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UNDERSTANDING THE DISPARATE BEHAVIORAL CONSEQUENCES OF LMX DIFFERENTIATION: THE ROLE OF SOCIAL COMPARISON EMOTIONS

FADEL K. MATTA
University of Georgia

LINN VAN DYNE
Michigan State University

The burgeoning literature on LMX differentiation has demonstrated positive and negative cross-level outcomes depending on specific boundary conditions. Although this research has provided key insights into the LMX phenomenon at multiple levels of analysis, we currently lack a conceptual understanding of when and why LMX differentiation may have positive or negative consequences at work. Opening the black box between LMX differentiation and work behaviors, we draw on social comparison theory to develop a conceptual model of the cross-level implications of LMX differentiation for employee emotions and discretionary behaviors. Since each LMX dyad is nested within the broader workgroup, we incorporate multilevel relationships in our theorizing. Relying on social comparison theory, we theorize that specific instances of resource allocation by leaders function as affective events that trigger social comparison emotions. More specifically, we posit that these affective events trigger an emotion appraisal process that causes relative individual LMX status and justice perceptions to interact as sources of social comparison information, influencing the type of social comparison emotion that emerges, with subsequent effects on interpersonal discretionary behavior. Overall, our social comparison perspective unravels emotional mechanisms that provide one explanation for why LMX differentiation has inconsistent effects on employee work behaviors.

Leader-member exchange (LMX) theory centers on the premise that leaders develop differentiated relationships with employees, ranging from low-quality transactional relationships based on formal contractual exchanges to high-quality socioemotional relationships that supplement the formal contractual exchange with mutual trust, loyalty, obligation, and commitment (Liden, Sparrowe, & Wayne, 1997). While the majority of the leadership literature focuses on general leader traits and behaviors, LMX theory is especially powerful because it acknowledges that leaders engage in different dyadic exchange relationships with each employee within a workgroup (Dulebohn, Bommer, Liden, Brouer, & Ferris, 2012). To date, most individual-level LMX research has emphasized the positive aspects of high LMX quality, including numerous beneficial outcomes, such as positive job attitudes, performance, and OCBs (Dulebohn et al., 2012; Gerstner & Day, 1997; Ilies, Nahrgang, & Morgeson, 2007).

Recent research has extended the idea of LMX to the group level by introducing LMX differentiation (for a group-level meta-analysis see Yu, Matta, & Cornfield, 2018), defined as the group-level variability in LMX relationships within a specific group (Erdogan & Bauer, 2010; Liden, Erdogan, Wayne, & Sparrowe, 2006). LMX differentiation provides an important platform for extending our understanding of LMX because it recognizes that each LMX dyad is nested within the broader workgroup. However, predicting the effects of LMX differentiation on individual outcomes is complex because, according to Liden and colleagues, there are "theoretically compelling explanations for both positive and negative associations between LMX differentiation and individual performance" (2006: 724). For example, although LMX differentiation can facilitate individual performance by providing more resources to and rewarding subordinates who are most capable of utilizing those resources, it can also

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detract from individual performance when viewed negatively as preferential treatment.

To date, empirical findings are consistent with Liden and colleagues' (2006) observation. Indeed, in their recent review, Anand, Vidyarthi, and Park concluded that "findings on the effects of LMX differentiation have been mixed at best" (2015: 288). In addition, nearly all of the cross-level consequences of LMX differentiation are conditional. For example, research suggests that the effects of LMX differentiation on employee behaviors depend on other factors, such as LMX quality (Gooty & Yammarino, 2016; Harris, Li, & Kirkman, 2014; Liao, Liu, & Loi, 2010; Liden et al., 2006; van Breukelen, Konst, & van der Vlist, 2002), relative LMX quality (Henderson, Wayne, Shore, Bommer, & Tetrick, 2008), target member competence (Sias & Jablin, 1995), and distributive/procedural justice climates (Erdogan & Bauer, 2010). Further, the interplay of LMX differentiation with these boundary conditions is also complex because some research suggests that LMX differentiation strengthens the positive effects of LMX and relative LMX on desired behavioral outcomes (Henderson et al., 2008; Ma & Qu, 2010), whereas other research suggests that LMX differentiation weakens the positive links between LMX and desired behavioral outcomes (Gooty & Yammarino, 2016; Harris et al., 2014; Liao et al., 2010).

Overall, the LMX differentiation literature is fragmented and complex, and we currently lack a systematic understanding of mechanisms that drive these differential effects, leaving scholars to lament that "conclusive findings are hard to come by" (Erdogan & Bauer, 2015: 418). One potential reason for the confusing pattern is that no research has considered emotional mechanisms that may explain why LMX differentiation has inconsistent effects on employee behaviors. Furthermore, we lack a conceptually driven understanding of how LMX differentiation influences emotional responses of employees, with reviews acknowledging that the linkages between leader-member social exchanges and emotions are underdeveloped (e.g., Gooty, Connelly, Griffith, & Gupta, 2010; Rajah, Song, & Arvey, 2011; Tse, Troth, & Ashkanasy, 2015). This is not surprising given that the leadership literature has generally been slow to integrate emotional mechanisms and processes (Ashkanasy & Humphrey, 2011), but it is problematic because affect is one of four "currencies of exchange" in LMX relationships (Dienesch & Liden, 1986; Liden & Maslyn, 1998) and the LMX exchange process is "not only behavioral but also emotional" (Graen & Uhl-Bien, 1995: 230).

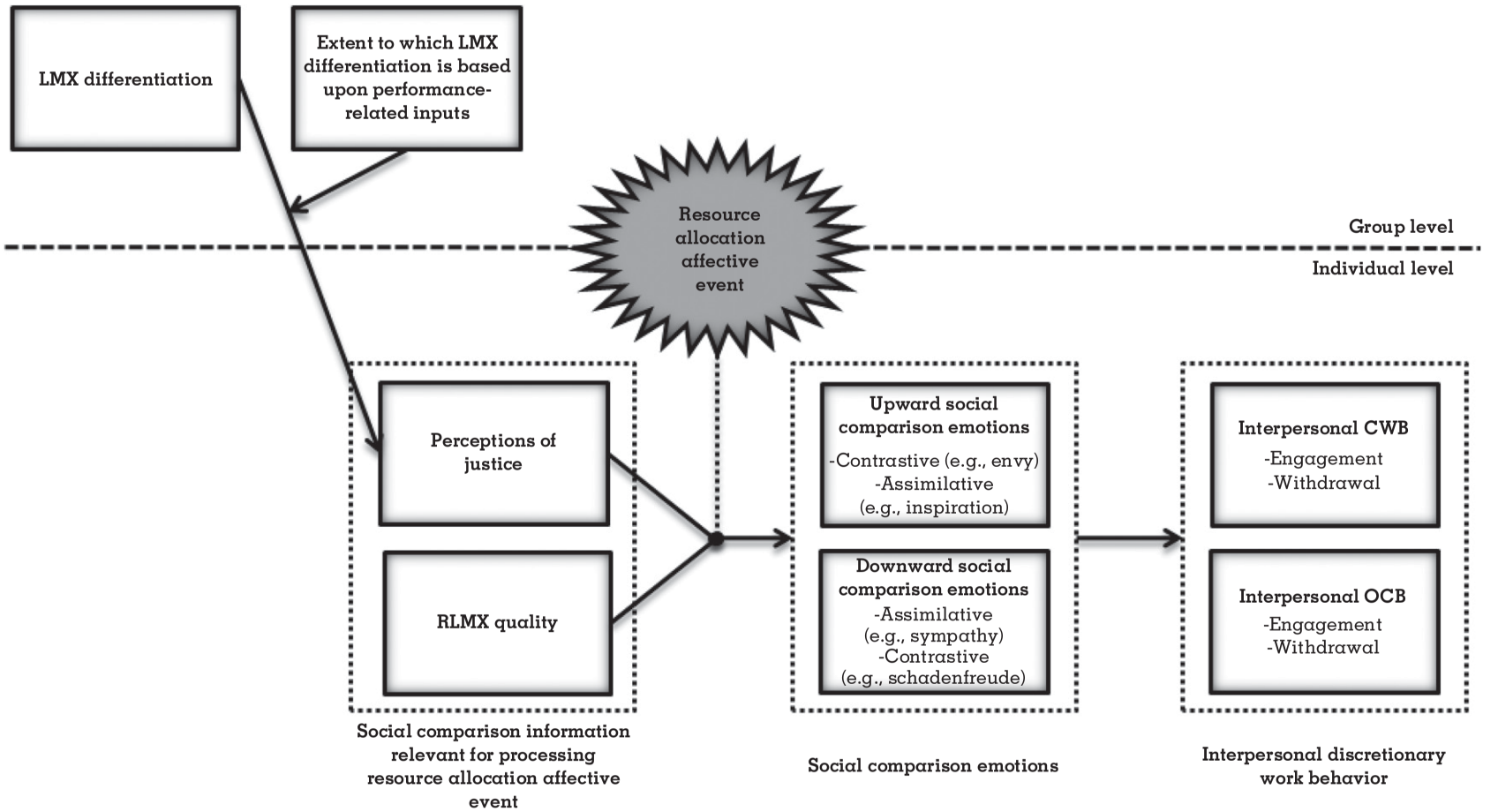
Thus, the goal of this article is to apply three social comparison lenses—social comparison theory (Festinger, 1954), social comparison emotions (Smith, 2000), and social comparison as social cognition (Buunk & Gibbons, 2007)—to open the black box of emotional processes that link high levels of LMX differentiation with discretionary behaviors (see Figure 1), explaining why some workgroup members respond favorably and others unfavorably to LMX differentiation. As we describe in detail later in the article, we focus on organizational citizenship behavior (OCB) and counterproductive work behavior (CWB) because they reflect favorable and unfavorable behavioral reactions to social comparison emotions.

We contribute to theory and practice in several ways. Theoretically, we integrate emotions into the study of LMX and provide one explanation for prior inconsistent behavioral effects of LMX differentiation. We also answer calls to consider the dark side of high LMX and the bright side of low LMX (e.g., Erdogan & Bauer, 2015; Matta & Van Dyne, 2015), to integrate social comparison processes (e.g., Greenberg, Ashton-James, & Ashkanasy, 2007) and emotional reactions (e.g., Duffy, Shaw, & Schaubroeck, 2008) into LMX theorizing, and to emphasize discrete emotional reactions (e.g., Brief & Weiss, 2002). Practically, our model highlights the importance of managerial sensitivity to the positive and negative consequences of differentiation and provides guidance on anticipating specific behavioral outcomes. The article also provides insights on how social comparison emotions drive these behaviors.

FOUNDATIONAL ASSUMPTIONS OF OUR THEORIZING

Before developing our theory, we summarize our foundational assumptions. First, we clarify the definition and conceptualization of LMX used in our theorizing. We rely on Schriesheim, Castro, and Cogliser's definition of LMX as "the quality of the exchange relationship between leader and subordinate" (1999: 77). LMX is an observable two-way exchange relationship that varies on the extent to which the relationship includes socioemotional resources, such as information, influence, tasks, latitude, support, and attention (Graen & Scandura, 1987; Wilson, Sin, & Conlon,

FIGURE 1
Theoretical Framework



Note: Although not depicted in the figure, Proposition 10 theorizes an individual-difference moderator of the experience of and behavioral reactions to social comparison emotions.

2010). Because the LMX construct is rooted in the extent to which the exchange relationship includes these resources, many of our LMX differentiation arguments focus on the differential exchange of socioemotional resources within groups. We also assume that employees value LMX and LMX-related resources. Although some individuals may occasionally reject offers to become high-LMX employees (e.g., when leaders lack power, autonomy, resources, or trustworthiness; Dienesch & Liden, 1986; Graen & Scandura, 1987), the preponderance of research shows that both high- and low-LMX employees value LMX (e.g., Dansereau, Graen, & Haga, 1975; Liden et al., 1997; Maslyn & Uhl-Bien, 2001). As a final point here, in line with Liden et al.'s seminal review, we conceptualize low-LMX relationships as "relationships that are void of mutual trust, loyalty, respect, and liking . . . [that is,] *not* positive, rather than negative" (1997: 83). Thus, low-LMX relationships are distinct from negative, de-energizing, or hostile relationships.

Another assumption is that because the processes described in our model center on the differential effects of LMX differentiation, the occurrence of differentiation is a boundary condition of our model. We note, however, that differentiation is more the norm than the exception in workgroups—for example, leaders typically differentiate LMX quality in 80 to 90 percent of workgroups (Graen & Cashman, 1975; Liden & Graen, 1980). Our theorizing also focuses on social comparison processes, and we hold other factors constant. Drawing from Festinger's (1954) original formulation of social comparison theory, we focus on self-evaluation as the primary motive for LMX-related social comparisons. Although other motives for social comparison exist (e.g., self-enhancement; Thornton & Arrowood, 1966; Wills, 1981), we focus on the self-evaluation motive because it has been the exclusive focus in the LMX domain (e.g., Henderson et al., 2008; Hu & Liden, 2013; Vidyarthi, Liden, Anand, Erdogan, & Ghosh, 2010).

Finally, our theorizing is bound to contexts in which fairness evaluations are primarily based on an equity (as opposed to an equality or need) rule. Although we recognize that other rules may be more salient in certain contexts (e.g., an equality rule in a union environment, a need rule in a nonprofit [e.g., see Fiske, 1992, and Wellman, 2017]), we focus on equity for several reasons. First, the LMX differentiation literature—the focal literature of our theorizing—acknowledges that equity standards are "used most often in evaluating the fairness of differential treatment" (Sias & Jablin, 1995: 30). This is not surprising considering that the LMX literature itself is built on the notion that effective leaders differentiate their exchange quality with subordinates to make the most efficient use of their limited resources such that more resources are provided to subordinates who can contribute more toward accomplishing collective objectives (Dansereau et al., 1975). Second, equity (versus equality or need) tends to be the dominant basis of justice used in organizations (Bierhoff, Cohen, & Greenberg, 1986; Cohen, 1987; Colquitt & Jackson, 2006), as well as in measures of justice (e.g., Colquitt, 2001). Finally, and perhaps most important, an equity rule provides the most explanatory power in terms of explaining the discrepant effects of LMX differentiation on individual behaviors (the ultimate goal of this article). An equality rule simply suggests that the less differentiation there is, the better, rendering such a rule ineffective in explaining the differential effects of high LMX differentiation. In contrast, an equity rule posits that the effects of differentiation vary based on the inputs used to differentiate exchange relationships (a key feature of our theorizing).

CROSS-LEVEL EFFECTS OF LMX DIFFERENTIATION

Social Comparison Theory and LMX Differentiation

Social comparison theory is ultimately about "our quest to know ourselves, about the search for self-relevant information and how people gain self-knowledge and discover reality about themselves" (Mettee & Smith, 1977: 69–70). Social comparison theory (Festinger, 1954) posits that people are driven by a motive to self-evaluate, and this desire leads them to evaluate their own standing based on comparisons with referent others when objective evaluations are not available (Buunk & Gibbons, 2007). Social comparisons have utility because they allow people to assess their relative status within groups in order to navigate specific social environments (Spence, Ferris, Brown, & Heller, 2011). In this article we focus on LMX differentiation as an especially important aspect of work contexts within which individuals often engage in social comparisons for the purpose of evaluating their relative status.

Social comparison theory is particularly relevant to high levels of LMX differentiation because differentiation in LMX is based on the premise of unequal distribution of LMX-related socioemotional resources within the group (Sparrowe & Liden, 1997). When groups are characterized by high levels of LMX differentiation, some employees have better relationships with the leader and receive more resources—such as information, influence, tasks, latitude, support, and attention—than other employees (Graen & Scandura, 1987; Wilson et al., 2010). In workgroups peers are proximal referent others (e.g., Ambrose, Harland, & Kulik, 1991; Ambrose & Kulik, 1988) and a salient source of social comparisons because they work in the same unit, typically work in close proximity, often perform similar tasks (Shah, 1998), and generally have similar attributes (Festinger, 1954).

In line with the above theorizing, research has demonstrated that individuals observe differences in LMX quality within workgroups (Duchon, Green, & Taber, 1986), and these differences drive social comparison processes (Tse, Lam, Lawrence, & Huang, 2013). Summarizing this point, Vidyarthi et al. noted that "when leaders differentiate, the varied levels of LMX quality within the group are likely to trigger social comparison processes" (2010: 849). Drawing on social comparison theory, scholars have introduced new constructs that represent LMX-related social comparison processes at the individual level, such as relative LMX (i.e., relative LMX standing within the workgroup, RLMX) and LMX social comparison (i.e., subjective ratings of relative LMX standing, LMXSC), and have shown the utility of these social comparisons at work (e.g., Henderson et al., 2008; Hu & Liden, 2013; Vidyarthi et al., 2010).

Although the relevance of social comparisons to LMX differentiation is clear (Anand et al., 2015), how and why social comparisons influence individual-level outcomes are less clear. As we noted earlier, reviews of the LMX differentiation literature describe the findings as inconclusive and often contradictory (Anand et al., 2015; Erdogan & Bauer, 2015). We suggest that highlighting the justice and emotional aspects of social comparison processes will help to clarify the mechanisms underlying these seemingly paradoxical outcomes. Importantly, our theoretical approach responds to Duffy et al.'s suggestion that "more fully integrating social comparison and justice models may afford organizational researchers a more comprehensive framework for understanding emotional reactions to social exchanges" (2008: 180). We begin our theorizing by elucidating one factor that determines when high levels of LMX differentiation influence individual justice perceptions in positive and negative ways.

LMX Differentiation and Individual Justice Perceptions

Numerous justice theories, including equity theory (Adams, 1963, 1965), relative deprivation theory (Crosby, 1976), referent cognitions theory (Folger, 1986a,b), and fairness theory (Folger & Cropanzano, 1998, 2001), recognize social comparison processes as key mechanisms that drive justice judgments. Equity theory (Adams, 1963, 1965), an extension of social comparison theory, suggests that equity judgments (i.e., distributive justice) are derived from comparing outputs against inputs between oneself and a referent other. From a social comparison perspective, equity theory is useful for understanding when high levels of LMX differentiation result in low or high individual perceptions of organizational justice (Sias & Jablin, 1995), defined as the extent to which people perceive actions or decisions undertaken by a supervisor or an organization to be fair (Greenberg, 1987, 1990).

A key premise of LMX theory is that leaders differentiate LMX quality in workgroups because of constraints on their time, energy, and resources (Graen & Scandura, 1987; Graen & Uhl-Bien, 1995). Graen posited that to accomplish workgroup goals, a leader "must enlist at least some of [their] people as 'special' assistants or [they] probably will fail" (1976: 1241). Because of the same constraints, however, leaders are unable to establish high-LMX relationships with all their employees (Liden & Graen, 1980). Thus, if a leader must establish some high-LMX relationships for their workgroup to perform effectively but cannot establish high-LMX relationships with all employees, an important question is how leaders identify and select high-LMX members and how group members react to this differentiation where some employees receive more resources (e.g., information, influence, and attention) than others.

Early theorizing suggested that managers select high-LMX employees based on (a) competence, skill, and performance; (b) compatibility and trust; and/or (c) leader prejudices concerning race, religion, or ethnic background (Graen, 1976;

Graen & Scandura, 1987; Liden & Graen, 1980). Empirical work has largely confirmed this theorizing. Indeed, Dulebohn and colleagues' (2012) meta-analysis highlighted three major categories that determine LMX quality: member characteristics (e.g., competence, skill, and performance), leader characteristics (e.g., leader personality and expectations), and interpersonal relationships (e.g., trust, compatibility, and bias based on liking and similarity). Of these criteria for differentiation, member competence, skill, and performance are especially relevant to equity theory.

Equity theory posits that contributions and merit should determine outcomes (Adams, 1963, 1965). Those who contribute more should get more. When leaders differentiate LMX relationships based more on performance-related inputs (e.g., member competence, skill, and performance), high levels of LMX differentiation should be perceived as equitable because the leader gives "more latitude and support to subordinates who are competent and who perform well" (Zhou & Schriesheim, 2010: 828). This is consistent with the basic tenet of LMX theory that leaders selectively allocate resources to employees who are best able to use the resources to enhance workgroup effectiveness (Graen & Uhl-Bien, 1995; Liden et al., 1997). Indeed, considering that the relational dimensions of LMX such as trust are earned (Colquitt, LePine, Zapata, & Wild, 2011; Ferrin, Dirks, & Shah, 2006), workgroups should view differentiated relationships as fair if these better relationships occur with employees who have earned trust (e.g., by displaying ability; Mayer, Davis, & Schoorman, 1995).

In contrast, when leaders differentiate based less on performance-related inputs (e.g., member competence, skill, and performance), high levels of LMX differentiation should be perceived as inequitable. Indeed, differential treatment based on issues that have no direct relationship with task performance or actual contributions is typically described as "unjustified preferential treatment and favoritism" (van Breukelen, van der Leeden, Wesselius, & Hoes, 2012: 47) that "violates the rule of justice" (Chen, He, & Weng, 2018: 6), whereas "employees are more accepting of differentiation when the pattern of differentiation can easily be attributed to differential employee ability or performance" (Nishii & Mayer, 2009: 1421). The above equity-based theorizing suggests that when your workgroup is differentiated and some employees receive more socioemotional resources than others, you will view differentiation as fair if it is justified by competence, skill, and/or performance but unfair if it is not.

Indirect empirical evidence supports our arguments about when high LMX differentiation is judged as fair. For instance, Sias and Jablin demonstrated that differential treatment "of a subordinate was perceived of as fair only when such treatment was seen to be warranted by the target's level of competence" (1995: 22). Similarly, Chen and colleagues (2018) showed that when leaders differentiated LMX based to a greater extent on member task performance (i.e., a higher one-to-one correlation between each member's task performance and LMX), the relationship between LMX differentiation and procedural justice judgments was positive, but when differentiation was based less on task performance, the relationship was negative.

In our theorizing we build on and extend the work of Chen et al. (2018) by expanding the focus from task performance as a specific input that leaders base differentiation on to the broader criteria of performance-based inputs (e.g., member competence, skill, and performance). We also broaden the focus from procedural justice to overall justice. This more abstract approach to justice is consistent with recent recommendations to focus on overall justice (e.g., Ambrose, Wo, & Griffith, 2015; Colquitt, 2012) because it is the key theoretical mechanism that explains why justice rule adherence (e.g., distributive, procedural, informational, and interpersonal) influences outcomes (Colquitt & Rodell, 2015).

> *Proposition 1: The cross-level relationship between LMX differentiation and overall justice is moderated by the extent to which differentiation is based on performance-related inputs such that the relationship is positive when the emphasis on performance-related inputs is high and negative when the emphasis is low.*

TRIGGERING INDIVIDUAL-LEVEL SOCIAL COMPARISON EMOTIONS

Overall justice (hereafter referred to as justice) is an important source of social comparison information that employees consider when formulating their social comparison emotional reactions. Given that individuals use social

comparisons to reduce uncertainty in their social environment (Greenberg et al., 2007), justice is particularly salient information because "a key function, perhaps *the* key function, of fairness is that it provides people with a way to cope with uncertainties that arise in their lives" (Lind & Van den Bos, 2002: 184). Thus, in our framework, justice perceptions provide social comparison information about perceived situational control (Thibaut & Walker, 1975; Van den Bos & Lind, 2002). Although our theorizing to this point has focused on the effects of LMX differentiation on justice perceptions, we posit that RLMX quality also provides important social comparison information because it captures social comparison discrepancies in LMX quality between employees and others in their group. Thus, in our framework RLMX quality provides social comparison information about within-group standing (Henderson et al., 2008; Hu & Liden, 2013). Emotions, however, are triggered by specific events (Weiss & Cropanzano, 1996). Therefore, before describing the role of social comparison information in influencing specific emotional reactions, we first define social comparison emotions and discuss discrete affective events that trigger these emotions.

Social Comparison Emotions and Emotion Appraisal Processes

Emotions are different from other affective constructs in that they are generated by a specific target or cause, are relatively intense, and tend to be short-lived (Barsade & Gibson, 2007). The discrete emotion that is elicited is largely determined by the appraisal process triggered by the target or cause. Although many appraisal theories of emotions exist (e.g., Frijda, 1986; Lazarus, 1991; Ortony, Clore, & Collins, 1988; Roseman, Spindel, & Jose, 1990; Smith & Ellsworth, 1987), the common thread in these theories is that appraisal processes unfold in two stages. The first stage determines whether the situation is favorable or unfavorable to one's self and one's current goal(s). The second stage interprets cues from the environment to make meaning of the situation, determining the discrete emotional response elicited. Although theories of emotion appraisal typically focus on broad features of emotions (e.g., valence and arousal), we posit that emotion appraisal is uniquely relevant to different social comparison emotions derived from Smith's (2000: 174) "general analytic structure" of social comparison emotions.

Smith's general analytic structure posits that social comparison emotions (i.e., emotions that occur when specific affective events trigger social comparison processes) are differentiated based on (1) the direction of the comparison and (2) the nature of the comparison. The direction of comparison can be upward (unfavorable comparison with superior others) or downward (favorable comparison with inferior others). Since theories of emotion appraisal posit that the first appraisal determines whether the situation is favorable or unfavorable to one's self and one's current goal(s), we theorize that the direction of comparison is particularly relevant to the first appraisal of social comparison emotions.

The nature of comparisons can be contrastive (highlighting differences and directing cognitions away from the referent) or assimilative (highlighting similarities and directing cognitions toward the referent). Perceived situational control—the extent to which you believe you can influence future outcomes (Testa & Major, 1990)—is a critical factor in determining whether an upward or downward social comparison emotion is contrastive or assimilative (Smith, 2000). When you make upward social comparisons, low controllability causes you to experience negative contrastive social comparison emotions (e.g., envy) that highlight differences between yourself and upward social comparison referents, and high controllability causes you to experience positive assimilative social comparison emotions (e.g., inspiration) that highlight similarities between yourself and upward social comparison referents. Envy is "an unpleasant and often painful blend of feelings characterized by inferiority, hostility, and resentment caused by a comparison with a person or group of persons who possess something we desire" (Smith & Kim, 2007: 49), whereas inspiration is pleasant feelings characterized by admiration, hope, and optimism caused by comparisons with others that suggest positive outcomes are attainable (Lockwood & Kunda, 1997). When you make downward social comparisons, low controllability causes you to experience negative assimilative social comparison emotions (e.g., sympathy) that highlight similarities between yourself and downward social comparison referents, and high controllability causes you to experience positive contrastive social comparison emotions (e.g., schadenfreude)

that highlight differences between yourself and downward social comparison referents. Sympathy is unpleasant feelings characterized by pity, fear, and worry caused by comparison with an inferior person or group (Eisenberg, 2000), whereas schadenfreude is pleasant feelings characterized by pride, contempt, and scorn caused by comparison with an inferior person or group (Smith, 2000). Given that the second stage of emotion appraisal theories focuses on interpreting situational cues and perceived situational control is the primary determinant of the nature of comparison (Smith, 2000), we theorize that the nature of comparison is key to the second appraisal.

Events That Trigger Social Comparison Emotions

Imagine what is going on when an employee expresses one of the following comments:

- "I am feeling really bad. Jerald (the leader) is providing Joe (a coworker) with the discretion to complete his work however he likes. He is the only one in our workgroup who is allowed to do that, even though he is one of the worst performers. It's not fair, and I feel helpless to change the situation."
- "Wow! Did you hear that Becky (a coworker) is now a group leader? That gives me hope that I, too, can move up. I have almost the same amount of experience, and last week Beth (the leader) hinted that I am on the right track."
- "I feel so sorry for Sandy (a coworker). Although she has proven herself to be capable, Samantha (the leader) never stands up for her when others question her work. I hope that never happens to me."
- "I hate to admit it, but I was pleased when John (a coworker) didn't get approved for the high-potential program. I know I have worked harder and my results are better, so I am glad James (the leader) recognized my contributions and included me in the program."

Each of the above illustrates an affective event that was triggered by a specific leader allocation of LMX-related resources. Each affective event generated different social comparison processes and emotions. Before developing theory about each unique reaction, we first discuss discrete affective events that trigger these reactions within the context of LMX differentiation.

The LMX literature is anchored on two perspectives—role (Graen, 1976) and social exchange theories (Liden et al., 1997)—and both emphasize leader distribution of resources (e.g., information, influence, tasks, latitude, support, and attention; Graen & Scandura, 1987; Wilson et al., 2010). Leaders, however, do not have unlimited opportunities to distribute resources (Scott, Colquitt, & Paddock, 2009; Scott, Garza, Conlon, & Kim, 2014). Interdependence with other departments can limit the ability to reorganize work, confidentiality about pending events (e.g., layoffs) can restrict information sharing, and personal energy and time are finite. Thus, although LMX relationships become routinized over time (Graen & Scandura, 1987), specific instances of resource distribution within a workgroup vary over time.

Although some specific resource allocations may be hidden and not known by other group members, research on managerial discretion notes that many resource allocations "are long lasting, making them more collectively observable" (Scott et al., 2009: 763). Consistent with affective events theory (Weiss & Cropanzano, 1996), each distribution of resources is a change to the environment. This should cause employees in high LMX differentiation groups to appraise and self-evaluate based on shifts in LMX-related resources in the environment. Indeed, theoretical research argues (e.g., Cropanzano, Dasborough, & Weiss, 2017) and empirical work shows (e.g., Dasborough, 2006; Gaddis, Connelly, & Mumford, 2004; Johnson, 2008; Tse et al., 2013) that leader behaviors, interactions, and exchanges serve as affective events. In the case of LMX-related resource allocations, the lack of objective standards for evaluating where one stands in terms of such resources makes social comparisons a valuable source of information (Festinger, 1954), and this triggers social comparison emotion appraisal processes.

MULTILEVEL DETERMINANTS OF SOCIAL COMPARISON EMOTIONS

Here we ask, "What social comparison information is relevant to the appraisal process that occurs following leader resource allocations within high LMX differentiation workgroups?" To answer this question, we turn to the social comparison literature and LMX literature. As noted above, the social comparison emotion appraisal process centers on the direction and the nature of the comparison (Smith, 2000). Below we posit that (1) RLMX quality provides social comparison information that influences the direction, and (2) justice perceptions provide social comparison information that influences the nature of the comparison.

RLMX Quality as Social Comparison Information

In the context of high LMX differentiation, a specific leader allocation of LMX-related resources is an affective event. Following such an event, the first stage of the appraisal process involves ascertaining if the direction of comparison is upward (social comparison with superior others) or downward (social comparison with inferior others). We posit that RLMX quality influences the direction of comparison because it provides social comparison information about your treatment compared to the rest of the workgroup (i.e., within-group standing; Henderson et al., 2008; Hu & Liden, 2013). Focusing on others in the group as the referent is consistent with social comparison theory (Wood, 1996) and is the most common approach applied in the LMX literature (e.g., Henderson et al., 2008; Hu & Liden, 2013; Vidyarthi et al., 2010). Those with high RLMX generally receive more socioemotional resources from their leaders relative to others in the group and accordingly make downward social comparisons. In contrast, those with low RLMX receive fewer resources than others and engage in upward social comparisons. Consistent with these arguments, research demonstrates that the cross-level effects of LMX differentiation are contingent on individual RLMX quality (e.g., Gooty & Yammarino, 2016; Henderson et al., 2008; Liden et al., 2006) and that individual emotional responses to triggering events are contingent on LMX quality (e.g., Ballinger, Lehman, & Schoorman, 2010; Ballinger & Schoorman, 2007; Dulac, Coyle-Shapiro, Henderson, & Wayne, 2008).

Justice Perceptions as Social Comparison Information

In the second stage of the appraisal process, individuals assess the nature of the social comparison (contrastive versus assimilative). We posit that justice perceptions influence the nature of the comparison by influencing perceptions of situational control. Justice is particularly important within the context of LMX differentiation because "high LMX differentiation in a group will make justice concerns salient" (Erdogan & Bauer, 2010: 1106). Since objective information for evaluation of allocations is not always available, employees rely on justice information to reduce their sense of uncertainty (Lind & Van den Bos, 2002; Van den Bos & Lind, 2002).

Smith's (2000) general analytic structure of social comparison emotions emphasizes the importance of perceived situational control over closing or maintaining social comparison gaps. When judgments of controllability are high, you have the sense that your efforts will allow you to become similar to referent others who are better off (when you have low RLMX) and avoid becoming similar to those who are worse off (when you have high RLMX). In contrast, when judgments of controllability are low, you do not feel able to improve or avoid deterioration in your situation.

The justice literature provides insights on how justice perceptions influence perceived situational control. According to Van den Bos and Lind, "If one's environment and the people in it are fair, then one can expect to be able to control one's destiny" (2002: 39). Thibaut and Walker (1975) similarly theorized that justice is important because it makes long-term outcomes seem more controllable. The theoretical argument that justice increases perceptions of situational control is supported by uncertainty management research (e.g., Van den Bos, 2001; Van den Bos & Miedema, 2000; Van den Bos, Wilke, & Lind, 1998) and aligns with our equity-based theorizing that performance-based LMX differentiation is viewed as equitable because employees understand they can influence their outcomes by varying performance-related inputs.

In sum, we propose that RLMX plays a key role in the primary appraisal (providing social comparison information about the direction of comparison) and that justice perceptions play a critical role in the secondary appraisal (providing social comparison information about the level of situational control). This two-stage appraisal process complements past work exploring the role of justice-relevant affective events in eliciting discrete emotions (e.g., Barclay, Skarlicki, & Pugh, 2005; Weiss, Suckow, & Cropanzano, 1999). Indeed, research in this tradition positions outcome favorability as driving the primary appraisal. In our context, RLMX is the predominant indicator of outcome favorability, determining whether the direction of comparison of LMX-related resources is unfavorable (comparison with superior others) or favorable (comparison with inferior others). In line with this past work's emphasis on justice in the secondary appraisal, we also focus on justice in the secondary appraisal—in our theory, determining perceptions of situational control and the nature of comparison (contrastive versus

assimilative). Going beyond extant research linking justice-relevant affective events to emotions, we focus our theorizing on emotions that are primarily relevant to social comparisons processes—relying on Smith's (2000) general analytic structure of social comparison emotions as an overarching theory—and that prompt the interpersonal discretionary behaviors that result from these processes. Thus, combining these two sources of social comparison information, we advance a two-by-two matrix (see Figure 2) and a social comparison emotion appraisal process (see Figure 3) to elucidate when each of Smith's (2000) four general types of social comparison emotions emerges.

Justice Perceptions, RLMX, and Upward Contrastive Social Comparison Emotions

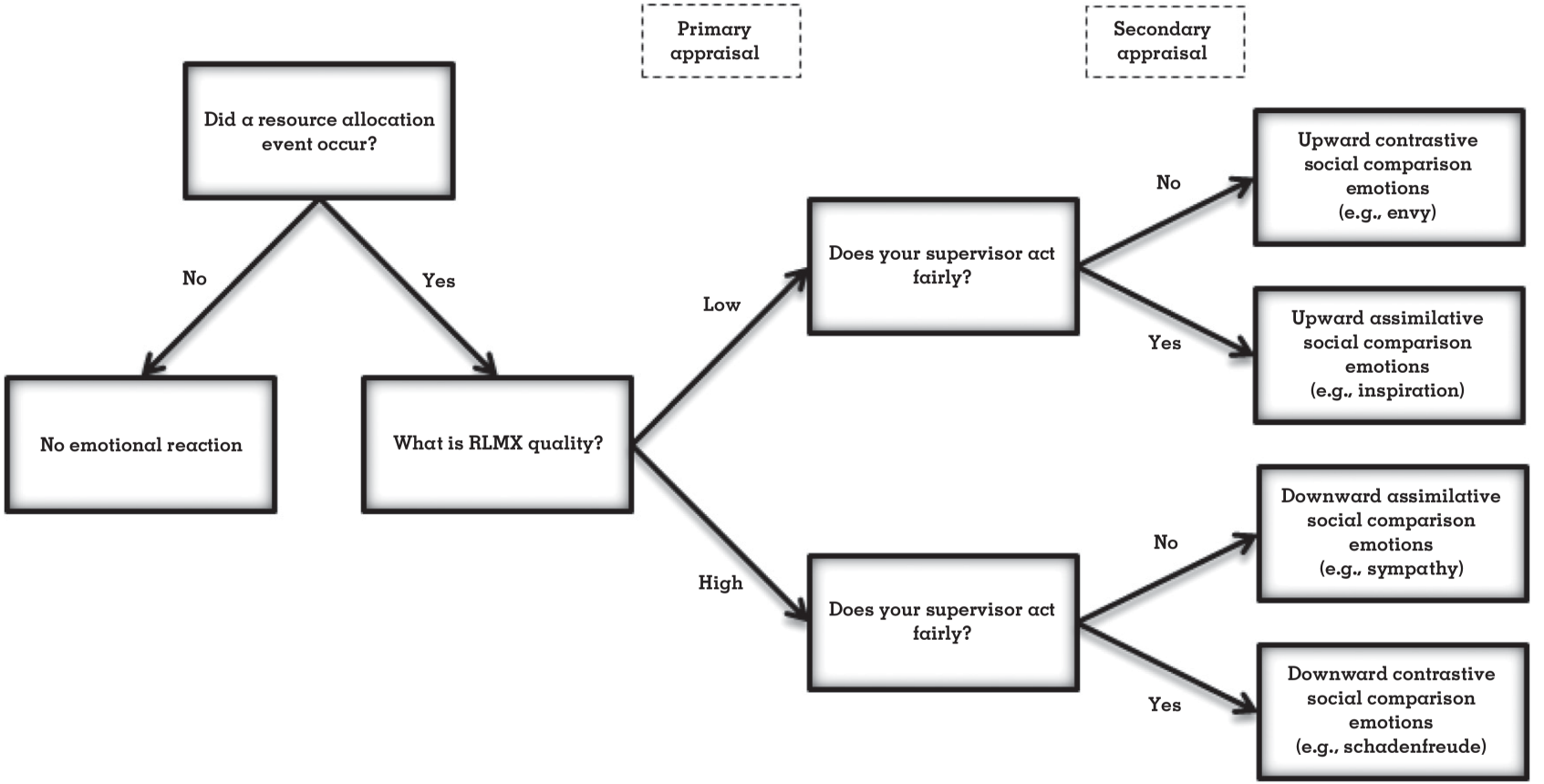
What causes employees to experience upward contrastive social comparison emotions following the allocation of LMX-related resources within a high LMX differentiation workgroup? Upward contrastive social comparison emotions include depression, shame, resentment, and envy. Such emotions emerge when the social comparison emotion appraisal process indicates that you are (1) worse off than others (low RLMX) and (2) unable to change your situation (low-justice perceptions make outcomes seem uncontrollable; Smith, 2000). To make these arguments more concrete, we describe the role of social comparison information in influencing envy, an upward contrastive social comparison emotion, in greater detail. Envy encompasses aspects of the other upward contrastive social comparison emotions because it combines a sense of inferiority with depressive feelings and resentment (Smith, Parrott, Ozer, & Moniz, 1994). Moreover, envy is particularly relevant to our social comparison–based theoretical model because it is "the prototype of the social comparison–based emotion as it so clearly requires a social comparison for it to take place" (Smith, 2000: 177).

If you are an employee in a workgroup with high LMX differentiation and your leader allocates an LMX-related resource within the workgroup (e.g., latitude in how certain employees can complete work), this resource allocation event triggers an emotion appraisal process and search for social comparison information to evaluate your status. First, you consider the direction of comparison. If you have low RLMX, you are generally not on the receiving end of resource allocations relative to others in your workgroup (Henderson et al., 2008). Thus, others in the group represent upward comparisons. Indeed, employees typically desire the resources associated with higher LMX relationships and want to enhance their relationship quality (Maslyn & Uhl-Bien, 2001). Second, you assess whether you have situational control. If justice perceptions are low, the unfair context gives you a low sense of situational control (Cropanzano, Byrne, Bobocel, & Rupp, 2001; Van den Bos & Lind, 2002). Your referent others are superior to you and have what you covet, but you

FIGURE 2
Crossing Justice Perceptions and RLMX Quality on Social Comparison Emotions

		Justice perceptions	
		Low justice *Low controllability*	**High justice** *High controllability*
RLMX quality	**Low RLMX** *Upward social comparisons*	**Upward contrastive social comparison emotions (e.g., envy)** *Unable to enhance low RLMX*	**Upward assimilative social comparison emotions (e.g., inspiration)** *Able to enhance low RLMX*
	High RLMX *Downward social comparisons*	**Downward assimilative social comparison emotions (e.g., sympathy)** *Unable to maintain high RLMX*	**Downward contrastive social comparison emotions (e.g., schadenfreude)** *Able to maintain high RLMX*

FIGURE 3
Appraisal Process of Social Comparison Emotions Within High LMX Differentiation Contexts



feel unable to attain their status because the unfair context leads you to think your work efforts would not be recognized or rewarded. These social comparisons cause you to experience upward contrastive social comparison emotions. This would be consistent with the experience of envy, which emphasizes the desire for something others have that seems unattainable for you (Smith & Kim, 2007).

Consistent with these theoretical arguments, empirical research has demonstrated that upward social comparisons elicit envy and depressive affect (e.g., Fischer, Kastenmüller, Frey, & Peus, 2009; Salovey & Rodin, 1984)—especially in low-control versus high-control conditions (e.g., Testa & Major, 1990), as well as when upward comparisons are appraised as undeserved (e.g., van de Ven, Zeelenberg, & Pieters, 2012). Combining the above conceptual arguments and these empirical findings, we propose the following.

> *Proposition 2: Individual RLMX and justice perceptions interact to predict individual group member upward contrastive social comparison emotions (e.g., envy) when individual RLMX and justice perceptions are both low (rather than high).*

Justice Perceptions, RLMX, and Upward Assimilative Social Comparison Emotions

What causes employees to experience upward assimilative social comparison emotions in response to distribution of resources by the leader within a high LMX differentiation workgroup? Upward assimilative social comparison emotions include optimism, admiration, and inspiration. These emotions arise when the social comparison emotion appraisal process indicates that you are (1) worse off than others (low RLMX) and (2) able to change your situation (high justice perceptions make outcomes seem controllable; Smith, 2000). We illustrate our arguments with inspiration because it incorporates aspects of the other upward assimilative social comparison emotions. For instance, Smith posited that "feelings of inspiration, like optimism, imply enhanced expectations for the future and a positive redefining of one's capabilities, created by another person's superior example. . . . they also seem to require that the advantaged person be expressly admired" (2000: 186).

If your leader distributes an LMX-related resource (e.g., influence to provide leadership to the group) within a high LMX differentiation workgroup, this triggers an emotion appraisal process and search for social comparison information to evaluate status. In the first appraisal, you assess RLMX quality to determine the direction of comparison. If you have low RLMX, you generally receive fewer resources than others (Henderson et al., 2008), and others in the group represent upward comparisons. Second, you consider situational control. If justice perceptions are high, you have a sense of control because fairness leads you to think you can influence outcomes (Colquitt, Scott, Judge, & Shaw, 2006; Van den Bos & Lind, 2002). Other group members have superior status that highlights upward comparisons of "what is possible," and the fair context suggests your efforts would be recognized and rewarded, making that possibility seem attainable. These social comparisons cause you to experience upward assimilative social comparison emotions. This would be consistent with the experience of inspiration, which emerges only when people believe that they can achieve the same level of success as an upward referent (Lockwood & Kunda, 1997, 1999).

In line with the above theorizing, empirical studies have shown that upward comparisons trigger inspiration, for example, for cardiac patients (e.g., Helgeson & Taylor, 1993), students (e.g., Buunk, Peiro, & Griffioen, 2007), and individuals making major life transitions (e.g., Lockwood, Shaughnessy, Fortune, & Tong, 2012). Furthermore, Lockwood and Kunda (1997) demonstrated that this relationship occurred only for those who thought it was possible to succeed like the referent. In sum, our theory and this empirical evidence lead us to propose the following.

> *Proposition 3: Individual RLMX and justice perceptions interact to predict individual group member upward assimilative social comparison emotions (e.g., inspiration) when individual RLMX is low (rather than high) and justice perceptions are high (rather than low).*

Justice Perceptions, RLMX, and Downward Assimilative Social Comparison Emotions

What causes employees to experience downward assimilative social comparison emotions

when a leader allocates resources in a workgroup characterized by high LMX differentiation? Downward assimilative social comparison emotions include pity, fear, worry, and sympathy. Such emotions surface when the social comparison emotion appraisal process indicates that you are (1) better off than others (high RLMX) and (2) unable to maintain your situation (low justice perceptions make outcomes seem uncontrollable; Smith, 2000). We illustrate our arguments with sympathy because it embodies aspects of the other downward assimilative social comparison emotions. Indeed, sympathy captures "the worry and fear over one's future outcomes plus a pity for the current disadvantaged condition of the other person" (Smith, 2000: 191).

When your leader distributes resources (e.g., displaying support for certain employees) and the group is characterized by high LMX differentiation, you begin an emotion appraisal process and search for social comparison information in order to evaluate your status. First, if you have high RLMX, you generally are on the receiving end of resources relative to others (Henderson et al., 2008). Thus, others in the group represent downward comparisons. In the second stage, if you have low justice perceptions, unfairness causes you to think you cannot influence outcomes, and you have a sense of low situational control (Cropanzano et al., 2001; Van den Bos & Lind, 2002). This absence of situational control leaves you feeling at risk of losing your status and becoming similar to those who have low RLMX. Even though you now have superior status, your downward social comparisons cause you to focus on others as "feared selves" you wish to avoid becoming in the future (Lockwood, 2002; Lockwood, Jordan, & Kunda, 2002) because low justice perceptions suggest you may not be able to maintain your status. Indeed, low justice leaves you vulnerable to similar undeserved outcomes in the future, and Lockwood's work has demonstrated that "when vulnerability [is] high, downward comparisons [deflate] self-evaluations" (2002: 343). This elicits a sense of "kinship in feeling that enables a person to share in the misfortune of another person" (Smith, 2000: 191). These social comparisons cause you to experience downward assimilative social comparison emotions. This would be consistent with the experience of sympathy, which emerges only if negative outcomes (i.e., downward comparisons) seem undeserved (Brigham, Kelso, Jackson, & Smith, 1997; Ortony et al., 1988), such as when outcomes seem low in controllability and are not determined by performance-related inputs (i.e., low justice).

In support of our above arguments, empirical work has demonstrated that downward comparisons result in sympathy when outcomes or misfortunes are viewed as undeserved (e.g., Brigham et al., 1997; Feather, McKee, & Bekker, 2011; Feather, Wenzel, & McKee, 2013), whereas the relationship is buffered when the referent is seen as responsible for the outcome or misfortune (e.g., Marjanovic, Greenglass, Struthers, & Faye, 2009). Taken together, this theorizing and empirical work leads us to propose the following.

> *Proposition 4: Individual RLMX and justice perceptions interact to predict individual group member downward assimilative social comparison emotions (e.g., sympathy) when individual RLMX is high (rather than low) and justice perceptions are low (rather than high).*

Justice Perceptions, RLMX, and Downward Contrastive Social Comparison Emotions

What causes employees to experience downward contrastive social comparison emotions when LMX differentiation in a workgroup is high and leaders allocate resources? Downward contrastive social comparison emotions include pride, contempt, scorn, and schadenfreude. These emotions occur when the social comparison emotion appraisal process indicates that you are (1) better off than others (high RLMX) and (2) able to maintain your situation (high justice perceptions make outcomes seem controllable; Smith, 2000). We use schadenfreude as an example of our arguments. Smith argued that schadenfreude captures aspects of pride, contempt, and scorn because "the self-enhancing aspect of the downward comparison provides the pleasure (Brigham et al., 1997), and the apparently contemptible aspects of the person may produce the malicious edge that also seems part of the emotion" (2000: 189). Although schadenfreude is "ubiquitous in everyday life, it has received very little attention among psychologists and decision-making researchers" (Kramer, Yucel-Aybat, & Lau-Gesk, 2011: 140). Generally, individuals experience pleasure at the successes or good fortunes of others, and they experience

displeasure at the failures or misfortunes of others. However, when social comparisons indicate that the failures of referent others seem appropriate and justified, people experience schadenfreude (Kramer et al., 2011).

If you are in a high LMX differentiation workgroup, resource allocation by the leader (e.g., assigning tasks that have the potential for growth and learning to certain employees) triggers an emotion appraisal process and search for social comparison information to evaluate status. In the first appraisal, if you have high RLMX, you generally receive more resources (Henderson et al., 2008) and others in the group represent downward comparisons. In the second appraisal, if your perceptions of justice are high, fairness provides you with a sense of situational control (Colquitt et al., 2006; Van den Bos & Lind, 2002). You have superior status and feel able to maintain your status because the environment is fair. These social comparisons cause you to experience downward contrastive social comparison emotions. This would be consistent with the experience of schadenfreude, which is triggered only when downward comparisons are justified and deserved (Feather & McKee, 2009; Feather & Sherman, 2002), such as when outcomes seem high in controllability and are determined by performance-related inputs (i.e., high justice).

Research supports these arguments and shows that downward comparisons elicit schadenfreude (Dvash, Gilam, Ben-Ze'ev, Hendler, & Shamay-Tsoory, 2010), especially when negative consequences seem deserved (e.g., Feather & McKee, 2009; Feather & Sherman, 2002; Feather et al., 2013; van Dijk, Ouwerkerk, Goslinga, & Nieweg, 2005). Together, our arguments and this empirical evidence lead us to propose the following.

> *Proposition 5: Individual RLMX and justice perceptions interact to predict individual group member downward contrastive social comparison emotions (e.g., schadenfreude) when individual RLMX and justice perceptions are both high (rather than low).*

SOCIAL COMPARISON EMOTIONS AND DISCRETIONARY BEHAVIOR

Because the ultimate goal of our theory is to explain the favorable and unfavorable behavioral reactions to social comparison emotions resulting from LMX differentiation, we focus on the facets of job performance that best capture these behavioral reactions (i.e., OCB and CWB). When high levels of LMX differentiation and leader resource allocations trigger social comparison emotions, employees attempt to reduce the social comparison tension that accompanies those emotions. For example, Adams posited that when social comparisons trigger emotions, "the tension created in Person will drive him to reduce it" (1965: 283). One way to reduce this tension is by engaging in discretionary behavior directed at the source of this tension. Indeed, Organ (1988, 1990) noted that individuals are likely to increase or decrease OCB in response to inequity and social comparison imbalances, and Colquitt and colleagues' (2013) meta-analysis showed that (in)equity influenced both OCB and CWB via state affect.

Interpersonal Discretionary Behaviors

Job performance is an important outcome in organizational research. Not only is it the most widely studied criterion in the literature (Campbell, 1990) but it is often referred to as "the criterion" (Dalal, 2005: 1241). Although scholars originally defined job performance as *in-role* task performance, the definition has evolved to include *extra-role* discretionary behaviors. Indeed, current perspectives suggest that job performance is made up of three facets: task performance, OCB, and CWB (e.g., Rotundo & Sackett, 2002; Viswesvaran & Ones, 2000). Discretionary behaviors are important components of job performance because they "shape the organizational, social, and psychological context that serves as the catalyst for task activities and processes" (Borman & Motowidlo, 1997: 100).

In addition to broadly capturing volitional favorable and unfavorable behavioral reactions (in line with our research question), discretionary behaviors are particularly relevant to our model for two reasons. First, theory has posited and research demonstrated that discretionary behaviors help employees rectify social comparison imbalances via motivational, affective, and social exchange processes (Cohen-Charash & Mueller, 2007; Spence et al., 2011). Second, discretionary behaviors should be particularly promising responses to social comparison emotions because these behaviors are affect laden (e.g., Dalal, Lam, Weiss, Welch, & Hulin, 2009; Spector & Fox, 2002)

and can be interpersonally targeted at the source of social comparison tension. Consistent with "target similarity" effects (Lavelle, Rupp, & Brockner, 2007), because the direction of social comparison tension in our theory is generated owing to discrepancies between employees and the remainder of coworkers in their workgroup (i.e., RLMX quality), we posit that employees target their discretionary work behaviors at the remainder of coworkers in their workgroup in order to rectify these social comparison imbalances. In sum, we focus on two contrasting (i.e., one positively and one negatively intended) interpersonal discretionary behaviors that allow employees to alleviate their social comparison tension: interpersonal OCB and interpersonal CWB.

Organ defined OCB as "individual behavior that is discretionary, not directly or explicitly recognized by the formal reward system, and that in the aggregate promotes the effective functioning of the organization" (1988: 4). Interpersonal OCB aims to benefit a particular person/group. It includes helping and cooperating with others in ways that go beyond formal task requirements (Podsakoff, MacKenzie, Paine, & Bachrach, 2000). Dalal et al. defined CWB as "volitional employee behavior that harms, or at least is intended to harm, the legitimate interests of an organization" (2009: 1052). Interpersonal CWB aims to harm a particular person/group. It includes gossiping, blaming others, competing destructively, and abusing others (Robinson & Bennett, 1995).

Figure 4 summarizes our next set of propositions, which posit that upward social comparison emotions and tension elicit engaging in discretionary behavior and downward social comparison emotions and tension elicit withholding discretionary behavior. We integrate the nature of social comparison emotions by positing that contrastive social comparison emotions and tension trigger negative behaviors, such as engaging in interpersonal CWB and withholding interpersonal OCB, whereas assimilative social comparison emotions and tension trigger positive behaviors, such as engaging in interpersonal OCB and withholding interpersonal CWB.

Crossing Direction and Nature of Social Comparison Emotions

Consistent with a social comparison as social cognition perspective (Buunk & Gibbons, 2007), different types of social comparisons trigger different motivational states (Taylor & Lobel, 1989; Wood, 1989; Wood & Taylor, 1991). For example, Corcoran, Crusius, and Mussweiler (2011) posited that upward comparisons motivate people to improve their situation, whereas downward social comparisons motivate satisfaction with the present situation. Indeed, "upward comparisons can motivate people and can provide information on how to make progress" (Corcoran et al., 2011: 124). Low-RLMX employees who receive fewer socioemotional resources need to alter the status quo, and upward comparisons typically motivate that progress. In contrast, downward comparisons allow one to "feel better about [one's] own situation" (Wills, 1981: 245). Indeed, the rich array of feedback and information received by high-RLMX employees triggers less need to alter the status quo and more satisfaction with the current situation. Applied to our model, we posit that upward social comparison emotions prompt concrete actions to improve RLMX status and engagement in discretionary behavior (OCB or CWB), whereas downward social comparison emotions prompt employees to feel more satisfied with current RLMX status and withholding of discretionary behavior (OCB or CWB).

While the direction of social comparison emotions (i.e., upward or downward) influences whether employees aim to reduce their social comparison tension by engaging in or withholding discretionary behavior, the nature of social comparison emotions (i.e., contrastive versus assimilative) influences whether negative or positive behavior is triggered. Social comparison theory posits that differences and dissimilarity elicit negative behaviors. Indeed, Festinger noted that dissimilarity can halt comparison processes and cause negative behaviors because "cessation of comparisons with others will be accompanied by hostility or derogation" (1954: 129). In line with a social comparison as social cognition perspective (Buunk & Gibbons, 2007), the fundamental nature of contrastive social comparison emotions highlights dissimilarity, directing cognitions away from the comparison other. Thus, consistent with research linking dissimilarity to negative behaviors (e.g., Chattopadhyay, 1999; Liao, Joshi, & Chuang, 2004), we posit that these emotions trigger negative interpersonal behaviors, such as engaging in (upward comparisons) interpersonal CWB and withholding (downward comparisons) interpersonal OCB. In contrast, social comparison theory posits that similarity

FIGURE 4
Crossing Nature and Direction of Social Comparison Emotions on Discretionary Behaviors

		Nature of social comparison emotion	
		Contrastive social comparison emotion *Negative* *discretionary behavior*	**Assimilative social comparison emotion** *Positive* *discretionary behavior*
Direction of social comparison emotion	**Upward social comparison emotion** *Enact* *discretionary behavior*	**Enact CWB** *in response to upward contrastive social comparison emotions (e.g., envy)*	**Enact OCB** *in response to upward assimilative social comparison emotions (e.g., inspiration)*
	Downward social comparison emotion *Withhold* *discretionary behavior*	**Withhold OCB** *in response to downward contrastive social comparison emotions (e.g., schadenfreude)*	**Withhold CWB** *in response to downward assimilative social comparison emotions (e.g., sympathy)*

elicits positive behaviors. Indeed, in a review of the theory, Buunk and Gibbons noted that "people will seek out the company of others similar to themselves" (2007: 4). In accordance with a social comparison as social cognition perspective (Buunk & Gibbons, 2007), the fundamental nature of assimilative social comparison emotions highlights similarity, directing cognitions toward others. Thus, in line with research linking similarity to positive behaviors (e.g., Byrne, 1971; Chattopadhyay, 1999; Tsui, Porter, & Egan, 2002), we posit that these emotions trigger positive behaviors, such as engaging in (upward comparisons) interpersonal OCB and withholding (downward comparisons) interpersonal CWB.

Our propositions below posit that the joint effects of direction (i.e., upward or downward) and nature (i.e., contrastive versus assimilative) of the social comparison emotion determine the discretionary actions employees take to reduce their social comparison tension. This interaction of direction and nature of social comparison emotions allows us to predict the enacting or withholding of interpersonal OCB versus the enacting or withholding of interpersonal CWB.

Upward Social Comparison Emotions and Interpersonal Discretionary Behaviors

What type of behavioral responses occur when you experience an upward contrastive social comparison emotion such as envy (resulting from low RLMX and low justice perceptions) or an upward assimilative social comparison emotion such as inspiration (resulting from low RLMX and high justice perceptions)? As explained below, we theorize that you will actively engage in negative or positive behavior toward others in the group to rectify or improve your situation. We illustrate our arguments with envy and inspiration.

Building from our direction and nature of social comparison emotions framework, when social comparison emotions are upward, employees are driven to improve their situation (Corcoran et al., 2011; Wood, 1989), triggering active engagement in discretionary behavior. The type of active behavior, however, differs based on the nature of the emotion (i.e., contrastive versus assimilative). Contrastive social comparison emotions highlight differences and direct cognitions away from others in the group (Smith, 2000), so they elicit negative behaviors such as active engagement in interpersonal CWB. Actively engaging in interpersonal CWB reduces your frustration over feeling inferior to dissimilar others whom you envy and helps you "even the score" (Cohen-Charash & Mueller, 2007), reducing your social comparison tension. Assimilative social comparison emotions highlight similarities and direct cognitions toward others in the group (Smith, 2000), so they trigger positive behaviors such as active engagement in interpersonal OCB. Proactively engaging in interpersonal OCB reduces your social comparison tension by facilitating collaboration with similar others in the workgroup who inspire you (Cuddy, Fiske, & Glick, 2007; Lockwood & Kunda, 1997).

These theoretical arguments for upward contrastive and assimilative social comparison emotions are consistent with theory and research on envy and inspiration. Regarding envy, Weiner (2005) posited that envy elicits antisocial action tendencies, and research shows that envy prompts threat-oriented action tendencies (e.g., Duffy, Scott, Shaw, Tepper, & Aquino, 2012; Dunn & Schweitzer, 2006; Tai, Narayanan, & McAllister, 2012). Empirical research also supports linkages between envy and engaging in negative interpersonal behaviors, such as interpersonal CWB (e.g., Cohen-Charash & Mueller, 2007), creation of a negative work atmosphere (e.g., Cohen-Charash, 2009), and social undermining (e.g., Duffy et al., 2012). In terms of inspiration, Weiner (2005) argued that admiration (an upward assimilative social comparison emotion and a component of inspiration; Smith, 2000) triggers prosocial action tendencies. Empirical research also supports associations between inspiration and engaging in positive interpersonal behaviors with upward comparison referents, such as helping and associating behaviors (e.g., Cuddy et al., 2007), because these upward comparison referents illustrate "the accomplishment one can hope to achieve" (Lockwood & Kunda, 1997: 93). Thus, when you experience upward contrastive social comparison emotions (e.g., envy) or upward assimilative social comparison emotions (e.g., inspiration), we propose that you will respond by engaging in interpersonal CWB or interpersonal OCB, respectively.

Proposition 6: Upward contrastive social comparison emotions (e.g., envy) positively influence engaging in interpersonal CWB.

Proposition 7: Upward assimilative social comparison emotions (e.g., inspiration)

positively influence engaging in interpersonal OCB.

Downward Social Comparison Emotions and Interpersonal Discretionary Behaviors

What type of behavioral responses occur when you experience a downward assimilative social comparison emotion such as sympathy (resulting from high RLMX and low justice perceptions) or a downward contrastive social comparison emotion such as schadenfreude (resulting from high RLMX and high justice perceptions)? We theorize that you will withhold negative or positive behavior toward others in the workgroup to avoid further harm to others or to maintain your situation. We use sympathy and schadenfreude to illustrate our arguments.

When social comparison emotions are downward, employees feel satisfied with their current RLMX status, causing them to withhold discretionary behavior (Corcoran et al., 2011; Wills, 1981). The type of behavior withheld, however, differs based on the nature of the emotion (i.e., contrastive versus assimilative). Assimilative social comparison emotions highlight similarities and direct cognitions toward others in the group (Smith, 2000), triggering positive behaviors such as withholding interpersonal CWB. Refraining from CWB toward others in the group helps you reduce your social comparison tension by avoiding harm to similar others with whom you sympathize (Greitemeyer & Rudolph, 2003). Contrastive social comparison emotions highlight differences and direct cognitions away from others in the group (Smith, 2000), triggering negative behaviors such as withholding interpersonal OCB. Refraining from OCB directed at dissimilar others allows you to reinforce and justify your higher status as deserved based on your superior contributions (Weiner, 2005), reducing your social comparison tension.

Theory and empirical research on sympathy and schadenfreude support these theoretical arguments for downward assimilative and contrastive social comparison emotions. Regarding sympathy, although Weiner (2005) noted that sympathy induces prosocial action tendencies, he also proposed (Weiner, 1995) that sympathy inhibits antisocial action tendencies. This proposal is consistent with the negative meta-analytic association between sympathy and aggressive behavior (Rudolph, Roesch, Greitemeyer, & Weiner, 2004). In terms of schadenfreude, Weiner (2005: 97) posited that the action tendency evoked by schadenfreude is a "refusal to help." Empirical research also supports linkages between schadenfreude and reductions in helping behavior (e.g., Hareli & Weiner, 2002; Schulz, Rudolph, Tscharaktschiew, & Rudolph, 2013). In sum, when you experience downward assimilative social comparison emotions (e.g., sympathy) or downward contrastive social comparison emotions (e.g., schadenfreude), we propose that you will respond by withholding interpersonal CWB or interpersonal OCB, respectively.

Proposition 8: Downward assimilative social comparison emotions (e.g., sympathy) positively influence withholding of interpersonal CWB.

Proposition 9: Downward contrastive social comparison emotions (e.g., schadenfreude) positively influence withholding of interpersonal OCB.

INDIVIDUAL-DIFFERENCE MODERATORS OF PROPOSED RELATIONS

Although we expect the relationships described in the model to hold for employees in general, it is important to acknowledge that individual differences play an important role in influencing social comparison processes (for reviews see Buunk & Gibbons, 2007, and Wheeler, 2000). Thus, we conclude with an LMX- and social comparison–relevant individual difference that should influence the experience of and behavioral reactions to social comparison emotions.

The two individual differences most relevant to our theorizing are social comparison orientation (an individual's inclination to engage in social comparisons with others; Gibbons & Buunk, 1999) and equity sensitivity (an individual's sensitivity to differences in outcome/input ratios; Huseman, Hatfield, & Miles, 1987). Social comparison orientation should magnify the experience of and behavioral reactions to all social comparison emotions in a similar manner (Buunk & Gibbons, 2007). Thus, we focus our theorizing on equity sensitivity because it should have differential effects across different social comparison emotions.

Theory and research on equity sensitivity suggest that low-equity-sensitivity individuals (benevolents) prefer and are more tolerant of

underreward, whereas high-equity-sensitivity individuals (entitleds) prefer and are more tolerant of overreward (Huseman et al., 1987). For benevolents, upward comparisons are satisfying and elicit positive emotions (e.g., upward assimilative social comparison emotions, such as inspiration), while downward comparisons are dissatisfying and elicit negative emotions (e.g., downward assimilative social comparison emotions, such as sympathy). Indeed, Huseman et al. conceptualized benevolents as givers who, "by experiencing others' needs vicariously, . . . are sufficiently affectively aroused to sacrifice their own interests for those of others" (1987: 224), and this is core to assimilative social comparison emotions, such as inspiration and sympathy (Smith, 2000). The converse applies to entitleds. For them, downward comparisons are satisfying and elicit positive emotions (e.g., downward contrastive social comparison emotions, such as schadenfreude), whereas upward comparisons are dissatisfying and elicit negative emotions (e.g., upward contrastive social comparison emotions, such as envy). Indeed, Huseman et al. (1987: 224) conceptualized entitleds as getters who desire to get "a better deal" than comparison others, highlighting dissimilarity—which is core to contrastive social comparison emotions, such as envy and schadenfreude (Smith, 2000). Thus, we posit that the experience of and behavioral reactions to assimilative social comparison emotions (e.g., inspiration and sympathy) are stronger for benevolents, and the experience of and behavioral reactions to contrastive social comparison emotions (e.g., envy and schadenfreude) are stronger for entitleds.

Indirect empirical work supports the above theorizing. For example, empirical research shows that contrastive reactions—such as the experience of negative affect resulting from psychological contract breach based on extrinsic rewards (Kickul & Lester, 2001), the withholding of interpersonal OCB resulting from psychological contract breach (Restubog, Bordia, & Tang, 2007), and the withholding of interpersonal OCB resulting from low organizational justice (Blakely, Andrews, & Moorman, 2005)—are exacerbated for entitleds and buffered for benevolents. Research also demonstrates that assimilative reactions—such as the exchange of interpersonal OCB (Akan, Allen, & White, 2009)—are more typical for benevolents than entitleds. Finally, Liu, Hernandez, and Wang (2014) showed that LMX differentiation was more damaging to intrateam trust (a pattern consistent with a contrast effect) when the team contained more entitleds (rather than benevolents). Taken together, we propose the following.

> *Proposition 10: Equity sensitivity moderates the effects of social comparison information such that (a) the experience of and (b) behavioral reactions to assimilative social comparison emotions (e.g., inspiration and sympathy) are stronger for benevolents and (c) the experience of and (d) behavioral reactions to contrastive social comparison emotions (e.g., envy and schadenfreude) are stronger for entitleds.*

DISCUSSION

Our framework has theoretical implications for the LMX literature and LMX differentiation literature. To date, most LMX research has focused on leader-member dyads (e.g., Dulebohn et al., 2012; Gerstner & Day, 1997; Ilies et al., 2007), and much less research has considered the broader workgroup context surrounding the dyad. Moreover, although researchers have recently begun to explore the social context surrounding LMX dyads based on LMX differentiation (e.g., Erdogan & Bauer, 2010; Liao et al., 2010; Liden et al., 2006) and RLMX (e.g., Henderson et al., 2008; Vidyarthi et al., 2010), the field has lacked a unifying theoretical framework to guide integration of findings across studies (Martin, Thomas, Legood, & Dello Russo, 2018). Our approach begins to address this problem by developing a framework that elucidates the contrasting relationships of LMX differentiation with discretionary employee behaviors.

This framework should be particularly useful because it describes the role of emotions in explaining the positive and negative effects of LMX differentiation. Aside from a limited set of empirical studies (e.g., Tse, Ashkanasy, & Dasborough, 2012; Tse et al., 2013), research on emotions in the LMX differentiation literature and RLMX literature is largely absent—despite the explicit relevance of emotions to seminal theorizing on the topic (e.g., Dienesch & Liden, 1986; Graen & Uhl-Bien, 1995). Our application of social comparison theory and emotions provides a novel framework for future research to examine social comparison emotions within the context of LMX and LMX differentiation. Importantly, our

framework also responds to calls for research that avoids an "overemphasis on the study of mood at the expense of discrete emotions" (Brief & Weiss, 2002: 297), and it considers the effects of LMX differentiation on the "different types of positive and negative interpersonal emotions" (Tse et al., 2013: 985).

Our theorizing also answers calls for research examining the dark side of high LMX and the bright side of low LMX (e.g., Erdogan & Bauer, 2015; Matta & Van Dyne, 2015). In their recent LMX review, Erdogan and Bauer noted that researchers need to adopt a more "balanced approach" and should explicitly consider "potential downsides to having a high-quality exchange" (2015: 419; for rare exceptions see Ballinger et al., 2010; Pelletier, 2012; Shapiro, Boss, Salas, Tangirala, & Von Glinow, 2011). Our theorizing, which posits that high LMX can elicit schadenfreude and the withholding of OCB and that low LMX can elicit inspiration and the enactment of OCB (in addition to the more traditional emphasis on positive outcomes of high LMX and negative outcomes of low LMX), represents a more "balanced approach."

Our theory building additionally responds to recommendations for research integrating social comparisons with the LMX literature. For example, Greenberg and colleagues noted that "the prospects for understanding LMX relationships in terms of social comparison processes make this an area worthy of future research and theory development" (2007: 34). Similarly, Vidyarthi and colleagues noted that "extant research has neglected the social comparisons with other group members that employees make in order to derive the meaning of LMX" (2010: 859). Our framework addresses these issues by drawing from three social comparison lenses—social comparison theory (Festinger, 1954), social comparison emotions (Smith, 2000), and social comparison as social cognition (Buunk & Gibbons, 2007)—to elucidate the processes that cause LMX differentiation to influence employee interpersonal discretionary behaviors.

Finally, we also contribute to the social comparison literature. First, we highlight the value of integrating three social comparison perspectives in one framework. Social comparison theory (and its conceptual extension, equity theory) was particularly useful in developing the arguments for our cross-level proposition (i.e., Proposition 1), Smith's (2000) general analytic structure of social comparison emotions was key to establishing Propositions 2 through 5, and the social comparison as social cognition perspective was pivotal to advancing Propositions 6 through 9. Only by bringing each of these social comparison perspectives together were we able to unpack reasons why some workgroup members respond favorably and others unfavorably to LMX differentiation. Second, Smith's (2000) general analytic structure of social comparison emotions emphasizes direction and controllability as important social comparison information but does not speak to discrete triggers of social comparison emotions. Thus, we advance his work by elucidating leader resource allocation events as triggers for social comparison emotions and relative LMX and justice perceptions as key social comparison information within work contexts. Third, we also advance Smith's (2000) framework of social comparison emotions by showing how his theorizing aligns with more traditional emotion appraisal processes, linking it more clearly with the broader emotions literature. Finally, we qualify the proposed social comparison processes by introducing equity sensitivity as a boundary condition, providing theoretically impactful differential effects.

Practical Implications

The framework also has practical implications. For managers, the model highlights the importance of being sensitive to the consequences of differentiation. Given the human tendency to engage in social comparisons with proximal referent others in order to self-evaluate (Festinger, 1954), managers should expect employees to notice differences, especially when they allocate resources in high LMX differentiation workgroups. Managers should also be aware that differentiation has both positive and negative consequences for employees. Moreover, when managers significantly differentiate the quality of their relationships with employees, they should pay special attention to the extent to which they differentiate based on performance-related inputs. The model also provides managers with guidance on how social comparison emotions motivate employees to enact and withhold different types of discretionary behaviors. Thus, managers should pay attention to cues employees provide about their social comparison emotions so they can anticipate negative and

positive discretionary behaviors and take appropriate actions. Awareness of differences in social comparison emotions should therefore help managers anticipate and better understand employee behaviors.

For employees, the model offers insights on why some sorts of differential treatment seem more unfair than others and the importance of whether leaders differentiate LMX relationships based on performance-related inputs. Additionally, awareness of the four categories of social comparison emotions should shed light on reasons why peers use interpersonal discretionary behaviors to reduce their social comparison tensions.

Limitations and Future Directions

While we have been systematic in our theory building and have used social comparison theory as an overarching framework, our model has limitations. First, we made assumptions that could be loosened or qualified. As one example, we assumed that employees make fairness evaluations primarily based on an equity (as opposed to an equality or need) rule. Although we have reasons for making that assumption (see the "Foundational Assumptions of Our Theorizing" section), we acknowledge that other rules besides equity (such as equality or need) may play a larger role in some contexts. Examples of such contexts include when performance is measured more subjectively or performance inputs are hard to observe and compare (e.g., Meindl, 1989; Miller & Hamblin, 1963), causing biased perceptions of performance-related inputs and rendering social comparison and equity less viable. The same may be true of union environments and collectivistic cultures where equality is often preferred (e.g., Kim, Park, & Suzuki, 1990; Leung & Bond, 1984). In such contexts, the effects we posit may become not only weakened but also less straightforward.

Although our final proposition addressed equity sensitivity as an individual-difference moderator, it would also be interesting to consider other moderators that may influence social comparison processes within the context of LMX differentiation. For example, perceived similarity (e.g., Mussweiler, Rüter, & Epstude, 2004), psychological closeness (e.g., Brown, Novick, Lord, & Richards, 1992), or identification (e.g., Buunk & Ybema, 1997) between an employee and the referent other or group may also influence the social comparison process. Indeed, Mussweiler's (2001, 2003) selective accessibility model posits that individuals are more likely to assimilate (contrast) with referents that they perceive as (dis)similar. Our model could also be expanded to other outcomes that help employees relieve their social comparison tension. For example, beyond discretionary forms of job performance, changes to task performance may help relieve social comparison tension (e.g., Blanton, Buunk, Gibbons, & Kuyper, 1999).

Although we have argued that employees target their discretionary work behaviors at the remainder of coworkers in their workgroup, future theoretical and empirical work could provide value by predicting precisely what individuals or subgroups in the workgroup may be the specific target of these behaviors. We focused our theorizing on coworkers generally because this was most consistent with our core constructs and theorizing. Indeed, because the direction of social comparison tension in our theory was generated by RLMX quality (discrepancies between employees and the remainder of coworkers in their workgroup), it followed that employees would target their behaviors at that source (i.e., the remainder of coworkers) in order to rectify these social comparison imbalances. That said, it is likely that specific individuals or subgroups are most likely to be targeted. For example, low-RLMX employees may target their behaviors more toward high-RLMX employees (whereas high-RLMX employees may target their behaviors more toward low-RLMX employees) because focusing behaviors toward members of the opposite subgroup should be most effective in rectifying social comparison discrepancies.

Finally, while our theorizing applies broadly to upward contrastive (i.e., depression, shame, resentment, and envy), upward assimilative (i.e., optimism, admiration, and inspiration), downward assimilative (i.e., pity, fear, worry, and sympathy), and downward contrastive (i.e., pride, contempt, scorn, and schadenfreude) social comparison emotions, we illustrated our arguments with concrete examples of what Smith (2000) referred to as the "prototype" emotions of envy, inspiration, sympathy, and schadenfreude. As a next step, scholars can consider differences within each type of social comparison emotion. For example, even though schadenfreude includes a blend of pride, contempt, and scorn (all of which are downward contrastive social comparison emotions), it would be interesting to theorize

about the conditions that cause individuals to experience pride without contempt/scorn, and vice versa.

CONCLUSION

LMX research has grown dramatically over the past four decades and provides significant insights on how resource exchanges affect managers and employees. Until recently, most LMX research focused on leader-member dyads and did not consider the social context surrounding the dyads. Given the contemporary emphasis on horizontal approaches to organizing work and work teams (Ilgen, 1999), it is critically important to consider the effects of LMX and LMX differentiation across multiple levels of analysis. Our framework provides an initial model based on social comparison theory for how LMX differentiation influences employee social comparison emotions and interpersonal discretionary behavior. We hope our theorizing stimulates empirical examination of these relationships and leads to more nuanced understanding of the cross-level effects of LMX differentiation on employee outcomes.

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Fadel K. Matta (fmatta@uga.edu) is an assistant professor in the Department of Management at the University of Georgia's Terry College of Business. He received his Ph.D. from Michigan State University. His research focuses on organizational justice, leader-member exchange, and emotions in the workplace.

Linn Van Dyne (vandyne@broad.msu.edu) is a professor in the Department of Management at Michigan State University. She received her Ph.D. from the University of Minnesota. She researches proactive behavior and cultural intelligence.