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HOW GENDER IMPACTS OBSERVERS' PERCEPTION OF ABUSIVE SUPERVISION

A Thesis

Presented in

Partial Fulfillment of the

Requirements for the Degree of

Master of Science and Health

By

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VITA

Lisa C. Hofmann (formerly Lisa C. Hicklin) was born in Peoria, Illinois, May 13, 1982. She graduated from Illinois Valley Central High School, received her Bachelor of Arts degree from DePaul University in 2011.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

When an individual is exposed to abusive supervision, the abuse can result in negative effects for the individual, observer, and the organization. Abusive supervision is defined "as 'subordinates' perceptions of the extent to which their supervisors engage in the sustained display of hostile verbal and non-verbal behaviors, excluding physical contact" (Tepper, 2000, p.178). Einarsen (2000) further defines abusive supervision as "repeated and enduring negative acts" (p.381). It includes behaviors such as ridiculing the subordinate, putting them down in front of others, making negative comments about them to others, and being rude to the individual (Tepper, 2000). Behaviors such as unfair criticism are reported to be the most common form of abusive supervision, followed by reports of intimidation and humiliation. Further types of abusive supervision reported were verbal abuse, withholding of information, and excessive monitoring (Simpson & Cohen, 2004). Abusive supervision can encompass a myriad of behaviors performed by a superior toward a subordinate. When a superior uses these various behaviors, this abuse can have negative effects on the subordinate. This abuse can also have negative effects on observers of the abuse (Tepper, 2000).

Research has primarily focused on the act of abusive supervision and how it affects the superior or subordinate (Tepper, 2000; Einarsen, 2000; Leymann, 1990; Olafsson, 2004). However, there are other parties affected by this abuse, specifically those not experiencing the abuse. These people are not the targets of

the abuse; they are on the sidelines, observing the abusive behaviors. These are the people in a work environment who witness their co-workers being abused, but are not being abused from their superior directly. It is important to focus on the observer because abusive supervision can affect the observer in a similar manner to the target. The observer may experience undue stress or suffer from negative health effects due to exposure to abusive supervision. The abuse may also create a poor organizational climate for the observers and even make the observers anxious about possibly being the next target of the abuser. In addition, individuals have different reactions to abusive supervision (Courtright, 2011; Salin, 2011). Based on individual differences such as gender, male and female observers may not observe abusive supervision in the same manner. That is, a man observing a superior being abusive toward a woman may not view the act as abusive supervision. On the other hand, a woman observing the same interaction may sympathize with the female target and conclude that such action is indeed abusive supervision (Salin, 2011). There is little research examining the role of observers of abusive supervision. Due to the limited research on observers and abusive supervision, this study will contribute to both science and practice in unveiling how male and female observers perceive abusive supervision.

Consequently, the aim of the present research is to examine how the gender of an observer impacts their perception of abusive supervision with regard to the gender dyad of superior and subordinate, and their intention to take action against it. That is, do male and female observers differ on their perceptions of when the superior is a male and the subordinate female? Consider this

hypothetical example of four co-workers. Say Matt and Jennifer both observe their boss, Rob, abusing their coworker Megan. Would Jennifer be less accepting of this abusive behavior than Matt? Also, is Jennifer more likely to take action against the abuse because Megan is also a female? This study will examine all potential gender combinations in regard to superior/subordinate relationships.

In the next section, I will elaborate on varying aspects of abusive supervision. I will first define abusive supervision, I will discuss how targets experience and address the abuse, I will then move on to observers' perceptions of abusive supervision and how they address the abuse, and finally address gender differences in relation to abusive supervision.

Abusive Supervision

Abusive supervision occurs when an individual perceives that a superior is engaging in continuous, hostile behavior toward the individual, including verbal or non-verbal actions (Tepper, 2000). Different researchers have used a variety of terms for abusive supervision, including: bullying, mobbing, work abuse, and victimization. For the purpose of the paper, I will be using the term abusive supervision. Research concludes that abusive supervision has a clear and direct effect on the target subordinate of the abuse, whom the superior is directing their behavior towards. Being subject to abusive supervision creates negative consequences for the target subordinate of the abuse (e.g., depression and related symptoms such as impotence, lack of self esteem, sleeplessness) (Einarsen, 2000). Reportedly, the most common effects of abusive supervision are the loss of

confidence, anxiety and the loss of self-esteem (Simpson & Cohen, 2004). Other research agrees with these effects and expands the reported consequences as having implications on performance, attitudes, difficulty concentrating, frustration, and again psychological health (Hornstein, 1996; Lutgen-Sandvik, 2006). In conclusion, when individuals are exposed to abusive supervision, there is a great chance that they can suffer from an array of negative health outcomes.

I would like to point out some contingent factors that influence perceptions of abusive supervision. It is important to note that encompassed in the definition of abusive supervision, the abuse is from the perception of a target or an observer; therefore an action that may be viewed as abusive supervision to one person may not be viewed as abusive supervision to another (Tepper, 2000). Therefore, the concept of abusive supervision is subject to the perception of the party involved. Another qualifying factor of abusive supervision is that the target must feel that they are incapable to defend themselves against the abuser (Einarsen, 2000). The final qualifier is that abusive supervision needs to be frequent, enduring abusive interaction, continuing over a certain amount of time. Lutgen-Sandvik (2006) suggests an average duration of abuse is 18 to 20 months. To clarify, abusive supervision cannot be a one-time occurrence. Therefore, abusive supervision is conditional on the perception of individuals, their ability to defend themselves, and the frequency of the action.

How Victims Address the Abusive Supervision

When people are exposed to abusive supervision, how they choose to address the abuse can vary amongst individuals; specifically, their individual framing can affect if and how they address the abuse. Framing is the process of how a person viewing abusive supervision will process the situation and decide how to proceed after processing such information. How an individual frames abuse is formed by that person's norms, behaviors, and characteristics (Putnam & Holmer, 1992). Putnam and Bochantin (2009) discuss framing issues in the following way: how individuals will name a specific situation, who in the situation will receive blame, and how individuals will confront such situations (Putnam & Bochantin, 2009). For example, a person may experience negative behaviors at work and decide that they have experienced abusive supervision. They will then assign blame, either to the person acting out the behavior, on themselves, or the organization, and then they will decide how they want to proceed. Some possibilities are keeping quiet, talking to a friend, reporting the abusive supervision to a formal authority, or talking to the abuser directly. These different paths the target can take depend on the person's characteristics. There are several paths to take in how to address abusive supervision. How a person chooses to address the abuse can vary significantly.

Abusive supervision can have negative outcomes for the subordinate who is the victim, but it is also important to acknowledge that those who observe this negative behavior can be affected as well. Typically, these are the co-workers of the subordinate, who are witnessing their co-worker being abused by a superior.

How Abusive Supervision Affects Observers

Employees who perceive abusive supervision can be affected and can suffer as a result of viewing the abusive supervision. Subordinates, who perceived their supervisors as abusive, reported significantly lower job satisfaction, lower life satisfaction, lower continuance commitment, lower normative commitment, lower affective commitment, greater work-to-family conflict, greater family-to-work conflict, greater depression, greater anxiety, and greater emotional exhaustion (Tepper, 2000). Research on resistance to abusive supervision stated that employees who witnessed their co-workers being exposed to abusive supervision reported greater fear, stress, and feel inclined to leave the organization (Lutgen-Sandvik, 2006). Other studies supported that witnessing the coworker being abused indeed did have an impact on the observer. Vartia (2001) stated that participants reported more general stress and mental stress, when compared to those who were not exposed to abusive supervision at work. Another study conducted on abusive supervision found that observers of abusive supervision rated their work environment quality (i.e., challenge, leadership, work control, work load) lower than those who did not witness abuse in the workplace (Jennifer et al., 2001).

Courtright (2011) looked specifically at third parties perception of abusive supervision in relation to performance outcomes. In this study, participants read about a CEO and assessed the effectiveness of either an abusive or non-abusive CEO. Results found that when the CEO was highly effective, there was no difference in acceptability of an abusive or non-abusive CEO. However, when the

CEO was not effective, the abusive CEO was rated significantly lower than the non-abusive CEO. That is if the observer sees the abuse resulting in a productive outcome, or a way to get things moving, this impacts the observer's perception in justifying the abuse. They also were accepting of this abuse toward the other party if they did not see themselves as the potential target (Courtright, 2011). Based on these studies, it is clear that along with victims of abusive supervision, an observer of abusive supervision is also affected by the superior's abusive behaviors.

How do Observers Address the Abusive Supervision

As discussed earlier, victims struggle with how to address abusive behaviors. In addition, observers struggle in the same manner, feeling unsure as to how to react when witnessing abusive supervision. Some observers may not vocally denounce the abuse because they feel that they will not be able to assist in the situation (VanHeugten, 2011). This is unfortunate considering that research suggest that when the observer speaks up about abusive supervision, this can result in a positive outcome. A qualitative study of individuals who were both targets and witnesses of abuse found that when employees discuss abuse and what actions to take, this resulted in proving support and validation of their feelings (Lutgen-Sandvik, 2006). These interactions resulted in positive outcome such as validation of feelings, social support and brainstorming about what targets and observers can do about the abuse. When an observer discusses the abusive supervision with the target, this can confirm the target's feelings and provide a collective voice for the target to speak up about the abuse (Lutgen-Sandvik,

2006).) The observer will hold a more believable voice when reporting the abuse to human resources, believing that the observers are more objective and more value might be placed on their report. Finally, when targets and observers come together and report the abuse, this support has a greater impact on how the organization addresses the abusive supervision (Lutgen-Sandvik, 2006). It can be very easy for observers of abusive supervision to not speak up, rationalizing that it is not their problem. However, when an observer chooses to say something, it might have positive results in bringing an end to the abusive supervision.

Gender Differences in Incidents of Abusive Supervision

Researchers have examined how the gender of the subordinate may be a factor in abusive supervision. In a study of prison officers, researchers found that men and women were abused equally as often. However, they found that women were more often abused by their co-workers, whereas men were abused by their co-workers and superiors (Vartia & Hyyti, 2002). Similarly, another study found that men reported experiencing more abusive type experiences compared to women, but did not consider themselves a victim of abusive supervision as often as women. For example, if a man was asked to count the numbers of times they had been ridiculed by a superior (an abusive behavior) they might state five times whereas the woman's count may be only two. However when formally asked if they have been a victim of abusive supervision, there was no gender difference; in other words, men and women reported experiencing the same amount of abuse (Olafsson & Johannsdottir, 2004). So even though men reported being a victim of abusive type behaviors, they did not conclude that action to be abusive. Men

appear to be targets of abusive supervision from a wider range of people, but not necessarily more often and appear to have a wider range of what is considered acceptable behavior in the workplace. Other studies state that there is a gender difference in abusive supervision. Simpson and Cohen (2004) stated that women (28.5%) reported experiencing abusive supervision at a higher percentage than men (19.8%). It appears as if research is still unclear as to whether men and women experience abusive supervision at a similar rate, however, how they interpret the abusive supervision seems to vary among the genders.

Gender of superior using abusive supervision.

Both men and women superiors are using abusive supervision on their subordinates. Men and women are reported to be abusive toward co-workers at a similar rate. However, it appears that a man is more likely to use abusive supervision on another man than a woman (Leymann, 1996). On the other hand, female managers appear to be equally abusive to men and women (Leymann, 1996).

Gender of the observer witnessing the abusive supervision.

Gender of the observer may also have an impact on perceptions of abusive supervision. A recent study that looked at third parties perceptions' of abusive supervision found that both male and female observers were influenced by both the abuse and the outcome of the abusive supervision. This study found when the manager was a poor performer, men rated the abusive superior as less effective than the non-abusive supervisor but women showed no rating difference

(Courtright, 2009).Other research (Salin, 2011) has shown that when the observer is examining an abusive situation involving both men and women, the observer will tend to relate to and favor the person of the same gender. However, in both male and female observers, if the superior and subordinate are the same gender, the phenomenon disappears (Salin, 2011). It appears that in certain situations the individual's gender may influence their perception of the situation.

Both similarity/attraction theory and relational demography that may help explain this phenomenon of why there is a gender difference in regards to abusive supervision. Similarity/attraction theory (Byrne, 1971) is the idea that individuals will evaluate others on demographics and assess those who are more similar to themselves more favorable than those who may not be as similar, individuals will feel that those who are more similar to themselves will validate their own attitudes and beliefs. Considering gender in regards to similarity/ attraction theory, a female is likely to favor another female co-worker, because she believes they will share the same beliefs and thus validating her beliefs. A recent study examined similarity/attraction theory and found when the supervisors view the employee as less similar to themselves, this increases relationship conflict and lower performance evaluations resulting in higher levels of abusive behaviors toward the superior(Tepper, Moss, & Duffy, 2011). To extrapolate this to the proposed study, when an individual witnesses someone who is not similar to themselves being treated with abusive type behaviors, they are likely to be more accepting and less likely to take action against such behaviors.

Another possible explanation for men and women viewing abusive behaviors differently is relational demography (Tsui, Egan, &O'Reilly, 1992). This is the idea that individuals will assess how similar they are to others by more specific dimensions such as gender, age, education, tenure, race, and occupational function. In this assessment the individual will asses their self identity in the organization. For example, a 60 year-old individual in upper management is likely to categorize them self as similar to another 60 year old in upper management, when compared to a 20 year-old who works in the mailroom. Tsui et al. (1992) further discuss that if an individual used gender as a factor in identifying their relational demography they will strive for homogeneity, thus relating to those of the same gender. For example, if a woman witnesses both a woman and a man being the targets of abusive supervision, relational demography will suggest that women will identify with the other women because they are in the same gender category. Results (Tsui et al., 1992) found that for men being different than their coworkers decreased their psychological commitment, increased their absences, and decreased their intention to stay with the organization. This effect was also found in women, however not as strong (Tsui et al., 1992). This could be that women may accustom to working with those of the opposite gender than men, not that the necessarily prefer it. Relational demography supports that individuals prefer congruency in the people around them.

Bell, Towler, and Fisher (2011) examined relational demography trainer and trainee outcomes, this study found an asymmetrical gender relationship in relational demography. That is for women, gender of the trainer impacted their

learning but men showed no difference if the trainer was male or female. Interesting, women gained more knowledge if their trainer was male compared to if their trainer was female. Regardless, based on this study women appear to be more sensitive to gender difference in a superior than men (Bell et al., 2011).

However, another study looking at athletic coaches found no significant effects of relational demography in preferring a coach to be the same gender or age (Sagas, Paetzold, & Ashley, 2005). It is interesting to note that trainers' relational demography has an effect but in coaches it was not found. It appears however, in reference to relational demography that in some organizational situations, gender congruity is a factor in employee assessments. Thus this is a variable that needs to be explored in regards to observers and abusive supervision.

Reports on incivility found that both men and women observers tend to react negatively when a woman is the target of incivility (Miner-Rubino & Cortina, 2004, 2007). This effect was especially pronounced in male dominated work environments; both men and women in male skewed workgroups were more withdrawn from work and had lower health satisfaction (Miner-Rubino & Cortina, 2007). Another study concluded that women had stronger reactions than men when exposed to incivility toward women, possibly because they could empathize with the female or they were fearful of being the next target (Miner-Rubino & Cortina, 2007).

Further, a field study looked at how an observer's gender will influence their perception of incivility and negative emotions (Miner & Eischeid, 2012). This was a sample of restaurant employees across the United States. This study

found that women reported higher levels of anger when witnessing another women being treated uncivil compared to witnessing a man being treated in the same manner. Women also tended to react with more passion than men when exposed to incivility. Similarly, men reported being more angry when witnessing a male coworker being treated with incivility than female coworkers witnessing female workers being treated with incivility, suggesting that men experience more negative emotion overall then women (Miner & Eischeid, 2012). This study supports both similarity- attraction theory and relational demography, in that both male and female employees are more strongly affected when they witness someone of the same gender being treated unfairly than someone of the opposite gender.

Some past research supports that men and women both tend to relate to the individual who is of the same gender as themselves. Other research concludes that men and women are both affected when witnessing women be the targets of negative work behaviors. For this reason this research proposes that when the supervisor and subordinate are all of the same gender and the observer is of the opposite gender the observer will be more accepting of abusive behaviors compared to all other conditions (Table 1).

Gender differences in incidents of reporting abusive supervision.

There appears to be a gender difference in reports of abusive supervision; men and women react to abusive supervision in different ways. Olafsson and Johannsdottir (2004) found that men were more likely to confront the abuser whereas women were more likely to seek outside help. For example, a woman

may be more likely to report the abuse to the Human Resources department or talk to their manager, where as a man is more likely to confront his abuser.

It has also been proposed that men may have a broader interpretation of what constitutes acceptable work behavior when compared to women. For example, work overload may be viewed as abusive supervision to a woman but not to a man (Simpson & Cohen, 2004). Women report witnessing significantly more abusive behaviors then men, specifically when asked how often they witnesses incivility toward coworkers, 64% of women reported they had observed these behaviors where only 43% of men reported witnessing these behaviors (Miner & Eischeid, 2012). This is not to suggest that women are actually around more abusive behaviors, but that they may be more observant of abusive behaviors than men. These studies suggest that men may be less inclined to report abuse or be less observant that they are being abused than women.

Research supports that individuals tend to have a bias toward those of the same gender as themselves, in addition to reports of men and women interpreting and reporting abusive supervision differently. For this reason this research proposes that there will be an interaction of gender and willing to take action against abusive supervision, in relation to the gender composition.

Rationale

Considering the negative health effects that abusive supervision creates, organizations should be concerned with how their employees view and conclude how to proceed when being exposed to abusive supervision. If a co-worker offers

social support, this can be a positive outcome from other subordinates when exposed to abusive supervision (Einarsen, 2000; Lutgen-Sandvik, 2006). If a co-worker is willing to intervene when observing abusive supervision this could have a possible ameliorative effect (Leymann, 1990). Perceptions of abusive supervision and willingness to help or intervene can be dependent of several factors. All observers do not view the abusive supervision in the same manner; this can be dependent on the person's norms, behaviors and/or gender. It also has been suggested that men may hold a different view of what is acceptable behavior compared to women (Simpson & Cohen, 2004). This suggests that not all parties view abusive supervision in the same manner.

Research of abusive supervision has included a wide variety of studies on gender of the superior and subordinate and the outcomes of the abuse. The idea of considering the outside observer of the abusive supervision is a new topic to be researched. Miner and Eischeid's (2012) field study has touched on this topic by examining observers perceptions of incivility, finding a clear gender congruency effect. The specific topic of the observer's perceptions of abusive supervision and their likelihood of taking action against such behaviors has not been previously studied. Therefore, the proposed hypotheses for this paper will contribute to this subject area by exploring outcomes and perceptions of abusive supervision.

Statement of Hypotheses

Hypothesis 1: When there is gender congruence among superior, subordinate and incongruent of the observer, the observer will be more accepting of this condition compared to when there in-congruency among the superior and subordinate.

Hypothesis 2a: Male observers are expected they will have greater intention to take action against abusive supervision behaviors, when the subordinate is a male rather than female.

Hypothesis 2b: Female observers are expected they will have greater intention to take action against abusive supervision behaviors when the subordinate is female rather than male.

CHAPTER II
METHOD

The data being used for this study was archival data collected for a larger research study. Data collection was from January 17, 2011 through March 12, 2012. The data was collected in the following manner.

Research Participants

Research participants (*N*=327) enrolled in an Introduction to Psychology course were recruited from the student subject pool of DePaul University. The study was an online study, whereby participants completed an online survey. Of the 327 participants, 145 participants completed all requirements of the study (men=26, women=119). The descriptive statistics were as follows: mean age=20.15, *sd*=3.1. Participants' race was 53.8% white, 16.6% were Hispanic,12.4% were white non-Hispanic, 6.9% were Island Pacific; 6.9% were African American and 3.4% were Other. Other demographics included that 47.6% of participants were freshmen in college and 73.8 % of participants had worked full or part time.

Procedure

Each participant was randomly assigned to one of the dyadic conditions: (I) female superior-female subordinate (*n*=37), (II) female superior-male subordinate (*n*=27), (III) male superior-female subordinate (*n*=43), (IV) male superior-male subordinate (*n*=38). Participants received a total of six e-mails over a one-week period. Conditional on meeting the previous day's requirements, each morning, participants received a new email and continued reading vignettes about the specific superior-subordinate dyad condition they were randomly assigned to

at the beginning of the week.

Participants received daily e-mails involving short vignettes (Appendix A). Vignettes constituted a series of scripts of day-to-day activities of employees in an office. The employees were in meetings and witnessed acts of abusive supervision intermittently placed in the readings. Vignettes were developed by the researchers while incorporating Tepper's (2000) abusive supervision items, for example "Tells me my thoughts or feelings are stupid," "Reminds me of my past mistakes and failures," and "Tells me I'm incompetent."(p189).

E-mails containing the links for the vignettes were sent by 9 am on each day and mini-quizzes were open until 11 pm on that night. The emails were sent though DePaul's Sona system to ensure anonymity for the research participants. The first e-mail was an introduction in which they received a consent form and detailed information about the organization and employees of a department. Vignettes had both neutral and abusive supervision leadership behaviors placed intermittently in the script. For each vignette, they responded to a one-question mini-quiz to demonstrate if they paid attention to the material (Appendix B).

Materials

At the end of the one-week period, participants rated the acceptance of the behaviors of the supervisor in the vignettes and their likelihood to take action against the abusive supervision. Due to not finding any scales that tapped into this construct of acceptance of abusive supervision, the measure was developed by Gamze Arman and myself (Appendix C). The Acceptance of Behavior Scale comprised of seven items, asks participants to rate items such as "*(Superior's*

name) is treating *(subordinate's name)* fairly", "The relationship between *(subordinate's name)* and (*superior's name)* is a normal superior-subordinate relationship" on a scale ranging from 1*(strongly disagree)* to 5 *(strongly agree)*. Items four and five were reverse coded.

The Taking Action Scale, comprised of seven items, asks participants to rate items such as "*If I was one of the subordinate's coworkers I would… "*inform someone from the management about the behaviors of *(superior's name)* towards *(subordinate's name)*" on a scale ranging from 1 *(extremely unlikely)* to 7*(extremely likely)* (Appendix C). Item five was reverse coded.

Participants answered demographic questionnaire (Appendix C) collecting information about participant's age, gender, race, age, work experience (fulltime, part time, both or none) and year in college (freshman, sophomore, junior or senior). This was administered on day one of the study.

CHAPTER III

RESULTS

Statistical Analyses

Factor Analysis

Factor Analysis was conducted on the Acceptance of Abusive Supervision Scale and the Taking Action Scale. For both of these scales, considering the items for these scales were generated by the authors and had no theoretical or empirical support, a Principal Axis Factoring analysis was conducted.

All factor loadings for the Acceptance of Abusive Supervision scale were correlated, all reaching above .50; this supported inclusion of all the items in the scale. Bartlett's test of sphericity was significant ($\chi^2(21) = 132$, $p<.50$) and the Kaiser- Meyer- Olkin measure of sample adequacy was .78 above the recommended value of .6. The results from the Factor Analysis for the acceptance of abusive supervision scale concluded a one factor scale. The initial eigenvalue showed that a one factor model explained 28.6% of the variance. Allowing for direct oblimin rotation the factor loadings suggested five items to be extracted, meeting the minimum criteria of having a factor loading of .40 or greater. These items included: "*Superior's name* is treating *Subordinate's name* fairly" (factor loading = .70), "The relationship between *Subordinate's name* and *Superior's name* is a normal superior-subordinate relationship" (factor loading = .61), "*Superior's name* should revise her behaviors towards *Subordinate's name"* (reverse coded) (factor loading =.62), "I would be fine with *Superior's name* as

my supervisor" (factor loading =.64) and finally, "If I were *Superior's name*, I would treat my subordinates in the same manner" (factor loading =.52).

The factor analysis for the Acceptance of Abusive Supervision Scale suggested the removal of two additional items due to low factor loadings. These were "*Subordinate's name* should revise her behaviors at work setting," (factor loading =. 21) and "*Subordinate's name* should consider quitting her job" (reverse coded) (factor loading=. 20).

Table 2
*Factor loadings based on a principle analysis factoring with oblimin rotation for 7 items from Perception of Abusive Supervision Scale (*N *= 145)*

	Perception of Abusive Supervision
Superior's name is treating *Subordinate's name* fairly.	.70
I would be fine with *Superior's name* as my supervisor.	.64
(Reversed) Superior's name should revise her/his behaviors towards *Subordinate's name*	.62
The relationship between *Subordinate's name* and *Superior's name* is a normal superior-subordinate relationship.	.61
If I were *Superior's name,* I would treat my subordinates in the same manner	.52
Subordinate's name should revise her/his behaviors at work setting.	.21
(Reversed)Subordinate's name should consider quitting her/his job.	.20

I also conducted a factor analysis for the Taking action scale. Results of the Taking Action Scale showed that items correlated with the other items, all reaching above .50 with the exception of item six "Speaking with some other coworkers to see if they see any problems with *Superiors name* behaviors toward *Subordinates name",* which eventually was eliminated. Bartlett's test of

sphericity was significant ($\chi^2(21) = 134$, *p<.50)* and the Kaiser- Meyer- Olkin measure of sample adequacy was .49, which is low, however this is expected considering the small sample size. The initial eigenvalue showed that a one-factor model explained 19.8% of the variance. While allowing for direct oblimin rotation, results concluded a one factor scale. The items extracted and thus retained were: "Informing someone from the management about the behaviors of *Superior's name* towards *Subordinate's name*" (factor loading = .73), "Encouraging *Subordinate's name* to talk to someone from the management" (factor loading= .61), "Encouraging *Subordinate's name* to ask *Superior's name* to change her way of treating *Subordinate's name*" (factor loading = .56).

The items that were removed because of low factor loadings were: "Encouraging *Subordinate's name* to see a psychologist" (factor loading = -.13)," Not getting involved" (factor loading = .14), "Speaking with some other coworkers to see if they see any problems in *Superior's name* behaviors toward *Subordinate's name*"(factor loading = .22), and "Talking to *Superior's name* about her behaviors toward *Subordinate's name*" (factor loading= .30).

Table 3
*Factor loadings based on a principle analysis factoring with oblimin rotation for 7 items from Taking Action Scale (*N *= 145)*

	Taking action
Informing someone from the management about the behaviors of *Superior's name* towards *Subordinate's name*.	.73
Encouraging *Subordinate's name* to talk to someone from the management.	.61
Encouraging *Subordinate's name* to ask *Superior's name* to change her way of treating *Subordinate's name*.	.56
Talking to *Superior's name* about her behaviors	.30

toward *Subordinate's name*.	
Speaking with some other coworkers to see if they see any problems in *Superior's name* behaviors toward *Subordinate's name*.	.22
Not getting involved.	.14
Encouraging *Subordinate's name* to see a psychologist.	-.13

Factorial Analysis of Variance

To test Hypothesis 1, a three-way between-subjects factorial analysis of variance was performed using three independent variables (superior's gender, subordinate's gender, and observer's gender) and a dependent variable (perceptions of abusive supervision). A three way interaction of superior gender X subordinate gender X observer gender was not statistically significant [F(1,7)=.04, *p*=.85.]. Neither the subordinate gender X observer gender [F (1,7)=. 04 *p* =. 44], superior gender X observer gender [F (1,7)=2.27 *p* =. 13], or superior gender X subordinate gender [F (1,7)=1.89 *p* =. 17], interactions were found to be statistically significant. Finally there were no main effects for superior gender [F (1,7)=1.33 *p* =. 25 and subordinate gender [F (1,7)=. 50 *p* =. 48]. There was a marginally significant effect for observer gender [F (1,7)=3.71 *p* =.06]. Men (*M*=1.97, *SD*=. 53) were more accepting of the abusive behaviors compared to women (*M*=1.72, *SD*=. 59).

TABLE 4

ANALYSIS OF VARIANCE: Perception of Abusive Supervision

Source	Df	MS	F
Superior Gender (S1)	1	.45	1.33
Subordinate Gender (S2)	1	.17	.50
Observer Gender (O1)	1	1.25	3.71*
S1 x S2	1	.63	1.89
S1 x O1	1	.76	2.27
S2 x O1	1	.20	.60
S1 x S2 x O1	1	.01	.04
Error	137	.34	

Note: The higher the number, the greater the acceptance of abuse.

*p<.10

To test Hypothesis 2a and b, a three-way between-subjects factorial analysis of variance was performed with the three independent variables (superior's gender, subordinate's gender, and observer's gender) on the dependent variable (Taking Action Against abusive supervision). A three way interaction of superior gender X subordinate gender X observer gender was not statistically significant [F (1, 7)=.005, p=.94.]. Neither the subordinate gender X observer gender [F (1, 7) =1.34, p =.25], superior gender X observer gender [F (1,7)=.61, p =..43], or superior gender X subordinate gender [F (1, 7) =.51, p =.47], interactions were found to be statistically significant. Finally there were no main effects for observer gender [F (1, 7) =.32, p =.57] and superior gender [F (1, 7)

=.50, *p* =.48]. There was a marginally significant main effect for subordinate gender [*F* (1,7)=3.42, *p* =.07]. When the subordinate was female (*M*= 5.08, *SD*= .97) participants reported they were more likely to take action against abusive behaviors than compared to a male subordinate (*M*=4.82, *SD*= .99).

TABLE 5

ANALYSIS OF VARIANCE: Taking action Against Abusive Supervision

Source	Df	MS	F
Superior Gender (S1)	1	.49	.50
Subordinate Gender (S2)	1	3.38	3.42*
Observer Gender (O1)	1	.31	.32
S1 x S2	1	.50	.51
S1 x O1	1	.61	.61
S2 x O1	1	1.32	1.34
S1 x S2 x O1	1	.01	.01
Error	137	.3	

Note: The higher the number, the greater intention to take action.

*p<.10

CHAPTER IV

DISCUSSION

In this study I hypothesized that when there is gender congruence between superior, subordinate but incongruence with the observer, the observer will be more accepting of this condition compared to when there is incongruity among the superior and subordinate. In addition I also hypothesized that individuals would be more likely to take action against abuse when seeing another person of the same gender as themselves were being treated with abusive type behaviors compared to if they witnessed someone of an incongruent gender. However, I failed to find statistically significant results to support theses hypotheses. Results of this study did not significantly support the proposed hypothesis. Results supported a marginally significant result that men were more accepting of abusive behaviors than women. That is regardless of the gender of the superior or subordinate, men reported the behaviors as more acceptable than women. This also supports previous literature that men may have a broader interpretation of what is considered acceptable behavior at work compared to women (Olafsson & Johannsdottir, 2004; Simpson & Cohen, 2004). For example, a male observer may feel it is acceptable for a superior to remind their subordinate of a mistake they made in the past, whereas a female observer may feel the same behaviors are not acceptable. The woman may feel this behavior is unnecessary and therefore abusive. Results also supported that participants, regardless of their gender, were more inclined to take action against abusive supervision when they witnessed a woman being treated in an abusive type manner than compared to witnessing a

man being treated in the same manner. This may be a result of women being viewed as the weaker gender and thus needing assistance when in distress. It is interesting that in this study female observers were just as likely to offer support to a female subordinate as male observers. Maybe women also feel that women need assistance more than men when they are the targets of abusive supervision.

There are several limitations to this study that may have lead to the non-significant results. According to Cohen' s Power primer (1992) a sufficient number of participants would have been 215; however considering this was archival data there was little control over this aspect. It is possible that with a larger sample size and more male participants, specifically the marginally significant results would have been significant. The smaller sample size was due to large attrition rate, the study took place over six days, so a large percentage of participants did not finish all six days. Also the sample had a very limited number of male participants, only 21.8% of the participants were male. The pool of where we recruited participants was of Psychology 101 students, which is female dominated already, and this was reflected in our final sample size. Another possible explanation to not finding significant results could be societies' view on gender roles, specifically society's beliefs regarding chivalry. For example, society's concept of chivalry probably involves a man standing up for a woman when she is in distress. It could be that men are expected to speak up against abusive behaviors when they witness a woman being the target of such abuse; this notion of chivalry could override any similarity/ attraction theory behaviors. Similarly, a man may view a male superior and a male subordinate as individuals

who do not need assistance because witnessing this abuse does not require chivalry or for them to conform to the role of rescuer. However, if the same man sees a female subordinate being treated with abusive type behaviors by a male superior, a man might choose to speak out for the woman because it is a chivalrous thing to do.

These limitations may be explored in future studies by examining participants' attitudes regarding traditional male and female roles in society. Another possible limitation of this study was the photos chosen to represent the male and female superior. The photo of Jane could be interpreted as being younger and more physically attractive than Jack. By not matching the superiors on physical characteristics, it is unclear whether the non-effects are due to physical attractiveness or other factors that could act as confounds. If participants viewed Jane as attractive, they may have been more accepting of the abuse and maybe less willing to offer help. Or some research supports that individuals might be less accepting of abusive behaviors if they perceive the individual as attractive. We did not test for these effects, so it might have been worthwhile to pilot-test the materials. Another limitation was in the vignettes; some of the behaviors were internal to the actor and not actually witnessed by the observer. For example the action of "(*subordinate*) calms her/himself" may not be actually witnessed by an observer; this is more of an internal state that is not necessarily displayed. Finally, the scale measuring participants' intent to take action against the abuse focused on what type of actions they may take. The actions may be capturing too many types of support. For example, it appears that both instrumental and

affective support is represented in the scale. Ducharme and Martin (2000) define instrumental support as when a coworker offers material assistance to help solve a potential problem, for example the item, "Encourage (*Subordinate's name*) to talk to someone from the management." Whereas affective support is when an individual expressed feelings of compassion and caring for the other individual, for example "Encourage (*Subordinate's name*) to ask (*Superior's name*) to change her/his ways of treating (Subordinate's *name*)" is an example of affective support because the observer is letting the target know that they care about how they are treated (Ducharme & Martin, 2000). It may be possible that one observer is more likely to offer one type of support over another therefore rating high on one item but low on another.

Researchers may want further expand on this study by examining other factors that predict reactions to abusive supervision. For example, cultural differences in perceptions of abusive supervision might matter, particularly as countries can differ in terms of lines of authority or power distance.

This study is a preliminary investigation into the potential gender bias in the acceptance of abusive supervision and willingness to help a coworker. That is, in the workplace when both male and female employees witnesses abusive behaviors, the observer's gender may dictate their interpretations of whether the actions are considered appropriate or not. Men appear to be more accepting of abusive behaviors when compared to women. This is supported by previous literature. Further, it appears that all employees are more likely to help when they see a woman being treated with abusive behaviors than a man. These results can

have important implications for human resource professionals when dealing with reports of an abusive supervisor. If human resource departments understand that employees can have varying acceptance levels and willingness to offer support based on their gender, human resource departments could better understand the interactions between superiors and subordinates. One way this may be reduced is that organizations can design training interventions that stimulate awareness of the antecedents of bias in an attempt to reduce these gender discriminatory practices.

Abusive supervision can happen in any organization. Considering the negative health effects that abusive supervision creates, organizations should be concerned with how their employees view abusive supervision and willingness to speak up against such behaviors. Perception of abusive supervision can be dependent on several factors. All observers do not view the abusive supervision in the same manner; this can be dependent on their sex, culture, or even socioeconomic status. Further research on observers' perceptions of abusive supervision would help to bring light to this dark side of leadership.

CHAPTER V

SUMMARY

Superiors may engage in hostile verbal and non-verbal behaviors towards their subordinates; such actions can be described as abusive supervision. These behaviors can have negative consequences on both the recipient of the abuse and outsiders who perceive the abusive supervision. The aim of this research is to examine if an individual's gender has an impact on their perception of abusive supervision and their intention to take action against the abuse. This study will examine if when there is gender congruence among superior, subordinate and incongruent of the observer if the observer will be more accepting of this condition compared to all other conditions. Also, are men more likely to take action against abuse when the subordinate is male, whereas are women more likely to take action if the subordinate is female? Participants will read vignettes describing interactions between a specific gender dyad over a week's period and rate their acceptability of abusive supervision behaviors and their likelihood of helping the subordinate. A portion of archival data from a larger study will be used to analyze the proposed hypotheses. Results will provide important insight on the effects that abusive supervision can have on those individuals who observe this type of abuse.

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Table 1

Chart of Proposed Hypothesis 1

	Hypothesis 1a	**Hypothesis 1b**
Dyad	Male Observers Acceptance Rate	Female Observers Acceptance Rate
Male Superior/ Male Subordinate	More accepting	Less accepting
Male Superior/ Female Subordinate	Less accepting	Less accepting
Female Superior/ Male Subordinate	Less accepting	Less accepting
Female Superior/ Female Subordinate	Less accepting	More accepting

Appendix A

Vignettes

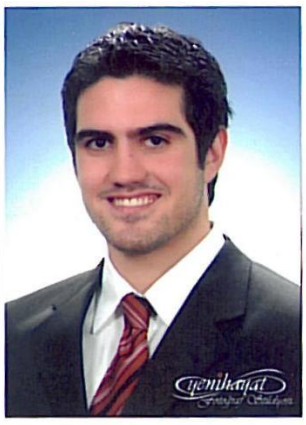
<u>Data Collection Day 1</u>

Background information

1. The Elizabethan Hotel
   This is a five star hotel chain with 200 hotels across the United States and Canada. The Elizabethan Hotel focuses on hospitality and exceptional service to each of their guests. They take pride in providing each guest a home away from home.
2. Human Resources department
3. Employees
   1. Superior

- Jane/Jack
- Work experience: 20 years in various professional positions, 7 years as a supervisor.
- In this company: 10 years
- Supervisor of Staffing

   2. Subordinate

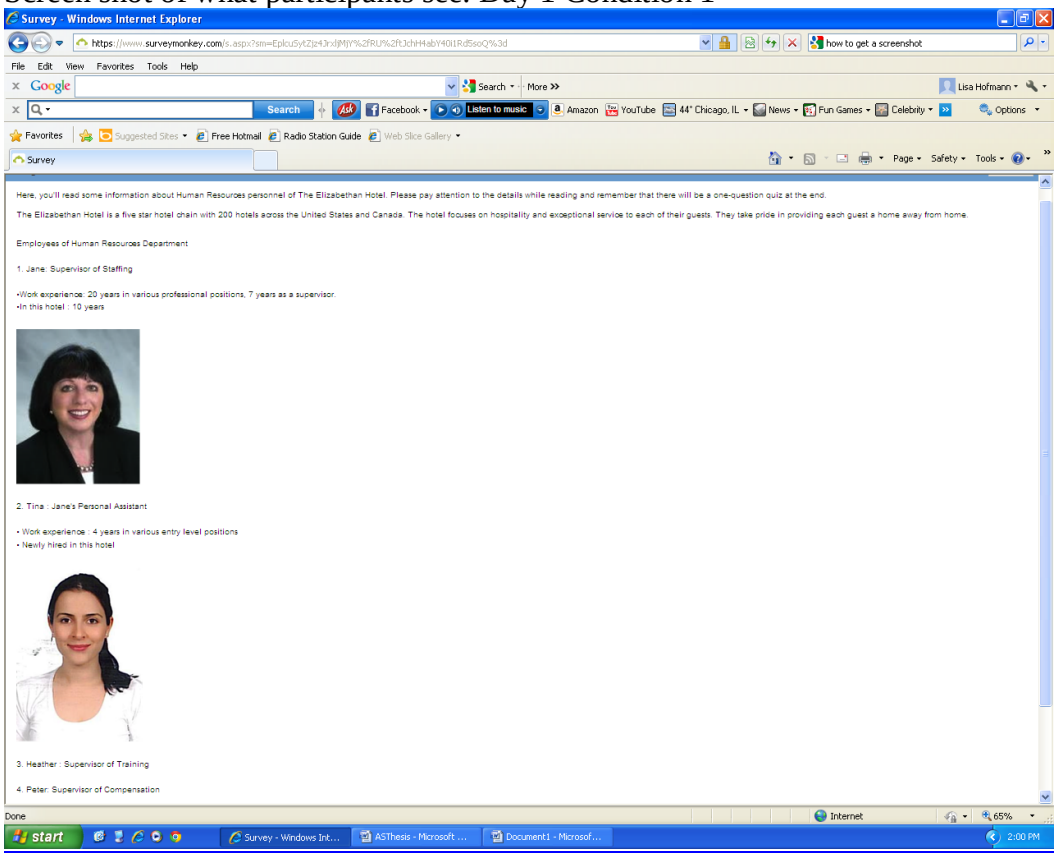


- Tina/Tom

- Work experience: 4 years in various entry level positions
- In this company: Newly hired
- Personal Assistant to Supervisor of Staffing

3. Others
    - Heather– Supervisor of Training
    - Peter- Supervisor of Compensation

Screen shot of what participants see. Day 1 Condition 1



<u>Data Collection Day 2</u>

Neutral : First day at work

In a corner office, Tina listens as Jane informs her of the responsibilities of her new position. Jane tells Tina, "This position requires a great deal of competency and dedication. You will assist me with every aspect of my job." Jane details each responsibility for Tina.

Tina learns that that she is will be involved with facilitating recruitment for the entire hotel chain. Specifically, Tina will be responsible for posting any available positions on monster.com and updating ads in the newspaper. Tina also learns that

she will be helping at University Job Fairs and Career Days in order to get new graduates interested in working for The Elizabethan Hotel. Jane is also interested in the effectiveness of their different recruitment methods so she asks Jane to research the value of their recruitment methods. Jane tells Tina, "I'm interested in what kind of return on investment we are acquiring, I need to be sure we are investing in the right recruitment outlets." Tina learns that she will need to help in developing a way to assess the advantages of recruitment.

Jane informs Tina that once they complete the recruitment process they will proceed with the selection process. Ultimately, Tina will be responsible for reserving an assessment center to assist with selection. Tina will contact and schedule an interview with Jane for those whom display potential. Jane will interview each candidate and make the final decision as to whom to hire. After the candidate is hired, Tina will direct the employee to the personnel department to acclimate the new employee into the company.

… 3 MONTHS LATER…

Abusive supervision: One-to-one interaction

In Jane's office, Jane and Tina are talking about the applications for the open waiter positions. Tina is briefing Jane about the new applicants. Most of the applicants are from Monster.com and a handful came from the newspaper ad. There are some applicants with no waiting experience, one applicant has 5 years wait staff experience and one who was in retail for 3 years and is ready to make a change. Jane is unhappy with the number and quality of applications using newspaper ads. Jane criticizes Tina for the lack of applicants from the newspaper, "Why can't you get any more applicants from the newspaper ad, there is hardly anyone who has wait staff experience. Did you forget to place the ad in time again?" Tina recalled her first and only mistake in the three months she has been working at Conjure Hotel. When she first began this job she forgot to place the ad before the paper was printed. Tina feels terrible about that mistake, but she was new at the job and was unaware of the deadline.

Tina brushes off Jane's comments and moves on. She continues reviewing the

applicants with Jane. Jane is not content with this crop of applicants and asks Tina to recruit more applicants. Jane informs Tina that these applicants are sub-par and that she will have to expand her search in order to complete this task. Tina tells Jane about a new idea she thought might bring in more quality applicant. "What about an incentive to our current employees if they refer their friends?" Jane thinks for a moment and then criticizes Tina's idea, "Tina, that is a stupid idea, think about it…. I don't want all the staff to be friends, then they will never get anything done."

Data Collection Day 3
Abusive supervision: Monthly Meeting

The entire team is together in the conference room giving updates about her/his area of responsibility. Seated around the table are Heather, Peter, Tina, and at the head of the table Jane. Tina is happy to be sitting in on this meeting and excited to learn what the other employees are doing. Jane begins the meeting by asking each employee to give an overview of what they have been working on.
Peter, the Supervisor of Compensation begins with his updates. Peter recently attained the results of the employee satisfaction for compensation and lets the team know that the results are unfortunately at mid-level. Peter brings it to the team's attention that The Elizabethan Hotel is doing well this year and that the profits have increased since last year. So in an attempt to boost morale, Peter states that at the next staff meeting he would propose bonuses for all employees. Jane begins to discuss her projects but quickly turns it over to Tina to discuss what progress she has made. Tina is a little startled because she hadn't expected to be called upon in this meeting. Tina calms herself and is able to discuss the progress she has made. She tells the team that there are a few positions that need to be filled. Tina states that she organized a booth at the most recent University Job Fair. Jane and Tina spoke with many students who were showing interest in entry-level jobs. "It was a long day, talking to all these students on my own and trying to assess each student, but I feel that we were able to pick out a few potential candidates."

Jane interrupts, “Tina had a rocky start when she first joined out team. But with my guiding hand, I’m glad that we got some quality applicants from the job fair. I think we finally have Tina integrated into the company.” Tina is thinking to herself, “She had nothing to do with setting up the job fair. When I asked her for help she told me I could handle it on my own and once we were there she was outside taking phone calls most of the day.”

Jane continues taking credit for all Tina’s hard work. Tina is shocked, but doesn’t say anything and allows the next team member to continue the conversation. After the team realizes that Jane is finished with her statement and that Tina isn’t going to comment, Heather the Supervisor of Training goes over her updates. She lets the team know that there are several new hires that will be going through their training program in the next week. She also tells them that the feedback that she received from the senior staff was that the training program was very successful in preparing the new hires.

Neutral

Jane, Heather and Tina are all in the conference room discussing the training and orientation program for new hires. Heather is the Supervisor of Training so she has been working with Jane on this program. Heather explains that this orientation will assist in integrating the new employees into the company culture. Jane asks Tina if she has completed all the work. Tina lets her know that she has mailed out the New Employee Welcome letters and has confirmed 95% of the new employees will be accepting their positions. Heather continues to discuss what will be covered in the orientation, for example The Elizabethan Hotel’s policies and procedures, tax forms, any on the job training that may be needed, etc. The orientation will provide all the information to the new employees so that they will all become contributing members to this hotel team.

<u>Data Collection Day 4</u>

Neutral

Jane and Tina have a meeting in Jane’s office to review three candidates being considered for the position of General Manager of the Marketing Department. Tina tells Jane that she has reduced the applicant pool to three very qualified

applicants. Tina tells Jane that the first candidate graduated from University of Pennsylvania and has been working for a top 10 marketing firm for 12 years. He has excellent customer and personal service skills and was due a promotion before he moved for family reasons. The second candidate graduated University of Michigan with magna cum laude honors and has 7 years work experience behind him, he has a great working knowledge, but at times can be unsure of his skill set. Then finally the last candidate graduated from University of North Carolina with 18 years work and owned his own marketing company for several years. Jane examines candidates further, looking at each of their skills, knowledge and abilities and decides to interview two of the three applicants. Jane asks Tina to set up interviews.

Abusive supervision: In the Absence of Tina/Tom

It's about 2pm and Jane ventures out of her office to see what is happening on the cubical floor. She is making conversation with the workers and looking around the office. Jane realized that Tina's desk is empty, "Where is Tina? Did she give up? Is this company too hard on the new girl?" An employee reminds Jane, "She is at a doctor's appointment, I think she said she has had difficulty sleeping lately." Jane takes this opportunity to see what Tina has been up to. She shuffles through Tina's files and desk.

<u>Data Collection Day 5</u>

Abusive supervision: Office Setting (The whole department)

It's Friday and the end of the workweek, everyone is excited for their weekend. Jane is visiting and socializing with the other employees. Jane asks Peter, "Hey Peter, what are you up to this weekend?" "Oh well, my wife is having a baby and she wants me to paint the nursery this weekend. So we will be making a trip to Home Depot and spending the rest of the weekend painting, you?" Jane tells everyone about an old college friend coming into town and about the plans they have for the weekend. After Jane finished explaining every detail of her weekend Peter tries to include Tina, "Tina, what are your plans?" Tina replies with an "Oh not much, just relaxing, getting some yard work done". Jane gives a superior

smirk and sarcastically says, “BIG weekend! “ Tina tries to speak up but Jane has already dominated the conversation and won’t allow Tina to speak. Heather lets everyone know that she and her husband will be having a get together at her house to watch the football game on Sunday and gives an open invitation to anyone who may want to join.

Neutral

For the past week Tina has been encountering problems with the online system. She has tried successfully to fix the problem on her own. She tells Jane about the problem. Tina tells Jane that the ads that she has wanted to post will no longer upload. Also all the ads from the previous month have been lost. Tina explains that she has attempted to fix the problem but continually receives error messages. Jane refers Tina to the hotel’s computer support specialist to assist with the problem. Tina discusses the problem with the computer support specialist and after he spends some time on the problem he was able to see the glitch in the system and fixes the problem.

Appendix B
Daily Quizzes

Day 1
What of the following statements is false?

a) The name of the hotel chain is The Elizabethan Hotel
b) Tina has 4 years previous work experience
c) The Elizabethan Hotel is primarily located in Europe
d) Jane's job title is Supervisor of Staffing

Day 2
What is NOT one of Tina responsibilities of her new job?

a) Posting available positions on line and in the newspaper
b) Assist new employees in acclimating to their new position
c) Reserving assessment centers
d) Assisting with University Job Fairs

Day 3
When Jane interrupts Tina in the office meeting Tina's actions were

a) Stand up for herself and tell Jane how she felt
b) Not say anything
c) Politely leave the room

Day 4
Why is Tina not at work this particular day?

a) She is on vacation
b) She is at the doctors office
c) She is at an University Job fair
d) The story does not say

Day 5
Who is coming to visit Jane for the weekend?

a) Her parents
b) An Previous boss
c) A friend from college
d) Her niece

Appendix C
Measures

Acceptance of Abusive Supervision Scale

Please indicate how much you agree with following statements, using the scale (1:Strongly Disagree, 5: Strongly Agree)

1. Jane is treating Tina fairly.
2. Tina should revise her behaviors at work setting.
3. The relationship between Tina and Jane is a normal superior-subordinate relationship.
4. Jane should revise her behaviors towards Tina.
5. Tina should consider quitting her job.
6. I would be fine with Jane as my supervisor.
7. If I were Jane, I would treat my subordinates in the same manner.

Taking Action Scale

Please indicate your likelihood to engage in the following behaviors, if you were one of Tina's coworkers, using the scale (1:Extremely Unlikely, 7: Extremely Likely)

1. Informing someone from the management about the behaviors of Jane towards Tina.
2. Encouraging Tina to see a psychologist.
3. Encouraging Tina to talk to someone from the management.
4. Encouraging Tina to ask Jane to change her way of treating Tina.
5. Not getting involved.
6. Speaking with some other coworkers to see if they see any problems in Jane’s behaviors toward Tina.
7. Talking to Jane about her behaviors toward Tina.

Demographics

1. What is your gender?
    - Male
    - Female
2. How old are you?
3. What is your race?
    - White
    - White-non Hispanic
    - African-American
    - Hispanic
    - Asian Pacific Islander
    - Native American
    - Other
4. Your Year in the university?
    - Freshman
    - Sophomore
    - Junior
    - Senior
5. Do you have work experience?
    - Yes, full time
    - Yes, part time
    - Yes, full time and part time
    - No

Appendix D
Intercorrelations

Summary of Intercorrelations

Measure	1	2	3	4
1. Taking Action				
2. Acceptance of abuse	.32**			
3. Age	.04	.02		
4. Year in college	.05	.06	.55**	
5. Work experience	-.09	-.04	-.20*	-.16

**p<.01, *p<.05.

n=145

Appendix E

Descriptive Statistics for Acceptance of Abusive Supervision

Mean statistics for Scores for Acceptance of Abusive Supervision

	Male Superior						Female Superior					
	Male Subordinate			Female Subordinate			Male Subordinate			Female Subordinate		
Observer	N	M	(SD)	N	M	(SD)	N	M	(SD)	N	M	(SD)
Male	6	3.66	(.60)	9	4.12	(.72)	6	4.21	(.30)	5	4.20	(.42)
Female	32	4.23	(.60)	34	4.46	(.66)	21	4.13	(.71)	32	4.17	(.62)

Appendix F
Descriptive Statistics for Taking Action

Mean statistics for Scores for Taking Action

	Male Superior				Female Superior			
	Male Subordinate		Female Subordinate		Male Subordinate		Female Subordinate	
Observer	N	M (SD)	N	M (SD)	N	M (SD)	N	M (SD)
Male	6	4.12 (.75)	9	4.88 (.33)	6	4.52 (1.21)	5	4.90 (.72)
Female	32	4.63 (1.02)	34	4.78(1.03)	21	4.58 (.84)	32	4.82(1.03)