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When More can Mean Less: How Drawing Increased Attention to a Social Enterprise’s Good Deeds can Backfire

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Abstract:	<p>Social enterprises often use stories about the people who their work touches as a way to bolster support among key stakeholders. In particular, social enterprises may deploy this strategic resource among employees, who often work for low wages given the financial constraints social enterprises are subject to, as they make trade-offs between spending resources on mission versus financial viability. While research suggests that drawing increased attention to the beneficiaries of this work fosters feelings of compassion and motivation among employees, often implicit in this relationship is that employees are in an advantaged position, relative to those they are helping, and that drawing increased attention to beneficiaries reflects a downward social comparison. Yet this is not always the case, and in this research we question the efficacy of drawing attention to the successes of beneficiaries that may reflect an upward social comparison. We address this question in a field experiment conducted in partnership with a large social enterprise, whose mission-based work is largely funded by a used clothing retail operation employing a low-wage, low-status workforce. Our results suggest a much more complex set of outcomes than prior theory would predict. We contribute to the literature on social enterprises by raising the potential that drawing increased attention to its successes could backfire; to the literature on prosocial motivation by augmenting it with an explicit social comparison lens; and to identifiable victim theory, whereby, contrary to extant predictions, we found that providing greater detail about beneficiaries does not necessarily increase positive emotional responses.</p>

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3 **When More can Mean Less: How Drawing Increased Attention to a Social Enterprise's Good**
4 **Deeds can Backfire**
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8 **ABSTRACT**
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10 Social enterprises often use stories about the people who their work touches as a way to bolster
11 support among key stakeholders. In particular, social enterprises may deploy this strategic resource
12 among employees, who often work for low wages given the financial constraints social enterprises are
13 subject to, as they make trade-offs between spending resources on mission versus financial viability.
14 While research suggests that drawing increased attention to the beneficiaries of this positive impact will
15 create feelings of compassion and the motivation to work even harder for these beneficiaries, often
16 implicit in this relationship is that employees are in an advantaged position, relative to those they are
17 helping, and that drawing increased attention to beneficiaries reflects a *downward* social comparison. Yet
18 this is not always the case, and in this research we question the efficacy of drawing attention to the
19 successes of beneficiaries that may reflect an *upward* social comparison. We address this question in a
20 field experiment conducted in partnership with a large social enterprise, whose mission-based work is
21 largely funded by a used clothing retail operation employing a low-wage, low-status workforce. Our
22 results suggest a much more complex set of outcomes than prior theory would predict. We contribute to
23 the literature on social enterprises by raising the potential that drawing increased attention to its successes
24 could backfire; to the literature on prosocial motivation by augmenting it with an explicit social
25 comparison lens; and to identifiable victim theory, whereby, contrary to extant predictions, we found that
26 providing greater detail about beneficiaries does not necessarily increase positive emotional responses.
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50 Keywords: Social Enterprise; Hybrid Organization; Prosocial Motivation; Beneficiary Salience;
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3 *It's good that [Helping Hands] has done this, you know, and offered this program...But I can understand*
4 *why people will be mad...Seeing the real [beneficiary of the program], it hit home. She lives in Long*
5 *Beach. I live in Long Beach. She was living paycheck to paycheck. We are living paycheck to*
6 *paycheck...So it's like there's a little, probably a little bit of jealousy there, you know, because it really*
7 *happened. It hit home because this is a real story. This is the real person.*
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9 INTRODUCTION

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11 Social enterprises are an increasingly common type of hybrid organizational form (Battilana &
12 Dorado, 2010) that seeks to deliver both social and economic value (Battilana, Sengul, Pache & Model,
13 2015). Given this plurality of goals (Pache & Santos, 2010), social enterprises must organize in ways that
14 minimize resources spent internally in order to maximize the resources allocated towards the social cause
15 (Pache & Santos, 2013; Battilana & Lee, 2014). Whereas purely commercial ventures are able to dedicate
16 the full weight of their resources towards their economic aims, social enterprises often operate with lean
17 internal budgets as they are subject to high levels of scrutiny from stakeholders when resources are
18 diverted from mission-based activities (Moizer & Tracey, 2010). This can create austere operating
19 environments that present challenges to maintaining organizational momentum and enthusiasm for the
20 hard work of enacting social change. To help combat this, social enterprises often attempt to “rally the
21 troops” by producing narratives that leverage awareness of the social value they create as a strategic
22 resource, often creating this awareness by telling success stories that call greater attention to the social
23 value they produce (Ruebottom & Auster, 2018; Besharov, 2008). Theory and common sense would
24 suggest that by more visibly emphasizing the clear link between the activities the workers do and the
25 social value received by beneficiaries of the organization’s cause, higher levels of motivation can be
26 achieved.
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45 This form of motivation that foregrounds the other-focused outcomes of one’s work is referred to
46 as prosocial motivation (Grant, 2008; Aguinis & Glavas, 2019; Burbano, 2016), and social enterprises
47 would appear well-positioned to leverage this strategic resource because of the social content and
48 narratives they have available to them (Battilana & Lee, 2014; Besharov, 2008). Prior research in this
49 stream suggests that when organizational actors are “cued” to the social impact that their work is having –
50 by making beneficiaries more salient through direct contact or detailed information – these cues can spark
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3 positive emotional responses, such as compassion, that ultimately lead employees to want to work even
4 harder, so as to help even more (Bolino & Grant, 2016; Dutton, Worline, Frost & Lilius, 2006; Small,
5 Loewenstein, & Slovic, 2007). Findings have been robust to a range of different settings; for example,
6 recent studies have examined the positive effects of PSM among fundraisers (Grant & Sumanth, 2009),
7 nurses (Belle, 2013), firefighters (Grant, 2008a), lifeguards (Grant, 2008b), and military security force
8 officers (Grant & Berry, 2011), making them want to work harder for the people they help.
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Implicit in these examples, however, is that PSM is most often studied in situations that position those providing benefit (i.e., the employees) *above* those who are receiving benefit (i.e., the beneficiaries), therefore implying a *downward* social comparison, with employees' efforts helping to "pull up" a given beneficiary. This may be related to socioeconomic status differences, or more broadly to a relative sense of advantage (for example, firefighters, lifeguards, or military officers typically consider themselves to be in a stronger position vis a vis beneficiaries, well-situated to rescue or otherwise aid those in need) (Rosso, Dekas, & Wrzesniewski, 2010; Brief & Nord, 1990). Yet, in social enterprises, where resources are scarce and organizations often must employ high numbers of low wage staff to undertake day-to-day activities, there also exists the possibility that employees would feel an *upward* social comparison towards those the organization is helping, when, for example, the employees themselves are in situations of financial or social precarity. In such cases, we question whether strategically highlighting the successes of beneficiaries by making them more salient would still lead to more compassion and subsequent motivation. We suggest that it is important to understand how predictions of the effectiveness of these motivational strategies might differ as it interacts with upward versus downward social comparisons.

We test this question via a field experiment, complemented by qualitative interview data. Our research was conducted in collaboration with an organizational partner, a mission-driven hybrid organization that relies on retail operations as a key component of its revenue generating strategy, which then funds its social initiatives. Its retail workforce is largely comprised of low-wage workers, and low employee motivation is an ongoing challenge for the organization. In the experiment, we created a series

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3 of different conditions to explore how the effects of drawing increased attention to beneficiaries may
4 differ in situations where beneficiaries were of lower status as compared to higher status.
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7 Our findings suggest a more complex set of outcomes than traditionally predicted. First, we find
8 that making beneficiaries very salient to workers can actually backfire, as heightened feelings of envy
9 rather than compassion appear under conditions that foster upward social comparison. Second, even in the
10 case of downward social comparisons, our results suggest that providing more detailed information about
11 beneficiaries (thereby making them more salient) can in some cases fail to produce the positive emotional
12 and motivational effects that existing theory would predict, as employees feel no increase in compassion
13 when a *specific* beneficiary is highlighted, as compared to generic messaging about beneficiaries.
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20 Qualitative follow-up interviews suggested that generic messaging can in fact allow employees to “fill in
21 the blanks” with a beneficiary that is more personalized and therefore meaningful than a specific
22 beneficiary’s success story.
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28 Taken together, these findings have significant implications. First, we contribute to the literature
29 on the internal dynamics of hybrid social enterprises. Social enterprises commonly attempt to compensate
30 for the austerity of their working conditions by leveraging their social impact as a strategic resource, yet
31 we suggest that such a resource can in fact backfire if it is used without consideration of the relative social
32 position of the receiving audience. Second, we contribute to theories of prosocial motivation, by bringing
33 considerations of social comparison to bear on extant predictions. Whereas prosocial motivation has often
34 implicitly assumed a downward comparison, we test the boundaries of the theory’s findings in a context
35 where upward social comparisons may occur. Third, we contribute to identifiable victim theory: contrary
36 to extant predictions, we found that in some cases, providing greater detail about an organizational
37 beneficiary does not necessarily increase positive emotional responses. We also contribute
38 methodologically, designing a field experiment that responds to calls for an increased use of experimental
39 methods (Bitektin, Lucas, & Schilke, 2018; Schilke, 2018) – widely considered to be the “gold standard”
40 of science (Coleman, 1990; Merton, 1949). Field experiments in particular have the unique ability to
41 establish causal relationship without sacrificing external validity, because they leverage the power of
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3 randomization but also take place in the “real world” (Grant & Wall, 2008; Levitt & List, 2009). Finally,
4 we provide practical guidance to social enterprises. While social enterprises may seem well-suited to
5 harness the power of prosocial motivation, their employees are often struggling themselves. If employees
6 perceive that their own hard work is pushing the beneficiaries of their social enterprise’s programming to
7 a higher level than they are themselves, then the use of success stories – that make beneficiaries highly
8 salient – may lead to negative social comparisons, decreasing positive emotions, and ultimately have a
9 negative effect on workplace the organization’s ability to execute it’s social mission.
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20 **LITERATURE REVIEW**

21 **Internal Dynamics of Hybrid Social Enterprises**

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24 Traditional sectoral boundaries are becoming increasingly blurred, and a growing number of
25 organizations fall into the category of hybrid organizations (Battilana et al., 2015; Kraatz & Block, 2008).
26 Recent research has highlighted both the many challenges involved in organizations that are forced to
27 balance the conflicting expectations of multiple constituents (Battilana et al., 2015; Pache & Santos,
28 2013), as well as the benefits of hybridity, including organizational innovation, sustainability, and
29 endurance (Jay, 2013; Kraatz & Block, 2008; Besharov & Smith, 2014). Moreover, hybrids are
30 increasingly understood to be uniquely positioned to address pressing social issues (Battilana & Dorado,
31 2010; Jay, 2013; Tracey et al., 2011), and social enterprises have been highlighted as an “ideal type” of
32 hybrid organization (Battilana & Lee, 2014). Social enterprises are those organizations that combine
33 aspects of business and social welfare, and typically pursue a social mission, simultaneously engaging in
34 commercial activities to sustain their operations (Battilana & Lee, 2014; Mair, 2010).
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47 One of the particular challenges of social enterprises is that they often need to stretch limited
48 resources across activities that satisfy a range of goals, including both commercial and social welfare
49 (Moizer & Tracey, 2010; Battilana & Lee, 2014). For example, Tracey et al. (2011) examine a work
50 integration social enterprise (WISE)—an organizational form whose mission is to reintegrate individuals
51 with employment-related challenges back into the workforce by providing employment. The WISE they
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3 studied attempted to provide work for the homeless, but ultimately failed because their financial resources
4 did not cover both internal human resource needs and the needs of customer stakeholders. In contrast,
5 Battilana et al. (2015) show how a similar organization productively navigated these tensions for optimal
6 social performance. But for many social enterprises, because of pressure to channel all financial surplus
7 into the social mission, it becomes almost necessary to rely on staff who will work for less than fair
8 market rates. In fact, many social enterprises and their stakeholders believe that money spent
9 compensating employees is an act of diverting resources away from its ultimate mission (Pallotta, 2012).
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11 As a result, these organizations often leverage their missions as an organizational resource by sharing
12 stories of organizational successes with employees as a form of non-financial motivation (Ruebottom &
13 Auster, 2018; Besharov, 2008).

24 **Prosocial Motivation and Beneficiary Salience**

25
26 There are many theories within management dedicated to non-financial motivation of employees.
27 Motivation in a workplace context has been broadly defined as “a set of energetic forces that originate
28 both within as well as beyond an individual’s being, to initiate work-related behavior, and to determine its
29 form, direction, intensity, and duration” (Latham & Pinder, 2005, p. 486). One particular non-financial,
30 energetic force—one that originates beyond the individual’s being but that is not tied to monetary
31 incentives—is when work is inspired by a higher purpose; that is, when work is perceived by individuals
32 as significant or beneficial to society (Grant, 2008; Wrzesniewski, 2003). This energizing force has roots
33 in early research on job design that highlights the importance of “task significance” for employee
34 motivation (Hackman & Oldham, 1975), and it is now often referred to as prosocial motivation (PSM).
35 This research stream broadly suggests that individuals will be more motivated to work when they feel that
36 their work has a positive impact on others or contributes to a greater good (Bunderson & Thompson,
37 2009; Grant, 2012; Morgeson & Humphrey, 2006), such as when an organization calls explicit attention
38 to its mission or ideology (Besharov, 2008). Prior work suggests that, when triggered, the motivation to
39 make a prosocial difference can lead to positive work behaviors such as increased effort, persistence, and
40 helping behaviors, with employees generally investing more time and energy into their assigned tasks
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3 (Staw, 1977; Vroom, 1964). PSM has also been linked to employees' feelings of competence, social
4 worth, and self-determination (Grant, 2008). For example, Hu and Liden (2015) find that priming PSM at
5 the team level by drawing attention to the social implication of their work leads to higher levels of team
6 cooperation and ultimately team effectiveness. Grant and Sumanth (2009) find that in a study of
7 fundraisers working in mission-driven organizations, prosocial motivation improves objectively measured
8 employee outcomes, particularly when the organization and its managers are perceived as trustworthy.
9 And Cardador and Wrzesniewski (2015) find that prosocial (but not competitive) motivation positively
10 relates to citizenship behavior.
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20 This review suggests that the “beneficiary” of an individual’s work (whether it is society,
21 community, or specific individuals)—and how deliberately a job is designed to make workers aware of
22 such beneficiaries—will at least partially determine the extent to which individuals will experience such
23 positive emotions and motivation. This “relational architecture” (Grant, 2008) of work foregrounds two
24 key factors in the likelihood that individuals will be motivated by and find meaning in the social impact
25 of their work. The first is beneficiary contact—that individuals have “vivid, proximal exposure to the
26 human beings affected by their contributions” (Grant, 2012: 458). For example, one study that facilitated
27 an interaction between fundraisers and their beneficiaries found significantly higher job performance and
28 persistence than a control group which had no interaction (Grant, Campbell, Chen, Cottone, Lapedis, &
29 Lee, 2007). Beneficiary contact can be structurally designed into a job or task by highlighting that “what
30 employees do at work has import and meaning for others who use the products produced or benefit in
31 some way from the employee’s efforts” (Kanfer, 2009: 122), typically by facilitating interactions between
32 employees and beneficiaries (Grant et al., 2007). Such interactions allow employees to see the meaningful
33 consequences of their work, which in turn can foster an emotional or affective commitment, encouraging
34 employees to sustain effort, even if they would have otherwise lost personal motivation (Grant, 2008,
35 2012; De Dreu, & Nauta, 2009). However, when employees do not have any contact with their
36 beneficiaries, even work that objectively has a prosocial impact might not be perceived as meaningful,
37 and thus fail to produce prosocial motivation (Grant, 2008).
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3 The second factor is that employees receive information about the beneficiaries. Prior work
4 suggests that employees evaluate the importance of their work through the lens of the information that
5 they receive about the beneficiaries of their work, via a social evaluation of the “beliefs, emotions,
6 behaviors, group memberships, and intrinsic worth of beneficiaries” (Grant, 2012: 402). This evaluation
7 takes place at multiple levels. At a sociological level, organizational and occupational ideologies provide
8 cues as to whether beneficiaries are important, valuable, and worthy of such benefit (Ashforth & Kreiner,
9 1999; Grant, 2012). At an individual level, information about beneficiaries shapes the perceptions of
10 employees about the worthiness of beneficiaries (Grant, 2012). Additionally, people are more likely to
11 help when those in need of help are framed as specific individuals, rather than in abstract or statistical
12 terms, also known as the identifiable victim effect (Lee & Feeley, 2016; Kogut & Ritov, 2005; Small,
13 Loewenstein, & Slovic, 2007). When beneficiaries are determined (even if anonymous), they elicit more
14 motivation to act than when they are undetermined (Small & Loewenstein, 2003), and more specific
15 information (such as age, name or picture) amplifies this effect (Kogut & Ritov, 2005a; Sah &
16 Loewenstein, 2012; Erlandsson, Bjorklund, & Backstrom, 2015). Taken together, beneficiary contact and
17 beneficiary information create “beneficiary salience” which can trigger feelings of compassion that
18 ultimately lead employees to want to work even harder, so as to help even more.

36 37 **A Social Comparison Perspective**

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39 The empirical contexts of the research in the above review generally positions those *providing*
40 benefit above those who are *receiving* benefit (i.e., the beneficiaries), as the empirical contexts of such
41 studies often involve employees (or givers of aid) of a higher socioeconomic status than beneficiaries (the
42 receivers of aid), implying a downward social comparison. For example, university fundraisers are more
43 productive and effective when they know something about the needy students they are raising money for
44 (Grant, 2008). Even when a higher socioeconomic status is not implied, there is typically an assumption
45 that those doing the helping are in a more advantageous position than those on the receiving end of their
46 beneficence. When workers determine that they are in a position to be able to provide value to a
47 beneficiary, and when this beneficiary is in need, a *downward* social comparison is formed, which creates
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3 an emotional basis for the relationship, triggering feelings of empathy or compassion (Kanov, Maitlis,
4 Worline, Dutton, Frost, & Lilius, 2004; Dutton et al., 2006; Miller, Grimes, McMullen & Vogus, 2012).
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7 Yet, this positioning is not always the case; consider personal support workers, early childhood
8 educators, and social workers, all of whom are typically considered to be relatively low income, in some
9 cases even relative to the beneficiaries of their work. This observation suggests that in some cases,
10 making very salient the benefits that are incurred by others because of an employees' work can trigger an
11 *upward* social comparison, (Buunk & Gibbons, 2007), particularly when such beneficiaries may appear
12 equal to or better off than the employees themselves (Buunk & Gibbons, 2007). In short, beneficiary
13 salience may not always increase positive emotions in workers. Indeed, it may depend on the worker's
14 position relative to the beneficiary and the *direction* of the "social comparison"—the self-evaluation in
15 comparison to others (Buunk & Gibbons, 2007)—that salience may trigger.
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28 **HYPOTHESES**

29 **The Moderating Effect of Social Comparison on Emotional Responses to Beneficiary Salience**

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31 As discussed above, prior work suggests that employees' PSM can be enhanced by making the
32 beneficiaries of their work more salient, such that having more information about and contact with their
33 beneficiaries will help them recognize the positive impact of their efforts, resulting in a desire to work
34 even harder. Indeed, having contact with beneficiaries can lead employees to experience their work in a
35 manner that is more "emotionally charged; they are more affectively engaged in their work as a result of
36 firsthand exposure to their actions affecting living, breathing human beings" (Grant, 2008: 398). An
37 important affective component of this process is the experience of compassion.
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46 Compassion is "the feeling that arises in witnessing another's suffering and that motivates a
47 subsequent desire to help," and it is elicited only when a perceived target is deemed deserving of help
48 (Goetz, Keltner, & Simon-Thomas, 2010: 351). At work, gaining more information about beneficiaries
49 helps employees determine how worthy the beneficiaries are of receiving help (Grant, 2008). In situations
50 where the beneficiary is relatively worse off or less advantaged than the employee (i.e., downward social
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3 comparisons), we expect employees to respond favorably to increases in beneficiary salience,
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5 experiencing a greater degree of compassion—which would be consistent with the extant literature (e.g.,
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7 Erlandsson, Bjorklund, & Backstrom, 2015). However, in cases where employees feel their work is
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9 improving the lot of beneficiaries *relative* to their own (i.e., upward social comparisons), increasing the
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11 salience of a beneficiary may actually decrease compassion, as it highlights the beneficiary’s elevated
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13 socio-economic status vis-à-vis their own.
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16 For low-status employees, such upward social comparisons with beneficiaries may lead to a
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18 perceived inequity. In general, people tend to compare themselves mostly to others that have become
19
20 salient due to a degree of interaction and the availability of information (Festinger, 1954; Kulik &
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22 Ambrose, 1992; Williams, 1975; Nickerson & Zenger, 2008). In social enterprises, then—with workers
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24 that often have comparatively low status themselves—providing beneficiary success stories may in fact
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26 lead low-status employees to invidiously compare their personal rewards and outcomes with benefits
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28 received by those they are working to help. Increasing the salience of a beneficiary may, therefore,
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30 inadvertently increase the salience of a perceived inequity as well, as employees are better able to take the
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32 beneficiary’s perspective and see what life would be like if they too reaped the downstream rewards of
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34 their own labors. In short, we argue that while beneficiary salience can *create* positive emotional
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36 responses in situations of downward social comparison, under conditions of upward social comparison—
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38 as can be the case with low-status social enterprise workers and the people they are helping (who may in
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40 fact become higher status because of their aid)—beneficiary salience may in fact *reduce* positive
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42 emotions. We formally predict the following:
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45 *H1a) The relationship between higher levels of beneficiary salience and compassion will be*
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47 *moderated by the direction of social comparison, such that in conditions of upward (versus*
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49 *downward) social comparison, beneficiary salience will decrease compassion.*
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52 Not only can upward social comparisons create situations that attenuate positive emotions (i.e., a
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54 decrease in compassion), they may in fact foster negative emotions. More specifically, we theorize that
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56 upward social comparisons can evoke envy, “the unpleasant emotion that can arise when we compare
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3 unfavorably with others” (Smith & Kim, 2007: 46). At its worst, malicious envy is “a destructive
4 interpersonal emotion aimed at harming (or at least not helping) the envied individual” (Brooks, Huang,
5 Abi-Esber, Buell, Huang, & Hall, 2019: 667; text in parentheses added). For a social comparison to evoke
6 envy, “in addition to sharing similarities with an advantaged person, the individual who experiences envy
7 must consider the domain in which the advantage is enjoyed to be relevant....If the domain is not
8 relevant, social comparison does not occur and no envy is experienced” (Ganegodia & Bordia, 2019, p.
9 778; see also Salovey & Rodin, 1984; Tesser, 1988).

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11 For social enterprises that operate among disadvantaged populations, the employees they hire are
12 often drawn from a population with a similar status as the beneficiaries they aim to help. If low-status,
13 low-wage employees thus see beneficiary success stories of people who have overcome challenges that
14 they themselves are currently facing, there is a risk of detrimental upward comparisons. And increasing
15 the salience of those stories gives employees even more material from which to form a social evaluation
16 of beneficiaries as perhaps *unworthy* of beneficence—or at least no more worthy than they themselves,
17 who may have a similar levels of need, and are thus equally if not more deserving of beneficence (Smith
18 & Kim, 2007). We predict that increasing attention on a beneficiary’s success (i.e., increasing beneficiary
19 salience), therefore, will highlight the possibility in employees’ minds that while beneficiaries used to be
20 of similar status as they themselves, the beneficiaries have now been pushed to a higher level that the
21 employees also wish to obtain—in other words, the employees will be envious.

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23 *H1b) The relationship between beneficiary salience and envy will be moderated by the direction*
24 *of social comparison, such that in conditions of upward (versus downward) social comparison,*
25 *beneficiary salience will increase envy.*

26
27 Most importantly, a decrease in compassion and an increase in envy can have significant negative
28 effects on prosocial motivation in the workplace. As reviewed by Dutton et al. (2006), positive emotions
29 such as compassion lead people to be more attentive to and empathetic towards the suffering of others
30 (Cassell, 1991; Solomon, 1998); want to respond to and ease such suffering (Wuthnow, 1991; de Waal,
31 1996), and take direct action to do so (Clark, 1997). In other words, compassion (as compared to in-active
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3 emotions such as sympathy) “implies action and must involve some sort of response in addition to other
4 crucial elements of attention and emotion...there must be a movement to respond” (Dutton et al., 2006:
5 60). This “movement to respond” however, is not just an individual response. Rather, it can create a
6 collective response at the organizational level, or what Dutton et al. (2006) refer to as compassion
7 organizing. This collective response can be harnessed as an important organizational resource. And in the
8 case of social enterprises, for example, this resource can be redirected towards the execution of the
9 organization’s mission, in the form of prosocial motivation. When compassion for the beneficiaries of
10 one’s organizational mission decreases, therefore, we expect that prosocial motivation at work will
11 decrease also.

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13 Similarly, but in an opposite manner, envy in the workplace can negatively affect employee
14 prosocial motivation. At the organizational level, envy has been described as a “social comparison cost”
15 (Zenger, 1992; 1994; Nickerson & Zenger, 2008), manifest as firm costs in the form of behaviors such as
16 reduced motivation and effort, departure, non-cooperativeness, and even, when taken to extremes,
17 sabotage (Nickerson & Zenger, 2008). As envy thus decreases one’s desire to help the target of envy, we
18 expect that, in the context of a social enterprise, employees who are envious of the beneficiaries they are
19 working to help will experience lower levels of prosocial motivation. Taken together, in conjunction with
20 our previous hypotheses, we predict that under conditions of upward social comparison, beneficiary
21 salience will have a negative indirect effect on prosocial motivation, through decreased compassion and
22 increased envy:

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24 *H2) The interaction effects between beneficiary salience and social comparison on compassion*
25 *and envy will extend to prosocial motivation, such that there will be a negative indirect effect of*
26 *beneficiary salience on prosocial motivation through (a) decreased compassion and (b) increased*
27 *envy in conditions of upward (versus downward) social comparison.*

53 **METHODOLOGY**

54 **Research Setting**

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3 This study was conducted in collaboration with a large North American social enterprise whose
4 mission is to provide training, career counseling, placement and other social services for individuals in
5 need, which we will call Helping Hand. Helping Hand is funded in large part by a number of different
6 retail operations, such as used clothing retail, and electronics and furniture recycling, which generate
7 large numbers of low-skilled, low-wage, and labor-intensive jobs.
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14 Our research engagement with the organization began with a series of meetings with the top
15 leadership of the organization, including the President, Vice President of Partnerships, and the leadership
16 team of the regional chapter in southern California that we ultimately ended up working with. In these
17 initial meetings, as well as a subsequent full-day on-site meeting and series of interviews with the
18 leadership team, board, and retail staff, the topic of workplace motivation was raised as a significant issue
19 facing the organization. Specifically, the organization struggles with high turnover and low employee
20 performance. However, given their status as a non-profit, they are only able to pay minimum wage;
21 moreover, minimum wage in California is already increasing by \$4 over the next several years, so the
22 leadership team was particularly keen to work towards identifying and testing non-financial mechanisms
23 to increase employee motivation and commitment.
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35 Our next step following this initial engagement was to collect qualitative data to give us a deeper
36 understanding of who this organization's employees are, and how they are currently motivated. Therefore,
37 in November of 2017, a member of our research team spent three days on-site conducting a series of
38 interviews. He interviewed 27 individuals in total, including 17 retail store employees (managers,
39 assistant managers, and sales associates); and 10 corporate/headquarter employees. Several key findings
40 were relevant to our study and helped shape the decisions we made going forward in the study design.
41 First, we learned that there was significant variance in the level of mission awareness among Helping
42 Hand's retail managers and its employees. While retail managers seemed well aware of the organizational
43 mission, it appeared that base-level employees were less aware and perceived that the retail mission was
44 about "making money." Further, even among these employees there appeared to be a high degree of
45 variance in which employees were already aware of Helping Hand's mission on two dimensions: who the
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3 beneficiaries of the organization actually were, and how much they knew about such beneficiaries. In fact,
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5 we also learned that many employees perceived themselves as “the same” as Helping Hand’s
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7 beneficiaries. That is, they felt that their social status was approximately equal to that of Helping Hand’s
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9 beneficiaries. This alerted us to the distinct possibility that an emphasis among employees on Helping
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11 Hand’s mission without consideration of relative social status may not be as effective as the literature on
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13 prosocial motivation might predict. In summary, going into these interviews we began with an initial
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15 intention to explore the ‘who’—that is, the social comparison aspect of our research question. However,
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17 these interviews provided us with clues that there may be value in also understanding the interaction
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19 effect of beneficiary salience.
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22 **Study Design**

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24 To test our hypotheses, we worked with one chapter of the larger social enterprise, which
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26 operates 19 retail stores with 225 employees in southern Los Angeles county. We also worked with a
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28 production company to create four different versions of a 3-minute informational video about the
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30 organization’s mission. The content of each video was identical, but they differed in terms of the salience
31
32 and social comparison of the message. Two of the four videos (the “high salience” videos) were video
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34 footage of a woman named Jenny (an actor) talking about her story in a monologue style. The other two
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36 (the “low salience” videos) were “whiteboard drawings”, providing identical information but without
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38 reference to a specific individual. Additionally, two of the four videos told a story that reflected an
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40 “upward comparison” to the average Helping Hand worker, and the other two reflected a “downward
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42 comparison” to the average Helping Hand worker. In each video in the high salience condition, the
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44 upward and downward comparison actors were the same woman, but with subtle differences in hair,
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46 clothing and make-up. Thereby, we created a 2x2 research design, varying on the dimensions of social
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48 comparison (upward/downward) and beneficiary salience (high/low).
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52 Each of the approximately 200 employees were randomly assigned (at the store level) to view one
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54 of the four different versions in small groups of two to three individuals and then complete a survey. In
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56 other words, within each store, individuals were randomized into four different “viewing groups.” This
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3 viewing occurred on the same day at an ‘all employee’ meeting held at each store—such meetings are
4 typically held simultaneously on Sunday mornings at each store every eight weeks, and we timed our
5 intervention to fall on this meeting day, in order to avoid potential spillover or contamination that might
6 occur if individuals from different conditions viewed the videos on different days and then communicated
7 with one another.
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13 **Measures**

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15 Each of our survey scales were measured using a 7-point Likert scale, ranging from “Strongly Disagree”
16 to “Strongly Agree.”
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20 **Compassion.** To measure compassion, we used a 3-item scale that drew from Kanov et al.’s
21 (2004) notion of compassion as comprising both the emotional response as well as wanting to take action.
22 Our measure read: *Hearing about the [Helping Hand] program participants in the video, I felt*
23 *compassion/sympathy/a desire to help.*
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29 **Envy.** For our envy scale, we adapted items from a scale by Cohen-Charash and Mueller (2007)
30 designed to measure episodic envy. We did not use all of the items because some of them appeared to be
31 too extreme to be relevant to our context (with items for example, describing hatred). Our measure read:
32 *Hearing about the [Helping Hand] program participants in the video, I felt envious/bitter/resentful.*
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38 **Prosocial motivation.** Our PSM measure drew from the well-validated Grant (2008) scale, which
39 read: *At [Helping Hand], I am motivated because: I care about benefiting others through my work/I want*
40 *to help others through my work/I want to have a positive impact on others/it is important to me to do*
41 *good for others through my work.*
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46 **Survey order.** Our survey was provided in paper directly following the video viewing. We
47 provided two versions of the survey, identical in all respects except the order in which the compassion
48 and envy scales appeared. Despite attempts to randomize this, our analysis suggested that our
49 randomization efforts were not fully successful at randomizing survey order; therefore we controlled for
50 the survey order variable in our analysis.
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RESULTS

Descriptive statistics, correlations, and reliabilities for key variables are displayed in Table 1. First, results of a one-way analysis of variance (ANOVA)—examining the effects of beneficiary salience, social comparison, and the interaction between the two on compassion, controlling for survey order, $F(4, 198) = 2.12, p = .080$ —revealed a marginally significant interaction effect of salience x social comparison ($p = .083$). Probing the simple slopes of the interaction, still controlling for survey order (see Figure 1), revealed that salience did not affect compassion in the downward comparison condition, but high salience negatively affected compassion for those in the upward comparison condition.

We then conducted a similar ANOVA predicting envy, $F(4, 198) = 1.33, p = .259$, which also resulted in a marginally significant interaction effect of salience x social comparison ($p = .059$)—although we interpret this result with caution, given that the overall model was not statistically significant. The pattern of the simple slopes (see Figure 1) suggests a reversal effect, wherein salience decreases envy for those in the downward comparison condition but increases envy for those making an upward comparison.

Having found initial evidence that salience and social comparison interactively affect compassion, and possibly envy, we next sought to examine the potential downstream effects on prosocial motivation. An ANOVA predicting prosocial motivation, $F(4, 197) = .31, p = .871$ (again, controlling for survey order), resulted in a salience x social comparison interaction effect that was not statistically significant ($p = .763$). However, the absence of an effect does not preclude the existence of an indirect effect, through a mediator (see MacKinnon, Krull, & Lockwood, 2000; Hayes 2017), especially given that beneficiary salience seems to have opposite effects for those in the upward and downward comparison conditions, suggesting a possible suppression effect. We therefore used Hayes's (2017) PROCESS macro for SPSS (model 7) with 5,000 iterations to produce 90% bootstrap confidence intervals (CIs) for the conditional indirect effect of salience on prosocial motivation, moderated by social comparison, through both compassion and envy as parallel mediators. As indicated by the indirect effects and corresponding CIs displayed in Table 2, social comparison moderates the indirect effect of salience on prosocial motivation (through compassion), such that there is a significant negative indirect effect of salience for

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3 upward but not downward social comparisons. Similarly, we find that the indirect effect of salience on
4 prosocial motivation, through envy, also depends on the direction of the social comparison: the negative
5 indirect effect of salience for those in the upward comparison condition is significantly different from the
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7 indirect effect of salience for those in the downward comparison condition.
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11 Interestingly, the fact that we did not find high beneficiary salience to increase compassion (and
12 subsequent prosocial motivation) for those in the downward comparison condition seems at odds with the
13 extant literature (e.g., Small, Loewenstein, & Slovic, 2007). Erlandsson, Bjorklund, and Backstrom
14 (2015), for example, specifically found that sympathetic emotions underlie the identifiable victim effect.
15 Swedish university students in their study that received more information that helped identify an
16 impoverished child in need (a downward comparison) were more motivated to offer help. This effect was
17 completely mediated by increased feelings of sympathy (as measured by three items asking how much
18 they felt intense compassion, strong empathic feelings, and emotionally touched). Conversely, in our
19 study, even in the downward comparison condition we did not find a similar increase in compassion when
20 employees received more information about the beneficiaries of their work. Suspecting that this seeming
21 discrepancy might be a function of the unique context of our field experiment (i.e., a population in which
22 people may perceive themselves as disadvantaged), we conducted follow-up interviews with a number of
23 employees to dig deeper.
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39 **Additional Qualitative Insights**

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41 Following the field experiment, we conducted a series of interviews with 20 purposefully selected
42 retail employees to better understand our statistical results. Specifically, we wanted to dig deeper on why
43 a high level of beneficiary salience could create negative emotions, and why, in the downward
44 comparison condition, we did not see any positive effects of beneficiary salience, as previous studies have
45 shown. Our interviews largely followed a similar approach: first we would ask individuals about their
46 reaction to the video they'd seen the previous day; following that, we would show interviewees one of the
47 other videos, and "reveal" what our statistical results had suggested. We would then ask them to theorize
48 why they thought we had gotten the results we did from the different conditions. For example, an
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3 individual who had initially seen the low salience version may have subsequently been shown a high
4 salience version, and asked to theorize why, generally speaking, many people had preferred the low
5 salience version. Similarly, we asked participants who had initially seen the downward social comparison
6 version to then watch the upward social comparison version, and theorize why on average people
7 preferred the downward social comparison. We also explicitly asked them about their emotional
8 responses – about compassion and envy – and those of others. This interviewing approach had the
9 advantage of decreasing social desirability bias and any stigma or discomfort that they may have felt
10 about talking about their own emotional responses, as we were asking them to theorize about our
11 statistical averages, rather than their own personal feelings.

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22 ***The downsides of high beneficiary salience:*** A predominant theme that we heard from retail
23 employees was largely confirmation of our statistical results – that beneficiary salience could cause
24 negative emotions – but they suggested that this might happen for a number of different reasons. For
25 example, we heard confirmation that when employees were exposed to “Jenny,” they did not actually feel
26 more compassionate. When asked why this was the case, one interviewee suggested that it was because
27 the salience made the person more proximate: “*cause you actually see the person, like talking about their*
28 *story and how two years ago she wouldn't have seen herself where she's at.*” When asked why this might
29 be negative, she suggested that it caused her to identify similarities to her own life: “*cause you kind of see*
30 *like you could see your own like life kind of in that, you know, you'd be like, okay, well I'm living*
31 *paycheck to paycheck. I want to be where she's at now*” (Willow¹, 1).

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43 Furthermore, she and others suggested that this in turn created a sense that their situation
44 compared unfavorably to the beneficiary:

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*“You don't know how they are going to help other people when they barely pay us, how are we
supposed to live? I mean it's hard, like even hard for me right now. So you know, rent goes up but
your pay doesn't go up.” (Gardena)*

*“Why can't I get the help? You know? Yeah. I work for goodwill. I do all this to make other
people's lives better. Yeah. But how are we bettering ourselves? Yeah. We're still struggling*

¹ These names refer to the store names where the interviews took place.

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3 *getting paid minimum wage. You can't get a raise. Yeah. So that's how I feel about that.” (Storm*
4 *Plaza)*
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6 Moreover, higher salience seemed to create more of a sense of urgency to “fix” the unfavorable situation
7 that had been highlighted by the upward comparison to “Jenny”: *“It's like, my job sucks, I need to quit*
8 *now and I need to go back to school. [Why?] Because you saw a person, I was looking at her. Oh my*
9 *God, this sucks.”* When asked how this differed in the absence of seeing “Jenny,” the respondent replied:
10 *“You know it's real but you are not worried about it, you know like oh whatever. I'll just go back and do*
11 *my job. That's cool. That goodwill is doing something for people, you know it, somewhere. But now, no,*
12 *no, no. It's time for me to quit!” (Torrance)*
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21 Some also suggested that their compassion decreased because it caused suspicion that the
22 beneficiaries might be taking advantage of the aid:
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25 *“There could be some people that might be taking advantage of that, and there might be others*
26 *that really need it. You know what I mean? There might be somebody that really needs that, needs*
27 *it, and is living in their car, and they're homeless, and they need that. And then there's other*
28 *people that could be taking advantage of that too. While we're here working our butts off and not*
29 *getting benefits? You know what I mean?” (Cerritos, 1)*
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32 *“There's a lot of homeless people out there that are not even looking for jobs. They could work in*
33 *Goodwill right now and I, we work, and they really could work, and they're not working. They're*
34 *out there just begging for money. And they, yeah, they're out there and you can look at them.*
35 *They're wearing, you know, name brand stuff in there. You're looking at him like, really? Are you*
36 *really homeless? And then if you offer them, you know, it says will work for, you know, we're,*
37 *we're here food or whatever. They offered them food. No, I don't like food. I want money. And*
38 *then, you know, they're not really, there's scams, you know what I mean? So, I don't know. So*
39 *maybe some people out there that don't want no job... They just want money for booze or drugs or*
40 *whatever” (Cerritos, 2)*
41

42 *“Um, and I, I figure like that's, that's maybe a reason why the people go like, no, they just go in,*
43 *signed yourself up and like get all this help. But they don't really, like they don't work for it like*
44 *we do or I don't know. I've heard people saying that like, oh, they just, they could just easily like*
45 *sign up saying they're homeless and like get the help. But like, yeah, we are actually like working*
46 *for 'em to make 'em, stuff like that.” (Willow, 2)*
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48 This suspicion was not only raised about beneficiaries taking advantage of resources generated by
49 employees’ work, but also suspicions about the organization:
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52 *“You know when you hear stuff like, oh the company put a freeze on the pay. Bullshit. Where's the*
53 *money? So they stayed at \$11. Minimum wage in L.A. is \$13.25. Where's the rest of the money?”*
54 *(Gardena)*
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We also heard that salience decreases compassion because it diverts organizational resources from operational necessities critical to accomplishing financial goals:

“I think that does happen cause like, I think like they should be focusing on them and us cause... sometimes, um, we don't like have bins for work. Like today the truck didn't come. Um, I don't know what problem they had over there, but like there are things that really back us up from meeting our goals and stuff, and before, like we didn't have that much employees. We just got all a full staff right now - before we used to be half of it. And it was a big struggle. Most of the people that resigned from here, they go like, no, they're not paying us good enough. Or like, it's too much job for the little what we get back or, or people would go like, I like what they do here, but um, I really need to get a job where they pay me more, and stuff like that, cause that's like the main problem, I think about the, well that and like we don't really get that much motivation - we, we get more like, you guys need to meet more of the goals. Like we have our goals increase more and we're like, well how are we gonna do it? And you don't have what we need, we need more supplies and stuff like that.” (Willow, 2)

Some suggested that this did not only decrease their feelings of compassion, but in fact created increased negative feelings of envy:

“Especially if you're working hard at Goodwill, maybe you're not doing nursing, you're just a Goodwill worker, and I've worked really hard; I don't make that a year. That could be where the jealousy would come in and her, and her, success story of \$50 k a year, and looking at someone like me, as assistant manager, and I'm like, hmm, I only make this much a year, and I actually put in the hard work and sweat, for years.” (Carson)

“We don't make that much money whatsoever! Whatsoever, you know? We're still going to do what we have to do. But, I can understand that there would be a little bit of envy there because she, she had that opportunity, she takes it and you know, she got to where she is and we're back here slaving, you know, for our little pennies, you know.” (Torrance)

In addition to creating a less positive or even negative emotional reaction, we heard that a high level of salience creates a cognitive anchor that may or may not resonate. For example, one interviewee recounted that because of past experiences with nursing (the job that Jenny gets), the success story did not resonate with her as much as other stories may have, or if she'd been allowed to fill in the details from her own imagination.

“OK, we can get the story with Jenny, but let's say you're not into nursing, and you say if I went to Goodwill I wouldn't go for that program. But maybe I'm into another program and it makes me...want to hear the success stories from other programs. That [nursing] is not something that everyone wants to do, so then it opens your...How will people in culinary arts do? Loss prevention, all the other programs? how are people benefitting from those.” (Carson)

Another suggested that in addition to cognitively anchoring on the story, high salience also “forced” them to anchor on a specific individual:

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“No, because it's just, it's probably narrowing it to that one person and with the stick figure you're talking about everybody...The stick figure is not pinpointed on a woman or a man or a teenager in need. Jenny is just Jenny...And maybe certain people probably were like, okay, well they just picked Jenny, why couldn't they pick, um, Raul, or, you know, Tony?” (Storm Plaza)

When we asked individuals to compare the videos with and without “Jenny,” we broadly heard that high salience exacerbated the tendency to engage in invidious social comparisons.

“I kind of think about the saying, ignorance is bliss. Sometime you just got to maybe not give too much information that way, you know? We just don't think about it too much; we just kind of do our job.” (Torrance)

“You know, it's kind of a double-edged sword, because sometimes, you know, I do appreciate they do help people, cuz there are people who need help, but like I said, too, when you see that person making more than you, you know?” (E&J)

The upsides of low beneficiary salience. Most interestingly, we heard some suggestions that in the absence of “Jenny” – that is, when the story was told with just a whiteboard animation – individuals would often conjure up an image of someone they knew (typically a friend or family member) in their minds. In some cases, that was themselves; that is, in the absence of Jenny they made a connection to their own experiences. For example, when we asked respondents who they were thinking about during the whiteboard (low salience) video, we heard:

“Me, it was the same what happened to me, I was walking around and not having a job and drinking, and then I went to goodwill. First I went to the Salvation Army. Yeah. Then I was in rehab for a while and then after that I moved to downtown LA and got a job from [Helping Hands]. And then from there I been doing good.” (Carson)

“Yeah. Cause um, I know even personally myself, you know, I've tried to get a job. This is my first official job, because I know I got two seasonal jobs before, but this is an actual one. Yeah. So I would say I was in their steps and like, the same.” (Storm Plaza, 2)

In other cases, we heard that in the absence of Jenny, they imagined other individuals that resonated with them:

[I pictured] “one of my sister's friends, she's living like that right now. She still works for the 99 cent store, which is great. But she has nowhere else to live, so she just has her car.” (Storm Plaza, 2).

“For me it's like seeing it can be anyone really...it doesn't matter who he really was or who it is because it could be whoever is watching it. It could be a homeless man, or, um, a young teenager, or adults. So, I mean, I can't really say. I mean, I would imagine it could be a man or woman or a child, you know, trying to even learn how to get a job...I feel compassionate about it because I'm

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3 *hearing it too is like it can be he or she a veteran or a homeless man or a woman.” (Storm Plaza,*
4 *2)*
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6 Therefore, the story took on a high level of meaning for them. Whereas, when they were shown a video
7 with an individual (Jenny), they were unable to insert this individual with whom they already had a
8 connection with into the story line, thereby making the high salience condition *less* impactful for them,
9 rather than more, as we (and prior theory) had predicted.
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17 **DISCUSSION**

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19 Social enterprises often use stories about the people who their work touches as a way to bolster
20 support among key stakeholders. In particular, social enterprises may deploy this strategic resource
21 among employees, who often work for low wages given the financial constraints social enterprises are
22 subject to as they make challenging trade-offs between spending resources on mission versus financial
23 viability (Battilana & Lee, 2014). While social enterprises may appear well positioned to leverage this
24 tactic, such efforts to bolster support in this way can in fact backfire. In this research, we foreground the
25 importance of considering the social position – relative to beneficiaries – of the workers on the receiving
26 end of these organizational narratives. Specifically, we consider the (often) low-wage workforces of
27 social enterprises, and question how extant predictions that highlight the benefits of prosocial
28 organizational narratives might differ among this population. We also consider how making these
29 beneficiaries very salient – by providing specific, detailed information in the content of narratives – might
30 differentially affect our population of interest. Interestingly, we find that the effects of salience are highly
31 contingent on the beneficiary’s social position, relative to the audience. This work makes a number of
32 contributions.
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48 First, we contribute to the literature on social enterprises. There is a significant and growing body
49 of work on the hybrid nature of social enterprises which combines both business principles and charitable
50 aims. Much of this work to date has emphasized the challenges (and some benefits) inherent in an
51 organizational form that embraces such duality of purpose, across a range of fields (Battilana & Lee,
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3 2014). For example, many studies have looked at the external and internal tensions of hybrid logics –
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5 competing prescriptions within the same organization – for how an organization should behave. Yet, in its
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7 emphasis on the “what”, we still lack empirical insights into *how* such organizations might best navigate
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9 and address such challenges (Battilana & Lee, 2014).
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11 This research attempts to contribute in this regard, particularly addressing the internal
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13 microdynamics of social enterprises, ‘at the coalface’ (Barley, 2008). Internally, studies have outlined
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15 how tensions arise when financial and attentional resources must be allocated across mission and internal
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17 operations (e.g., Austin, Bermudez, & Escobar, 1999; Tracey et al., 2011; Moizer & Tracey, 2010). One
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19 specific tension that stems from this balancing act is that social enterprises are often forced to hire low-
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21 wage, low-status workers to undertake the daily activities of running the social enterprise (e.g., sorting
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23 used clothes, making bread at 4am, distributing newspapers). We suggest that this creates a category of
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25 workers that are often exposed to the narratives about the beneficiaries of their organization’s mission, but
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27 at the same time are likely immune to – or even repelled by – such narratives. This creates a challenge for
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29 social enterprises, who may be tempted to deploy their mission-related successes as a strategic resource
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31 that can compensate for financial constraints as they attempt to sustain enthusiasm among key
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33 stakeholders with few financial resources to draw from (Burbano, 2016). We suggest that a social
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35 enterprise’s social mission can indeed be a strategic resource, but that it is one that must be deployed with
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37 caution, paying careful attention to the audience’s position, relative to those whom the organization seeks
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39 to benefit.
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43 While this challenge might be particularly pronounced in the case of social enterprises (Battilana
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45 and Lee, 2014), we also suggest that our findings apply in varying degrees to organizations more broadly,
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47 given that many if not most organizations engage in some form of communication surrounding the
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49 benefits that stem from their work—whether central or peripheral to the core of their work, often
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51 associated with corporate social responsibility (CSR) (Matten & Moon, 2008; McWilliams & Siegel,
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53 2001). Prior research has documented many potential benefits for organizations that laud their social
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55 impact, particularly related to employee retention and commitment, (Bode, Singh, & Rogan, 2015;
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3 Burbano, 2016), especially as a new generation of workers is increasingly insistent that the companies
4 they work for fit their values (Eisner, 2005). Yet, recent work examining sustainability certifications has
5 also begun to hint that there may be downsides to organizations very publicly projecting a positive image
6 of their work (Gehman & Grimes, 2016). Our empirical context examined a case where the employees
7 themselves were of lower status than the beneficiary – and indeed many corporations have low status
8 workers that this type of social messaging could backfire with. Consider, for example, an office worker
9 hearing about a CSR initiative that sends impoverished children to universities. While this messaging may
10 be designed to motivate this employee, our research highlights the possibility that calling attention to this
11 (and this office worker’s role in facilitating it) may in fact be demotivating if they are in a position to be
12 doubting their ability to send their own kids to college. Or, there may be spillover effects, even if the
13 workers themselves are not of lower status than the highlighted beneficiaries. For example, workers might
14 feel envy vicariously, on behalf of members of their family or social network. Indeed, our qualitative data
15 alluded to this, as one individual reported feeling anger for a friend who had worked equally hard as
16 “Jenny,” but without the same results:
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33 *I have a friend that went through the [Helping Hands] program - it was my roommate, you know,*
34 *and I watched her go through it. I watched her wake up every day, had to be at [Helping Hands]*
35 *at 6 o'clock. I watched her study, I watched her do the whole program...Jenny kind of made me*
36 *jealous a little bit because she makes \$50k and I'm like, my friend don't make that much, you*
37 *know? (Torrence)*
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39 Interestingly, when asked, this respondent said she felt no jealousy for her roommate, who was
40 also making significantly more money than her, pointing to the importance of understanding the
41 connection between the audience of the social messaging, and the beneficiary. This anecdote highlights
42 that there may indeed be situations where we would expect higher salience to produce positive effects
43 among lower status beneficiaries, and we leave this interesting question for future research to probe.
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49 The anecdote above also highlights the difference between intentional, targeted exposure and
50 unintended ancillary spillover (Elsbach & Sutton, 1992). Our intervention reflected a targeted approach,
51 whereby social messaging was designed specifically for workforce motivation purposes. Yet, this
52 approach brings up the additional possibility that CSR or impression management messaging aimed at
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3 one group – for example, the more affluent donors of Helping Hands – often cannot necessarily be hidden
4 from other stakeholder groups (like its low-wage employees) who may have a very different emotional
5 response to the message. As organizational boundaries are increasingly open and blurring to include more
6 stakeholders previously at the periphery (Ringel, Hiller & Zietsma, 2018), this adds a layer of complexity
7 to organizational efforts to use their social mission as a strategic resource as they struggle to find optimal
8 balance in messaging that may be exposed to diverse stakeholder groups. Indeed, this reflects a specific
9 concern in current theorizing about the boundaries of the firm, and how they may be used strategically to
10 avoid envy and social comparison costs (Nickerson & Zenger, 2008), and also how organizations might
11 be able to harness the positive effects of envy, or what is referred to as benign envy (Brooks et al., 2019).

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22 The idea of more targeted messages to different stakeholder groups also brings to the foreground
23 the issue of the “fit” between the audience and the beneficiary. While the identifiable victim effect
24 suggests that salient victims that can be identified will elicit more help from others than anonymous
25 statistics (Lee & Feeley, 2016), our results suggest more nuance than that. Our intervention only offered
26 one “Jenny,” (albeit this same person was stylized to reflect upward and downward social comparisons),
27 and our participants were diverse in age, gender, and ethnicity. While our research did not address these
28 demographic differences, it may be that fit between audience and beneficiary is critical. On one hand, it
29 may be that homophily would prevail – that is, the more similarities between worker and beneficiary, the
30 better. On the other hand, it may also be that homophily would *trigger* social comparisons, and create a
31 negative emotional response, as is alluded to in the quote that begins our manuscript: “*She lives in Long*
32 *Beach. I live in Long Beach. She was living paycheck to paycheck. We are living paycheck to*
33 *paycheck...So it's like there's a little, probably a little bit of jealousy there.*” These questions of fit are
34 particularly important in the age of increasingly targeted advertising efforts, and we leave this important
35 question for future research to consider.

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51 Our results also offer a novel perspective on prosocial motivation and prosocial impact.
52 Specifically, we bring an explicit consideration of social comparison to bear on extant predictions of
53 prosociality. This opens up a number of interesting questions for future research. For example,
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3 beneficiary salience is generally regarded as being comprised of both contact with and information about
4 beneficiaries. Our manipulation was designed to simulate both: contact with (virtually, through the video),
5 and information about (through the content of the video). Prior work might fruitfully disentangle these
6 two to better understand whether different elements of salience (contact versus information) change
7 predictions. Further, future work may attempt to disentangle different types of information, and our
8 qualitative data hinted at this also, as several informants suggested that certain pieces of information felt
9 more motivating than others. Finally, while our study represented a more simplified upwards and
10 downwards social comparison, social status is continuous, and it may be that there is a range of upward
11 comparison which has positive implications, but that there is a threshold beyond which effects become
12 negative. This also reflects a limitation of our study design and a fruitful avenue for future research to
13 consider.

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26 More broadly, our findings highlight the importance of the target of prosocial motivation, and, by
27 extension, a person's perceived prosocial impact. For the employees of the social enterprise we examined,
28 it mattered whether the beneficiary of their hard work was of lower or higher status, suggesting that not
29 all prosocial efforts are created equal (in the minds of the employees). We therefore need a better
30 understanding of how prosocial motivation differs depending on the target. For example, psychologically,
31 how is it different to help someone you know and care about versus helping society at large? How does
32 prosocial motivation differ depending on the social category of the person (or people) you are helping. As
33 social identity (Tajfel & Turner, 1979; Hogg & Abrams, 1988) and social categorization theories (Turner,
34 2010; Hogg & Terry, 2000) might suggest, helping someone by "pulling" them up to your level (a
35 downward comparison) might be a pull into your social category. However, helping someone by pushing
36 them up (an upward comparison) might be a push beyond your social category, leading you to identify
37 with them less. And what is the role of beneficiary salience in expanding or contracting the boundaries of
38 the social categories people form in their minds, such that they are willing to help society at large versus
39 only subsets of society? Future research could help paint a clearer picture of the psychology of prosocial
40 motivation.

CONCLUSION

A fundamental challenge among social enterprises is how to maintain employees' motivation under conditions of (often) low pay and high emotional stress. One important tool available to such organizations is to harness prosocial motivation – motivation driven by the positive impact one's work has on others. Indeed, organization's social mission can be an important strategic tool, particularly to compensate for the challenging trade-offs that social enterprises must often make around resourcing their mission or their manpower. Our research offers a cautionary tale, however, as among our population of interest – low-wage and low-status workforces – we find that this can generate upward social comparison, and cause efforts to draw increased attention to an organization's good deeds, can indeed backfire. On a more positive note, taken together our results suggest that when beneficiaries are less salient, workers may be more likely to “fill in the blanks” with beneficiaries who are more meaningful and motivating to them. Generally speaking, our study provides an important step in clarifying how social enterprises may more effectively leverage mission to maintain momentum among low wage workforces, ultimately allowing them to more successfully achieve their missions.

APPENDICES

Table 1

Descriptive Statistics and Bivariate Correlations

	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	1	2	3	4	5	6
1. Beneficiary Salience	.50	.50	–					
2. Upward Comparison	.51	.50	.01	–				
3. Compassion	5.65	1.22	-.09	-.03	(.78)			
4. Envy	2.40	1.53	.00	.00	-.36***	(.89)		
5. Prosocial Motivation	5.94	1.19	-.08	-.00	.66***	-.35***	(.96)	
6. Survey Order	1.54	.50	.05	.18**	-.14*	.09	-.01	–

* $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$, *** $p < .001$

Note. Scale reliabilities are given in parentheses. Beneficiary Salience is coded as 1 = high, 0 = low.

Upward comparison is coded as 1 = upward, 0 = downward.

Table 2

Conditional Indirect Effects of Salience on Prosocial Motivation

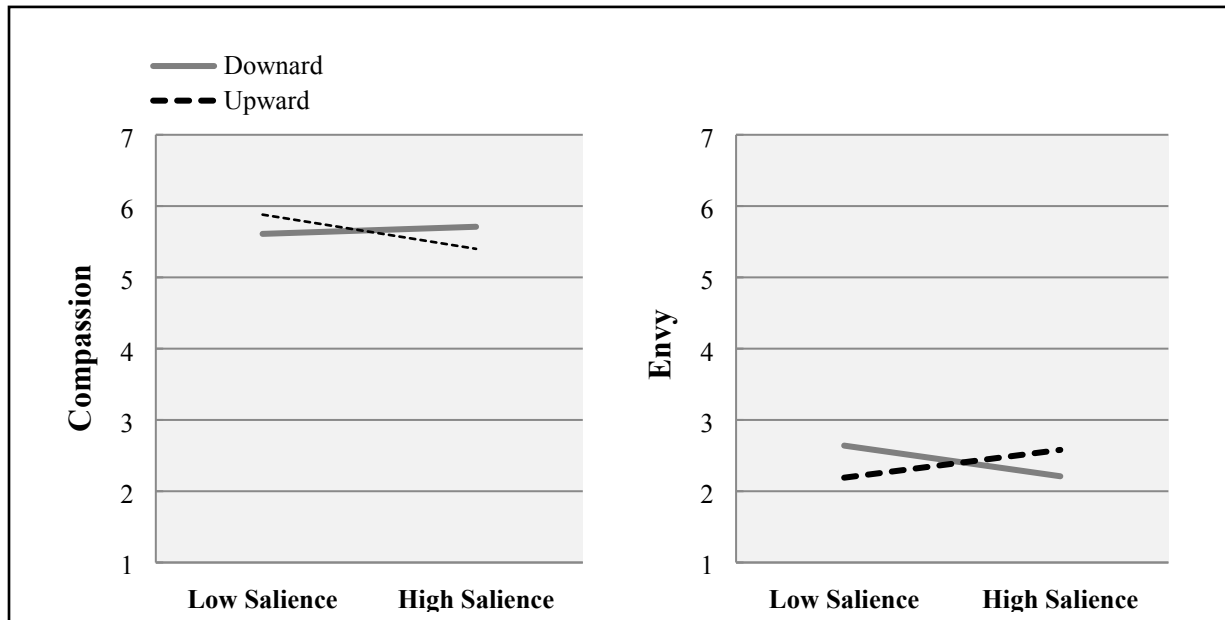
Moderator: Social Comparison	Mediator	DV: Prosocial Motivation			
		<i>Effect</i>	<i>SE</i>	LLCI	ULCI
Downward	Compassion	.081	.159	-.189	.335
Upward	Compassion	-.297	.131	-.508	-.082
	Index of Moderated Mediation:	-.378	.204	-.711	-.034
Downward	Envy	.038	.035	-.011	.100
Upward	Envy	-.038	.035	-.103	.008
	Index of Moderated Mediation:	-.076	.054	-.176	-.001

Note: Table entries were computed using a bootstrapping estimation procedure with 5000 resamples.

Effects represent the conditional indirect effect of beneficiary salience on prosocial motivation, through compassion and envy as parallel mediators, for those in either the upward or downward comparison conditions. Survey order was included as a control variable, but the pattern of results and significance levels of the indices of moderated mediation remain the same when the control variable is excluded from the model.

Figure 1

Interaction Effect of Salience x Social Comparison on Compassion and Envy



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