Not All Fairness Is Created Equal: A Study of Employee Attributions of Supervisor Justice Motives

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A large body of research demonstrates that employee perceptions of fair treatment matter. The overwhelming focus of these investigations has been on how employees react to whether or not they perceive their supervisor behaved in a fair manner. We contend, however, that employees not only question and react to whether they are treated fairly, but also to *why* they believe their supervisor acted fairly in the first place. To do so, we consider how employee attributions of supervisor motives for fair treatment influence the cognitive and affective mechanisms by which fair treatment influences employee reactions to fairness. Drawing from the justice actor model, we focus on both cognitive (establishing fairness, identity maintenance, and effecting compliance) and affective (positive affect) motives underlying supervisors' fair treatment. Relying on theory and research on motive attribution and leader affect, we develop predictions for how employees' perceptions of these motives as a result of short-term exchanges over time influence supervisor-directed citizenship behavior through both cognitive (trust in the supervisor) and affective (positive affect) mechanisms. Our experience sampling study of 613 weekly fair events (from 171 employees) largely supported our predictions, demonstrating that attribution of supervisor motives is a meaningful component of an employee's justice experience.

Keywords: experience sampling methodology, fairness, justice, motive attribution

Research in the organizational justice literature continues to demonstrate the critical importance of employee perceptions of justice (for a historical overview, see Colquitt, Greenberg, & Zapata-Phelan, 2005). Indeed, we have an expansive literature linking employee perceptions of justice rule adherence to important employee outcomes such as trust, affect, citizenship behavior, and performance (Colquitt et al., 2013). One common thread in this research is that it focuses on employee reactions to answering the question "was my supervisor fair?" (Colquitt, 2001). The

importance of this question is clear, and has driven decades of research. However, might it also matter to employees the reasons *why* they believe their supervisor acted fairly?

Supervisors enact justice for many different reasons (i.e., they have varied motives for behaving in a fair manner; Scott, Colquitt, & Paddock, 2009; Scott, Garza, Conlon, & Kim, 2014), which employees may ultimately consider as they react to fair treatment. To illustrate, consider four scenarios in which an employee experiences the exact same amount of fairness (i.e., her treatment is equitable, consistent, justified, and proper), but makes a different attribution about *why* her supervisor acted fairly. In the first scenario, the employee thinks she was treated fairly because her supervisor was attempting to "do the right thing" and ensure justice was maintained. In the second scenario, the employee thinks she was treated fairly because her supervisor wanted to appear to others as doing the right thing—even though her supervisor had no real interest in being fair. In the third scenario, the employee thinks she was treated fairly because her supervisor was providing fairness as a resource in the ongoing social exchange relationship, which is expected to be reciprocated in some way by the employee. Finally, in the fourth scenario, the employee simply assumes her fair treatment is the result of the supervisor being in a good mood that day, which may reduce her ability to predict how the supervisor might behave in the future.

Under the current paradigm, justice scholars would assume that employee reactions to each of the above scenarios would be

identical because the employee receives equivalent levels of fairness in each. We contend, however, that the reactions of the employee in each scenario are likely to differ due to the power that motive attribution plays in determining recipient reactions (Harvey, Madison, Martinko, Crook, & Crook, 2014; Heider, 1958). In contrast to current perspectives, we suggest that not all fairness is created equal, and the reasons behind fair treatment are important to employees. In so doing, we challenge the implicit assumption that being treated fairly is all that matters to employees, shifting the conversation in the literature instead to *why* employees think they are treated fairly. Although the justice literature has demonstrated the importance of attributions (e.g., Bies & Shapiro, 1987; Martinko, Douglas, Ford, & Gundlach, 2004; Ployhart & Ryan, 1997; Stouten, De Cremer, & van Dijk, 2006), the focus has been exclusively on causal attributions (i.e., whether or not to view a supervisor as responsible for an outcome) rather than deeper motive attributions (i.e., reasons behind the supervisor's behavior; Heider, 1958). We contribute to theory on justice by introducing motive attribution to the justice literature, addressing the limitation noted by Scott et al. (2014) that research on supervisor justice motives has failed to consider employee reactions.

To achieve the above goals, below, we develop and test theory surrounding employee attributions of supervisor motives for fair treatment as well as the effects of these attributions on reactions to fair treatment that vary over time. First, to develop theory around *what* motives employees are likely to attribute supervisor fair treatment to, we draw from the justice actor model (e.g., Scott et al., 2009, 2014)—which identifies cognitive (i.e., establishing fairness, identity maintenance, and effecting compliance) and affective (i.e., positive affect) motives behind a supervisor's adherence to rules of justice. We then consider *how* attribution to each of the supervisor cognitive and affective motives influences recipient reactions (Heider, 1958), including trust in the supervisor and positive affect, as well as supervisor-directed citizenship behavior as our downstream outcome. We test our model by utilizing an experience sampling design. Harvey et al. (2014, p. 140) recently noted "a consideration of the factors that influence attributions over time could provide new insight into how workplace relationships and behaviors evolve." We heed this call, providing one of the few dynamic examinations of motive attribution.

Theory and Hypotheses

Justice Actor Model

The justice actor model (Scott et al., 2009) is a conceptual framework focused on actors (i.e., managers) specifically, and their motives for treating subordinates in a just manner. Beginning with "cold" cognitive motives, the model suggests that managers act fairly to establish fairness, create and maintain desired social identities, and/or attempt to effect compliance from subordinates (Scott et al., 2009, 2014). When mangers are driven by an establishing fairness motive, they act fairly because it is the "right thing to do." Adherence to justice rules thus keeps the scales of justice in balance and ensures people both get what they deserve, and deserve what they get (Lerner, 1980). When managers are driven by an identity maintenance motive, they act fairly because they wish to create or maintain a desired social identity. Adherence to justice rules is thus a method for managing impressions (Green-

berg, 1990). Finally, when managers are driven by an effecting compliance motive, they act fairly because they wish to control and influence their subordinate's behavior. Adherence to justice rules is thus used as a resource in the social exchange relationship (Blau, 1964).

The above motives imply that a supervisor's fair treatment is based on a rational cost/benefit analysis. However, this may not always be the case. Thus, the justice actor model also identified "hot" affective motives, suggesting managers may simply act fairly because they are experiencing a positive affective state at the time (Scott et al., 2009, 2014). When managers are driven by a positive affect motive, they act fairly because the action tendency that accompanies positive affect facilitates justice rule adherence. For example, positive emotions typically prime a prosocial state of action readiness (e.g., cooperation, information sharing, and kindness; Isen, 2000) that is conducive to fair treatment.[1]

Motive Attribution of Events That Are Beneficial to Oneself

In his foundational book on interpersonal interactions, Heider (1958) described the attributional processes that occur in response to events and interactions that are beneficial (or harmful) to oneself. He used the term *beneficial* as an umbrella term to capture a wide range of human interaction that generally benefit a person (e.g., praising, teaching, protecting, encouraging)—a definition that encapsulates fair treatment from a supervisor. When such beneficial treatment occurs, Heider (1958) posited that individuals go through several levels of attribution, with the depth of attribution increasing as attribution moves from the first level to the second level to the third level. The first level is causal attribution, in which individuals attempt to interpret the cause of the beneficial treatment (e.g., person or situation). The second level is intention attribution, in which individuals attempt to interpret whether the beneficial treatment caused by a person was intended. The third level is motive attribution, in which individuals attempt to interpret *why* the person intentionally engaged in the beneficial treatment.

When describing the role that attribution plays in response to events and interactions that are beneficial to oneself, Heider (1958) highlighted the aforementioned third level of attribution (i.e., motive attribution) as particularly important. Specifically, he posited that reactions to beneficial treatment are largely determined by attributions about the motives of the benefactor. Although the natural reaction to beneficial treatment is reciprocation (and to harmful treatment is retribution), Heider (1958, p. 265) theorized that such reactions "become markedly attenuated, if not com-

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[1] We note that the justice actor model also describes a negative affect motive within the context of unfairness and justice rule violation (Scott et al., 2009). When managers are driven by a negative affect motive, they act unfairly because the action tendency that accompanies negative affect facilitates justice rule violation. For example, negative emotions typically prime an antisocial state of action readiness (e.g., aggressiveness and impoliteness; Berkowitz, 1993; Tedeschi & Felson, 1994) that is conducive to unfair treatment. Considering our focus on fair treatment (rather than unfair treatment) and the emerging consensus surrounding the notion that reactions to justice rule adherence reflect different constructs than reactions to justice rule violations (Colquitt et al., 2015; see also Dulebohn, Conlon, Sarinopoulos, Davison, & McNamara, 2009; Gilliland, Benson, & Schepers, 1998), we focus our theorizing explicitly on the positive affect motive relevant to justice rule adherence.

pletely dissipated, upon the discovery that the harm or the benefit was not the true goal of the agent." Indirect support for this theorizing can be found in past empirical work showing that reactions to the behaviors of subordinates (e.g., organizational citizenship or feedback seeking; Allen & Rush, 1998; Bolino, 1999; Eastman, 1994; Halbesleben, Bowler, Bolino, & Turnley, 2010; Johnson, Erez, Kiker, & Motowidlo, 2002; Lam, Huang, & Snape, 2007) and coworkers (e.g., volunteering; Rodell & Lynch, 2016) vary dramatically depending upon attribution of motives behind these behaviors.

The Extent to Which a Fair Event Is Attributed to Supervisor Cognitive Motives

Drawing from Heider's (1958) foundational theorizing, we posit that attributions involving cognitive motives identified in the justice actor model (Scott et al., 2009, 2014) will have social exchange implications. Indeed, Heider (1958) contended that individuals typically make motive attributions as they process beneficial treatment and the inferences drawn influence the desire to engage in reciprocation with the person who engaged in beneficial treatment. This cognitive desire for reciprocation described by Heider (1958) dovetails with the cognitive, social exchange pathway by which justice influences work outcomes (see Colquitt et al., 2013). In line with theory on social exchange (Blau, 1964) and research on justice (Colquitt et al., 2013), we rely on trust in the supervisor—defined as positive expectations about the words, actions, and decisions of one's supervisor (McAllister, 1995)—as an indicator of social exchange in interpersonal relations.

Although several indicators of social exchange in interpersonal relations (e.g., trust, leader-member exchange, support, commitment, and psychological contracts; Cropanzano & Byrne, 2000) are used interchangeably in the justice literature (Colquitt et al., 2013), trust in the supervisor is uniquely relevant for motive attribution. Within the justice literature, "Trust involves beliefs about the intentions of the authority" (Tyler & Lind, 1992, p. 142), such that trust accrues when the intentions of an authority are believed to be driven by the "desire to treat people in a fair and reasonable way" (Tyler, 1989, p. 831). Below we specify *how* attribution of fair treatment to each of the supervisor cognitive motives over time influences trust in the supervisor and subsequent engagement in supervisor-directed citizenship behavior in response to fair treatment.

The extent to which a fair event is attributed to a supervisor establishing fairness motive. Heider (1958) theorized that acts are only perceived by recipients as truly beneficial when such acts are attributed as genuine. He further posited that, when this occurs, the natural reaction of the recipient is reciprocation. With the above in mind, which supervisor justice motive best encapsulates a genuine interest in being fair?

Drawing from the justice actor model (Scott et al., 2009, 2014), we submit that a motive to establish fairness aligns well with a genuine interest in being fair. When employees attribute fair treatment as a result of a short-term exchange to an establishing fairness motive, they conclude that their supervisor treated them fairly because it was the "right thing to do" to maintain a just world (Lerner, 1980). An establishing fairness motive encapsulates a pursuit of justice that is not self-serving; rather, the supervisor acts fairly because he or she views justice as a valued end in itself,

rather than a means through which he or she can achieve other goals (Scott et al., 2009, 2014). As such, when individuals attribute a specific fair event to a motive to establish fairness, they should perceive their supervisor as genuinely interested in being fair. Given that beneficial treatment that is attributed as genuine and not self-serving prompts social exchange dynamics (Heider, 1958), such attributions are likely to elicit trust in the supervisor in response to the event (even beyond the effects of fair treatment itself). Indeed, "If people believe that the authorities are trying to be fair and to deal fairly with them, they trust the motives of those authorities" (Tyler, 1997, p. 337).

Indirect empirical evidence for the above theorizing can be drawn from motive attribution work in other literatures. For instance, nascent work on subordinate feedback seeking behavior (Lam et al., 2007) and employee volunteering (Rodell & Lynch, 2016) shows that attribution of an intrinsic motive to such behaviors enhances the extent to which they influence alternative indicators of social exchange quality (e.g., leader-member exchange and support). Taken together, we predict:

> *Hypothesis 1:* The extent to which a fair event is attributed to a supervisor establishing fairness motive is positively associated with trust in the supervisor in response to the event.

The extent to which a fair event is attributed to a supervisor identity maintenance motive. In contrast to acts that are attributed as genuine, Heider (1958) posited that acts that are attributed to more self-serving, instrumental motives are likely to be seen as less beneficial, often resulting in negative outcomes. For example, when beneficial behaviors are attributed in this way, Heider (1958) contended that reciprocation may become eliminated entirely.

When considering attribution to self-serving, instrumental supervisor justice motives, an identity maintenance motive is particularly relevant. When employees attribute fair treatment as a result of a short-term exchange to an identity maintenance motive, they suspect that their supervisor treated them fairly to convey a particular image to others, managing his or her impression via adhering to justice rules (Scott et al., 2009, 2014). That is, the supervisor's behavior is "performed behind a 'veneer of justice'" (Greenberg, 1990, p. 119), executed instrumentally to achieve his or her own distal goal of a desired image. As such, when individuals attribute a specific fair event to a motive to manage impressions, they may perceive their supervisor as being untruthful, unreliable, calculating, and manipulative (Crant, 1996; Treadway, Ferris, Duke, Adams, & Thatcher, 2007). Given that beneficial treatment that is attributed as instrumental and self-serving hampers social exchange dynamics (Heider, 1958), such attributions are likely to reduce trust in the supervisor in response to the event (beyond the effects of fair treatment itself). Indeed, if authorities believe that the intentions of authorities are not benevolent, trust in the authority is likely to suffer (Tyler, 1989, 1994, 1997; Tyler & Lind, 1992).

Indirect evidence for the above theorizing can also be drawn from nascent motive attribution work in other literatures. For example, Lam et al. (2007) showed that attribution of an impression management motive to feedback-seeking behavior attenuated the extent to which it influenced leader-member exchange quality (an indicator of social exchange). In sum, we predict:

Hypothesis 2: The extent to which a fair event is attributed to a supervisor identity maintenance motive is negatively associated with trust in the supervisor in response to the event.

The extent to which a fair event is attributed to a supervisor effecting compliance motive. The two attributions we have discussed thus far—a motive to establish fairness versus a motive to maintain a desired social identity—arguably lie at the two extremes of motive attribution (i.e., genuine vs. self-serving, respectively). There is, however, also likely to be a "middle ground." We suggest the third and final cognitive motive discussed by Scott et al. (2009, 2014)—adherence to justice rules to effect compliance—is an example of this middle ground.

When employees attribute a fair event as a result of a short-term exchange to an effecting compliance motive, they believe that their supervisor is using justice as a social exchange resource, triggering an obligation for "employees to reciprocate in ways that preserve the social exchange relationship" (Masterson, Lewis, Goldman, & Taylor, 2000, p. 740). In contrast to attributions to establishing fairness and identity maintenance motives, there are reasons to suspect attribution to an effecting compliance motive can be seen in a positive or a negative light by employees. On the one hand, "Subordinates may respond in favorable ways to adhere to the norm of reciprocity, which guides social exchange relationships and stipulates that individuals should return benefits to those from whom they have received benefits" (Scott et al., 2014, p. 1573). On the other hand, Heider (1958, p. 265) noted reactions to beneficial treatment can sometimes be hampered "because p[erson] does not wish to become obligated to o[ther] or come under his power in any way."

This juxtaposition parallels the broader "fundamental social dilemma" that is central to several core justice theories (e.g., fairness heuristic theory; Lind, 2001; Van den Bos, 2001). Although employees can attain valuable outcomes by identifying with, and contributing effort to, an authority, this compliance also makes the employee vulnerable to exploitation. Considering the theoretical grounding for both positive and negative reactions to attribution of a fair event as a result of a short-term exchange to an effecting compliance motive, the question we wish to address is *for whom* are attributions to such motives likely to be seen in a positive versus negative light?

In keeping with our assertion about the importance of social exchange (generally) and trust (specifically), we posit trust propensity—the generalized belief that others are trustworthy and can be trusted (Mayer, Davis, & Schoorman, 1995)—is likely to impact the way in which employees react to the extent they attribute a specific fair event to a supervisor motive to effect compliance. Of the three motives discussed thus far, trust propensity is likely to be particularly valuable in the context of attributing a fair event as a result of a short-term exchange to an effecting compliance motive. In contrast to the clear positive data associated with attributing a fair event to an establishing fairness motive and the clear negative data associated with attributing a fair event to an identity maintenance motive, attributions to this motive create a hazy picture about whether one should trust or not. Situations in which clear data on whether to trust or not are lacking are precisely the situations where people turn to trust propensity. Indeed, the trust literature acknowledges that clear data on whether to trust will "swamp the effects of a person's trusting tendency in ongoing relationships" (McKnight, Cummings, & Chervany, 1998, p. 477), whereas trust propensity plays a significant role when it is ambiguous based on the available data whether one should trust or not (Gill, Boies, Finegan, & McNally, 2005; Johnson-George & Swap, 1982; Mayer et al., 1995; Rotter, 1980; van der Werff & Buckley, 2017).

When it is ambiguous whether to trust, several scholars have noted trust propensity serves as a filter through which individuals interpret the actions of others (e.g., Govier, 1994; Lewis & Weigert, 1985; Mayer et al., 1995), with "trusting parties perceiving more good reasons to trust" (Colquitt, Scott, & LePine, 2007, p. 918). From this perspective, individuals high in trust propensity are likely to view the various valuable outcomes of a high-quality social exchange relationship accompanying compliance (e.g., unspecified receipt of assistance, advice, appreciation, and instrumental services; Blau, 1964) as good reasons to trust in response to the specific fair event. Conversely, individuals low in trust propensity are suspicious of others (Ferguson & Peterson, 2015), resulting in a careful and guarded approach to interpersonal interactions. As such, individuals low in trust propensity are likely to view the potential exploitation accompanying compliance in the social exchange relationship as a salient reason not to trust in response to the specific fair event. Considering that empirical research also supports the notion that trust propensity alters the effects of perceptions of supervisor justice rule adherence on work outcomes (e.g., Colquitt, Scott, Judge, & Shaw, 2006), we predict:

Hypothesis 3: The relationship between the extent to which a fair event is attributed to an effecting compliance motive and trust in the supervisor in response to the event is moderated by trust propensity, such that the relationship is more positive for employees high in trust propensity and more negative for employees low in trust propensity.

The Extent to Which a Fair Event Is Attributed to Supervisor Affective Motives

In general, research on motive attribution (e.g., Allen & Rush, 1998; Bolino, 1999; Eastman, 1994; Halbesleben et al., 2010; Johnson et al., 2002; Lam et al., 2007; Rodell & Lynch, 2016) has assumed that individuals consider others as acting primarily based on rational cost/benefit analyses, resulting in a literature focused on attributions to others' cognitive motives (e.g., genuine vs. self-serving). Research on justice actors, however, shows that managers oftentimes act fairly simply because they are experiencing a positive affective state at the time (Scott et al., 2014). Thus, we extend this research by also investigating the possibility that employees may attribute an affective motive for their supervisor's adherence to justice rules.

In contrast to the reciprocation (i.e., social exchange or trust) mechanism discussed above—but in line with the alternative affective mechanism by which fair treatment influences citizenship behavior (Colquitt et al., 2013), we posit that attributions involving the positive affect motive identified in the justice actor model (Scott et al., 2009, 2014) will have implications for the emotional experience of employees. Theory and research on leader affect and emotional contagion provide a conceptual foundation for this proposition. Specifically, this work collectively suggests that employees tend to pick up on, catch, and react to leader affect (for

reviews, see Gooty, Connelly, Griffith, & Gupta, 2010; Rajah, Song, & Arvey, 2011; van Knippenberg & van Kleef, 2016). Employees are likely to be attuned to identifying whether positive affect is being experienced and driving fair treatment because "people are hard-wired to pick up emotional signals from others" (Côté, 2005, p. 515). Moreover, the recognition that positive affect is driving their supervisors behavior is likely to be used by employees "as a type of social information to understand how he or she should be feeling" (Barsade, 2002, p. 648; see also, van Kleef, 2009). Indeed, emotion and affect transfer from person to person through both subconscious (e.g., internal feedback from the mimicry of an affective display, such as smiling eliciting positive affect; Sy, Côté, & Saavedra, 2005) and conscious (e.g., an affective display conveying social information about how one should feel) emotional contagion processes (Barsade, 2002; Hennig-Thurau, Groth, Paul, & Gremler, 2006; Netemeyer, Maxham, & Lichtenstein, 2010)—the latter of which should be particularly relevant to attributions to a supervisor positive affect motive.

When employees attribute a fair event as a result of a short-term exchange to a positive affect motive, they (a) observe that their supervisor is experiencing a positive affective state at the time and (b) perceive this as the driver of their supervisor's engagement in fair treatment (Scott et al., 2009, 2014). Because leaders are seen as being motivated by, and acting on, positive affect, such attributions provide social information that employees should similarly experience and act on positive affect as well (Barsade, 2002). Thus, via emotional contagion processes resulting from attributing a specific fair event to a positive affect motive, we posit that employees are likely to use that attributed affect as social information, triggering the transfer of the attributed affect to them in response to the event.

Interestingly, though not widely recognized, Heider's (1958) original work also provides a theoretical basis for employees picking up on and catching their supervisor's emotional state. Specifically, he noted "an emotion in o[ther] simply produces an emotion in p[erson] . . . the causal source of our feeling stems from the affective nature of our surroundings, for instance, the mood of another person" (Heider, 1958, p. 279). Moreover, an expansive body of empirical research on emotional contagion processes generally (e.g., Pugh, 2001; Totterdell, 2000; Tsai & Huang, 2002) and conscious emotional contagion processes specifically (e.g., Gump & Kulik, 1997; Hsee, Hatfield, & Chemtob, 1992; Sullins, 1991) supports these arguments. We note that research also shows that emotions are more likely to transmit downward (i.e., from leaders to followers rather than from followers to leaders) because (a) leaders and higher status individuals have more opportunities to display and transmit their affect (Sy et al., 2005), (b) affective states of leaders and high status individuals are highly salient to followers (Sy & Choi, 2013), and (c) individuals with less power are more likely to pay attention to and mimic the behavior of leaders and high power individuals (Anderson, Keltner, & John, 2003). In sum, we predict:

> *Hypothesis 4:* The extent to which a fair event is attributed to a supervisor positive affect motive is positively associated with employee positive affect in response to the event.

Downstream Behavioral Outcomes of Attribution of Supervisor Motives

Although we have (to this point) explicitly considered trust in the supervisor and positive affect in response to fair events over time as proximal cognitive and affective (respectively) outcomes of motive attribution, these proximal outcomes are typically theorized within the justice literature to serve as conduits that transmit the effects of justice-related phenomena to downstream behavioral outcomes (Colquitt et al., 2013). We focus specifically on supervisor-directed citizenship behavior—defined as volitional employee behavior targeted toward the supervisor that improves the functioning of the organization (Dalal, Lam, Weiss, Welch, & Hulin, 2009)—because it aligns with theory and research on both motive attribution and emotional contagion. In terms of motive attribution, behavioral reciprocation is the primary reaction to beneficial treatment that is viewed as genuine. Indeed, Heider (1958, p. 266) posited that when acts are seen as truly beneficial, employees will be driven to reciprocate until "we have recompensed him, till we ourselves have been instrumental in promoting his happiness." Similarly, research shows that citizenship behavior is a natural behavioral byproduct of positive emotional contagion processes that flow from leaders to followers (e.g., Johnson, 2008).

In line with Heider's (1958) behavioral reciprocation theorizing, trust in the supervisor in response to the specific fair event is likely to transmit the effects of motive attributions for fair treatment on supervisor-directed citizenship behavior following the event. Indeed, trust is theorized to be a core reciprocation mechanism by which beneficial treatment influences citizenship behavior (Organ, 1988, 1990; Organ & Konovsky, 1989). This is because trust resulting from favorably attributed beneficial treatment is likely to make individuals more comfortable in the social exchange, reducing the anxiety about going the extra mile to reciprocate such treatment (Colquitt et al., 2013; Konovsky & Pugh, 1994). These arguments are indirectly supported by primary (Konovsky & Pugh, 1994) and meta-analytic (Colquitt et al., 2013) research demonstrating trust as a mediator of the effects of fair treatment on citizenship behavior.

Positive affect in response to the specific fair event is also likely to transmit the effects of motive attributions for fair treatment on supervisory-directed citizenship behavior following the event. Experiencing positive affect as a result of attributing fair treatment to a supervisor positive affect motive will trigger a prosocial state of action readiness (e.g., cooperation, information sharing, and kindness; Isen, 2000) in employees, ultimately manifesting in the engagement of citizenship behavior. Indeed, Scott, Matta, and Koopman (2018) demonstrated that within-person fluctuations in positive affect were meta-analytically associated with citizenship behavior. These arguments are also consistent with meta-analytic research showing positive affect mediates the effects of fair treatment on citizenship behavior (Colquitt et al., 2013). Finally, work in the motive attribution literature shows that positive affect can drive behavioral responses to attributed motives (e.g., Halbesleben et al., 2010). Thus, we predict:

> *Hypothesis 5:* Employee trust in the supervisor in response to a fair event mediates the effects of the extent to which a fair event is attributed to cognitive motives—that is, establishing fairness (5a), identity maintenance (5b), and the interaction of

effecting compliance and trust propensity (5c)—on supervisor-directed citizenship behavior following the event.

Hypothesis 6: Employee positive affect in response to a fair event mediates the effects of the extent to which a fair event is attributed to a positive affect motive on supervisor-directed citizenship behavior following the event.

Research Questions

We focus on attribution to supervisor cognitive motives as predictors of employee trust in the supervisor in response to the fair event and attribution to supervisor affective motives as predictors of employee affect in response to the fair event because these pathways are most consistent with the theoretical perspectives we draw from. That said, it is possible that cross-cutting effects exist, such that attribution to supervisor cognitive motives relate to positive affect in response to the fair event and attribution to supervisor affective motives relate to trust in the supervisor in response to the fair event. For instance, Heider (1958) does mention that gratitude (a cognitive-affective state associated with a benefit received because of the good intentions of another person; Emmons & McCullough, 2003) may be triggered by beneficial treatment that is attributed as genuine. Additionally, attribution to supervisor affect may spill-over to trust in the supervisor as trust has an affective component (McAllister, 1995). Thus, we explore these possibilities as research questions:

Research Question 1: Does the extent to which a fair event is attributed to supervisor cognitive motives—that is, establishing fairness, identity maintenance, and the effecting compliance—relate to employee positive affect in response to the event?

Research Question 2: Does the extent to which a fair event is attributed to a supervisor positive affect motive relate to employee trust in the supervisor in response to the event?

Our theorizing considers the extent to which attribution to each of the supervisor motives for fair treatment influence outcomes. Nonetheless, it is possible that multiple attributions stemming from the same fair event may co-occur. Indeed, past research suggests that individuals often have multiple motives for engaging in behavior (Scott et al., 2014) and multiple motives can interact to influence outcomes (Grant & Mayer, 2009). The same may be true of motive attribution. Thus, we explore the notion of co-occurring attributions as research questions:

Research Question 3: To what extent do the motives attributed to supervisor fair treatment co-occur as a result of a short-term exchange over time?

Research Question 4: Does the co-occurrence of multiple supervisor motives for fair treatment as a result of a short-term exchange over time result in interactive effects?

Method

Procedures and Participants

Given our interest in employee reactions to perceived supervisor motives for fair treatment, we asked employees to reflect upon fair treatment and assess their perceptions of their supervisor's motives behind that treatment. Considering that supervisor motives for fair treatment vary within supervisors over time (Scott et al., 2014) and that experience sampling methodology helps to mitigate memory and recall biases associated with reflecting on events (Beal, 2015; Beal & Weiss, 2003; Fisher & To, 2012; Uy, Foo, & Aguinis, 2010), we conducted an interval-contingent experience sampling methodology study (Wheeler & Reis, 1991). Employees received an online survey each week for five consecutive workweeks, capturing employee perceptions of the fairest event each week, attributions to each of the possible supervisor motives for that event, and reactions to that event. The use of experience sampling methodology provided the added benefit of allowing us to group mean-center our exogenous variables, removing all between-person variance from these constructs (Enders & Tofighi, 2007). This effectively eliminates between-person confounds (e.g., personality traits such as trait affectivity) and several sources of same-source bias (e.g., social desirability, acquiescence, and common rater effects; Gabriel, Podsakoff, et al., 2018; Matta, Scott, Colquitt, Koopman, & Passantino, 2017; Podsakoff, MacKenzie, Lee, & Podsakoff, 2003).

Because reactions to fairness reflect different constructs than reactions to unfairness (Colquitt, Long, Rodell, & Halvorsen-Ganepola, 2015) and our theory focuses on employee attributions for *fair* treatment, we focused our investigation on the *fairest* event that occurred each week. We chose the fairest event specifically because attribution processes tend to be triggered for salient experiences surrounding important outcomes (Weiner, 1985, 1986, 1995). Justice/fairness is a critically important outcome in employee's daily lives (Colquitt & Zipay, 2015; Cropanzano, Byrne, Bobocel, & Rupp, 2001; Kanfer, Frese, & Johnson, 2017), and research demonstrates that individuals notice, are attentive to, and react to changes in fairness even on a day-to-day basis (e.g., Ferris, Spence, Brown, & Heller, 2012; Koopman, Lin, Lennard, Matta, & Johnson, 2019; Loi, Yang, & Diefendorff, 2009; Matta, Erol-Korkmaz, Johnson, & Bıçaksız, 2014; Matta et al., 2017; Matta, Scott, Guo, & Matusik, 2019; Yang & Diefendorff, 2009). Moreover, research suggests that extreme (i.e., the most fair and most unfair) experiences are the most important in shaping reactions to fairness and unfairness (Gilliland, 2008; Gilliland, Benson, & Schepers, 1998). We note that this design restricts our analyses to high levels of fair treatment (in line with our research question). However, because some fair events may be fairer than others, we also collected the overall fairness of the event to serve as a control variable in our analyses.

To identify potential participants, students in management courses at a Midwestern university were given extra credit for recruiting a full-time employee to participate in our study (for similar, see Harrison & Wagner, 2016; Koopman, Matta, Scott, & Conlon, 2015; Matta, Scott, Koopman, & Conlon, 2015; Mayer, Aquino, Greenbaum, & Kuenzi, 2012). As a result of this recruitment process, we had an initial pool of 285 potential participants. Following best practice (e.g., Wheeler, Shanine, Leon, & Whitman, 2014; Zapata, Olsen, & Martins, 2013), we conducted a series of validity checks to ensure the legitimacy of these potential participants. First, we requested work e-mail addresses and contacted each participant directly. Second, we compared the IP addresses of all employees to those of the students who identified

them. Finally, a member of the research team contacted all research participants to verify their address to remit payment.

We began the study by sending each potential participant a baseline survey prior to the initial experience-sampling phase that explained the purpose and requirements of the voluntary study. This baseline survey also included the measure of trust propensity in addition to employee demographics. Following the baseline survey, participants were enrolled in the experience-sampling portion of the study that included five weekly surveys. Weekly surveys were distributed at the end of each week for five straight weeks. We decided on a 1-week interval—rather than a daily interval—to increase the likelihood that employees had experienced a fair event with their supervisors (Lin, Scott, & Matta, 2018; Totterdell, Wood, & Wall, 2006). For each weekly survey, employees were first asked to write about the fairest event that occurred in dealing with their supervisor during the previous week. Then, with that fair event in mind, they were asked to assess the extent to which that event was fair (to serve as a control variable) and the extent to which they attributed that fair event to each of the possible supervisor cognitive and affective motives. Finally, employees were asked to rate their trust in the supervisor in response to the fair event, positive affect in response to the fair event, and supervisor-directed citizenship behavior since the fair event occurred. Participants were incentivized with a raffle, such that each completed survey resulted in an entry toward one of 20 $100 prizes. This data collection was deemed exempt per Michigan State University's IRB# ×14-178e: Fairness Motives in the Workplace.

Although 285 full-time employees made up our initial pool of potential participants, 185 ultimately chose to participate in the weekly surveys. Of those 185 participants, six did not complete more than one weekly survey (which is necessary for ESM analysis), five did not report a fair event occurring in at least two weekly surveys (either because of a lack of interaction with their supervisor or difficulty recalling that a fair event occurred), and three had missing data on at least one substantive variable in each of the weekly surveys completed.[2] As a result, our final sample was made up of 171 employees. Those 171 employees completed 613 of a possible 855 weekly surveys (72% response rate). Employees were 60% female, with an average age of 38.89 ($SD =$ 13.96), and an average tenure in the current organization of 9.67 ($SD = 10.27$). Participants were employed in a variety of industries (e.g., manufacturing, education, government, health care, retail, and communications).

Measures

For the weekly measures (i.e., all measures except trust propensity), participants were first asked to consider the fairest event that occurred in dealing with their supervisor during the previous week. With that event in mind, participants responded to the items described below using a 5-point Likert scale (from 1 = *to a very small extent* to 5 = *to a very large extent*), unless otherwise noted.

Attribution to supervisor cognitive and affective motives. Participants rated the extent to which they thought their supervisors were acting fairly for cognitive and affective reasons using the justice motives measure developed by Scott et al. (2014). This scale included five items for establishing fairness, six items for identity maintenance, six items for effecting compliance, and three items for positive affect.[3] Capturing the extent to which the behavior was attributable to each of the motives is the most common practice applied in field studies on motive attribution (e.g., Allen & Rush, 1998; Halbesleben et al., 2010; Johnson et al., 2002; Lam et al., 2007; Rodell & Lynch, 2016). Each item began with the stem "To what extent did your supervisor act fairly during the event. . . ." Example items for an establishing fairness motive are ". . . to ensure that you get what you deserve?" and ". . . to ensure that you view the workplace as characterized by truth and righteousness?" Example items for an identity maintenance motive are ". . . to ensure that you think of him/her as a good leader?" and ". . . to ensure that you have a positive impression of him/her as a leader?" Example items for an effecting compliance motive are ". . . to ensure that you comply with his/her wishes?" and ". . . to ensure that you carry out your job as he/she would want you to?" Example items for a positive affect motive are ". . . because he/she was happy?" and ". . . because he/she was pleased?" The average coefficient alpha for attribution to establishing fairness, identity maintenance, effecting compliance, and positive affect motives across weeks were .93, .97, .95, and .96, respectively.

Trust in the supervisor. Participants rated the trust they felt in their supervisors in response to the fair event they had described using 5 items from Gillespie's (2003) Behavioral Trust Inventory (from 1 = *strongly disagree* to 5 = *strongly agree*; for similar applications of this measure, see Baer, Matta, Kim, Welsh, & Garud, 2018; Lau, Lam, & Wen, 2014; van der Werff & Buckley, 2017). As discussed by Schoorman, Mayer, and Davis (2007, p. 348), although numerous problems exist with extant measures of trust (e.g., low reliabilities; scale length), "the Behavioral Trust Inventory has good psychometric properties." Example items include "Since the fair event that I wrote about, I relied on my supervisor's work-related judgments," "Since the fair event that I wrote about, I depended on my supervisor to handle an important issue on my behalf." The average coefficient alpha across weeks was .91.

Positive affect. We measured positive affect using the five-item PANAS short-form developed by Mackinnon et al. (1999). Participants reported their experience of positive affect as a result of their supervisors' actions using a 5-point Likert scale (from 1 = *very slightly or not at all* to 5 = *very much*). Example items for positive affect include *excited*, *enthusiastic*, and *inspired*. The average coefficient alpha for positive affect across weeks was .92.[4]

Supervisor-directed citizenship behavior. We measured citizenship behavior directed at the supervisor following the fair

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[2] No statistically significant differences were found between the initial 285 potential participants and the final 171 participants on age, $F_{(193)} =$ .69, *ns*, gender, $F_{(196)} = .97$, *ns*, race, $F_{(196)} = .31$, *ns*, job tenure, $F_{(193)} =$ .10, *ns*, supervisor interaction time, $F_{(192)} = .15$, *ns*, or hours worked per week, $F_{(193)} = 1.79$, *ns*.

[3] Although we did not develop predictions for attribution to a supervisor negative affect motive because of our focus on fair treatment (Scott et al., 2009), to be comprehensive in scope, we collected data on such attributions using the justice motives measure developed by Scott et al. (2014). Example items for a negative affect motive are ". . . because he/she was irritated?" and ". . . because he/she was frustrated?" (coefficient alpha across weeks = .93).

[4] To be comprehensive in scope, we also collected data on negative affect using the 5-item PANAS short-form developed by Mackinnon et al. (1999). Example items include "distressed," "upset," and "nervous" (coefficient alpha across weeks = .93).

event using three items from Dalal et al. (2009). These items were created explicitly for research employing experience-sampling methodology. The items were assessed using a 5-point Likert scale (from 1 = *strongly disagree* to 5 = *strongly agree*). The items were "I have gone out of my way to be nice to my supervisor," "I have tried to help my supervisor," and "I have tried to be available to my supervisor." The average coefficient alpha across weeks was .85.

Trust propensity. In line with Colquitt et al. (2006), we measured between-employee trust propensity using 5 items from the International Personality Item Pool (2001) rated from 1 = *strongly disagree* to 5 = *strongly agree*. Example items include "I trust others," "I trust what people say," and "I am wary of others (R)." The coefficient alpha for this scale was .80.

Control variable—overall fairness of the event. Participants were asked to assess the overall fairness of their supervisor during the event using Colquitt et al.'s (2015) three-item scale. The items were "To what extent did your supervisor act fairly?" "To what extent did your supervisor do things that were fair?" and "To what extent did your supervisor behave like a fair person would?" The average coefficient alpha across weeks was .97.

Analyses

In Mplus 7.11 (Muthén & Muthén, 2010), we used multilevel path analysis to test our hypotheses. Following best practices in modeling ESM data (e.g., Beal, 2015), we used random slopes to model the hypothesized level 1 relationships. The level 1 variables consisted of the within-person constructs, including attribution to supervisor cognitive motives, attribution to a supervisor positive affect motive, trust in the supervisor in response to the event, positive affect in response to the event, supervisor-directed citizenship behavior, and overall fairness. The between-person construct (i.e., employee trust propensity) was modeled as a level 2 variable.

We grand-mean centered employee trust propensity and group-mean centered the level 1 predictors according to the recommendations of Hofmann and Gavin (1998) and Ohly, Sonnentag, Niessen, and Zapf (2010). By group mean-centering our level 1 predictors, we were able to assess within-person effects while effectively controlling for possible between-person confounds

(Enders & Tofighi, 2007). We also followed best practice recommendations from Beal (2015) to control for lagged criteria (i.e., previous week trust in the supervisor, affect, and supervisor-directed citizenship behavior) when predicting each outcome, allowing our results to be interpreted as a change in the level of each construct from the previous week (Johnson, Lanaj, & Barnes, 2014; Scott & Barnes, 2011).

To test mediation and cross-level moderated mediation, we applied a parametric bootstrapping procedure, according to the recommendation by Preacher, Zyphur, and Zhang (2010). We ran a Monte Carlo simulation with 20,000 replications to test the 95% bias-corrected confidence interval (CI) around the indirect effect (for comparable applications for this method, see Koopman, Lanaj, & Scott, 2016; Lanaj, Johnson, & Barnes, 2014; Wang et al., 2013). For moderated mediation, we tested the difference in conditional indirect effects (Hayes, 2015).

Results

Variance Components

First, we examined null models (regressions with no predictors) to partition the amount of variance residing at the within- versus the between-individual levels of analysis. As presented in Table 1, the null models revealed that the within-individual level accounted for between 46% (for attribution to identity maintenance and positive affect motives) and 60% (for supervisor-directed citizenship behavior) of the variance in our focal constructs. Considering the substantial amount of within-person variance, these results confirm that a multilevel modeling approach is appropriate. In addition, they suggest that a given employee perceived different reasons for his or her supervisor's fair treatment from one weekly event to the next.

Test of Measurement Model

We conducted a multilevel confirmatory factor analysis to determine whether the constructs measured in our study were distinguishable from each other. The results of the multilevel confirmatory factor analysis confirmed that our proposed eight-factor, within-person (i.e., attributions to a supervisor establishing fairness motive, identity maintenance motive, effecting compliance

Table 1
Variance Components of Null Models for Level 1 Variables

Variable	Within-individual variance (ρ^2)	Between-individual variance (τ_{00})	Percentage of variability within-individual
Overall fairness	.29[*]	.29[*]	50%
Establishing fairness motive	.51[*]	.55[*]	48%
Identity maintenance motive	.52[*]	.61[*]	46%
Effecting compliance motive	.58[*]	.66[*]	47%
Positive affect motive	.60[*]	.71[*]	46%
Trust in the supervisor[a]	.40[*]	.39[*]	51%
Positive affect[a]	.55[*]	.62[*]	47%
Citizenship behavior[b]	.37[*]	.25[*]	60%

Note. ρ^2 = within-individual variance in the dependent variable; τ_{00} = between-individual variance in the dependent variable. Percentage of variability within-individual was computed as $\rho^2/(\rho^2 + \tau_{00})$.
[a] In response to event. [b] Following the event.
[*] $p < .05$.

motive, and positive affect motive, trust in the supervisor and positive affect in response to the event, supervisor-directed citizenship behavior, and overall fairness) and one-factor between-person (i.e., trust propensity) model fit the data well. Specifically, $\chi^2(571) = 1602.87$ ($p < .01$), CFI = .93, RMSEA = .05, and SRMR-within = .04. Moreover, all items loaded significantly on their corresponding factor ($p < .05$). This model fit the data better than all 28 constrained models in which any two of the eight within-person factors were combined, $637.67 \leq \Delta\chi^2s$ ($\Delta df = 7$) ≤ 1832.01. These results demonstrate the dimensionality and discriminant validity of our measures and confirm our modeling approach.

Qualitative Data on Weekly Fair Events

At the beginning of each weekly survey, participants were first asked to write about the fairest event that occurred in dealing with their supervisor that week. They were also asked to specify which of the dimensions of justice (i.e., distributive, procedural, informational, and/or interpersonal) they believed were relevant to the fair event. Across the 613 fair events and 171 participants, fair events covered myriad situations spanning all four dimensions of justice—167 (27.2%) were relevant to distributions, 144 (23.5%) were relevant to procedures, 269 (43.9%) were relevant to information, and 230 (37.5%) were relevant to interpersonal interactions. Table 2 displays qualitative examples of the fair events that participants described.

Descriptive Statistics and Correlations

The means, standard deviations, and correlations are reported in Table 3. The coefficient alphas (averaged across weeks of the data collection for within-individual variables) are reported on the diagonal in parentheses.

Test of Hypotheses

The results of the multilevel path analysis testing our hypotheses are shown in Figure 1 and Table 4. We controlled for the overall fairness of the event on all endogenous variables to demonstrate the effects of motive attribution and our mediating mechanisms over and above the fairness of the treatment itself (we note that our results are robust to the removal of this control variable). Hypothesis 1, which predicted that the extent to which a fair event is attributed to a supervisor establishing fairness motive is positively associated with trust in the supervisor in response to the event, was supported ($\gamma = .10$, $p < .05$). Hypothesis 2, which predicted that the extent to which a fair event is attributed to a supervisor identity maintenance motive is negatively associated with trust in the supervisor in response to the event, was not supported ($\gamma = .03$, ns).

Hypothesis 3 predicted that the relationship between the extent to which a fair event is attributed to an effecting compliance motive and trust in the supervisor in response to the event is moderated by trust propensity. Specifically, we expected the relationship to be more positive for employees high in trust propensity and more negative for employees low in trust propensity. This hypothesis was supported ($\gamma = .14$, $p < .05$). Figure 2 presents the plot of this interaction at conditional values of trust propensity, specifically at one *SD* above and below the mean (Cohen, Cohen, West, & Aiken, 2003). As predicted, the relationship between the extent to which the fair event was attributed to an effecting compliance motive and trust in the supervisor in response to the

Table 2
Qualitative Examples of Fair Events per Justice Dimension

Justice dimension	Example quote
Distributive justice	"I was given extra clients because I showed the proper skills."
	"[Supervisor] tasked me to represent Treasury at an important CFO meeting. I thought her decision to send me as a delegate was fair because of all her direct reports, I was the most qualified to represent Treasury at this meeting."
Procedural justice	"She included me in a meeting so I could voice my opinion on a situation that I really cannot make the decision but will have to relay to others the outcome. As I am the contact person for those who the decision would really impact I thought it very fair to include me in the meeting when she did not have too."
	"This week, my supervisor helped clarify a legal matter on our team. We work with a client who does work for the government and has security measures to ensure privacy and protection of intellectual property. We had an opportunity to get some support from a resource in India, and my supervisor helped us wade through the contract documents to understand if our client would allow work from someone outside of the United States. He looked at all of the facts, and made suggestions based on data. He treated all parties very fairly."
Informational justice	"I was given a lot of information on future planning that he didn't have to give me. He did this to make sure I understood the situation as well as be able to make my own decisions more fully in the future."
	"My supervisor shared information about changes happening in our area that will not necessarily affect me as they are major changes happening in about two years when I will be retired."
Interpersonal justice	"My son was in the hospital all last week so I missed a week of work and when I came in Monday [Supervisor] was very concerned and we discussed what was going on with my son, how I was doing, how I felt bad about missing a week of work and he told me not to worry about my job, my son is most important and that I do a great job. Made me feel good."
	"During my manager's staff meeting on Wednesday, 10/8, each analyst talks about what they are doing in their role, as well as outside projects. Last week, I accepted a leadership role within our PRIDE diversity network at [Company], and had mentioned it to her at the beginning of this week. After I had finished updating my group yesterday on what I am working on, [Supervisor] asked if I would like to mention my new leadership role, which I elected to share with the rest of the group at that time. As a member of the LGBT community, while it is appreciate when non-members show tolerance, but it is in no way required, especially in the workplace. However, by [Supervisor] acknowledging this accomplishment of mine, it sets a precedent to her staff that any accomplishment, despite the topic, is always worth recognizing and celebrating. It made me feel more engaged and trusting of my manager."

Table 3
Means, Standard Deviations, and Correlations Among the Study Variables

Variable	M	SD	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12
Level 1 variables														
1. Overall fairness	4.21	0.47	(.97)											
2. Trust in the supervisor[a] (T − 1)	3.41	0.86	.06	(.91)										
3. Positive affect[a] (T − 1)	3.23	1.03	.10*	.28*	(.92)									
4. Citizenship behavior (T − 1)	3.57	0.77	.00	.39*	.26*	(.85)								
5. Establishing fairness motive	3.12	0.61	.21*	−.04	.01	.05	(.93)							
6. Identity maintenance motive	3.37	0.61	.14*	−.06	.03	.04	.22*	(.97)						
7. Effecting compliance motive	3.02	0.63	.12*	−.02	.06	.00	.16*	.36*	(.95)					
8. Positive affect motive	3.09	0.66	.13*	−.04	−.05	.02	.20*	.26*	.19*	(.96)				
9. Trust in the supervisor[a]	3.39	0.61	.11*	.15*	.11*	.00	.11*	.06	.05	.04	(.91)			
10. Positive affect[a]	3.18	0.74	.14*	.04	−.03	.03	.16*	.08*	.14*	.24*	.23*	(.92)		
11. Citizenship behavior[b]	3.53	0.61	.18*	−.03	.15*	.12*	.07	.08*	.11*	.10*	.36*	.27*	(.85)	
Level 2 variable														
12. Trust propensity	3.52	0.56	.11	−.02	.05	.00	−.04	−.09	.02	.13	−.01	.13	.04	(.80)

Note. Level 2 *n* = 171. Level 1 *n* = 613. Between-individual correlations and standard deviations are reported for the level 2 variable. Within-individual correlations and standard deviations are reported for level 1 variables. Coefficient alphas (averaged across the five weeks of the data collection) are reported on the diagonal. T − 1 = previous week.
[a] In response to event.   [b] Following the event.
* *p* < .05.

event was more positive for employees high in trust propensity and more negative for those low in trust propensity. Trust propensity explained 38.5% of the variance in the within-individual slopes between the extent to which the fair event was attributed to a supervisor effecting compliance motive and trust in the supervisor in response to the event.[5] Overall, our model explained 23.2% of the within-individual variance in trust in the supervisor in response to the event.

Hypothesis 4, which predicted that the extent to which a fair event is attributed to a supervisor positive affect motive is positively associated with employee positive affect in response to the event, was supported (γ = .25, *p* < .01). Overall, our model explained 16.6% of the within-individual variance in employee positive affect in response to the event.

Hypothesis 5 predicted that employee trust in the supervisor in response to a fair event mediates the effects of the extent to which a fair event is attributed to cognitive motives (i.e., establishing fairness, identity maintenance, and the effecting compliance and trust propensity interaction) on supervisor-directed citizenship behavior following the event. In support of hypothesis 5a, our results showed a positive and significant indirect effect of the extent to which the fair event was attributed to a supervisor establishing fairness motive to supervisor-directed citizenship behavior following the event through employee trust in the supervisor in response to the event (estimate = .02; 95% CI [.004, .054]). Hypothesis 5b, however, was not supported because of the lack of a significant first stage path. Thus, the indirect effect of the extent to which the fair event was attributed to a supervisor identity maintenance motive to supervisor-directed citizenship behavior following the event through employee trust in the supervisor in response to the event was not significant (estimate = .01; 95% CI [−.017, .034]). To test whether the cross-level interaction between the within-person extent to which the fair event was attributed to a supervisor effecting compliance motive and between-person trust propensity was mediated through trust in the supervisor in response to the event to supervisor-directed citizenship behavior following the

event, we tested the 95% CI for the difference in the conditional indirect effect at high and low (±1 *SD*) levels of trust propensity. The difference in the conditional indirect effect was significant (estimate = .03; 95% CI [.006, .081]), providing support for hypothesis 5c (Hayes, 2015).

Hypothesis 6 predicted that employee positive affect in response to a fair event mediates the effects of the extent to which a fair event is attributed to a positive affect motive on supervisor-directed citizenship behavior following the event. Consistent with this hypothesis, employee positive affect in response to the event mediated the effects of the extent to which the fair event was attributed to a supervisor positive affect motive on supervisor-directed citizenship behavior following the event (estimate = .03; 95% CI [.010, .050]). Overall, our model explained 17.0% of the within-individual variance in supervisor-directed citizenship behavior following the event.

Supplemental Tests of Research Questions

To explore our first two research questions, we reestimated our model including cross-cutting paths (attribution to supervisor cognitive motives with positive affect in response to the event and attribution to a supervisor positive affect motive with trust in the supervisor in response to the event). The results of this model are presented in Table 5. Although bivariate correlations revealed weak relationships between attribution to each of the supervisor cognitive motives and employee positive affect in response to the event, these paths were not significant in our path model. That is, we observed no cross-cutting effects between attribution to any of the supervisor

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[5] Additional analyses revealed that trust propensity did not moderate the relationships between the extent to which a fair event is attributed to a supervisor establishing fairness motive (γ = −.06, n.s.) as well as the extent to which a fair event is attributed to a supervisor identity maintenance motive (γ = −.05, n.s.) and trust in the supervisor in response to the event.
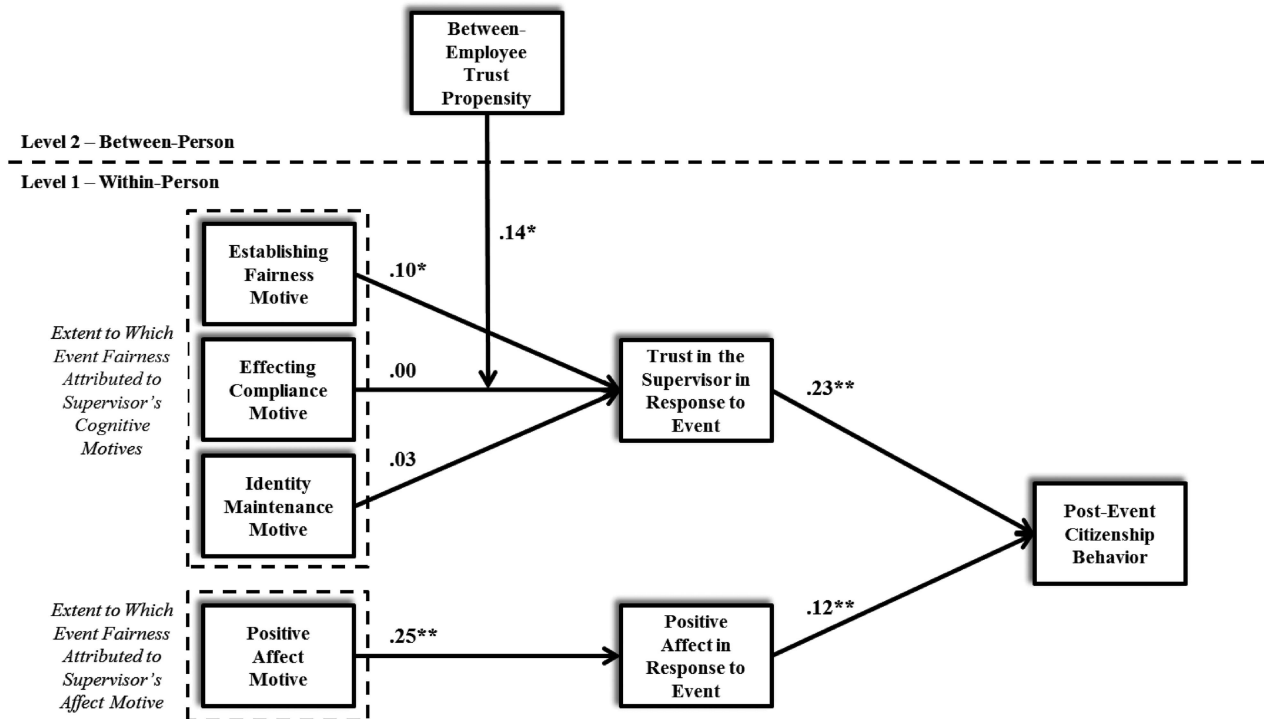
Figure 1. Results of multilevel path analysis for hypothesized model. Level 2 *n* = 171. Level 1 *n* = 613. * *p* < .05. ** *p* < .01.

cognitive motives and employee positive affect in response to the event or between attribution to a supervisor positive affect motive and employee trust in the supervisor in response to the event once the shared variance across the motives was partialed out.

We also explored the extent to which attribution to supervisor motives co-occurred on a week-to-week basis and whether the co-occurrence of multiple supervisor motives for fair treatment resulted in interactive effects. Beginning with attribution co-

Table 4
Results of Multilevel Path Analysis

Variable	Trust in supervisor γ	Positive affect γ	Citizenship behavior γ
Intercept	3.34** (.37)	3.26** (.28)	1.92** (.43)
Level 1 controls			
Overall fairness of event	.01 (.08)	.25** (.08)	.18* (.07)
Previous week trust in supervisor	.02 (.11)		
Previous week positive affect		−.03 (.08)	
Previous week citizenship behavior			.13 (.08)
Level 1 predictors			
Attribution to an establishing fairness motive	.10* (.05)		.01 (.05)
Attribution to an identity maintenance motive	.03 (.05)		.01 (.02)
Attribution to an effecting compliance motive	.00 (.05)		.03 (.03)
Attribution to a positive affect motive		.25** (.04)	.01 (.02)
Level 2 predictor			
Trust propensity	−.01 (.10)		
Cross-level interaction			
Attribution to an effecting Compliance Motive × Trust Propensity	.14* (.06)		
Level 1 mediators			
Trust in supervisor			.23** (.06)
Positive affect			.12** (.03)
Variance explained			
Level 1 pseudo-R^2	23.2%	16.6%	17.0%

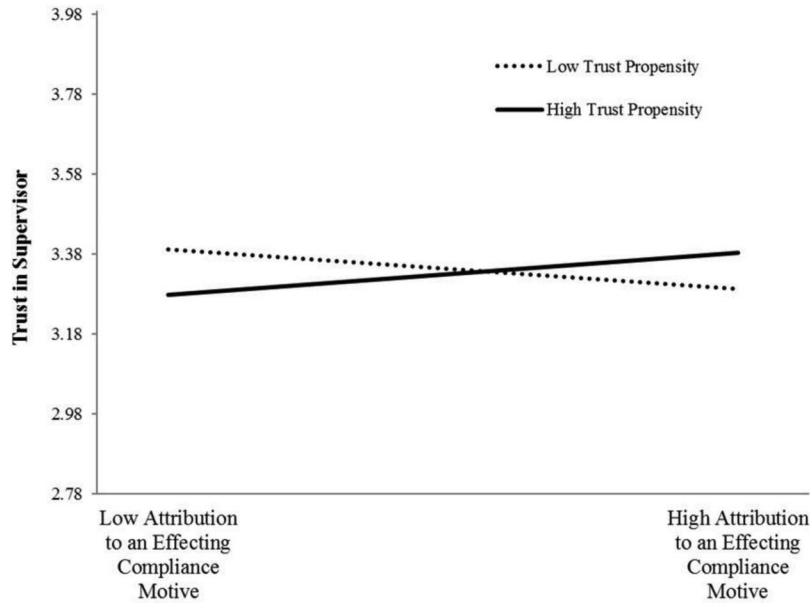*Note.* Level 2 *n* = 171. Level 1 *n* = 613.
* *p* < .05. ** *p* < .01.

Figure 2. Cross-level interaction of trust propensity on random slope between attribution to a supervisor effecting compliance motive and trust in the supervisor.

occurrence, the shared variance across attributed motives ranged from 3% to 13% (average = 6%), depending on the particular set of supervisor motives for fair treatment considered. Thus, it does appear that dual attributions may occur to some extent in certain cases. We note that the amount of shared variance in attributed motives is quite similar to what has been shown in motive attribution studies in other domains (e.g., Allen & Rush, 1998; Halbesleben et al., 2010; Johnson et al., 2002; Lam et al., 2007; Rodell

& Lynch, 2016). Turning to the potential implications of co-occurring attributions to supervisor motives for fair treatment, we tested for potential interactive effects. When predicting trust in the supervisor in response to the event, the results of these analyses revealed that (a) the extent to which a fair event is attributed to an establishing fairness motive did not interact with the extent to which a fair event is attributed to an identity maintenance motive ($\gamma = -.08$, *ns*), an effecting compliance motive ($\gamma = -.05$, *ns*), or

Table 5

Results of Multilevel Path Analysis With All Motives Predicting Trust in Supervisor and Positive Affect

Variable	Trust in supervisor γ	Positive affect γ	Citizenship behavior γ
Intercept	3.35^{**} (.37)	3.29^{**} (.30)	1.88^{**} (.44)
Level 1 controls			
Overall fairness of event	.01 (.08)	$.22^*$ (.09)	.13 (.08)
Previous week trust in supervisor	.01 (.11)		
Previous week positive affect		$-.03$ (.09)	
Previous week citizenship behavior			.14 (.13)
Level 1 predictors			
Attribution to an establishing fairness motive	$.10^*$ (.05)	.01 (.05)	.01 (.05)
Attribution to an identity maintenance motive	.03 (.05)	$-.03$ (.06)	.01 (.02)
Attribution to an effecting compliance motive	.00 (.05)	.01 (.06)	.03 (.03)
Attribution to a positive affect motive	.00 (.04)	$.22^{**}$ (.05)	.01 (.02)
Level 2 predictor			
Trust propensity	$-.01$ (.10)		
Cross-level interaction			
Attribution to an effecting Compliance Motive × Trust Propensity	$.14^*$ (.07)		
Level 1 mediators			
Trust in supervisor			$.24^{**}$ (.07)
Positive affect			$.11^{**}$ (.04)
Variance explained			
Level 1 pseudo-R^2	23.7%	24.6%	17.0%

Note. Level 2 *n* = 171. Level 1 *n* = 613.
$^* p < .05.$ $^{**} p < .01.$

a positive affect motive ($\gamma = .04$, *ns*), (b) the extent to which a fair event is attributed to an identity maintenance motive did not interact with the extent to which a fair event is attributed to an effecting compliance motive ($\gamma = -.10$, *ns*) or a positive affect motive ($\gamma = -.09$, *ns*), and (c) the extent to which a fair event is attributed to an effecting compliance motive did not interact with the extent to which a fair event is attributed to a positive affect motive ($\gamma = -.20$, *ns*). When predicting positive affect in response to the event, the extent to which a fair event is attributed to a positive affect motive did not interact with the extent to which a fair event is attributed to an establishing fairness motive ($\gamma = -.05$, *ns*) or an effecting compliance motive ($\gamma = .20$, *ns*), but it did interact with the extent to which a fair event is attributed to an identity maintenance motive ($\gamma = -.17$, $p < .05$). As depicted in Figure 3, the positive effect of the extent to which a fair event is attributed to a positive affect motive on positive affect in response to the event was weaker when the fair event was also attributed to an identity maintenance motive and stronger when not.[6]

Discussion

As the literature on organizational justice has continued to progress into a more mature stage of its lifecycle, we have a well-developed understanding of the effects of justice on outcomes such as trust, affect, and citizenship behavior (Colquitt et al., 2013). Considering the mature status of the literature, it is often necessary for scholars to "go against the grain" and challenge weakly held assumptions to advance the literature in more significant ways (Colquitt, 2012). One such assumption—identified in this article—is that, although scholars have created an expansive understanding of how employees react to perceptions of fair treatment, we ignore the reasons why employees believe their supervisor acted fairly in the first place, implicitly assuming that the end (i.e., being treated fairly) is all that matters and why that end came to be (motives attributed for that treatment) is irrelevant. Our theory and results challenge this assumption.

Consistent with our motive attribution theorizing derived from Heider's (1958) foundational work, our results demonstrated that employees can indeed perceive various motives behind fair treatment. Specifically, we showed that employees vary in the extent to which they attribute supervisor fair treatment from event to event to the cognitive and affective motives identified by the justice actor model (Scott et al., 2009, 2014). In fact, the amount of within-person variance in attribution to each of the supervisor motives varied as much within-person (within-supervisor) as between-person (between-supervisor).

More importantly, not only did these attribution processes occur, but they also explained incremental variance in week-to-week work outcomes above and beyond the fairness of the event itself. This suggests that even if a given employee perceives that two events were equally fair, the perceived reasons behind the event have a unique impact on that employee's reactions. Thus, not all fairness is created equal. For example, when employees attributed fair treatment to a greater extent to an establishing fairness motive, levels of trust in the supervisor and subsequent supervisor-directed citizenship behavior increased that week. Considering that an establishing fairness motive is grounded in the premise of acting fairly because it is the "right thing to do" to maintain a just world

(Lerner, 1980), it does appear that supervisors get a "boost" in work outcomes when employees perceive them as engaging in fair treatment for the "right" (i.e., non self-serving) reasons.

The reverse does not necessarily seem to be true when employees perceive their supervisors as acting fairly for more self-serving, instrumental reasons. When employees attributed fair treatment to a greater extent to an identity maintenance motive, our study failed to support a "penalty" in terms of trust in the supervisor and subsequent supervisor-directed citizenship behavior that week. In this case, it appears that employees may be hesitant to penalize supervisors who are ultimately behaving in a fair manner, even if that behavior is attributed as self-serving for the supervisor. Just as Heider (1958, p. 255) noted that "Pain is disagreeable in itself, and though its coloration can be widely changed by different attribution, its core negative value persists," the same may be somewhat true of the positive value of fair treatment.

Interestingly, the lack of result for attribution to an identity maintenance motive is consistent with some work in the motive attribution domain. For example, although the literature shows that attribution to altruistic and intrinsic motives play a consistently positive role, the results for impression management and instrumental motives is less clear. That is, some studies show negative effects (e.g., Eastman, 1994; Halbesleben et al., 2010; Lam et al., 2007), others show partial support for negative effects (e.g., Rodell & Lynch, 2016), and still others fail to support negative effects (e.g., Allen & Rush, 1998; Johnson et al., 2002).

Our results also support our contention that employees perceiving their supervisor as acting fairly to facilitate reciprocation in the ledger of social exchange can be a "double-edged sword." On the one hand, when employees high in trust propensity attributed fair treatment to a greater extent to an effecting compliance motive,

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[6] We conducted a series of additional supplemental analyses to test the robustness of our model. First, we controlled for the extent to which the fair event was attributed to a negative affect motive as well as negative affect in response to the event. Attributing fair events to supervisor negative affect motives did occur in our data but were quite rare (e.g., only 3.3% of fair events scored greater than two on a five-point scale). The results of all of the hypothesis tests were unchanged in this model. Second, because fair events could be relevant to various dimensions of justice (i.e., distributive, procedural, informational, and interpersonal), we captured data on what dimensions of justice the fair event was related to each week (allowing the participant to choose one or multiple dimensions) and controlled for the dimension. We found no differences in the support for hypotheses when controlling for dummy codes representing the dimension of justice (i.e., distributive, procedural, informational, and interpersonal) relevant to the fair event on all endogenous constructs. Third, we tested our model without control variables (i.e., overall fairness and lagged criteria). The results of all of the hypothesis tests were unchanged. Finally, we conducted an additional analysis to examine the potential of reverse causality. Because the degrees of freedom in the reverse causal model do not differ from the degrees of freedom in our primary model, we compared these non-nested models using Akaike information criterion (AIC) and Bayesian information criterion (BIC; for similar examples testing reverse causality, see Jin, Seo, & Shapiro, 2016; Matta et al., 2017; Ou et al., 2014). Smaller AIC and BIC values are preferred when comparing models because the model with the smallest AIC and BIC is "the one most likely to replicate" (Kline, 2011, p. 220). The results of comparing the primary model to the reverse causal model showed that the hypothesized model (AIC = 8253.04, BIC = 8500.47) had lower AIC and BIC than the reverse causal model (AIC = 15906.45, BIC = 16264.34), demonstrating that the hypothesized model provided superior fit to the data. Detailed results of each of these analyses are available upon request from Fadel K. Matta.
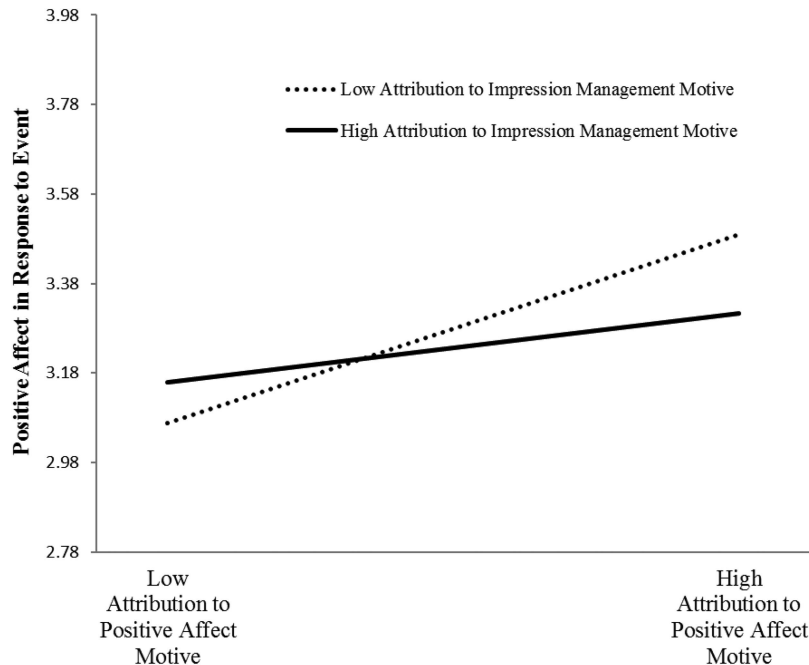
Figure 3. Within-person interaction between the extent to which a fair event is attributed to an identity maintenance motive and a positive affect motive on positive affect in response to the event.

they responded more favorably in terms of trust in the supervisor and subsequent supervisor-directed citizenship behavior that week. On the other hand, when employees low in trust propensity attributed fair treatment to a greater extent to an effecting compliance motive, they responded less favorably. These differing reactions parallel the contrasts from the "fundamental social dilemma"—that is, trusting an authority can provide valuable outcomes but can also make one vulnerable to exploitation (Lind, 2001; Van den Bos, 2001). Considering that trust propensity influenced which reaction was more likely to emerge, the results of our study show that trust propensity continues to play an important role in altering the effects of justice-related phenomena (cf., Colquitt et al., 2006).

Although our study explores the cognitive aspects that have been the focus of extant motive attribution work (e.g., Allen & Rush, 1998; Eastman, 1994; Johnson et al., 2002; Lam et al., 2007; Rodell & Lynch, 2016), our study also demonstrates an overlooked affective side to motive attribution. In line with conscious emotional contagion processes—whereby emotions of others serve as social information that influence one's own emotional state (Barsade, 2002; Hennig-Thurau et al., 2006; Netemeyer et al., 2010), when employees attributed fair treatment to a greater extent to positive affect motives, those positive affective states were "caught" by employees, ultimately influencing their engagement in supervisor-directed citizenship behavior that week. Although we have seen a recent push in the justice literature to integrate affective perspectives (Colquitt, 2012; Colquitt et al., 2013), the above results continue to highlight the value of exploring the cognitive and affective reactions to justice-related phenomena in tandem.

We also found some evidence for the co-occurrence of attribution to multiple supervisor motives for the same fair event. Moreover, when it came to the extent to which a fair event was attributed to an identity maintenance motive and a positive affect

motive, this co-occurrence appeared to have implications for outcomes that week. Specifically, the extent to which a fair event was attributed to an identity maintenance motive contextualized the effects of attribution to a positive affect motive, buffering the positive affective benefits of such attributions. Thus, although we found little support for the negative main effects for the extent to which a fair event was attributed to an identity maintenance motive, attribution to an identity maintenance motive does appear to have a dark side in terms of thwarting the positive emotional contagion processes resulting from the extent to which a fair event is attributed to a positive affect motive.

Before proceeding, we note that, on the surface, the magnitude of our coefficients (in some cases) appear somewhat small. Interpreting individual coefficients, however, can be deceiving in an ESM study with group-mean centering because the coefficients represent deviations from an individual's baseline (Beal, 2015; Enders & Tofighi, 2007). For this reason, effect sizes tend to be much smaller in experience sampling work. As noted by Lanaj, Kim, Koopman, and Matta (2018, p. 19), "Effect sizes tend to be smaller in experience sampling research such as ours (Liu et al., 2015; Uy, Lin, & Ilies, 2017), because these studies focus on explaining within-person variance rather than total variance." In terms of the overall within-person effect sizes, our model explained 23.2%, 16.6%, and 17.0% of the week-to-week variance in trust in the supervisor, positive affect, and citizenship behavior, which compare favorably with other experience sampling studies (e.g., Foulk, Lanaj, Tu, Erez, & Archambeau, 2018; Gabriel, Koopman, Rosen, & Johnson, 2018; Liu, Song, Li, & Liao, 2017; Liu et al., 2015; Mitchell, Greenbaum, Vogel, Mawritz, & Keating, 2019; Tepper et al., 2018; Uy, Lin, & Ilies, 2017).

We also note that even small deviations on a week-to-week basis become quite impactful when considered over longer dura-

tions. For example, a .10 to .15 (on a 5-point scale) change in trust in the supervisor on a weekly basis resulting from an attribution to a particular motive would correspond to a change of .50 to .75 if an employee were to attribute justice relatively greatly to that motive each week across the duration of our five-week study. Extrapolating beyond our five-week window, these effects are even more sizable when considered over durations often examined in between-person research and used for evaluation purposes by practitioners (e.g., a 52-week year). Because trust in the supervisor and positive affect are critical factors that influence a number of important outcomes (Colquitt et al., 2007; Lyubomirsky, King, & Diener, 2005), these fluctuations are likely to have substantial practical meaning.

Practical Implications

Our study also has important implications for practice. First and foremost, our results indicate the importance of employee perceptions of motives for fair treatment from supervisors. Indeed, employees respond to the exact same level of fair treatment in differing ways depending upon what they perceive to be their supervisor's motives for that fair treatment. Our results suggest that managers can benefit if their employees attribute their fair treatment to a motive to establish fairness. Ironically, initial research suggests that an establishing fairness motive is the motive used least often by supervisors (Scott et al., 2014). Thus, our research suggests that supervisors should think about fair treatment more as something to do for its own sake as opposed to something that is done for instrumental reasons.

Second, our study highlights the importance of identifying employees who are high and low in trust propensity. When employees are high in trust propensity, they will likely respond favorably to fair treatment that is believed to be targeted at establishing a social exchange. However, when employees are low in trust propensity, such a belief may backfire. Any understanding that managers can accrue about the trust propensity of an employee will aid them in identifying whether conveying such a motive will be fruitful, particularly because a motive to effect compliance appears to be a strong driver of their justice rule adherence (Scott et al., 2014).

Third, our study provides further evidence of the importance of supervisor affective displays (for reviews, see Gooty et al., 2010; Rajah et al., 2011; van Knippenberg & van Kleef, 2016). When supervisors act fairly because they are experiencing positive emotions, those emotions are often consciously "caught" by employees. Considering the important role that emotions play in work contexts (Barsade & Gibson, 2007), managers would be well-served to display or regulate specific emotions within the context of fair treatment because such emotions are likely to transfer to employees.

Limitations and Suggestions for Future Research

Though our study has several strengths (e.g., consideration of multiple attributed motives simultaneously, multiple fair events per employee, experience sampling design to mitigate memory biases, controlling for event level fairness, use of group-mean centering to control for between-person confounds, controlling for lagged criteria), there are several limitations that should be noted. First, because our repeated measures were captured using self-reported surveys, some concerns could exist over common method bias (Podsakoff et al., 2003) and our presumed causal order. We chose self-reports because the focal employee is the best source of measurement for the majority of constructs in our model (e.g., attributions about supervisor motives for fair treatment, trust, and affect) and is a common strategy in ESM studies. Moreover, to mitigate concerns over same-source bias, we removed all between-person variance from these constructs by group-mean centering (Enders & Tofighi, 2007). That said, although meta-analytic research demonstrates that "self-rated OCB is not only a viable method of measuring OCB but also that it may represent a preferred manner . . . [and] researchers would likely come to very similar conclusions whether they used self-ratings versus other-ratings of OCB" (Carpenter, Berry, & Houston, 2014, pp. 564– 565), future research could extend our work by using other-reports of behavior. We also took several steps to establish the causal sequence of our constructs (e.g., the referent used in our measures; demonstrating that the hypothesized model provided superior fit to the data in comparison to the reverse causal model in an analysis described in footnote 6). That said, future work using laboratory settings could further establish causation.

Although the difficulty with achieving high response rates in ESM studies is well-documented (Beal, 2015; Gabriel, Podsakoff, et al., 2018), we acknowledge that the drop from 285 potential participants to 185 actual participants in the ESM portion of the study is worth noting. As we elaborated earlier, we found no significant differences between the potential participants and the final sample on age, gender, race, job tenure, supervisor interaction time, or hours worked per week. Moreover, because we group-mean centered our within-person predictors (which results in each observation being compared against that individual's own baseline and removes between-person confounds; Enders & Tofighi, 2007), this is unlikely to bias our within-person effects. Nonetheless, we do not know for certain why these individuals chose not to participate in our ESM study (e.g., didn't fit the study criteria, burden associated with the study, time constraints, lack of motivation, insufficient incentives, or some other reason).

An additional limitation of our study is that we are unaware of how accurate employee motive attributions are. Although an employee may perceive that their supervisor treated them fairly for various cognitive and affective reasons, it is not clear whether their supervisor actually treated them fairly for those same reasons. In many respects, in addition to being consistent with past work on motive attribution (e.g., Allen & Rush, 1998; Eastman, 1994; Halbesleben et al., 2010; Johnson et al., 2002; Lam et al., 2007; Rodell & Lynch, 2016), this is beyond the scope of both our theory and the motive attribution theorizing we rely on to develop our theory. That said, we see explorations into the alignment between supervisor motives for fair treatment and employee attribution of those motives to be a particularly fruitful area for future research.

An additional area for future research would be to explore the effects of justice motive attribution within the context of justice violations and unfair treatment. In our study, we isolated the effects of justice motive attribution within the context of fair treatment. Would we find the same effects for unfair treatment? For example, it could be the case that attributing unfair treatment to an identity maintenance motive (which had no effects in our study of fair treatment) may be particularly deleterious. As another example, the effects of attributions may be stronger in the context

of justice violations and unfair treatment. Indeed, research suggests that individuals are more attentive to justice information and attributions are more salient when outcomes are negative (Brockner & Wiesenfeld, 1996; Weiner, 1985, 1986, 1995).

Exploring unfair treatment may also be a useful context for examining attribution to a supervisor negative affect motive. Although the justice actor model suggests that a supervisor positive affect motive is relevant to fairness and a supervisor negative affect motive is relevant to unfairness (Scott et al., 2009), as noted in footnote 6, our exploratory analyses revealed that employees in rare cases attributed fair treatment to negative affect motives. One theme in these situations from our qualitative data was that, in most cases, the employee and supervisor experienced an aversive event that triggered supervisor negative affect (e.g., guilt for, or anxiety about, the employee's situation), leading them to step in and protect the employee (i.e., act fairly). Acting fairly in response to guilt and anxiety is consistent with research on the action tendencies associated with those emotions. Indeed, work on emotion action tendencies shows that guilt triggers the need to expiate, atone, and make reparation (Lazarus, 1991), and anxiety primes individuals to be situationally attentive and interested (Frijda, Kuipers, & ter Schure, 1989). Nonetheless, we see unfair treatment as a context in which attribution to a supervisor negative affect motive will be more prevalent.

Conclusion

One of the first questions that employees ask following treatment from a supervisor is "was that fair?" (Colquitt, 2001, p. 386). For that reason, it is not surprising that we have an expansive literature on organizational justice that continues to grow. In this article, we have shifted the question to be addressed from "was my supervisor fair?" to "*why* was my supervisor fair?" In doing so, we showed that attributed supervisor motives for fair treatment explained unique variance (over and above the fairness of the event itself) in both the cognitive and affective mechanisms by which justice influences work outcomes over time. Given that supervisors get a "boost" when they are seen as being fair for the "right" reasons, our study holds valuable implications for not only theory but also practice.

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