



Leadership & Organization Development Journal

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Article information:

To cite this document:

Jibao Gu Jun Song Jianlin Wu , (2016), "Abusive supervision and employee creativity in China", Leadership & Organization Development Journal, Vol. 37 Iss 8 pp. 1187 - 1204

Permanent link to this document:

<http://dx.doi.org/10.1108/LODJ-02-2015-0021>

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Abusive supervision and employee creativity in China

Departmental identification as mediator and face as moderator

Employee
creativity
in China

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Received 13 February 2015
Revised 29 June 2015
Accepted 26 October 2015

Abstract

Purpose – The purpose of this paper is to examine how abusive supervision affects employee creativity, incorporating departmental identification as a mediator and face as a moderator based on social identity theory.

Design/methodology/approach – The study sample consisted of 207 full-time employees in China.

Findings – Results indicate that abusive supervision is negatively related to employee creativity and this relationship is fully mediated by departmental identification. In addition, face held by employees plays a moderating role: the direct effect of abusive supervision on departmental identification and the mediating effect of departmental identification are stronger when face is low rather than high.

Practical implications – This study also has major practical implications for organizations. First, the organizations should fully understand the harmfulness of abusive supervision and try to avoid abusive behaviors. Second, the organizations could enhance employee creativity by promoting departmental identification. Third, employees who hold low face should get more attention and support.

Originality/value – This study makes several theoretical implications. First, findings contribute to enriching one's understanding of the relationship between abusive supervision and employee creativity in China. Second, the domain of abusive supervision is expanded by empirically testing departmental identification as a crucial psychological mechanism explaining the abusive supervision – employee creativity relationship. Third, this study also advances one's understanding of social identity process by examining empirically moderating effects of cultural value in the relationship between abusive supervision and employee creativity.

Keywords Face, Employee creativity, Abusive supervision, Departmental identification

Paper type Research paper

Over the past decade, the topic of abusive supervision has received increasing research attention. In the USA, 10-16 percent of workers experience varying degrees of abusive supervision (Hoobler and Brass, 2006). However, according to Sina, China's biggest web portal, nearly 50 percent of workers had encountered abusive treatment from their supervisors in the workplace. In China, supervisors highlight discipline and authority (Pellegrini and Scandura, 2008), and tend to control most of the valuable resources (Hwang, 1987). Employees need to be unquestionably obedient and respectful to the orders of supervisors (Farh *et al.*, 2007) for the effective resources. Consequently, Chinese employees have high endurance for abusive supervision in the Chinese context (Wu *et al.*, 2009), which leads to the prevalence of abusive supervision in China.

This research was supported by the National Natural Science Foundation of China (NSFC; No. 71371177) and the Anhui Provincial Natural Science Foundation (APNSF; No. 1308085MG110). The opinions expressed in this paper are those of the authors and do not necessary reflect the views of NNSF and APNSF.



However, limited empirical studies have focused on the effects of abusive supervision within Chinese culture (Lin *et al.*, 2013). How does abusive supervision affect the creativity or performance of employees within the Chinese context?

Previous studies on the effect of abusive supervision on employee creativity are limited and inconsistent, with some studies finding negative relationships (Liu *et al.*, 2012; Zhang *et al.*, 2014), and others finding a curvilinear relationship (Lee *et al.*, 2013). These inconsistent findings suggest that the effect of abusive supervision on employee creativity may not be direct, and the underlying mechanism through which abusive supervision influences employee creativity remains unclear. Moreover, samples in the existing studies were adapted from different countries (e.g. USA, South Korea). Such inconsistent results can be attributed to different cultural factors and moderating mechanisms involved in each study. Hence, more studies are needed to identify mediators and moderators that can clarify how and when abusive supervision influences employee creativity (Lee *et al.*, 2013).

The current study makes an effort in this research direction. Theoretical arguments have indicated that psychological mechanism is crucial in explaining the linkages between abusive supervision and employee creativity (Liu *et al.*, 2012). Intrinsic motivation is considered a theoretically and empirically powerful psychological mechanism through which abusive supervision affects employee creativity (Liu *et al.*, 2012; Zhang *et al.*, 2014). Additional evidence for the motivational process can be provided from a social identity perspective (Ellemers *et al.*, 2004). Identification, like intrinsic motivation, stimulates employees to focus on their work (Ryan and Deci, 2000). Accordingly, the present study draws on social identity theory to posit departmental identification as a mediating mechanism to explain the relationship between abusive supervision and employee creativity.

The process of identification is influenced by individual differences, but limited relevant research work has been done (Epitropaki and Martin, 2005). Social identity theory suggests that an individual's self-esteem can be improved (Abrams and Hogg, 1988) and the depersonalization process can be reinforced (Hogg, 2001) in the identification process. As one of the most prominent Chinese cultural values (Oetzel *et al.*, 2001), face represents an individual's attitude to self-esteem. Individuals who care about face are conscious of their appearance and whether they can share knowledge (Huang *et al.*, 2008) as they want to mingle with others, which may be connected with the process of depersonalization. Thus, face, as cultural value, is likely to affect the process of identification. We focus on the moderating effect of face between abusive supervision and departmental identification.

Theoretical background and hypotheses

Abusive supervision

Tepper (2000) conceptualized abusive supervision as "subordinates' perceptions of the extent to which supervisors engage in the sustained display of hostile verbal and nonverbal behaviors, excluding physical contact" (p. 178). Examples of abusive supervision include humiliating employees in public, mocking, belittlement, rudeness, breaking promises and taking some other inappropriate behaviors (Tepper, 2000). According to Harris *et al.* (2007), abusive supervision is characterized by the following: a subjective assessment from employees wherein different employees have difference perceptions when confronted with the same supervisor; a "sustained display" rather than temporal event; not belonging to the scope of violent behaviors; and actions themselves instead of the intentions of the behaviors.

Abusive supervision results in unfavorable consequences. First, abusive supervision is a workplace stressor that is positively related to detrimental psychological outcomes, such as increased depression (Haggard *et al.*, 2011), decreased psychological need satisfaction (Lian *et al.*, 2012), and poor affective well-being (Kernan *et al.*, 2011). Moreover, employees may respond to abusive supervision with undesirable life outcomes. For example, Carlson *et al.* (2012) observed that abusive supervision leads to employees' job burnout, which in turn intensifies work-family conflict. In addition, several studies have revealed the adverse effects of abusive supervision in the workplace. Employees are likely to react against abusive supervision by reducing performance and withholding citizenship behaviors because of lacking procedural justice (Zellars *et al.*, 2002), distrusting in supervisors (Wu *et al.*, 2009) and producing emotional exhaustion (Aryee *et al.*, 2008).

Although a number of scholars have investigated the undesirable outcomes of abusive supervision (Tepper *et al.*, 2009), empirical results about the role of abusive supervision in creativity are scare and inconsistent. Liu *et al.* (2012) and Zhang *et al.* (2014) found a negative relationship linking abusive supervision to employee creativity. One important exception is that Lee *et al.* (2013) found a curvilinear relationship linking abusive supervision to employee creativity in the context of government. The present study, from the perspective of social identity, attempts to explore how abusive supervision impacts employee creativity and the internal mechanisms in different kinds of organizations in China.

Social identity theory

Social identity theory has been successfully applied in the organizational context (Van Dick *et al.*, 2008). Social identity is defined as "that part of an individual's self-concept which is derived from his knowledge of his membership of a social group (or groups) together with the value and emotional significance attached to that membership" (Tajfel, 1978, p. 63). Identification is rooted within social identity theory, which is defined as "the perception of oneness with or belongingness to some human aggregate" (Ashforth and Mael, 1989, p. 21). Identification has two basic motivations, namely, the demands for self-categorization (Ravishankar and Pan, 2008) and self-enhancement (Epitropaki and Martin, 2005).

According to McAllister and Bigley (2002), individuals' self-concept is formed by their perceptions of the treatment from others; hence, employees' self-definition is influenced by the perceived treatment within the department. Given that the leaders play an important role in representing the department, the leader's behavior may be a major antecedent of identification (Zhang *et al.*, 2012). It conveys a signal whether employees are respected or valued (Jian *et al.*, 2012). As identification increases, employees will initiatively work for the success or goals of groups (Mael and Ashforth, 1992). Otherwise, if identification decreases, they are separated from the groups (Tajfel, 1982).

Furthermore, some scholars have suggested variability among individuals in terms of understanding the process of identification (Mael and Ashforth, 1992; Ryan and Deci, 2000). Thus, individual differences should be considered in studying the process of identification. For example, Epitropaki and Martin (2005) found that the positive relationship between transactional leadership and organizational identification is stronger for employees with a connected self-schema.

To clarify the effect of abusive supervision on employee creativity from social identity perspective, the present study tests a specific type of identification (departmental identification) as mediator and a specific cultural value (face) as a moderator.

Abusive supervision and employee creativity

Employee creativity refers to “the generation of novel and appropriate ideas, products, processes or solutions that are useful or appropriate to the situation” (Thatcher and Brown, 2010, p. 291). Inherently, creativity is a complex process filled with risks (Shalley and Gilson, 2004) and even failures. However, when employees are intrinsically motivated to perform tasks, they tend to accept challenges, propose ingenious ideas or solutions and then become creative (George and Zhou, 2001; Deci and Ryan, 2008). Thus, intrinsic motivation is an important component of creativity (Amabile, 1996). Persistent efforts provide the foundation for enhancing creativity (Hirst *et al.*, 2009). Specifically, with persistent efforts, employees can seek extensive knowledge and deep processing strategies, which in turn, facilitates their capability to handle complex and uncertain tasks (Elliot and McGregor, 2001). In addition, support from the supervisor is extremely important for creative processes (Carmeli *et al.*, 2013), which can stimulate employees to generate novel ideas (Amabile, 1996).

In essence, abusive supervision is a workplace stressor, which leads to employees’ stress reactions (Lin *et al.*, 2013). In general, individuals will utilize limited personal resources to handle stressful circumstances (Hobfoll, 2002). Thus, in the context wherein employees experience prolonged emotional or psychological mistreatment from an abusive supervisor (Harvey *et al.*, 2007), employees must invest large amounts of psychological resources to cope with the stress resulting from abusive supervision. By doing so, their psychological resources are gradually depleted, thereby aggravating their mental exhaustion (Wu and Hu, 2009). Abused employees gradually decrease their emotional and psychological connection with their jobs and departments – because of exhaustion – begin spending working time on private affairs and daydreaming instead of handling work-related issues (Chi and Liang, 2013). Without sufficient time and efforts to focus on their jobs, abused employees are less likely to create useful and novel ideas, thereby decreasing their creativity.

With increased exposure to abusive supervision, which includes public criticism, inconsiderate actions, rudeness and derogating comments, employees are more inclined to have feelings of being humiliated and belittled (Keashly and Harvey, 2005). They may even doubt the department’s attitudes to their contributions and the meaning of their jobs (Rafferty and Restubog, 2011). As a result, abused employees would be further unsatisfied with their jobs and entertain thoughts of quitting (Tepper, 2000). Accordingly, employees with an abusive supervisor develop little interest in their job (Liu *et al.*, 2012), thereby decreasing employees’ internal motivation. Consequently, abused employees are less likely to proactively accept challenges and put forward ingenious ideas or solutions, thereby repressing their creativity. Taken together, we predict:

H1. Abusive supervision is negatively related to employee creativity.

Mediating role of departmental identification

Departmental identification is expected to mediate the relationship between abusive supervision and employee creativity. Departmental identification reflects the strength of the psychological relationship linking employee to the department (Van Knippenberg and Sleebos, 2006). Employees who have identification with the department will regard the goals of the department as their own (Haslam, 2004) and are willing to strive for the departmental interests and success (Carmeli *et al.*, 2007).

Employees’ departmental identification will be destroyed by abusive supervision. As employees’ self-knowledge is influenced by how others treat them (McAllister and

Bigley, 2002) and in workplaces where supervisors play an important role, employees' understanding of themselves tends to be influenced by their supervisor's behaviors to some level. Abusive supervisors always treat employees with hostile attitudes, even mocking or accusing employees in public (Tepper, 2000). Thus, when employees are unfairly treated by an abusive supervisor, the former will think that their efforts and contributions are not respected or accepted (Jian *et al.*, 2012). Furthermore, employees may doubt whether their capabilities can meet the requirements of the department and feel isolated. Depending on these situations, abused employees often find it difficult to perceive a sense of belonging to their department. Thus, they are less likely to define themselves as a member of the department, thereby inhibiting departmental identification.

As departmental identification diminishes, the psychological linkage between the employee and the department is weakened, mentally alienating employees from the department. Thus, to consider collective interests as their personal interest is difficult for these employees and their intrinsic motivation to devote their best efforts for the department is repressed (Van Knippenberg and Sleebos, 2006). Lowly identified employees are unwilling to come up with novel opinions and suggestions because of lack of intrinsic motivation. With such weak psychological connection to the department, employees will not care about the obstacles which can hinder the department's progress and status. They will also not bother about the potential failures in the process of overcoming obstacles, even though these failures can lead to negative effects on departmental performance. Hence, employees will not invest sustained efforts in avoiding potential failures and risks, which will weaken their capability (e.g. knowledge absorption capacity) to handle complex and uncertain tasks in the long run. Consequently, such employees lack the capabilities to put forward novel ideas and creative solutions for achieving department's goals and overcoming barriers, hence exhibiting less creativity. Overall, abusive supervision will undermine departmental identification, thereby reducing the creativity of employees. Therefore, we predict:

H2. Departmental identification mediates the negative relationship between abusive supervision and employee creativity.

The moderating role of face

Face originates from China (Chan, 2006), which "depicts the pattern of orientations in an interpersonal and hierarchical connection and social behaviors to enhance one's face and to avoid losing one's face" (Cheung *et al.*, 2001, p. 408). It is a kind of Chinese values (Matsudaira, 2003) that is based on long-term traditional culture. Although issues about face are universal (Huang *et al.*, 2008), the unique Confucian culture makes face more salient in China than in the western countries (Redding and Ng, 1983). The prominent position of face in China can be reflected in an old saying: "Every person needs face; every tree needs [a] bark." Within a Confucian cultural context, face is connected with a person's self-esteem (Hwang and Hu, 2010). Individuals with high face tend to care more about their self-esteem (Hwang, 2006) and pursue a higher level of self-esteem. They are happy to share knowledge with others and careful of how to dress (Huang *et al.*, 2008), because they want to be a member of the people around them.

Compared with those who hold low face, high-face ones have higher demand for their self-esteem and care more about their self-esteem. Self-esteem implies a kind of self-concept that he is a person of value (Sowislo and Orth, 2013). Because identification contributes to enhancing employees' feelings of self-worth (Smidts *et al.*, 2001) and

thereby improving self-esteem (Abrams and Hogg, 1988), high-face ones will be more inclined to maintain a stable identification with the department where they work. Given that supervisors represent the department, high-face employees will also try harder to keep harmonious relationships with their supervisors. By doing so, such employees are more likely to hold high-quality relationships with their supervisors, thereby keeping more stable identification with their supervisor and department (Huang *et al.*, 2014).

On the other hand, individuals will be depersonalized in the identification process (Hogg, 2001). The focus of their attention will be changed from individuality to prototypicality in the process of identification (Epitropaki and Martin, 2005). High-face employees are more likely to consider the situational needs (Hwang and Hu, 2010), thereby adopting more behaviors (e.g. dressing appropriately and sharing knowledge) to cater to others. They are more inclined to integrate into the collective. Thus, compared with those with low face, employees with high face will pay more attention to their membership in the collective instead of individuality. Consequently, for high-face employees, the process of depersonalization is more likely to be strengthened and the identification with the department becomes more stable.

Overall, the departmental identification of high-face employees is less susceptible to the external environment. Therefore, the negative effect of abusive supervision on departmental identification will be buffered for employees with high face. By contrast, the effect of abusive supervision on departmental identification is relatively strong among low-face employees. Therefore, it is reasonable to assume that the negative effect of abusive supervision on departmental identification will be moderated by face. Thus, we predict:

- H3.* The relationship between abusive supervision and departmental identification is moderated by face, such that the relationship is weaker with high face and stronger with low face.

As shown in the theoretical framework, departmental identification mediates the relationship between abusive supervision and employee creativity and face moderates the relationship between abusive supervision and departmental identification. Based on the notion of the moderating role of face in the relationship between abusive supervision and departmental identification and the positive relationship linking departmental identification to employee creativity, referring to the logic of moderated mediation model (Edwards and Lambert, 2007), there is a reason to believe that the mediating effect of departmental identification is also moderated by face. As previously discussed, low-face employees are more likely to react to abusive supervision by diminishing departmental identification, and the negative effect of abusive supervision on such employees' creativity through departmental identification can be enhanced as well. In particular, when employees who possess high face are less sensitive to abusive supervisors via maintaining departmental identification, abusive supervision has a weaker indirect influence on employee creativity. Conversely, low-face employees are more sensitive to abusive supervisors by reducing the feelings of belongingness and identification to the department, hence, abusive supervision has a stronger indirect influence on employee creativity. Based on above, we propose:

- H4.* Face moderates the mediating effect of departmental identification on the abusive supervision-creativity relationship, such that the mediating effect is stronger when the level of face is low rather than high.

Figure 1 shows the research model.

Method

Sample

Participants were recruited by a convenience sampling procedure from six organizations in three industries in Central China (thereby, enhancing the generalizability of our research), including sales and related, finance and government. These participants were contacted and invited to participate in the study by the researchers. Paper-based questionnaires were distributed to employees on site and were collected on the spot. During the pilot phase, participants were asked to provide comments on the questionnaire to guarantee the quality of the questionnaire. In formal research, participants were informed of the purpose of the survey and the procedures of how to fill in the questionnaire. Participants were requested to evaluate their own level of creativity, departmental identification and face, and the level of perceived abusive supervision in the department. All information provided by the employees was assured to be kept confidential. In all, 250 questionnaires were distributed, and 243 were returned (a 97.2 percent response rate). Of these, 30 questionnaires were discarded owing to missing data. The demographic profile of the 213 valid participants is presented in Table I.

Measures

All measurement items were adapted from the existing literature to ensure validity. All English measurements were first translated into Chinese by a professor in the

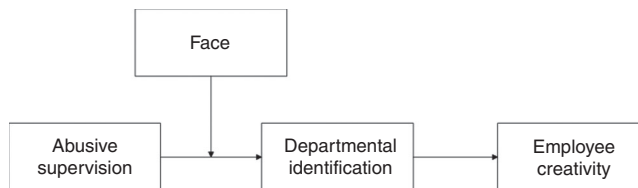


Figure 1.
Conceptual model

Item	Category	Frequency	%
Gender	Male	113	53.1
	Female	100	46.9
Age	20 years or less	4	1.9
	21-30	110	51.7
	31-40	80	37.7
	41-50	18	8.2
	51 years or more	1	0.5
Tenure	Less than 1 year	55	25.6
	2-4 years	92	43
	5-7 years	43	20.3
	8-10 years	12	5.8
	More than 10 years	11	5.3
Education level	Associate's degree (e.g. a two-year education diploma)	49	23.1
	Bachelor's degree	137	64.3
	Master's degree or above	27	12.6
Type of ownership	State-owned company	82	38.5
	Non-state-owned company	131	61.5

Note: $n = 213$

Table I.
Demographic profile
of participants

management area to avoid the problem of semantic discrepancies in the Chinese and English editions. Then, the Chinese questionnaire was translated back into English. Finally, a pretest was conducted, and some terms were appropriately modified to adopt specific research context. All items in the present questionnaire were measured with a five-point scale.

Perceived abusive supervision was assessed using the 15-item scale proposed by Tepper (2000). A sample item is as follows: "Supervisor tells me my thoughts or feelings are stupid" (1 = never, 5 = very frequently).

Self-reported creativity was measured using the three-item scale proposed by Dul *et al.* (2011). A sample item is as follows: "I often come up with creative solutions to problem" (1 = strongly disagree, 5 = strongly agree). Self-reported creativity is the best choice because employees are the ones who best understand what makes them creative in the workplace (Shalley *et al.*, 2009).

Departmental identification was tested using the five-item scale proposed by Smidts *et al.* (2001). A sample item is as follows: "I experience a strong sense of belonging to my department" (1 = strongly disagree, 5 = strongly agree).

Face was measured using the five-item scale of Huang *et al.* (2008). A sample item is as follows: "I would like to share my knowledge in public, because it will make me gain face" (1 = strongly disagree, 5 = strongly agree).

Control variables. Employee demographics, including gender, age, education, and tenure were controlled in the current study, because these variables have a significant role in employee creativity (Zhou and George, 2003; Shalley and Gilson, 2004).

Results

Validity and reliability

Confirmatory factor analysis is performed to assess the reliability and validity of the multi-item measurement scale. Table II shows that Cronbach's α ranges from 0.77 to 0.89, indicating that all variables have acceptable reliability. All item loadings are higher than the 0.70 criterion. Table II also shows that composite reliability ranges from 0.87 to 0.92, which are above the 0.70 recommended levels. All construct's average variance extracted (AVE) scores range from 0.57 to 0.76, which are higher than the 0.5 criterion. These results indicate that the convergent validity of our measurement instrument is good. This study also compares the relationship between the correlations among constructs and square root of the AVE scores to assess the discriminant validity of the items. Table III indicates that the square root of the AVE scores for each construct is greater than the correlations among the constructs, thus confirming the discriminant validity.

Descriptive statistics and intercorrelations

Table III summarizes the means, standard deviations and correlations for all variables. The mean of abusive supervision in Table III ($M = 1.70$, $SD = 0.70$) is similar to those of

Table II.
Loadings, Cronbach's α , composite reliability, and average variance extracted (AVE)

Variables	Loading	Cronbach's α	Composite reliability	AVE
Abusive supervision	0.70-0.79	0.89	0.91	0.57
Employee creativity	0.85-0.90	0.84	0.91	0.76
Departmental identification	0.79-0.91	0.89	0.92	0.75
Face	0.72-0.90	0.77	0.87	0.69

Variables	Mean	SD	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
1. Gender	-	-	-	-0.15*	-0.07	-0.03	0.03	-0.14*	0.05	-0.10
2. Age	-	-	-0.15*	-	-0.14*	0.55***	0.13	-0.19**	-0.09	0.03
3. Education level	-	-	-0.07	-0.14*	-0.03	-0.03	0.01	0.01	0.03	0.15*
4. Tenure	-	-	-0.03	0.55***	-0.03	0.12	0.12	-0.10	-0.02	0.06
5. Abusive supervision	1.70	0.70	0.03	0.13	0.01	0.12	(0.75)	-0.28***	-0.38***	0.01
6. Employee creativity	3.22	0.96	-0.14*	-0.19**	0.01	-0.10	-0.28***	(0.84)	0.42***	0.16*
7. Departmental identification	3.65	0.95	0.05	-0.09	0.03	-0.02	-0.38***	0.42***	(0.87)	0.01
8. Face	3.39	0.94	-0.10	0.03	0.15*	0.06	0.01	0.16*	0.01	(0.83)
9. Type of ownership (Method variance marker)	-	-	0.01	-0.03	0.06	0.05	0.00	-0.01	-0.07	-0.02

Notes: $n = 213$. Values in parentheses on the diagonal are the square roots of AVE of each scale. Unadjusted correlations appear below the diagonal; correlations adjusted for common method appear above the diagonal. * $p < 0.05$; ** $p < 0.01$; *** $p < 0.001$

Table III.
Means, standard
deviations,
correlations, and
square roots of AVE
in diagonals

other studies conducted in China (e.g. Aryee *et al.*, 2008; Zhang *et al.*, 2014), which is also higher than those studies using samples from the West: for instance, Tepper *et al.* (2004; Study 2: $M = 1.26$, $SD = 0.54$) and Decoster *et al.* (2013; $M = 1.38$, $SD = 0.55$). Accordingly, the sample in the present study is representative. As indicated in Table III, abusive supervision is negatively related to departmental identification ($r = -0.41$, $p < 0.001$) and employee creativity ($r = -0.28$, $p < 0.001$). Moreover, departmental identification is positively related to employee creativity ($r = 0.45$, $p < 0.001$). These results are consistent with and provide initial support for our hypotheses. The variance inflation factors during hierarchical regression analyses range from 1.02 to 1.46, which means that multicollinearity problems are minimal in the present research.

Common method bias

Two methods were applied to test the possible common method variance. First, according to Harman one-factor test (Podsakoff and Organ, 1986), results show that five factors that account for 73.90 percent of variance are extracted and the first factor accounts for 16.77 percent. Thus, although data are collected from the same source, common method bias is not a major contaminant for our results. Second, following the guidelines of Podsakoff *et al.* (2012) and Liu *et al.* (2010), the type of firm ownership (state-owned and non-state-owned) is selected as the marker variable, which is theoretically unrelated to the substantive variables. As show in Table III, the ten significant correlations remain significant after adjustment.

Hypothesis testing

Hierarchical multiple regression analysis is conducted to test *H1* and *H2*. First, the independent variable is significantly related to the dependent variable and the mediator, respectively. Second, the mediator is significantly related to the dependent variable. Finally, the coefficient of the independent variable becomes smaller when the mediator is incorporated into the regression equation.

As shown in Table IV, abusive supervision is significantly related to departmental identification ($\beta = -0.41$, $p < 0.001$, Model 2) and employees' creativity ($\beta = -0.26$, $p < 0.001$, Model 4). Moreover, departmental identification is significantly associated with employees' creativity ($\beta = 0.45$, $p < 0.001$, Model 5). Third, the effect of abusive supervision on employees' creativity ($\beta = -0.09$, ns, Model 6) is not significant when departmental

	Departmental identification			Employee creativity		
	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4	Model 5	Model 6
Gender	0.04	0.05	-0.14*	-0.13*	-0.16*	-0.16**
Age	-0.14	-0.11	-0.22**	-0.20*	-0.16*	-0.15*
Education	0.02	0.13	0.02	0.03	-0.03	-0.02
Tenure	0.07	0.09	0.01	0.02	-0.02	-0.01
Abusive supervision		-0.41***		-0.26***		-0.09
Departmental identification					0.45***	0.41***
R^2	0.03	0.20	0.06	0.12	0.25	0.26
ΔR^2	0.03	0.17	0.06	0.06	0.19	0.14
F	0.19	9.83***	3.06*	5.55***	13.41***	11.49***
ΔF	0.19	41.77***	3.06*	14.67***	51.77***	36.32***

Notes: $n = 213$. * $p < 0.05$; ** $p < 0.01$; *** $p < 0.001$

Table IV.
Results of the mediating effects of departmental identification

identification is included in the regression equation, whereas departmental identification is still significantly related to employee creativity ($\beta = 0.41, p < 0.001$, Model 6), indicating that the relationship between abusive supervision and employee creativity is fully mediated by departmental identification. Thus, *H1* and *H2* are supported.

We adopt the bias-corrected bootstrapping procedure developed by Preacher and Hayes (2008) to further test *H2*.

Table V shows that the indirect effect of abusive supervision on employee creativity via departmental identification is negative and significant (indirect effect = -0.23 , 95 percent CI = -0.36 to -0.13), which is excluded 0. Thus, *H2* is supported. The model is significant, adjusted $R^2 = 0.23, F(6, 200) = 11.49, p < 0.001$.

This study adopts hierarchical moderated regression analyses to test *H3*. Control variables are entered in Step 1. The independent variable is entered in Step 2. The moderator is entered in Step 3. Finally, the interaction term is entered. In order to avoid multicollinearity, both independent (abusive supervision) and moderator (face) variables are centered in the regression analyses (Aiken and West, 1991).

Consistent with our hypotheses, results show that employees' face negatively moderates the direct relationship between abusive supervision with departmental identification. As shown in Table VI, the interaction between abusive supervision and face is positively related to departmental identification ($\beta = 0.23, p < 0.001$, Model 4). Figure 2 shows that abusive supervision is more negatively related to departmental identification when face is low ($r = -0.62, p < 0.001$) rather than high ($r = -0.10$, ns). Accordingly, *H3* is supported.

Path	Abusive supervision→Departmental identification→Employee creativity
Bootstrap-indirect effect	-0.23
Standard error	0.06
Lower limit 95% CI	-0.36
Upper limit 95% CI	-0.13

Notes: $n = 213$. Adjusted $R^2 = 0.23, F(6, 200) = 11.49, p < 0.001$. Confidence intervals are bias-corrected based on 10,000 bootstrap samples. Control variables: gender, age, education level and tenure. * $p < 0.05$; ** $p < 0.01$; *** $p < 0.001$

Table V.
Indirect effects of
abusive supervision
(via departmental
identification) on
employee creativity

	Model 1	Departmental identification		Model 4
		Model 2	Model 3	
Gender	0.04	0.05	0.05	0.05
Age	-0.14	-0.11	-0.11	-0.07
Education	0.02	0.13	0.13	0.14
Tenure	0.07	0.09	0.09	0.08
Abusive supervision		-0.41***	-0.41***	-0.40***
Face			-0.01	0.01
Abusive supervision × Face				0.23***
R^2	0.03	0.20	0.20	0.25
ΔR^2	0.03	0.17	0.00	0.05
F	0.19	9.83***	8.15***	9.23***
ΔF	0.19	41.77***	0.01	12.81***

Notes: $n = 213$; * $p < 0.05$; ** $p < 0.01$; *** $p < 0.001$

Table VI.
Results of the
moderating
effects of face

H4 predicts that face moderates the abusive supervision-departmental identification-employee creativity mediating linkage. The hypothesis is further tested by bootstrapping test of Edwards and Lambert (2007).

As shown in Table VII, abusive supervision is negatively related to departmental identification ($\beta = -0.84, p < 0.05$) for low-face employees, whereas the relationship is not significant ($\beta = -0.20, ns$) for those with high face. The difference between the above two coefficients is significant ($\Delta\beta = 0.63, p < 0.05$). Therefore, the negative relationship between abusive supervision and departmental identification is strengthened at a low face level, which provides additional evidence for *H3*. In addition, as shown in Table VII, at a low face level, the indirect effect of abusive supervision on employee creativity via departmental identification is significant ($\beta = -0.33, p < 0.05$), whereas for high-face employees, the indirect relationship is insignificant ($\beta = -0.08, ns$). Moreover, the difference between the above two coefficients is significant ($\Delta\beta = 0.26, p < 0.05$). Hence, *H4* is supported.

Discussion

First, a negative relationship has been found between abusive supervision and employee creativity, which is in line with the results of most studies (Liu *et al.*, 2012; Zhang *et al.*, 2014). Additional evidence is provided for the adverse effect of abusive

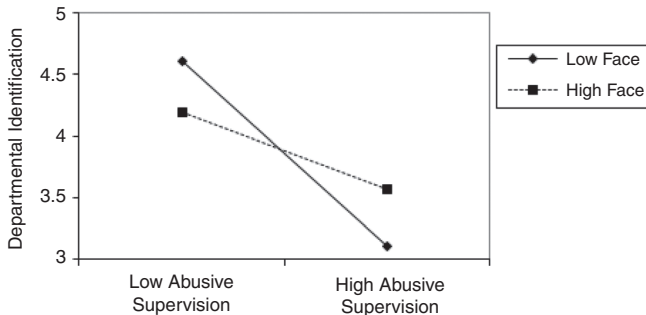


Figure 2. Plot of interaction between abusive supervision and face on departmental identification

Notes: High face is indicated by a square; low face is indicated by a diamond

Moderator variable	Abusive supervision (X)→Departmental justification (M)→Employee creativity (Y)				
	Stage		Effect		
	First P_{MX}	Second P_{YM}	Direct effects P_{YX}	Indirect effects $(P_{YM}P_{MX})$	Total effects $(P_{YX}+P_{YM}P_{MX})$
Simple paths for low face	-0.84*	0.40*	-0.21	-0.33*	-0.55*
Simple paths for high face	-0.20	0.38*	-0.07	-0.08	-0.14
Differences	0.63*	-0.02	0.15	0.26*	0.40*

Table VII. Results of the moderated path analysis

Notes: $n = 213$. P_{MX} , path from abusive supervision to departmental identification; P_{YM} , path from departmental identification to employee creativity; P_{YX} , path from abusive supervision to employee creativity. Low face refers to the mean of face minus one standard deviation; high face refers to the mean of face plus one standard deviation. * $p < 0.05$

supervision on employee creativity. One exception is that Lee *et al.* (2013) found an inverted *U*-shaped relationship between abusive supervision and employee creativity in South Korea. There are two possible explanations for the inconsistent findings. On one hand, compared with the Chinese, people in Korea have a higher level of collectivism (Hofstede, 2003). Thus, confronted with abusive supervision, Korean employees are more likely to follow the orders from the supervisors and continue performing as usual than the Chinese. On the other hand, the sample of Lee *et al.* (2013) is from a government-affiliated institute, which limits the generalization of the findings. By using the samples from different industries, our findings are more general. Findings also contribute to enriching our understanding of the relationship between abusive supervision and employee creativity in China.

Second, in response to the call for more attention to potential psychological mechanisms linking abusive supervision to employee creativity (Liu *et al.*, 2012), we identify the social identity process by which abusive supervision relates to employee creativity. Although intrinsic motivation serves as a powerful mediating mechanism (Zhang *et al.*, 2014), many other motivational variables linking the context to employee creativity have been found. According to Ryan and Deci (2000) identification, just like intrinsic motivation, stimulates employees to focus on completing the task. Thus, additional explanation is provided by social identity perspective for the motivational process, thereby expanding the domain of abusive supervision.

Third, as a representative of individual differences and cultural values, face is confirmed to moderate the direct effect of abusive supervision on departmental identification and the mediating effect of departmental identification. Few endeavors have been devoted to exploring the moderating role of dispositional characteristic in the identification process (Epitropaki and Martin, 2005) and the effects of cultural factors in the abusive supervision literature (Martinko *et al.*, 2013). By empirically examining the moderating effect of cultural value in the relationship between abusive supervision and employee creativity, the present study fills the gap.

Practical implications

First, abusive supervision has been found to negatively affect employee creativity, thus, organizations must be aware of the harmfulness of abusive supervision. Sound selection system and interventional mechanisms should be established, which contribute to quickly identifying and preventing abusive supervision. Specifically, in the stage of recruitment and selection, human resources department should take effective measures (e.g. psychological tests) to judge an individual's abusive supervision disposition. The HR should give careful consideration before providing managerial positions for those with high-abusive supervision disposition. Managers should be encouraged to take leadership development programs to find and correct inappropriate behaviors in the workplace (Harris *et al.*, 2007). Also they should be trained in interpersonal relationship skills and anger management (Xu *et al.*, 2012).

Second, results of the present study indicate a positive relationship between departmental identification and employee creativity by showing departmental identification as mediator. Thus, enhancing employee creativity by intensifying employees' sense of belongingness to the department is helpful. Departmental identification can be strengthened by taking actions, such as affirming the value and contribution of employees and caring for the life of employees. Shaping departmental image and encouraging employees to engage in competition with other departments can also help employees to engender a sense of identification with the department.

Third, based on the literature of the cross-cultural management (Kirkman *et al.*, 2006; Gelfand *et al.*, 2007), cultural values are crucial to know how employees react to different leadership. Thus, the role of Chinese cultural values in the management practice should be taken seriously. Results demonstrate that the effect of abusive supervision is stronger at a low-face level. Thus, departments should pay more attention to low-face employees. Also employees should be provided and encouraged to take trainings in emotional control ability and human skills, which contribute to keeping a good interaction relationship with others.

Limitations and future research directions

As for limitations, first, instead of longitudinal data, all variables in this study are measured at the same point of time. Thus, the long-term effects of abusive supervision may have been ignored, and the cross-sectional data essentially cannot be used for causal inferences. Therefore, further research could use longitudinal data to complement this study.

Second, our data are obtained from a single source. Although the common method bias is not a major problem in the current study, we encourage future research to use multiple data sources, which can minimize the common method bias.

As for future research, first, although the present study investigates the identification process linking abusive supervision and employee creativity, the internal mechanism of abusive supervision on employee creativity remains complex. To further enrich theory and knowledge of destructive leadership and creativity, future research can expand this study's framework and explore additional mediating mechanisms from other deeper theoretical perspectives.

Second, this research was conducted in China and focused only on one cultural factor, which is face. Other cultural differences should be included in further research, because the consequences of abusive supervision on employee creativity may vary with different cultural backgrounds. Thus, more studies should consider other cultural factors embedded in various cultural contexts.

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