Third Party Justice: The Impact of Relationships on Emotions

University of Waterloo: Thesis Report; PSYCH 499C

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Abstract

This research seeks to further understand how 3rd parties' respond emotionally to witnessing abusive supervision in the workplace. Based on theories of deontic justice, emotions are thought to arise in third parties due to an activation of automatic moral beliefs and principles. However, in the workplace, where employee relationships often go beyond being simply colleagues, the question arises as to how these relationships may influence what one may consider moral or ethical behaviour. I predicted that in response to witnessing abusive supervision, the degree to which specific moral emotions are activated would partially depend on the third party's perceived similarity to the perpetrator of injustice. Specifically, I predicted that those who feel highly similar to their supervisor would be more likely to feel greater amounts of guilt in the place of anger, while those who feel less similar would be more likely to feel greater amounts of anger. Although no significant interactions were observed, the present study continues to reinforce the idea that behaviour motivating moral emotions are elicited by acts of abusive supervision and suggests that the relationship between observer and supervisor deserves further investigation.

Keywords: abusive supervision, moral emotions, supervisor similarity

In the modern day workplace, relationships are formed around the many day-to-day interactions that take place between individuals in their environment. Often, employee interaction is not only encouraged, but is a major requirement in most workplaces. While it is unlikely that we will form meaningful connections with everyone we work and interact with, there is no denying that many of one's adulthood relationships are built around and formed as a direct result of their working environment. On top of this, research has shown that these same workplace relationships can have a significant impact on employee attitudes, emotions and behaviours (Nahrgang, Morgeson & Ilies, 2009).

Workplace relationships can be formed between a variety of parties across varying levels of organizational hierarchy. Not only are workplace relationships formed between employees working together horizontally as peers, but between subordinates and their direct supervisors and managers. The role of the supervisor is an essential role in many organizations that is often looked at as a first source of guidance and support. Unfortunately, supervisors are not always able to provide said support and can thus fail to uphold their responsibilities. Supervisors can also act in the complete opposite manner, leading employees to become the target of interpersonal injustice and more specifically, acts of abusive supervision. While abusive supervision is undoubtedly an issue for its direct target, causing increased psychological distress and emotional exhaustion (Tepper, 2007); these same behaviours can also impose consequences towards organizations as a whole. As a result of retaliation to abusive supervision, organizations can incur a variety of costs either through the damage or loss of capital and assets, or in more subjective ways, such as lower employee productivity (Dunlop & Lee, 2004). Upon a closer examination of these negative effects, recent research has also shown that simply witnessing

abuse towards others can elicit third party emotions which may lead to retaliatory behaviors against the perpetrator (Mitchell, Folger & Vogel, 2015).

Deontic justice theory suggests that the desire to punish a wrongdoer is driven by human morality and that witnessing abuse should create an innate state of moral anger (Folger, 2001). Although, anger is traditionally assumed to be the primary emotional response brought on from acts of interpersonal injustice, research has shown that third party perceptions of fairness can be biased (Blader, Wiesenfeld, Fortin & Wheeler-Smith, 2013). If this is the case, anger may not always be felt by third-parties to the same degree. The range of moral emotions is made up of a wide set of emotions that includes not only outward feelings such as anger, but inward feelings such as guilt and shame as well. Hence, it is important to consider the role of these other emotions and the factors that contribute to their production within a third-party. The self-conscious emotions including guilt, shame and pride drive people to behave in moral and socially appropriate ways. While shame and guilt do share some similar characteristics and have similar elicitors, there are still distinguishing factors between the two emotions. Of both guilt and shame, guilt is generally seen as the more moral emotion. Guilt involves a sense of responsibility and a feeling that one has violated a moral standard. In studies on the links between moral emotions and aggression, guilt was found to reduce aggressive behaviours in contrast to feelings of anger (Stuewig, Tangney & Harty, 2006).

This insight into moral emotions begs the question of what factors cause moral emotions other than anger, which is thought to be the dominant deontic response, to emerge in response to a perceived wrongdoing. Ultimately, research has suggested that the moral emotions expressed by a third-party in response to witnessing abuse can be altered by their various perceptions of those involved in the situation. Recent work has expanded upon deontic justice theory to suggest

that third-party interpretations of fairness can depend on a variety of perceptions, including the relationship between the third party and the target of abuse. Specifically, research has shown that third-party emotions and behaviours depend on how they evaluate the recipient of abuse with a critical factor being the extent to which they believe the target was deserving of the treatment (Mitchell et. al. 2015). Still, why certain emotions are expressed over others is not fully understood, and there are likely a variety of factors that may come into play. Moving away from evaluations of the target of abuse, there is also the possibility that a third-party may have certain beliefs about the perpetrator of injustice as well.

Returning to the inevitable development of workplace relationships, it is possible that some individuals may be less inclined to feel anger towards their supervisor based on the extent to which they perceive themselves to be similar to him or her. Specifically, by examining the concept of similarity within the context of social identity theory, one may note that feelings of similarity may lead individuals to include others within their self-concept based on the development of an in-group (Hogg, 2001). An individual's sense of belonging can also lead him to experience self-relevant feelings when an in-group member is believed to have acted in a socially unacceptable manner (Fortune & Newby-Clark, 2008). As a result, inward moral emotions such as guilt may be experienced vicariously, as the actions of the in-group perpetrator did not live up to the third-party's moral standards (Tangney, Stuewig & Mashek, 2007). Based on this notion, I hypothesize that moral emotions in response to witnessed abusive supervision can be influenced by how strongly employees feel similar to their supervisor.

The present research aims to contribute to a growing body of work that concerns deontic justice theory and third-party responses to abusive supervision. Specifically, this research seeks to understand why certain moral emotions are expressed over others and why not all third parties

experience a sense of moral anger when confronted with an act of injustice. Working to expand our knowledge of what underlies specific emotions is critical to understanding how abusive supervision can impact the greater workplace environment. A better understanding of the details behind how moral emotions develop has the potential to better inform organizations on how employees may respond to witnessing abuse in their work environment and how decision makers can work to manage these behaviours in the future.

Theoretical Background

Deontic Justice

When studying how third-parties respond to witnessed abuse, the deontic justice framework provides the basis for why certain emotions are expressed. The concept of deontic justice involves the idea that cognitive processes and behaviours can be motivated by ethical principles. Folger (2001) first introduced the term out of an observation that responses to injustice can arise from a sense of duty, obligation and moral virtue, suggesting that justice is largely grounded in basic ethical assumptions. In many ways, justice can be viewed as a judgment of the morality of an outcome or interaction. When an employee has determined that an act is unfair, they have also determined that this same act has broken an established standard or norm. As a result, an individual's perception of such an event can trigger an emotional response and potentially a behaviour that has no economic self-interest and that is independent of consequences (Cropanzano, Goldman & Folger, 2003). Moreover, the effects of such injustice extend beyond that of the direct victim. Deontic Justice theory suggests that simply witnessing another's mistreatment will create other-focused emotions in third parties who perceive injustice to have occurred (Folger, 2001). Not only are these emotions harsh but they can be the drivers of behavioral scripts in response to the witnessed act (Mitchell et al., 2015). While acts of injustice

including distributive and procedural injustice can all be the foundation for said emotions, third parties more readily perceive acts of interpersonal injustice to be morally wrong (O'Reilly, Aquino & Skarlicki, 2015).

Interpersonal Injustice and Abusive Supervision

Interpersonal violations are especially likely to trigger deontic reactions due to the fact that the source of the transgression is less ambiguous compared to that of procedural or distributive justice. (O'Reilly et al., 2015). In the workplace, one prevalent source of interpersonal injustice comes in the form of abusive supervision (Tepper, 2000; Bies & Tripp, 1998). From the viewpoint of a third party, abusive supervision refers to subordinates' perceptions of the extent to which supervisors engage in the sustained display of hostile, verbal and nonverbal behaviours, excluding physical contact (Tepper, 2000). More specifically, these behaviours can include actions such as: displays of rudeness, intimidation, public criticism and inconsiderate behaviour towards another (Bies & Tripp, 1998). Abusive supervision can produce a variety of detrimental effects on the target of abuse, including: less favorable attitudes toward job, life and organization, greater conflict between work and family life, as well as increased psychological distress (Tepper, 2000). However, more relevant to the discussion at hand, is the relationship between abusive supervision and justice in the eyes of a third party. While there is no denying that abusive supervision can have many negative effects for the direct target of abuse, it is also responsible for the production of moral emotions in third parties as well (Folger, 2001).

Moral Emotions

Within the broader category of moral emotions, research has identified two clusters of moral emotions that are of particular interest. While these two clusters do not exhaust the full list of moral emotions, they are relevant to the examination of third party reactions. Both clusters are

closely tied to internalized respect for social order and are triggered by a violation of the moral principles (Lowery, Haidt and Imada, 1999).

As previously discussed, moral anger is often viewed as the primary deontic moral emotion and can be placed within the first cluster alongside contempt and disgust (Contempt, Anger, Disgust; CAD). This cluster reflects a concern for integrity and social order, with an outward focus towards others. While contempt and disgust also can arise from the negative evaluation of others, they are somewhat less important when compared to moral anger in the context of abusive supervision. For example, Rozin (1999) found that feelings of contempt where more likely linked to violations of social hierarchy and that feelings of disgust were linked to violations of community ethics such as racism. In contrast, anger arises more specifically in response to violations of the rights of individuals. What separates moral anger from the generalized emotion of anger is that it is specifically provoked by an act of moral violation. Anger as a non-moral emotion, is a reaction to frustration or goal blockage, linked to an action tendency that marshals an aggressive response (Lowery, Haidt & Imada, 1999). For example, while someone may feel angry about an unforeseen disruption that occurs in their day, this would not be classified as a feeling of moral anger. Moral anger must arise following an automatic intuition of moral wrongness in response to a special class of anger-eliciting events in which the perpetrator's behaviour represents a violation of moral standards. This sense of moral anger can serve several functions including the motivation of the third-party bystander to take action in order to resolve the observed injustice (Tepper, 2000). As a result, the present research focuses on moral anger as the primary outward focused moral emotion.

The second moral emotion cluster contains shame, embarrassment and guilt (Shame, Embarrassment, Guilt; SEG). These emotions involve ongoing assessments of the moral worth of

one's self within one's broader community and motivate individuals to behave in a culturally acceptable fashion. In contrast to the CAD emotions, SEG emotions are focused inward and are sometimes referred to as the self-conscious emotions (Lowery, Haidt & Imada, 1999). The majority of research on these emotions has been largely focused on the two negatively valenced emotions of shame and guilt, as each are primarily evoked by moral lapses (Tangney, 2000). The self-conscious emotions including guilt and shame drive people to behave in moral and socially appropriate ways. For these emotions to arise, the individual who experiences them must focus on some aspect of the self, such as activating public self-representations or blaming the self for a situation that has unfolded (Tracy & Robins, 2004).

While shame and guilt share some similar characteristics and have similar elicitors, there are some distinguishing factors between the two emotions. While shame and guilt are interrelated and have traditionally been used synonymously by the layperson, most researchers now agree that they are two distinct emotions, separated by their degree of focus on the self and the public or private nature of the transgression (Benedict, 1946). Of the two, guilt is seen as the more moral emotion and is reported to include feelings of tension, remorse and regret. Guilt involves a sense of responsibility and a feeling that one has violated a moral standard. In situations where people are describing personal experiences of guilt, they show a greater empathy for others than when they describe shameful experiences (Leith & Baumeister, 1998). In contrast, shame has an inherently self-centered focus that leads an individual to focus on their own bad self as opposed to bad behaviour or actions. For feelings of guilt, the sense of responsibility highlights the negative consequences experienced by others (Tangney et al., 1994), creating concerns about the effects of one's behaviours on others. (Eisenberg, 2011). Finally, SEG emotions can motivate the individual to want to fit in, and behave in a culturally acceptable fashion (Lowery et al.,1999).

Guilt in particular has been reported to involve the desire to undo aspects of one's behaviour (Niedenthal, Tangney & Gavanski 1994). On top of this, it has been demonstrated that a link between guilt and reduced outward aggression is partially mediated through other-oriented empathy (Stuewig et al., 2006). Guilt has been shown to correspond with reparative actions as opposed to attempts to hide, or escape the provoking situation. These actions can include: confessions, apologies and undoing the consequences of behaviour (Tagney et al., 2007), all of which are empathic responses that motivate people to do what is right (Tepper, 2000). In contrast, Shame's focus on the self opposed to focus on behaviour can derail the empathic process placing less focus on the harmed other. Extending this, guilt-prone individuals are less likely to engage in direct, indirect and displaced aggression when angered (Tangney et al. 1996), a direct contrast to moral anger. Therefore, the present research focuses in on guilt as the primary inward moral emotion of examination in the context of third-party justice attributions.

While there has been some work examining the development and role of moral emotions for third-parties (e.g, O'Reilly, 2015; Mitchell, 2015), little work has been done to examine how the relationships formed between third parties and their supervisors may affect these emotions.

Supervisor Similarity

One of the most well-known theories of interpersonal similarity is the similarity-attraction paradigm, suggesting that similar individuals will tend to express higher levels of liking towards similar people and wish to interact with them more frequently (Byrne, 1971). Building off this idea, greater levels of interpersonal similarity are also associated with better communication and a mutual understanding of expected behaviours (Hambrick, 1994). In the workplace, supervisor-subordinate similarity can be examined in a variety of distinct ways. One such way is subordinate perceived similarity, or the perception of how similar employees feel

towards their supervisor (Turban & Jones, 1988). This measure of similarity includes items such as: “My supervisor and I see things in much of the same way” and “are alike in a number of areas”. (Liden, Wayne & Stilwell, 1993). In comparison to other measures of similarity such as perceptual congruence and actual similarity, perceived similarity has been shown to be more positively related to important workplace outcomes including: performance ratings, pay ratings and job satisfaction (Turban and Jones, 1988). Furthermore, it has been empirically demonstrated that deep-level similarities have a more consistent and lasting effect on work outcomes than surface-level similarities (Bauer & Green, 1996).

Extending upon this notion, perceived similarity also plays an important role in the development of one’s social identity within a group. Tajfel (1972) first introduced the idea of social identity theory in order to define how individuals conceptualize themselves in intergroup contexts. He defined social identity as an individual’s knowledge that he belongs to a certain group with some emotional significance (Tajfel, 1972). Self-categorization theory expands on social identity theory by specifying that the process of social categorization is the cognitive basis behind group behaviours (Hogg & Terry, 2000). Specifically, self-categorization theory suggests that an individual's perceived similarity to a target of evaluation will accentuate the development of a relevant in-group prototype (Hogg, & Terry, 2000). Prototypes represent the defining attributes of a group with a critical feature including the similarities within groups (Hogg, 2001). As a result of these prototypes, changes in self-conceptualization and the basis of the perceptions arise through the process of depersonalization. Depersonalization produces a variety of interactions within a group such as cooperation, empathy, shared norms and mutual influence. On top of this, in-group members also share greater levels of liking amongst one another due to the prototypical similarity to the self (Hogg, 2001).

In-group relationships can also have the ability to alter the emotions that one may feel as a member of that group. It has been shown that individuals often believe that their own social standing suffers when people with whom they are associated (perpetrator) act in socially inappropriate ways Specifically, this feeling has been termed the guilty by association effect (GBAE), showing that members of a group can experience emotions vicariously through the actions of another (Fortune & Newby-Clark, 2008). Seeing as perceived similarity contributes largely to the establishment of one's development of group association, the same underlying concept should apply between a subordinate and their supervisor in the workplace. When a supervisor is perceived to be similar, this may aid in their inclusion of the supervisor within a subordinate's self-concept. Thus, it is possible that this association may lead third parties to greater levels of cooperation and mutual understanding, reducing anger as the primary response to abusive behaviour. Instead, it is possible that inward focused emotions of guilt may arise though an association with actions that did not live up to their moral standards. As such I hypothesize that a third party's perceived similarity towards their supervisor will play a moderating role in the development of moral emotions including anger and guilt.

Hypothesis 1(a): There will be a two-way interaction whereby third parties who perceive themselves to be less similar to their supervisor will be more likely to experience the outward focused emotion of moral anger in response to abusive supervision.

Hypothesis 1(b): There will be a two-way interaction whereby third-parties who perceive themselves to be more similar to their supervisor will be more likely to experience the inward focused emotion of guilt in response to abusive supervision.

The Influence of Moral Identity

Finally, when examining third party reactions under deontic justice reasoning, it is important to considered individual differences in the internalization of moral standards. Moral identity is defined as the extent to which moral characteristics (e.g., caring, kind, friendly, compassionate, fair), are internalized into an individual's self-concept (Aquino & Reed, 2002). Moral identity plays an important role in moral functioning, emotions and behaviour, as it influences how people will interpret and respond to situations that require a form of moral judgement (O'Reilly, Aquino & Skarlicki, 2015). Levels of moral identity vary amongst individuals and can be identified as either being strong (highly accessible) or weak (less accessible). Individuals with a strong moral identity aim to maintain behavioural self-consistency and show a commitment to action that promotes the welfare of others. Those with a high moral identity are more likely to reliably attend and process information concerning moral acts across a range of situations (Shao Aquino, & Freeman, 2008). On the other hand, individuals with a weak moral identity are less likely to consider the implications of their actions towards others. Based on this information, it is likely that moral identity could further influence how emotions are developed in third parties.

Hypothesis 2: There will be a three-way interaction whereby moral identity will further strengthen the interactive effect between 3rd party abuse and supervisor similarity on anger and guilt.

Study Overview

The present study consisted of a two-part survey that aimed to test our predictions. The first part, a pre-screen survey was designed to limit the pool of participants to those who had actually witnessed abusive supervision directed towards a co-worker from their immediate

supervisor. Those who met the criteria were then invited back to participate in a follow up survey. In the follow up survey, in order to examine the idea that certain emotions are more likely to be elicited by a third party as a result of the perceived similarity between the supervisor and subordinate was tested. Participants (depending on their assigned condition) were asked to recall a time when their supervisor was either abusive or supportive toward a co-worker and then were asked to described how they felt about the situation. Participants also completed a variety of validated scales in order to obtain alternative measures of emotions.

Participants and Procedure

All participants were recruited through the Amazon Mechanical Turk (M-Turk), and survey items were distributed online through the Qualtrics Survey Software platform. Due to the nature of the study being based on workplace experiences, M-Turk was chosen to provide a wider sample pool that would be more diverse both in terms of demographics as well as in professional workplace experience. While university students were initially considered and a pilot study was conducted using the same design and measures, the data collected was poor due to the students limited time spent working under a direct supervisor and limited exposure to abusive supervision. In order to meet the requirements to move on and be invited back for the follow up survey, participants were required to work at least 20 hours a week, and met the criteria of having witnessed abusive supervision in the workplace. This Pre-Screen survey also collected the initials of both the participant's supervisor and co-worker to be used when recalling an incident in the follow-up study.

300 participants completed the pre-screen survey, and of those, 129 who met the participation requirements were invited back through M-Turk to participate in a follow up study one week later. After excluding one participant with unusable data, the final sample size was

N=77 with 54% reporting their gender as female. The average age of participant was 36.68 years old (*SD* = 10.0 years). The main survey was also distributed online through the Qualtrics platform. In this survey, participants were asked to complete a variety of open ended self-report responses, as well as previously validated scales. Participants began by completing scale items to measure their perceived similarity to their supervisor. This task was placed at the beginning of the survey in order for this assessment to not be influenced by remembering a potentially negative act carried out by that supervisor. Following this task, participants were then asked to complete a critical incident task (Mitchell et al., 2015), in which they were randomly assigned to recall an interaction at work that either involved an act of abusive supervision or a supportive interaction between their supervisor and a co-worker. The critical incident technique allows for an effective way to focus the object of study on the specific perpetrator and event showing to be valid when evaluating perceptions of mistreatment involving supervisors (Bobocel, 2013). Finally, to complete the survey, participants completed open-ended and likert-style measures of the emotions they experienced at the time of the incident they recalled.

Pre-Screen Measures:

Witnessed Abusive Supervision: A 15 item Abusive Supervision measures created by Tepper (2000) and modified by Mitchell and colleagues (2015), was used to asses' leaders' abusiveness. Respondents indicated their agreement with which the supervisor enacted each of the items modified for use in a third-party context (e.g. "invades my co-worker's privacy" and "reminds my co-worker of past mistakes and failures"), using a 5-point scale (1 = *cannot remember him/her ever using this behaviour with me*, 5 = *he/she uses this behaviour often with me*).

Moral identity: a five-item moral identity internalization scale developed by Aquino and Reed (2002) was used to asses' moral identity. The internalization sub-scale was used because it best reflects the extent to which moral traits are accessible to one's self-concept (Aquino, Freeman, & Reed, et al., 2009) Participants were asked to read a list of moral characteristics that can describe a person (e.g., *caring, kind, friendly*) and then asked to rate their agreement with a variety of items in relation to these characteristics, representing participant's ability to make outward expressions of their morally relevant views. This scale was scored on a five-point scale (1=*Strongly disagree*, 5 = *Strongly agree*).

Main Survey Measures

Supervisor Similarity: Third parties' similarity towards their supervisor was measured under the framework of perceived similarity. Perceived similarity was assessed using a six-item measure developed by Liden, Wayne and Stilwell (1993). Sample items include (e.g., "This supervisor and I are similar in terms of our outlook, perspectives, and values", "I think that this supervisor and I will see things in the same way") and was measured on a five-point scale (1= *Strongly disagree*, 5 = *Strongly agree*).

Supervisor Recollection Task (Critical Incident): In an open-ended textbox response, participants were randomly assigned to either recall the details regarding a time when a co-worker (previously identified in the pre-screen survey) had been treated in an abusive (unfavorable, unfriendly or belligerent) or supportive (favorable, friendly, or non-belligerent) manner by their direct supervisor. Participants were asked to spend the next 5 minutes writing 4-6 sentences. Regardless of what response was given, participants were forced to wait at least 1 minute before moving on to the next survey item.

Open-Ended Emotions: In order to examine the open ended responses measuring emotions collected from the main survey, Linguistic Inquiry and Word Count **(**LIWC) software was used to analyze written responses for emotional context. Research has shown that the LIWC is an effective tool and that it can accurately identify emotion in language use (Tausczik & Pennebaker, 2010). The LWIC reads written text files and then compares each word from the contained text against a user-defined dictionary. This dictionary then identifies which words are associated with certain psychologically-relevant categories. Following a reading of the words, a percentage of total words that that match each of the dictionary categories is calculated. These dictionaries are the heart of the program, as they tell the text analysis which words to identify and classify. In the present study, the newest LIWC2015 library was used to assess the collected open-ended responses for the emotion of anger. In order to measure guilt, a custom library for the LIWC tool was added in the place of the LIWC 2015 library.

Following the participant's recollection of a prior interaction between their co-worker and supervisor, participants were asked to think and write about any emotions they may have experienced in response to the event. Participants were given as much time as needed to complete this task but could not spend less than 1 minute before moving on to the next survey item. These responses where then analyzed for emotional context and classification using the LIWC software. The percentage of anger and guilt related words used by each participant in their response was recorded. For example, if a participant wrote a 50-word response, and used 5 anger words (10%) they would receive a score of 10.

Moral Anger: Moral anger was measured using three items from Barclay, Skarlicki and Pugh (2005) that were modified to fit the needs of a third party context. In this measure, participants were asked the extent to which they felt, angry, upset and hostile in response to the

event previously identified in the critical incident task. This was measured on a five-point scale ranging from (1= *not at all* to 5= *extremely*). This measure is designed to specifically capture moral anger opposed to the generalized emotion of anger as it asks participants to interpret an event for which they were not directly harmed. As such, we can interpret the relationship between the identified justice violation and expressed emotions as capturing moral anger.

Guilt: Guilt was assessed using two separate combined measures. First guilt was measured using 6 items from the PANAS-X Scales (Watson & Clark, 1994), modified for use in a third party context. The six items were specifically chosen from the PANAS-X specification of guilt related items. In this measure, participants were asked the extent to which they felt particular emotional experiences such as: guilty, blameworthy, and dissatisfied with self, in response to the event previously identified in the critical incident task. This scale was scored on a five-point scale ranging from (1=*not at all* to 5= *extremely*).

All of the above scale measures for emotions were combined into one collective set of items in which the order of presentation was randomized.

Results

In the main survey, participants were exposed to a manipulation that required them to either recall a time when they had witnessed their supervisor treat a co-worker in an unfriendly manner or a time when they had witnessed their supervisor treat a co-worker in a supportive manner, Table 1 shows the means, standard deviations, and correlations for the study variables. While not directly testing the main hypothesis, in order to first examine the effects of this manipulation on the elicited moral emotions, independent-sample t-tests were performed for each dependant variable. As was expected, there was a significant difference between conditions on measures of moral anger through both scale measurement and self-report (Figure 1). Results of

the independent samples t-test show that mean moral anger differs between those who recalled an event of abusive supervision (M = 2.40, SD = 1.19, n = 40) and those who recalled a supportive interaction (M=1.50, SD = 0.85, n = 37), t (75) = 3.745, $p < .01$. This result was also consistent with open-ended measures of anger analyzed through text analysis, with anger-related words for the abusive condition occurring more frequently (M= 1.73, SD = 2.41, n= 40) than those in the supportive condition (M = 0.66, SD = 1.97, n= 37), t (75) =2.117, $p < .05$. However, no significant effect of condition was found for any other measure of emotion (Table 2).

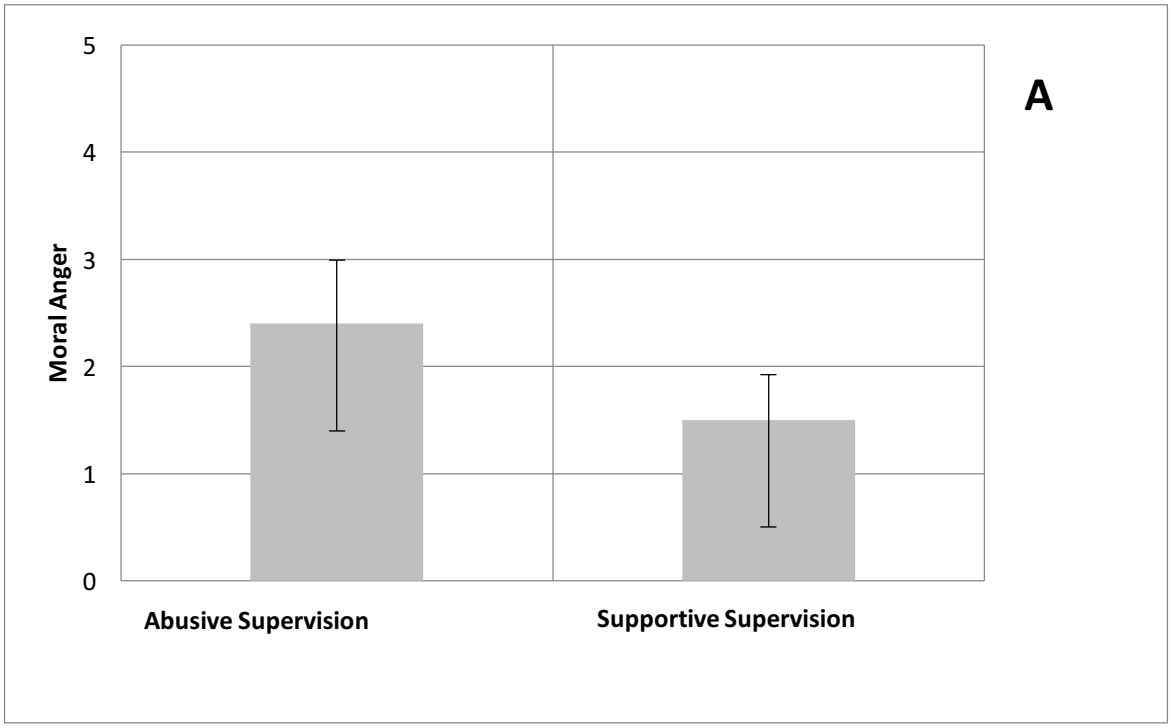

Figure 1a. Relationship between witnessed interaction and moral anger

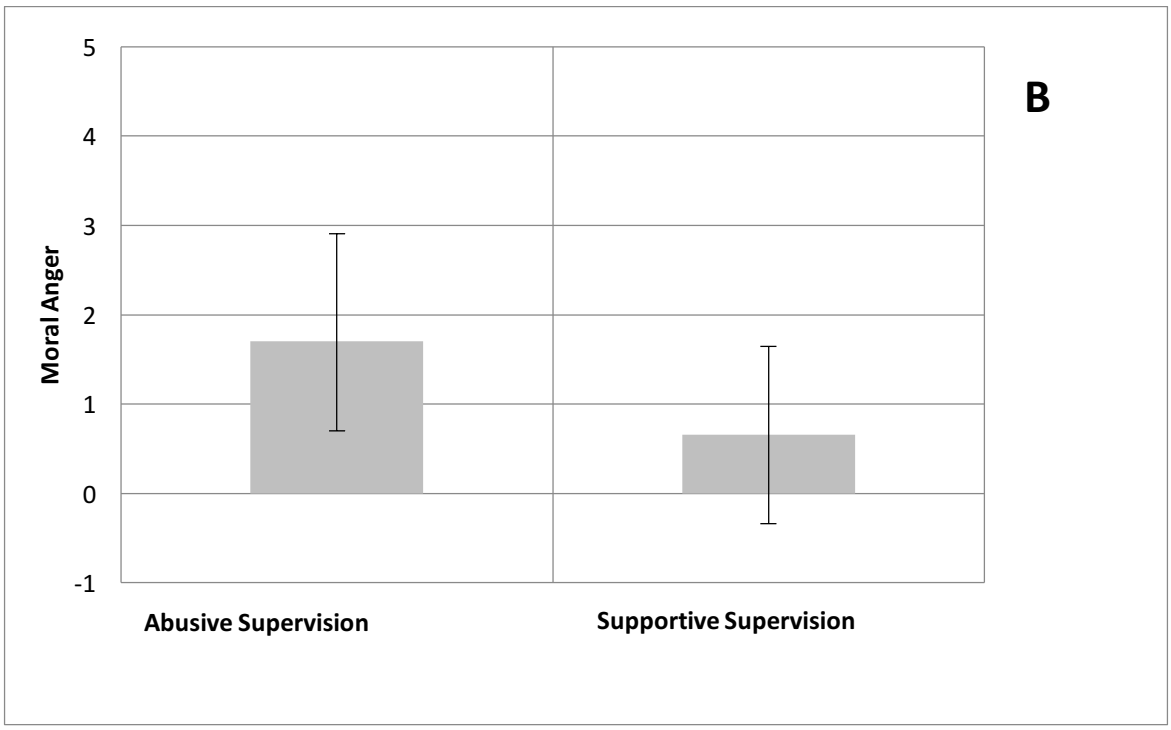

Figure 1b. Relationship between witnessed interaction and moral anger (LIWC analysis)

In order to test the main hypotheses hierarchical regression analysis was used. Hypothesis 1a predicted that the third-parties perceived similarity to their supervisor would moderate the relationship between abusive supervision and the moral emotion of anger, such that the effects would be stronger when third parties perceive themselves to be less similar to their supervisor. In order to test the hypothesized two-way interactions, we followed the procedures outlined by Aiken & West (1991), whereby abusive supervision was entered in Step 1 and the perceived supervisor similarity variable was mean-centered and entered in Step 1 as well. The interaction term of these two variables was entered in Step 2. Looking at the abusive supervision by perceived supervisor similarity interaction term, we find that it has a marginally significant effect on levels of anger-related words as coded by the LIWC text analysis on the open-ended responses (b = -1.382, p = 0.09), (Figure 2a). The interaction effect accounts for an additional

three percent of the variance in the use of anger-related words ($R^2 = 0.03$, $p > 0.05$). The effect of abusive supervision on anger in this case is significant when perceived supervisor similarity is low ($t = 2.47$, $p < 0.05$), but not when it is high ($t = 0.07$, *ns)* (Figure 2b). These results suggest some support for Hypothesis 1a. Levels of anger were also tested using a validated scale for moral anger. Again, the effect of abusive supervision by perceived supervisor similarity on levels of moral anger was found to be marginally significant ($b = -0.24$, $p = 0.09$) and the interaction effect accounts for an additional two percent of variance in moral anger ($R^2 = 0.02$, $p > 0.05$). In the case of the moral anger scale abusive supervision is also significant when perceived supervisor similarity is low ($t = 3.93$, $p < 0.05$), but not when it is high ($t = 1.57$, *ns)* (Figure 2b). These results suggest some support for Hypothesis 1a.

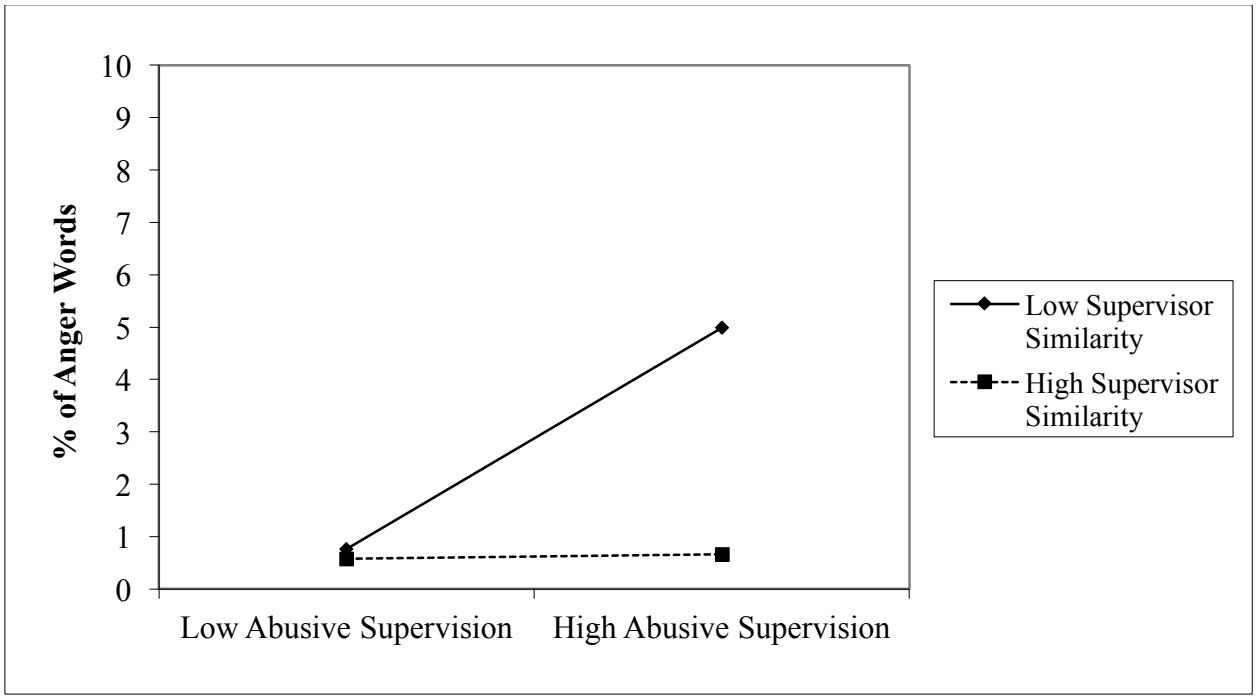

Figure 2a: This figure represents the moderately significant moderating effect of perceived supervisor similarity for abusive supervision on anger measured by text-analysis

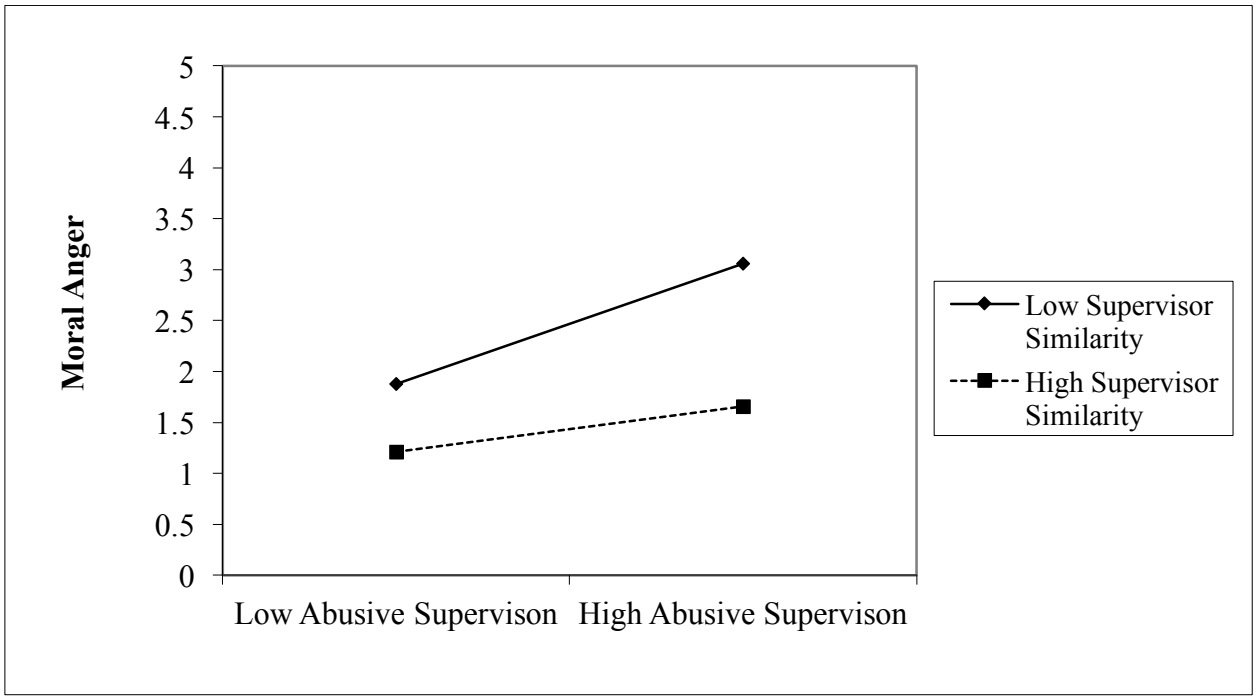

Figure 2b: This figure represents the moderately significant moderating effect of perceived supervisor similarity for abusive supervision on moral anger measured by likert-scale

Hypothesis 1b predicted that the third-party's perceived similarity to their supervisor would moderate the relationship between abusive supervision and the activated moral emotion of guilt, such that the effects would be more strongly positive when third parties perceive themselves to be more similar to their supervisor. As was the case for moral anger, guilt was analysed through both open-ended responses coded by the LIWC and scale assessment. To test this hypothesis we used the same regression procedures noted above. Looking at the abusive supervision by perceived supervisor similarity interaction we find that it does not significantly predict levels of guilt-related words as measured by the LIWC text analysis on open ended responses (b = -1.26, *ns*). For scale item measures of guilt, again the abusive supervision by perceived supervisor similarity interaction did not significantly predict reported guilt. (b = -0.10,

ns). These results indicate that perceived supervisor similarity does not effect measures of guilt. As such, Hypothesis 1b was not supported.

Hypothesis 2, predicted that moral identity would further strengthen the relationship between interactive effect of abusive supervision and supervisor similarity on moral emotions, such that a stronger sense of moral identity should increase the levels moral emotion felt. However, the abusive supervision by perceived supervisor similarity by moral identity three-way interaction did not significantly predict levels of anger related words measured by the LIWC text analysis on open ended responses (b = -1.40, *ns*) or for scale item measures of anger (b = -0.31, *ns)* . This pattern also followed for levels of guilt measured by open ended responses (b = -1.71 p > 0.05 ns) and guilt measured by scale (b = 0.13, *ns)*.

Table 1

Descriptive Statistics and Correlations

Variables	Means	SD	1	2	3	4	5
1. SupSim	4.2460	1.50533					-
2. MoralID	4.4911	0.60068	0.009				
3. OEAnger	1.9438	5.31516	-0.314**	0.053			
4. OEGuilt	1.2601	4.71894	-0.236*	0.059	0.764**		
5. Anger	2.0000	1.14354	-0.557**	0.000	0.362**	0.258*	
6. Guilt	1.4684	0.76053	-0.297**	-0.228**	0.113	0.011	0.623**

*** indicates p<0.01 (2-tailed) and * indicates p<0.05 (2-tailed) SupSim = perceived supervisor similarity, MoralID = moral identity, OEAnger = LIWC anger related words, OEGuilt= LIWC guilt related words, Anger=moral anger, Guilt = guilt.*

Table 2

Results of t-tests and Descriptive Statistics

Variable	Condition						95% CI for Mean Difference		
	Abusive			Friendly					
	M	SD	n	M	SD	n		t	df
OEAnger	1.73	2.41	40	0.66	1.97	37	0.0630-2.0719	2.117	75
OEGuilt	0.76	1.22	40	0.78	2.09	37	-0.7995-0.7438	-0.072	75
Anger	2.40	1.19	40	1.50	0.85	37	0.5908-5.9555	3.745*	75
Guilt	1.63	0.89	40	1.28	0.55	37	-0.0587-0.6793	1.958	75

*** indicates p<0.01 * indicates p<0.05 OEAnger = LIWC anger related wordsr, OEGuiltL= LIWC guilt related words, Anger=moral anger, Guilt = guilt.*

Table 3

Regression results (b-values) for the marginally significant interaction on OEAnger

Variable	Step 1	Step 2
AbSup:	2.04 (1.14)	2.155 (1.13)
SupSim	-1.025 (0.38)**	-0.62 (0.68)
AbSup*SupSim		-1.382 (0.82)
ΔR^2	0.135**	0.32

*** indicates p<0.01 and * indicates p<0.05. Standard error values are in parenthesis. AbSup = abusive supervision, SupSim = perceived supervisor similarity*

Table 4

Regression result (b-values for marginally significant interaction on Anger

Variable	Step 1	Step 2
AbSup:	0.79 (0.20)**	0.81 (0.19)**
SupSim	-0.391 (0.07)**	-0.22 (0.12)
AbSup*SupSim		-0.24 (0.14)
ΔR^2	0.43**	0.02

*** indicates p<0.01 and * indicates p<0.05. Standard error values are in parenthesis. AbSup = abusive supervision, SupSim = perceived supervisor similarity*

General Discussion:

The aim of this research was to examine how third parties' emotions develop as a result of witnessing abusive supervision directed towards their coworkers. Specifically, this research sought to identify relational factors that may impact of deontic reactions by examining the moderating effects of perceived supervisor similarity. As expected, analyses confirmed that

witnessing acts of abusive supervision compared to witnessing positive interactions did significantly increase the levels of anger felt by the third party in measures of both open-ended and likert-style measurement. However, there was no significant effect on self-reported measures of guilt and only a marginally significant effect on the scale measures. Nevertheless, these results do suggest that moral emotions regardless of their nature can be experienced simply by witnessing an act of abusive supervision.

Bringing perceived supervisor similarity into the picture, it was hypothesized that the degree to which third-parties perceived themselves to be similar to their supervisor would moderate the extent to which these emotions were felt. Through the use of an online survey, it was found that measures of perceived supervisor similarity did not significantly moderate the amount of either guilt or anger felt by the third-party as a result of witnessing abusive supervision. It was believed that when a third-party perceived themselves to be more similar to their supervisor that they would experience reduced feelings of moral anger and greater feelings of guilt. Regression analysis revealed a marginally significant effect for supervisor similarity in the correct direction for anger but virtually no effect for guilt. These results were consistent for both open-ended and likert-style measures of emotion. Finally, with the inclusion of moral identity, again there was no significant effect of the hypothesized three-way interaction between abusive supervision, supervisor similarity and moral identity. While little support was found in the present study for the hypotheses, the marginally significant interaction effects of supervisor similarity suggest that there may be more to examine when considering the relationship between third party and supervisor on emotions.

Theoretical Implications:

Although the results of this study failed to identify perceived supervisor similarity to be an important factor in predicting moral emotions in response to witnessed abusive supervision, it still makes a number of important contributions to the literature. First regardless of the examined moderating variables, the results of this study continue to enforce the tenets of deontic justice in that an act of abusive supervision can influence third-party responses. Furthermore, while there has been a variety of research examining third-party reactions to injustice, studies considering the role of workplace relationships on deontic reactions have focused on attitudes towards the target of abuse (eg., Mitchell, 2015; Reich 2015). In the present study, the pre-existing relationships between the third party and the instigator (the supervisor) were examined in order to extend the literature towards a greater consideration of the variety of relationships that can be formed between employees, and are an important situational factor in the workplace.

Practical Implications:

Darley and Pitman (2003) suggested that there are two major response impulses to witnessing mistreatment: punishment of the perpetrator and aid directed towards the victim. It follows, third parties that moral emotions experienced as a result of abusive supervision may be the key factor that drives individuals to engage in harmful behaviours or supportive behaviours. First, a third party may want to get back at the perceived perpetrator, with more anger leading to a stronger impulse to restore justice. Anger has been found to motivate third parties to harm transgressors even when doing so incurs personal cost to the third party. (Turillo et al., 2002). Secondly, third parties have also been shown to engage in prosocial behaviour, demonstrating support and care directed towards the target of abuse. Examples of co-worker support include, providing the co-worker with emotional support and providing the co-worker with help to handle the situation (Westring & Ryan 2009). Since the relationships between third-parties and their

supervisors may play some role in the development of the emotions that fuel these behaviours, managers may need to become more aware of their managerial style and how they interact with subordinates.

Limitations and Future Research Directions:

As is true in any research, the present study was not without its limitations and it is important to acknowledge these moving forward. Although the results of the present study did not fully support the hypotheses, the lack of findings offers unique insights into potential issues when conducting research of this kind, as well as directions for future research that may resolve them. The primary concern in the present data analysis was the effectiveness of using the Linguistic Inquiry and Word Count (LIWC) software as a primary means to measure emotion. While the LIWC has been validated as an effective tool for text analysis, ultimately its ability to generate reliable results depends on the total amount of text analyzed. Considering that the main measure of LIWC analysis is a returned percentage of words that match a defined dictionary, this means that the smaller the word count of the text response, the less telling the output. In the case of the present study, participants were not restricted in any way to the length of response they could provide in the text entry box. The only restriction that was forcefully enforced was that they must remain on the page for at least one minute as controlled by the Qualtrics software. As a result, the length of text responses that were recorded varied in both length and quality. The average length of response that was analyzed was 43 words. With such small responses sizes, it is highly possible that this was not enough language content to produce accurate interpretations of emotional content from the LIWC output, as any text with fewer than 50 words should be looked at with a certain degree of skepticism (LIWC, 2015). Examining the correlation results both text-analyzed measures of anger and guilt were strongly correlated ($r = 0.76$, $p < 0.01$)

suggesting that this form of analysis may not truly be capturing the desired constructs. Taking this one step further, using open-ended measures also makes the assumption that everyone is equally competent in their ability to perceive, judge and describe the quality and magnitude of personal events or experiences (Gottschalk, 1997). Upon a manual examination of the provided responses, this error in assumption can be clearly seen. For example, while some responses were long, explaining not only the emotions they felt but the underlying reasons for what caused them, other responses were small and contained only a brief description (Appendix A). As such, future research examining self-reported emotions through the use of text-analysis software should include a tighter screening of responses prior to the software analysis and should consider throwing out poor responses. It may also be worth investigating the effect of forcing participants to produce a minimum amount of text length, opposed to simply imposing a time based restriction.

Another concern regarding the chosen measurements of this study is the measure of the relationship chosen between the third-party and supervisor. The chosen measure of perceived supervisor similarity was based on the fact that it has been shown to contribute the the development of cooperation, empathy, shared norms and mutual influence (Hogg, 2011). Research involving abusive supervision has also suggested that third parties are more likely to agree with abusive supervisors to whom they are similar (Tepper et al., 2011). However, there are a variety of other leadership dynamics that involve a form of relationship between the supervisor and their subordinates that were not examined in the present study. For example, Leader-Member Exchange Theory (LMX) emphasizes the differing relationships that supervisors develop with subordinates within a work unit (Graen & Scandura, 1987). However, LMX is a multidimensional construct. Prior research has identified a variety of factors that may influence

the quality of the exchange relationship, including: liking and implicit theories (Engle & Lord, 1997). Interestingly, one variable that has been shown to consistently impact on levels of liking is the examined variable in the present study of perceived similarity (Byrne, 1971). Engle & Lord (1997) found that liking was strongly related to subordinate ratings of LMX quality and that perceived similarity was strongly related to both LMX and liking, completely mediating the effects. With this is mind, it is possible that perceived supervisor similarity may only be a small part of a bigger picture when examining relationships between subordinates and supervisors. Considering that the results of the present study produced some marginally significant results, perhaps, it may reflect that only a portion of the potential moderating effects were examined, leaving out better indicators of the overall relationship.

Finally, since it has been shown that the third-party evaluations of the target of abuse also play a role in examining emotions in response to abusive supervision (Mitchell et. al, 2015), the presently used variables should not be examined in isolation. Future research should take into consideration both the third-party's beliefs about the target of abuse while also considering their relationship with the transgressor to better capture the greater dynamics of the various interactions at play in the workplace environment.

Conclusion:

Overall, while the prediction that supervisor similarity would influence the emotions felt by a third party was not fully supported, there is some evidence to suggest that the relationship between the third-party and supervisor may play some role in the development of emotions following a witnessed act of abusive supervision. The results from this study and the outlined limitations begin to highlight the gap that exists when examining a third party's relationship with their supervisor and brings up a greater concern. If perceived supervisor similarity does not seem

to moderate the relationship between abuse and emotions, perhaps it is possible that there are other outstanding characteristics of the supervisor or beliefs from the third-party that play a greater role in influencing the relationship. As workplace interactions continue to play an important role in the modern day workplace, this issue will become increasingly more important and deserves further investigation by future researchers.

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Appendix A:

Sample Open Emotion Responses

Detailed Responses

"I did not witness the event firsthand but heard the story from GM later that day. I could relate to his irritation, as it isn't fair for him not to be given a chance to explain himself. I have to wonder what LG thinks of him if she automatically assumes he has not started work on time. I felt irritated on his behalf. At the same time, I can see the misunderstanding happening, I just don't think she handled it in the right way. There is already tension in the workplace and getting on people's case doesn't help with attitudes towards management."

"I felt sorry for CP since I know what it can be like on the job but knew that he had behaved inappropriately and had to be let go. I felt indignation on his part at how his termination was handled but also a feeling of 'thank god, I'm not in the crossfires here.' Overall, it was a very uncomfortable experience because all of the upper level management wanted to handle it differently and kept asking myself and the other manager what we thought. We were both new and felt torn between our jobs and our friend CP."

Short Responses

"Upset, discouraged, I felt it was unnecessary and inappropriate, not professional"

"I experienced happy, proud, and grateful emotions in response to the interaction being recalled."

Formal Notification of Ethics Clearance:

Gmail

Evan Prowse <evanprowse@gmail.com>

Ethics Clearance (ORE # 21412)

1 message

ORE Ethics Application System <OHRAC@uwaterloo.ca> Mon, Mar 14, 2016 at 11:59 AM
To: djbrown@uwaterloo.ca
Cc: shanig@uwaterloo.ca, eejprows@uwaterloo.ca

Dear Researcher:

The recommended revisions/additional information requested in the ethics review of your application for the study:

Title: Third Party Interactions At Work
ORE #: 21412
Principal/Co-Investigator: Doug Brown (djbrown@uwaterloo.ca)
Student Investigator: Samuel Hanig (shanig@uwaterloo.ca)
Student Investigator: Evan Prowse (eejprows@uwaterloo.ca)

have been reviewed and are considered acceptable. A University of Waterloo Research Ethics Committee is pleased to inform you this study has been given ethics clearance.

A signed copy of the notification of ethics clearance will be sent to the Principal Investigator (or Faculty Supervisor in the case of student research). Ethics approval to start this research is effective as of the date of this email. The above named study is to be conducted in accordance with the submitted application (Form 101/101A) and the most recent approved versions of all supporting materials.

University of Waterloo Research Ethics Committees operate in compliance with the institution's guidelines for research with human participants, the Tri-Council Policy Statement for the Ethical Conduct for Research Involving Humans (TCPS, 2nd edition), Internalization Conference on Harmonization: Good Clinical Practice (ICH-GCP), the Ontario Personal Health Information Protection Act (PHIPA), and the applicable laws and regulations of the province of Ontario. Both Committees are registered with the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services under the Federal Wide Assurance, FWA00021410, and IRB registration number IRB00002419 (Human Research Ethics Committee) and IRB00007409 (Clinical Research Ethics Committee).

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Renewal: Multi-year research must be renewed at least once every 12 months unless a more frequent review has otherwise been specified by the Research Ethics Committee on the signed notification of ethics clearance. Studies will only be renewed if the renewal report is received and approved before the expiry date (Form 105 - https://uwaterloo.ca/research/office-research-ethics/research-human-participants/renewals). Failure to submit renewal reports by the expiry date will result in the investigators being notified ethics clearance has been suspended and Research Finance being notified the ethics clearance is no longer valid.

Modification: Amendments to this study are to be submitted through a modification request (Form 104 - https://uwaterloo.ca/research/office-research-ethics/research-human-participants/modifications) and may only be implemented once the proposed changes have received ethics clearance.

Adverse event: Events that adversely affect a study participant must be reported as soon as possible, but no later than 24 hours following the event, by contacting the Chief Ethics Officer. Submission of an adverse event form (Form 106 - https://uwaterloo.ca/research/office-research-ethics/research-human-participants/report-problems) is to follow the next business day.

Deviation: Unanticipated deviations from the approved study protocol or approved documentation or procedures are to be reported within 7 days of the occurrence using a protocol deviation form (Form 107 - https://uwaterloo.ca/research/office-research-ethics/research-human-participants/report-problems).