



## **Abusive Supervision and Organizational Citizenship Behaviors: An Examination of Potential Boundary Conditions**

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## **Abusive Supervision and Organizational Citizenship Behaviors: An Examination of Potential Boundary Conditions**

While the management literature has primarily focused on productive and positive management behaviors and their positive implications, a small but growing stream of research has explored the negative consequences of undesirable management behaviors. Research on undesirable management behaviors suggests that these behaviors have a detrimental impact on employee attitudes (e.g., job satisfaction; organizational commitment) and employee behaviors (e.g., organizational deviance and organizational citizenship behaviors; for a full review, see Tepper, 2007). These results suggest that a more comprehensive understanding of how managerial behavior impacts employee attitudes and behavior should include investigations of both desirable and undesirable managerial behaviors.

This study focuses on a set of undesirable management behaviors known as abusive supervision. Abusive supervision has been defined as nonphysical hostile actions that a manager takes at the expense of a subordinate (Tepper, Henle, Lambert, Giacalone, & Duffy, 2008). Examples of abusive supervision include lying, rudeness, ridicule, invasion of privacy, and inappropriate expressions of anger. Not surprisingly, empirical evidence has shown abusive supervision to have a significant impact on many important individual as well as organizational outcomes. Some of the troubling outcomes for abused employees include problem drinking (Bamberger & Bacharach, 2006), psychological distress (Yagil, 2006), supervisor-directed aggression (Dupre, Inness, Connelly, Barling, & Hopton, 2006) and family-directed aggression (Hoobler & Brass, 2006). In addition, abusive supervision has been shown to be related to multiple outcomes detrimental to organizations including, organizational deviance (Tepper, Henle, Lambert, Giacalone, & Duffy, 2008; Thau, Bennett, Mitchell, & Marrs, 2008), low job satisfaction (Tepper, Duffy, Hoobler, & Ensley, 2004), decreased organizational citizenship behaviors (Zellars, Tepper, & Duffy, 2002), and increased intentions to quit (Tepper, 2000).

The current research contributes to the literature by investigating the possibility of boundary conditions on the relationship between abusive supervision and its consequences. Specifically, we examine the moderating effects of satisfaction with pay and dyadic duration on the relationship between abusive supervision and organizational citizenship behaviors (OCBs). Thus, this research questions whether abusive supervision's negative impact on a subordinate's willingness to perform OCBs might be impacted by the presence of other variables.

### **Theoretical Framework**

#### ***Abusive Supervision and Organizational Citizenship Behaviors***

Previous research has shown that mistreated employees develop the need to retaliate against their abuser (Skarlicki & Folger, 1997). While both empirical and theoretical evidence suggests that employees may respond to abusive supervision with equally destructive behaviors such as organizational deviance (Thau, Bennett, Mitchell, & Marrs, 2008; Tepper, Henle, Lambert, Giacalone, & Duffy, 2008), it has also been suggested that the power differential between supervisors and subordinates is likely to moderate the behavioral responses of employees who face abusive supervision (Zellars, Tepper, & Duffy, 2002). Withholding OCBs, however, may present abused employees with a relatively safe option for retaliating against their supervisors.

OCBs were first described by Organ (1988) as behaviors that are important to the organization's performance, but not part of the employee's official job duties. The fact that OCBs are discretionary behaviors that are not a part of an employee's required tasks makes them an attractive tool for employees to use both to reciprocate for positive treatment and to withhold in response to negative treatment. Employees should feel safe to contribute or withhold OCBs without fearing for the safety of their positions in the organization.

Zellars, Tepper, and Duffy (2002) tested the impact of abusive supervision on OCBs and found a significant negative relationship between the two variables. This relationship was also moderated by the individual's definition of OCBs as extra-role behavior, such that the relationship between abusive

supervision and OCBs was stronger when the employee defined OCBs as behaviors that were beyond the scope of their job responsibilities. Based on these theoretical arguments and empirical evidence, we offer the following hypothesis:

Hypothesis 1: Abusive supervision will be significantly negatively related to OCBs.

This study furthers the understanding of the relationship between abusive supervision and OCBs by examining two potential moderating variables. Specifically, the duration of the dyadic relationship between the supervisor and subordinate is explored as a factor that may impact the nature of the relationship between abusive supervision and the employee's willingness to withhold OCBs. Likewise, we also investigate the possibility that the employee's satisfaction with pay may also have an impact on their response to abusive supervision.

### ***The Moderating Role of Dyadic Duration***

Dyadic duration is a contextual variable defined as the length of time a subordinate has worked for their immediate supervisor (Mossholder, Niebuhr, & Norris, 1990). Mossholder, Bedeian, Neibuhr, and Wesolowski (1994) describe the nature of dyadic relationships as evolving in a manner that resembles a learning curve, which implies that the dynamics of the supervisor-subordinate relationship are likely to change over time. The notion that dyadic duration impacts the nature of a dyadic relationship is supported by empirical results that find dyadic duration to be a significant moderating influence on the relationship between multiple dyad-related variables (e.g., Vecchio & Bullis, 2001; Mossholder, Neibuhr, & Norris, 1990; Mossholder, Bedeian, Neibuhr, & Wesolowski, 1994). The length of time that a subordinate has worked for a manager appears to have an impact on the relationship between the two individuals, and therefore may impact an employee's willingness to withhold OCBs when faced with abusive supervision.

Graen and Scandura (1987) introduced a model of dyadic organizing whereby the manner in which the nature of a dyadic relationship is likely to change over time is described. This model contends that new dyadic relationships are characterized by supervisors providing a good deal of task-related information while subordinates take a submissive position. As dyadic relationships age, the subordinates begin to assert themselves more by way of participating in exchanges in hopes of attaining resources from the supervisor (Graen & Scandura, 1987). Applied to the relationship between abusive supervision and OCBs, this model suggests that when dyadic duration is low, employees' passivity makes them less likely to withhold OCBs even when they face abusive supervision. When the relationship matures such that employees assert themselves by way of participating in exchanges with their supervisor, withholding OCBs may provide the employees with an appropriate opportunity to satisfy an exchange with an abusive supervisor.

Additional theoretical statements about dyadic duration may also lend support to the notion that employees will be more willing to withhold OCBs in response to abusive supervision in longer-term dyadic relationships. Mossholder, et al. contend that as time passes the intensity of the dyadic relationship begins to fade. Additionally, longer dyadic duration implies that less training and socialization is needed, which results in less contact time between the supervisor and subordinate (Mossholder, Neibuhr, & Norris, 1990). This decrease in direct supervision may make the abused subordinate feel more comfortable withholding OCBs without fearing retribution from their supervisor even if the employee perceives the OCBs to be nondiscretionary behaviors. Based on the preceding discussion, the following hypothesis is offered:

Hypothesis 2: Dyadic duration will moderate the negative relationship between abusive supervision and OCBs such that the relationship will be stronger when dyadic duration is high rather than low.

### ***The Moderating Role of Satisfaction with Pay***

Satisfaction with pay refers to an individual's attitude regarding the adequacy of their compensation from their employer. The formation of this attitude is thought to be heavily influenced by perceptions of both distributive and procedural fairness (Tremblay, Sire, & Balkin, 2000). Outcomes associated with pay satisfaction include decreased intentions to quit, higher organizational commitment (Vandenberghe & Tremblay, 2008), and increased perceived organizational support (Williams, Brower, Ford, Williams, & Carraher, 2008).

Social exchange theory (e.g., Blau, 1964) is often useful in interpreting the behavioral and attitudinal consequences of satisfaction with pay. Social exchange theory posits that individuals strive to maintain equitable exchanges of resources (both economic and social) with their organizations. Therefore, individuals develop the need to reciprocate their organizations when they receive valuable resources from the organization (e.g., adequate compensation), and perhaps develop the need to retaliate against their organization when they receive inadequate resources or poor treatment (e.g., abusive supervision).

Pay satisfaction appears to be a measure of the level of resources an individual has received from their organization, and therefore should impact the employee's inclination to reciprocate or retaliate. Vandenberghe and Tremblay (2008) suggest that high satisfaction with pay signals to employees that they have received tangible resources from the organization. Additionally, they propose the notion that satisfaction with pay sends signals to the employee that their status within the organization is elevated and that they are valued by the organization (Vandenberghe & Tremblay, 2008), which represents a significant outlay of intangible resources to the employee. Social exchange theory would suggest that these increases in both tangible and intangible resources that the employee experiences when satisfaction with pay is high will, in turn, inspire that employee to want to contribute something back to the organization.

Using the social exchange theory lens to consider abusive supervision suggests that experiencing abusive supervision would decrease the level of intangible resources that the individual receives from their organization. The individual's satisfaction with pay and the level of abuse from a supervisor could be considered collectively (along with other resources received from the organization) as the individual develops their overall need to reciprocate their employer. Thus, the effect of abusive supervision on the employee's willingness to perform OCBs may be diminished by other resources they are receiving from the organization, namely satisfaction with pay. If an employee experiences abusive supervision, but is satisfied with their pay, then they are experiencing a higher level of resources from the firm than would an individual who is experiencing abusive supervision and low satisfaction with pay. The individual with high satisfaction with pay, therefore, should experience less of a need to retaliate for the abusive supervision they experience than the individual who is experiencing both abusive supervision and low satisfaction with pay. Thus, the experience of satisfaction with pay may mitigate the negative consequences of abusive supervision leaving the employee less likely to withhold OCBs. This logic suggests an interactive effect between abusive supervision and satisfaction with pay that we hypothesize below.

Hypothesis 3: Satisfaction with pay will moderate the negative relationship between abusive supervision and OCBs such that the relationship will be stronger when satisfaction with pay is low rather than high.

### **Methods**

#### ***Subjects***

A survey was distributed via email and in paper format to employees of seven locations of a large bank in Kazakhstan. Since the survey dealt with relationships between employees and their supervisors, the bank requested that participation be limited to individuals who had been employed by the bank for more than one year, which yielded a sample of 800 bank employees. Usable surveys were collected from 357 employees, which represents a 45% response rate. The survey questionnaire was constructed in

English, and then translated into Russian by experts in the field, using translation-back-translation to double check for accuracy. It should also be noted that three of the respondents reported working for the bank for less than one year.

### **Measures**

**Abusive supervision.** Abusive supervision was measured using a 15-item scale developed by Tepper (2000). Respondents indicated the frequency with which their supervisor exhibited certain abusive behaviors on a 5-point scale (1 = never to 5 = very often). Sample items include “My boss ridicules me”, and “My boss puts me down in front of others” ( $\alpha=.70$ ).

**Satisfaction with pay.** The Pay Satisfaction Questionnaire (PSQ), developed by Heneman and Schwab (1985) was used to measure satisfaction with pay. This 18-item measure asks respondents to indicate how satisfied they are with their compensation on a 5-point scale (1=very dissatisfied to 5 = very satisfied). Sample items measured individual’s satisfaction with “your take home pay,” as well as “your current salary” ( $\alpha=.86$ ).

**Dyadic Duration.** Dyadic duration was measured via a 1-item measure whereby respondents were asked “how many years have you worked for your current supervisor?”. While this information was not obtained directly from personnel records to assure accuracy, others have argued that this information is not contentious, and therefore one might expect that respondents would be willing to report dyadic duration accurately (Mossholder, Neibuhr, & Norris, 1990).

**Organizational Citizenship Behaviors.** A 19-item scale developed by Moorman and Blakely (1995) was used to measure OCBs. The scale consisted of items such as “I go out of my way to help co-workers with work related problems,” and “I voluntarily help new employees settle into their job.” The items were assessed via a 5-point Likert scale with “strongly disagree” and “strongly agree” as anchors ( $\alpha=.79$ ).

### **Analyses**

Hierarchical regression was used to test the interactive effects predicted by the study’s hypotheses. Hypothesis 1 was tested with a simple linear regression whereby OCBs were regressed on abusive supervision. To test the moderation predicted by hypothesis 2, a cross-product term was created whereby dyadic duration was multiplied by abusive supervision. Then, a four step hierarchical regression was created where tenure was added as a control in the first step, abusive supervision was added in the second step, dyadic duration was added in the third step, and the cross product term was added in the fourth step. A similar approach was taken to test hypothesis three whereby abusive supervision was added in the first step, satisfaction with pay was added in the second step, and the cross product term (abusive supervision X satisfaction with pay) was added in the third and final step.

### **Results**

Descriptive statistics for all study variables are reported in Table 1. Correlations between study variables were consistent with expectations with the exception of a positive correlation between dyadic duration and abusive supervision. While this correlation was not expected, it does not appear to have had an adverse impact on the hypothesis testing analyses.

TABLE 1  
**Descriptive Statistics, Reliabilities, and Correlations for Study Variables (n=357)**

Variable	Mean	S.D.	1	2	3	4
1. Abusive Supervision	1.38	0.27	(.70)			
2. Satisfaction w/Pay	3.27	0.37	-.404**	(.86)		
3. Dyadic Duration	2.66	1.41	.116*	.073	-	
4. OCB	3.78	0.36	-.329**	.492**	.031	(.79)

Reliability estimates provided on the diagonal.

\* $p < .05$ ; \*\* $p < .01$

Results from the simple linear regression which tested hypothesis 1 are presented in Table 2. These results suggest a negative relationship between abusive supervision and a subordinate's willingness to perform OCBs ( $B = -.429, p < .001$ ). Therefore, hypothesis one was supported.

TABLE 2  
**Results of Regression Test of Abusive Supervision on OCBs**

Predictor	Step 1
Abusive Supervision	-.429***
<i>R</i>	.329
<i>R</i> <sup>2</sup>	.108
Adjusted <i>R</i> <sup>2</sup>	.106

\*\*\* $p < .001$

The hierarchical regression used to test the moderating effects predicted in hypotheses two and three are reported in Tables 3 and 4 respectively. Prior to hierarchical regression analysis, study variables were centered to minimize potential problems caused by multicollinearity. Support for these hypotheses was indicated by the significance of the cross-product terms in the final step of each regression. The results for the test of hypothesis two indicate that dyadic duration moderates the relationship between abusive supervision and OCBs ( $B = -.063, p < .001$ ). Likewise, the significance of the cross product term in the exploration of satisfaction with pay suggests support for hypothesis three ( $B = .047, p = .021$ ). The direction of these moderating effects is depicted in Figures 1 and 2.

TABLE 3  
**Results of Multiple Regression of Abusive Supervision and Dyadic Duration on OCBs**

Predictors	Step 1	Step 2	Step 3	Step 4
Tenure	-.031**	-.010	-.083***	-.082***
Abusive Supervision		-.111***	-.087***	-.079***
Dyadic Duration			.143***	.165***
Abusive Supervision X Dyadic Duration				-.063***
$\Delta R^2$		.089	.044	.032
Total <i>R</i> <sup>2</sup>	.023	.112	.156	.188

Predictor variables were centered prior to inclusion.

\*\*\* $p < .001$ , \*\* $p < .01$ , \* $p < .05$

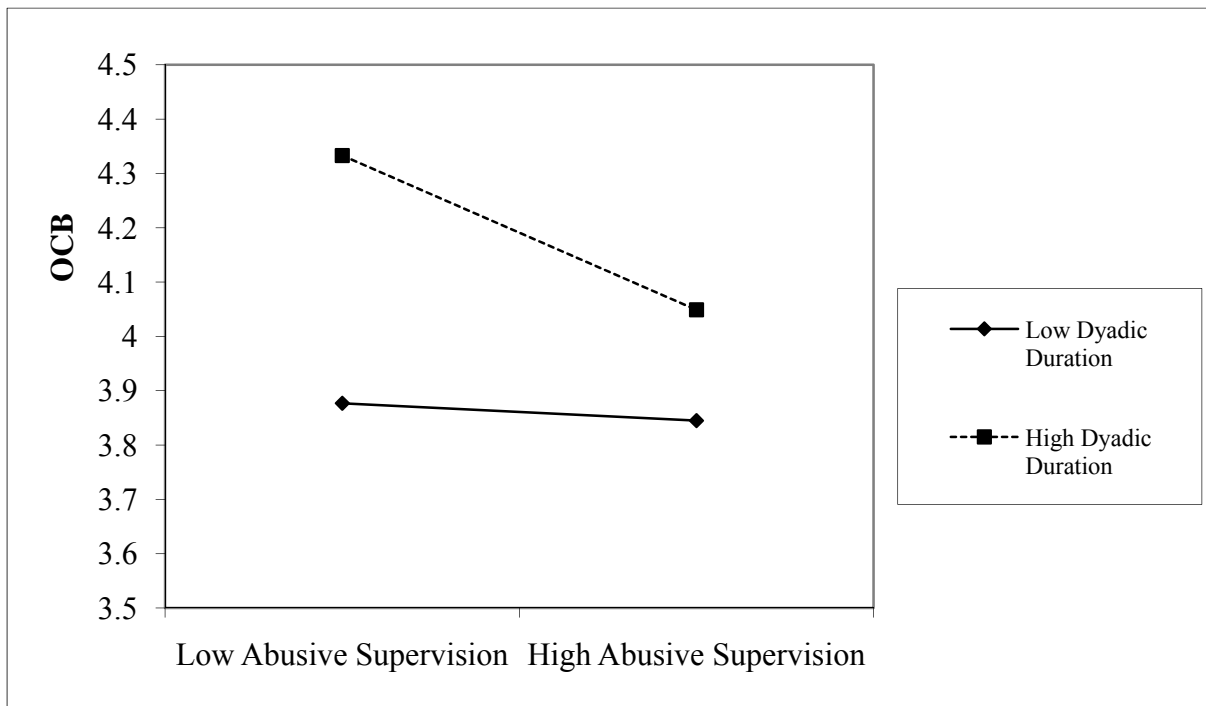
TABLE 4  
**Results of Multiple Regression of Abusive Supervision and Satisfaction with Pay on OCBs**

Predictors	Step 1	Step 2	Step 3
Abusive Supervision	-.118***	-.055**	-.035***
Satisfaction with Pay		.153***	.172***
Abusive Supervision X Satisfaction with Pay			.047*
$\Delta R^2$		.156	.011
Total $R^2$	.108	.264	.275

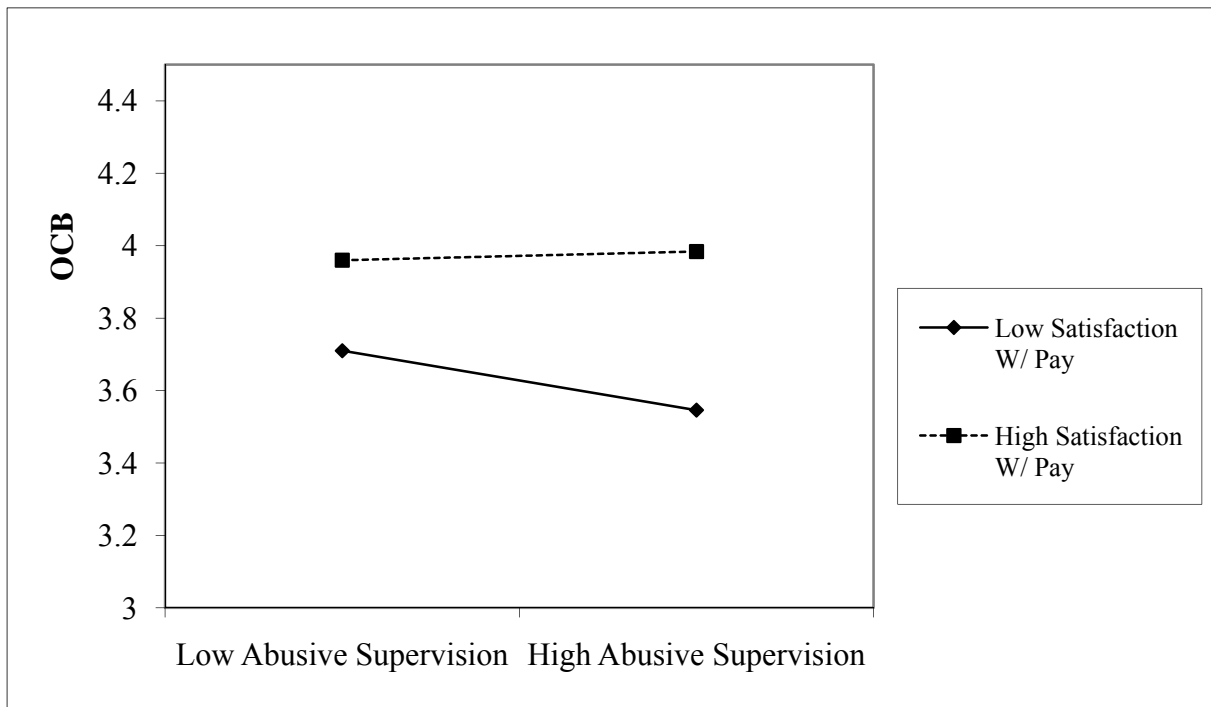
Predictor variables were centered prior to inclusion.

\*\*\*p<.001, \*\*p<.01, \*p<.05

FIGURE 1  
**Moderating Effect of High versus Low Dyadic Duration on the Abusive Supervision – OCB Relationship**



**FIGURE 2**  
**Moderating Effect of High versus Low Satisfaction with Pay on the Abusive Supervision – OCB Relationship**



**Discussion**

This study explored the boundary conditions of the negative impact of abusive supervision on OCBs. Specifically, results indicate that abusive supervision is negatively related to OCBs, which replicates the findings of Zellars, Tepper, and Duffy (2002) in a unique context. While Zellars et al. noted that their results may have been impacted by the possibility that abusive supervisors were less likely to rate employee OCBs highly, the nature of our data makes that alternative hypothesis improbable. While the use of a self-reported measure of OCBs may have introduced common method bias into our analysis, it avoids the possibility that a supervisor’s propensity to be abusive may influence that supervisor’s willingness to rate subordinate’s OCBs accurately.

The main contribution of this research stems from the introduction of two important boundary conditions on the abusive supervision – OCB relationship. The moderating impact of dyadic duration suggests that the nature of individual responses to abusive supervision develop and change over time within a specific dyad. Graen and Scandura’s (1987) model of dyadic organizing suggests that employees become more assertive in longer-term dyadic relationships, which is consistent with our empirical finding that employees become more willing to withhold OCBs in response to abusive supervision when dyadic duration increases. Mossholder, Bedeian, Neibuhr, and Wesolowski (1994) suggest an alternative rationale that may explain the moderating effect of dyadic duration by positing that as dyadic duration increases employees begin to feel like their career is not progressing as quickly as they would like. This is likely to lead to frustration with the organization that may make withholding OCBs from that organization and their abusive supervisor that much easier to justify.

Finally, the moderating impact of satisfaction with pay was also empirically supported by this study. These results imply that individuals who are satisfied with their compensation are more tolerant of abusive supervisors than individuals who feel like their compensation is too low. This phenomenon is consistent with social exchange theory’s thesis that individuals reciprocate their organizations in



accordance with the amount of tangible and intangible resources they receive. Thus, it appears that the experience of high satisfaction with pay represents a level of resources (tangible and intangible) that diminishes the employee's willingness to retaliate in response to abusive supervision.

This study is not without limitations. While the use of self-reported OCBs avoids the possibility that abusive supervisors rate employee OCBs differently than non-abusive supervisors, it may also be subject to common-method bias. Additionally, the causality implied in our theoretical statements can not be directly tested without longitudinal data.

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