THE GOODY-GOOD EFFECT: WHEN SOCIAL COMPARISONS OF ETHICAL BEHAVIOR AND PERFORMANCE LEAD TO SELF-THREAT VERSUS SELF-ENHANCEMENT, SOCIAL UNDERMINING, AND OSTRACISM

By

MATTHEW J. QUADE

Bachelor of Science in Business Administration
The University of Tulsa
Tulsa, Oklahoma
2004

Master of Business Administration
Oklahoma State University
Stillwater, Oklahoma
2008

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Dissertation Approved:

Dr. Rebecca L. Greenbaum

Dissertation Adviser

Dr. Debra L. Nelson

Dr. Mark B. Gavin

Dr. Tom J. Brown

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Abstract:

I extend work on behavioral ethics by proposing that there can be unfavorable consequences to ethical behavior. Drawing on social comparison theory (Festinger, 1954), I find that employees experience self-threat and self-enhancement as a result of ethical behavior comparisons. A lab study and a field study were paired to test the theoretical model. In the field, data from 310 employee-coworker dyads reveals that employees who report being more ethical than a comparison coworker experience more self-threat and more self-enhancement. These relationships are moderated by a performance comparison with the same coworker. Results also reveal that ethical behavior comparisons are indirectly related to social undermining and ostracism via self-threat. Thus, when employees experience self-threat as a result of an ethical behavior comparison, they are likely to respond by socially undermining and/or ostracizing the coworker with whom they compared themselves. This mediated relationship is also impacted by the moderating presence of a performance comparison. Implications, both theoretical and practical, as well as suggestions for future research are discussed.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Dissertation Proposal Background

In the mid-1980s, management researchers began investigating ethical and unethical behavior in organizations (Treviño, Weaver, & Reynolds, 2006). However, not until the 2000s did management researchers begin to approach the topic with theoretical and methodological vigor. In the early 2000s, the media highlighted the ethical missteps of corporations such as Enron and Tyco and subsequently made the public more aware of the need for corporations to receive ethical guidance. The Sarbanes-Oxley Act was passed in 2002 as a way to protect investors from unethical business practices. These and other events made business ethics a much more salient topic in the popular press. It also became a requirement for large organizations to enact codes of ethical conduct. Simultaneously, researchers were realizing ethics in organizational life had been understudied, and there was and is a very practical need for research in this area. Accordingly, the behavioral ethics field has experienced a stark increase in the number of articles appearing in top-tier journals.

Behavioral ethics is defined as "individual behavior that is subject to or judged according to generally accepted moral norms of behavior" (Treviño et al., 2006: 952). There tends to be an underlying assumption regarding behavioral ethics; ethical behavior is advantageous and should be promoted, while unethical behavior is harmful and should be avoided. Most behavioral ethics research has been framed in accordance with this assumption. For example, one study found that the presence of ethical leaders made it less likely subordinates would engage in

unethical behavior (Mayer, Aquino, Greenbaum, & Kuenzi, 2012); providing support for the notion that ethical behavior leads to favorable outcomes. Other studies have looked at situations that help enhance the impact of an ethical leader (Jordan, Brown, Treviño, & Finkelstein, 2011) because it is widely believed that ethical leadership is valuable and should be promoted. Extant research has also found associations between ethical leadership and increased employee voice (Walumbwa & Schaubroeck, 2009) and performance (Walumbwa, Mayer, Wang, Wang, Workman, & Christensen, 2011).

At the same time, behavioral ethics researchers have examined predictors of unethical behavior, with the goal of learning how to avoid such behavior. For example, one study found that organizations create good and bad social environments that can impact employee unethical behavior (Kish-Gephart, Harrison, & Treviño, 2010). Gino and her colleagues conducted research that identified antecedents of unethical behavior, such as having a promotion focus (Gino & Margolis, 2011) and the presence of abundant wealth (Gino & Pierce, 2009). Another study found goal setting motivated unethical behavior when people fell just short of their goals, suggesting that in some cases goal setting should be approached with caution (Schweitzer, Ordóñez, & Douma, 2004). Despite more recent, substantial advances in behavioral ethics research, one important component has yet to be examined.

The behavioral ethics literature has failed to fully consider that behaving *ethically* may be associated with *unfavorable* consequences. Social comparison theory (Festinger, 1954) states that people tend to compare themselves to similar others. In this vein, I argue that when employees compare their ethical behavior with that of a coworker they are making an ethical behavior comparison. I theorize that when employees are low in ethical behavior comparison (they are less ethical than the comparison coworker) they will experience feelings of self-threat (e.g., envy, anger, contempt, and threat). Alternatively, when employees are high in ethical behavior comparison (they are more ethical than the comparison coworker) they will experience feelings of self-enhancement (e.g., superiority, arrogance, and pride). Additionally, I argue that the

performance of the coworker in comparison to that of the employee (*performance comparison*) will moderate the relationship between the ethical behavior comparison and the feelings of self-threat or self-enhancement. More specifically, when the employee makes a low ethical behavior comparison, if the employee is also an inferior performer compared to the coworker (*low performance comparison*), the coworker will be seen as seemingly too perfect and the feelings of self-threat will be even stronger. When the employee makes a high ethical behavior comparison, if the employee is also a superior performer compared to the coworker (*high performance comparison*), the coworker will be seen as even more fallible and thus the feelings of self-enhancement will be even stronger.

Drawing on social comparison theory (Festinger, 1954) and cognitive dissonance theory (Festinger, 1957), I then theorize that feelings of self-threat are a form of cognitive dissonance, or psychological discomfort, that people are motivated to reduce. Festinger stated that when a person making a comparison recognizes that "a discrepancy exists…there will be tendencies to change others to bring them closer to oneself" (1954: 126). Festinger also noted that "when dissonance is present…the person will actively avoid situations and information which would likely increase the dissonance" (1957: 3). In accordance with these theoretical perspectives, I argue that employees can manage feelings of self-threat by socially undermining and/or ostracizing the coworker. Social undermining is behavior that is intended to harm another person's social relationships, work-related success, and reputation (Duffy, Ganster, & Pagon, 2002). Ostracism is a way to socially reject or exclude another person (Williams, 2001). Thus, I aim to demonstrate that ethical behavior can have negative consequences by showing that an ethical behavior comparison is indirectly related to the comparison coworker becoming the target of social undermining and/or ostracism. Finally, I hypothesize the indirect relationship between an ethical behavior comparison and social undermining and ostracism, as mediated by feelings of self-threat, is also moderated by performance comparison, such that when the employee is an inferior performer (*low performance comparison*), the coworker will be seen as even more

threatening and thus will be more likely to become the victim of social undermining and ostracism.

The social comparison process is arguably a common phenomenon that people engage in (Buunk & Gibbons, 2007). It also seems this process unfolds for many people within organizations and yet the application of social comparison theory to the organizational context has been under researched (Goodman, 2007: 1). This study is one of only a few to analyze social comparisons in organizations, and to my knowledge, it is the first to do so with regards to ethical behavior. Additionally, although a great deal of research has focused on behavioral ethics, particularly ethical leadership, prior work has yet to investigate the potential negative consequences that could result from behaving ethically. While it has been noted that people are sometimes hesitant to be classified as a "goody good" (Treviño & Nelson, 2011), research has failed to identify why this may be the case. This study attempts to indicate why some people shy away from behaving ethically and/or refrain from advocating for such behavior in their organization.

CHAPTER II

LITERATURE REVIEW AND HYPOTHESIS DEVELOPMENT

Ethical Leadership Literature Review

Traditionally, behavioral ethics research focused on antecedents of ethical/unethical behavior. This work largely began with James Rest's (1986) four-stage model of the ethical decision-making process. His contention was that when people are faced with ethical decisions, they will go through the following four stages: moral awareness, moral judgment, moral motivation, and moral behavior. More specifically, the individual first needs to be aware that the decision is indeed a moral situation. The individual then makes a judgment about that situation and may or may not feel motivated to follow through with ethical behavior. Treviño (1986) added the influence of contextual factors to the ethical decision-making process. She suggested that people will look to others for ethical guidance and that people's cognitive moral development (Kohlberg, 1969) will determine how much they are influenced by contextual factors.

Another factor influencing a person's ethical decision making process is the moral intensity of a situation (Jones, 1991). Moral intensity consists of six dimensions: magnitude of consequences, concentration of effect, probability of effect, temporal immediacy, social consensus, and proximity. When a situation is seen as increasingly morally intense an individual is more likely to view that situation as an ethical one. In more current research, through a qualitative meta-analysis, Tenbrunsel & Smith-Crowe (2008) came to the conclusion there are three components to ethical decision making: moral awareness, moral decision making, and amoral decision making. All of these scholars and the work that followed tended to focus on

ethical intentions, with relatively little work focusing on actual ethical behavior and its consequences.

Only within the last eight years have researchers begun to examine ethical behavior, primarily in the form of ethical leadership (Brown & Treviño, 2006). In fact, ethical leadership is the only type of ethical behavior that has been studied extensively. Work on ethical leadership is based on social learning theory (Bandura, 1977), which states that people learn how to behave by observing and modeling the behavior of others. I argue that non-supervisory employees who exhibit ethical behavior within organizations can serve as informal ethical leaders. As with ethical leadership, these "informal" ethical leaders demonstrate to others expectations regarding ethical conduct and promote ethical standards through their actions, communication, and decision making.

Although my theoretical model examines employee ethical behavior, my literature review specifically focuses on the construct of ethical leadership and related extant research. First, I review the ethical leadership literature because, to my knowledge, ethical behavior has only been studied within the context of leadership. Second, I contend that employees who behave ethically serve as informal ethical leaders, making it appropriate to review the ethical leadership literature. Finally, the only measures of ethical behavior that exist are ethical leadership measures, which I argue can serve as appropriate proxies for employee ethical behavior.

Ethical Leadership Definition

Ethical leadership is defined as "the demonstration of normatively appropriate conduct through personal actions and interpersonal relationships, and the promotion of such conduct to followers through two-way communication, reinforcement, and decision-making" (Brown, Treviño, & Harrison, 2005: 120). The ethical leadership construct was systematically developed through a series of studies (Brown et al., 2005; Treviño, Brown, & Hartman, 2003). Treviño and her colleagues first set out to determine how ethical leadership is conceptually understood. They conducted qualitative interviews with employees who were proximal to executives (Treviño et al.,

2003; Treviño, Hartman, & Brown, 2000). They discovered that ethical leadership consists of two dimensions: *moral person*, consisting of the leader's personal traits and character, and the *moral manager*, consisting of the leader's attempt to make an ethics message salient to followers. Using this work as a starting point, Brown and his colleagues (2005) developed and validated the ethical leadership scale, which was instrumental in the growth of research on this topic.

The ethical leadership concept is rooted in social learning theory (Bandura, 1977, 1986). Social learning theory contends that people learn by watching and then mimicking other people. Those other people must be both attractive and credible to be considered valued sources of information. Treviño (1986) noted that most people look to their leaders as attractive and credible role models and rely on their leaders as sources of ethical guidance. Ethical leaders aim to make ethics a part of their leadership platform, and thus ethics messages should be more salient in organizations that promote ethical leadership (Treviño et al., 2003).[1]

Consequences of Ethical Leadership

Extant research has demonstrated that ethical leadership is related to favorable outcomes for employees and organizations. Ethical leadership has been linked to increases in employee performance (Walumbwa et al., 2011; Piccolo, Greenbaum, Den Hartog, & Folger, 2010) and group performance (Walumbwa, Morrison, & Christensen, 2012). Ethical leadership has also been shown to have a positive impact on the effectiveness of top management teams (De Hoogh & Den Hartog, 2008). Beyond performance, studies have shown that those who work for ethical leaders are more likely to conduct organizational citizenship behaviors (Avey, Palanski, & Walumbwa, 2011). Ethical leadership has been shown to increase employee job satisfaction (Avey, Wernsing, & Palanski, 2012) and commitment to the supervisor (Hansen, Alge, Brown, Jackson, & Dunford, 2012). Effectiveness of the leader and employee satisfaction with the leader

[1] The literature summarized in the preceding two paragraphs comes from Brown and Treviño's (2006) review of the ethical leadership construct. A more thorough review of the early work on ethical leadership is provided in that article. For the purposes of this study, I will continue reviewing the ethical leadership literature that was published subsequent to that review.

have also been identified as consequences of ethical leadership (Toor & Ofori, 2009). Ethical leaders are more likely to be seen as exhibiting potential to reach senior leadership positions, even though they are not any more likely to be promoted in the near-term (Rubin, Dierdorff, & Brown, 2010).

The benefits of ethical leadership move beyond increasing positive outcomes to include decreasing negative outcomes. The presence of ethical leadership discourages unethical behavior. Employees are less likely to engage in unethical behavior themselves and to be involved in relationship conflict when they work for an ethical leader (Mayer et al., 2012). Similarly, those who work for ethical leaders are less likely to engage in deviance (Avey et al., 2011). Supervisory ethical leadership has been linked to increases in employees' reporting of internal unethical conduct (Mayer, Nurmohamed, Treviño, Shapiro, & Schminke, 2013). Similarly, ethical leaders have been found to have a positive impact on the conscientiousness of the group, making it more likely the group will speak up and voice concerns (Walumbwa et al., 2012).

Ethical leadership also affects outcomes at the organizational level. Ethical leadership has been shown to reduce political behavior and subsequently improve important organizational outcomes like helping behavior among employees (Kacmar, Andrews, Harris, & Tepper, 2012). Also, leaders who focus on ethics improve the work environment and decrease negative behaviors such as bullying (Stouten, Baillien, Van den Broeck, Camps, De Witte, & Euwema, 2010). Additionally, ethical leadership promotes an ethical culture throughout the organization (Schaubroeck, Hannah, Avolio, Kozlowski, Lord, Treviño, Dimotakis, & Peng, 2012). Extant research supports a trickle-down model of ethical leadership whereby top management ethical leadership leads to supervisory ethical leadership, which then increases group-level OCBs and decreases group-level deviance (Mayer, Kuenzi, Greenbaum, Bardes, & Salvador, 2009).

Antecedents of Ethical Leadership

Researchers believe ethical leadership is very real and very present in organizations (Brown et al., 2005; Treviño et al., 2003). Therefore, understanding what leads to ethical

leadership has been the focus of a variety of studies. One study found supervisors who have higher levels of cognitive moral development are often identified as ethical leaders (Jordan et al., 2011). This study highlights how a supervisor who is more advanced in how he or she reasons through ethical situations becomes a beacon of ethical guidance for subordinates. Moral identity is "a self-schema organized around a set of moral trait associations" (Mayer et al., 2012: 153), and it has two dimensions, symbolization, the public aspect of moral identity, and internalization, the private aspect (Aquino & Reed, 2002). Both of these dimensions were positively related to ethical leadership, indicating those high in moral identity see moral issues as an important part of who they are and thus are likely to exhibit ethical leadership behaviors (Mayer et al., 2012). Other personality traits have been shown to be present in ethical leaders. For example, leader agreeableness and conscientiousness have been positively related to the ethicality of the leader, as rated by subordinates (Walumbwa & Schaubroeck, 2009; Kalshoven, Den Hartog, & De Hoogh, 2011a). Finally, research has shown that leaders who are high on social responsibility (e.g., adhering to a moral-legal standard of conduct, internal obligation, and concern for others) are more likely to be rated as ethical leaders by subordinates (De Hoogh & Den Hartog, 2008).

Mediators of Ethical Leadership

Extant research on ethical leadership has also focused on mechanisms to explain the effectiveness of ethical leadership. Researchers have found that the relationship between ethical leadership and performance is mediated by leader-member exchange, self-efficacy of the subordinate, and the subordinates' organizational identification (Walumbwa et al., 2011). Thus, the presence of an ethical leader facilitates a stronger bond between the leader and subordinate, helps the subordinate gain confidence, and may lead him or her to want to identify with the organization or workgroup; hence, triggering an increase in employee performance. Another study found that the relationship between ethical leadership and task performance is partially explained by the job characteristics model (Piccolo et al., 2010). In particular, ethical leaders tend to make their followers feel more empowered and autonomous on the job, and the ethical leader's

emphasis on "doing the right thing," also infuses task significance into the follower's work role. Accordingly, the followers of ethical leaders tend to then exert extra effort on the job, which increases task performance. Group conscientiousness and group voice have also been found to explain the relationship between ethical leadership and performance at the group level (Walumbwa et al., 2012).

Another mediating mechanism, psychological safety, has been shown to explain the relationship between ethical leadership and employee voice (Walumbwa & Schaubroeck, 2009). This indicates that ethical leadership allows followers to feel comfortable or psychologically "safe" taking interpersonal risks at work, which leads subordinates to speak up and believe their opinions will be well received by the work group without fear of retaliation. Similarly, Mayer et al. (2013) found that low levels of ethical leadership generated fear of retaliation among subordinates. Fear of retaliation leads employees to refrain from reporting unethical conduct. Finally, ethical climate has been identified as a mediator between ethical leadership and reductions in employee misconduct (Mayer, Kuenzi, & Greenbaum, 2010).

Moderators of Ethical Leadership

Scholars have identified a number of boundary conditions of the ethical leadership effect. One such condition is perceptions of coworker ethical behavior. Specifically, those who work for an ethical leader are more likely to report unethical conduct if they believe their coworkers behave ethically and are supportive of internal ethical reporting (Mayer et al., 2013). Another study investigated the moderating effects of gender and perceptions of a political environment on the relationship between ethical leadership and subordinates' OCBs (Kacmar, Bachrach, Harris, & Zivnuska, 2011). Kacmar and colleagues (2011) found that when managed by an ethical leader, men are more likely to engage in OCBs when they perceive high political environments, whereas women are more likely to do so when they perceive low political environments.

In terms of personality differences, another study found that the positive relationship between ethical leadership and employee engagement is suppressed when leaders are high on

Machiavellianism (Mach) because their public and private identities do not align (Den Hartog & Belschak, 2012). Avey et al. (2011) found that subordinates' self-esteem moderated the relationship between ethical leadership and subordinate (a) OCB and (b) deviance, such that these relationships are weaker when subordinate self-esteem is high as opposed to low. The authors contend that when subordinates are high in self-esteem, the effects of ethical leadership are less recognized, as the subordinate is more confident and thus in less need of someone to provide guidance. Finally, social distance was found to moderate the relationship between a leader's moral transgression and his or her subsequently being rated as an ethical leader (Tumasjan, Strobel, & Welpe, 2011). More specifically, the authors found that in situations of high social distance, the leader's immoral behavior is judged more severely, leading to fewer ethical leadership ratings.

Ethical Leadership as a Mediator or Moderator

The ethical leadership construct has matured to a level that it is now being used as an explanatory mechanism and as a boundary condition for other interesting research models. For example, Mayer and his colleagues (2012) found that ethical leadership partially mediates the relationship between leader moral identity and group unethical behavior and group relationship conflict. Thus, it seems the moral identity of the leader manifests itself in his or her exhibiting ethical leadership behavior that then improves the behavior of the group. Walumbwa & Schaubroeck (2009) also identified ethical leadership as a mediator between leader personality traits (agreeableness and conscientiousness) and employee psychological safety and employee voice behaviors. Another study investigated the cascading effect of ethical leadership (Mayer et al., 2009), whereby supervisory ethical leadership mediated the relationship between top management ethical leadership and group-level outcomes (e.g. decreased deviance or increased OCBs).

Finally, Greenbaum and her colleagues have investigated the moderating role of ethical leadership. In one study, the authors found that ethical leadership moderates the positive

relationship between employee Mach and opportunistic unethical behavior; such that in the presence of an ethical leader, the negative impact of the Mach is reduced (Greenbaum, Hill, Eissa, Mawritz, & Quade, 2012). In the other study, they found that the positive relationship between customer unethical behavior and emotional exhaustion is weakened by the presence of an ethical leader (Quade, Greenbaum, Eissa, Mawritz, & Kim, in press). Both of these studies indicate the ability of an ethical leader to help nullify or lessen the negative impact of other people's unethical behavior.

Measures of Ethical Leadership

Although Brown et al.'s (2005) ethical leadership measure is the most widely used and has consistently appeared in top-tier publications, some argue that it falls short of completely measuring the construct. Some scholars began studying ethical leadership as a multi-dimensional construct (Resick, Hanges, Dickson, & Mitchelson, 2006; De Hoogh & Den Hartog, 2008). De Hoogh and Den Hartog (2008) noted that ethical leadership consists of morality and fairness, role clarification, and power sharing and measured those dimensions using adapted scales from the Multi-Culture Leader Behavior Questionnaire (Hanges & Dickson, 2004). Resick and colleagues (2006) identified 15 items from the Global Leadership and Organizational Behavior Effectiveness (GLOBE) leadership scales and found they represented a four-factor model that aligned closely with conceptual dimensions from the ethical leadership literature. The four dimensions are character/integrity, altruism, collective motivation, and encouragement. Kalshoven and colleagues (2011b) took this work a step further by developing a theory-based seven-factor measure called the Ethical Leadership at Work (ELW) questionnaire, which they believe most accurately operationalizes the ethical leadership construct. The seven dimensions are people orientation, fairness, power sharing, concern for sustainability, ethical guidance, role clarification, and integrity. Finally, Yukl, Mahsud, Hassan, and Prussia (2011) reviewed all ethical leadership measures and argued that each measure is flawed and thereby obstructing research on the concept. They then go on to develop and validate, adapting items from existing measures, a new

15-item uni-dimensional scale called the Ethical Leadership Questionnaire (ELQ). In sum, the field lacks agreement regarding the best way to measure ethical leadership. However, the Brown et al. (2005) ethical leadership scale continues to receive the highest number of citations.

Conclusion

To conclude, the literature reviewed suggests that ethical behavior on the part of leaders (i.e., ethical leadership) is beneficial and should be promoted within organizations. However, the unfavorable consequences that may be associated with ethical behavior, leadership or otherwise, has not been explored. Whistle-blowing is perhaps the closest parallel. Whistle-blowing is the "the disclosure by organization members of illegal, immoral, or illegitimate practices under the control of their employers to persons or organizations that may be able to effect action" (Near & Miceli, 1985: 4). Typically, the whistle-blower faces backlash from those who remain in the organization, despite having behaved in a way that a third party would see as ethical. Most of the findings in the whistle-blower literature indicate that there could be negative consequences for behaving ethically by blowing the whistle. However, whistle-blowing is distinct from the model hypothesized herein. I suggest ethical behavior is a more sustained, consistent type of behavior rather than a one-time event such as internally or externally reporting unethical behavior or illegal conduct. Furthermore, ethical behavior based on Brown et al.'s (2005) conceptualization implies that the formal or "informal" ethical leader continuously promotes what is right and good for the organization, which is different than revealing wrongdoing on the part of the organization, as in whistle-blowing. I argue that uncovering the potential adverse consequences of ethical behavior is beneficial in determining why some employees may be reluctant to behave ethically, or at least to be labeled as someone who does, as in a goody-good (Treviño & Nelson, 2011). Further, investigating the full range of ethical behavior's consequences could give researchers a better understanding of the entire construct, which would hopefully ignite interest in other potential research questions that have yet to be studied.

Hypotheses Development

Ethical behavior is generally thought to be positive, something to be championed by supervisors and organizations. The popular press, too, largely portrays ethical behavior favorably and unethical behavior unfavorably. Thus, it makes sense that most behavioral ethics research, to date, has approached the topic as if ethical behavior is predominately good and should be promoted and unethical behavior is predominately bad and should be avoided. However, I argue that perceptions of ethical behavior may be associated with unintended, unfavorable consequences.

Although Brown et al. (2005) conceptualized ethical leadership according to a specific supervisory, managerial, or leadership position, I argue the ethical leadership behaviors can be promoted among lower-level employees who have not been awarded a legitimate leadership role. In other words, employees can still demonstrate ethical leadership by discussing business ethics, making fair and balanced decisions, and/or leading their personal life in an ethical manner. These employees are likely to serve as ethical role models for other employees, or to at least convey to other employees that they strongly uphold ethics. Because these employees are not necessarily formal leaders, I will describe the behavior of these employees as "ethical behavior" throughout my research.

The ethical leadership concept was conceptualized using social learning theory (Bandura, 1977, 1986). Given that social learning theory focuses on observed behaviors, ethical behavior is an appropriate way to label my construct of interest. Ethical behavior is defined in this study *as the demonstration of normatively appropriate conduct through personal actions and interpersonal relationships, and the promotion of such conduct to others*. I slightly adapted Brown et al.'s definition by replacing the "promotion of conduct to followers…" with the "promotion of conduct to others…," thus, making it clear that the promotion of ethical behavior does not have to come from a legitimate, leadership source.

The ethical leadership literature provides considerable evidence that ethical leaders serve as role models for employees, which then leads to favorable employee outcomes, such as higher levels of OCB, task performance, and reductions in deviant behavior (Avey et al., 2011; Walumbwa et al., 2011; Mayer et al., 2009; Piccolo et al., 2010). In this vein, I expect that employees who promote ethical behaviors will also serve as role models for colleagues and perhaps inadvertently promote favorable outcomes for the organization. However, I am interested in examining the association between perceptions of ethical behavior and potentially unfavorable outcomes for an ethical person. Given the well-established reasons for behaving ethically, it is unclear why anyone would decide against promoting ethical behavior at work. Thus, identifying potential adverse consequences for those who promote ethical behavior could help in understanding this strange disconnect. Doing so could allow organizations to understand why some employees may be hesitant to display ethical conduct and how to protect those who want to do the right thing. I believe ethical conduct may be associated with unfavorable consequences because of a social comparison process. Employees may experience feelings of self-threat when they compare themselves to a more ethical coworker, and in turn punish the more ethical coworker by socially undermining or rejecting him or her.

Social Comparison Theory

This research is theoretically based on Leon Festinger's (1954) social comparison theory. The central tenet of social comparison theory is that humans are motivated to evaluate their opinions and abilities. Festinger posited that people are inclined to compare their opinions and abilities against an objective standard; however, when such a standard does not exist, people often compare themselves to similar others.

Festinger (1954) noted that the comparison process begins with a person identifying a similar other. He states that if the difference between the two people is too large, people will not use each other as comparison targets. So, in an organization, a similar other might be someone who holds the same position in the organization, has the same level of expertise, has the same

level of education, similar organizational tenure, or comparable work experiences. For example, a lower-level employee will not make a comparison with his or her boss, a member of the top management team, or the CEO. Instead, the person is likely to compare him or herself to another lower-level employee who started around the same time, has gone through the same training, or has a similar educational background. The specific criterion one uses to make the comparison is not as important as the understanding that a valid comparison can only be made with someone who is similar on some dimension(s).

A social comparison process yielding divergence in opinions, behaviors, or values can be disconcerting. Extant research on social comparisons suggests that upward comparisons (i.e., the person is lower than the comparison other on a desired factor) are likely to lead to negative feelings (Wood, 1989). Conversely, downward comparisons (i.e., the person is higher than the comparison other on a desired factor) are likely to induce positive feelings (Wills, 1981). The underlying assumption here is that people prefer the feelings that come from a downward comparison over those that come from an upward comparison. For example, in a downward social comparison, a salesperson concludes that he or she is more productive (e.g. has more sales) than a coworker and thus may feel enhanced. Alternatively, in an upward comparison, salespeople who are less productive than their coworkers may feel inadequate and threatened.

Morse and Gergen (1970) conducted a social comparison experiment and found that an upward comparison decreased feelings of self-esteem while a downward comparison increased feelings of self-esteem. In the experiment, while waiting for an interview, applicants for a job encountered one of two different types of applicants for the same job. In one condition the comparison applicant, who was a confederate, exhibited socially desirable behaviors during an interview. He was dressed in a suit, well-groomed and self-confident, and he also had objects that displayed his preparation and qualification for the position. The researchers referred to this comparison applicant as *Mr. Clean*. The other condition utilized a comparison applicant, also a confederate, who was not socially desirable. He was vastly under dressed, appeared grossly

unprepared and even wore an odorous sweatshirt. This comparison applicant was referred to as *Mr. Dirty*. The results of the study revealed that those applicants exposed to a comparison encounter with Mr. Clean (an upward comparison) had lower ratings of self-esteem than those who encountered Mr. Dirty (a downward comparison). Morse and Gergen's (1970) work reveals that when compared to someone who exhibits more socially desirable qualities, the person making the comparison is likely to feel threatened and less confident. Conversely, when compared to someone who displays less socially desirable qualities, the person making the comparison will feel enhanced and more confident. I argue that ethical behavior comparisons will elicit similar consequences for those involved.

Ethical Behavior Comparisons

The use of social comparison theory to support my hypothesized model aligns closely with the theoretical underpinnings from much of the early research on ethics. Kohlberg (1969) suggested that people look outside themselves to others for ethical guidance. This sentiment was echoed by Treviño (1986). Further, research on ethical leadership draws on social learning theory (Bandura, 1977, 1986). I argue that social learning arguments could also support a more inherent, social comparison process. Employees, for example, may be unsure of how to behave in specific ethical situations, and thus look to coworkers for ethical guidance. In making that assessment, employees may compare a coworker's behavior to how they may have behaved in the absence of that ethical guidance. Thus, I contend that ethical behavior in the workplace elicits comparisons with others.

The impact of an ethical comparison will depend on the direction of the comparison being made. For the purposes of my research, I refer to the ethical comparison process as *ethical behavior comparison*, such that employees who view their behavior as less ethical than a coworker are making a *low ethical behavior comparison*. Someone who is low on ethical

behavior comparison is likely to feel threatened (e.g. envy, anger, contempt, and threat)[2]. Employees who view their behavior as more ethical than a coworker are making a *high ethical behavior comparison*. Someone who is high on ethical behavior comparison is likely to feel enhanced (e.g. pride, arrogance, and superiority)[3].

The social comparison literature consistently finds that when people evaluate themselves as inferior to others, they tend to experience feelings of self-threat or negative affect (Cohen-Charash, 2009; Tesser & Smith, 1980, Tesser, Millar, & Moore, 1988; Moran & Schweitzer, 2008). This experience of feeling threatened, what I call self-threat, has been operationalized in the literature as negative emotions (e.g. envy, anger, contempt, and threat) (Dunn, Ruedy, & Schweitzer, 2012). I argue low ethical behavior comparisons will evoke similar feelings for employees. In low ethical behavior comparisons, employees will feel threatened because they perceive that their coworkers' behaviors are more ethical than their own. This reminds less ethical employees that they could be doing a better job ethically. When a social comparison indicates inferiority the result is typically envy (Parrott & Smith, 1993). Inferior social comparisons can also lead to feelings of inadequacy, tension, and stress (Dunn et al., 2012).

Employees who exhibit ethical behavior, who I argue serve as informal ethical leaders, actively discuss and promote ethical conduct (Brown et al., 2005). This behavior could remind less ethical employees that they need to abide by ethical standards. Thus, low ethical behavior comparisons are made even more salient because employees see the behavior as something they should be doing. Perhaps the behavior of a more ethical coworker essentially sets a higher

[2] I am not proposing that one person in the comparison process behaves ethically and the other person behaves unethically. Rather, I contend, based on social comparison theory that if an employee behaves more or less ethically than the coworker to whom he or she compares, the employee will feel enhanced or threatened, respectively. So, my hypothesized model allows for the likelihood that in organizations these comparisons will be made between two employees who both behave ethically, but to varying degrees.

[3] The social comparison literature uses the terms upward comparisons and downward comparisons. Thus, someone making a low ethical behavior comparison indicating he or she is less ethical than a coworker would be making an upward comparison. Someone making a high ethical behavior comparison indicating he or she is more ethical than a coworker would be making a downward comparison. For the sake of clarity, especially when it comes to presenting the study's results, I simply refer to these as an ethical behavior comparison. So, if someone makes a high/low ethical behavior comparison he or she is more/less ethical than a coworker.

standard for less ethical employees and in effect creates more work. This could be work that less ethical employees are unwilling or unable to perform. Alternatively, less ethical employees could see a more ethical comparison coworker's behavior as over the top, or beyond what should be reasonably expected. Either way, these low ethical behavior comparisons are likely to elicit feelings of anger and contempt (e.g. negative affect) on the part of the less ethical employee.

Conversely, the social comparison literature demonstrates that people who evaluate themselves as superior experience positive affect (Kulik & Gump, 1997; Gibbons, 1986), pride (Smith, 2000), and increases in self-esteem (Morse & Gergen, 1970), or what I collectively refer to as feelings of "self-enhancement." I define self-enhancement as *an inflated view of the self* (e.g. pride, arrogance, and superiority). In this vein, Wills demonstrated that social comparisons where one feels superior can serve as a "self-enhancing comparison process" (1981: 245). Similarly, I argue that high ethical behavior comparisons will lead to feelings of self-enhancement for the more ethical employees.

A comparison whereby one is superior is self-affirming (Buunk & Ybema, 1995). Thus, a high ethical behavior comparison will affirm that the more ethical employees' perception of their behavior is superior to that of the less ethical comparison coworker. More ethical employees may take pride in the fact that they discuss ethical issues at work, are trustworthy, and conduct their personal lives in accordance with ethical standards. These feelings of pride could be closely joined by feelings of arrogance and superiority, as anyone who falls short of the employees' ethical standards may be looked down upon.

In sum, ethical behavior can be enacted to varying degrees and thus is ripe for social comparison among employees. When employees compare their ethical behavior to a coworker's and recognize a discrepancy, they will feel threatened when the coworker is seen as more ethical, and they will feel enhanced when the coworker is seen as less ethical. Therefore, I hypothesize the following:

Hypothesis 1: Ethical behavior comparison is negatively related to self-threat.

Hypothesis 2: Ethical behavior comparison is positively related to self-enhancement.

Moderating Impact of Performance

Investigating the moderating impact of performance comparisons on the relationship between ethical behavior comparisons and self-threat or self-enhancement will help identify a condition under which employees feelings of threat or enhancement are strengthened. Literature on the pratfall effect (Aronson, Willerman, & Floyd, 1966) was built on the premise that those who are considered the most able are generally not well liked (Bales, 1953, 1955; Bales & Slater, 1955; Hollander & Webb, 1955). The pratfall effect is the idea that when a superior person commits some type of blunder (e.g. spills coffee on him or herself), it serves to humanize the person and thus makes him or her more attractive (Aronson et al., 1966). Consider an example in which a high performing employee is largely disliked by coworkers because his or her performance makes him or her seem too perfect. Then, this employee oversleeps and misses a very important meeting. This blunder effectively brings the employee down to everyone else's level and makes him or her more likable. My use of this literature aligns with the argument that the absence of a blunder leaves the superior person seeming too perfect or as someone whose status one could never achieve.

In low ethical behavior comparison situations, less ethical employees already feel threatened. If they also perceive that their performance is inferior to that of the more ethical comparison coworker (*low performance comparison*), their feelings of self-threat are likely to be even stronger. Heider talked about existential envy being "when the existence of another person is a continuous reproach to the envious, a constant reminder of his own inferiority" (1958: 291). Kiesler, Weizmann, and Pallak built on Heider's work noting that extremely competent people are threatening and that "anything that increases the threat would make the competent person less attractive and anything that reduces the threat (e.g. makes the competent other more "human") would increase his personal attractiveness" (1967: 107). In my theoretical model, the more ethical coworker who is also a superior performer may be seen as too perfect, which would increase the

comparison employee's feelings of self-threat by reminding the employee of his or her own inferiority.

In high ethical behavior comparisons, more ethical employees feel enhanced. If they perceive their performance to be superior to that of the less ethical coworker (*high performance comparison*) their feelings of enhancement may be even stronger. In their work on the pratfall effect, Aronson and his colleagues (1966) also found that a mediocre person who committed a blunder was subsequently viewed as that much more mediocre. Thus, if the person who overslept and missed the important meeting was an average employee the blunder would make him or her seem even more average or incompetent. This parallels a high ethical behavior comparison situation in which the less ethical comparison coworker is, by comparison, an inferior performer. Essentially, the less ethical, low performing coworker is viewed as especially inferior, leaving the comparison employee to feel that much better about him or herself; thus, strengthening feelings of self-enhancement.

Therefore, I hypothesize the following:

Hypothesis 3: Performance comparison moderates the relationship between ethical behavior comparison and self-threat, such that the negative relationship between ethical behavior comparison and self-threat is stronger when performance comparison is low versus high.

Hypothesis 4: Performance comparison moderates the relationship between ethical behavior comparison and self-enhancement, such that the positive relationship between ethical behavior comparison and self-enhancement is stronger when performance comparison is high versus low.

Self-Threat as a Form of Dissonance

When someone makes a low ethical behavior comparison, I argue he or she will experience feelings of self-threat. This self-threat could also be identified as psychological discomfort, or what Festinger calls dissonance (1957). In his work on cognitive dissonance

theory, Festinger defines dissonance as "being psychologically uncomfortable" (1957: 3). There are two main propositions that Festinger uses to support cognitive dissonance theory. First, "the existence of dissonance, being psychologically uncomfortable, will motivate the person to try to reduce the dissonance and achieve consonance" (Festinger, 1957: 3). Second, "when dissonance is present, in addition to trying to reduce it (dissonance), the person will actively avoid situations and information which would likely increase the dissonance" (Festinger, 1957: 3). Festinger continues by saying that reducing dissonance is a "basic process in humans" (1957: 4). The notion that humans are motivated to reduce dissonance is exemplified by Festinger using the concept of hunger. Meaning, if humans are hungry there is uneasiness and discomfort due to their natural desire and need for food. Hungry people are going to do whatever they can to address (e.g. eliminate) their hunger and will try to avoid being hungry again in the future.

Cognitive dissonance theory is closely tied to Festinger's work on social comparison theory in that when people make comparisons and experience discomfort, they will respond by attempting to reduce the discomfort. Cognitive dissonance has been used to explain things like the discomfort a person feels when they fail to act morally (Treviño et al., 2006), hypocritical leaders inducing employee turnover intentions (Greenbaum, Mawritz, & Piccolo, 2012), and forgetting rules after behaving dishonestly because it reduces feelings such as guilt (Shu & Gino, 2012). In this study, self-threat reduction (i.e. dissonance reduction) seems to serve as a natural explanation for what will happen when a person experiences self-threat. Therefore, I draw on Festinger's (1957) cognitive dissonance theory herein to help explain the less ethical employee's response to experiencing self-threat.

Self-Threat Reduction through Social Undermining and Ostracism

Prior research indicates that there could be a direct relationship between a low ethical behavior comparison and some type of behavioral response. The whistle-blowing literature, specifically, demonstrates that those who behave more ethically could face harsh behavioral treatment. Those who report unethical behavior, whistle-blowers, are subsequently seen as

unlikable and are sometimes punished by their peers (Greenberger, Miceli, & Cohen, 1987). When whistle-blowers are seen as highly ethical they are subsequently disliked and rejected by others (Treviño & Victor, 1992). Further, Kohlberg (1981) talks about how those who are highly ethical will not be accepted by others and could face significant challenges socially, because the ethical individuals are behaving beyond the accepted norms of the group. Despite evidence for a direct relationship, I expect the relationship between ethical behavior comparison and relevant behavioral responses to be indirect. Specifically, I argue that this relationship is mediated by feelings of self-threat, as supported by cognitive dissonance theorizing.

Extant research demonstrates two ways a person might try to reduce self-threat: harming the target of the comparison and/or distancing oneself from the target (Tesser, 1988; Tesser & Smith, 1980). When people experience threats to their sense of self, they are likely to respond with antisocial behavior, including purposely hurting other coworkers (Aquino & Douglas, 2003). In a social comparison experiment, when given the opportunity, individuals acted to prevent someone who was superior in abilities from getting additional points (performance) (Hoffman, Festinger, & Lawrence, 1954). In inferior performance comparison situations, which would be likely to elicit feelings of inadequacy and threat, people were likely to harm others on an interpersonal level (Lam, Van der Vegt, Walter, & Huang, 2011). All of this research signals that people will take action to reduce dissonance by changing the position of the comparison other. These two approaches to reducing self-threat, harming and distancing, closely parallel existing constructs in organizational behavior research: social undermining and ostracism.

The first potential response to reduce feelings of self-threat is social undermining. Social undermining is defined as "behavior intended to hinder, over time, the ability to establish and maintain positive interpersonal relationships, work-related success, and favorable reputation" (Duffy et al., 2002: 332). Through social undermining, threatened employees attempt to bring a more ethical coworker, the source of the dissonance, down to their level. When a person engages in social undermining there is an explicit attempt to cause one or more of the following outcomes:

interfering with the victim's social relationships, diminishing his or her work-related success, and hindering the reputation of the victim (Hershcovis, 2011: 504). Thus, if people feel threatened because they are not as ethical as someone else, perhaps hindering that person's reputation, social relationships, or work-related success would help reduce the threat being experienced.

Threatened employees could engage in a number of social undermining behaviors at the expense of the target. For example, threatened employees could spread rumors about a more ethical coworker, with the aim of damaging his or her reputation. Envy, which I have identified as a component of self-threat, has been linked to social undermining behavior such as counterproductive work behaviors (Cohen-Charash & Mueller, 2007), deception (Moran & Schweitzer, 2008), or hindering the target's performance (Cohen-Charash, 2009). Thus, threatened employees could also take advantage of opportunities to hinder the work effort of a more ethical coworker; perhaps by lying to the target or by delaying work that will adversely affect the target's performance. Threatened employees could also refrain from offering help to a more ethical coworker or may abstain from fulfilling past promises (Pemberton & Sedikides, 2001). Another approach would be to attack a more ethical coworker socially by publicly sharing their dislike for the coworker.

The second alternative to reduce feelings of self-threat in the midst of a low ethical behavior comparison is to socially reject the ethical other by engaging in ostracism. Ostracism occurs when people perceive that they have been ignored or excluded by others (Williams, 2001). Recently scholars have begun studying ostracism in the workplace. This work began with the development and validation of the workplace ostracism scale (Ferris, Brown, Berry, & Lian, 2008). Ostracism has negative consequences for those who experience it at work, such as decreased job satisfaction, organizational commitment, performance, and reductions in organizational citizenship behaviors, as well as increases in turnover intentions (Ferris et al., 2008).

Threatened employees could initiate a number of ostracism tactics directed at a more ethical coworker. For example, when the more ethical coworker enters the room the less ethical employee may leave the room. In a social conversation at work, the less ethical employee may make it a point to not talk to the more ethical coworker. The less ethical employee might also exclude the target from a group lunch invitation or coffee break. Ostracism effectively reduces or eliminates the number of encounters between two people; hence, helping the less ethical coworker reduce feelings of threat that originate from comparing oneself to the more ethical coworker.

In sum, social undermining and ostracism are behavioral responses to reduce feelings of self-threat that result from low ethical behavior comparisons. By socially undermining the source of self-threat, less ethical employees are able to figuratively bring a more ethical comparison coworker down to their level. By ostracizing a more ethical comparison coworker, less ethical employees are able to distance themselves from the source of self-threat. Both of these responses work to reduce the dissonance the threatened person experiences. Thus, I expect when employees experience self-threat due to a low ethical behavior comparison they will be more likely to respond by socially undermining and/or ostracizing the target of that threat. Therefore, I hypothesize the following:

Hypothesis 5: Self-threat mediates the relationship between ethical behavior comparison and (a) social undermining and (b) ostracism.

Moderated-Mediation: Negative Consequences to Ethical Behavior

To complete my theoretical model, I also predict a pattern of moderated mediation, as shown in Figure 1. In accordance with prior hypotheses and theorizing, I predict that the interactive effect of ethical behavior comparison and performance comparison onto (a) social undermining and (b) ostracism is explained by feelings of self-threat. More specifically, when a person is low on ethical behavior comparison and is also low on performance comparison, the

employee will experience even stronger feelings of self-threat, which will then lead to higher levels of social undermining and ostracism. Thus, I predict the following:

Hypothesis 6: Self-threat mediates the relationship between the interactive effect of ethical behavior comparison and performance comparison onto a) social undermining and b) ostracism.

CHAPTER III

METHOD

In this chapter, I introduce the method employed for testing my theoretical model. I used a multi-study, multi-method approach for the purpose of improving the validity and generalizability of my findings. First, I describe the laboratory experiment. I present the participants and procedures, including the experimental manipulations. I then review the checks of these manipulations from a pilot study. Second, I describe the field study, including the participants, procedures, and study measures.

Study 1 - Lab Study

Given the theoretical model hypothesized, I designed a lab study in which there are three ethical conditions (lower than referent, equal to referent, higher than referent) and three performance conditions (lower than referent, equal to referent, higher than referent). This creates a three by three between-subjects design in which there are nine experimental conditions.

Participants and Procedures

Two hundred eighty-five upper-level undergraduate business students from a south-central university were invited to participate in the experiment in exchange for extra credit. Students were told that for participating in the experiment they would receive a set amount of extra credit, and based on their performance on a competitive task within the experiment, they could earn additional discretionary extra credit. The entire experiment took place electronically. The participants were told they were participating in a competitive task that had two components: ethical judgments and task performance. Each participant was told the purpose of the research

was to determine how business students reason about ethics compared to a) other business students or b) students from other colleges. Additionally, the participants were told that the experimenter wanted to know whether their performance tended to be higher or lower than those same groups. Therefore, each participant was told he or she was being randomly paired with another student who had already completed both the ethical judgments and task performance tasks. In reality, participants were not actually compared with another student. Rather, their reported scores were manipulated and determined by random assignment into one of the nine experimental conditions. As this portion of the experiment was introduced, participants were told their performance compared to the other student would dictate the amount of discretionary extra credit they are able to earn. This was included to increase the amount of effort the participants put forth on the subsequent tasks.

First, the participant responded to a series of six ethical dilemmas. These ethical dilemmas have been used in previous research (Flynn & Wiltermuth, 2010; Pitesa & Thau, 2013). However, they were slightly adapted for purposes of this manipulation. In my study, I created four potential responses that could be considered to vary in their ethicality. Participants were asked to select how they would respond in each situation. Additionally, they were told that the best responses for the ethical dilemmas had been pre-determined by a group of research experts across the country. It was important for participants to believe there was a response that was the most ethical and that therefore they might be able to respond more or less ethically than the comparison student. After answering all six of the ethical dilemmas participants viewed a screen that reported their score was being calculated and compared. The following screen displayed the participant's score in comparison to the other student.

To make the score reporting more believable and more impactful, I created three categories: high ethical judgments (80-100% correct answers), medium ethical judgments (60-79% correct answers), and low ethical judgments (less than 60% correct answers). So, for example, a participant in the "lower than referent" condition was told he or she scored in the

"medium ethical judgments" category and the comparison student scored in the "high ethical judgments" category. To assist in the believability of the study, and to ensure participants were not unnecessarily discouraged, the "low ethical judgments" condition was never used. The scoring system also ensured the comparison being made was between similar levels of ethical judgments, which is a core point of social comparison theory. In other words, a comparison will not take place if the participant diverges too much from the comparison student. Further, the use of these categories helped to standardize the scores to some degree; rather than leaving the participants to interpret how big of a difference they believe three points is, for example. Each of the six ethical dilemmas, as well as an example of the "lower than referent" condition reporting screen, are included in Appendix A.

After viewing the scores on the ethical dilemmas, participants were taken to a screen explaining the task performance activity, which was an anagram task. This anagram task has been used in several studies in which participants need to be engaged in some type of performance task (Vance & Colella, 1990; Schweitzer et al., 2004; Cadsby, Song, & Tapon, 2007). This is an appropriate performance task because performing successfully requires ability, of which the undergraduate student sample should all be fairly equal (Cadsby et al., 2007). Given that this task was not extremely difficult, participants were not expected to get discouraged and therefore their effort was expected to remain high. Further, it is believable that even if a person does well on the task, the comparison student could score better.

In my study, participants were told the objective was to create more words using the seven letters provided in 90 seconds than the student they were being compared with. There were five rules given: 1) all words must be English words, 2) a word must be at least two or more letters long, 3) cannot use proper nouns (Ed, Texas, Sue, etc.), 4) cannot use both the singular and plural form of a word (dog, dogs), and 5) letters may only be used once in the same word. In this study each participant completes one practice round and then five competitive rounds. Each round is displayed on a new screen within the survey and each screen is timed so that a student has no

more and no less than 90 seconds to complete a round; this also helps ensure that participants actually engage in the activity. I analyzed the anagram tasks and identified ten participants who made no attempt to follow any of the rules. These ten cases were excluded from all of the data analyses. Thus, the final sample in the lab study was 246 students, for a total response rate of 86%.

After completion of the five competitive rounds, similar to the ethical dilemmas portion of the study, participants were told their scores were being calculated and compared to the comparison student. Then, depending on the assigned experimental condition, they viewed their scores and that of the comparison student. Just as before, I used three categories to group scores to make the study consistent, improve believability of comparisons, and elicit comparisons among similar others. The three categories were: high task performance (75-100% of words found), medium task performance (50-74% of words found), and low task performance (0-49% of words found). So, for example, if a participant was in the "lower than referent" condition his or her score would be in the "medium task performance" condition and the comparison student would be in the "high task performance" condition. The text that appeared on the screen explaining the Anagram task as well as the letters used for each of the six rounds are included in Appendix A. I have also included an example of the score reporting screen for the "lower than referent" condition in Appendix A. After completing the experimental task, just prior to asking participants to rate their self-threat and self-enhancement, there was a screen that listed the scores for the participant and the comparison student on both the ethical judgments and the anagram task. Then participants were asked to rate their self-threat and self-enhancement, which was based on their feelings towards the comparison student. This was followed by items rating the outcome variables, social undermining and ostracism.

Measures

Self-threat. Self-threat was rated using ten items from a scale developed by Dunn and his colleagues (2012). The scale consists of items that capture envy, anger, contempt, and threat. The

participant was asked to rate how strongly they agreed with the statements when thinking about the student they had been compared to in the lab. This scale in its original form had twelve items, all of which were included in this study. However, after analyzing the factor loadings and studying the reliabilities, it was clear the two negatively worded items were problematic and thus were dropped from the analyses (see Schmitt & Stults, 1985). These items were rated on a seven-point Likert-type scale (1 = *strongly disagree*, 7 = *strongly agree*). Participants read the following stem, "please indicate how strongly you agree with the following when thinking about yourself compared to the student with whom you were compared in this exercise." Sample items include "I feel contempt towards him/her" and "S/he makes me feel tense" (α = .90).

Self-enhancement. Self-enhancement was rated using nine items that were intended to capture pride, arrogance, and superiority. A detailed explanation for where the derivation of this scale is included in the field study. These items were also rated on a seven-point Likert-type scale (1 = *strongly disagree*, 7 = *strongly agree*). Participants were given the same stem as for the self-threat measure, "please indicate how strongly you agree with the following when thinking about yourself compared to the student with whom you were compared in this exercise." Sample items for self-enhancement include "S/he can learn a great deal from me" and "I believe I would know better than him/her in any given situation" (α = .90).

Social undermining. Because participants did not know the comparison student, using validated measures for these constructs seemed inadequate and unbelievable for the manipulation. Instead, I created unique questions that assess the participant's desire to undermine and/or exclude the comparison student. Social undermining is "behavior intended to hinder, over time, the ability to establish and maintain positive interpersonal relationships, work-related success, and favorable reputation" (Duffy et al., 2002: 332). To assess their desire to socially undermine the comparison student, I asked them to consider a scenario where a professor can only recommend one student for an internship. Using the stem "how likely would you be to do the following?" sample items include "recommend the comparison student for the internship,"

"recommend the professor continues to search the applicant pool," and "talk badly about the comparison student to the professor" (α = .65). These items were created in an attempt to capture the three facets of social undermining behavior and were rated on a seven-point Likert-type scale (1 = *very unlikely*, 7 = *very likely*).

Ostracism. Ostracism is the perception that one has been ignored or excluded by others (Williams, 2001). To assess participants' desire to ostracize or exclude the comparison student, I asked them to consider a time in which they were involved in a student group on campus (e.g., fraternity, sorority, student government, academic club, residential life group, or intramural team). Using the stem "if this comparison student were a member of the student group how likely would you be to do the following?" sample items include "ignore him/her," "avoid working with him/her directly," and "not include him/her in your personal conversations" (α = .93). These items were rated on a seven-point Likert type scale (1 = *very unlikely*, 7 = *very likely*).

A complete list of the measures described above is included in Appendix A.

Pilot Study

To test the manipulations, I first conducted a pilot study (N = 173). Of the nine experimental conditions, I had an average of 19.2 participants per condition, with the smallest condition only having 16 participants and the largest condition having 21 participants. Each participant responded to two items for the ethical behavior comparison, "compared to the student with whom I was paired, my ethical judgments were [better/worse/the same]" and "in an ethical situation whose decision would be more ethical? [mine/comparison student/both equal]." Each participant also responded to two performance-based items, "compared to the student with whom I was paired, my performance was [better/worse/the same]" and "in a word game, such as Scrabble or Words with Friends, whose performance would be higher? [mine/comparison student/both equal]."[4]

[4] To increase the reliability of my manipulation check measures, when conducting Study 1 (the lab study), I added a third item for both the ethics and performance manipulations. Thus, there were three ethics items

The success of the manipulations of the independent variable and moderating variable was examined using one-way ANOVAs. The ethical behavior comparison manipulation had a significant effect on the participants' perceptions of there being an ethical difference between the participant and the comparison student [$F(2, 170) = 146.2$, $p < .001$]. Participants in the high ethical comparison condition reported higher ethical comparisons ($M = 2.93$, $SD = .17$) than did participants in either the similar ethical comparison ($M = 2.54$, $SD = .35$) or the low ethical comparison ($M = 1.55$, $SD = .67$) conditions. These mean differences were statistically significant at the $p < .05$ level. All comparisons for the manipulation checks of both ethics and performance were on a three-point scale in which three indicates the respondent is more ethical than the comparison student. The performance manipulation also had a significant effect on the participants' perceptions of there being a performance difference between the participant and the comparison student [$F(2, 170) = 153.7$, $p < .001$]. Participants in the high performance comparison condition reported higher performance comparisons ($M = 2.84$, $SD = .34$) than did participants in either the similar performance comparison ($M = 2.38$, $SD = .52$) or low performance comparison ($M = 1.35$, $SD = .52$). Additionally, I conducted a manipulation check across conditions to ensure the ethical decision making condition did not have an effect on participants' perceived performance comparison, and vice versa. I found that there were no effects across conditions as the ethical comparison condition did not have a significant effect on participants' self-ratings of their performance comparison [$F(2, 170) = 1.75$, *ns*] and the performance comparison condition did not have significant effect on participants' self-ratings of their ethical decision making comparison [$F(2, 170) = 1.67$, *ns*]. These results suggest the manipulations were effective in manipulating the independent variable and the moderating variable.

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and three performance items. The ethics item was "who would a professor be more likely to use as an example of ethical decision making? [me/comparison student/both equal]". The performance item was "compared to the student with whom I was paired, who was more successful on the anagram task? [me/comparison student/both equal]". I used all three items to create a scale score for the ethics and performance manipulation checks.

Study 2 - Field Study

Participants and Procedures

Six-hundred-thirty students from a south-central university were invited to participate in in exchange for extra credit. Sixty-one percent of the invited participants were distance-learning MBA students who were full-time working adults. The additional 39% of invited participants were undergraduate students, 80% of whom were also distance-learning students. Students who were working participated directly and those who were not were asked to recruit a working adult (this person must work 20 hours per week, but it was preferred they find someone who worked 40 hours per week). This person was the focal employee who then asked a coworker to serve as the comparison coworker. The employee was given the following instructions with regard to selecting a coworker:

> *Choose a person in your organization with whom you work frequently. This person should also be in a comparable position, have a similar educational background, and have approximately the same organizational tenure.*

The first sentence of those instructions was adapted from previous work done on social comparisons in the workplace (Cohen-Charash & Mueller, 2007). My additional instruction helps ensure the participant was making a comparison more in line with that described by Festinger (1954). Festinger stated, "a person does not tend to evaluate his opinions or his abilities by comparison with others who are too divergent from himself" (1954: 120). Asking the participant to choose someone in a comparable position, of similar educational background, with approximately the same organizational tenure helps ensure a social comparison process is taking place that coincides with Festinger's (1954) theory.

Additionally, by using the snowball approach, my data spanned a wide variety of jobs across a number of organizations, which increases the generalizability of the study's findings (Hochwarter, Perrewé, Meurs, & Kacmar, 2007; Morgeson & Humphrey, 2006). In addition to

extra credit for the students, there was a drawing for four separate cash prizes of $101 for all employees that participated, and four identical prizes for all coworkers who participated.

By asking both a focal employee and a coworker to participate, I attempted to avoid same source biases (Podsakoff, MacKenzie, Lee, & Podsakoff, 2003). Additional steps to help avoid common method bias were taken (Podsakoff et al., 2003). First, respondents were encouraged to answer each item as honestly as possible. Second, and subsequently, respondents were assured their answers would remain anonymous. They were told no responses from participants will ever be shared with the other member of their dyad or with any representative of their organization. Finally, I emphasized there were no right or wrong answers.

The focal employees were asked to create a unique eight-digit code. This code was the only identifying information used in the survey. They were asked to forward the survey link for the coworker survey to their selected coworker. Focal employees also gave the eight-digit code to the selected coworkers so that the surveys could be matched into employee-coworker dyads while ensuring anonymity.

Three hundred fifty-three employee participants completed the employee survey. Focal employees rated their own ethical behavior comparison, performance comparison, self-threat, and self-enhancement. They also rated their own social desirability as a control. Three hundred nineteen coworker participants completed the coworker survey. The comparison coworkers rated the degree to which they are socially undermined and ostracized by the focal employee. I was able to match responses for 310 employee-coworker dyads (49% response rate).

The employee respondents consisted of 65.2% males. The average age of employee respondents was 31.3 years (*SD* = 9.8). Eighty-nine percent of employees reported being employed full-time, thus only 11% were part-time employees. The employees reported an average organizational tenure of 5.0 years (*SD* = 5.4) and that they had worked with the comparison coworker an average of 2.9 years (*SD* = 3.0). I also asked the employees whether they held a management position. Forty-one percent reported they were non-management, 20.3%

were line-managers, 28.7% were middle managers, 6.5% were senior managers, and 3.5% classified themselves as "other". Finally, 3.2% were African American, 4.5% were Asian American, 79.9% were Caucasian, 3.9% were Hispanic/Latino/a, 3.6% were Native American, 1.6% were biracial, and 3.2% reported being "other".

The coworker respondents were made up of 61.5% males. The average age of coworker respondents was 32.5 years (*SD* = 10.0). The coworkers were also primarily full-time workers as only 11.4% reported working part-time. The coworkers reported an average organizational tenure of 5.1 years (*SD* = 5.1) and that they had worked with the employee who asked them to participate an average of 3.1 years (*SD* = 3.3). As for their position, 46.5% reported being in non-management positions, 19.7% were line managers, 26.8% were middle managers, 5.2% were senior managers, and 1.9% classified themselves as "other". Finally, 3.9% were African American, 6.2% were Asian American, 76.9% were Caucasian, 5.2% were Hispanic/Latino/a, 2.6% were Native American, 1.0% were biracial, and 4.2% reported being "other".

Antecedent, Moderating, and Mediating Measures

Ethical behavior comparison. Focal employees rated their own ethical behavior comparison using a slightly adapted version of Brown et al.'s (2005) ten-item ethical leadership scale. Three items were adapted to remove the supervisory nature of the scale. Two items were adapted by substituting the word "others" for "employees" and another item was modified from "disciplines employees who violate ethical standards" to "believe others should be disciplined for violating ethical standards." The respondent was given the following instructions, "compared to the coworker you invited to participate in this study, are you more or less likely to…" Example items include, "have the best interests of others in mind" and "set an example of how to do things the right way in terms of ethics" (α = .93). Each item was rated on a seven-point Likert-type scale (1 = *much less likely compared with coworker*; 7 = *much more likely compared with coworker*).

Performance comparison. Focal employees rated their own in-role performance compared to that of the coworker using Williams and Anderson's (1991) seven-item scale. The

respondent was given the following instructions, "compared to the coworker you invited to participate in this study, are you more or less likely to…" Sample items include, "adequately complete assigned duties," "perform tasks that are expected of you," and "fulfill responsibilities specified in job description" (α = .91). These items were rated using the same seven-point scale that was used for the ethical behavior comparison (1 = *much less likely compared with coworker*, 7 = *much more likely compared with coworker*).

Self-threat. The focal employees rated their own level of self-threat using a twelve-item measure that encompasses feelings of envy, anger, contempt, and threat (Dunn et al., 2012). However, as was done in the lab study, the two negatively worded items were dropped as they did not load well on the construct (Schmitt & Stults, 1985). Respondents read the following stem "indicate how strongly you agree with the following when thinking about yourself in comparison to the coworker you asked to complete the coworker survey." All items were measured using a seven-point Likert-type scale (1 = *strongly disagree*, 7 = *strongly agree*). Sample items include, "I feel contempt towards him/her," "S/he makes me feel tense," and "I feel stress thinking about him/her" (α = .92).

Self-enhancement. The focal employee rated his or her own level of self-enhancement using an operationalization of self-enhancement that includes pride, arrogance, and superiority. There was no existing measure for self-enhancement. Therefore, similar to the approach taken by Dunn et al. (2012)[5], I adapted a nine-item measure using pride, arrogance, and superiority items from existing scales. Respondents were given the same stem as for the self-threat items, "please indicate how strongly you agree with the following when thinking about yourself in comparison to the coworker you asked to complete the coworker survey." I used five items from a pride scale (Tracy & Robins, 2007). Sample pride items include, "I feel accomplished compared to him/her"

[5] Dunn, Ruedy, and Schweitzer (2012) noted that inferior comparisons elicit deflated views of the self, what they called negative emotions. However, there was no singular measure for this construct, and they operationalized it as envy, anger, contempt, and threat and adapted items from existing scales. Similarly, there is no singular measure for self-enhancement, and thus I followed the work of Dunn et al. by adapting items from existing scales to create a measure.

and “I feel like I am more worthy than him/her.” I selected two items from a workplace arrogance scale (Johnson, Silverman, Shyamsunder, Swee, Rodopman, Cho, & Bauer, 2010). Sample arrogance items are, “I believe I know better than him/her in any given situation” and “I do not find it necessary to explain my decisions to him/her.” I also selected two items from the superiority factor of the Narcissistic Personality Inventory (Raskin & Hall, 1979; Emmons, 1987). Sample superiority items are, “I am more knowledgeable than him/her” and “S/he can learn a great deal from me.” All of these items were measured using a seven-point Likert-type scale (1 = *strongly disagree*; 7 = *strongly agree*) (α = .90).

Outcome Measures

Social undermining. The comparison coworker rated how often he or she experiences social undermining from the focal employee using the commonly used thirteen-item scale (Duffy et al., 2002). Example items, using the stem “how often does the person who asked you to complete this survey engage in the following behavior” are…“delay work to make you look bad or slow you down,” “belittle your ideas,” and “give you incorrect or misleading information about the job.” The respondents were asked to report how often they experience each of the items using a seven-point Likert-type scale (1 = *never*; 7 = *always*) (α = .95).

Ostracism. The comparison coworker also rated how often he or she is ostracized by the focal employee using the ten-item workplace ostracism scale (Ferris et al., 2008). The stem for the items was, “Please indicate how often the person who asked you to complete this survey engages in the following behavior.” Example items include, “ignore you at work,” “refuse to talk to you at work,” and “treat you as if you weren’t there.” Respondents rated each item using a seven-point Likert-type scale (1 = *never*; 7 = *always*) (α = .95).

Control Measures

Social desirability. The focal employees rated their social desirability using a ten-item measure (Strahan & Gerbasi, 1972). Extant research demonstrates that people may respond in socially desirable ways when rating socially sensitive items (Spector, 2006). That is, when self-

reporting something such as ethical behavior comparison or performance comparison, those who are high in social desirability are likely to respond to items in the way that is most socially acceptable. It is socially desirable to be seen as someone who behaves ethically or who is a high performer. Thus, each of these variables provides the opportunity for those who wish to be seen in a positive way to provide misleading responses. Therefore, I control for social desirability in my study. Social desirability was rated on a seven-point Likert-type scale (1 = *strongly disagree*, 7 = *strongly agree*). Example items include, "I always practice what I preach," "there have been occasions when I took advantage of someone," and "I'm always willing to admit it when I make a mistake" (α = .75).

All of the aforementioned measures are shown in Appendix B.

CHAPTER IV

RESULTS

This chapter provides a description of the analyses that were employed for both studies of this multi-study dissertation. For both the lab study and the field study, I conduct confirmatory factor analyses to assess the distinctiveness of the study's variables, followed by the testing of my study's hypotheses. In the lab study, I also provide the results of the manipulation check. For each study, I also discuss post-hoc analyses that could prove beneficial as I move this research towards publication. First, I provide the results of the lab study, followed by the results from the field study.

Study 1 – Lab Study

Confirmatory Factor Analyses

To confirm the distinctiveness of the variables used in the lab study, I conducted confirmatory factor analyses (CFA) with maximum likelihood estimation using JMP (JMP Pro 10). The measurement model consisted of four factors: self-threat, self-enhancement, social undermining, and ostracism. The measurement model has four latent factors and 31 indicators (10 items for self-threat, 9 items for self-enhancement, and 6 items each for both social undermining and ostracism). The results indicate that the four-factor model provided reasonable fit to the data, $\chi^2(425) = 926.04$, $p < .001$; comparative fit index (CFI) = .90; root mean square error of approximation (RMSEA) = .07; standardized root mean square residual (SRMR) = .07 (Bentler & Bonnett, 1990; Hu & Bentler, 1999). Additionally, there are no cross-loadings as all indicators load onto their intended construct and all indicators are statistically significant ($p < .01$).

I then compared the measurement model to a three-factor model in which all of the items for both social undermining and ostracism were specified to load onto one factor, $\chi^2(428) = 972.86$, $p < .001$; CFI = .89; RMSEA = .07; SRMR = .07. I also compared it with a two-factor model where social undermining and ostracism loaded onto a single factor while self-threat and self-enhancement also loaded onto a single factor, $\chi^2(431) = 1794.41$, $p < .001$; CFI = .72; RMSEA = .11; SRMR = .13. Finally, the measurement model was compared to a one-factor model in which all of the indicators in the study loaded onto a single factor, $\chi^2(431) = 2482.15$, $p < .001$; CFI = .58; RMSEA = .14; SRMR = .14. Using a change in χ^2 test, I was able to determine that the four-factor model was a significant improvement over the three-factor model [$\Delta \chi^2 (3) = 46.82$, $p < .001$], two-factor model [$\Delta \chi^2 (6) = 868.37$, $p < .001$], and one-factor model [$\Delta \chi^2 (6) = 1556.11$, $p < .001$] and thus provided better fit to the study data than any of these alternative models.

Descriptive Statistics and Correlations

The means, standard deviations, reliabilities, and intercorrelations among the variables used in the lab study are included in Table 1.

Manipulation Check

Prior to testing my hypotheses, I conducted one-way ANOVAs to assess the effectiveness of the study's manipulations. The ethical behavior comparison manipulation had a significant effect on participants' perceptions that they were either more ethical, less ethical, or equal on ethical decision making than the comparison student [$F(2, 243) = 289.33$, $p < .001$]. Participants in the high ethical comparison condition reported higher ethical comparisons ($M = 2.82$, $SD = .34$) than did participants in either the similar ethical comparison ($M = 2.11$, $SD = .34$) or the low ethical comparison ($M = 1.34$, $SD = .48$) conditions. These mean differences were statistically significant at the $p < .05$ level. These ethical comparisons were on a three-point scale in which three indicates the respondent is a more ethical decision maker than the comparison student. The performance comparison manipulation had a significant effect on participants' perceptions that they were either a better performer, worse performer, or equal performer to the comparison

student [$F(2, 243) = 429.02$, $p < .001$]. Participants in the high performance comparison condition reported higher performance comparisons, on a three-point scale, ($M = 2.91$, $SD = .23$) than did participants in either the similar performance comparison ($M = 2.11$, $SD = .34$) or the low performance comparison ($M = 1.24$, $SD = .48$) conditions. These mean differences were statistically significant at the $p < .05$ level. Additionally, there were no effects across conditions. So, the ethical comparison condition did not have a significant effect on participants' self-ratings of their performance comparison [$F(2, 243) = .20$, *ns*] and the performance comparison condition did not have significant effect on participants' self-ratings of their ethical decision making comparison [$F(2, 243) = .00$, *ns*]. All of these results, taken together, indicate the participants perceived the manipulations as intended.

Hypotheses Tests

To test the first four hypotheses, I conducted two separate univariate ANOVAs. Hypothesis 1 predicted ethical behavior comparison would be negatively related to self-threat. Results of the ANOVA revealed, however, that ethical comparison was not significantly related to self-threat [$F(2, 237) = .991$, *ns*]. Hypothesis 2 predicted ethical behavior comparison would be positively related to self-enhancement. ANOVA results revealed that direction of the ethical behavior comparison had a significant effect on self-enhancement [$F(2, 237) = 3.39$, $p < .05$]. Planned paired comparisons revealed that participants experienced significantly higher self-enhancement following a high ethical behavior comparison ($M = 3.72$, $SD = 1.07$) than following a similar ethical behavior comparison ($M = 3.29$, $SD = 1.03$, $t(243) = -2.57$, $p \leq .01$). The difference between self-enhancement for those in the high ethical behavior comparison and in the low ethical behavior comparison condition approached significance ($M = 3.41$, $SD = 1.06$, $t(243) = -1.88$, $p < .10$). There was no significant difference between the self-enhancement experienced by those in the low ethical behavior comparison condition and the similar ethical behavior condition ($t(243) = .72$, *ns*). These findings demonstrate a positive relationship between ethical behavior comparison and self-enhancement, in support of Hypothesis 2. However, it should be

noted that although the mean for self-enhancement of those in the high ethical behavior comparison condition was indeed significantly higher than those in the similar ethical behavior comparison condition, the difference between those in the high and low ethical behavior comparison condition only approached statistical significance. This unusual finding is further discussed in the Discussion.

Hypothesis 3 stated that performance comparison would have a strengthening effect on the negative relationship between ethical behavior comparisons and self-threat, such that participants in the low performance condition would experience more threat than those in the alternate conditions. Hypothesis 4 suggested a performance comparison would have a strengthening effect on the positive relationship between ethical behavior comparison and self-enhancement, such that participants in the high performance condition would experience more enhancement than those in the other conditions. Results revealed that the interaction of performance comparison and ethical behavior comparison was not significantly related to self-threat [$F(4, 237) = .57$, *ns*] or to self-enhancement [$F(4, 237) = .15$, *ns*]. Thus, neither Hypothesis 3 nor 4 was supported.

Hypothesis 5 predicted that self-threat would serve as a mediator between ethical behavior comparison and the outcome variables a) social undermining and b) ostracism. Hypothesis 6 predicted a moderated-mediation relationship whereby performance comparison moderated the indirect relationship between ethical behavior comparison and the outcome variables, social undermining and ostracism, via self-threat. The first condition that must be met for mediation to be present is that the independent variable, in this case ethical behavior comparison, must be significantly related to the mediator, self-threat (MacKinnon, Lockwood, Hoffman, West, & Sheets, 2002). This relationship was not significant. Thus the mediation predictions, Hypothesis 5 and 6, are not supported.

Even though Hypothesis 5, the mediating role of self-threat, could not be tested, I did test the relationship between self-threat and the study's dependent variables, social undermining and

ostracism. The results revealed that self-threat was significantly and positively related to measures I proposed for both social undermining ($B = .28$, $p < .001$) and ostracism ($B = .41$, $p < .001$). Additionally, I included alternative measures of social undermining (e.g., giving incorrect or misleading information about the comparison student to the professor, spreading rumors about the comparison student to the professor, talking bad about the comparison student to the professor behind his/her back), which were also significantly predicted by self-threat ($B = .35$, $p < .001$). As a final measure of social undermining, I asked participants to assign percentages, totaling 100%, of the discretionary extra credit to themselves and the comparison student. The relationship between self-threat and the percentage of discretionary extra credit was not significant ($B = .01$, *ns*), but self-enhancement did significantly predict the percentage of discretionary extra credit given to oneself ($B = .09$, $p \leq .01$). This indicates that students who reported self-enhancing feelings were more likely to assign themselves a higher percentage of the discretionary extra credit than the comparison student.

Similarly, I included alternative measures of ostracism (e.g., likelihood of socializing with comparison student if he/she joined the same student group, likelihood of avoiding the comparison student at group functions), which were also significantly predicted by self-threat ($B = .25$, $p \leq .001$). All of these results taken together appear to support the notion that when people experience negative emotions when thinking of someone else, they will try to reduce these negative emotions by harming the person or distancing themself from the person.

I also decided to analyze, post-hoc, potential reactions for those who experience self-enhancement after an ethical behavior comparison. Feelings of self-enhancement were significantly and positively related to both measures of social undermining ($B = .20$, $p < .001$), ($B = .21$, $p < .001$). Self-enhancement was also significantly and positively related to one measure of ostracism ($B = .22$, $p < .001$) and approached significance for the other measure of ostracism ($B = .11$, $p < .10$). Given these significant results for outcomes of self-enhancement, coupled with support that ethical behavior comparison was positively related to self-enhancement, I conducted

a Sobel test (Sobel, 1982) to determine if self-enhancement mediates the relationship between ethical behavior comparisons and social undermining and/or ostracism (MacKinnon et al., 2002). The tests of the indirect effect using the proposed measures for both social undermining ($z = 1.70$, $p < .10$) and ostracism ($z = 1.72$, $p < .10$) only approach significance. Thus, I cannot completely conclude the relationship between ethical behavior comparison and the outcome variables occurs through self-enhancement. Similarly, using alternative measures of these constructs, social undermining ($z = 1.71$, $p < .10$) approached significance and ostracism ($z = 1.31$, *ns*) was not significant. Although these results only approach significance, the findings may suggest that someone high in ethical behavior comparison is likely to act unfavorably (e.g., through social undermining and/or ostracism) towards the comparison other due to feelings of self-enhancement.

Additionally, in the lab study, I included an alternative measure of a mediator, negative affect, which could explain the relationship between an ethical behavior comparison and unfavorable outcomes such as social undermining and ostracism. To test these measures, I used univariate ANOVAs in which both the ethical behavior comparison and performance comparison conditions were included as factors so I could also assess the interactive effect on negative affect. The measure was the negative affect component of the positive and negative affective scale (PANAS) (Watson, Clark, & Tellegen, 1988). The results were not significant for the relationship between an ethical behavior comparison and state negative affectivity [$F(2, 237) = .41$, *ns*] or for the interactive effect [$F(4, 237) = .58$, *ns*].

Study 2 – Field Study

Confirmatory Factor Analyses

Just as I did for the lab study, I conducted a CFA using maximum likelihood estimation in JMP (JMP Pro 10). Because there were measures in this study rated by different respondents, employees and coworkers, a CFA was conducted only on those constructs rated by the same respondent. So, for the measures rated by the employee, the measurement model consisted of five factors: ethical behavior comparison, performance comparison, self-threat, self-enhancement, and

social desirability. These five latent factors had 46 indicators (10 for ethical behavior comparison, 7 for performance comparison, 10 for self-threat, 9 for self-enhancement, and 10 for social desirability). The results indicate the five-factor model provided reasonable fit $\chi^2(974) = 1934.3$, $p < .001$; CFI = .89; RMSEA = .06; SRMR = .07 (Bentler & Bonnett, 1990; Hu & Bentler, 1999). Also, there were no cross-loadings among any of the indicators and all indicators were statistically significant ($p < .01$).

I then compared the employee-rated measurement model to a four-factor model in which all of the items for self-threat and self-enhancement were specified to load onto a single factor, $\chi^2(978) = 2768.2$, $p < .001$; CFI = .79; RMSEA = .08; SRMR = .11. I also compared the original five-factor model to a three factor model in which ethical behavior comparison and performance comparison loaded onto a single factor, as did self-threat and self-enhancement, along with social desirability as its own factor, $\chi^2(981) = 3362.3$, $p < .001$; CFI = .72; RMSEA = .09; SRMR = .12. Finally, the measurement model was compared to a one-factor model in which all of the indicators were specified to load onto a single factor, $\chi^2(984) = 4928.9$, $p < .001$; CFI = .54; RMSEA = .12; SRMR = .15. A change in χ^2 test indicated the five-factor model was a significant improvement over the four-factor model [$\Delta \chi^2 (4) = 833.9$, $p < .001$], three-factor model [$\Delta \chi^2 (3) = 1428.0$, $p < .001$], and one-factor model [$\Delta \chi^2 (3) = 2994.6$, $p < .001$].

This was followed by conducting a CFA for the measurement model of the measures rated by the coworker, social undermining and ostracism. This two-factor model had 23 indicators (13 for social undermining and 10 for ostracism). The results indicate the two-factor model provided acceptable fit, $\chi^2(225) = 1105.8$, $p < .001$; CFI = .89; RMSEA = .11; SRMR = .04. There were also no cross-loadings among any of the coworker rated indicators. I compared this coworker measurement model to a one-factor model in which all 23 indicators were specified to load onto a single-factor. A change in χ^2 test demonstrated the two-factor model was significantly better than the one-factor model [$\Delta \chi^2 (1) = 284.3$, $p < .001$].

Descriptive Statistics and Correlations

The means, standard deviations, reliabilities, and intercorrelations among the variables used in the field study are included in Table 2.

Explanation of Analyses

To test the entire moderated mediation model, I used a method recommended by Preacher, Rucker, and Hayes (2007). This method utilizes an SPSS macro created by Preacher and his colleagues (2007). I ran a regression equation that estimates both mediator variable and dependent variable models. Analyzing the mediator variable model, I was able to determine if the ethical behavior comparison had a direct effect on self-threat (Hypothesis 1) and if the presence of a performance comparison moderated that relationship (Hypothesis 3). The mediator variable model regresses the mediator (self-threat) onto the independent variable (ethical behavior comparison), moderator (performance comparison), and the interaction of those two, as well as the control variable (social desirability). The dependent variable models in the two separate models regresses the dependent variables (social undermining for Hypothesis 5a and 6a, ostracism for Hypothesis 5b and 6b) onto the independent variable (ethical behavior comparison), mediator (self-threat), moderator (performance comparison), and the interaction of ethical behavior comparisons and performance comparisons, as well as the control variable (social desirability). For the first model I analyzed, social undermining served as the dependent variable, and it was replaced by ostracism in the second model. The results of the mediator variable model are the same in both of these models.

Because there were no hypotheses where self-enhancement serves as a mediator, I used hierarchical regression rather than Preacher et al.'s (2007) macro to analyze Hypotheses 2 and 4. I ran one model in which I was able to determine if the ethical behavior comparison had a direct effect on self-enhancement (Hypothesis 2) and if the presence of a performance comparison moderated that relationship (Hypothesis 4). This model regressed self-enhancement onto the ethical behavior comparison, performance comparison, and the interaction of the two comparisons, as well as the control, employee social desirability.

Hypotheses Tests

Prior to testing my hypotheses, I mean centered the ethical behavior comparison and performance comparison variables (Aiken & West, 1991; Cohen, Cohen, West, & Aiken, 2003). To provide support that multicollinearity is not an issue, I analyzed variance inflation factor scores and found all of them were below 10.0 (Kline, 2011).

To test the entire moderated-mediation model, I used Preacher et al.'s (2007) macro as previously described. Hypothesis 1 predicted that ethical behavior comparison would be negatively related to self-threat. The results (reported in Table 3) revealed that there was a significant relationship ($B = .41$, $p < .001$), but it was in the opposite direction of what was hypothesized, thus Hypothesis 1 was not supported. This indicates that when people view themselves as more ethical than someone else, they report being threatened. Hypothesis 2 predicted that ethical behavior comparison would be positively related to self-enhancement. I found support for this hypothesis as the relationship was positive and significant ($B = .40$, $p < .001$). This indicates that those who have a high ethical behavior comparison are likely to experience feelings of enhancement. This finding is reported in Table 4.

Hypothesis 3 predicted that performance comparison would strengthen the negative relationship between ethical behavior comparison and self-threat when performance comparison was low versus high. The results, though significant, do not support this hypothesis as the interactive effect has a negative relationship with self-threat ($B = -.14$, $p < .05$). This suggests that the positive relationship between ethical behavior comparison and self-threat is weaker when performance comparison is high as opposed to low. In other words, people who are more ethical do not feel as threatened by a less ethical coworker, as long as the more ethical employee is a higher performer than the comparison coworker. These results are provided in Table 3 and the plotted interaction is illustrated in Figure 2. The plotted interaction reveals that the relationship between ethical behavior comparisons and self-threat is strengthened when performance comparisons are low. I conducted a simple slopes analysis to further assess the interaction (Aiken

& West, 1991; Preacher, Curran, & Bauer, 2006). It revealed that the simple slope of self-threat onto ethical behavior comparison was stronger under conditions of low levels of performance comparison ($t = 4.89$, $p < .01$) as opposed to high levels of performance comparison ($t = 3.09$, $p < .01$).

Hypothesis 4 suggested a performance comparison would moderate the positive relationship between ethical behavior comparisons and self-enhancement by strengthening it. The results revealed that this moderating effect was significant ($B = -.19$, $p < .01$), but in the opposite direction of what was hypothesized. (See Table 4 for the results.) Further the plotted interaction does not align with my predictions. (See Figure 3 for the plotted interaction.) The plot indicates that when performance is low, the relationship between ethical behavior comparison and self-enhancement is stronger. It appears poor-performing, ethical employees still feel more enhanced, because they are at least more ethical than the comparison coworker. The simple slope results revealed that the slope of self-enhancement onto ethical behavior comparisons is positive and significant when performance comparisons are both low ($t = 4.43$, $p < .01$) and high ($t = 2.35$, $p < .01$), but the relationship is stronger when performance comparison is low, whereas I predicted that the relationship would be stronger when performance comparison is high. Thus, Hypothesis 4 is not supported.

Hypothesis 5 predicted that self-threat mediates the relationship between ethical behavior comparison and (a) social undermining and (b) ostracism. The results of these analyses are provided in Table 3. The dependent variables models from the moderated-mediated regressions previously run show there is a direct positive relationship between self-threat and a) social undermining ($B = .35$, $p < .001$) and b) ostracism ($B = .28$, $p < .001$). This is the second step to show mediation is present (MacKinnon et al., 2002). The first step, that the antecedent is related to the mediator, was shown by the significant results that ethical behavior comparison is positively related to self-threat. Finally, a test of the indirect effect must be provided to show that the relationship between the antecedent and outcome occurs through the mediator. I conducted a

Sobel test for both social undermining ($z = 4.42$, $p < .001$) and ostracism ($z = 4.49$, $p < .001$), which provide support for Hypothesis 5, that self-threat mediates the relationship between ethical behavior comparison and (a) social undermining and (b) ostracism.

Hypothesis 6 predicts a moderated-mediation relationship, whereby self-threat serves as the mediator between the interactive effect of ethical behavior comparisons and performance comparisons and the unfavorable outcomes, social undermining and ostracism. To test this hypothesis, I looked at the conditional indirect effect of ethical behavior comparisons on social undermining and ostracism (through self-threat) at multiple levels of performance comparisons (one standard deviation below the mean, the mean, and one standard deviation above the mean). As is shown in Table 3, these results revealed that all three conditional indirect effects were positive and significantly different from zero for both social undermining and ostracism. Even though the indirect effects are significant at all three levels of the moderator, they become progressively stronger at lower levels of the moderator (e.g., one standard deviation below the mean). I used a bootstrapping method with 5,000 samples and generated 95% confidence intervals, which verified these findings.

Additionally, Preacher et al.'s (2007) method computes conditional indirect effects for a range of values for the moderator. This is a complement to the more standard use of the moderator at one standard deviation above and below the mean and the mean, and it allows the researcher to identify specific values at which the conditional indirect effect is statistically significant. These results are provided in Table 5 and reveal that the conditional indirect effect was significant ($p \leq .05$) for any value of performance comparison less than or equal to 1.39 (mean centered) for both social undermining and ostracism. All of these results taken together indicate that at low levels of performance comparison, that is when people see themselves as a lower performer than a comparison coworker, they are more likely to socially undermine and/or ostracize coworkers due to stronger feelings of self-threat that are generated from a high ethical comparison. But, as the performance comparison becomes higher (i.e., people report being a

higher performer than a coworker), self-threat is less likely to explain the relationship between ethical comparison and social undermining and/or ostracism towards the coworker. Technically, Hypothesis 6 is supported, but this is only the case because I did not specify a direction for the moderated-mediation hypothesis. I had expected that a low performance comparison would moderate the negative relationship between an ethical behavior comparison and self-threat, when in reality it moderates a positive relationship between these two.

In the original dissertation proposal I had proposed to create the ethical behavior comparison and performance comparison measures by comparing the scale scores (Dunn et al., 2012). As an alternative operationalization of ethical behavior comparison and performance comparison, I conducted analyses, post-hoc, using this method. Thus, using the employee rating of his or her own ethical behavior and performance and that of his or her coworker, I was able to assign each employee into an ethical behavior comparison and performance comparison category. When the coworker's ethical behavior score was higher than the employee's, it was considered a low ethical behavior comparison (N = 65). When the coworker's ethical behavior score was lower than the employee's, it was considered a high ethical behavior comparison (N = 216). When the coworker's ethical behavior score was equal to the employee's, it was considered a similar ethical behavior comparison (N = 29). The same method was employed for creating the performance comparisons (low performance comparison: N = 82; high performance comparison: N = 174; similar performance comparison: N = 54).

ANOVA results revealed that ethical behavior comparison was not significantly related to self-threat [$F(2, 307) = 1.90$, *ns*]. Thus, Hypothesis 1 is not supported using this method. Ethical behavior comparison was significantly related to self-enhancement [$F(2, 307) = 3.10$, $p < .05$]. Planned paired comparisons indicated that self-enhancement was significantly higher following a high ethical behavior comparison ($M = 3.81$, $SD = 1.07$) than following a low ethical behavior comparison ($M = 3.44$, $SD = 1.09$, $t(307) = -2.43$, $p < .05$). The difference between self-enhancement for employees with a similar ethical behavior comparisons ($M = 3.62$, $SD = 1.13$)

was not significantly different than with low ethical behavior comparisons ($t(307) = -.73$, *ns*) or high ethical behavior comparisons ($t(307) = -.92$, *ns*). These findings provide support for Hypothesis 2. The interactive effect of performance comparison on the relationship between ethical behavior comparison and self-threat [$F(4, 301) = .34$, *ns*] and self-enhancement [$F(4, 301) = 1.38$, *ns*] was not significant. Thus, Hypothesis 3 and 4 were not supported using this method. Since the direct relationship between ethical behavior comparison and self-threat was not significant using this method, Hypothesis 5 (mediation) and 6 (moderated mediation) are also not significant.

For all remaining analyses, I returned to using the scale scores of ethical behavior comparisons, rather than the Dunn et al. (2012) method of comparing scores. It is worth noting that I collected a measure of negative affect that could be used as an alternative operationalization of self-threat. Employees were asked to rate their affect using the following stem, "when comparing yourself to the coworker who you asked to complete the coworker survey, to what extent do you agree that you experience the following emotions?" Post-hoc, using only the 10 negative affect items from the PANAS scale (Watson et al., 1988) ($\alpha = .95$) and Preacher et al.'s (2007) macro, I found that ethical behavior comparison is positively related to negative affect ($B = .30$, $p < .01$). The interactive effect of performance comparison weakens the relationship between ethical behavior comparison and negative affect ($B = -.16$, $p < .05$). Negative affect is positively related to both social undermining ($B = .18$, $p < .001$) and ostracism ($B = .14$, $p < .001$). Further, tests of the indirect effects reveal that negative affect mediates the relationship between ethical behavior comparison and social undermining ($z = 2.50$, $p \leq .01$) and ostracism ($z = 2.52$, $p \leq .01$). Further, there is evidence to support moderated mediation as the interactive effect is significant at one standard deviation below the mean (social undermining: $B = .08$, $p < .01$; ostracism: $B = .06$, $p < .01$) and the mean (social undermining: $B = .05$, $p \leq .01$; ostracism: $B = .04$, $p \leq .01$), but then is no longer significant at one standard deviation above the mean (social

undermining: $B = .02$, ns; ostracism: $B = .02$, *ns*). These significant findings closely resemble those found when self-threat serves as the mediator.

Finally, the consequences of feeling enhanced as a result of social comparisons have been understudied. This was the primary reason why no outcome variables for this part of the model were included in this study. Yet, post-hoc, I decided to examine the potential for social undermining and ostracism to serve as consequences of feeling enhanced, while controlling for social desirability. Using Preacher et al.'s (2007) moderated mediation macro, the relationship between ethical behavior comparison and self-enhancement was positive and significant ($B = .40$, $p < .001$) and the interactive effect of performance comparison weakened the effect ($B = -.19$, $p < .01$). The dependent variable model revealed that self-enhancement predicted social undermining ($B = .08$, $p < .10$) and ostracism ($B = .06$, $p < .10$), but these results only approached significance[6]. Calculations using the Sobel test (Sobel, 1982) revealed that self-enhancement mediates the relationship between ethical behavior comparison and social undermining ($z = 1.82$, $p < .10$) and ostracism ($z = 1.82$, $p < .10$), but these results should be interpreted with caution, as the conditional indirect effects only approach significance. It appears that experiencing self-enhancement as a result of high ethical behavior comparison may result in similar deviant outcomes as feeling threatened.

To test for moderated mediation, I looked at the conditional indirect effect of ethical behavior comparisons on social undermining and ostracism (through self-enhancement) at multiple levels of performance comparisons (one standard deviation below the mean, the mean, and one standard deviation above the mean). For social undermining, this indirect effect only

[6] When social desirability is removed as a control variable, these results become significant: social undermining ($\beta = .11$, $p < .01$) and ostracism ($\beta = .09$, $p < .05$). Additionally, the Sobel tests still indicate that self-enhancement serves as a mediator between ethical behavior comparison and social undermining ($z = 2.34$, $p < .05$) and ostracism ($z = 2.49$, $p \leq .01$). Further, analysis of the conditional indirect effects provides support for self-enhancement mediating the relationship between the interactive effect of ethical behavior comparison and performance comparison and social undermining and ostracism (both are significant at one standard deviation below the mean, and the mean, and then are no longer significant at one standard deviation above the mean).

approaches significance at one standard deviation below the mean ($B = .04$, $p < .10$) and the mean ($B = .03$, $p < .10$). It is then not significant at one standard deviation above the mean ($B = .02$, *ns*). For ostracism, the indirect effect only approaches significance at one standard deviation below the mean ($B = .04$, $p < .10$) and is not significant at the mean ($B = .03$, *ns*) and one standard deviation above the mean ($B = .01$, *ns*). Though these results may indicate that at low levels of performance comparison, employees are more likely to socially undermine and ostracize their coworkers due to stronger feelings of self-enhancement, they do not provide statistically significant support for a moderated-mediation effect.

CHAPTER V

DISCUSSION

This research provides a unique theoretical perspective to a topic that has received increasing interest among both scholars and practitioners in the last 20 years. To date, ethics research has been grounded in a very strong assumption that ethical behavior is advantageous and should be promoted, while unethical behavior is detrimental and should be avoided. Using social comparison theory (Festinger, 1954) to analyze ethical behavior, I was able to uncover how people feel and respond when they compare their ethical behavior to that of their coworkers. Importantly, this study identified potential unfavorable consequences, social undermining and ostracism, that are indirectly related to perceptions of ethical behavior.

My expectation was that employees would be bothered when perceiving a coworker to be more ethical, and that this sense of threat would be intensified if the coworker was also a superior performer. I also hypothesized that when employees perceived a coworker to be less ethical, the employee would feel enhanced, and this relationship would be strengthened when the coworker was also perceived to be an inferior performer. I then predicted that feelings of self-threat would mediate the relationship between ethical behavior comparisons and unfavorable outcomes, social undermining and ostracism. The results of this study, however, indicate that something different, though still important, could be taking place. I find that people are threatened (envy, anger, contempt, threat) by those who are less ethical than them. Also, more ethical employees become even more threatened when the less ethical coworkers seem to be thriving from a performance

standpoint. Further, these feelings of self-threat that result from ethical behavior comparisons then lead to social undermining and ostracism.

Simultaneously, I find, as predicted, that high ethical behavior comparisons are positively related to self-enhancement. But, the relationship between ethical behavior comparison and self-enhancement is strengthened when the employee sees him or herself as a lower performer than the comparison other, rather than a higher performer. This could indicate that poor performing employees still feel enhanced, because at least they do their job in a way that is more ethical than their higher performing coworker. Additionally, supplemental analyses indicate enhancement that results from ethical behavior comparison is related to social undermining and ostracism. This signals that feeling enhanced as a result of an ethical behavior comparison, just like feeling threatened, could lead people to act unfavorably towards their less ethical coworker. All of these results, taken together, have a number of important implications for both theory and practice.

Theoretical Implications

This research makes a number of theoretical contributions to the social comparison, behavioral ethics, social undermining, and ostracism literatures. The results of this research were counterintuitive and one finding, in particular, runs contrary to traditional social comparison theoretical arguments. Social comparison research has consistently found that high comparisons (i.e., when people view themselves as superior to comparison others) elicit positive affect (Klein, 1997; Gilbert, Giesler, & Morris, 1995; Wood, Taylor, & Lichtman, 1985). However, I find that people who make high ethical behavior comparisons actually experience negative affect in the form of envy, threat, anger, and contempt.

My unexpected findings may be explained by the person-perception literature, whereby people are expected to endure certain traits and behaviors to be successful within an organizational context. It could be that in organizational settings, embodying the characteristics of morality, and demonstrating moral behaviors, is actually a liability. Researchers have shown that being "warm," "communal," and generally "moral" can lead a person to be perceived as likable,

but not very competent (Fiske, Cuddy, & Glick, 2007; Kreps & Monin, 2011). Hence, a social comparison process that renders a person more ethical than a comparison coworker, could make the more ethical person feel threatened because he/she may be viewed as less capable of garnering success, at least when compared to the less ethical coworker. Employees may prefer to remain ethically neutral to avoid being seen as someone who is moral, yet incapable of performing well. Some scholars have argued that the majority of leaders within organizations operate as ethically neutral, or amoral, leaders (Carroll, 1987; Treviño et al., 2003). Non-supervisory employees may also find it easier to remain ethically neutral out of fear of being viewed as a goody-goody—someone who is too focused on morality and not focused enough on performance.

Beyond the aforementioned person-perceptions arguments, it could also be that more ethical employees find less ethical coworkers threatening because less ethical coworkers are more inclined to engage in expedient behaviors to attain success. A highly ethical employee should be more committed to following rules and "doing the right thing" in terms of ethics. The more ethical employee considers the needs of multiple stakeholders when making decisions and defines success not just by results, but also by the way results are attained. A less ethical comparison coworker may not ascribe to these same practices, or at least not with the same vigilance as the more ethical coworker. Hence, the less ethical coworker's work load may be a little bit lighter, and performance potentially higher, than the more ethical employee. The discrepancy between the more ethical and less ethical employees' day-to-day "moral" practices could serve as a real threat to the more ethical employee because the two employees are no longer on the same footing in terms of fairly competing within the organization.

Interestingly, my results demonstrate that more ethical employees feel even more threatened when they are lower performers than less ethical comparison coworkers. Person-perception arguments lend support to this finding. Those who are moral low-performers are reaffirmed of their high morals, but at the same time, they are indeed less competent, which

would make them feel threatened by high-performing, less ethical coworkers. This finding also supports the possibility that the higher-performing, less ethical coworker really is being expedient in order to be successful, which would again make the more ethical, lower-performing employee certainly feel threatened. Taken together, the arguments I provided for the unexpected finding that more ethical employees feel threatened by less ethical employees, especially when the more ethical employee is a lower performer, could serve as an interesting and important caveat to traditional social comparison theory arguments. Generally speaking, it may be true that people who see themselves as superior on some dimension do indeed experience positive emotions when thinking of the inferior comparison other. However, given the competitive nature of organizations, and the fact that endorsing ethical principles and behaviors takes time, a "superior" ethical comparison may not be seen as that desirable within work contexts. Accordingly, it may be worthwhile for scholars to further consider just what it means to be "ethical" within a corporation. The findings for this study may provide insight as to why some employees may prefer to remain ethically neutral—if not everyone is doing it, then taking an ethical stand may put a person in a vulnerable situation.

A final possible explanation for the positive relationship between ethical comparison and feelings of self-threat may be attributed to concerns about reputation. It could be that employees consider comparable coworkers to be reflections of themselves. Assuming that the employee believes that similar others should abide by the same ethical standards, comparing oneself to a less ethical coworker could make the more ethical employee feel vulnerable. The more ethical employee may feel threatened in the sense that the less ethical coworker could bring down the image of the more ethical employee. Simply by association, if the less ethical coworker does indeed engage in unethical behavior, the more ethical employee may feel like his or her reputation could be harmed as well. For example, two employees who started working around the same time, with the same alma mater, and same organizational position, are likely to see each other as being very similar and comparable. If one employee behaves less ethically than desired,

the more ethical employee may wonder whether management will categorize him or her to be equally loose in his or her moral standards. The possibility of having a ruined reputation may explain why more ethical employees feel threatened by less ethical coworkers.

My research also contributes to the literature by examining the relationship between ethical comparisons and performance comparisons on feelings of self-enhancement. I originally predicted that an employee who is both more ethical and a superior performer than a comparison coworker will feel more enhanced. Interestingly, I instead found the impact of performance comparison on the positive relationship between a high ethical behavior comparison and self-enhancement is stronger when the performance comparison is low rather than high. It could be that employees use ethical behavior as a way to emotionally compensate for not being a high performer. Although the employee is a lower performer, he or she may feel good about being more ethical because of the positive accolades that likely go along with being moral, such that the employee may be considered warmer, more communal, and generally more likeable (Bird & Waters, 1989; Fiske et al., 2007). Also, there's a certain level of discipline that comes from being ethical, that may be harder for others to emulate (Baumeister & Tierney, 2011), especially in light of the day-to-day temptations to behave expediently for the sake of higher performance. It is also possible that those who are more ethical truly see themselves as morally superior because they have the courage to stand up for what they believe to be right, even if this means sacrificing performance. Hence, the positivity surrounding moral traits and behaviors, as well as the potential liabilities (e.g., being seen as less competent), may explain why more ethical employees simultaneously experience both enhancement and threat in response to less ethical coworkers. It is almost as if these employees are saying, "I may be deficient in performance, but at least I am more ethical than my coworker." Accordingly, people may derive more self-enhancement from a high ethical behavior comparison than from a high performance comparison.

I also contribute to the literature by using social comparison theory within the domain of ethics, which has previously received "surprisingly little attention" (Monin, 2007: 53).

Furthermore, Greenberg, Ashton-James, and Ashkanasy noted that "social comparison appears to be embedded deeply into the fabric of organizational life" and yet there have been "no unified efforts to explain organizational behavior from the perspective of social comparison processes" (2007: 23). My research contributes to the burgeoning stream of research that utilizes social comparison theory to further understand organizational life (Vidyarthi, Liden, Anand, Erdogan, & Ghosh, 2010; Lam et al., 2011; Dunn et al., 2012; Spence, Ferris, Brown, & Heller, 2011). Festinger's (1954) theory states that people are inclined to compare their opinions and/or abilities. A reason for the lack of social comparison research in the ethics domain could be because of the challenge of labeling ethics under one of these two categories—opinions: "how right one is" versus abilities: "how smart one is" (Monin, 2007: 54). However, Monin implies that the duel nature of ethicality is more of a benefit than a challenge, as reflected in his statement, "the hybrid nature of morality makes it a complex and rich domain to study social comparison" (2007: 55). My research provides just one example of how researchers could study ethics-related questions through the lens of social comparison theory.

Additionally, I contribute to the literature by identifying unfavorable outcomes that may be indirectly associated with perceptions of ethical behavior, namely, social undermining and workplace ostracism. Extant behavioral ethics research has predominately focused on identifying antecedents of ethical judgment, intentions, and behaviors (Treviño et al., 2006). The motivation of studying antecedents of ethical choice (Kish-Gephart et al., 2010) is likely attributable to the desire to prevent unethical behaviors in the first place. Treviño et al. (2006) noted the lack of empirical work that studies consequences of ethical behavior, which in recent years has been partially addressed by research that examines the consequences of ethical leadership. However, with the exception of a few theoretical pieces (Birds & Waters, 1989; Greenbaum, Quade, & Bonner, 2013; Kreps & Monin, 2011), research that examines the potential hazards of promoting an ethical agenda remains sparse. To my knowledge, my research is one of the first to empirically investigate whether perceptions of ethical behavior can indirectly lead to unfavorable outcomes.

My research further contributes to the literature by demonstrating that when employees recognize they are more ethical than a coworker, they see this as problematic and actually act to reduce the discrepancy. Research on moral balance (Nisan, 1990, 1991) and compensatory ethics (Zhong, Ku, Lount, & Murnigham, 2010) contends that when people make moral decisions, they do so in light of a desire to achieve moral equilibrium. Thus, if someone made a moral decision in the past, they are more likely to make an immoral decision in the present to achieve balance, and vice versa. Perhaps this speaks to why a more ethical employee would use a morally-questionable behavioral response (i.e., social undermining) to reduce dissonance. It could be that a more ethical employee, realizing he or she is surpassing a coworker when it comes to ethics, actually believes he or she is becoming too focused on ethics and thus acts in a way that will bring about ethical balance.

Alternatively, it could be that the more ethical employee, especially if he or she is a lower performer, feels the need to restore justice by bringing the less ethical coworker down to a lower level of social standing, via social undermining. Indeed, the retributive justice literature contends that some people find it moral and just to punish a problematic person's unjust behavior (Skarlicki & Folger, 1997). Assuming that the more ethical employee feels that the less ethical coworker is not playing by the "rules of the game," the more ethical employee may find it perfectly acceptable to bring the coworker down to the level he or she deserves by engaging in social undermining and ostracism. In a similar vein, the moral psychology literature also discusses the benefits of gossip, and other types of retributive behavior, towards a morally wayward other (Haidt, 2012). When a member of a community, such as an organization, behaves in non-normative ways, deviant behavior directed toward that person can be helpful for encouraging the person to start behaving in accordance with moral expectations. In other words, punishing a less ethical coworker can serve as a way to protect collective moral interests, which may further explain why more ethical people find it okay to engage in ostracism and social undermining towards a less ethical coworker.

It should be noted that just because an employee rates a comparison coworker as less ethical, this does not necessarily mean that the comparison coworker is *unethical*. Rather, the less ethical coworker could be operating within the organization as an ethically neutral employee. Future research will need to further substantiate this possibility, but if it is true that the less ethical comparison coworker is better categorized as ethically neutral, rather than unethical, this could uncover potentially favorable and unfavorable outcomes of ethically neutral behavior. On the favorable side, the ethically neutral employee may feel less threatened by other employees, especially if he or she is a very good performer. On the unfavorable side, the ethically neutral employee may be the target of social undermining and ostracism on the part of more ethical employees who feel threatened by the ethically neutral employee. Although these inquiries are speculative at present, the idea of further studying the pros and cons of ethically neutral behavior are highlighted by Greenbaum, Quade, and Bonner (2013). Greenbaum et al. (2013) theorized that leaders may opt to remain ethically neutral because they perceive negative career and social consequences of being an ethical leader. Similarly, if employees see more benefit, both in terms of social and career consequences, of being ethically-neutral, this could damage an organization's ability to sustain a strong ethical focus. In this vein, I argue that there is a lot of potential for research to further identify unfavorable outcomes associated with ethical behavior in organizations.

My research also adds to the behavioral ethics literature by identifying employees as informal ethical leaders (e.g., non-supervisor). There are measures of ethical climate (Victor & Cullen, 1987), ethical leadership (Brown et al., 2005), and even a multi-dimensional measure of unethical behavior (Kaptein, 2008). Yet, despite the proliferation of research on ethics in the management literature in the last 30 years, there is still no validated measure for ethical behavior. Subsequently, very little research has studied ethical behavior of non-supervisors. My contention that employees in non-supervisor roles can and do serve informal ethical leaders is unique to the field. Given that people are looking to others for ethical guidance (Treviño, 1986), by taking a

strong ethical stand at work, I argue that any employee who engages in ethical behavior is actually an informal leader. Future research that adopts this same approach would be able to answer additional questions about ethical behavior at the employee level, rather than just the supervisory level.

Finally, and less significantly, I contribute to both the social undermining and ostracism literatures by identifying antecedents to these two constructs. Most of the early work in these literatures was focused on identifying the negative outcomes that were sure to accompany such behavior. Understanding the numerous deleterious effects of such behavior is certainly important. Recently, however, it has been noted that compared to the consequences of these constructs, there is an equal need to focus on the antecedents of both social undermining (Duffy, Scott, Shaw, Tepper, & Aquino, 2012) and ostracism (Robinson, O'Reilly, & Wang, 2013). Work on antecedents of these topics is important because it will help researchers understand the constructs more fully and thereby allow them to educate practitioners more holistically on how to prevent and deal with such behavior.

Practical Implications

There are practical implications to my research as well. First, organizations should be aware that employees who see themselves as more ethical than their coworkers feel threatened. Thus, organizations should be cautious when rewarding and promoting ethical compliance (Treviño & Nelson, 2011). We know from reinforcement theory (Skinner, 1969) that people will behave in ways that align with rewards and refrain from behaviors that lead to punishment. Thus, it is important for managers and organizations to reward *both* ethical conduct and performance. If an organization says ethical conduct is important, but continues to only reward employees based on performance (Kerr, 1975), then it is no wonder that more ethical employees with feel threatened by their less ethical, but higher performing coworkers.. In other words, the organization may be able to mitigate the more ethical employees' feelings of self-threat by making sure that these employee's ethical efforts are recognized and rewarded too. Otherwise, the

more ethical employees may engender feelings of incompetence, powerlessness (Fiske et al., 2007), and as my research shows, feelings of self-threat.

Additionally, organizations need to find a healthy balance of promoting ethical compliance, while also making sure that high-performance expectations remain intact (Treviño et al., 2003). Overemphasizing ethical compliance could come at the expense of performance. My research indicates that employees are more likely to feel prideful and superior when they are more ethical than others. Because of these positive feelings, employees may become too focused on ethics, without giving much thought to their performance—a sure problem for organizations. Organizations would be better off making sure that all employees think and behave similarly regarding ethics, with a strong collective commitment to ethical behavior, while at the same time ensuring that performance expectations and behaviors remain high.

Given that those who view themselves as more ethical may engage in social undermining and ostracism towards less ethical coworkers, it becomes even more important for organizations to ensure that all employees think and behave similarly in terms of ethics. From the earliest work on social undermining and ostracism, these behaviors have been linked to negative outcomes for the targets of such behavior. Those who are socially undermined report being less committed to the organization and having less self-efficacy and engage in more counterproductive behaviors (Duffy et al., 2002). Similarly, those who are ostracized are subsequently less committed, actually perform worse and engage in more deviant behavior, and finally are more likely to exit the organization (Ferris et al., 2008). Thus, when more ethical employees feel threatened, and hence respond in negative ways, the organization's bottom-line performance is likely to suffer. As noted, the organization can generate a strong ethical climate (Mayer, Kuenzi, & Greenbaum, 2009), in part by rewarding all employees accordingly, which may prevent discrepancies in ethical behavior comparisons and subsequent unfavorable responses.

If possible, organizations should try to redirect the unfavorable responses of more ethical employees. Preventing employees from making social comparisons based on ethical behavior

does not seem plausible, and is actually not desirable. Given that the proliferation of ethical conduct is reliant on social learning, it is actually beneficial for employees to compare themselves to coworkers on ethical dimensions. Because my research indicates that the more ethical employees, rather than the less ethical coworkers, may be the ones to react unfavorably via an ethical social comparison, organizations should direct their attention to helping these employees cope with their frustration in constructive, rather than destructive, ways (Greenbaum, Mawritz, Mayer, & Priesemuth, 2013). Rather than harming and avoiding the less ethical coworkers, the more ethical employees could be encouraged by managers to work with the less ethical coworkers on improving their ethical behavior.

A final practical implication is that organizations need to realize employees may prefer to remain ethically neutral. Taking an ethical stand by demonstrating and/or promoting ethical conduct may actually put the employee in a vulnerable position, both in terms of social and career consequences (Greenbaum et al., 2013). This could become problematic for organizations where an ethics message is emphasized and where the demonstration and promotion of ethical conduct by employees is expected. Reluctance on the part of employees to engage in such behavior could severely limit the organization's ability to sustain an ethical agenda. It could be that organizations have to reevaluate what constitutes ethical conduct in the organization. That is, perhaps someone who remains ethically neutral, but does not behave unethically should be considered to be an ethical employee. It could be that employees are okay with behaving ethically as long as they do not have to vocalize their stance to others. Thus, if being an ethical employee did not require having to vocalize and/or publicly promote such behavior, maybe it would remove the burden employees may feel to serve as informal leaders who advocate for ethical behavior.

Limitations

This research is not without limitations. First, Study 1, the lab study, did not provide many statistically significant results. There may have been problems with the design of the lab study. First, and most importantly, I suspect the study suffered from a lack of realism. In my

study, I introduced a fictitious comparison student. Though other social comparison studies conducted in lab settings have used fictitious referents for comparison (Bazerman, Schroth, Shah, Diekmann, & Tenbrunsel, 1994; Dugosh & Paulus, 2005), I suspect that social comparisons based on perceptions of ethical behavior would be better suited if the participants actually knew the referent. Research has shown that people judge behavior as more unethical when they are able to identify a victim (Gino, Shu, & Bazerman, 2010). Accordingly, I anticipate that participants would be more invested in comparing their ethicality to people they actually know, in which they can properly assess the level of harm these comparison others bestow upon victims. Hence, participants who compare their ethicality with actual people should be more affected by social comparisons. In a lab setting, future research would benefit from investigating whether perceptions of harm and knowledge of a victim affect social comparison processes.

Another potential problem associated with the lab study could be the presence of apathetic participants (Whitley, 2002). Apathetic participants are those who are disinterested in and/or unmotivated to complete the study honestly and to the best of their ability. Even though students were told they could earn discretionary extra credit based on their performance, it is quite possible it was not enough motivation to induce substantial effort. I did, however, remove participants from the data analysis who made no attempt to follow directions, making problems associated with apathy less likely. However, there could have been other apathetic participants who were not screened out.

An additional limitation of Study 1 was the peculiar finding regarding the mean of self-enhancement, whereby hose in the low ethical behavior comparison condition had a higher mean (M = 3.41, SD = 1.06) than those in the similar condition (M = 3.29, SD 1.03), though this difference was not significant. One would expect for the mean of self-enhancement to be higher in the similar ethical behavior comparison condition as opposed to the low condition. However, because *both* the participants' ethical behavior and performance influence self-enhancement, participants in the similar ethical behavior comparison condition, who were also in the high

performance comparison condition, may have reported feeling self-enhanced because of performance. Unfortunately, there is no way to identify whether participants made their ratings of self-enhancement (or self-threat) based more on their ethical behavior comparison or performance comparison.

Another limitation is that Study 2, the field study, is cross sectional, which does not allow me to determine the causal direction of the theoretical model. However, my conceptualization of the hypothesized relationships is consistent with social comparison theory. Social comparisons are consistently linked to subsequent emotional outcomes (Buunk, Collins, Taylor, Van Yperen, & Dakof, 1990; Gibbons & Gerrard, 1991; Smith, Parrott, Diener, Hoyle, & Kim, 1999; Buunk, Zurriaga, Peiro, Nauta, & Gosalvez, 2005). Additionally, emotions that are a result of a social comparison process typically lead to some type of behavioral response (Cohen-Charash, 2009; Moran & Schweitzer, 2008). Nonetheless, a longitudinal or experimental design that improves upon the one conducted herein would help address this problem and provide more support for the generalizability of this study's findings.

Another potential limitation of Study 2 is common method variance. However, I have attempted to eliminate some same source bias by having coworkers rate the criterion variables, social undermining and ostracism (Podsakoff et al., 2003). Thus, the predictor variables and the criterion variables in Study 2 were rated by different sources (Podsakoff et al., 2003). Furthermore, same source bias is less of a concern when testing interactions (Evans, 1985).

A final limitation of Study 2 was that employees may not have selected a comparison coworker who was deemed "similar" based on social comparison theory. Though I provided clear directions for selecting a "similar" comparison coworker, it is possible that employees selected a convenient coworker and thus not someone who would elicit outcomes typically associated with social comparison research. However, I did attempt to account for this potential shortcoming by asking all participants (employees and coworkers) their organizational tenure, highest level of education completed, and position. I then compared the responses for each dyad. Fifty percent of

dyads were considered a match on tenure, 49.7% matched on education, and 58.1% of dyads matched on position. I then compared each of these three categories and created a control variable whereby those dyads who matched on at least two of the three categories were considered to have made a similar comparison (55.5%). I then ran the analyses again using this variable as a control and found that the results were unchanged. Though these numbers may seem low, in some circumstances it may be difficult for an employee to select a comparison coworker who meets the criteria I provided, and thus they were forced to select a coworker out of convenience. Further, my method aligns with prior suggestions that participants be allowed to select their own referents rather than directing them to a specific comparison subject (Goodman & Haisley, 2007). Nevertheless, future research may benefit from conducting such studies in a single organization where comparison dyads are chosen by the researchers to ensure that social comparisons are being made with similar others, in accordance with social comparison theory.

Future Research

This research points to a number of potential avenues for future research. First, the findings that high ethical behavior comparisons leads to negative emotions, such as self-threat, are counterintuitive and run counter to what is consistently found in the social comparison literature. Typically, low social comparisons lead to self-threatening feelings (Cohen-Charash, 2009; Tesser et al., 1988; Tesser & Smith, 1980). Perhaps something is different when the comparison is being made in the ethics domain. I suspect that there are a number of domains in organizations in which a high social comparison would elicit negative emotion. In work settings, people who are lower performers, less ethical, less committed, or more deviant are likely to harm the organization. These employees' behavior or attitudes could damage the performance, reputation, or climate of the organization. Thus, when employees make higher comparisons with these types of coworkers, it is likely they will be angered by, or have contempt for, these coworkers. Knowing that a higher comparison could lead a person to experience negative

emotions, and assuming negative emotion is something to be avoided, it becomes important to understand the other types of comparisons that may induce similar reactions.

Second, other potential outcomes that could result from an ethical social comparison process should be examined. Given that much of the research conducted in the ethical leadership literature is built on social learning theory (Bandura, 1977, 1986), I believe social comparisons are especially likely to occur when considering ethics-related situations. I argue that observational learning, almost inherently, includes a social comparison process. Perhaps more ethical employees believe that less ethical coworkers do not worry about adhering to ethical rules and standards and therefore approach their work with expedience, which may increase productivity. As a result of social comparisons, more ethical employees may decide to role model their less ethical coworkers in an effort to be more expedient themselves. A spiraling effect whereby less ethical behavior by one employee leads to less ethicality on the part of coworkers is likely to be detrimental for organizations (Andersson & Pearson, 1999). Comparisons based on ethics could also lead to heightened competition among employees to outdo one another in terms of ethical behavior. Though this would likely propagate the ethical agenda of the organization, it may also distract employees from continuing to focus on performing effectively. Ethical comparisons might also initiate an "us versus them" mentality among employees and subsequently split work groups or organizations into factions, which would be likely to damage performance.

Third, researchers should still consider that there may be negative outcomes that result from behaving ethically at work. To date, ethics research has focused on the benefits of ethical behavior. The current study is not intended to lead managers or organizations to reconsider the promotion of ethical agendas. It is my hope that future research would not discount the importance of ethics initiatives. Though this study identified unfavorable consequences of ethical behavior, it did so indirectly, and it was based on perceptions of ethical behavior. Nevertheless, there is still a very real possibility that ethical behavior can have an adverse impact for individuals and/or organizations. For example, an emphasis on ethical behavior by the

organization and/or its leaders, both formal and informal, could serve to slow down employees who are primarily focused on performance. The time spent promoting an ethical agenda, or making sure employees are adhering to ethics-related protocols, may harm the efficiency of an individual or work group. It would be interesting to identify specific contexts where ethical behavior may actually lead to decreases in performance (e.g. sports, sales, marketing). In many organizations, I would expect unrealistic or infeasible ethics-related rules to be related to increases in things like stress, turnover intentions, emotional exhaustion, supervisor-directed deviance, or other counterproductive behaviors.

Fourth, additional moderators that could impact this model should be considered. The current study identified performance comparison as a moderator of the relationship between ethical behavior comparison and self-threat and self-enhancement. However, there could be other moderators that might influence the relationship between ethical behavior comparisons and self-threat and self-enhancement. For example, the sex of the comparison coworker may influence the relationship. When people evaluate their jobs, they are more likely to use someone of the same sex as a referent (Crosby, 1982). Similarly, when making comparisons based on pay, people typically choose referents of the same sex (Major & Forcey, 1985). Thus, I suspect that people will have stronger emotional reactions when making ethical behavior comparisons with a same-sex person. So, a person high on ethical behavior comparison who experiences both self-threat and self-enhancement will experience more threat and enhancement when his or her comparison other is of the same sex than when the comparison is made with someone of the opposite sex. Another potential moderator could be the attractiveness of the comparison coworker. It would be interesting to see, for example, if a more ethical employee is even more threatened when the comparison coworker is more physically attractive. Other potential moderators could be organizational climate or leadership style. Thus, if the climate or leadership style supports ethics, a person with a high ethical behavior comparison may experience even stronger feelings of superiority or enhancement.

Finally, future research would benefit from studying ethical behavior at various levels of the organization. Schaubroeck and his colleagues (2012) studied how ethical leadership enacted at various levels of the organization impacted followers both directly and indirectly. Another study, by Mayer and his colleagues (2009), found support for a trickle-down model whereby the impact of top-management-team ethical leadership on group-level outcomes was mediated by supervisor ethical leadership. Just as with these studies, especially in the last decade, much of the research on behavioral ethics has been heavily focused on leaders. This may be, in part, because there is no validated measure of ethical behavior that is not exclusive to leaders. However, ethics-related research questions are certainly applicable to non-supervisory employees. As was done in this study, future studies could use the ethical leadership scale (Brown et al., 2005) at the non-supervisor level by replacing words like "employees" with "others". Another alternative would be to create a measure of ethical behavior specifically for non-supervisors. Regardless, studying ethics at non-supervisor levels does not have to be, and should not be, reserved for studies where social comparisons are used. It would be interesting to investigate how coworkers or teams respond to non-supervisor employees who demonstrate and promote ethical behavior. Given the increased focus on ethical standards by many organizations, it seems imperative that researchers more fully study the antecedents and outcomes, both positive and negative, of ethical behavior that occur at all levels within an organization.

Conclusion

The solitary focus of behavioral ethics research has been on the benefits of ethical behavior and the costs associated with unethical behavior. However, researchers have yet to investigate the potential unfavorable consequences that could result from ethical behavior. This study's findings suggest that more ethical employees are threatened by less ethical coworkers, especially when they are low performers. As a result, the more ethical employees attempt to reduce this threat by socially undermining and/or ostracizing the less ethical coworkers. Furthermore, additional analyses indicate that self-enhancement may explain the relationship

between the interactive effect of ethical behavior and performance comparisons onto social undermining and ostracism. By connecting ethical behavior to unfavorable consequences, even if indirectly, I have taken a first step in an important direction for the evolution of ethics research. This study points to the potential for ethics to serve as a platform or justification for deviant behavior, which is certainly problematic and merits further investigation. My hope is that this research will ignite interest in the idea that ethical behavior, though still quite beneficial and worthy of advocacy in organizations, may have adverse consequences and lead to a proliferation of research in this same direction.

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TABLES

Table 1: Descriptive Statistics from Lab Study

Descriptive Statistics, Reliabilities, and Correlations among Study Variables

Variable	*M*	*SD*	1	2	3	4	5	6
1. Ethical behavior comparison	1.98	.82	-					
2. Performance comparison	2.00	.82	-.03	-				
3. Self-threat	2.09	.87	.02	-.13*	(.90)			
4. Social Undermining	3.33	.89	.16*	.14*	.27**	(.65)		
5. Ostracism	1.78	.83	.02	.05	.43**	.44**	(.93)	
6. Self-enhancement	3.47	1.06	.12	-.04	.28**	.24**	.28**	(.90)

Note. $N = 246$. Numbers in parentheses are coefficient alphas.
* $p < .05$.
** $p < .01$.

Table 2: Descriptive Statistics from Field Study

Descriptive Statistics, Reliabilities, and Correlations among Study Variables

Variable	*M*	*SD*	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
1. Ethical behavior comparison	4.54	.83	(.93)						
2. Performance comparison	4.50	.90	.68**	(.91)					
3. Self-threat	1.87	.94	.26**	.14*	(.92)				
4. Social Undermining	1.35	.72	.19**	.10	.49**	(.95)			
5. Ostracism	1.21	.59	.13*	.09	.47**	.83**	(.95)		
6. Self-enhancement	3.72	1.09	.40**	.39**	.32**	.21**	.19**	(.90)	
7. Social desirability (Employee)	4.67	.81	.09	.07	-.22**	-.21**	-.18**	-.18**	(.75)

Note. $N = 310$. Numbers in parentheses are coefficient alphas.
* $p < .05$ level.
** $p < .01$ level.

Table 3: Regression Results for Conditional Indirect Effects

	Self-threat (R^2 = .14)					
Variable	*B*	*SE*	*t*			
Mediator variable model						
Constant	3.20	0.29	10.80***			
Social desirability	-0.26	0.06	-4.23***			
Ethical behavior comparison (EBComp)	0.41	0.08	4.79***			
Performance comparison (PerfComp)	-0.01	0.08	-0.09			
EBComp x PerfComp	-0.14	0.06	-2.13*			
	Social Undermining (R^2 = .26)			Ostracism (R^2 = .23)		
	B	*SE*	*t*	*B*	*SE*	*t*
Dependent variable model						
Constant	1.20	0.25	4.86***	1.00	0.21	4.83***
Social desirability	-0.11	0.05	-2.37*	-0.07	0.04	-1.76
Self-threat	0.35	0.04	8.44***	0.28	0.03	8.12***
Ethical behavior comparison (EBComp)	0.07	0.06	1.19	0.00	0.05	0.03
Performance comparison (PerfComp)	-0.02	0.06	-0.33	0.02	0.05	0.37
EBComp x PerfComp	0.02	0.05	0.40	0.01	0.04	0.23
<u>Performance comparison</u>						
Conditional indirect effect at $M \pm 1$ *SD*	Boot indirect effect	Boot *SE*	Boot *Z*	Boot indirect effect	Boot *SE*	Boot *Z*
-1 SD (-.90)	0.18	0.04	4.05***	0.14	0.04	4.01***
M (.00)	0.14	0.03	4.14***	0.11	0.03	4.10***
+1 SD (.90)	.10	0.03	2.94**	0.08	0.03	2.92**

Note. N = 310. Predictor variables are mean centered. Bootstrap sample size = 5,000
* $p < .05$
** $p < .01$
*** $p < .001$

Table 4: Regression Results for Self-Enhancement

	Model 1			Model 2		
Variable	*B*	*SE*	*t*	*B*	*SE*	*t*
Constant	5.12	0.32	15.92***	5.12	0.32	16.08***
Social desirability (Employee)	-0.30	0.07	-4.43***	-0.28	0.07	-4.13***
Ethical behavior comparison (EBComp)	0.34	0.09	3.78***	0.40	0.09	4.40***
Performance comparison (PerfComp)	0.28	0.08	3.42***	0.37	0.09	4.22***
EBComp x PerfComp				-0.19	0.07	-2.80**
F	31.45***			26.06***		
R^2	0.24			0.26		
ΔF				7.81**		

Note. $N = 310$. Predictor variables are mean centered.
* $p < .05$
** $p < .01$
*** $p < .001$

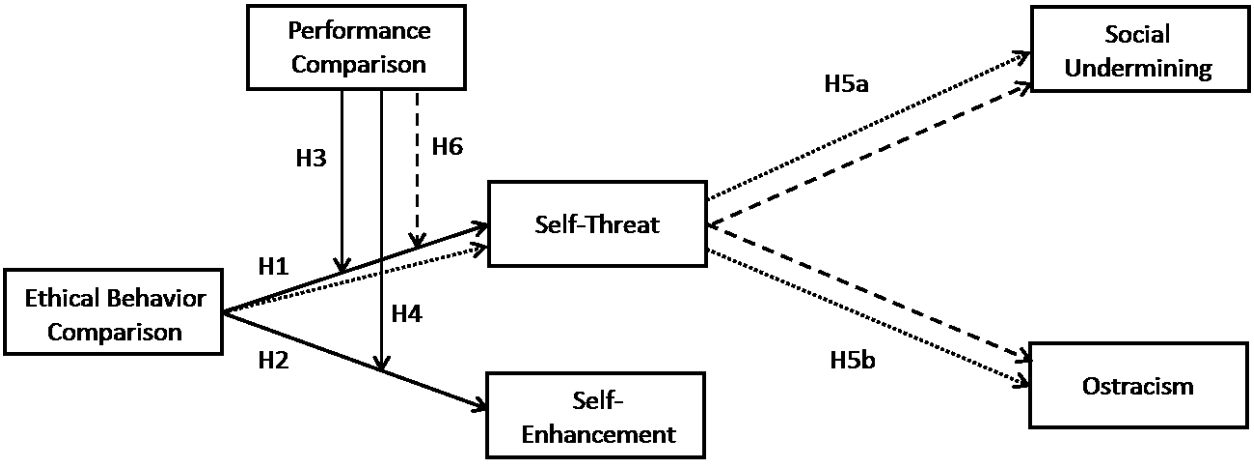
Table 5: Conditional Indirect Effect at Range of Values of Performance Comparison

Social Undermining				
Performance comparison	Boot indirect effect	Boot *SE*	Boot *Z*	Boot *p*
-2.21	0.25	0.07	3.51	.0004
-1.74	0.22	0.06	3.69	.0002
-1.27	0.20	0.05	3.89	.0001
-0.80	0.18	0.04	4.09	.0000
-0.33	0.16	0.04	4.20	.0000
0.14	0.13	0.03	4.05	.0001
0.61	0.11	0.03	3.47	.0005
1.09	0.09	0.03	2.57	.0100
1.39	0.08	0.04	1.96	.0500
1.79	0.06	0.04	1.28	.2000
2.26	0.03	0.05	0.66	.5100
Ostracism				
Performance comparison	Boot indirect effect	Boot *SE*	Boot *Z*	Boot *p*
-2.21	0.20	0.06	3.49	.0005
-1.74	0.18	0.05	3.66	.0003
-1.27	0.16	0.04	3.86	.0001
-0.80	0.14	0.04	4.05	.0001
-0.33	0.13	0.03	4.16	.0000
0.14	0.11	0.03	4.02	.0001
0.61	0.09	0.03	3.44	.0006
1.09	0.07	0.03	2.56	.0110
1.39	0.06	0.03	1.96	.0500
1.79	0.05	0.04	1.28	.2000
2.26	0.03	0.04	0.66	.5100

Note. $N = 310$.
Range of values represent abbreviated version of output provided by the macro.

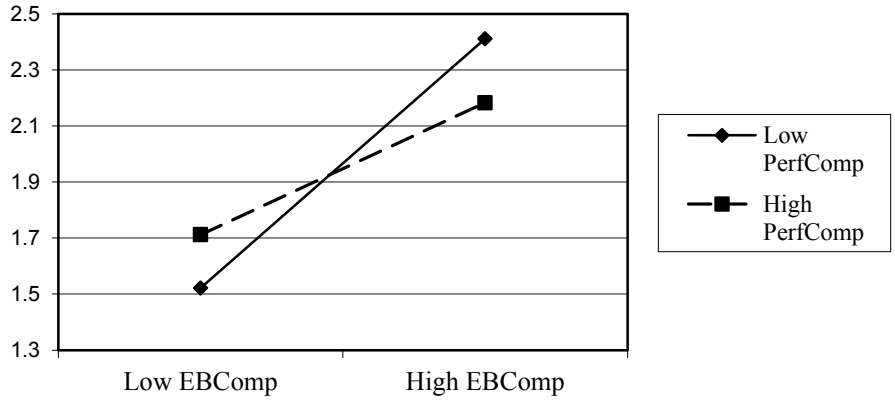
FIGURES

Figure 1: Hypothesized Theoretical Model



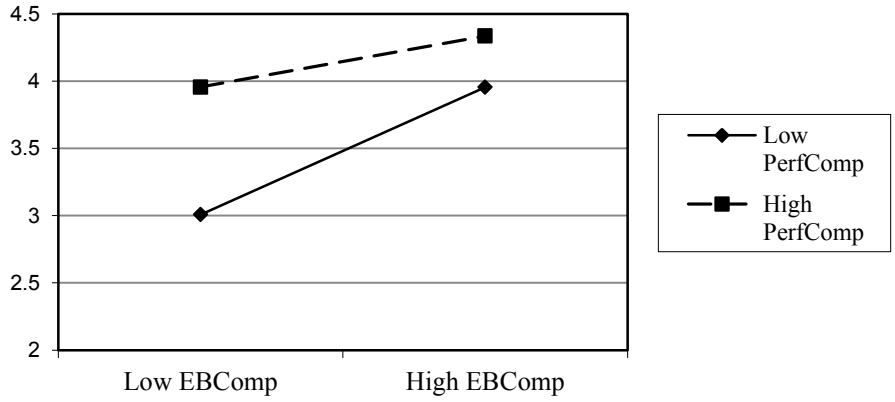
Note: Hypothesis 5a and 5b represents the mediated model in which self-threat mediates the relationship between ethical behavior comparison and a) social undermining and b) ostracism. Hypothesis 6 represents the moderated mediation model in which self-threat mediates the relationship between the interactive effect of ethical behavior comparison and performance comparison onto a) social undermining and b) ostracism.

Figure 2: Relationship between Ethical Behavior Comparison and Self-Threat as Moderated by Performance Comparison



Note. EBComp = Ethical behavior comparison, PerfComp = Performance comparison

Figure 3: Relationship between Ethical Behavior Comparison and Self-Enhancement as Moderated by Performance Comparison



Note. EBComp = Ethical behavior comparison, PerfComp = Performance comparison

APPENDICES

Appendix A: Lab Study

Included in this appendix are the six ethical dilemmas used in the lab study and an example of the score reporting screen that a student in the "lower than referent" condition would see. Each ethical dilemma appears on a new screen. Additionally, the explanation of the Anagram task and the letters used for each of the six rounds are included. The reporting screen for the "lower than referent" condition in the anagram task is also included. Finally, the self-threat and self-enhancement items used in the lab study and the unique outcome measures are provided.

Ethical Dilemma #1: You are in charge of testing a new software package that your company has recently developed. It will be launched in a week, which means you will need to set up round-the-clock testing before then. You have to assign people to two teams-one daytime shift and one graveyard shift.

1. Flip a coin to randomly assign employees to each of the two teams.
2. Assign all of the married employees that have kids to the daytime shift.
3. Ask employees to volunteer for one of the two shifts.
4. Pay the people who are willing to work the graveyard shift more money to do so.

Ethical Dilemma #2: You notice one of your best employees taking printer paper, highlighters, and post-it notes home in her laptop bag. This employee has worked at the firm for many years, but there is a rule against this and clear procedures for providing employees with supplies if they choose to work at home. According to company policy, you are required to fire this employee on the spot.

1. You do not fire her.
2. You fire her immediately.
3. You ask her to meet with you to confront her about the situation.
4. You talk to her coworkers to find out how long this has been going on.

Ethical Dilemma #3: Your colleague, who you consider to be a friend, is looking to hire a new manager in her department. She has identified an external candidate she would like to hire, but company rules require her to consider internal candidates first. She has asked you not to disclose to people within the company that she has already picked out an external candidate for the position. However, you know two employees in your area who would like to have this job, and each has asked you directly if your colleague has already picked someone for this position.

1. You decide to tell them she has not picked anyone yet.
2. You decide to tell them she has already picked someone from outside the company.
3. You talk to the colleague to try and persuade her to consider the two internal employees.
4. You talk to someone in HR to let them know your colleague plans to ignore the company rule.

Ethical Dilemma #4: You work in a small division of a large company. Two of your colleagues, whom you are friends with outside of work, have been working on a new business venture together. Although it is against company policy, you notice that they have been spending a significant amount of time at work making plans for this new business. Despite their involvement in this side business, these colleagues have always made time to help you with the issues you encounter at work. Your boss, who is concerned by the declining performance of your group, asks you if these colleagues are using company time to pursue interests not related to the company.

1. You tell your boss that the colleagues are pursuing their own interests on company time.
2. You play dumb and pretend that you aren't really sure why performance is declining.
3. You cover for your colleagues and tell your boss they aren't using company time to pursue their own interests.
4. You take the blame and tell your boss you have been really distracted by things happening at home and that you'll get things turned around.

Ethical Dilemma #5: You manage a small company that is trying to secure an additional round of venture-capital financing. The firm employs five people, each of whom has an irreplaceable set of skills. If any of the five were to leave, the company would struggle to secure additional financing. One of the principal employees, whom you consider a friend has recently informed you that he has received an extremely appealing offer from another company that is much more likely to succeed. The employee must make a decision in the next two days. Out of respect for you, this employee has told you that he will go to the other company only if you offer your blessing.

1. You go talk to the other employees to see if they think the group can pick up the slack if this person leaves.
2. You encourage this person to take the offer with your blessing.
3. You fire the person on the spot because they clearly don't want to be a part of your company anymore.
4. You discourage the employee from leaving out of concern for the group.

Ethical Dilemma #6: You manage a medium-sized company that is located in a small town. Unfortunately, you are forced to lay off a third of your workforce in six months' time. You know that as soon as you announce the layoffs property prices in the small town will fall off considerably, as will the effort of the company's employees. One of your favorite employees, whom you admire very much, has been going through some hard times financially. You would like to give this employee some advance notice so that he could sell his house for a reasonable price. However, you know that if you tell him to sell the house there is a chance the rest of the company would read the sale as a sign that layoffs are imminent long before the planned announcement date. If this were to happen, not only would property prices drop, so too would firm productivity.

1. You bring the employee in and drop hints that he should sell his house.
2. You clearly tell him to sell his house.
3. You don't have a conversation with the employee prior to announcing the layoffs.
4. You warn all of the company that layoffs may be on the horizon and that they should be aware of this and consider every option.

Reporting Screen:

I'm sorry. You scored lower than the comparison student. Your score fell within the range of "ethical judgments" that ethics experts call **MEDIUM** ethical judgments. The comparison student's score fell within the range of "ethical judgments" that ethics experts call **HIGH** ethical judgments:

Expert Pre-determined Ethical Judgment Groups

High Ethical Judgments	Medium Ethical Judgments	Low Ethical Judgments
Scores: 80-100% correct answers	Scores: 60-79% correct answers	Scores: Less than 60% correct answers

You: MEDIUM ethical judgments
Comparison Student: HIGH ethical judgments

Anagram Task:

Now you will partake in the "task performance" activity, and again, your score will be compared to the same other student. Please follow directions carefully.

Your task performance will be determined by completing an Anagram task. Here is how this task works. In each round you will be given a list of letters. You will have 90 seconds to record as many words as possible using those letters. However, there are a few rules which you must follow.

1. All words must be English words
2. A word must be at least 2 or more letters long
3. You may not use proper nouns (Ed, Texas, Sue, etc.)
4. Cannot use both the singular and plural form of a word (dog, dogs)
5. Letters may only be used once in the same word

If you violate any of these rules the system will not count that word in your total. Additionally, I ask that you not consult any of your classmates or use any external source (phone, tablet, computer, etc.) for help during this task.

You will have 1 practice round and then there will be 5 competitive rounds. Your goal is to record as many words as possible. Remember, your final score will be compared to the comparison student. Good luck!

1. Practice Round - A E D B K U G
2. Round 1 - O A S F K E V
3. Round 2 - O A D M H U P
4. Round 3 - O E L B J A M
5. Round 4 - U A D Q W E R
6. Round 5 - E A S C K I Y

Reporting Screen:

I'm sorry. You scored lower than the comparison student. Your score fell within the range of **MEDIUM** for task performance. The comparison student's score fell within the range of **HIGH** for task performance.

High Task Performance	Medium Task Performance	Low Task Performance
75-100% of words found	50-74% of words found	0-49% of words found

You: MEDIUM task performance
Comparison Student: HIGH task performance

Self-Threat (Dunn, Ruedy, & Schweitzer, 2012)

Participant ratings about self

Please indicate how strongly you agree with the following when thinking about yourself compared to the student with whom you were paired in this exercise. (1 = strongly disagree, 7 = strongly agree)

To what extent do you feel the following emotions towards this student?

1. It somehow doesn't seem fair that s/he seems to have all the talent.
2. I feel contempt towards him/her.
3. The bitter truth is that I generally feel inferior to him/her.
4. S/he makes me feel tense.
5. I am feeling relatively inadequate.
6. I feel pity towards him/her.
7. I feel disgusted by him/her.
8. I feel stress thinking about him/her.
9. I feel close to him/her without knowing him/her.
10. Frankly, his/her success makes me resent him/her.
11. I feel repulsed by him/her.
12. I feel apprehensive towards him/her.

Self-Enhancement (Johnson et al., 2010; Tracy & Robins, 2007; Emmons, 1987)

Participant ratings about self

Please indicate how strongly you agree with the following when thinking about yourself compared to the student with whom you were paired in this exercise. (1 = strongly disagree, 7 = strongly agree)

To what extent do you feel the following emotions towards this student?

1. S/he can learn a great deal from me.
2. I feel accomplished compared to him/her.
3. I believe I would know better than him/her in any given situation.
4. I feel confident that I am better than him/her.
5. I feel like I am more worthy than him/her.
6. I am more knowledgeable than him/her.
7. I do not find it necessary to explain my decisions to him/her.
8. I feel more successful than him/her.
9. I feel more fulfilled than him/her.

Outcome Measures:

Social undermining

Every student who participated in this experiment will get the extra credit promised by their professor. However, a discretionary number of points will also be awarded. You have some say in how these points should be allotted. Assuming there are a fixed number of points, what percentage of the points should be allotted to you and what percentage should be allotted to the other student (the one you were compared to). These two numbers added together cannot exceed 100%.

You: 0-100%
Other: 0-100%

Please consider the following scenario. Your professor can only recommend 1 student for an internship. If the professor asked for your input, how would you respond regarding the following? (1 = not very likely, 7 = extremely likely)
How likely would you be to…

1. Recommend the "comparison student" for the internship?
2. Recommend that the professor continue to search the applicant pool rather than recommend the "comparison student"?
3. Recommend yourself for the internship rather than the comparison person?
4. Talk badly about the "comparison student" to the professor?
5. Not correct the professor if you knew he/she was wrong about the "comparison student's" performance?
6. Not correct the professor if he/she thought your performance was higher than the comparison student?

Who do you think would be more qualified for the internship?

0 = you, 1 = comparison student

Ostracism
As you have been told, you'll be asked to complete a follow-up study that is identical to this one. Please indicate whether you would like to be compared to the same student or if you would like to be paired with another comparison student.

0 = same student
1 = different student

Please consider the following scenario. Think about a student group that you are currently involved with, or were involved with in the past (e.g., fraternity, sorority, SGA, academic club, residential life group, or intramural team). If you have not been a part of student

activities, please imagine as if you have been. With this in mind, how likely would you be to do the following (1 = not very likely, 7 = extremely likely)?
How likely would you be to…

1. recommend the "comparison student" to join your student group?
2. socialize with this "comparison student" if he/she joined your student group?
3. avoid this person at student group functions?

If this "comparison student" were a part of your student group how likely would you be to do the following? (1 = not very likely, 7 = extremely likely)

1. Invite him/her to a social activity that is not required for your student group
2. Ignore him/her
3. Avoid working with him/her directly
4. Not include him/her in your personal conversations
5. Not invite him/her if you went out for a coffee break
6. Not ask him/her if he/she wanted anything if you went out to run an errand

APPENDIX B: Field Study - Measures

Ethical Behavior Comparison – modified Ethical Leadership scale (Brown, Treviño, & Harrison, 2005)

This ethical leadership scale has been modified slightly to remove the leader or supervisor nature of the items and more accurately reflect informal ethical leadership.

Regarding the following questions, please compare yourself to the coworker you invited to participate in this study.

Compared to this coworker, are you more or less likely to… (1 = much less likely compared with coworker, 2=less likely, 3=somewhat less likely, 4=neutral, 5=somewhat more likely, 6=more likely, 7 = much more likely compared with coworker)

1. Listen to what others have to say?
2. Believe others should be disciplined for violating ethical standards?
3. Conduct your personal life in an ethical manner?
4. Have the best interests of others in mind?
5. Make fair and balanced decisions?
6. Be trusted by others?
7. Discuss business ethics or values with others?
8. Set an example of how to do things the right way in terms of ethics?
9. Define success not just by results but also the way that they are obtained?
10. Ask "what is the right thing to do?" when making decisions?

Performance Comparison (adapted from Williams & Anderson, 1991)

Regarding the following questions, please compare yourself to the coworker you invited to participate in this study.

Compared to this coworker, are you more or less likely to… (same scale as for Ethical Behavior Comparison)

1. Adequately complete assigned duties?
2. Fulfill responsibilities specified in job description?
3. Perform tasks that are expected of you?
4. Meet formal performance requirements of the job?
5. Engage in activities that will directly affect your performance evaluation?
6. Neglect aspects of the job you are obligated to perform? (R)
7. Fail to perform essential duties? (R)

Self-Threat (Dunn, Ruedy, & Schweitzer, 2012)

Please indicate how strongly you agree with the following when thinking about yourself in comparison to the coworker who you invited to participate in this study. (1 = strongly disagree, 7 = strongly agree)

To what extent do you feel the following emotions towards this coworker?

1. It somehow doesn't seem fair that s/he seems to have all the talent.
2. I feel contempt towards him/her.
3. The bitter truth is that I generally feel inferior to him/her.
4. S/he makes me feel tense.
5. I am feeling relatively inadequate compared to him/her.
6. I feel pity towards him/her.
7. I feel disgusted by him/her.
8. I feel stress thinking about him/her.
9. I feel close to him/her without knowing him/her.
10. Frankly, his/her success makes me resent him/her.
11. I feel repulsed by him/her.
12. I feel apprehensive towards him/her.

Self-Enhancement (Johnson et al., 2010; Tracy & Robins, 2007; Emmons, 1987)

Please indicate how strongly you agree with the following when thinking about yourself in comparison to the coworker who you invited to participate in this study. (1 = strongly disagree, 7 = strongly agree)

To what extent do you feel the following emotions towards this coworker?

1. S/he can learn a great deal from me.
2. I feel accomplished compared to him/her.
3. I believe I know better than him/her in any given situation.
4. I feel confident that I am better than him/her.
5. I feel like I am more worthy than him/her.
6. I am more knowledgeable than him/her.
7. I do not find it necessary to explain my decisions to him/her.
8. I feel more successful than him/her.
9. I feel more fulfilled than him/her.

Social Undermining (Duffy, Ganster, & Pagon, 2002)

Please indicate how often the coworker who invited you to fill out this survey engages in the following behavior. (1 = never, 7 = always)

How often does this person intentionally…

1. Insult you
2. Give you the silent treatment
3. Spread rumors about you
4. Delay work to make you look bad or slow you down
5. Belittle your ideas
6. Hurt your feelings
7. Talk bad about you behind your back
8. Criticize the way you handled things on the job in a way that is not helpful
9. Not give you as much help as he or she promised
10. Give you incorrect or misleading information about the job

11. Compete with you for status and recognition
12. Let you know that he or she does not like you or something about you
13. Not defend you when people speak poorly of you

Ostracism (Ferris, Brown, Berry, & Lian, 2008)

Please indicate how often the coworker who invited you to fill out this survey engages in the following behavior. (1 = never, 7 = always)

How often does this person…

1. Ignore you at work
2. Leave the area when you enter
3. Not answer your greetings
4. Not invite you to lunch when a group is going
5. Avoid you at work
6. Not look at you at work
7. Shut you out of the conversation
8. Refuse to talk to you at work
9. Treated you as if you weren't there
10. Not invite you or ask you if you wanted anything when s/he went out for a coffee break

Social Desirability (Strahan & Gerbasi, 1972)

Please indicate how strongly you agree with the following. (1 = strongly disagree, 7 = strongly agree)

1. I'm always willing to admit it when I make a mistake
2. I always practice what I preach
3. I never resent being asked to return a favor
4. I have never been irked when people expressed ideas very different from my own
5. I have never deliberately said something to hurt someone's feelings
6. I like to gossip at times
7. There have been occasions when I took advantage of someone
8. I sometimes try to get even rather than forgive and forget
9. At times I have really insisted on having things my own way
10. There have been occasions when I felt like smashing things

Appendix C: IRB Approval – Lab Study

Oklahoma State University Institutional Review Board

Date:	Thursday, November 29, 2012
IRB Application No	BU1225
Proposal Title:	Responses to Ethical and Performance Differences
Reviewed and Processed as:	Expedited

Status Recommended by Reviewer(s): Approved Protocol Expires: 11/28/2013

Principal Investigator(s):

Matthew Quade
206 Hanner
Stillwater, OK 74078

Rebecca Greenbaum
318 Business
Stillwater, OK 74078

The IRB application referenced above has been approved. It is the judgment of the reviewers that the rights and welfare of individuals who may be asked to participate in this study will be respected, and that the research will be conducted in a manner consistent with the IRB requirements as outlined in section 45 CFR 46.

☒ The final versions of any printed recruitment, consent and assent documents bearing the IRB approval stamp are attached to this letter. These are the versions that must be used during the study.

As Principal Investigator, it is your responsibility to do the following:

1. Conduct this study exactly as it has been approved. Any modifications to the research protocol must be submitted with the appropriate signatures for IRB approval. Protocol modifications requiring approval may include changes to the title, PI, advisor, funding status or sponsor, subject population composition or size, recruitment, inclusion/exclusion criteria, research site, research procedures and consent/assent process or forms.
2. Submit a request for continuation if the study extends beyond the approval period of one calendar year. This continuation must receive IRB review and approval before the research can continue.
3. Report any adverse events to the IRB Chair promptly. Adverse events are those which are unanticipated and impact the subjects during the course of this research; and
4. Notify the IRB office in writing when your research project is complete.

Please note that approved protocols are subject to monitoring by the IRB and that the IRB office has the authority to inspect research records associated with this protocol at any time. If you have questions about the IRB procedures or need any assistance from the Board, please contact Dawnett Watkins 219 Cordell North (phone: 405-744-5700, dawnett.watkins@okstate.edu).

Sincerely,

Shelia H. Kennison

Shelia Kennison, Chair
Institutional Review Board

Appendix D: IRB Approval – Field Study

Oklahoma State University Institutional Review Board

Date:	Friday, March 29, 2013
IRB Application No	BU1315
Proposal Title:	Responses to Ethical Differences at Work
Reviewed and Processed as:	Exempt

Status Recommended by Reviewer(s): Approved Protocol Expires: 3/28/2014

Principal Investigator(s):

Matthew Quade
206 Hanner
Stillwater, OK 74078

Rebecca Greenbaum
318 Business
Stillwater, OK 74078

The IRB application referenced above has been approved. It is the judgment of the reviewers that the rights and welfare of individuals who may be asked to participate in this study will be respected, and that the research will be conducted in a manner consistent with the IRB requirements as outlined in section 45 CFR 46.

☒ The final versions of any printed recruitment, consent and assent documents bearing the IRB approval stamp are attached to this letter. These are the versions that must be used during the study.

As Principal Investigator, it is your responsibility to do the following:

1. Conduct this study exactly as it has been approved. Any modifications to the research protocol must be submitted with the appropriate signatures for IRB approval. Protocol modifications requiring approval may include changes to the title, PI, advisor, funding status or sponsor, subject population composition or size, recruitment, inclusion/exclusion criteria, research site, research procedures and consent/assent process or forms.
2. Submit a request for continuation if the study extends beyond the approval period of one calendar year. This continuation must receive IRB review and approval before the research can continue.
3. Report any adverse events to the IRB Chair promptly. Adverse events are those which are unanticipated and impact the subjects during the course of this research; and
4. Notify the IRB office in writing when your research project is complete.

Please note that approved protocols are subject to monitoring by the IRB and that the IRB office has the authority to inspect research records associated with this protocol at any time. If you have questions about the IRB procedures or need any assistance from the Board, please contact Dawnett Watkins 219 Cordell North (phone: 405-744-5700, dawnett.watkins@okstate.edu).

Sincerely,

Shelia N. Kennison

Shelia Kennison, Chair
Institutional Review Board

VITA

Matthew J. Quade

Candidate for the Degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

Dissertation: THE GOODY-GOOD EFFECT: WHEN SOCIAL COMPARISONS OF ETHICAL BEHAVIOR AND PERFORMANCE LEAD TO SELF-THREAT VERSUS SELF-ENHANCEMENT, SOCIAL UNDERMINING, AND OSTRACISM

Major Field: Business Administration

Education:

Completed the requirements for the Doctor of Philosophy in Business Administration at Oklahoma State University, Stillwater, Oklahoma in December, 2013.

Completed the requirements for the Master of Business Administration at Oklahoma State University, Stillwater, Oklahoma in 2008.

Completed the requirements for the Bachelor of Science in Business Administration at The University of Tulsa, Tulsa, Oklahoma in 2004.

Experience:

Title Landman, Chesapeake Energy Corporation
High School Teacher and Coach, Edmond North High School

Professional Memberships:

Academy of Management
Southern Management Association
Society of Industrial and Organizational Psychology