

Leadership and Trust in Higher Education: The Role of ACE Scores and Supervisor Gender in Women's Experiences

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Abstract

Utilizing a correlative quantitative approach, this study explored the relationships between trust in leadership, supervisor gender, and Adverse Childhood Experience (ACE) scores. An anonymous, online survey was administered to 76 female participants currently working in higher education. The results indicate neutral attitudes toward supervisors, with average trust scores hovering around the midpoint. However, further analysis revealed variations based on ACE scores and supervisor gender. Women without ACEs reported lower trust in male supervisors, while those with higher ACE scores had negative perceptions of female supervisors, particularly regarding consistency and transparency. These findings suggest that trust in supervisor relationships is influenced by both the personal histories of employees and the gender dynamics within the workplace. The study's implications point to the need for future research to explore the influence of ACE scores and supervisor gender on trust, and to develop strategies for enhancing trust and effective leadership in higher education settings, especially among female supervisors and female employees with higher ACE scores.

Keywords

Workplace Trust, Supervisor Relationships, Internalized Oppression, Higher Education, ACE Scores

1. Background

Since the 1980s, considerable attention has been directed toward understanding trust dynamics within professional relationships. Particularly since the turn of the century, there has been a focused exploration of trust between employees and

supervisors in higher educational settings. Contemporary research explores the role of perceived justice (Pan et al., 2018) as a central element in trust between supervisors and subordinates, aligning with the earlier findings of Mayer and Davis (1999). Modern definitions of trust in these relationships add a tangible dimension that offers significant explanatory and predictive power in educational reforms (Guo et al., 2017; Niedlich et al., 2020).

Additionally, it is important to consider how dynamics of oppression may influence trust in supervisor and subordinate relationships. According to David and Derthick (2014, p. 3), oppression encompasses both a state and a process. The state of oppression involves unequal access to power and privilege among groups, while the process refers to how inequality is upheld between these groups. Internalized oppression can lead individuals to perceive themselves negatively and as having limited agency (Liebow, 2016; David & Derthick, 2017; Ruggles, 2015). Those experiencing internalized oppression may inadvertently perpetuate discrimination within societal structures, thus hindering their advancement (Vaughn-Pollard, 2022).

For women, a significant consequence of internalized oppression is the presence of shared membership bias, manifesting as biases against fellow women (Stephenson et al., 2022). Women experiencing shared membership bias often engage in self-preservation behaviors, striving to attain higher status within the group hierarchy (Gerhards & Kosfeld, 2020; Liebow, 2016). This phenomenon, often referred to as “hen-pecking,” stems from the survival instinct among oppressed group members (Liebow, 2016). Even in predominantly female workplaces, presumed to be free from gender discrimination, substantial biases against women persist (Stephenson et al., 2022). Moreover, members of targeted groups may attempt to distance themselves from group identity by denying personal experiences of discrimination (Crosby, 1984; Gerhards & Kosfeld, 2020). According to Lindsey et al. (2015), women are less inclined to respond to discrimination faced by others, possibly as a self-protective measure to believe they are exempt from gender bias consequences.

While internalized oppression and shared membership bias shape interpersonal dynamics in adulthood, early life experiences, such as Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs), further complicate these relational patterns. Research on Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs) has illustrated their significant consequences for adult health, well-being, and interpersonal relationships (Felitti, 2002; Webster, 2022). ACEs encompass various forms of traumatic experiences during childhood, including physical, emotional, and sexual abuse, neglect, and household dysfunction, such as domestic violence, substance abuse, or parental separation. These early adverse experiences can have profound and lasting effects on an individual’s psychological and emotional development, influencing their behavior, self-perception, and ability to interact positively with others in adulthood (Riggs, 2010).

One critical area where ACEs exert a significant influence is in the formation

and maintenance of trust (Bellis et al., 2014). Trust is foundational to healthy relationships, both personal and professional. However, individuals who have experienced ACEs often struggle with trust due to the disruption of their early attachments and the betrayal or neglect they may have encountered from caregivers or other significant figures in their lives (Murphy et al., 2014; Riggs, 2010). These early experiences can lead to a heightened sense of vulnerability and a tendency to perceive others as untrustworthy, creating barriers to forming secure and trusting relationships later in life (Bellis et al., 2014).

Trust impacts various dimensions of professional life, including the willingness to engage in open communication, the receptiveness to feedback, and the motivation to pursue career development opportunities, (Dirks & De Jong, 2021). However, individuals with high Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACE) scores may struggle with trust due to disruptions in early attachment and negative relational experiences (Murphy et al., 2014). This difficulty in establishing trust can manifest in several ways, potentially affecting professional dynamics. Women in higher education who have experienced significant adversity may find it challenging to fully engage with their supervisors and experience heightened anxiety and skepticism in professional relationships, which can hinder their ability to benefit from mentorship and support (Stewart-Tufescu et al., 2022; Roisman et al., 2007).

The purpose of this study was to examine the trust relationship between women in higher education and their supervisors. Specifically, this study investigated the following:

- 1) What is the effect of supervisor gender on women's trust in supervisors in higher education?
- 2) How do the ACE scores of women working in higher education influence their trust in supervisors?

By considering the contributions of supervisor gender and Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACE) scores, the findings may help pinpoint individual influencing factors to trust as well as offer suggestions on how difficulties with these relationships might be successfully addressed. This study sought to contribute further understanding of supervisory trust development and serve as practical advice for effective workplace ecosystems supporting women in higher education.

2. Theoretical Framework and Review of Literature

The research project was guided by Critical Theory, a social theory that seeks to uncover and analyze the underlying assumptions in society that perpetuate inequities, to foster social improvement (Horkheimer & Adorno, 1993; Thompson, 2017). Social theories often emphasize the role of both individual and environmental factors in shaping behavior and experiences (Bronner, 2017; Butler, 2011). In particular, Critical Theory examines how social influences, such as gender norms and organizational culture, shape beliefs and behaviors (Butler, 2011; Horkheimer, 1982), stressing the importance of understanding the social, cultural, and historical contexts that create and sustain power relations.

Trust and trustworthiness hold intrinsic value beyond their practical benefits. Trust is fundamental to ethical workplace interactions, serving as a core component of a positive organizational culture (Gopalan et al., 2023). Trustworthiness is crucial not just for achieving organizational goals but as an essential aspect of personal and professional integrity (Costa et al., 2010; Lauritsen, 2018). While higher levels of employee trust are positively associated with better organizational outcomes (Addison & Teixeira, 2020; Lau et al., 2013; Schilke et al., 2023), fostering trust is also beneficial for quality of life and individual satisfaction.

2.1. Women and Trust

Women and men often have different interpretations of trust, with self-disclosure being a crucial aspect of trust for women. Specifically for women, the ability to openly share personal information is central to building trust, which in turn is linked to higher relationship quality and overall well-being (Qiu et al., 2022). However, research by Bevelander and Page (2011) suggests that women may trust each other less in professional environments compared to men. This lack of trust may stem from historical workplace structures that promote competition rather than collaboration among women. Further, research indicates that while women do engage socially with each other, they tend to be more cautious in the workplace, often preferring to network with men rather than their female counterparts (Van Helden et al., 2021).

Women in male-dominated industries face unique challenges, including stereotypes that portray them as less competent for leadership roles (Eagly & Karau, 2002). This can lead to distancing from female colleagues to avoid reinforcing biases that might hinder their career advancement. Research indicates that women often feel pressured to adopt masculine traits like assertiveness to succeed (Bozani, 2021; Ibarra et al., 2013), which can reduce collaboration and support among women (Chen et al., 2022). Moreover, societal expectations around gender and leadership contribute to women's caution in professional relationships. Women leaders often face higher scrutiny from female subordinates, leading to the "queen bee syndrome," where they distance themselves from other women to maintain authority (Derks et al., 2016; Harvey, 2018). This dynamic can weaken trust among women in hierarchical settings, fostering feelings of isolation and competition.

2.2. Higher Education and Occupational Segregation

A study by Smith and Shoho (2007) revealed significant differences in trust levels across various ranked positions in academia with those in lower ranks often perceiving less trust from their superiors, directly influencing their sense of belonging and professional security. Differences in trust based on rank and position within higher education is further complicated by occupational segregation, particularly among women in education, who constitute a substantial portion of the academic workforce (O'Keefe & Courtois, 2019; US Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2021).

Occupational segregation remains a persistent issue in higher education, where women frequently encounter limited advancement opportunities and disparities in rank compared to their male counterparts (Mason et al., 2013; O’Keefe & Courtois, 2019). Despite their significant representation in academia, women are often concentrated in lower-ranking, less prestigious positions, which can impede their professional growth and influence trust dynamics within the institution (Birchley, 2015; Jameson et al., 2022). These disparities in rank and status can create environments where trust is unevenly distributed, with women facing unique challenges and expectations that differ from those of their male colleagues. Furthermore, a lack of trust by women toward their female supervisors may reduce opportunities for mentorship, which is critical for career and leadership growth (Mcilongo & Strydom, 2021). This mistrust could perpetuate the cycle of limited career advancement and hinder the progression of women into higher leadership positions.

2.3. Trust and Adverse Childhood Experiences

People who have a history of Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs) typically experience lower levels of trust in supporting institutions, systems, and authority figures, including supervisors (Murphy et al., 2014; Roisman et al., 2007). This is particularly relevant in professional settings like higher education, where trust in supervisors is critical for positive workplace dynamics. Those who have experienced abuse, witnessed violence, or been under governmental care tend to have heightened levels of mistrust, which can create barriers to seeking support and resources in the workplace (Brown, 2023). This lack of trust may influence not only their professional relationships but also their career development and overall well-being. Recent research by Bellis et al. (2024) asserts the importance of identifying trusted resources and support systems to better assist individuals with ACEs, suggesting that tailored communication and interventions could enhance trust-building efforts between employees and supervisors in higher education.

2.4. Trust and Internalized Oppression

Individuals who experience internalized oppression often struggle with lower self-trust, which extends to their interactions with others (Liebow, 2016). Additionally, internalized oppression can lead individuals to doubt their worth and abilities, fostering a pervasive sense of mistrust in themselves. As a result, they may also find it challenging to trust others, as their self-doubt and feelings of inadequacy undermine their confidence in forming reliable relationships (Bellis et al., 2024; Brown, 2023). This cycle of mistrust can perpetuate feelings of isolation and reinforce the negative impacts of internalized oppression.

Internalized oppression is the acceptance by a marginalized group that certain social groups are inferior to the dominant group (Clark & Clark, 1950; David & Derthick, 2014, 2017). Acceptance of this belief might explain why many people from oppressed groups automatically think and act in a way that makes them feel

antagonistic toward themselves (David & Derthick, 2017; Vaughn-Pollard, 2022). Additionally, these automatic negative thoughts, feelings, and actions, may contribute to personal and professional self-defeating behavior (David & Derthick, 2017; James-McCarthy et al., 2021). Internalized oppression develops over time as a result of persistent subjugation (Clark & Clark, 1950; David & Derthick, 2014, 2017). Notably, internalized oppression contributes to the underrepresentation of women in higher ranks, as their internalized views of gender roles can hinder their career advancement (James-McCarthy et al., 2021). Subsequently, women may experience imposter syndrome and shared membership bias, which may directly or indirectly affect their levels of trust in others in the workplace.

The United States, historically founded on patriarchal principles, maintains a system where men hold a disproportionate share of institutional and social power (Ruggles, 2015). Patriarchy is based on the belief in biological differences that position women as inferior to men (Facio, 2013). This structure systematically excludes women from powerful societal roles, particularly in political, religious, cultural, and economic spheres (Facio, 2013; Khelghat-Doost & Sibly, 2020). Women's experiences in the workplace are directly shaped by this pervasive patriarchy (Adisa et al., 2019; Khelghat-Doost & Sibly, 2020).

Systemic oppression operates through structures that advantage certain groups while disadvantaging others (Asare, 2022). The scarcity mentality, a belief that resources are limited, results in marginalized groups competing against each other rather than addressing systemic inequalities (Del-Villar, 2021). In the workplace, women often experience a scarcity mentality, especially when only a few leadership positions are available to them (Asare, 2022), leading to internal competition, undermining cooperation among women, and reinforcing oppression within the group (Chen et al., 2022). Additionally, as women focus on competing for scarce resources, their work performance may suffer, perpetuating stereotypes that they are less effective or productive (Novotney, 2014).

2.5. Literature Review Summary

Trust and trustworthiness are foundational elements in workplace dynamics, serving both ethical and practical purposes (Gopalan et al., 2023). Trust, especially for women, can be influenced by a variety of factors, including shared membership bias, internalized oppression, and workplace competition. Women often find self-disclosure central to building trust, yet face challenges such as lower trust in female colleagues and pressures to adopt masculine traits to succeed in male-dominated environments (Bevelander & Page, 2011; Bozani, 2021). In higher education, occupational segregation and disparities in rank further complicate trust dynamics, as women may experience mistrust toward their female supervisors, limiting mentorship opportunities (Smith & Shoho, 2007; Mcilongo & Strydom, 2021). For those with Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs), trust is even more fragile, often shaping their relationships with authority figures, including

supervisors (Murphy et al., 2014). Additionally, internalized oppression exacerbates mistrust, particularly among marginalized groups, by undermining self-worth and fostering feelings of inadequacy (Liebow, 2016). These dynamics, coupled with systemic patriarchy and competition among women for limited leadership roles, contribute to the ongoing challenges women face in building trust and advancing professionally (Ruggles, 2015; Adisa et al., 2019).

3. Research Methodology

Correlational quantitative design, a non-experimental method used to explore relationships between two or more variables without attempting to influence the dependent and independent variables (Creswell & Creswell, 2018), was selected for this research project. Correlational studies do not establish cause and effect but rather associations that can be the basis for further experimental research to identify potential causal mechanisms (Creswell & Creswell, 2018; Gravetter & Wallnau, 2016). This interpretive strategy is useful not only for heuristic purposes regarding future research but also in guiding the theoretical or practical application of this knowledge (Fraenkel et al., 2018).

The relationship between Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACE) scores, supervisor gender, and trust in supervisors among women employees in higher education was explored. Variables measured included supervisor gender and ACE scores. To gather the ACE scores, the survey used the 10-question Adverse Childhood Experiences questionnaire developed by Felitti et al. (1998) with large-scale data collection conducted by Kaiser Permanente, later in cooperation with the Centers for Disease Control. At the beginning of the survey, participants received and were required to sign an Informed Consent statement before proceeding, along with being provided proof of IRB approval. The researcher's contact information was included within the Informed Consent statement, and survey participants were encouraged to contact the researcher with any questions or concerns. Additionally, if requested, survey participants were provided with a copy of their completed survey and the option to amend their answers.

3.1. Participants and Research Setting

The study involved 76 participants, all of whom were women aged 18 and above, currently employed in higher education. The participants completed an anonymous online survey designed to explore their trust in supervisors, with 39% reporting to male supervisors and 61% to female supervisors. The minimum sample size required for the study was determined to be 67, based on a G*Power calculation by Social Science Statistics (n.d.), ensuring sufficient statistical power to detect meaningful information within the data.

3.2. Sampling Procedures and Data Collection

The recruitment method for this research project utilized purposeful and snowball sampling strategies. The researcher advertised the study in Higher Ed Learning

Collaborative, a public Facebook group with approximately 44,000 members, and Women in Higher Education, a public Facebook group with approximately 48 members. Contacts established from this recruitment were encouraged to share the opportunity within their networks. Additionally, a targeted Facebook Ad Campaign was utilized to reach the specific population sought for this study. The campaign was independent of the researcher's personal account to ensure anonymity.

Upon receipt of the accepted Informed Consent, completion of the three screening questions (age, gender, higher education employment status), and agreement to continue, participants were provided access to the survey and assigned a random identifier. Participants provided non-identifying demographic information, completed the non-copyrighted, publicly available Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACE) questionnaire (Felitti et al., 1998), and answered the Trust Me Scale questions, developed by Tzafirir and Dolan (2004). Permission was received to use this scale. No other materials were included in this research project. Participants completed a survey with 30 required questions and one optional question. Four questions gathered demographic information and consent, 10 questions consisted of the ACE questionnaire and 16 were the Trust Me Scale questions. The survey received 127 responses, however, only 76 participants qualified and completed the survey in its entirety.

3.3. Data Analysis

Trust dynamics between women in higher education and their supervisors were examined using the Trust Me Scale, for which approval was obtained. Data was organized in a spreadsheet format, encompassing variables such as supervisor gender and Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACE) scores. Statistical analysis was conducted using the Social Sciences Statistical Calculators (Social Science Statistics, n.d.). Means were calculated and sorted by variables and a One-Way ANOVA explored relationships between the variables. Significance testing assessed the strength of correlations, with p-values indicating statistical significance ($p < 0.05$).

Reliability was ensured through the use of standardized survey instruments that were previously validated in similar research contexts. Internal validity was maintained by controlling for potential confounding variables, such as the participants' current work environment and their supervisory relationships, including any personal connections to the researcher. External validity was supported by selecting a diverse sample of women in higher education, allowing for the generalization of the findings to a broader population. The survey's content validity was also ensured by aligning the questions with established theories and prior research on trust and supervisor relationships. Trustworthiness was established by providing transparency in the data collection and analysis process. The anonymous nature of the survey allowed participants to provide honest and uninhibited responses.

Informed consent was obtained from all participants, who were made aware of the study's purpose, procedures, and their right to withdraw at any time. The

anonymity of the participants was preserved by using an online survey platform that did not collect any identifying information. Additionally, the study was reviewed and approved by an Institutional Review Board (IRB) to ensure compliance with ethical standards, including the safeguarding of participants' confidentiality and the responsible reporting of findings.

4. Findings

Overall, participants displayed neutral attitudes toward their supervisors, regardless of their gender, with a slight tendency toward distrust. The Trust Me Scale utilizes a 5-point Likert Scale, with 1 representing strong disagreement and 5 representing strong agreement. The mean score for positive trust was 3.066, and for negative trust, it was 3.09. However, further analysis revealed distinct patterns in how trust levels correlated with participants' ACE scores and the gender of their supervisors.

Individuals with zero ACEs generally exhibited a lower tendency to agree with positive comments about their supervisors, scoring an average of 2.73, indicating a general disagreement with such attributes. On the other hand, those with mid-range ACE scores showed a tendency to disagree with negative comments about their supervisors, with an average score of 2.58. However, this trend shifted again among individuals with the highest ACE scores (8 - 10), who were more inclined to agree that their supervisors possess negative attributes, as evidenced by a higher average score of 3.83.

When examining the overall scores based on the gender of supervisors, there was a slight difference in perceptions. For women supervisors, the average score for positive attributes was 3.079, and for negative attributes, it was slightly higher at 3.14. In comparison, for male supervisors, the scores were similar but slightly lower, with positive attributes averaging 3.047 and negative attributes averaging 3.0.

Participants who reported never experiencing an Adverse Childhood Experience (ACE) exhibited negative beliefs toward male supervisors. For instance, 75% of participants who scored zero on the ACE scale disagreed with the statement that "Employees' needs and desires are very important to managers" when their supervisor was male. In contrast, when the supervisor was female, 100% of these participants agreed with the same statement, suggesting a perception that female supervisors were more attuned to their needs. Among those with zero ACE scores, 100% disagreed with the statement "Managers would not knowingly do anything to hurt the organization" when their supervisor was male. Openness and transparency emerged as another critical area where gender played a role in shaping trust. All participants with zero ACE scores disagreed that "My managers are open and upfront with me" if their supervisor was male.

Alternatively, participants with higher ACE scores consistently shared distrust of their female supervisors. When examining perceptions of organizational success and ethics, a difference emerged based on the gender of the supervisor.

Among participants with high ACE scores (7 - 10), all agreed that “People in the organization succeed by stepping on other people” when their supervisor was female, whereas all participants with ACE scores between 7 and 10 disagreed with this statement when the supervisor was male. A One-Way ANOVA was calculated on all participant answers to this question, including the variables of supervisor gender and ACE scores, which revealed significance. Equation (1), with an F-ratio of 675.32 and a p-value less than 0.00001, indicates a statistical significance at $p < 0.05$.

$$(F[2, 225] = 675.32, p < 0.001) \quad (1)$$

The study examined differences in how participants perceived their supervisors’ knowledge. Eighty percent of participants with high ACE scores (7 - 10) disagreed that “Managers have a lot of knowledge about the work that needs to be done” when referring to female supervisors. Consistency in managerial actions was another area where gender differences were evident. All participants with ACE scores between 7 and 10 agreed that “Managers’ actions and behaviors are not consistent” when their supervisor was female, indicating significant concerns about reliability and predictability.

Issues of information sharing and authenticity further illustrate the complexity of trust dynamics. Eighty-three percent of participants with ACE scores between 7 and 10 disagreed that “Managers express their true feelings about important issues” when their supervisor was female. All participants with ACE scores between 7 and 10 expressed distrust in female supervisors, with 100% agreeing with the statement, “It is best not to share information with my managers.” A One-Way ANOVA was conducted on all participant answers to this question, including the variables of supervisor gender and ACE scores, and the analysis revealed significance. Equation (2), with an F-ratio of 718.29 and a p-value less than 0.00001, demonstrates statistical significance at $p < 0.05$.

$$(F[2, 225] = 718.29, p < 0.001) \quad (2)$$

An interesting finding in this study is that women who reported never experiencing ACEs were generally more negative toward their male supervisors. This could potentially be attributed to the gendered dynamics of leadership in higher education, where male supervisors may be perceived as representing traditional authority figures. Women without ACEs might feel more comfortable challenging male authority, especially if they have had fewer personal experiences that necessitated navigating trauma or fear-based power dynamics. Without the burden of past trauma influencing their perception of male authority, they may also feel freer to express dissatisfaction with what they see as unequal gender power relations. These women may be more attuned to gender disparities and more critical of male leadership styles that could perpetuate patriarchal structures in their workplaces.

Women with higher ACE scores, on the other hand, may experience greater levels of internalized oppression, which could influence their trust in female supervisors. The phenomenon of shared membership bias suggests that individuals

from marginalized groups, including women, may be harsher in their judgment of members of their own group due to internalized societal expectations. Women with higher ACE scores may carry unresolved trauma or feelings of inadequacy, perpetuated both by personal experiences and societal oppression, which might manifest in their relationships with female supervisors. This internalized bias could be strengthened by early life experiences where trust was undermined, making it harder to establish positive and supportive relationships with female supervisors, even when there is a shared gender identity.

Supplementary Findings

The most commonly reported Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs) among the study participants were related to emotional neglect and domestic violence. A significant 41.07% of participants answered “yes” to the statement, “Before your 18th birthday, did you often or very often feel that no one in your family loved you or thought you were important or special? Or, that your family didn’t look out for each other, feel close to each other, or support each other?”. Additionally, 41.96% of participants indicated that they had witnessed or experienced domestic violence in their homes, responding affirmatively to the question, “Before your 18th birthday, was your mother or stepmother often or very often pushed, grabbed, slapped, or had something thrown at her? Or sometimes, often, or very often kicked, bitten, hit with a fist, or hit with something hard? Or, ever repeatedly hit over at least a few minutes or threatened with a gun or knife?”. These findings suggest that experiences of emotional neglect and domestic violence are alarmingly common and may significantly influence individuals’ ability to trust others. Additionally, witnessing domestic violence against a female in the household could influence the development of internalized oppression and shared membership bias against other women.

5. Implications and Potential Limitations

This research project potentially experienced validity limitations. Self-selection bias may have influenced the findings, as those who chose to participate may have held strong beliefs about the topic. Additionally, recall bias, participants not remembering or relaying experiences accurately, could have added a validity limitation. Participants who did not complete the survey in its entirety raised concerns about participant compliance. Additionally, the exclusion of these survey answers exposed potential issues that could have affected the study’s internal validity, as these survey answers might have provided valuable insights.

Additionally, a potential limitation to consider was selection bias. Using announcements in Facebook groups and targeted Facebook ads to recruit participants may have resulted in a biased sample. Those who responded may not have been representative of the larger population. Consequently, the generalizability of the study’s findings to the broader population may be limited. Furthermore, the population defined for this study was broad, which might have diluted the study’s

ability to draw specific conclusions. A more narrowly defined population or the inclusion of additional demographic factors could have provided a more targeted understanding of the research problem.

The findings of this study expose the complex relationship between trust in supervisors, the gender of those supervisors, and Adverse Childhood Experience (ACE) scores of women in higher education. These results suggest several important avenues for future research. The gender differences observed in this study indicate a need to further examine how gender dynamics influence trust and perceptions of leadership in academic settings. How male and female supervisors are perceived in terms of empathy, transparency, and consistency, particularly in environments where turnover is common or the industry is in decline, such as private higher education institutions, is another area of potential exploration.

Future research could investigate whether women with higher ACE scores demonstrate elevated levels of internalized oppression, potentially manifesting as imposter syndrome, shared membership bias (as measured by implicit bias tests), and distrust toward their female coworkers and supervisors. Additionally, it would be valuable to explore whether women's trust in supervisors, influenced by their ACE scores and the gender of their supervisor, differs based on their professional rank. A follow-up survey could examine if women in higher-ranking positions, such as deans or department chairs, experience trust in leadership differently from those in lower-ranking roles, such as assistant professors or administrative staff. This could help determine whether hierarchical position moderates the impact of supervisor gender and personal adversity on trust dynamics.

The finding that women who do not report experiencing ACEs are generally more negative toward male supervisors suggests that gender dynamics in leadership roles may warrant deeper exploration. This finding could infer that women who report not experiencing early life trauma may have little tolerance for traditional male leadership styles, while women who report ACEs view their male supervisors more positively. Future research could focus on how different leadership styles influence the professional relationships and job satisfaction of women in higher education, specifically how ACE scores and internalized oppression intersect with leadership styles and outcomes. Additionally, studies could examine whether this pattern holds across other industries or sectors and explore interventions that might promote more inclusive leadership approaches.

The potential for internalized oppression among women with higher ACE scores and their distrust of female supervisors points to the need for further investigation into the psychological and emotional factors that influence trust in leadership. The role of trauma in shaping professional relationships, especially among women working in higher education, is an area for future study. Research could explore the intersection of ACEs, gender identity, and leadership trust more broadly, with a focus on how shared membership bias affects collaboration, mentorship, and career advancement for women. Additionally, interventions aimed at addressing internalized oppression and fostering more supportive dynamics

between women leaders and their female colleagues could be developed, tested, and refined.

The significant role of ACE scores in shaping perceptions of trust suggests that personal history and experiences play a critical role in workplace relationships. Future studies could expand on this observation by exploring how ACEs and other psychological factors, such as resilience or coping mechanisms, interact with trust in various professional contexts. Longitudinal studies could also be valuable in understanding how these perceptions evolve and how interventions aimed at building trust could be tailored to individuals with different ACE backgrounds. Moreover, exploring the impact of supervisor training programs focused on addressing implicit biases and enhancing trust-building strategies could provide actionable insights for improving workplace environments. Additional research should prioritize exploring intersectionality to understand how various social identities, such as race and socioeconomic status, interact with ACE scores, supervisor gender, and trust in leadership. These future directions would not only deepen our understanding of the complexities of trust in supervisor relationships but also contribute to the development of more effective and inclusive leadership practices.

6. Summary

The relationship between trust in supervisors, Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACE) scores, and supervisor gender among women working in higher education was explored using a correlative quantitative approach. Seventy-six women participated by completing an anonymous, online survey. Participants were asked to evaluate trust in their supervisors, and the data was analyzed with a focus on how participant's ACE scores and supervisor gender influenced these perceptions.

The overall findings revealed that while participants generally had neutral attitudes toward their supervisors, significant differences emerged when considering ACE scores and the gender of the supervisor. Women with higher ACE scores exhibited less trust toward their female supervisors, especially regarding their supervisors' empathy, transparency, and consistency, while women who reported experiencing zero ACEs demonstrated less trust in their male supervisors. These findings point to the intricate dynamics of trust in professional relationships, suggesting that both personal histories of adverse experiences in childhood and supervisor gender are factors in shaping perceptions and experiences among women in higher education.

Conflicts of Interest

The author declares no conflicts of interest regarding the publication of this paper.

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