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Interpersonal Leadership: The Role Of Perceived Motivation For Self-Disclosure And Self-Disclosure Appropriateness In Employee Affect For Supervisor

Caleb Barrett Malik

Illinois State University, caleb8222@gmail.com

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INTERPERSONAL LEADERSHIP: THE ROLE OF PERCEIVED MOTIVATION FOR
SELF-DISCLOSURE AND SELF-DISCLOSURE APPROPRIATENESS
IN EMPLOYEE AFFECT FOR SUPERVISOR

Caleb B. Malik

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Previous research has strongly supported the importance of supervisor leadership style in employee satisfaction and productivity in the workplace. Although the use of referent power is a key factor in successful leadership, little research has been conducted to identify specific communicative behaviors that enable a supervisor to establish a referent power base. Given that positive affect, specifically liking, is the basis for the enactment of referent power, this study examines the relationship between a supervisor's self-disclosure behavior and the extent to which an employee likes his or her supervisor. A sample of working professionals (N=168) was surveyed and asked to respond to several scales that assessed their current supervisor's self-disclosure behavior and one scale that assessed how much they liked that supervisor. A hierarchical regression was conducted and results indicated that both perceived motivation for self-disclosure and self-disclosure appropriateness predicted an employee's liking for his or her supervisor. Implications for practice and directions for future research are offered.

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IN EMPLOYEE AFFECT FOR SUPERVISOR

CALEB B. MALIK

A Thesis Submitted in Partial
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for the Degree of

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IN EMPLOYEE AFFECT FOR SUPERVISOR

CALEB B. MALIK

COMMITTEE MEMBERS:

Sandra M. Metts, Chair

Lance R. Lippert

Stephen K. Hunt

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I recently read a quote from Abraham Lincoln that read “I am a success today because I had a friend who believed in me, and I didn’t have the heart to let him down” When I read this, I thought of my academic career, and how I am very much where I am at now because of the people who believed in me. Certainly, no one has believed in me more than my thesis committee and my family.

While many students meet the faculty who will be on their committee after they start graduate school, I was fortunate to create a relationship with my mine several years before as an undergraduate student. Dr. Sandra Metts, Dr. Lance Lippert, and Dr. Steve Hunt were all passionate about their teaching and about their students, and it inspired me, and surely others, to be better students and better people. These faculty members cared deeply about their students, made class fun, and showed an excitement for the content they were teaching as if it were the first time they were teaching it. Quite frankly, had I not had faculty of their caliber, I would have most likely not attended graduate school. However, their passion for their work was infectious, and it motivated me to take my education to the next level and make a greater commitment to my learning. Moreover, given the courses they teach, I can say with confidence that they have taught me everything I know about interpersonal communication, leadership, persuasion, and organizational communication. First and foremost, I want to thank Dr. Metts for reading and helping to revise an innumerable amount of drafts. She always had incredible insight

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CHAPTER I

THE PROBLEM AND ITS BACKGROUND

Introduction

Previous research has supported the position that turnover can be problematic for organizations (e.g., Cardy & Lengnick-Hall, 2011, Abbasi & Hollman, 2000; Ratna & Chawla, 2012). One way to reduce turnover is by increasing the leadership skills of supervisors (Hausknecht, Rodda, & Howard, 2009) and for this reason it is important that supervisors use effective and appropriate leadership skills in order to retain employees. One of the primary ways that supervisors can improve their leadership ability is by influencing the actions of their followers as effectively and appropriately as possible and extant research has suggested that employees respond best to influence that stems from a relationship with their supervisor (Richmond, McCroskey, Davis, & Koontz, 1980). More specifically, employees feel that their supervisor leads best when they influence their followers through what has been labeled “referent power” (French & Raven, 1959, p.161; Richmond et al., 1980). The basis for this form of power is established when a subordinate likes his or her supervisor. Therefore, the current study seeks to assess a possible avenue for establishing liking in a supervisor and subordinate relationship given that liking is the basis for referent power. In defining referent power French and Raven (1959) state it has “its basis in the identification of [follower] with [leader]” (p. 161). Northouse (2013) supports this notion when he defines referent power as the likability of

a leader. Certainly, leaders can motivate through other forms of power; however, research supports the superior success of the domains of referent and expert power (i.e., power based on knowledge; Richmond et al., 1980). Additionally, the use of referent power falls into the domain of relational leadership, and numerous research studies have shown relational leadership to be a predictor of positive subordinate outcomes (Casteñeda & Nahavandi, 1991; Madlock, 2008; Richmond, McCroskey, Davis, & Koontz, 1980; Stringer, 2006). Given the positive association between referent power and employee outcomes, it is imperative that research seeks to establish a theoretical basis for those behaviors that facilitate subordinate liking, and a pragmatic foundation for implementing those behaviors.

In addition, previous research has shown an association between self-disclosure and liking, but not all self-disclosure will lead to liking (see Derlega, Metts, Petronio, & Margulis, 1993, for a review). Therefore, this research seeks to determine the process through which a supervisor can utilize self-disclosure appropriately as a technique for increased liking by subordinates. In doing so, those qualities of self-disclosure that facilitate liking in the specific context of the supervisor-subordinate relationship will be identified. More specifically, the present research seeks to understand characteristics of self-disclosure in the supervisor-subordinate relationship that are perceived to be appropriate, as appropriateness of the disclosure is expected to determine whether liking occurs.

Statement of the Problem

Retaining high performing employees and keeping them engaged is a focus of many organizations. This concerted effort is prompted by the numerous benefits

stemming from employee retention and engagement. In general, organizations optimize their production potential and increase their competitive advantage over others by maintaining the employment of productive personnel (Cardy & Lengnick-Hall, 2011). High employee turnover is a significant cost to organizations for several reasons. First, the loss of employees causes a departure of organizational knowledge (Abbasi & Hollman, 2000; Ratna & Chawla, 2012). This loss of knowledge can ultimately delay innovation and implementation of new programs (Abbasi & Hollman, 2000). Second, turnover can disrupt the performance of the exiting employee prior to his or her leaving, and further loss of performance can occur due to the lack of skills for his or her replacement for an extended period of time as he or she adjusts to the new position (Sightler & Adams, 1999).

Third, the exit of valued employees disrupts social and communication networks, resulting in lower morale and group cohesion (Sightler & Adams, 1999). Moreover, those who remain behind may experience dissonance following the exit of a fellow employee depending on why they believe the departure occurred (Sightler & Adams, 1999). Fourth, not only can employee turnover be problematic for internal relationships, but it can also damage the company's relationship with customers. Clients choose to do business with an organization partially due to the interactions that they have had with the organization's representatives, and when those employees leave, those bonds are broken as well (Ratna & Chawla, 2012).

Yet, even with all of the negative consequences of employee turnover, supervisors have been unable to reduce the rate of employees "quitting" in the United States. The Bureau of Labor defines quitting as "voluntary separations by employees." The one

exception to this is retirement, which is considered behaviorally different, and is accounted for among other statistics (United States Department of Labor, 2014). Between 2004 and 2014 the quit rate has remained relatively unchanged at around 1.8 percent or 2.4 million workers a month. This has only varied slightly having peaked in 2006 at two percent (United States Department of Labor, 2006) and reduced to 1.5 percent between 2008 and 2011 (United States Department of Labor, 2008; 2009; 2010; 2011).

Admittedly, this period where the quit rate remained around 1.5 percent does represent a decline in this statistic for an extended period of time, but it is important to take into account the recession occurring during this period, which likely deterred employees from quitting their jobs. Past research supports this position, as employees have been shown to stay at their job if they believe they have no other alternatives (Hausknecht, Rodda, & Howard, 2009). Therefore, the return of the quit rate to 1.8 percent in 2014 signifies a need for continued research with a focus on improving employee working conditions to prevent their departure.

Furthermore, not only is employee turnover problematic for organizations and consistently high, but employees are also less engaged in their work than they could be. Khan (1990) defined employee engagement as the ways in which employees “employ and express themselves physically, cognitively, and emotionally during role performances” (p. 694), while others have added the concept of organizational commitment to this definition (Bhuvanaiah & Raya, 2014) Employment disengagement is characterized by withdrawal and defensiveness in these same areas. Recent research evidence shows that only 30 percent of employees are engaged in their work, with 55 percent not engaged and 15 percent actively disengaged (Gallup Consulting, 2010). It is

vital that supervisors keep employees engaged in their work given that it is an antecedent for job performance and organizational citizenship behavior, even more so than job involvement, job satisfaction, and intrinsic motivation (Rich, Lepine, & Crawford, 2010). In summary, not only does the American workplace have room for improvement in turnover rates, but in workplace engagement as well.

To improve the workplace in both of these aspects, researchers should determine the reasons employees leave the organization or disengage, and make these factors available to supervisors along with strategies for improving or eliminating these reasons. Doing so would allow supervisors to make better decisions about their communication behavior, which would encourage employees to remain. In previous research, employees have stated that one of the primary reasons they will choose to stay at their position with an organization is because of constituent attachments, or the sense that they are connected with others in the organization, including supervisors (Hausknecht et al., 2009). Moreover, this is a more important factor for high performing employees than low performing employees (Hausknecht et al., 2009), which further supports the notion that there should be a focus on increasing constituent attachments so as to retain the best talent. Also, when employees their supervisor supports them, also known as perceived supervisory support, they are less likely to leave their job (Gentry, Kuhnert, Mondroe, & Page, 2007). Employee engagement has also been shown to improve when employees feel that they have both strong interpersonal relationships with co-workers and a supportive connection with their supervisor (Kahn, 1990).

Clearly, the role of the supervisor in establishing and maintaining positive interpersonal relationships with employees is crucial. However, there is a lack of research

on what processes specifically make an employee feel a strong connection with his or her supervisor. Therefore, this thesis explores communication strategies that facilitate an employee's liking for his or her supervisor, a positive emotion that should increase the employee's workplace satisfaction, commitment, and engagement. It draws from the fields of both organizational leadership and interpersonal communication to provide the theoretical framework within which logical hypotheses can be derived and tested in order to understand the factors that facilitate close ties between supervisors and employees. Ultimately, the knowledge gained from this study will help to improve the experiences of employees in the workplace, encourage commitment to the company, and improve productivity.

CHAPTER II

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

The following review of literature will discuss several constructs and theories related to the current research. It begins with a definition of leadership to provide a lens through which leadership and the research as a whole will be viewed. It then moves to a delineation of the differences between task leadership and relational leadership, with specific attention on relational leadership and the implications for its use. This section is followed by a discussion of referent power, a focus of this study and one aspect of relational leadership. This discussion explicates the ways in which referent power relates to other bases of power and presents evidence as to why this form of power is most useful in the supervisor-subordinate relationship as it is enacted by supervisors within the work environment. To further relate relational leadership to liking an additional section focuses specifically on leader-member exchange theory. This flows logically given that high leader-member exchange is characterized by a number of qualities, one of which includes liking, the factor that ties together the preceding sections focused on relational leadership and referent power. As the final step in the logic, which proceeds from relational leadership, to referent power, to leader member exchange, this review closes with a discussion of self-disclosure. Here, a link is made between the way self-disclosure relates to liking and relational leadership. Additionally, the characteristics of self-disclosure that are of interest to this study are identified.

Relational Leadership Style

Scholars have described leadership in a variety of ways, but this study will operate under the definition stated by Dansereau, Graen, and Haga (1975) in their seminal work on leader member exchange (LMX) theory. They characterize leadership as “influencing others without recourse to authority” (p. 48). Furthermore, leadership is a phenomenon best assessed through follower perceptions. Lord and Maher (1993) support this position when they argue, “the locus of leadership is not solely in a leader or solely in followers. Instead, it involves behaviors, traits, characteristics, and outcomes produced by leaders as these elements are interpreted by followers” (p. 11). Therefore, it is crucial in the study of leadership to analyze the behaviors of a leader not simply by the outcomes of his or her actions, but by the perceptions of the followers who interpret them. This allows for a better understanding of the effectiveness of his or her leadership tactics, and therefore more accuracy in offering suggestions for improvement.

When the study of leadership first began, researchers did not account for the followers’ perceptions. This practice in leadership research did not occur until an emphasis was placed on the relational leadership style, or an increased focus on the “interpersonal relationships that develop within the working unit” (Hersey & Blanchard, 1972, p. 70). This leadership behavior is characterized by an emphasis on the needs of individual workers and not the needs of the organization (Hersey & Blanchard, 1972). Some specific behaviors include: listening to group members, a willingness to make changes, and acting in a friendly and approachable manner (Hersey & Blanchard, 1972). Prior to this period, the primary focus had been on initiating task structure through behaviors such as: assigning members to tasks, establishing rules and regulations, and

telling members what is expected of them (Hersey & Blanchard, 1972). Together these became known as task leadership style and relational leadership style.

This transition from task structuring to relationship building began in 1924 in what have been titled, “The Hawthorne studies” (McQuarrie, 2005). During this investigation, researchers became aware that employee performance was dependent upon both task structuring and relational processes in the workplace. This line of research gained interest in the 1950’s during the Ohio State Studies, which concentrated on task and relational leadership styles (Hemphill & Coons, 1957). Further support for the concept of leadership as both task and relational can be drawn from Castañeda and Nahavandi (1975) who demonstrated that leaders must use both task facilitation and relational development behaviors in their supervisory roles.

Additionally, subsequent research by Hall and Lord (1995) indicated that messages sent by leaders contain both task and relational information. Moreover, they showed that followers interpret messages by leaders through both affective and cognitive channels, which are affected by individual, dyad, and even group level affective perceptions of that leader. Of particular interest to this research are the dyad and group level affective perceptions. Specifically, dyad refers to how much a person likes his or her supervisor due to the factors specific to that relationship, and group refers to the process by which a group forms an aggregate and relatively homogenous perspective of a leader. These factors ultimately affect the way that followers perceive the actions of their leader. Therefore, if a leader can succeed in creating a positive dyadic climate with each of his or her individual subordinates, he or she should be able to affect both dyadic and group level cognition in such a way that his or her actions are evaluated more positively.

Casteñeda and Nahavandi (1991) have examined positive perceptions of leaders with findings that indicate high leader ratings are dependent on use of both a relational leadership style and task style. In additional research, Fleishman (1998) displayed further evidence of the positive effects of a relational leadership style in a post-hoc analysis of previous research on this leadership style. Fleishman concluded that when relational management style is low and task style is high, turnover and grievances will be high as well. However, when leaders are high in relational style, they can increase their use of task style with only a minor increase in grievances and no increase in turnover. Furthermore, research has shown that the use of relational leadership style in tandem with task style will result in higher perceptions of the leader's communication competence and greater employee satisfaction (Madlock, 2008). Finally, relational leadership styles have emerged as a stronger predictor of perceptions of leader communication competence than task leadership styles (Madlock, 2008).

Referent Power

The importance of developing closeness and liking within power distance relationships can be demonstrated through a discussion of referent power. French and Raven (1959) first defined this power source as one of five bases, including coercive, reward, legitimate, expert, and referent. Coercive power is displayed by punishment of undesired behavior; reward power is used when a leader compensates his or her follower for desired behavior; legitimate power is inherent from his or her position as supervisor; and expert power is achieved if that leader is perceived to be a source of information. Finally, referent power is described as having "its basis in the identification of [follower] with [leader]" (French & Raven, 1959, p. 161). While leadership and power may seem to

be one in the same, the present study takes the perspective that power is a tool that can be used to influence employees' behaviors through coercion or through the motivation generated by responsive leadership.

As previously stated, leaders use some combination of both task and relational leadership style, and Richmond et al. (1980) linked supervisor leadership style to the power base he or she chooses to use. More specifically, those leaders who were perceived by their followers to be boss-centered (i.e., task style) utilized coercive and legitimate power, while those who were employee centered (i.e., relational style) utilized referent and expert power. Reward power was linked to neither style of leadership. Important in the findings of this research is the discovery that referent and expert power were tied to both employee centered leadership and employee satisfaction, which links the use of referent power to the above discussion of relational leadership. The finding that referent and expert power are linked to employee satisfaction, as well as commitment and motivation, is supported in a number of additional studies (e.g., Hinkin & Schriesheim, 1989; Kudisch, Poteet, Dobbins, Rush, Russell, 1995; Schriesheim, Hinkin, & Podsakoff, 1991).

In a study of a similar power-distance relationship, Finn (2012) found that when college instructors utilized expert and referent power, as opposed to coercive, students perceived that their instructors better understood them when they communicated with one another. This outcome carries over to the supervisor-subordinate relationship, as the concept of perceived understanding takes place in a variety of interpersonal relationships, including leader-follower (Cahn, 1990). Perceived understanding is crucial to establish in interaction because perceived misunderstanding can lead to relational disengagement

(Cahn, 1990). This is important given that disengagement, as previously demonstrated, is a major problem facing companies. Therefore, to facilitate perceived understanding, supervisors should employ referent power as leaders if they seek to reduce employee disengagement.

Another reason that leaders should seek to employ referent power is because it is a prosocially motivated behavior, as it is used on the basis of relationships, whereas other forms of power (e.g., coercive) are antisocial in nature. The significance of this distinction is made clear when examining literature focused on employee prosocial motivation and modeling. First, employees tend to model the behaviors of their leaders. For example, Lu and Lin (2014) have indicated that when leaders behave ethically it increases the likelihood that their employees will act ethically. Moreover, ethical leadership is associated with an ethical workplace climate. Therefore, leaders should try to lead prosocially, because it is likely that employees will model this behavior. This is important because when employees are inspired by prosocial motivations they are more creative in their work (Grant & Berry, 2011), and are more likely to have high job performance, take personal initiative, and engage in organizational citizenship behaviors (De Dreu & Nauta, 2009). Thus, when leaders motivate their followers through prosocial behaviors, followers may model that behavior, which could then lead to positive organizational outcomes.

Furthermore, positive affect for a supervisor becomes a basis for future interpretation of a leader's actions. This is known as affective processing, in which followers' positive feelings toward their leader guides the cognitive processing that they employ for their leaders' actions (Hall & Lord, 1995). Affective processing takes place

quickly and frames future actions made by a leader, so if leaders can facilitate liking, they may be able to positively influence the perceptions their followers have of their future behaviors. Affective processing relates to referent power such that requests might be perceived more positively if a follower has positive affect for their leader. Imagine a supervisor asking his or her employee to assume additional responsibilities. If positive affect characterizes the relationship, the employee may perceive it as an opportunity, and as the leader's way of displaying trust in the follower's abilities to complete the project well. If the relationship is characterized by negative affect, the request may be framed by the employee as extra work and abuse by the leader.

Given the aforementioned positive outcomes from the use of referent and expert power, it is evident they are the bases upon which a leader should rely when interacting with and motivating employees. Clearly, one can develop expert power through becoming more knowledgeable and competent at his or her profession and displaying that knowledge, but the development of referent power is less clear. It is obvious that the first component in this process is developing affiliation and liking.

Leader Member Exchange

Given the focus of this research on the importance of leader and follower relationships, a discussion of leader member exchange theory (LMX) is critical due to the theory's focus on the quality of the relationship between leader and follower, and this theory's ability to integrate the preceding discussions of relational leadership and referent power. This theory has been applied in studying numerous concepts, including virtual teams (Goh & Wasko, 2012), organizational politics (Kimura, 2013), benevolent leadership (Chan & Mak, 2012), and job mobility preparedness (Srikanth & Gurunathan,

2013). LMX is based on a combination of social exchange theory (Emerson, 1976), role theory (Gross, Mason, McEachern, 1958) and vertical dyad linkage theory (Dansereau et al.1975).

Vertical dyad linkage theory is of particular interest to the current study. One tenet of this theory is that, over time, leaders will develop different relationships with different followers. Specifically, supervisors will develop leadership exchanges with some followers which are characterized by influence without use of authority (Dansereau et al., 1975). However, with other subordinates the same supervisor will only influence, primarily, through the use of authority (Dansereau et al., 1975). Ultimately, this suggests a process through which leaders establish relationally specific leadership behaviors on the basis of the past relationship with specific followers.

Following this line of research, LMX describes the process through which leaders develop high-quality relationships with some members, while they develop low-quality relationships with others. As these relationships progress, leaders create in-groups and out-groups. In-group membership is typically characterized by high levels of trust, obligation, awareness of norms, and high identification with the team (Dienesch & Liden, 1986; Nahapiet & Ghoshal, 1998). Out-group membership, in contrast, is characterized by low trust, few interactions with others, reduced feelings of support, and rewards (Dienesch & Liden, 1986). It is important to note that in-group and out-group membership is fluid, and it is possible to move in and out of these groups on the basis of interactions over time.

Previous research indicates that close relationships between leaders and their followers have a number of positive outcomes. Mueller and Lee (2002) revealed the

systemic effects of follower perceptions of in-group membership. Findings showed that communication satisfaction at the interpersonal, group, and organizational levels increased significantly for those who perceived themselves to be members of the in-group. These findings suggest that leaders should make an effort to give opportunities to their followers for developing high-level exchanges where possible. By opening up through self-disclosure, a leader is able to offer this opportunity to his or her followers. Not only has system wide communication satisfaction been linked to high quality leader-member relationships, but job satisfaction has been as well (Stringer, 2006). This effect on job satisfaction was shown to extend to both intrinsic and extrinsic job satisfaction. Dienesch and Liden (1986) offered an overview of LMX and proposed a multi-dimensional construct that included perceived contribution, loyalty, and positive affect. This final component is of interest to this study, as the goal is to describe a disclosure process through which leaders can facilitate liking. With liking as a component of in-group membership, increasing liking becomes related to all of the positive effects described here for high quality leader-member exchanges.

Self-Disclosure

The creation of an interpersonal relationship between leader and follower, and the facilitation of liking, involves a process similar to that used in the initiation of social and interpersonal relationships. A key element in this process is self-disclosure. Derlega et al. (1993) state that, “[s]elf-disclosure, loosely defined as what individuals verbally reveal about themselves to others (including thoughts, feelings, and experiences), plays a major role in close relationships” and that self-disclosure “is an important component [in] the development of a close relationship” (pp. 1-2). This draws attention to a functional

definition of self-disclosure, as well as the crucial role it plays in creating close interpersonal relationships.

Through self-disclosure, individuals come to know one another and, based on the information they receive, decide if they wish to proceed with the development of the interpersonal relationship they have been presented. Therefore, self-disclosure functions as a tool for shaping the relationship, and can be positive if used appropriately. Initially, individuals seek to reduce uncertainty in relationships because those that are high in uncertainty are deemed to be less enjoyable than those low in uncertainty (Berger, 1987). One way to reduce uncertainty, and in most cases increase liking in these relationships, is through self-disclosure (Derlega et al., 1993). The five key aspects of the self-disclosure process are discussed below. These include depth, frequency, valence, perceived motivation for disclosure, and appropriateness.

Depth

Altman and Taylor (1973) described this first attribute of self-disclosure along with breadth in an account of social penetration theory. Depth refers to the level of intimacy and personally relevant information contained in a message, while breadth refers to the range or scope of issues that are discussed during interaction. For example, an individual may talk about a wide variety of topics with a friend, such as sports, professional interests, and politics, but may never go into detail. However, on other occasions, the topic of sexual orientation or sexual attitudes and behaviors may arise and he or she may share deeply held beliefs and personal experiences. As one would expect, disclosing information of too much depth may have a detrimental effect on a relationship, even to the point of ending that bond (McBride & Bergen, 2008). Therefore, less intimate

disclosures early in the relationship when uncertainty is still present with an increase over time would be most likely to be perceived as appropriate and facilitate liking.

Frequency

Frequency was discussed along with depth and breadth by Altman and Taylor (1973) as a primary factor in self-disclosure. They defined it as the rate at which individuals share information relative to the number of interactions they have across time in a given relationship. For example, supervisors may not engage in a lot of depth, but they may consistently share information with various employees about work-related concerns or their lives outside of work at a superficial level. Previous research on self-disclosure in the supervisor and subordinate relationship has been conducted within the relationship of counselor trainers and trainees (Ladany & Lehrman-Waterman, 1999). Results indicated that greater frequency of self-disclosure led to greater liking. Findings also showed that supervisors disclosed about both their personal lives and about their work experience. The latter was to aid their supervisees in advancing their skill sets through vicarious learning.

Although the findings of the Ladany and Lehrman-Waterman (1999) study suggest that increased disclosure results in greater liking, the authors caution that supervisors should be careful in their use of self-disclosure, as there may be a point where it becomes excessive and inappropriate. This concern is supported by Schrodt (2013) who found that the credibility of college instructors increased with the frequency of self-disclosure, as long as that self-disclosure was appropriate. This makes sense given that an increase in self-disclosure functions to reduce uncertainty about an individual's supervisor and that employee's work environment. Therefore, increasing frequency of

appropriate self-disclosure over time is expected to reduce uncertainty and facilitate liking.

Valence

Another characteristic of self-disclosure is valence, or the extent to which the information expressed in the disclosure is positive or negative for the recipient and evokes positive or negative affect (e.g., “I love you” vs. “I have never loved you.”) or is a positive or negative reflection on the discloser (e.g., “I worked for the Special Olympics all through college” vs. “I was arrested in college for shop lifting.”) (Chelune, Skiffington, & Williams, 1981). In a study of relationships similar to those of supervisor and subordinate, Cayanus and Martin (2008) found that when college instructors disclosed high amounts of negative information about themselves to their students, it had a negative effect on the teacher-student relationship. Similar findings would be expected in the present study; highly negative disclosures about self should negatively affect the amount of liking a subordinate has for his or her supervisor. On the other end of the spectrum, however, those individuals who are highly positive in their self-disclosure may be perceived as self-promoting and narcissistic. Both of these extremes on the valence continuum are generally seen as maladaptive and offer poor outcomes in most relationships (Paulhus, 1998). Therefore, it would follow that subordinates would negatively perceive those supervisors who were overly positive or negative in their self-disclosures, with progression in time over the course of the relationship allowing for greater valence, while still maintaining perceived appropriateness.

Perceived Motivation

The final aspect of self-disclosure that informs the current investigation is the employee's perceived motivation for the supervisor's disclosure. This component of self-disclosure interpretation was labeled attributional processes by Derlega et al. (1993) and involves the interpretation process through which the receiver of the disclosure attaches meaning and intent to the shared information. Essentially, it is how the receiver decides why the information is being shared. When a self-disclosure is perceived to be motivated by the desire to enhance the strength and quality of the relationship, and the receiver perceives his or her self to be special to the individual disclosing, that receiver will have an increase in attraction for the discloser (Taylor, Gould, & Brounstein, 1981). In discussing the reasons that individuals disclose, Rosenfeld and Kendrick (1984) found eight common reasons. These include catharsis, self-clarification, self-validation, reciprocity, impression formation, relationship maintenance and enhancement, social control, and manipulation. Clearly, these reasons for self-disclosure extend from relationally motivated (e.g., relationship maintenance and enhancement), to self-motivated (e.g., social control and manipulation).

What is important is not necessarily why the leader disclosed, but the follower's perception of why the leader was motivated to disclose that information. Therefore, this research seeks to determine the effects of the perception of the follower on the liking of the leader. One would expect that followers would more favorably receive those disclosures that are perceived to be relationally motivated than disclosures that are self-motivated.

Self-Disclosure, Liking, and Appropriateness

As previously discussed, individuals are typically more comfortable, and like others, with whom they have low uncertainty (Berger, 1987). Therefore, self-disclosure can lead to liking because it reduces relational uncertainty, but will only be successful when done appropriately. Thus, the current research proposes a model through which appropriateness of disclosure predicts the level of liking of the supervisor that results. Appropriateness has been defined as the extent to which a communicative behavior is deemed to be acceptable within a given context (Spitzberg & Cupach, 1984). This fits well with the current research since the imperative for the research is created through a need to determine what specific qualities of disclosure play a role in functional disclosure in the specific context of a workplace.

Appropriateness can be understood well through the lens of communication competence. As a multidimensional construct, appropriateness is the most theoretically common criterion for competent communication, alongside effectiveness, which has the longest history of study (Spitzberg & Cupach, 2011). Those individuals who violate expectations of these components of self-disclosure will likely be viewed as incompetent communicators, which will reduce the amount they are liked. For example, if an individual discloses information of great depth early in a relationship, he or she would probably be viewed as incompetent and disliking would result. This is supported by previous research that demonstrates the importance of communication competence in the success of both friendships (Holmstrom, 2009) and romantic relationships (Egeci & Gençöz, 2006). In organizational communication, Madlock (2008) found that perceptions of communication competence by leaders developed from use of a relational leadership

style, as did liking, which further supports the position that relational leadership, liking, and appropriateness are related.

Undoubtedly, the effects of communication competence present themselves in a wide variety of outcomes, including: relational development, health, achievement, risk-behavior, and psychological well-being (Spitzberg & Cupach, 2011). In the interaction scheme between supervisor and subordinate, one would expect that a communicator is viewed as competent to the extent that he or she follows social norms of both the environment and society in general. Spitzberg and Cupach (2011) support this stating that, “competent communication is viewed as inherently contextual in nature” and “standards of appropriateness for any given context must be taken into account in the evaluation of competence” (p. 496). It is certain, as stated in the previous discussion, that organizational interpretive schemata would guide the actions of supervisors and the interpretation of those actions by employees in the workplace (Rerup & Feldman, 2011). Therefore, supervisors who utilize disclosures that are perceived to be relationally motivated, and that have acceptable levels of depth, valence, and frequency for the length of the relationship will be those most likely to be perceived as appropriate, and ultimately most well liked.

Summary

The recent demographic indicators of employment longevity (United States Department of Labor, 2014) indicate that members of the workforce are unsatisfied and not as engaged as they could be in their work (Gallup Consulting 2010.) Therefore, scholarship that informs efforts to improve conditions of the workplace is needed. Creating a more enjoyable work environment for employees will motivate them to not

only remain at their jobs, but also become increasingly engaged in their projects. One aspect of the workplace that could be improved are the management skills of supervisors. Supervisors should seek to establish relationships with their employees, as initiating relationships that are more than just work related is vital for employee morale and commitment (Gentry et al., 2007; Hausknecht et al., 2009). This has been demonstrated in the field of research focused on relational leadership. For example, leadership is correlated with numerous positive outcomes including improved ratings of supervisors (Casteñeda & Nahavandi, 1991), reduced turnover and grievances (Fleishman, 1998), perceptions of the leaders communication competence (Madlock, 2008), and employee satisfaction (Madlock, 2008).

Clearly, implementing a relational leadership style is crucial for excellence as a leader. One determining factor for the leadership style that followers perceive a leader to use is the powerbase from which they operate (Richmond et al., 1980). Of interest to the current research, employees perceive that supervisors lead with a relational style when they rely upon referent power (Richmond et al., 1980). Therefore, to implement a relational leadership style, supervisors should establish a referent power base. Moreover, referent power has been related to employee satisfaction (Hinkin & Schriesheim, 1989), commitment (Kudisch et al., 1995), motivation (Schriesheim et al, 1991), and perceived understanding (Cahn, 1990). Ultimately, this notion is somewhat intuitive; employees are more willing to engage in a sustained working relationship, and care more about their work, if they like the person they are working for. Therefore, the goal of the current research is to establish pragmatic suggestions for behavior that will facilitate liking. Given that self-disclosure is one vital aspect of relationship building, and has been shown

to lead to liking, it is investigated here as a contributing variable to employee liking of his or her supervisor.

Self-disclosure alone does not facilitate liking; in fact, if performed inappropriately it can be observed as a violation of privacy rules, leading to relational disengagement by the receiver of the shared information (Petronio, 2002). Therefore, in order for self-disclosure to be successful, the information being shared, and the process through which it is shared, must be perceived as appropriate. Thus, this research examines specific aspects of self-disclosure under the belief that this behavior can lead to liking, but only if it is perceived to be appropriate. Ultimately, this should lead to liking given that the shared information will reduce uncertainty while establishing an interpersonal relationship. One possible confounding variable in this relationship between self-disclosure and liking is the age and sex similarities or differences between subordinate and supervisor. To control for this possible influence, these demographic variables will be controlled for within the current study. On the basis of these assumptions and review of the literature, the following hypotheses are posited.

Hypotheses

H₁: After controlling for the sex and age of the subordinate and the sex and perceived age of the supervisor, self-disclosure characteristics (i.e., frequency, depth, valence) will contribute significant variance in the liking of a supervisor.

H₂: Perceived motivation for disclosure will contribute significant variance in liking of a supervisor beyond that contributed by self-disclosure characteristics.

H₃: Employee perception of self-disclosure appropriateness will contribute significant variance in the liking of a supervisor beyond that contributed by self-disclosure characteristics and perceived motivation for disclosure.

CHAPTER III

METHODS

The previous chapter outlined the desirable outcomes that result from the use of both referent power and relational leadership by those in supervisory positions. Additionally, the various aspects of self-disclosure that could influence subordinate perceptions of supervisor self-disclosure were discussed and these were linked to a discussion of liking as a result of self-disclosure in a supervisor-subordinate relationship. Through this discussion, the argument was made that self-disclosure is a useful communicative behavior in the supervisor-subordinate relationship due to its potential to increase a subordinate's liking of his or her supervisor. The current chapter will outline the methods used to collect data for the current investigation. The chapter begins with a description of the sample, outlines the procedures used to collect the data, including the scales used in the survey, and concludes with a preview of the regression analysis used to test the hypotheses.

Participants

Participants were adults who have been graduated from a university, working for more than one year, and are currently employed. These participants were obtained through several channels. First, two large Midwest corporations (> 5000 employees) were identified and the survey link was posted on the intranet for each corporate

headquarters. These intranets are available for employee use, and they are unregulated. Therefore, a post that includes a link to the thesis survey for interested employees is consistent with the regulations for these company webpages. Second, the link for the survey was posted on social media and snowball sampling was used through this channel to obtain participants who fulfilled the qualifications for participation. Third, students at a large University in the Midwest were offered extra credit if they passed the link to the survey on to a friend or family member who fit the criteria for participation.

An initial sample of 210 individuals chose to participate in the study. However, 42 participants did not finish the survey and were therefore removed from final analysis. This resulted in a final sample of 168 participants. Participants ranged in age from 21 to 66 ($M = 33.7$) and consisted of 44 males and 121 females, with three participants not stating their sex. The supervisors of these participants had a perceived age range of 23 to 78 ($M = 45.1$) and consisted of 69 males and 97 females; two participants did not state the sex of their supervisors.

Convenience sampling was done in order to specifically investigate the experiences of individuals working in a corporate setting. It would be expected that some of the processes examined in the present research may function differently in different settings, and therefore, this research has a focused scope through which the variables of interest are viewed. However, the corporation and white-collar workers were targeted with the intent of understanding leadership in those contexts where tasks, meetings, and deadlines are to some extent emergent and negotiated, unlike skill specific contexts such as construction or manufacturing. Other contexts are outside of the scope of this research,

and future research will determine if hypothesized effects do or do not carry over to alternative contexts.

Procedure

Participants who responded to the link were directed to a survey that began with an informed consent page explaining the goal of the research and assuring them of anonymity. For those who chose to continue, a prompt appeared on the first page requesting that they fill out the survey thinking about the *direct* supervisor with whom they work most consistently. They were also informed that the term “self-disclosure” is defined as “information individuals verbally reveal about themselves to others that would not otherwise be known.” To assess demographic information, employees were asked to indicate their sex and age, and the sex and perceived age of their direct supervisor with whom they are currently employed and work with most consistently.

Measures

The following measures were utilized to assess the relationship between the liking of one’s supervisor and self-disclosure characteristics, perceived appropriateness, and perceived motivation for disclosure.

Liking

Liking was measured with an adapted version of the Wayne and Ferris (1990) Liking Scale. This four-item scale was originally developed for the measurement of supervisor liking of a subordinate. This required some modification to reflect the nature of the current research. The items used in the current investigation read: (1) “How much do you like this supervisor?”; (2) “I get along well with this supervisor.”; (3) “Working for this supervisor is a pleasure.”; (4) “I think this supervisor would make a good friend.”

The first item was measured on a 5-point Likert-type scale: (1) *I don't like my supervisor at all* to (5) *I like my supervisor very much*. The next three items were measured on a Likert scale from (1) *Strongly Disagree* to (5) *Strongly Agree*. This scale has been shown to have a Cronbach's alpha reliability estimate of .94 (Wayne & Ferris, 1990). The Cronbach's alpha for the current study was .92.

Self-Disclosure Characteristics

An adapted version of the Revised Self-Disclosure Scale (Wheeless, 1978) was used to measure the employee's perception of his or her supervisor's self-disclosure behavior. Originally intended to measure one's own self-disclosure behavior, the items were rephrased to reflect the purpose of the current research. This scale originally contained sub-scales for multiple aspects of disclosure, including: intended disclosure, amount, positive-negative, control of depth, and honesty-accuracy. Intent to disclose in an interaction and honesty-accuracy were removed due to their lack of application in the current research and the inability for an employee to judge these qualities of disclosure accurately. The remaining three subscales were used to measure frequency, valence, and depth. Frequency was assessed with items such as "My supervisor does not often self-disclose about her/himself" (reverse scored). Valence was assessed with items such as "My supervisor usually discloses positive things about her/himself." Depth was assessed with items such as "My supervisor often discloses intimate, personal things about her/himself without hesitation." All items were measured on 5-point Likert scales (1 = *Strongly Disagree* to 5 = *Strongly Agree*). These measures have been shown to have Cronbach's alpha scores of .88 (frequency), .91 (valence), and .84 (depth; Graham, 2004). In the current study the Cronbach's alpha scores were .81 (frequency), .48 (valence),

and .87 (depth). Because the reliability score for the valence items was below .5, which is unacceptable, an item was removed from the scale. By removing the item “My supervisor usually discloses positive things about her/himself” the reliability was raised to .68, which is a low, but acceptable alpha. Therefore, in the regression analysis, the two-item valence scale was used.

Appropriateness

The Conversational Appropriateness Scale was used to measure appropriateness of self-disclosure (Canary & Spitzberg, 1987). This 12-item scale was modified for the current research. For example, “Everything s/he said was appropriate” was altered to read “Everything my supervisor says in his/her self-disclosures is appropriate.” These items were measured on 5-point Likert scale (1 = Strongly Disagree to 5 = Strongly Agree). Cronbach’s alpha scores have been shown to range from .74 to .85 (Rubin, 2004). The Cronbach’s alpha for the current study was .94.

Perceived Motivation for Disclosure

In addition to the above four subscales, six items were constructed to measure the perceived motivation for the supervisor’s disclosure. The same 5-point Likert scale was used for this scale and ranged from *Strongly Disagree* (1) to *Strongly Agree* (5). These items include:

- 1) When my supervisor discloses, s/he does so because s/he trusts me.
- 2) When my supervisor discloses, s/he does so to make him/herself look good.*
- 3) My supervisor’s statements about him/herself are used to manipulate me.*

- 4) My supervisor shares information about her/himself with me to let me know we are friends.
- 5) When my supervisor shares information about her/himself with me, s/he does so to improve our relationship.
- 6) When my supervisor shares information about her/himself, she or he does so to share their work experiences so I can succeed professionally.

*Indicates reverse scoring

Scale development. In order to develop this scale to measure perceived motivation for supervisor's self-disclosure, the previous list of six items was generated on the basis of previous research conducted by Rosenfeld and Kendrick (1984) and Ladany and Lehrman-Waterman (1999). Rosenfeld and Kendrick (1984) suggested eight reasons individuals self-disclose, and of these motivations for self-disclosure those that seemed most plausible in the supervisor-subordinate relationship were impression formation, catharsis, relationship maintenance and enhancement, and manipulation. Therefore, items were constructed that reflected these motivations. Specifically, the item "when my supervisor discloses, s/he does so because s/he trusts me" relates to catharsis and relationship maintenance and enhancement. The item, "when my supervisor discloses, s/he does so to make him/herself look good" relates to impression formation. The item, "my supervisor's statements about him/herself are used to manipulate me" reflects the motivation of manipulation and the items, "my supervisor shares information about her/himself with me to let me know we are friends" and "when my supervisor shares information about her/himself with me, s/he does so to improve our relationship" relate to

the motivation of relationship maintenance and enhancement.” Furthermore, Ladany and Lehrman-Waterman (1999) argued that supervisors self-disclose to share information about their past work experience in order to help subordinates improve their performance. This suggested a need for the final item, “When my supervisor shares information about her/himself, she or he does so to share their work experiences so I can succeed professionally.”

In order to assess the reliability of this initial scale, a pretest was conducted with university students at the undergraduate level ($n = 68$) who were employed part time or full time in the community. Respondents were directed to think about their current supervisor as they responded. Reliability analysis yielded a Cronbach’s alpha of .503, which is acceptable, but falls into the poor range. An examination of the correlation matrix indicated an interesting pattern. Specifically, one item was not correlated with other items, but high correlations were evident within two clusters of items, suggesting that the scale assessed distinctly different underlying constructs.

In order to assess this assumption, an Exploratory Factor Analysis (EFA) using SPSS 22 was conducted. Five of the six items met the criteria for acceptable factor loadings of .60 or above on the primary factor and .40 or below on the secondary factor. Specifically, two items (“When my supervisor discloses, s/he does so to make him/herself look good” and “My supervisor’s statements about him/herself are used to manipulate me”) fell under the first factor, which was labeled *supervisor’s self-directed goals*. Three items (“When my supervisor discloses, s/he does so because s/he trusts me,” “My supervisor shares information about her/himself with me to let me know we are friends,” and “When my supervisor shares information about her/himself with me, s/he does so to

improve our relationship”) fell under the second factor which was labeled *relationship building*. This left the item “when my supervisor shares information about her/himself, she or he does so to share their work experiences so I can succeed professionally” out of either construct.

In sum, this EFA procedure resulted in two factors. The KMO measure fell into the mediocre range (.54) and the Bartlett’s test [$\chi^2 = 59.98 (15), p < .001$] was acceptable. Furthermore, eigenvalues for the two factors resulted in scores greater than 1.00. This was further evidenced in the scree plot. The resulting two-factor scale, consisting of five items, explained 57.14% of the variance. The first factor, supervisor self-directed goals, accounted for 29.34% of the total variance and had an eigenvalue score of 1.76. The second factor, relationship building, accounted for 27.80% of the total variance and had an eigenvalue score of 1.67.

While the item related to self-disclosing to share professional experience did not fall into either factor, the final scale for this study still used this item under the belief that this scale and item would be more accurate with working adults. This belief was supported by the final results of the study. During data collection this item was used and a second set of reliability and exploratory analyses were conducted. When used with the working adult sample ($n = 168$) the reliability analysis yielded a Cronbach’s alpha of .83, which is acceptable and falls into the good range. Furthermore, after conducting a second EFA, all six items fell into one of the two factors, including the item “When my supervisor shares information about her/himself, she or he does so to share his or her work experiences so I can succeed professionally,” which fell under the second factor of

relationship building with an acceptable loading above .60 on the first factor and below .40 on the second factor.

In addition, the KMO measure of the second EFA fell into the good range (.78) and the Bartlett's test [$\chi^2 = 420.106 (15), p < .001$] was also acceptable. Moreover, eigenvalues for the two factors were greater than 1.00 and these scores were further evidenced in the scree plot. The result of this test was a six-item scale, which explained 73.54% of the variance. With this final scale, *supervisor's self-directed goals* accounted for 19.04% of the variance, had an eigenvalue score of 1.14, and had a Cronbach's alpha of .86. The factor for *relationship building* accounted for 54.50% of the variance, had an eigenvalue score of 3.27, and a Cronbach's alpha of .78.

Data Analysis

A hierarchical regression analysis was conducted with SPSS 22 to determine the level of variance contributed by supervisor's general self-disclosure behavior, perceived motivation for disclosure, and appropriateness of disclosure. This predicted profile is illustrated in Figure 1. It was suspected that some effects might result as individuals perceive themselves to be more similar or dissimilar to their supervisor on the basis of sex and age. To account for this, age and sex were entered as the first block in the regression model as a control.

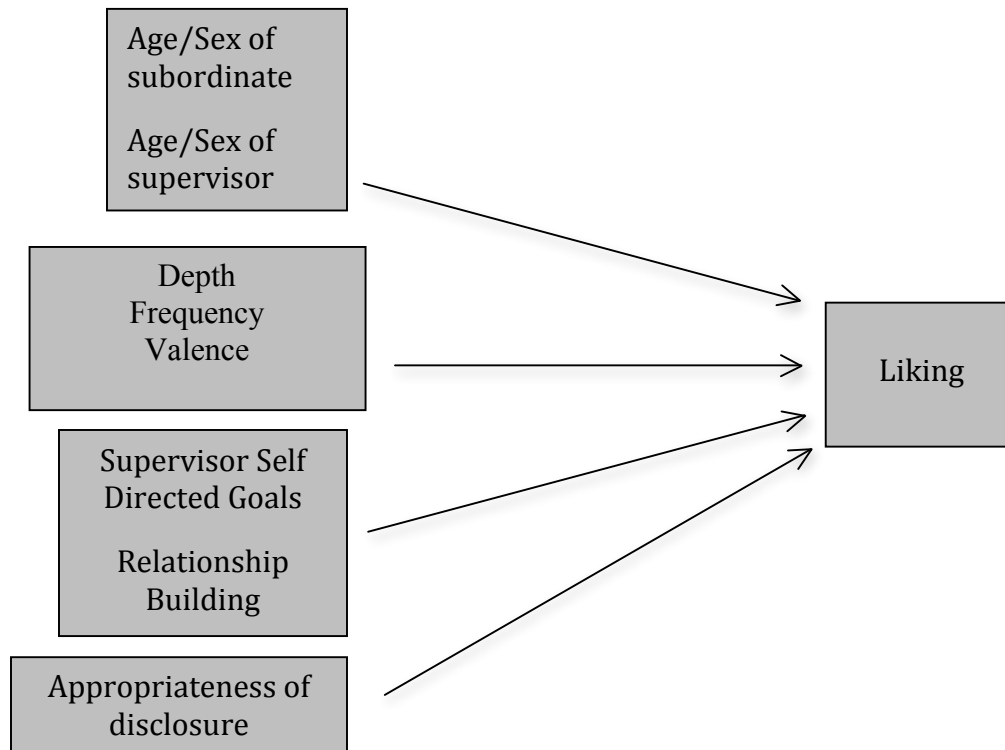


Figure 1. Hierarchical Regression Model

This figure illustrates the Hierarchical Regression used in this analysis.

The following chapter provides the statistical test of this model and the results of this test.

CHAPTER IV

RESULTS

The procedure for collecting and analyzing data described in the previous chapter resulted in several significant findings. Within this chapter the demographics of the sample will be discussed and the statistical results will be explained in detail.

A hierarchical regression analysis was performed to determine the contributions that self-disclosure characteristics, perceived motivation for self-disclosure, and perceived appropriateness of disclosure make to liking of a supervisor. Prior to establishing results, tolerance and VIF scores were interpreted and it was determined that multicollinearity was unlikely with tolerance scores all above .10 and VIF scores between 1.0 and 3.0. This allows for the determination of the effect on liking by both blocks as whole and individual variables within blocks.

Hypothesis One

Hypothesis one predicted that, after controlling for age and sex of both the subordinate and supervisor, frequency, depth, and valence of self-disclosure would contribute significant variance in the liking of a supervisor. This hypothesis was partially supported. After controlling for sex, which did not contribute significant variance, this block as a whole contributed significant variance in the hierarchical regression ($F(7, 157) = 3.462; p < .01$), explaining 9.3% of the variance in the liking of one's supervisor. However, within this block, the regression indicated that only frequency had a significant

standardized beta score ($\beta = .366, p < .001$) while valence ($\beta = -.071, p > .01$) and depth ($\beta = -.179, p > .01$) did not.

Hypothesis Two

Hypothesis two stated that, beyond the variance contributed by self-disclosure characteristics, perceived motivation for disclosure would contribute significant variance in the liking of one's supervisor. This hypothesis was supported for both the *supervisor's self-directed goals* ($\beta = .428, p < .0005$) and *relationship building* ($\beta = .449, p < .0005$) factors. This block was significant ($F(9, 155) = 29.490; p < .0005$) and explained 49.8% of the variance in the liking of one's supervisor.

Hypothesis Three

Hypothesis three stated that, beyond the variance contributed by self-disclosure characteristics and perceived motivation for disclosure, perceived appropriateness of self-disclosure would contribute significant variance to the liking of one's supervisor. This hypothesis was supported. Appropriateness of self-disclosure was significant ($F(10, 154) = 29.169; p < .0005$) and explained 2.3% of the variance beyond the previously entered blocks. In sum, the full model explained 65.4% of the variance in subordinate liking of supervisor. The results from all four blocks are shown below in Table 1.

Table 1. *The Effect of Self-Disclosure on Employee Liking of Supervisor*

Blocks	R^2 chg	F chg	Sig.	β
Block 1: Controls	.04	1.68	.158	
Age of Respondent				-.047
Sex of Respondent				.099
Perceived age of Supervisor				-.152
Sex of Supervisor				.025
Block 2: Self-Disclosure Characteristics	.09	5.64	.001	
Frequency				.366**
Valence				-.071
Depth				-.179
Block 3: Perceived Motivation	.50	104.60	.000	
Supervisor's Self Directed Goals				-.449**
Relationship Building				.428**
Block 4: Appropriateness of Disclosure	.02	10.32	.002	.255**

$p < .05^*$, $p < .01^{**}$

Note: The beta weights within this table are those resulting as the blocks were entered.

CHAPTER V

DISCUSSION

The previous chapter presented the regression analysis and the results that were obtained. The current chapter will summarize these findings, address the strengths and limitations of this study, and identify implications for both leadership practice and future research.

Summary of Results

As argued in the rationale, existing research suggests that several aspects of supervisor-employee interpersonal conversations appear to be influential in determining whether or not an employee likes his or her supervisor (Madlock, 2008; Richmond et al., 1980). Confirming this assumption is important because a supervisor is much more successful in using a relational leadership style based on referent power if he or she is able to persuade an employee to like him or her.

The results of this study strongly support the argument that self-disclosure is a key construct in determining the amount that an employee will like their supervisor. First, the classic dimensions of self-disclosure (i.e., frequency, valence, and depth) contribute to liking. More specifically, frequency was the most influential dimension of these three aspects of self-disclosure. This is supported by the results, which indicate that, individually, frequency was the only dimension that had a beta score of statistical significance.

Second, a far more personal approach to self-disclosure was introduced in this study. This factor, perceived motivation for disclosure, contributed additional variance to liking. Thus, the employee's perception of "why" the supervisor was sharing personal information was highly significant. Both the perceived negative motivations of a supervisor to serve his or her own needs as well as the positive motivation to enrich the relationship predicted liking. This finding underscores the need for organizational scholars interested in employee-supervisor relationships to move beyond the simple dimensions of self-disclosure to a broader conceptualization that includes the more personal interpretation of the supervisor's motives. Moreover, the high salience of the motivation factor offers new directions for other areas of research. For example, the traditional focus in interpersonal communication of depth and breadth of disclosure could be enriched by inclusion of motivation as measured by the current scale. In sum, the motivation scale created within this study will allow for valid measurement of this phenomenon in future studies is an important contribution of this research.

Third, the employee's perception of whether the self-disclosure was relationally and socially appropriate foregrounds the normative boundaries which employees impose on a supervisor's revelation of personal information, both positive and negative. The fact that perceived appropriateness contributed an addition 2% of the variance in liking of a supervisor indicates the complex process of assessment that employees utilize, albeit perhaps unconsciously, during interpersonal interactions with their supervisors.

Together, these variables explained 64% of the variance in an employees liking of their supervisor. This evidence clearly supports the position that self-disclosure from

supervisor to subordinate is crucial if supervisors desire to lead through the use of referent power and given that referent has numerous advantages over other power bases it is imperative that this takes some priority with leaders. Therefore, it is not only necessary that supervisors place an emphasis on self-disclosure, but the findings of this study suggest they should also place an emphasis on self-disclosing in specific ways in order to be effective. Furthermore, this extends the research on French and Raven's (1959) bases of power in that it offers a pragmatic way of building referent power for those in leadership positions.

Strengths

The first strength of this study is the sample from which the data were obtained. By obtaining a sample of adults with experience in the workplace, the results can be more accurately used to offer suggestions to supervisors about how to effectively self-disclose to subordinates. Had this sample been composed of college students, the findings would have to be used much more carefully when making suggestions to supervisors. This is especially true given that college students are a minority when it comes to individuals in the workplace. Thus, the findings of this study have much broader implications for the United States workplace at large. Moreover, given that responses were obtained through a variety of ways (i.e., corporate intranets, social media, snowball sampling through a student population), the results of this study have greater generalizability than if data had been collected through just one channel.

The second strength of this study is the way in which self-disclosure was assessed. Rather than merely looking at one aspect of self-disclosure (e.g., frequency) this study measured several different aspects of self-disclosure to gain a more nuanced

understanding of how self-disclosure functions in this relationship. Because of the more detailed nature of this measurement, more accurate suggestions can be given to supervisors about how they should utilize self-disclosure in the workplace.

The third strength of this study is that, along with a detailed measurement of self-disclosure in general, a new scale was developed for the measurement of self-disclosure. This perceived motivation for disclosure scale offers a new way of understanding and measuring self-disclosure behavior in a number of contexts. Moreover, the importance of this construct in future research is underscored by the impact it has in the current study. Given that perceived motivation for self-disclosure explained 50% of the variance in liking after controlling for age and sex of the subordinate, perceived age and sex of the supervisor, and self-disclosure characteristics (i.e., frequency, depth, and valence), it is clear that perceived motivation for disclosure is crucial to our understanding of perceptions of self-disclosure. Ultimately, the development of this construct and a scale for its measurement opens up new avenues for research. These future directions will be discussed below.

Limitations

While this study had several strengths, it also had limitations as well. The first of these is the lack of reliability for the scale used to measure valence of disclosure. While it had been previously demonstrated that this scale was reliable with an alpha of .84 (Graham, 2004), this was not supported in the current research. One reason for this may be the scale reduction that took place during the survey design. Given that these were working professionals, it was important that the survey was as short as possible. Otherwise, potential participants may be inclined to not take the survey due to excessive

length. Therefore, four of seven items were removed from this scale because they appeared redundant. Ultimately, this may have caused the low reliability of the valence scale and because the reliability was so low, an item had to be removed. This resulted in a two-item scale, which is certainly less than ideal.

The second limitation of this study is the lack of control for the length of the supervisor-subordinate relationship. This was an unfortunate oversight given the impact that time in the relationship has on one's self-disclosure (Derlega et. al., 1993). It would be expected that as employees progress through organizational socialization (Van Maanen, 1976) they would learn the appropriate self-disclosure behaviors in their specific workplace. This would make it likely that self-disclosure would change as a function of time, and therefore this should have been controlled in the current study.

The third limitation of this study was the age range and sex of participants in the sample. Because there are eight participants with the ages of 21 and 22 who participated, it appears that some participants took the survey who did not fit the demographic of college graduate with one year of work experience. While it is possible that they could fit this demographic, it is highly unlikely given that most students start college at approximately age 18 and take four years to complete their course of study. Therefore, participants should have been 23 at the youngest. However, these participants only represent four percent of the sample, and therefore, it is highly unlikely their answers influenced the outcome of the study. Moreover, these participants could have interpreted "college graduate" as an individual with an associates degree, which would make it possible for them to fit the desired demographic for the study. Given that there is no way to know for sure if they fit the survey requirements and that they were unlikely to

influence the study's outcomes, they were retained in the sample. In addition, the number of male and female participants in this study is unequal. However, the inclusion of sex in the hierarchical regression and a post-hoc t-test that indicated that there was no difference on the basis of sex indicates certainty in the findings. Yet, a more balanced sample should be a goal for future studies.

The final limitation of this study is the scale used to measure perceived motivation for disclosure. While the creation of this scale was certainly a strength, it is clear from the pretest conducted with college students that this scale is limited in use across younger adults. While it was useful for this sample of working adults, it was of poor reliability in the pretest and this suggests that it will need altered when used for future studies to be reliable for the population of interest.

Implications for Practice and Future Research

The results of this study confirm the importance of self-disclosure in the supervisor-subordinate relationship from both a practical and theoretical standpoint. While the importance of relational leadership and referent power has been supported for some time, the findings of the current research suggest a starting point for specific actions that can be taken in order to enact these leadership styles. Moreover, this first step is an opportunity for new research that will aid in a more nuanced understanding of the effects and functions of self-disclosure in the supervisor-subordinate relationship. These implications for leaders in the workplace and future research will be outlined below.

Supervisor-Subordinate Self-Disclosure in Practice

As the current research suggests, self-disclosure in the supervisor-subordinate relationship should not be over looked. While it is easy for leaders to merely focus on the

task, it is clear that there needs to be a conscious effort to create relationships with subordinates through self-disclosure. As the findings imply, this cannot be done without tact. Merely self-disclosing to a subordinate does not create liking, and could possibly be detrimental. Rather, supervisors should focus primarily on relationship building self-disclosure that is appropriate. Of course, this is highly contextual; however, there are some guidelines that can be offered in light of the current research.

First, supervisors should make sure that when they self-disclose to their subordinates they are perceived to be doing so for the right reasons. The best way to accomplish this is to make sure that it actually is for the right reason, that is to say, other focused. If a supervisor is going to self-disclose to a subordinate, he or she first needs to ask him or herself, “why I am I sharing this information.” If the answer aligns with the relationship building motivations outlined in this study, then it is likely that the self-disclosure will be effective. However, if the answer indicates to the supervisor that his or her motivation is more related to his or her needs and wants, he or she should refrain from sharing that information. Of course, it is not possible to control another person’s perceptions and as a result this is not a perfect system for ensuring that subordinates perceive supervisor self-disclosure to be for relationship building motives. Nevertheless, this is still a starting point for influencing the perceptions of one’s self-disclosure.

Second, it is best that those in supervisory positions question the appropriateness of their self-disclosure prior to sharing their private information. While this is also contextual, supervisors should have an idea of the organizational culture and what would be considered appropriate for that context. Moreover, within that context one should pay close attention to the nature of specific relationship. For example, knowing that self-

disclosure implies reciprocity (Derlega et al., 1993), if a supervisor had a subordinate who tended to engage in self-disclosure on a regular basis, it may be more appropriate for this supervisor to self-disclose to a greater extent (e.g., more negatively, more intimately, etc.) with this individual. Ultimately, the suggestion offered here is that supervisors should err on the side of caution. If it seems like it may be inappropriate to self-disclose a specific piece of information or in a certain situation, one should forgo self-disclosing in that instance. There will always be more opportunities for appropriate self-disclosure, but there will never be an opportunity to take back an inappropriate self-disclosure that has already been shared.

Third, leaders should think about how they utilize self-disclosure in two ways. First, they should think about self-disclosure as a tool for creating relationships in order to facilitate in-group membership for employees. By self-disclosing appropriately to employees, leaders create a communicative space in which social, as well as professional, interactions can emerge. As these interactions continue over time, the subordinate will begin to feel positive affect. Given that positive affect is one component of in-group membership in LMX, these interactions over time become one component of creating employee perceptions of in-group membership. Second, leaders should think about self-disclosure as a communicative skill that can be used to aid in leadership over a long period of time. Rather than seeing self-disclosure as a tool that is used as soon as a leader needs to influence their followers, leaders should think of self-disclosure as a communicative act that, over time, can aid in persuasion through the positive affect that it helps to create.

Future Research Directions

The current research resulted in several findings that have implications for the future research of self-disclosure and organizational leadership. These findings suggest that, in the case of subordinate liking for supervisor, the depth, frequency, and valence are not nearly as important as the appropriateness and perceived motivation for the disclosure. It is this latter aspect of self-disclosure, perceived motivation, which has a great potential for use in research focused on self-disclosure. This is especially true given the scale developed in the current research that can be used to measure this component in future studies.

The first possibility for future research is to continue improving the scale itself. While it did have a sufficient reliability score, the factor that measures supervisor's self-directed goals only contains two items. Although reliable, the presumed validity of the measure could be enhanced with additional items. This is, of course, only the beginning of the possibilities for this new measurement, which can then be used in a variety of contexts to understand the impact that perceived motivation has on the outcomes of self-disclosure.

The first place that this research could be conducted would be in the workplace as a continuation of the current study. Because the length of the relationship between the supervisor and the subordinate was not controlled in this study, this should be done in future studies of this relationship to more precisely account for indirect influences on the perceived qualities of self-disclosure. Also, given that this was a broad sample from a variety of professional organizations, it would be of interest to see if the same impacts would be found when comparing different organizational contexts. For example, if one

were to compare a sample of employees from a Fortune 500 company and a sample from a small non-profit, one would likely find that there are important differences in how self-disclosure functions and that successful self-disclosure varies based on the context. In addition to the context of the workplace, the new scale developed here can be applied to a variety of relationships. As an illustration, this scale could be used in the classroom, along with other measures of self-disclosure, to predict student affect for the instructor and for the course itself.

Furthermore, exploring the relationship between supervisor self-disclosure and other constructs in organizational communication could extend the current research. First, this study opened by identifying problems with retention and engagement and this is one promising area to continue this research. Because greater liking should be related to increased workplace satisfaction, one would expect that effective and appropriate self-disclosure by an employer would predict both workplace satisfaction and a reduced intent to quit. This hypothesis should be investigated in future studies. Second, the current research builds upon the work of French and Raven (1953) by identifying a practical means for creating a base of power. Thus, because liking is the basis for referent power, it would be expected that those supervisors who use effective self-disclosure would be perceived to lead through the use of referent power more than those who do not engage in effective and appropriate self-disclosure and this should be tested in future research. Third, this research has implications for extending LMX literature and future research should attempt to empirically establish a relationship between self-disclosure and perceptions of in-group membership as an extension of LMX. Fourth, while the current study found that self-disclosure related to the positive outcome of liking, it would be

naïve to think this is always the case and future studies should take a dark side approach to investigate if there are detrimental effects (e.g., perceptions of harassment) when self-disclosure takes place in a way that is perceived to be inappropriate (Spitzberg & Cupach, 2007).

Furthermore, while self-disclosure has been studied for many years, this study has created a new variable for study and a scale for its measurement. Therefore, this has vast implications for the future of self-disclosure research and future studies should investigate the affect of perceived motivation for self-disclosure on relationships in a variety of contexts beyond that of the supervisor and subordinate. However, even within the supervisor-subordinate relationship further research is needed. Given that there is a difference between a supervisor's relationship building motivations and self-directed goal motivations for self-disclosure, it may be that when supervisors are perceived to be heavily motivated by one as opposed to the other this acts as a predictor of their perceived leadership style. For example, because relationship building motives are focused on both members of the relationship, and particularly on the follower, leaders whose self-disclosures are perceived to be primarily motivated by the relationship may also be perceived as having a relational leadership style. Ultimately, this needs to be supported empirically in future research by including an assessment of employee's perceptions of the supervisor's leadership style.

Finally, future research should extend to qualitative studies that can aid with a more adequate understanding of what it means for a supervisor to be appropriate in his or her self-disclosure. Research of this kind could also help identify aspects of self-disclosure that indicate to an employee that the disclosure is either relationship or self-

directed in motivation. By exploring these topics through qualitative research we can gain a greater understanding of what topics to avoid or not avoid in order to be appropriate, and what actions can be used to signify that the self-disclosure is truly motivated by the relationship. Moreover, through qualitative research we can begin to understand employee reactions to self-disclosure and how employees respond when confronted with inappropriate or ineffective self-disclosure by a supervisor. Through this triangulation a greater understanding of this phenomenon can be established. This understanding will assist in determining the most effective ways for disclosing to subordinates in the workplace in order to develop stronger relationships and a more positive working environment.

Summary

Employees in the workplace are less engaged than they could be (Gallup Consulting, 2010) and retention is lower than where it should be (United States Department of Labor, 2014). However, this research adds to a body of knowledge trying to remedy this situation. As the previous literature has indicated, leaders who use a relational leadership style tend to have more positive outcomes with their followers (e.g., Fleishman, 1998). The current research extends this knowledge by exploring a specific interpersonal communication behavior that will allow leaders to create more positive relationships with their followers. Specifically, the findings of this research suggest that when subordinates perceive their leaders to regularly use self-disclosure that is appropriate and motivated by a desire to build the relationship they will like that leader significantly more than they would otherwise. Moreover, in completing this research a new scale was developed to assess the perceived motivation for a leader's self-disclosure.

Thus, not only have the results of this study offered implications for leadership practice, but they also motivate future research that further investigates the functions and effects of self-disclosure in the supervisor and subordinate relationship.

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APPENDIX
SURVEY MEASURES

Informed Consent Document

Self-Disclosure in the Supervisor-Subordinate Relationship as a Facilitator of Improved Work Experience

You are cordially invited to participate in a research study interested in discovering the role that self-disclosure plays in the creation of interpersonal relationships in the workplace between supervisors and subordinates. Before giving your consent to participate in this study, it is important to read the following information.

This study of self-disclosure in the supervisor-subordinate relationships is being conducted by Caleb Malik, under the supervision of Professor Dr. Sandra Metts in the School of Communication at Illinois State University. The primary objective of this study is to determine the role that self-disclosure plays in the facilitation of relationships between a supervisor and his or her subordinates. This will aid in the development of scholarship investigating ways in which leaders can better connect with his or her followers to create a more enjoyable and satisfying work environment.

The following survey contains several sections. In these sections you are asked to answer questions regarding: (1) your agreement to participate, (2) your relationship with your supervisor, (3) a variety of characteristics related to his or her self-disclosure behavior and communicative ability, and (4) demographic questions.

Your participation in this study will provide useful information and insight that can be used to benefit both the academic and professional community through a better understanding how leaders can make meaningful connections with their followers. Participation can also be beneficial to you as an individual as you reflect on your work experiences and supervisor. Although there are numerous benefits to participation, it should be noted that there are some risks associated with completing this survey. For example, you may encounter certain realizations about your relationship with your supervisor that may motivate anxiety or frustration. However, this risk is minimal, as your participation in this study is strictly voluntary and all responses are totally anonymous. If at any time you wish to withdraw from participation in the study, or not answer a specific question, you are free to do so without penalty. In addition, refusal to participate will not result in penalty of any kind. The survey should take 10-15 minutes to complete. Please do not complete the survey if you are under the age of 18.

Should you have any questions regarding your participation in this research please contact Caleb Malik, School of Communication, Illinois State University, (309) 660-1535 or cbmalik@ilstu.edu, or Dr. Sandra Metts, School of Communication, Illinois State University at (309) 438-7883 or smmetts@ilstu.edu.

Again, thank you for your voluntary participation in our research study. The data collected will be very useful for building communication theory. More importantly, the data will aid in discovering practical behaviors for supervisors to improve their leadership skills to improve the workplace experience of their subordinates.

Perceptions of Supervisor-Employee Relationship

Directions:

When responding to the following scale please think of your direct supervisor *with whom you work most consistently*. The purpose of this item is to understand your general relationship with your supervisor. Indicate your response to the question/statement by circling the number that most appropriately reflects your perception of the relationship.

1) How much do you like this supervisor?

1	2	3	4	5
<i>I don't like my supervisor at all</i>	<i>I don't like my Supervisor</i>	<i>I am indifferent</i>	<i>I like my supervisor</i>	<i>I like my supervisor very much</i>

2) I get along well with my supervisor.

1	2	3	4	5
<i>Strongly Disagree</i>	<i>Disagree</i>	<i>Neither Disagree nor Agree</i>	<i>Agree</i>	<i>Strongly Agree</i>

3) Working for my supervisor is a pleasure.

1	2	3	4	5
<i>Strongly Disagree</i>	<i>Disagree</i>	<i>Neither Disagree nor Agree</i>	<i>Agree</i>	<i>Strongly Agree</i>

4) I think my supervisor would make a good friend.

1	2	3	4	5
<i>Strongly Disagree</i>	<i>Disagree</i>	<i>Neither Disagree nor Agree</i>	<i>Agree</i>	<i>Strongly Agree</i>

Directions:

When answering the following scales please think of your direct supervisor *with whom you work most consistently*. Indicate the degree to which the following statements reflect how your direct supervisor communicates by marking (7) Strongly agree, (6) agree, (5) somewhat agree, (4) neither agree nor disagree, (3) somewhat disagree, (2) disagree, (1) strongly disagree.

These scales assess this supervisor’s self-disclosure, which is defined as “revealing information about oneself that carries risk and would otherwise not be known.” Please work quickly and just record your first impressions.

Frequency

1) My supervisor does not often self-disclose about her/himself.

1	2	3	4	5
<i>Strongly Disagree</i>	<i>Disagree</i>	<i>Neither Disagree nor Agree</i>	<i>Agree</i>	<i>Strongly Agree</i>

2) My Supervisor often self-discloses her/his feelings.

1	2	3	4	5
<i>Strongly Disagree</i>	<i>Disagree</i>	<i>Neither Disagree nor Agree</i>	<i>Agree</i>	<i>Strongly Agree</i>

3) Only infrequently does my supervisor express her/his personal beliefs and opinions.

1	2	3	4	5
<i>Strongly Disagree</i>	<i>Disagree</i>	<i>Neither Disagree nor Agree</i>	<i>Agree</i>	<i>Strongly Agree</i>

Positive or Negative Nature of Disclosure

4) My supervisor usually discloses positive things about her/himself.

1	2	3	4	5
<i>Strongly Disagree</i>	<i>Disagree</i>	<i>Neither Disagree nor Agree</i>	<i>Agree</i>	<i>Strongly Agree</i>

5) My supervisor normally reveals “bad” feelings s/he has about her/himself.

1	2	3	4	5
<i>Strongly Disagree</i>	<i>Disagree</i>	<i>Neither Disagree nor Agree</i>	<i>Agree</i>	<i>Strongly Agree</i>

6) My supervisor often reveals more undesirable things about her/himself than desirable things.

1	2	3	4	5
<i>Strongly Disagree</i>	<i>Disagree</i>	<i>Neither Disagree nor Agree</i>	<i>Agree</i>	<i>Strongly Agree</i>

Depth of Disclosure

7) My supervisor intimately discloses who s/he really is, openly and fully in conversations.

1	2	3	4	5
<i>Strongly Disagree</i>	<i>Disagree</i>	<i>Neither Disagree nor Agree</i>	<i>Agree</i>	<i>Strongly Agree</i>

8) Once my supervisor gets started, her/his self-disclosures last a long time.

1	2	3	4	5
<i>Strongly Disagree</i>	<i>Disagree</i>	<i>Neither Disagree nor Agree</i>	<i>Agree</i>	<i>Strongly Agree</i>

9) My supervisor often discloses intimate, personal things about her/himself without hesitation.

1	2	3	4	5
<i>Strongly Disagree</i>	<i>Disagree</i>	<i>Neither Disagree nor Agree</i>	<i>Agree</i>	<i>Strongly Agree</i>

10) I feel that my supervisor sometimes does *not* control her/his self-disclosure of personal or intimate things he/she shares about her/himself.

1	2	3	4	5
<i>Strongly Disagree</i>	<i>Disagree</i>	<i>Neither Disagree nor Agree</i>	<i>Agree</i>	<i>Strongly Agree</i>

11) Once my supervisor gets started, s/he intimately and fully reveals her/himself in his/her self-disclosures.

1	2	3	4	5
<i>Strongly Disagree</i>	<i>Disagree</i>	<i>Neither Disagree nor Agree</i>	<i>Agree</i>	<i>Strongly Agree</i>

Directions:

When answering the following scales please continue to think of your direct supervisor *with whom you work most consistently*. As you answer these scales, please reflect on why your supervisor chooses to self-disclose information about her/himself.

12) When my supervisor discloses, s/he does so to let me know s/he trusts me.

1	2	3	4	5
<i>Strongly Disagree</i>	<i>Disagree</i>	<i>Neither Disagree nor Agree</i>	<i>Agree</i>	<i>Strongly Agree</i>

13) When my supervisor discloses, s/he does so to make him/herself look good.

1	2	3	4	5
<i>Strongly Disagree</i>	<i>Disagree</i>	<i>Neither Disagree nor Agree</i>	<i>Agree</i>	<i>Strongly Agree</i>

14) My supervisor's statements about him/herself are used to manipulate me.

1	2	3	4	5
<i>Strongly Disagree</i>	<i>Disagree</i>	<i>Neither Disagree nor Agree</i>	<i>Agree</i>	<i>Strongly Agree</i>

15) My supervisor shares information about her/himself with me to let me know we are friends.

1	2	3	4	5
<i>Strongly Disagree</i>	<i>Disagree</i>	<i>Neither Disagree nor Agree</i>	<i>Agree</i>	<i>Strongly Agree</i>

16) When my supervisor shares information about her/himself with me, s/he does so to improve our relationship.

1	2	3	4	5
<i>Strongly Disagree</i>	<i>Disagree</i>	<i>Neither Disagree nor Agree</i>	<i>Agree</i>	<i>Strongly Agree</i>

17) When my supervisor shares information about her/himself, she or he does so to share their work experiences so I can succeed professionally.

1	2	3	4	5
<i>Strongly Disagree</i>	<i>Disagree</i>	<i>Neither Disagree nor Agree</i>	<i>Agree</i>	<i>Strongly Agree</i>

Directions:

When answering the following scales please continue to think of your direct supervisor *with whom you work most consistently*. Please think about how appropriate you believe her or his self-disclosures are overall.

18) My supervisor discloses things that seem out of place in conversation.

1	2	3	4	5
<i>Strongly Disagree</i>	<i>Disagree</i>	<i>Neither Disagree nor Agree</i>	<i>Agree</i>	<i>Strongly Agree</i>

19) Everything my supervisor discloses about her/himself is appropriate.

1	2	3	4	5
<i>Strongly Disagree</i>	<i>Disagree</i>	<i>Neither Disagree nor Agree</i>	<i>Agree</i>	<i>Strongly Agree</i>

20) The things my supervisor discloses in conversation are very suitable to the situation.

1	2	3	4	5
<i>Strongly Disagree</i>	<i>Disagree</i>	<i>Neither Disagree nor Agree</i>	<i>Agree</i>	<i>Strongly Agree</i>

21) Some of the things my supervisor discloses are awkward.

1	2	3	4	5
<i>Strongly Disagree</i>	<i>Disagree</i>	<i>Neither Disagree nor Agree</i>	<i>Agree</i>	<i>Strongly Agree</i>

22) My supervisor discloses things that should not be said.

1	2	3	4	5
<i>Strongly Disagree</i>	<i>Disagree</i>	<i>Neither Disagree nor Agree</i>	<i>Agree</i>	<i>Strongly Agree</i>

23) Some of my supervisor's disclosures are inappropriate.

1	2	3	4	5
<i>Strongly Disagree</i>	<i>Disagree</i>	<i>Neither Disagree nor Agree</i>	<i>Agree</i>	<i>Strongly Agree</i>

24) I am comfortable during conversations when my supervisor discloses about her/himself.

1	2	3	4	5
<i>Strongly Disagree</i>	<i>Disagree</i>	<i>Neither Disagree nor Agree</i>	<i>Agree</i>	<i>Strongly Agree</i>

25) Some of the things my supervisor discloses about her/himself are in bad taste.

1	2	3	4	5
<i>Strongly Disagree</i>	<i>Disagree</i>	<i>Neither Disagree nor Agree</i>	<i>Agree</i>	<i>Strongly Agree</i>

Demographics

Please indicate your age as of your last birthday _____

Please indicate your biological sex _____

Please indicate what you believe your supervisor's age is _____

Please indicate your supervisor's biological sex _____