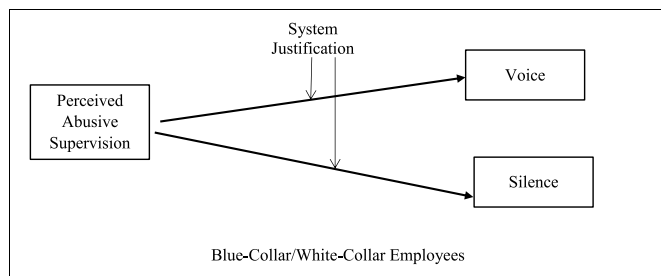


Fig. 1. Proposed moderation model.

3. Method

3.1. Participants and procedure

The study sample included full-time blue- and white-collar employees working in diverse industries in Turkey. The data were collected through an online questionnaire, and the link for the online survey was distributed via e-mail and social platform networks. One thousand one hundred seven people started the survey; however, 905 participants completed it. Among 905 respondents, nine were excluded from the analysis due to missing data and occurrence as an outlier in assumption checks. Thus, the final sample comprised 896 participants (44.8% women and 55.2% men). Of all participants, 36.4% were blue-collar workers (i.e., maintenance staff, security guards, medical attendants, porters, and construction workers), and 55.5% were white-collar workers (8.1% missing). The participants worked in diverse sectors, including medical/health (40.8%), service (16.4%), military/defense (7.3%), banking/finance (6.9%), education (6.3%), infrastructure/energy (6.1%), and other sectors (16.2%). Although participants from various sectors compose white and blue-collar employees, the percentages of blue-collar employees are reported as 37% for medical/health, 53.8% for service, 1.7% for military, 2.4% for banking/finance, 2.2% for education, and 2.9% for energy sectors, respectively. The rate of employees working at the managerial level was 19.9%, whereas the rate for the non-managerial level was 80.1%. The respondents had an average age of 33.91 ($SD = 8.27$), and 50.8% of the participants were married. Regarding education, 8.5% of the participants had primary education, 27.2% had a high school degree, 45.8% had a bachelor's or associate degree, and others (18.5%) had postgraduate degrees. On the average, the participants had five years of work experience, and 73.8% of the respondents indicated their supervisors' gender as male.

Ethical approval was obtained from the Ethical Commission Board before the data collection (approval reference: E-59394181-604.01.02-7242). The participants read and signed the informed consent describing the study and participants' rights. No incentives were offered for participation. All information was collected anonymously. The data were collected throughout April and June of 2021.

3.2. Measures

The questionnaire of the current study consisted of five sections, covering study variables (i.e., abusive supervision, employee voice, employee silence, system justification motives) and demographics (gender, age, tenure, education, position, sector, organization type, gender of the supervisor, etc.).

Abusive Supervision: The employees' perception of abusive supervision was measured by [Tepper's \(2000\)](#) 15-item scale. Some sample items were "ridicule me" and "tell me my thoughts or feelings are stupid." The response format was a 5-point scale in which the respondents were required to indicate the frequency of behavior performed by the supervisor from (1 = "I cannot remember him/her ever using this behavior with me" to 5 = "he/she uses this behavior very often with me"). Higher scores denoted that participants were frequently exposed to abusive

supervision behaviors by their supervisors. [Ulbeği, Ozgen, and Ozgen \(2014\)](#) conducted the Turkish translation of the instrument. In the current study, the reliability of the scale was 0.94 for the current study.

Voice Behavior: The employees' voice behavior was measured with six items developed by [Van Dyne and LePine \(1998\)](#). The illustrative item is "I speak up to my supervisor with ideas for new projects or changes in procedures at work." The response format was a 7-point scale ranging from 1, "strongly disagree" to 7, "strongly agree." Higher scores were indicative of more voice behavior. The Turkish translation and adaptation of the scale were conducted by [Cavmak and Demirtas \(2020\)](#). In this study, the Cronbach alpha coefficient was 0.85.

Silence Behavior: The employees' silence behavior was measured with five items borrowed from [Tangirala and Ramanujam's \(2008\)](#) silence scale. The items (e.g., "Although I have ideas for improving my work unit, I do not speak up") were rated on a 5-point frequency scale ranging from 0, "never" to 4, "always." In assessing silence, we preferred to use self-report data, consistent with prior studies, because it is difficult for observers to detect this behavior. The authors conducted the Turkish translation of the scale using a back-to-back translation technique. The Cronbach alpha coefficient was 0.79.

System Justification Motive: The employees' legitimacy and fairness perceptions of the prevailing social system were measured by the 8-item System Justification Scale developed by [Kay and Jost \(2003\)](#). The sample items were "Most policies serve the greater good" and "Everyone has a fair shot at wealth and happiness." The participants were required to indicate their responses on a 7-point scale ranging from 1, "strongly disagree" to 7, "strongly agree." Higher scores represent a more robust use of general system justification. The Turkish adaptation was conducted by [Sonmez \(2014\)](#). The internal reliability coefficient was 0.89.

4. Results

4.1. Preliminary analysis

As an initial step, the data were checked for the existence of univariate and multivariate normality. Univariate normality was assessed with skewness and kurtosis values, and multivariate normality was inspected with Mardia's coefficient of value. All the skewness and kurtosis values (after one abusive supervision item was deleted) were found to be less than the critical value of ± 3 ([Tabachnick & Fidell, 2001](#)), and no violations for multivariate normality were identified.

Harman's test was conducted to test common method variance, as the study design was cross-sectional. Accordingly, an exploratory factor analysis was conducted. The results of the unrotated factor analysis extracted six factors, with the variance extracted by the first factor being 23.7%. This variance was less than the acceptable limit of 50% ([Podsakoff & Organ, 1986](#)), suggesting that no general factor was apparent.

In addition to Harman's test, we also conducted confirmatory factor analyses to explore the construct validity and factorial structures and equivalence of the scales. All the items are loaded into a one-factor solution in the first CFA. The measurement model for the one-factor solution indicated a poor fit to data ($\chi^2 = 8299.45$, $df = 495$; RMSEA = 0.133; CFI = 0.480; GFI = 0.499; TLI = 0.445; BIC = 8748.12). The second CFA tested the alternative third-factor structure of the measurement model, where voice and silence items load on one factor. The model fit was better compared to the one-factor structure model ($\chi^2 = 2142$, $df = 493$; RMSEA = 0.061; CFI = 0.890; GFI = 0.85; TLI = 0.881; BIC = 2624.96). Examining the item loadings revealed that the voice and silence items have opposite signs in the same factor, and the loadings of silence items were below 0.50 in absolute terms. The third CFA tested the soundness of the four-factor measurement model. The standardized factor loadings of all the items were significant ($p < .001$) and ranged from 0.56 to 0.86. The four-factor model provided a relatively good fit to the data ($\chi^2 = 1403.7$, $df = 491$; RMSEA = 0.043; CFI = 0.939; GFI = 0.908; TLI = 0.934; BIC = 1900.04). The nested comparison of the four-factor model with the one-factor model showed that the

four-factor model better fits data ($\Delta\chi^2 = 7865.07, df = 4; p < .05$). Moreover, the nested comparison also showed the superiority of the four-factor model over the third-factor model ($\Delta\chi^2 = 739, df = 2; p < .05$), indicating that voice and silence items are related yet distinct constructs.

Upon identifying the measurement model, we ran a correlation analysis. Table 1 displays the means, standard deviations, and correlation coefficients. The intercorrelations among the variables provide initial support for the proposed hypotheses. As expected, the employees' perceptions of abusive supervision were significantly and positively correlated with silence ($r = 0.255, p < .001$) and negatively correlated with voice ($r = -0.168, p < .001$) and system justification motive ($r = -0.207, p < .001$). Independent sample *t*-test comparisons revealed statistical mean differences between blue- and white-collar employees for the variables of system justification motives [$M_{blue} = 3.14, SD_{blue} = 1.1; M_{white} = 2.35, SD_{white} = 1.2; t(821) = 8.86, p < .01$], voice behavior [$M_{blue} = 5.25, SD_{blue} = 1.2; M_{white} = 5.77, SD_{white} = 0.90; t(821) = -6.96, p < .01$], and silence behavior [$M_{blue} = 2.17, SD_{blue} = 0.78; M_{white} = 1.99, SD_{white} = 0.68; t(821) = 3.52, p < .05$].

4.2. Hypothesis testing

Measurement Invariance of the Model for White- and Blue-Collar Employees: As a first step in testing for invariance across groups, the validity of the hypothesized four-factor structure for white- and blue-collar employees was tested. For both samples, four latent variables were expected to be measured with 34 items (eight, fifteen, six, and five items, respectively, for system justification motive, abusive supervision, voice, and silence), and the latent variables were not allowed to co-vary. The baseline model was tested simultaneously for both samples. Initial results indicated a relatively poorly fitting model ($\chi^2(1054) = 2950.58, p < .05; CFI = 0.87; GFI = 0.82$). The poor fit was explained by a lack of covariance terms among latent variables. Adding covariance terms between latent variables seems theoretically logical, given the plausible relationships between the constructs.

Furthermore, this modification does not violate measurement invariance because these covariance terms are added to the measurement model for both groups. After this modification, the model improved substantially [$\chi^2(1042) = 2668.36, p < .05; CFI = 0.90; GFI = 0.92$], and nested model comparison suggested the existence of improvement in the model [$\Delta\chi^2(12) = 282.22; p < .05$]. After model fit was assessed, the factor loading pattern for each observed variable was examined using parameter estimates reported separately for blue-collar and white-collar samples. The findings showed significant parameter

estimates for two groups ($p < .01$), indicating similar factor structures for white- and blue-collar samples.

After factor-structure invariance was ensured through the above baseline model test, the invariance of the fully constrained model (i.e., measurement invariance) was examined with a model in which all factor loadings, factor variances, factor covariances, and error covariances were constrained to be equal across white and blue-collar samples. As seen from Table 2, the model in which only factor loadings were constrained (model 1) increased the χ^2 value from 2668.56 to 2700.16. Given that Model 1 is nested within the baseline/unconstrained model, a χ^2 difference test was performed to understand which model is better fitting. The χ^2 difference between the two models was not found to be significant [$\Delta\chi^2(30) = 31.8, p > .05$], leading us to conclude that factor loadings were similar for white- and blue-collar employees.

After that, we compared Model 1 with Model 2, which constrains structural covariances and factor loadings to be equal across the two groups. Model 2 increased the χ^2 value substantially, and this increase was found to be significant [$\Delta\chi^2(10) = 43.22; p < .01$]. Based on this result, it is concluded that structural covariances were not invariant across groups. Thus, further model comparisons (comparison of Model 2 and Model 3) were not conducted. Fit indices for these models are summarized in Table 2.

The results suggested the existence of partial invariance, meaning that system justification motive, the perceptions of abusive supervision, and voice and silence behavior could be measured with the same items in blue-collar and white-collar employee samples. However, given the nonexistence of equality for structural covariances, the relationships among these variables above are expected to differ across the two samples.

Hypothesis Tests: After showing measurement invariance across blue and white-collar employee groups, we calculated variable scores by

Table 2
CFA fit indices for models.

	χ^2	Df	GFI	RMSEA (CI)
Unconstrained Model	2668.56	1042	.91	.04 (.04, .05)
Model 1—Factor loading equal	2700.16	1072	.90	.04 (.04, .05)
Model 2—Factor loading and structural covariance equal	2743.22	1082	.87	.05 (.04, .06)
Model 3—Factor loading, structural covariance, and residuals equal	3496.34	1114	.78	.05 (.05, .06)

Table 1
Descriptive statistics and intercorrelations among the study variables.

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12
1. Gender	1											
2. Age	.062	1										
3. Education	-.109**	.068*	1									
4. Position	-.118**	-.320**	-.311**	1								
5. Marital	-.075*	-.455**	.009	.137**	1							
6. Work Group	-.073*	.044	.552**	-.340**	.014	1						
7. Public/Private	.006	-.196**	-.211**	.093**	.077*	-.138**	1					
8. Tenure	.069*	.547**	.275**	-.364**	-.258**	.207**	-.412**	1				
9. AS	.036	.045	.128**	-.055	-.030	.041	-.076*	.114**	1(.936)			
10. Voice	.032	.052	.235**	-.216**	.044	.236**	-.043	.108**	-.168**	1(.847)		
11. Silence	-.066*	.027	-.006	.048	-.013	-.122**	-.014	-.015	.255**	-.429**	1(.792)	
12. SJM	.192**	.008	-.409**	.127**	-.062	-.296**	.054	-.077*	-.207**	.016	-.082*	1(.888)
Mean									1.49	5.54	2.06	2.72
SD									.69	1.08	.72	1.30

Note. *and ** indicate $p < .05$ and $p < .01$, respectively.

The numbers in parentheses denote Cronbach alpha reliability coefficients; Gender is coded as 1- Women, 2-Men, and 3-Other; Education is coded as 1-Primary, 2-High school, 3-College/University, 4-Masters or Ph.D.; Marital status is coded as 1-Married, 2-Single; Position is coded as 1-Managerial, 2-Non-managerial; Workgroup is coded as 1-Blue collar, 2-White collar; Public/private is coded as 1-Public, 2-Private; The abbreviation SJM stands for social justification motives. The abbreviation AS stands for abusive supervision.

taking the mean of the items measuring each variable. We proposed a moderation model in which the effects of abusive supervision on voice/silence behavior were assumed to vary for system justification motives. As indicated before, although the effects of abusive supervision on voice and silence behavior are assumed to be evident among individuals with high system justification motives, these moderation effects are presumed to vary with occupational status.

Before multi-group path analysis was conducted for two groups of occupational class, path analysis was carried out with all participants (pooled data including white- and blue-collar employees) to evaluate the main and interaction effects. Following the suggestions of Aiken and West (1991), the scores of abusive supervision and system justification motives were mean-centered to avoid multicollinearity when the interaction effects were tested. The interaction term was calculated by multiplying the mean-centered scores of abusive supervision and system justification motives. Ten paths were specified: paths from abusive supervision to voice and to silence; paths from system justification to voice and to silence; paths from interaction term to voice and to silence; paths from education to voice and to silence; paths from tenure to voice and to silence. The last four paths were included to model to control the plausible confounding effects of education and tenure on voice/silence behaviors.

Among the control variables, only the effect of education on voice was found to be significant ($\beta = 0.17; p < .05$). As seen in Table 3, consistent with Hypotheses 1 and 2, abusive supervision negatively predicted voice behavior ($\beta = -0.21; p < .05$) yet positively predicted silence behavior ($\beta = 0.27; p < .05$) for all participants. Likewise, in line with Hypotheses 3 and 4, system justification motives predicted voice ($\beta = -0.11; p < .05$) and silence behavior ($\beta = 0.07; p < .05$). However, the interaction terms of abusive supervision and system justification motives predicted neither voice ($\beta = -0.06, ns$) nor silence ($\beta = 0.05; ns$) behavior for all participants. These findings suggested testing whether the moderating role of system justification motives on the relationship between abusive supervision and voice/silence behavior depends on the occupational class of the employee.

To do so, the same moderation model was tested for blue- and white-collar employees via a multi-group path. First, the invariance of the hypothesized model was assessed using a nested model comparison method. When the unconstrained model was compared with Model 1, in which all structural weights (i.e., regression weights) were constrained to be equal across blue and white-collar employees, a χ^2 difference test suggested the lack of invariance across two samples [$\Delta\chi^2(10) = 23.88; p < .05$]. This result indicated the dissimilarity of the hypothesized direct paths from abusive supervision and system justification to voice and silence behavior and the dissimilarity of the interaction effects of

abusive supervision and system justification for blue- and white-collar employees. Since invariance was not found for structural weights, more restrictive models assuming invariance of structural co-variances and structural residuals across two samples were not compared.

Subsequently, the fit between data and models was assessed using several indices. The fit indices for the unconstrained model indicated a relatively good fitting model (GFI = 0.88; CFI = 0.87; RMSEA = 0.07) based on the criteria suggested by Hu and Bentler (1999). When the parameters of the unconstrained model were examined, the moderating model was not invariant, referring to the fact that the paths varied significantly across blue-collar and white-collar employees, supporting H6. In terms of control variables (see Table 3), education was found to be associated with only voice behavior in white-collar ($\beta = 0.17; p < .05$) and in blue-collar samples ($\beta = 0.17; p < .05$).

After controlling for the effects of education and tenure, abusive supervision negatively predicted voice behavior in white-collar employees ($\beta = -0.31; p < .05$) and in blue-collar employees ($\beta = -0.10; p < .05$), supporting Hypothesis 1. This relationship was strong among white-collar employees. In line with Hypothesis 2, perceptions of abusive supervision positively predicted silence behavior in white- and blue-collar employees. This path seemed to be stronger in the blue-collar sample ($\beta = 0.37; p < .01$) than in white-collars ($\beta = 0.14; p < .05$).

When the main effects of system justification are examined separately for each occupational class, the differences between blue-collar and white-collar become more apparent. While the system justification motives failed to predict the voice and silence behavior of white-collar employees, they were found to have significant main effects on the voice and silence behavior of blue-collar employees. As shown in Table 3, system justification motives predict voice behavior negatively ($\beta = -0.17; p < .05$) and silence behavior positively ($\beta = 0.11; p < .05$).

Regarding moderating effects (system justification motives and abusive supervision) on employee responses of voice and silence, the interaction effect was significant only for white-collar employees. As seen in Table 3, for white-collar employees, the interaction effect of system justification and abusive supervision was significant ($\beta = 0.08; p < .05$) only for silence behavior, not for voice behavior. However, for blue-collar employees, the results did not support the moderating role of the system-justifying motives for voice and silence behaviors. Rather than interacting with abusive supervision, the main effects of the system justification motives were found to be more salient in employee responses. Those results indicate that the effects of system justification motives and perceptions of abusive supervision on voice/silence behavior vary for blue- and white-collar employees.

To illustrate the significant interaction effect in the white-collar sample, we plotted the regression of the dependent variable (silence

Table 3
Results of multi-group path analysis.

	All participants				White-Collar				Blue-Collar			
	β	p	95% CI Lower (b)	95% CI Upper (b)	β	p	95% CI Lower (b)	95% CI Upper (b)	β	p	95% CI Lower (b)	95% CI Upper (b)
AS to Voice	-0.21	0.00**	-0.51	-0.22	-0.31	0.02*	-0.46	-0.23	-0.10	0.05*	-0.31	-0.03
AS to Silence	0.27	0.00**	0.20	0.40	0.14	0.04*	0.21	0.37	0.37	0.01*	0.02	0.28
SJ to Voice	-0.11	0.00**	-0.04	-0.16	0.05	0.01*	0.24	0.11	-0.17	0.01*	-0.04	-0.21
SJ to Silence	0.07	0.03*	0.09	0.01	0.02	0.34	-0.07	0.02	0.11	0.05*	0.13	0.01
INT to Voice	-0.06	0.06	-0.20	0.03	-0.06	0.13	-0.18	0.07	-0.04	0.36	-0.16	0.11
INT to Silence	0.05	0.13	-0.04	0.13	0.08	0.05	0.03	0.11	-0.01	0.99	-0.12	0.10
Edu. to Voice	0.17	0.01**	0.26	0.45	0.17	0.01**	0.16	0.34	0.17	0.01*	0.16	0.34
Edu. to Silence	-0.04	0.15	-0.09	0.02	0.06	0.13	-0.03	0.08	-0.01	0.88	-0.03	0.08
Tenure to Voice	0.05	0.08	-0.01	0.02	0.05	0.18	-0.01	0.02	0.04	0.44	-0.01	0.02
Tenure to Silence	-0.03	0.33	-0.01	0.01	-0.09	0.83	-0.01	0.01	0.02	0.62	-0.01	0.10

Notes. SJ: System justification. AS: Abusive Supervision. INT: Interaction of abusive supervision and system justification. Edu: Education. 95% CI: Confidence interval of unstandardized estimate (upper and lower) *: $p < .05$; ** $p < .01$.

behavior) on the independent variable (abusive supervision perceptions) by taking 1SD above and 1SD below the moderating variable (system justification motives). Simple slope tests indicated the significance of the moderation effect for high levels ($t = 4.05$; $p < .05$) of system justification. Fig. 2 depicts how the relationship between abusive supervision and silence behavior varies with the system's justification motives. As seen in Fig. 2, the positive effect of abusive supervision on silence increases as white-collar employees' system justification motive strengthens.

5. Discussion

The current study explores how the system justification motive manifested itself in employees' perceptions of abusive supervision and voice/silence behaviors at the workplace. It also examines the differential effects of occupational class (i.e., blue-/white-collar) on those relationships. While extensive efforts exist to eliminate discrimination based on occupational class (i.e., collar differences) (Eurofound, 2014), our study takes place in a country with ceremonial laws for equality by the collar. However, white-collar workers are offered more social, psychological, and economic protection than blue-collar workers (Ates et al., 2014).

Based on Hypotheses 1 and 2, the research results confirm the links between perceptions of abusive supervision and voice/silence behavior for all participants. Consistent with the prior studies conducted with different samples (Li & Zhu, 2016; Morrison, 2023; Pandey et al., 2021; Peng et al., 2019; Wang & Jiang, 2015), the current study further extends evidence of the adverse effects of harmful leadership practices on employee behavior in the Turkish work context. That is, as perceptions of abusive supervision increase, employees' prosocial voice responses decrease, and silence responses increase. Those findings converge with the equity theory (Adams, 1963), which explains why employees show less prosocial behavior to maintain and keep a balance with their abusive supervisors when they experience mistreatment at work. Further, in line with the premises of COR theory (Hobfoll, 1989; Hobfoll & Shirom, 2000), it makes sense that employees remain silent when they perceive abusive supervision, to preserve their remaining resources (De Clercq et al., 2021).

Regarding differential effects with occupational class, the adverse effects of abusive supervision on voice are found to be stronger in the white-collar sample. Hence, what matters is whether the system allows abusive supervision to occur or whether the system tries to combat it. Employees may display voice behavior in systems with measures against abusive supervision. In systems that do not have regulatory measures and where abusive supervision is normalized, employee silence is entrenched (Lyons, Moorman, & Mercado, 2019). Supporting this

finding, Sozen, Yeloglu, and Fikret (2009) demonstrate that blue-collar workers do not display corrective actions, that they reduce voice behavior, and that they prefer to stay silent when faced with inequity. As the system offers less protection to blue-collar than white-collar employees against unfair treatment (Ates et al., 2014; Sozen et al., 2009), the blue-collar workers have more tendency to protect themselves by remaining silent. In line with this, we explained earlier the low opinions of blue-collar work held in Turkey and the possibilities of symbolic and psychological downgrading of this group of workers' standing compared to white-collar workers in Turkey.

Supporting Hypotheses 3 and 4, the system justification motives were found to predict voice and silence behavior for all participants. Thus, one may claim that system-justifying tendencies lead individuals to deny the presence of organizational and leadership-related problems, which could result in less voice and more silence. Although Hypothesis 5 was not supported in the pooled sample, Hypothesis 6—suggesting that the interaction effects on voice/silence responses vary for the employee's occupational class—was partially supported. In particular, for white-collar employees, system justification motives moderate the relationship between abusive supervision and silence, so the effect of abusive supervision on silence becomes more salient when white-collar employees endorse stronger system justification motives. This finding could be explained by the heightened concerns of white-collar employees about losing their entitlements and opportunities. As a higher-status group, white-collar workers might be more concerned about losing their status and privileges, leading them to remain silent, especially when their system justification motives are strong. In more authoritarian and less democratic social settings, displaying unfavorable responses to authority figures could bring certain social and material costs, such as losing social status (Bergman, Langhout, Palmieri, Cortina, & Fitzgerald, 2002). Alternatively, white-collar employees might have preferred avoidance and withdrawal (Oh & Farh, 2017) as emotion-focused coping strategies and thus have had less action tendency to deal with abusive supervisory practices (Breevaart et al., 2022).

On the other hand, the results did not support the moderating effect of the system-justifying motives for the link between abusive supervision and voice/silence behavior among blue-collar employees. The absence of a moderating effect could be attributed to the strong main effect of system justification in the blue-collar sample. The main effect of system-justifying motives on employee responses highlights the motivational tendencies of the low-status groups to imbue the status quo through rationalizing and legitimizing their status differences, which in turn reflected upon their less prosocial responses. This finding complies with the argument that members of disadvantaged groups would engage in system justification even at the expense of their immediate personal interests (Jost & Hunyady, 2003). Supporting this notion, the mean values of system justification motives were higher in blue-collar workers than in white-collar workers. System justification theory provides a robust explanatory lens. In particular, accepting system-justifying ideas may reduce individuals' abilities to react to circumstances they believe to be unfair (Wakslak et al., 2007).

It seems that when employees become part of the system (i.e., habitus), they internalize power and capital relationships, which creates an illusion guiding them to follow the written and unwritten rules of the system (Bourdieu, 1986). The illusion supports the existing system (Lupu & Empson, 2015) and keeps participants from questioning unequal treatment (Mergen & Ozbilgin, 2021). For blue-collar employees, system justification motives may serve a palliative function and act as a resource for coping with different stressors due to their unequal position in society (Jost & Hunyady, 2003). Notably, in different settings, the palliative effects of system justification were revealed in relatively disadvantaged groups, such as that women with higher system justification motives display less anxiety when exposed to sexism (Pacilli et al., 2019).

This research has its limitations. The cross-sectional nature of the study design precludes causal inferences among study variables. Cross-

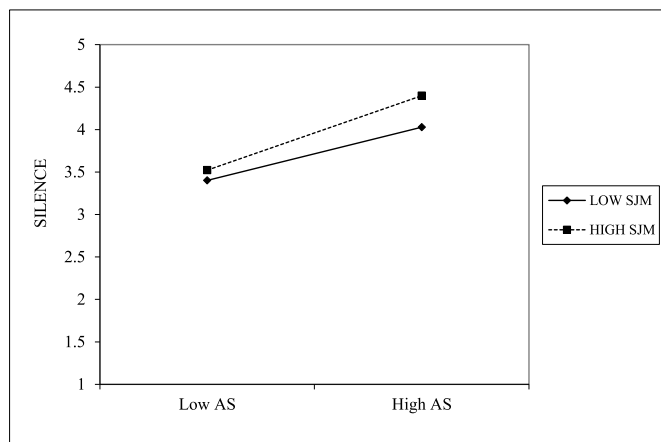


Fig. 2. The plot of moderation effect in white-collar employee sample. Note. AS: Abusive supervision; SJM: System justification motives.

sectional designs have several advantages, such as simplicity and cost-effectiveness. However, significant correlations between variables would not guarantee that one caused the other (Taris, Kessler, & Kelloway, 2021). Thus, future research might employ longitudinal methods in studying how reactions to abusive supervision develop over time and erode voice behavior. This study tested whether employees' justifications regarding the system are contextual (blue-collar/white-collar). Future research might also design and test the individual characteristics (i.e., personality traits such as locus of control, equity sensitivity, and proactive personality) as moderators and antecedents of system justification theory and explore their manifestations in organizational settings.

Moreover, future studies might benefit from retesting the model to explore the differential effects of other groups based on gender, sexual orientation, ethnic orientation, and age. The other limitation may concern whether the sector/industry shaped or played a role in both exposures to abusive supervision practices and system justification rationalizations of those employees. Some researchers argue (Breevaart et al., 2022) that specific sectors may have a climate of abusive supervision, accept more abuse, and thereby cultivate implicit theories that abusive relationships are considered normal. To account for the apparent confounding effect of respective sectors, independent sample *t*-tests were conducted to compare the mean scores of study variables across different sectors. Although no significant differences were detected in mean scores, researchers could consider the potential role of sector/industry (e.g., military) in shaping abusive supervision and system justification motives in future studies.

Another limitation concerns the assessment of voice and silence behavior with self-reports. Future studies could gather information from multiple sources, such as supervisors and colleagues, to address this limitation. This study also used the voice scale of Van Dyne and LePine (1998), which assesses extra-role and prosocial behavior. Future studies could use the measures of active and direct voice responses to mistreatment rather than extra-role behavior. A similar argument can be noted for silence behavior. Future research could theoretically discuss the muted responses of employees from psychological resistance theory, which mainly show themselves in the forms of inertia and a passive avoidance of taking any action. Moreover, as the data were collected from a single country, future research might replicate this study in other national and cultural contexts to increase generalizability. Future studies can be replicated in less hierarchical and low power-distance cultures, where a more active form of responses to workplace mistreatment can be expected (Imran, Fatima, Sarwar, & Iqbal, 2021).

The current paper has focused on the role of the system justification motive in predicting and shaping the individual's perceptions and behaviors, which remains an unexplored concern. The extant literature seems to have dealt mainly with a broad group of employees and has not empirically or theoretically defined specific contingencies concerning white and blue-collar workers. Moreover, at the organizational level, most HR policies and practices are designed to improve the well-being of white-collar employees more than blue-collar ones.

In terms of theoretical implications, applying system justification theory to organizational settings might inspire future research to understand this theory in the workplace better. This theory might contribute to HR managers and practitioners guiding and designing HR activities, particularly in minimizing perceptions of differential treatment. Those interventions might trigger, change, and decrease the prevailing system justification motives of the employees and could be enhanced particularly for disadvantaged groups such as blue-collar workers. In those interventions, individuals can be motivated to realize their system-justifying motives, interrupt those motives, and even challenge and interrogate those unconscious motives when faced with abusive, noninclusive behavior. As a result, those interventions might offer greater probabilities for discretionary actions fostering organizational effectiveness and preventing the perpetuation of social inequalities within organizational hierarchies (Proudfoot & Kay, 2014;

Thomas & Harris, 2021). Given that blue-collar workers constitute the backbone of the labor force and act as fighters in the field by participating in the organizational production process, the emphasis needs to be directed toward including blue-collar workers in management (HR-Dergi, 2014).

6. Conclusion

Current research is among the first to investigate abusive supervision perceptions and system-justifying motives as potential antecedents of voice and silence behavior among white- and blue-collar employees in Turkey, where there are only residual regulatory policies against workplace mistreatment. Overall, the study findings shed light on why some individuals remain silent and display less voice behavior when subjected to abusive supervision. This study may inspire future research to expand the understanding of voice and silence behavior of employees from different occupational collars and their system justification motives.

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