

TO COMPETE OR NOT TO COMPETE: AN EXAMINATION OF COMPETITION AND
BURNOUT

A Dissertation
Presented to
The Faculty of the Department
of Psychology
University of Houston

In Partial Fulfillment
Of the Requirements for the Degree of
Doctor of Philosophy

By
Azeez Oki
December, 2014

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BURNOUT

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ABSTRACT

The current study proposed a Conservation of Resources Theory-focused moderated mediation model to examine the effect an individual self-concept and perceptions of competitive climate have on feelings of justice and emotional exhaustion. Specifically, the study examined the direct relationship between a competitive climate and emotional exhaustion, while also examining the indirect relationship through distributive justice. The study also examined the moderating role individual self-concept has on the direct path of competitive climate and emotional exhaustion, and the indirect path of competitive climate and distributive justice. Results of the study showed support for the direct relationship between competitive climate and emotional exhaustion, the indirect relationship through distributive justice, and the interaction between competitive climate and individual self-concept on distributive justice. This study further enhances our understanding of the potential negative consequences associated with a competitive climate.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Chapter I

Introduction	1
Consequences of Competition.....	6
Burnout.....	10
Mediating Role of Distributive Justice.....	13
Moderating Role of individual Self-Concept.....	18

Chapter II

Methods	24
Participants and Procedures	24
Measures	25

Chapter III

Results	26
---------------	----

Chapter IV

Discussion	29
Theoretical Implications.....	30
Practical Implications	33
Strengths and Limitations.....	35
Future Directions.....	37
Conclusions.....	39

REFERENCES	41
------------------	----

TABLES	51
--------------	----

FIGURES	57
---------------	----

APPENDICES59

Chapter I

To Compete or not to Compete: An Examination of Competition and Burnout

Motivating employees to perform well has consistently been a top priority for organizations. Managers and supervisors have been deemed responsible for finding alternative and novel ways to motivate their respective employees. Although there is no fool-proof method to motivate employees, research has demonstrated that providing more autonomy, higher pay, and helping employees set goals all contribute to increases in employee motivation (Latham & Pinder, 2005; Locke & Laham, 2002). However, one area where there is still much debate is the idea of fostering a specific climate as a motivating tool.

Organizational climate is defined as the “shared perceptions of and the meaning attached to the policies, practices, and procedures employees experience and the behaviors they observe getting rewarded and that are supported and expected” (Schneider, Ehrhart, & Macey, 2013, p.362). Within this broad definition of climate, researchers have examined more specific forms of organizational climate. Specifically, there has been a large amount of research on service climate (Schneider, Macey, Lee, & Young, 2009), safety climate (Zohar & Luria, 2005), diversity climate (Gonzalez & DeNisi, 2009), and ethical climate (Martin & Cullen, 2006). The purpose of these more finite areas of climate is to establish more specific links to workplace outcomes. One area in this literature where research is seeking to unravel the positive and negative outcomes is a perceived competitive psychological climate, which is defined as the degree to which employees perceive organizational rewards to be contingent on comparisons of their performance against that of their peers (Kohn, 1992).

Competition has been a topic that has implications for developmental, organizational, marketing, educational, and competitive sports research. The fascination with competition stemmed from work done by Triplett (1898) who demonstrated that a child performed better on a task when he was performing next to another child. This fascination with the idea of competition has led many managers in organizations to attempt to establish competitive climates wherein employees can thrive and the organization can prosper as a result (Brown, Cron, & Slocum, 1998). However, research is divided on the utility of competition as a source of motivation. Some researchers have found competition to be inherently positive and a great motivating tool (Festinger, 1954), whereas others have found that competition is detrimental to the workplace due to its relation to poor individual well-being (Johnson & Johnson, 1989). Furthermore, some have found that the utility of competition for improving motivation is dependent on the individuals' desire to compete and the organizational context that allows competition (Fletcher, Major, & Davis, 2008).

Agreeing with Fletcher et al. (2008), I believe the best way to unravel the utility of competition is to use theoretically-based frameworks to understand the underlying mechanisms through which competition impacts employee outcomes and the conditions under which those relationships may be strengthened or weakened. Surprisingly, only two studies have examined competition in this fashion. That is, only two studies have attempted to explain why and when competitive climates lead to desirable outcomes. The paucity of research in this area represents an important gap in our understanding of why and when competition is or is not an effective motivational tool.

For the current study, I propose to examine why and when a competitive climate is associated with an important employee outcome, namely burnout, using the stressor-strain

framework. Burnout affects employees in a wide-range of fields and is often considered one of the most troubling job-strain outcomes due to its relation with other workplace outcomes such as performance, commitment, and satisfaction (Lee & Ashforth, 1996). However, no research to date has examined competitive climate in relation to burnout. Thus, the first goal of my study is to use a Conservation of Resources Theory approach to explain how the perception of a competitive climate may lead to an employee feeling burnout on the job due to a depletion of valued resources.

While examining the direct relationship is important, it is also imperative to examine possible explanatory variables in the direct relationship. One overlooked explanatory variable in the competition literature is employees' reactions to the rewards received. Due to the nature of competition, those reactions could be an important determinant of employees' subsequent attitudes and behavior. For example, a strong indicator of whether a competitive climate is an effective motivating tool may be the actual fairness of the rewards that are distributed (i.e., distributive justice). Research to date has not yet examined distributive justice as a potential consequence of competitive climates or the emotional strain that could occur if justice is low. Thus, the second goal of my study is to use Social Comparison Theory to explain how distributive justice mediates the relationship between competitive psychological climate and emotional exhaustion. By identifying whether distributive justice helps explain the relationship between competitive climate and emotional exhaustion, my study may provide suggestions to help managers further the motivational potential of a competitive climate by attenuating any feelings of poor justice.

Distributive justice may help explain the "why" in the hypothesized relationship between competitive climate and burnout, but it does not reflect the conditions under which

the relationship may be strengthened or weakened. In fact, only two studies have examined the interactionist perspective of competition and outcomes (Brown et al., 1998; Fletcher et al., 2008). These studies examined the impact competitive psychological climate, which is defined as the degree to which employees perceive organizational rewards to be contingent on comparisons of their performance against that of their peers (Kohn 1992), and trait competitiveness, which is defined as a dispositional preference to compete with others (Murayama & Elliot, 2012). Results from these studies showed that those who perceived a competitive climate and were also high on trait competitiveness set more goals, were more satisfied, committed, and dedicated to the job in comparison to those who were low on trait competitiveness.

While past research has examined trait competitiveness as an important condition in the effectiveness of a competitive climate, another individual difference variable that may impact how people respond to a competitive climate is individual self-concept. An individual self-concept refers to individual differences in the extent to which a person forms his/her self-concept by how unique he/she is in relation to others (Johnson & Saboe, 2011). It is my belief that individual self-concept will operate in a similar fashion as trait competitiveness because individual self-concept also focuses on differentiating in social comparisons. Employees with a strong individual self-concept desire to demonstrate their uniqueness in relation to others, and a competitive climate may facilitate employees' ability to focus on their uniqueness relative to others, while a climate that is not competitive could be detrimental for those with a strong individual self-concept.

To date, only two studies have looked at the person and organization context in relation to competition, thus there is need for more research examining this framework.

Research has found that using the interactionist perspective to investigate the joint effects of person and organizational characteristics can contribute meaningfully to the prediction of outcomes, such as attitudes (job satisfaction, job dedication) and behaviors (goal-setting). However, research has been less clear in examining the interactionist perspective's relation to well-being outcomes. Furthermore, there have been conflicting findings in the literature regarding competitive climate and well-being outcomes, with a few studies finding positive relationships, some demonstrating negative relationships, and others finding no significant relationship between the two.

The final goal of my study is to examine how the strength of individual self-concept moderates the mediated relationship between competitive climate and emotional exhaustion. Specifically, I expect that employees who possess a strong individual self-concept may perceive a competitive climate as an ideal work condition instead of a potential stressor. This could lead those with a strong individual self-concept to experience less emotional exhaustion and higher perceptions of distributive justice in comparison to those with a weak individual self-concept. This will be the first paper to examine the interactionist perspective of competition as it relates to organizational justice and burnout.

Findings of this study could have implications for research and practice. For practitioners, this study could reinforce to managers the importance of understanding the personality of their employees before attempting to use competition as a motivational tool. It will also provide managers with examples of specific potential outcomes to consider when implementing a competitive climate. For research, this study could lend further credence to examining both organizational and personal characteristics when investigating competition in the workplace. It may also help clarify a possible underlying mechanism in distributive

justice and theoretical framework in Conservation of Resources Theory through which competitive climate operates to yield negative outcomes.

I first review the literature on competition. In doing so, I discuss the most frequent theoretical rationales for explaining how competition affects employees and discuss the discrepancies in the literature with regard to the outcomes associated with a competitive climate. Specifically, I discuss the conflicting findings in relation to performance and psychological well-being. I then introduce burnout and review the literature on emotional exhaustion and explain the hypothesized relationship between competitive climate and emotional exhaustion using Conservation of Resources Theory. Next, I review the literature on organizational justice and explain why I expect distributive justice to act as a mediator in the aforementioned relationship. Finally, I introduce the interactionist perspective and explain how I expect individual self-concept to moderate the mediated relationship between competitive climate and exhaustion (see Figure 1 for hypothesized model). To accomplish this, I rely on Fit Theory and Conservation of Resources Theory.

Consequences of Competition

“Understand that if they (employees) become demotivated, it is because of the environment in which they work. Strong and courageous leaders recognize that such an environment is their own failure. Understanding that can prevent you from misdirecting resources into unnecessary efforts to motivate staff” (Roulett, 2009).

The above quote was taken from a news article about the importance of providing the right amount of resources to effectively motivate employees. Some researchers feel that competition can be demotivating to employees, while others view competition as a strong motivational tool (Deutsch, 1949). Predominantly, research has conceptualized competition

in two different manners: structural and intentional. Structural competition refers to competition that is inherent in situations, while intentional competition is more personal and attitudinal (Brown et al., 1998). An example of structured competition could be playing a sport such as basketball or football. In the context of success, there can only be one winner every game; thus, competition is inherent in the structure. An example of intentional competition could be internally making comparisons with others. For example, if two students are taking a test, they both have the opportunity to achieve perfect scores. However, one student may feel it is necessary to outperform the other classmate because of his/her innate drive to compete with others. This act of competition focuses more on a personal choice, than an environmental demand. Both conceptualizations capture an essence of competition, but both are created in different manners. Structured competition can be unintentionally created by organizational policies or workplace environment. Intentional competition is often noted and sought after in the selection process. Competitive psychological climate was derived from these two conceptualizations of competition, and is defined as the degree to which employees perceive organizational rewards to be contingent on comparisons of their performance against that of their peers.

One of the major theories that has been used to explain how competition affects employees is Social Interdependence Theory (Johnson & Johnson, 2005). According to this theory, when a situation is competitive, employees are unable to concurrently achieve goals. That is, “individuals believe that when one person achieves his or her goal, all others with whom he or she is competitively linked with fail to achieve their goals” (Stanne, Johnson, & Johnson, 2005, p. 134). They further state that this leads individuals in competitive situations to have conflicting interactions with peers and seek to interfere with others’ effort to achieve.

The problem with competition, according to the theory, is that predominantly focusing on a comparison other could be a threat to the self and lead individuals to seek self-protection strategies such as self-worth protection, self-handicapping, and defensive pessimism when they compare themselves to someone who may be better off. “Self-worth protection involves withholding effort so attribution of failure can be placed on not trying rather than being incompetent; self-handicapping involves creating an impediment to one’s performance so that an excuse is ready if one fails; defensive pessimism involves unrealistically low expectations for succeeding and valuing of the task to minimize anxiety about succeeding” (Johnson & Johnson, 2005, p. 322). However, while this theory states that making comparisons can have negative consequences to an individual’s self-worth, other theories have also posited that these comparisons could be motivating (Festinger, 1954). That is, individuals seek comparisons with others in order to improve their own standing; thus, any disparity is perceived as a motivational tool to identify gaps and increase progress.

The aforementioned conflicting views of how competition influences employees have not only been theoretical, but also empirical (Arnold, 2009; Johnson et al., 2009; Stanne, Johnson, & Johnson, 1999). That is, empirical studies have yielded conflicting findings with regard to how competition relates to important workplace outcomes such as performance and well-being. For example, Arnold et al., (2009) found competitive climate had no relation with self-rated performance or supervisor-rated performance. However, Johnson et al (2001) measured the effect competition had on performance for a hockey team. Results showed that cooperation and competition were positively related to all facets of performance. In contrast, in their meta-analysis to compare the relationships between competition and cooperation with motor performance, Stanne et al. (1999) found that competition was significantly yet

inconsistently related to motor performance (effect size = .36) in comparison to cooperation. The authors initially expected to find more consistent findings regarding competition due to the tasks being motor-related which lend well to competition. However, they explained that factors such as self-esteem, group cohesion, and social support may explain the modest relationship.

Finally, a recent meta-analysis examined the direct and indirect relationship between competition and performance (Murayama & Elliot, 2012). The authors examined competition as a characteristic of the person (trait competitiveness), as a perception of a situation (perceived environmental competitiveness), and as characteristic of the actual situation (structural competition). Similar to the current study, the authors only focused on intergroup competition, rather than intrapersonal competition (competition between oneself). Results of the meta-analysis demonstrated that there was no correlation between any forms of competition and performance. However, the second part of the study examined whether competition and performance were indirectly related through performance avoidance and approach goals. Performance approach goals represent trying to do well relative to others, while avoidance goals represent trying to avoid doing poorly in comparison to others. Results showed that all conceptualizations of competition were related positively to performance through performance approach goals and negatively related to performance through avoidance goals. The authors concluded that these competing underlying mechanisms may explain why there is often a non-significant relationship between competition and performance.

Inconsistent findings have also been shown in relation to psychological well-being outcomes. For example, Johnson and Norem-Hebeisen (1977) conducted a study on 70 high

school seniors to determine how attitudes regarding competition related to different psychological health outcomes. They found that competition was negatively related to delinquency, emotional immaturity, social maladjustment, need for affection, and conflict resolution. Furthermore, competition was positively related with attitudes towards self and social participation. Moreover, Arnold, Flaherty, Voss, and Mowen (2009) found that a competitive climate could help buffer the negative effect of role ambiguity on job efficacy. While these findings seem to demonstrate the positive outcomes that could be associated with competition, Chen and Cheng (2012) found that a competitive psychological climate leads to a decrease in well-being and psychological capital (hope, resiliency, self-efficacy, optimism). However, Johnson, Johnson, and Krotee (2001) found that there was no relationship between competition and indexes of psychological adjustment and health.

To summarize, there is a lack of consensus in the field regarding competition and outcomes. Competition has been shown to have a positive, negative, and no relation to facets of well-being and performance. If a manager is unsure of the consequences of implementing a competitive climate, then he/she may inadvertently cause unnecessary strain or a decrease in performance. However, competitive climate has not been examined in relation to one of the most job-related strain responses: burnout. Taylor (2012) stated that over 60% of employees identified as feeling burnout on the job. With that said, research has not yet examined the relationship between competitive climate and burnout despite its conflicting relationships with other well-being indicators. It is for this reason that I introduce burnout as a possible outcome of a perceived competitive climate.

Burnout

Maslach and Leiter (2008) defined burnout as a psychological syndrome that involves a prolonged response to chronic stressors on the job. In other words, burnout is

conceptualized as a psychological strain response to experienced job stress. Burnout has three dimensions: exhaustion, cynicism, and inefficacy. Exhaustion is the feeling of being overextended and depleted of one's emotional and physical resources. Cynicism or disengagement reflects indifference or a distant attitude towards work. Finally, inefficacy represents the self-evaluation dimension and refers to feelings of incompetence and a lack of achievement at work (Maslach & Leiter, 2008; Schaufeli & Salanova, 2007).

Burnout is a troubling state that has many negative outcomes for employees and organizations. For example, Maslach, Schaufeli, and Leiter (2001) state that burnout is associated with forms of withdrawal, intention to leave, lower productivity, and reduced commitment. Moreover, employees who display burnout symptoms can deplete their colleagues' resources and cause them to display burnout symptoms through a contagion effect (Bakker, Schaufeli, Sixma, & Bosveld, 2001). Although emotional exhaustion alone is not sufficient to fully capture burnout, emotional exhaustion is often considered the critical "1st stage" of burnout (Maslach, 2003). It is for this reason that I only focus on the emotional exhaustion component of burnout.

Conservation of Resources Theory (Hobfoll, 1989) has been used to explain stressor-strain models. The basic premise of this theory states that a loss or lack of resources leads to higher susceptibility to strain outcomes, such as emotional exhaustion. According to Hobfoll (1989), resources are 'those objects, personal characteristics, conditions, or energies that are valued by the individual or that serve as a means for attainment of these objects, personal characteristics, conditions, or energies' (p. 516). The more resources an individual has, the more successfully he/she can cope when faced with stressful situations. However, when

resources are threatened, strain outcomes such as emotional exhaustion can result (Hobfoll, 1989).

Emotional exhaustion has been shown to be related to a plethora of significant workplace outcomes. A meta-analysis by Lee and Ashforth (1996) demonstrated that emotional exhaustion was positively related to job stressors and negatively related to job resources and workplace attitudes, such as turnover intentions, job satisfaction, and job commitment. Research has also shown emotional exhaustion to relate to performance-related outcomes, such as organizational performance and organizational citizenship behaviors, (Cropanzano, Rupp, & Byrne, 2003; Huang, Chan, Lam, & Nan, 2010). Finally, research has demonstrated how positive environmental factors such as clarity, autonomy, innovative work, and social support are all related negatively to feelings of emotional exhaustion (Goddard, O'Brien, & Goddard, 2006; Lee & Ashforth, 1996). While no study to my knowledge has directly examined the relationship between a competitive psychological climate and emotional exhaustion, Conservation of Resources Theory (Hobfoll, 1989) provides a framework to explain why employees who work in a competitive climate might also experience high levels of emotional exhaustion.

One aspect of Conservation of Resources Theory states then when individuals are ill equipped to gain resources, they are likely to be vulnerable to strain outcomes and use self-protection strategies to protect their resources (Hobfoll, 1989). Once the element of competition has been made salient in the workplace, social comparisons that employees make are often for the sake of protecting one's self worth. As a result, employees in a competitive climate may try to obstruct each other's success, enhance the power differences, and partake in deceptive communication (Johnson & Johnson, 2005). Moreover, forcing an

employee to view his/her coworkers as competitors instead of cooperative peers may put emotional demands on the employee and deprive him/her of emotional resources. Emotional demands are work related tasks that require emotional effort, while emotional job resources are sources of emotional support that can be deployed to deal with job demands (De Jonge, Le Blanc, Peeters, & Noordam, 2008). In this example, the emotional demand is the competitive climate in which an employee works, while the emotional resource is the social support one would expect from fellow employees. In a competitive climate, employees may be less able to seek social emotional support from their fellow employees because they are considered the competition, and thus other employees may not be trusted to provide appropriate emotional support. Recent research has shown that emotional exhaustion relates negatively to emotional resources and positively to emotional demands (De Jonge et al., 2008). Thus, following Conservation of Resources Theory (Hobfoll, 1989), I make the following hypothesis.

H1: Competitive psychological climate will be positively related to emotional exhaustion.

Mediating Role of Distributive Justice

Thus far by using Conservation of Resources Theory, I have argued that a competitive psychological climate is a stressor that may be related to emotional exhaustion. However, this only demonstrates the direct relationship, but there may an indirect process through which a competitive climate could relate to emotional exhaustion. I posit that competitive climate is related to emotional exhaustion through a decrease in perceived distributive justice. In the sections that follow, I briefly review the literature on justice with a particular focus on distributive justice. I then use components of Social Comparison Theory

and Conservation of Resources Theory to explain how a competitive climate would be related to distributive justice and, by extension, emotional exhaustion

Organizational justice continues to be a strong motivational explanatory construct in the I/O literature. Justice theories have helped explain employee reactions, attitudes, and behaviors (Greenberg, 1987). An examination of the dimensionality of organizational justice by Colquitt (2001) demonstrated that there are four unique dimensions of organizational justice: distributive, procedural, interpersonal, and informational. With its basis in Equity Theory (Adams, 1965), distributive justice refers to the perceived fairness of outcomes one receives from a social exchange or interaction. Procedural justice refers to the perceived fairness of procedures used in decision making about the distribution of outcomes.

Interpersonal justice refers to the degree to which people are treated with care, dignity, and respect by authorities involved in executing procedures. Finally, informational justice refers to the extent to which people are provided with explanations that convey information about why outcomes or procedures were handled in a certain manner (Adams, 1965; Bies & Moag, 1986; Greenberg, 1990; Thibaut & Walker, 1975).

As previously defined, a competitive psychological climate is one wherein rewards are believed to be based on a performance comparison with other employees. Whereas the fairness of decision making processes, the information received, and the manner in which it was delivered are important aspects of justice, the feelings of fairness in reward distribution are likely to be most relevant in the context of a competitive climate. In such climates, employee rewards are determined not by their absolute level of effort, but by their contributions relative to others. As such, the current study focuses on only distributive justice.

Distributive justice has been shown to be related to significant workplace attitudes and behaviors. For example, distributive justice has been shown to be positively related to pay satisfaction supervisor commitment (Folger & Konovsky, 1989), and intent to turnover (Soltis, Agneessens, Sasovova, & Labianca, 2013). Furthermore, research has shown that distributive justice has longitudinal effects on organizational attitudes even after the allocation of resources decision was made (Ambrose & Cropanzano, 2003). A few meta-analyses also demonstrated the importance of distributive justice to important performance-related outcomes. Colquitt, Conlon, Wesson, Porter, and Ng (2001) found that distributive justice was related to citizenship behaviors, withdrawal behaviors, job satisfaction, and trust. A meta-analysis conducted by Cohen-Charash and Spector (2001) demonstrated that distributive justice is related with communication, pay raise amount, organizational support, performance appraisal satisfaction, worker performance, and counterproductive work behavior. Finally, Colquitt et al. (2013) found that distributive justice had an indirect relationship with task performance and citizenship behaviors through variables that measure the quality of the social exchange relationship, and through positive and negative affect.

While there has been a surplus of research on justice in relation to attitudes and behaviors, there are also some areas where research is lacking. Specifically, Nowakowski and Conlon (2005) stated that one gap in the justice literature is seeing how specific climates could impact justice perceptions. I rely on Conservation of Resources Theory to explain why a perceived competitive climate may be indirectly related to emotional exhaustion through perceptions of low distributive justice.

According to Conservation of Resources Theory (Hobfoll, 1989), people invest resources to gain resources. There is a long-term expectation that their investment will

produce a payoff in terms of returns, and when it does not, people will experience this as a loss of the expected gain (Hobfoll, 1989). This loss of expected gain could lead to decreased psychological well-being and higher levels of frustration. In the context of a competitive climate, the outcomes that employees receive are determined based on their performance relative to the performance of comparison others instead of their own absolute level of effort. This suggests that an employee may invest resources to the organization but may not receive a return on these resources (e.g., raise, praise, etc). For example, Employee A may increase his/her sales from 50 to 100 magazines in a month, but not receive “employee of the month” because employee B sold 130. While this may be procedurally fair because the highest performer received the reward, it overshadows the fact that Employee A invested a lot of resources in selling the 100 magazines, but he/she did not receive any reward or recognition in return which may result in feelings of poor distributive justice. It is for this reason that I make the following hypothesis.

H2. Competitive psychological climate is negatively related to distributive justice.

The added stress associated with poor distributive justice may make employees more susceptible to strain outcomes. That is, distributive justice may be the mediating mechanism that explains why a competitive climate is associated with higher levels of emotional exhaustion. According to Social Comparison Theory (Festinger, 1954), individuals seek comparisons with others to accurately measure their abilities. In a competitive organizational context, this could translate to employees comparing their input/rewards with that of their peers, employees who are more fortunate (higher rank), and/or employees who are less fortunate. The latter two comparisons capture a concept called upward comparisons and downward comparisons, respectively. While research initially concluded that the

consequences of a downward comparison are positive emotions, and the consequences of an upward comparison are negative emotions (Wills, 1981), more current literature has started to examine other facets that could play a role in these dyadic comparisons. Specifically, research has identified that outperformers (employees who perform better than others) could develop negative feelings when “they perceive themselves to be the target of an upward comparison, believe the resulting comparison will pose a threat to the comparer, and feel concern about the well-being of the comparer, about their interpersonal relationship with the comparer, or that the comparer may try to retaliate as a result of feeling threatened” (Exline & Lobel, 1999; Henagan, 2010, p58).

Hengan (2010) examined competitive psychological climate as a possible antecedent for this feeling described as comparison target discomfort. Hengan asserted that a competitive environment establishes a situation wherein the success of one individual occurs at the expense of another. This kind of situation would yield feelings of envy, resentment, and possible retaliation due to the restricted access to desired outcomes. Results of Hengan’s study demonstrated that there was a positive relationship between competitive psychological climate and comparison target discomfort.

Furthermore, Social Interdependence Theory (Johnson & Johnson, 2005) states that an employee may make attributions as to why a comparison other is performing better than he or she is to protect his/her self-worth. An employee may believe that the comparison other is receiving favorable treatment or has some form of an unfair advantage. This type of thinking serves to protect the employee’s ego and self-worth, but at the same time can drain resources because it is not an effective way of coping with the competitive situation.

To summarize, consistent social comparisons in a competitive climate may make an employee feel that there is poor distributive justice and lead to him/her feeling emotionally exhausted from the job. As stated above, the discomfort associated with comparisons could cause employees to feel resentment and envy towards their fellow employees. It may also result in making false attributions as to why the comparative other is performing better to protect one's self-worth. This would cause them to feel that they are not being awarded appropriately in relation to other employees on the job and that others are performing better because of some form of unfair advantage or treatment. Moreover, if the employee is considered an "outperformer", it is possible that he or she views poor distributive justice because he/she feels sympathy for the comparer due to an already established interpersonal relationship or concern for the comparer's well-being. The constant concern of comparing yourself to others, protecting your self-worth, and being the target of comparison would result in feeling emotionally exhausted on the job due to the resources expended making comparisons and the inability to gain resources in the form of social support from coworkers or by partaking in effective coping. Through negative reactions to comparisons and being compared while simultaneously using self-protection strategies and being rewarded on the basis of a comparison rather than personal inputs, a competitive climate will lead to lower levels of distributive justice and result in employees feeling emotionally exhaustion.

H3. The relationship between competitive psychological climate and emotional exhaustion is mediated by distributive justice.

The Moderating Role of Individual Self Concept

At this point, I have established a rationale for linking both the direct and indirect relationship of competitive psychological climate and emotional exhaustion, effectively

answering the “what” and “how” questions. However, it is important to examine the “who” as well. Meaning, for whom are these hypothesized paths stronger, weaker, or possibly non-existent? To further explain, I will introduce the impact self-concept can have on the aforementioned relationships by introducing the interactionist perspective (Caldwell & O’Reilly, 1990).

The basic premise of the interactionist perspective is that the joint effects of personality traits and organizational characteristics will explain more variance beyond the main effects of each type of variable (Brown, Cron, Slocum, 1998). That is, the relationship between a personality trait and an outcome will likely depend on the situation or context of the work environment. According to Joyce, Slocum, and Glinow (1982) there are multiple ways that personality can interact with an environment. The first is called effect congruence, which denotes that high levels of the trait and environmental context are better for the outcomes. The second one is called general congruence; it states that fit between personality traits and organizational contexts are desirable, regardless if high or low. Finally, functional congruence states that either the personality variable or the environmental variable could be related to the criterion, but having them both at high levels does not add incremental variance above having only one of the variables at a high level.

Similarly, Edwards (1991) defined person-job fit as the fit between the abilities of a person and the attributes of the job (demand/ability), and the desires of a person and the attributes of a job (need/supplies). Job demands are defined as the knowledge, skills, and abilities that are required to perform a job at an acceptable level. Job supplies are general characteristics of jobs or organizations that help promote employee effectiveness and well-being. Research has shown that having a high person-job fit is ideal for maximal productivity

and well-being (e.g., Behery, 2009; Kristof-Brown, Zimmerman, & Johnson, 2005; June & Mahmood, 2011). In the context of a competitive climate, traits that are associated with the tendency to make social comparisons and to define the “self” relative to others should be associated with lower strain outcomes and more positive work outcomes. In particular, I propose that the strength of one’s individual self-concept affects whether or not a competitive climate is related to emotional exhaustion.

Self-concept is defined as how people define themselves in relation to others. Specifically, there are three different components of self-concept: individual, which focuses on uniqueness in comparison to others, relational, which focuses on defining yourself based on dyadic relationships, and collective, which involves defining yourself based on group membership (Johnson & Saboe, 2011). The individual self is achieved by differentiating from others. That is, the individual self contains those aspects of the self-concept that differentiate the person from other persons as a unique constellation of traits and characteristics that distinguishes the individual within his or her social context. This form of self-representation relies on interpersonal comparison processes and is associated with the motive of protecting or enhancing the person psychologically (Brewer & Gardner, 1996).

As stated above, Conservation of Resources Theory provides a framework to understand how a competitive climate can be a job stressor that leads to emotional exhaustion. A competitive environment may put emotional demands on an employee and at the same time drain employees of emotional resources due to the lack of support from fellow coworkers. According to Folkman and Lazarus’s transactional model of stress (1986) individuals go through a number of processes when encountering potential stressors in the environment including a primary and secondary cognitive appraisal. In the primary appraisal,

the individual assess his/her own stake in the encounter with the environment and decides if it is potentially challenging, harmful, or threatening. If the event or condition is not deemed challenging, harmful or threatening, then it is not considered a threat to the individual's well-being. However, if the event or condition is evaluated as threatening, challenging, or harmful, then the individual moves into the secondary appraisal stage. In the secondary appraisal, the individual assesses what can be done to prevent harm and to enhance benefits, while thinking about different coping strategies.

Stress researchers generally agree that individual differences are likely to affect the primary appraisal, which is whether or not one appraises conditions in the environment as a stressor (e.g., Cavanaugh, Boswell, Roehling, & Boudreau, 2000). I propose that the strength of an employee's individual self-concept may determine how he or she views and responds to a competitive climate. An employee who has a strong individual self-concept forms his/her self-concept by how unique he/she is in relation to others (Johnson & Saboe, 2011). Thus, those who possess a strong individual self-concept may view a competitive climate as an opportunity to stand out in front of others and as a way to increase his/her motivation. In this way and in keeping with Conservation of Resources Theory (Hobfoll, 2011), an employee with a strong individual self-concept may feel that a competitive climate protects his/her personal resources of an individualized self-concept. As a result, employees with a strong individual self-concept will be more receptive of a competitive climate and less susceptible to becoming emotional exhausted. In contrast, employees who have a weak individual self-concept do not establish their self-concept through establishing uniqueness, but rather through a dyadic or collective relationship. Thus, because a competitive climate requires them to display their uniqueness with others employees with a weak individual self-concept

may perceive a competitive environment as a drain on their personal resources and therefore a stressor. As a result those who have a weak individual self-concept will be more emotionally exhausted in a competitive climate because their personal characteristic and environmental condition are incongruent. These above predictions are consistent with the general congruence framework, which states that fit between personal characteristics and the environment are desirable whether high or low.

To date, no studies have examined the interaction between competitive climate and individual self-concept. However, two studies have examined the interaction between environmental competitiveness and trait competitiveness which is conceptually related to individual self-concept and defined as the enjoyment of interpersonal competition and the desire to win and be better than others (Brown et al., 1998). First, Brown et al. (1998) examined the relationship between trait competitiveness and intraorganizational competition on salesperson goal setting and performance. Results demonstrated that the interaction between trait competitiveness and competitive climate influenced salespeople's goal setting. When a salesperson was high on trait competitiveness and they perceived the climate to be competitive, they set more goals. If they were low on trait competitiveness, they set low goals even with the perception of a competitive climate. Lastly, those who were high on trait competitiveness set higher goals only when they also perceived a highly competitive environment. The findings of this study demonstrate the importance of having traits that are a good fit to a competitive environment.

The second study built on Brown's initial study by examining the interaction of trait and environmental competitiveness with more outcomes such as job satisfaction, job dedication, organizational commitment and stress, and utilizing a sample of IT professionals

whose jobs are more interdependent than salesperson (Fletcher, Major, & Davis, 2008). Results indicated that there was a significant interaction between competitive psychological climate and trait competitiveness on all work place outcomes sans job stress. That is, the relationship between competitive climate and job stress did not vary based on the level of trait competitiveness. I believe my study will find different and significant results because it focuses on a more specific strain outcome. Fletcher et al. (2008) focused on perceived job stress, but did not focus on a strain outcome. The authors stated that high levels of trait competitiveness should weaken the positive relationship between competitive climate and job stress due to someone high on trait competitiveness receiving the amount of resources that they need to complete their job. However, according to Conservation of Resources Theory, receiving resources may not affect the perception of job stress, but instead buffer the consequences of job stress (i.e. emotional exhaustion and job attitudes). Consistent with this view, Fletcher et al. (2008) found that the negative relationships between competitive psychological climate and job satisfaction, commitment and job dedication were weaker for those high in trait competitiveness and stronger for those low in trait competitiveness.

To summarize, by using Conservation of Resources Theory and Fit Theory I posit that a competitive climate allows those who have a strong individual self-concept to express their uniqueness freely and receive the necessary resources from the environment to thrive. It is for this reason that I make the following hypothesis:

H4. The relationship between competitive climate and emotional exhaustion is moderated by individual self-concept such that the hypothesized positive relationship is weaker for those with a stronger individual self-concept.

In addition to individual self-concept moderating the direct relationship between competitive climate and emotional exhaustion, I also expect individual self-concept to moderate the negative relationship between competitive climate and distributive justice. Consistent with Fit Theory, I believe that because a competitive climate provides the necessary resources that an employee with a strong individual self-concept, he/she would be less likely to feel the distribution of resources is unjust. A situation where resources are based on a comparison between employees and not necessarily from individual input (i.e., a competitive climate) will allow an employee to further establish his/her uniqueness from other employees. Moreover by using Conservation of Resources Theory, a competitive climate may act as a potential resource to employees with a strong individual self-concept. This congruence allows an employee to work in his/her desired conditions and protects his/her self-concept by allowing him/her to demonstrate uniqueness. It is for this reason that I make the following hypothesis.

H5. The relationship between competitive climate and distributive justice is moderated by individual self-concept such that the hypothesized negative relationship is weaker for those high on individual self-concept.

Chapter II

Method

Participants and Procedure

Data was collected from 544 employed adults recruited from among students attending a large southern university. Participants' ages ranged from 18- 62 years old, and they worked a minimum of 20 hours per week. Eighty-two percent of the participants identified themselves as female, while 17.5% identified themselves as male. Table 1 presents mean comparisons between males and females on all of the variables measured in this study.

Participants worked in a wide-range of professions. Some of the more common professions observed were administrative assistant, assistant manager, cashier, and sales associate. The sample was ethnically diverse as 32% identified themselves as Hispanic, 22% as Caucasian, 18% as African American, and 16% as Asian. Data was collected using an online survey that was distributed through an external survey provider.

Data were cleaned followed the listwise deletion procedure, which deletes an entire entry if missing data is found in any data point. Moreover, there were three catch items in the survey, and participants were dropped if they incorrectly marked two or more of the three catch items. For this study, items were considered incorrectly marked if they clicked the wrong answer or if they left the item blank. A total of 60 participants were dropped for inputting incorrect answers on the catch items and an additional 52 were dropped for missing data; this yielded a final N of 432. In exchange for completing the survey, participants received extra credit to be used toward their course grades.

Measures

Competitive Psychological Climate. I used the four item measure of competitive psychological climate from Brown et al. (1998) with a 5-point response scale (1 = “Strongly Disagree” to 5 = “Strongly Agree”) High scores reflect high perception of a competitive climate ($\alpha = .74$). Please see Appendix A for a list of the items.

Individual Self-concept. Individual self-concept was measured using 4-items from Selenta’s and Lord’s (2005) Levels of Self-Concept Scale. A Sample item is, “I have a strong need to know how I stand in comparison to my coworkers”. High scores reflect adopting a stronger individual self-concept ($\alpha = .81$). Please see Appendix B for a list of the items.

Emotional Exhaustion. I used the six-item measure of emotional exhaustion from the MBI (Maslach, Leiter, & Jackson, 1996). Participants responded to the items using a 5-point response scale (1 = “Strongly Disagree” to 5 = “Strongly Agree”). High scores reflect high levels of exhaustion ($\alpha = .88$). Please see Appendix C for a list of the items.

Distributive Justice. Distributive justice was assessed using five items derived from Price and Mueller (1986). Participants indicated the level of fairness based on a 5-point scale (1 = “Very Unfair” to 5 = “Very Fair”). High scores reflect higher perceptions of justice ($\alpha = .92$). Please see Appendix D for a list of the items.

Chapter III Results

Means, standard deviations, reliabilities, and correlations are presented in Table 2. I used Pearson Correlations to test hypotheses 1 and 2, which proposed that competitive psychological climate would be positively related to emotional exhaustion and negatively related to distributive justice, respectively. As hypothesized, competitive psychological climate was positively related to emotional exhaustion ($r = .15, p < .01$) and negatively related to distributive justice ($r = -.13, p < .01$).

Hypothesis 3 stated that distributive justice would mediate the relationship between competitive psychological climate and emotional exhaustion. To test this hypothesis, I used the Process macro model 4 for SPSS (Hayes, 2012). This method allows for multiple tests to capture the mediation effect, such as the casual step approach, the Sobel test, and the bootstrapping procedure (Hayes, 2012). The bootstrapping procedure is often preferred amongst these few approaches because: a) the data associated with the analysis do not have to meet any assumptions of normality, b) it can ensure high enough power in small sample sizes, and c) bootstrapped confidence intervals tend to be asymmetric, which more closely

resembles the true sampling distribution (Preacher & Hayes, 2010). This procedure produces k number of resamples for the indirect effect and provides confidence intervals of the effect to determine significance.

When performing the bootstrapping procedure, there are three specific effects that are imperative to determine whether full, partial, or no mediation has occurred: the total effect, the direct effect, and the indirect effect. The total effect represents the effect of the independent variable's (competitive climate) relationship with the dependent variable (emotional exhaustion) without the presence of the mediator (distributive justice). The direct effect (path 'c' in Figure 1) represents the relationship between the independent variable and the dependent variable with the mediator present. Finally, the indirect effect (combined paths 'ab' in Figure 1) represents the difference between the total and direct effects; this represents the specific effect the mediator has in the relationship. In partial mediation, the direct and indirect effects are both significant. In full mediation, the indirect effect is significant, but the direct effect is not significant. Table 3 presents estimates for the direct, indirect, and total effects and the bootstrapped confidence intervals. The results of 2000 resamples produced statistically significant indirect ($b = .05$; .01LL, .10UL) and total effects ($b = .14$; .04LL, .24UL), and a non-significant direct effect ($b = .09$; -.00, .18). These results indicate that distributive justice fully mediates the relationship between competitive psychological climate and emotional exhaustion. Thus, hypothesis 3 was supported.

To test hypotheses 4 and 5 which proposed that individual self-concept moderated the "c" path (i.e., direct path from competitive climate to emotional exhaustion) and the "a" path (competitive climate to distributive justice), respectively, I utilized the SPSS Process macro. Specifically, Process model eight (Hayes, 2012) tests for moderation of the "a" path of the

mediation model and the “c” path, while also indicating the conditional direct and indirect effects. Moderated mediation assumes that the effect of the mediation differs on values of the moderator. To examine the conditional indirect effects, I analyzed the indirect effect at values at the mean and + 1/-1 standard deviation of individual self-concept.

Hypothesis 4 stated that individual self-concept would moderate the relationship between competitive psychological climate and emotional exhaustion (path 'c') in such a way that the hypothesized positive relationship would be weaker for those with a stronger individual self-concept. Table 4 presents the values for the interaction hypothesis. I ran the complete moderated mediation model using the bootstrapping procedure (2000 resamples). As shown in Table 4, the competitive psychological climate and individual self-concept product term was not significant due to the presence of 0 in the 95% confidence interval (b = -.07; -.18LL, .04UL). Thus, hypothesis 4 was not supported.

Hypothesis 5 stated that individual self-concept would moderate the relationship between competitive psychological climate and distributive justice (path 'a' in Figure 1) such that the hypothesized negative relationship would be weaker for those with a stronger individual self-concept. Table 5 presents the values for the interaction hypothesis. The competitive psychological climate-individual self-concept product term had a significant 95% confidence interval, (b = .17; .05LL, .29UL). Thus, Hypothesis 5 was supported. While examining the interaction term has been a proven method to test moderation effects, some researchers believe that a more accurate measure is to test the simple slopes at +/-1 SD. This is done by taking the difference in the regression effects and dividing that number by the pooled standard error. This value produces a t-value which indicates if the slopes are significantly different from 0. The results of the simple slopes analysis show a t-value of .40

($p = ns$) for high ISC and -6.70 ($p < .01$) for low ISC. Thus, only the low ISC slope is significant from 0. This means that there was a relationship between competitive climate and distributive justice only at low levels of individual self-concept. Please see Figure 2 for a graph of the interaction. Further analysis showed that there was evidence for a conditional indirect effect. Table 6 shows that when employees have a strong individual self-concept (operationalized as +1 SD above the mean), distributive justice was no longer a significant mediator in the competitive climate and emotional exhaustion relationship ($b = 0$; $-.06LL$, $.06UL$). However, at the weak and average level of individual self-concept, the indirect effect was still significant ($b = .10$; $.05LL$, $.17UL$) ($b = .05$; $.01LL$, $.10UL$).

Chapter IV Discussion

The purpose of this paper was twofold: first, to examine the effect competitive climate had on employees' emotional exhaustion and perceptions of distributive justice; second, to examine the interactionist perspective to investigate whether an individual's self-concept affects the relationship between competitive climate and exhaustion/distributive justice. To accomplish this, I relied on Conservation of Resources Theory to explain why a competitive climate may directly affect an employee's feelings of emotional exhaustion and also indirectly affect emotional exhaustion through decreased perceptions of distributive justice. Next, by utilizing the aspect of Conservation of Resources Theory which states that individuals strive to protect their resources, I examined the interactionist perspective to see what role an individual self-concept had on the aforementioned relationship. Specifically, I hypothesized that because a competitive environment gives those with a strong individual self-concept the opportunity to demonstrate their uniqueness, a strong individual self-concept would weaken the hypothesized positive relationship between competitive climate and

emotional exhaustion, and weaken the hypothesized negative relationship between competitive climate and distributive justice.

As hypothesized, the results showed a positive relationship between competitive climate and emotional exhaustion (H1) and a negative relationship between competitive climate and distributive justice (H2). Next, results supported the hypothesis that distributive justice would mediate the relationship between competitive climate and emotional exhaustion (H3). Finally, results showed partial support for the interactionist perspective. Individual self-concept did not moderate the direct relationship between competitive climate and emotional exhaustion (H4); but, it did moderate the relationship between competitive climate and distributive justice (H5). Taken together, the pattern of results highlights the potential negative consequences associated with implementing a competitive climate. Moreover, an employee's self-concept may play an important role in how he/she perceives the fairness of a competitive climate and his/her subsequent well-being. I discuss the implications, some strengths and limitations of the study, and future directions in the following sections.

Theoretical Implications

This was the first study to examine the competitive climate and burnout relationship. Moreover, it is the first of its kind to examine a competitive climate in a Conservation of Resource framework (Hobfoll, 1989). Findings support the theory's assertion that individuals are more susceptible to strain outcomes when they are ill equipped to gain resources. Specifically, due to the emotional demands placed on employees in a competitive environment and their inability to gain emotional resources due to the lack of social support from colleagues (i.e., competitors), an individual in a competitive climate is more likely to feel emotionally exhausted on the job. This shows support for the assertion that competitive

climate can be considered a potential strain on an employee, and can establish an environment in which employees may find it difficult to obtain resources.

Second, this study added to the literature on competitive climate by not only examining the direct relationship of climate on emotional exhaustion, but more importantly, the indirect relationship through distributive justice. Results showed that distributive justice fully mediated the relationship between a competitive climate and emotional exhaustion. These findings indicate that the process through which an employee in a competitive environment becomes emotionally exhausted may be through increasing the perception of unfairness in the work-inputted versus outcome-received dynamic. Also, these findings support the Conservation of Resources framework, which states that individuals invest resources to gain resources, and a loss of an expected gain can lead to higher susceptibility to strain outcomes.

A competitive environment is often a situation wherein there can only be a finite number of winners, yet all employees contribute with the expectation of receiving a reward in the end. When they do not receive a reward, they operate at a loss and are likely to perceive that the exchange process is not fair and as a result, may become emotionally exhausted on the job. Also, with rewards being contingent on a comparison between colleagues rather than individual performance, employees may feel that gaining a return on their investment is not something they can personally control, but instead it depends completely on how their colleagues perform. By examining the detrimental effect establishing a competitive climate may have in terms of a decrease in distributive justice and subsequent well-being, this study provides researchers some of the negative outcomes and a framework (justice) to study competition in the workplace.

Thirdly, this study advances research by examining a competitive climate in the interactionist perspective. Recall that only two studies have examined the interactionist perspective as it pertains to competition (Brown et al., 1998; Fletcher et al., 2008). This study examined the interactionist perspective as it pertains to both emotional exhaustion (hypothesis 4) and distributive justice (hypothesis 5). Findings from hypothesis 4 showed that there was no significant interaction between competitive climate and individual self-concept in predicting emotional exhaustion. It is possible that in relation to emotional exhaustion, competitive climate and individual self-concept follow the functional congruence perspective (Joyce et al., 1982). In this perspective, the trait may relate to an outcome, but the environment does not add significant value above and beyond the trait condition. While competitive climate was not a significant predictor of emotional exhaustion in the presence of the interaction term, individual self-concept was still significantly related to emotional exhaustion. This demonstrates that individual self-concept may have more to do with an employee feeling emotionally exhausted and supersede the effects of a competitive environment.

While hypothesis 4 was not supported, individual self-concept did moderate the indirect effect of competitive climate on emotional exhaustion. That is, there was a significant interaction between individual self-concept and competitive climate on distributive justice, such that the hypothesized negative relationship between competitive climate and emotional exhaustion through justice was weaker for those with a stronger individual self-concept. In other words, those with a strong individual self-concept perceived the input/outcome ratio of the competitive climate to be fairer than those with a weak individual self-concept. Further analysis showed that the negative relationship between

competitive climate and distributive justice was only found for those with a weak individual self-concept. There was not a significant relationship between competitive climate and distributive justice for those with a strong individual self-concept. This finding lends partial support to the general congruence framework which states that a match between traits and environmental conditions leads to better outcomes. This also further supports Fit and Conservation of Resources Theory (Edwards, 1991; Hobfoll, 1989). Specifically, the characteristics of a competitive climate provide the necessary resources to an employee with a strong individual self-concept by allowing him/her to demonstrate his/her uniqueness in comparison to other employees. As a result, those with a strong individual self-concept perceive the environment as more fair and as a result appear to be more resilient to the stress of a competitive environment than someone who has a weak individual self-concept. Another possible explanation is that a strong individual self-concept acts as a resource that enables employees to effectively cope with the stress demands of a competitive climate.

Practical Implications

The results of this study have several potential implications for practice. First, because competitive climate was positively related to emotional exhaustion, managers may take greater caution when implementing a competitive environment. Managers may believe that the benefits of a competitive environment would be increases in motivation and performance. However, these results suggest that it could also lead to feelings of poor distributive justice and emotional exhaustion. There has been a vast amount of literature detailing the consequences of poor perceptions of justice and burnout (Colquitt et al., 2001; Lee & Ashforth, 1996), so managers would be wise to understand the potential consequences associated with competition. The finding that distributive justice mediated the relationship

between competitive climate and emotional exhaustion suggests that managers may seek ways to provide employees with more resources on the job to attenuate the stress of low distributive justice. One such way that has been found in the literature to attenuate stress associated with fairness is to provide a thorough amount of information and feedback (Greenberg, 1990). Managers may discuss the utility of implementing a competitive environment to the employees and the significance as to why only a finite number of employees can receive a reward. Another potential solution that managers can do is by implementing a system where there are multiple factors that can yield an employee receiving a reward. Performance is a multi-faceted construct (Rotundo & Sackett 2002), so it may appeal more to an employee if factors such as working late, showing up to work on time, and volunteering are factored into the reward decisions. Having rewards for an abundance of factors could help employees feel that the rewards distributed are more just and attainable. For example, a manager at a car dealership could implement several rewards for employees, such as an attendance award, a customer satisfaction reward, and an overall sales award. Another potential solution is to incorporate team rewards into the nature of a competitive climate. Only one person may receive the main reward, but managers could infuse department-wide celebratory events if all employees hit a certain level of performance. Doing this could offset some of the negative fairness perceptions of only one person winning.

Another implication for this study is in regards to the role that individual differences play in employees' reaction to a competitive climate. Competitive climate was shown to have no impact on distributive justice perceptions when individual self-concept was strong; however, a competitive climate was shown to have a negative relationship with distributive justice in the weak individual self-concept condition. Moreover, at strong levels of individual

self-concept, distributive justice was no longer a significant mediator in the competitive climate and emotional exhaustion relationship. This demonstrates the importance of managers establishing the type of climate they want to implement and selecting the proper individuals to fit the climate. This also lends support to the Attraction-Selection-Attrition (ASA) model (Schneider, Goldstein, & Smith, 1995). If a competitive environment is desired for the workplace, managers should include a trait competitiveness or individual self-concept measure as part of the selection tool. Doing so would ensure that employees who are selected could thrive in the competitive work condition.

Strengths & Limitations

One limitation of this study is the sample of participants used. The sample consisted of adults who worked at least 20 hours per week in a variety of industries. Industries such as food and beverage, airlines, automotive, retail, and healthcare were represented. While this constitutes a diverse sample with regard to jobs, not every job may have had the dynamics necessary to be relevant for this study. For example, some participants worked as a nanny, a tutor, and or a coach. Examining a competitive environment using these employees may not be beneficial due to the lack of comparative peers on the job. A competitive climate may be of higher importance in certain industries, so future research should look to examine a competitive environment in specific industries to see if the magnitude of the relationships increase, decrease, or remain unchanged.

Another limitation of this study was the cross-sectional nature of the data collection. In this study, I collected data at one time-point. While this is beneficial to gather a large amount of data quickly, it prevents the ability to establish a cause-effect relationship. Essentially, it may not be a competitive climate that leads to employees feeling emotionally

exhausted on the job. An employee who took the survey may have been emotionally exhausted for a variety of other reasons such as school, time of day, mood, etc. Future research should seek to examine a competitive climate in a longitudinal design in order to establish a more cause and effect relationship between competitive climate and outcomes. Longitudinal designs would enable researchers to establish employee reactions after specific time points, such as before and after a reward was received and relate that to environment at a previous time point. Another way to establish causality would be to conduct an experimental design. Designing a condition where one group/organization had to perform a task in a competitive environment vs. a control group that performed the same task in neutral condition and examine how that relates to feelings of emotional exhaustion and distributive justice. This could help establish a causal relationship, but there may also be potential threats to external validity if conducted in a lab setting.

Another limitation of this study is the issue of common method variance. This concerns centers on the premise that relationships observed could be a product of a similar method in obtaining the data, rather than actual relationships between variables (Podsakoff, Mackenzie, Lee, & Podsakoff, 2003). Future research should seek alternative methods to measure the constructs presented in this study. Examples of this could be using multiple sources to collect data, collecting data at multiple time points. While this study did not gather data from multiple sources and/or collect data at multiple time-points, the study did ensure participants understood their scores were anonymous and that there was no right or wrong answer. Podsakoff et al., (2003) stated that bias can occur when participants think they have to answer in a socially-desirable manner or if their responses could be linked back to them. With the inability to collect data at multiple time points or measure the criterion/independent

variable in a different manner, the authors state that ensuring anonymity is the next best solution.

One strength of this study is the use of individual self-concept in the interactionist perspective. Previous research has often relied on trait competitiveness to interact with competitive environment (Brown et al., 1996; Fletcher et al., 2008). Examining a competitive environment and individual self-concept further broadens our understanding of the potential interactions between person and environment. The study being the first to utilize individual self-concept can open up a range of research examining the other potential interactions with a competitive environment such as the Big 5 or core self-evaluations.

Another strength of this study is sample size. A large sample size is needed to ensure enough power to find specific effects. Four hundred and seventy-five out of five hundred and fifty-four participants in the study were considered quality data. This translates to about 86% of the data. The length of the survey could have been hindrance for some participants, and they were not forced to answer any specific question. Moreover, participants' extra credit was based on completion, not quality. Thus, finding that such a large percentage of the data is useable lends credence to the accuracy of the findings in the study.

Future Directions

One future direction to this study should be a thorough examination into the conceptualization and the operationalization of an individual self-concept (Selenta & Lord, 2005). Only one item actually focuses on a comparison between the individual and coworkers and the remaining items concern comparisons to others more generally (i.e., not necessarily coworkers). This assumes that self-concept is stable across situations or roles. However, it is possible that an individual may demonstrate a strong individual self-concept in

the context of school, but not work, or while playing sports, but not with his/her family. In fact, Trait Activation Theory states that there may be situational cues that “activate” certain traits (Tett & Burnett, 2003). Examining whether individual self-concept has trait-like qualities or can be primed by introducing a competitive environment could have implications for employee selection. If it is more of a stable trait, then hiring managers should most likely seek to hire employees with this self-concept. However if it is not stable, hiring managers may have little need to include it in their selection systems because workers would acquire this self-concept once they are introduced to a competitive climate.

Another direction for future study is in regards to the measure of competitive climate. While individual-level perceptions of climate have vast utility and implications, a climate variable could also be measured at the workgroup- or organizational-level (Zohar & Luria, 2005). That is, even though an employee may perceive a competitive environment, a competitive environment may not actually be implemented by the manager/organization. One way to examine a competitive environment at the organizational level is to request supervisor ratings of a competitive environment. Results could be compared for employees’ perception of a competitive environment and managers’ ratings of actual competitive environment. While perceptions are very important, having managers actually state whether they actively implemented a competitive environment could change the outcomes. Difference scores could also be calculated to see if there is a strong discrepancy between manager’s perceptions and subordinate perceptions. Finally, collecting data from multiple sources could also attenuate the potential issue of common method variance (Podsakoff, Mackenzie, Lee, & Podsakoff, 2003; Spector, 2006).

Future studies should also examine the impact other forms of justice may have on the competitive climate and emotional exhaustion relationship. For example, an employee may have concerns about the process through which rewards are determined in a competitive environment (procedural justice), the amount of information they receive about the reward structure and process in a competitive environment (informational justice), and the way the message is delivered to them (interpersonal justice). Withholding information regarding the importance of a competitive process and/or not showing care when employees show displeasure about the competitive environment could lead to more negative consequences.

Finally, organizations are moving toward more team-oriented groups (Mathieu, Maynard, Rapp, & Gilson, 2008). With that said, there may be some utility in examining competitive climates in a group vs. group setting. The implications of this could be vast because unlike in individual-level competition, group-level competition would not deprive an employee of emotional resources such as social support. An employee could receive support from his/her work team. Having group-level as opposed to individual-level competition may also impact the kind of self-concept an employee would need to yield the best results. As previously stated, there are two other forms of a self-concept: collective and relational. A relational self-concept is one that focuses on identifying yourself through more dyadic relationships whereas collective self-concept focuses on group relationships. It may be possible that one of these two forms of self-concept would be most beneficial for an employee in a competitive group environment.

Conclusion

In conclusion, the findings of this study may help unravel our understanding of the potential consequences of a competitive climate. This study lends credence to examining a

competitive climate in a Conservation of Resources framework and in the interactionist perspective. Specifically, this study could provide managers with a higher understanding of the negative outcomes associated with implementing a competitive climate (emotional exhaustion & distributive justice). Managers may want to exercise more caution when implementing these environments, as the outcomes of this study demonstrate that a competitive climate may not be entirely positive for employees. Managers and researchers should also examine other potential resources that may help buffer some of these outcomes associated with implementing a competitive climate.

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Table 1

Mean comparisons between males and females

Variables	Gender	N	Mean	Std. Dev	Std. Error Mean
DistributiveJustice	male	68	3.244	1.0174	.1234
	female	352	3.446	.9422	.0502
CompetitivePsyClimate*	male	68	3.063	.7597	.0921
	female	352	2.794	.8784	.0468
EmotionalExh	male	68	3.07	1.017	.123
	female	352	3.06	.949	.051
IndSelConc*	male	68	3.321	.6621	.0803
	female	352	2.944	.8134	.0434

* Indicates significant mean difference at the .05 level.

Table 2

Means, standard deviations, correlations, and reliabilities

Variable	Mean	Std Dev	CPC	DJ	EE	ISC
Competitive Psychological Climate	2.82	.87	(.74)			
Distributive Justice	3.42	.96	-.13**	(.92)		
Emotional Exhaustion	3.07	.97	.15**	-.42**	(.88)	
Individual Self-concept	2.99	.80	.37**	-.08	.17**	(.81)

** N =432. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed). *. Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed). Reliabilities are in parenthesis. CPC = competitive psychological climate, DJ= distributive justice , EE = emotional exhaustion, ISC= individual self-concept

Table 3

Simple mediation effects and confidence intervals

Simple Mediation	Effect	SE	95%CI	
			LL	UL
Indirect Effect	0.05	0.02	0.01	0.11
Direct Effect	0.09	0.05	-0.00	0.18
Total Effect	0.14	0.05	0.04	0.24

CPC-DJ-EE
 Bootstrapped confidence intervals were constructed using 2000 resamples. * Values that do not contain 0 within the intervals yield significant effects. CPC = competitive psychological climate, DJ= distributive justice, EE = emotional exhaustion.

Table 4

Regression results: Interaction of competitive psychological climate and individual self-concept on emotional exhaustion

	B	SE	P	LL	UL
Constant	3.30	.53	.00	2.26	4.35
Competitive Psychological Climate	.27	.18	.13	-.08	.61
Individual Self-concept	.33	.16	.04	.02	.65
Interaction	-.07	.06	.21	-.18	.04

N= 432 * = p<.05. B= unstandardized coefficient. SE= standard error. LL = lower limit confidence interval. UL = upper limit confidence interval.

Table 5

Regression results: Interaction of competitive psychological climate and individual self-concept on distributive justice

	B	SE	p	LL	UL
Constant	5.31	.52	.00	4.30	6.33
Competitive Psychological Climate	-.65*	.19	.00	-1.02	-.28
Individual Self-concept	-.52*	.17	.00	-.86	-.18
Interaction	.17*	.06	.00	.05	.29

N= 432 *= p<.05. B= unstandardized coefficient. SE= standard error. LL = lower limit confidence interval. UL = upper limit confidence interval. Values that do not contain 0 within the intervals yield significant effects

Table 6

Bootstrapped indirect effects of competitive psychological climate on emotional exhaustion via distributive justice at specific values of individual self-concept

Moderator	Mod value	Effect	SE	95% CI	
				LL	UL
Low ISC	2.20	.11*	.03	.05	.17
Med ISC	2.99	.05*	.02	.01	.10
High ISC	3.78	-.00	.03	-.06	.06

N=432. Mean approach represents -1/+1 SD and the mean value of the moderator. Bootstrapped confidence intervals were constructed using 2000 resamples. * Significant confidence interval. SE= standard error, LL= lower limit, UL = upper limit. ISC individual self-concept.

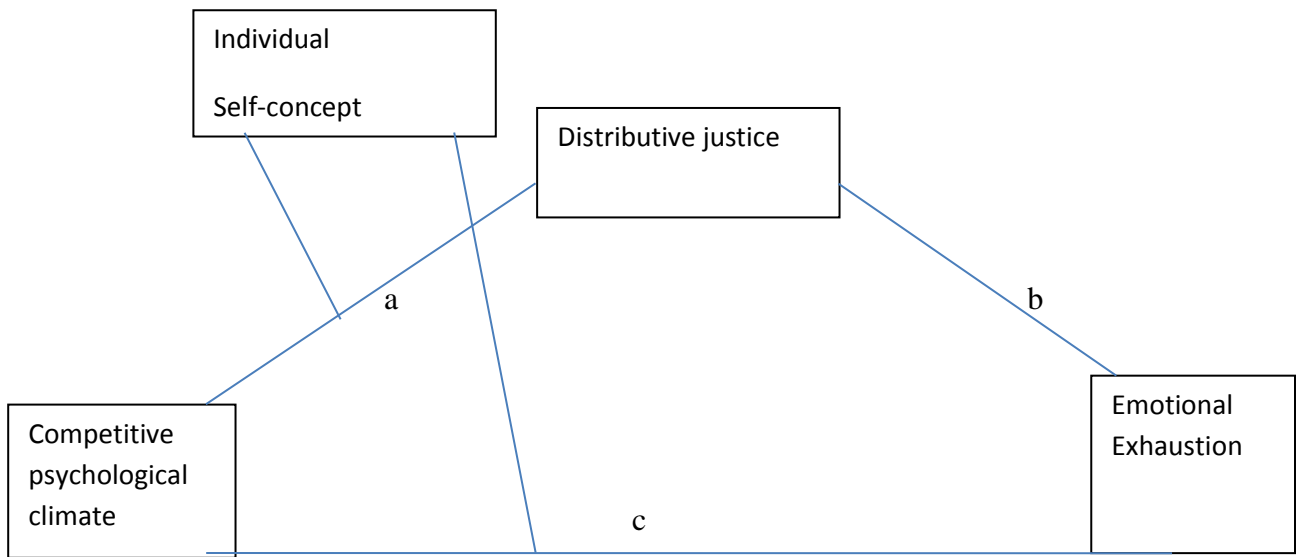


Figure 1. *Conceptual model*

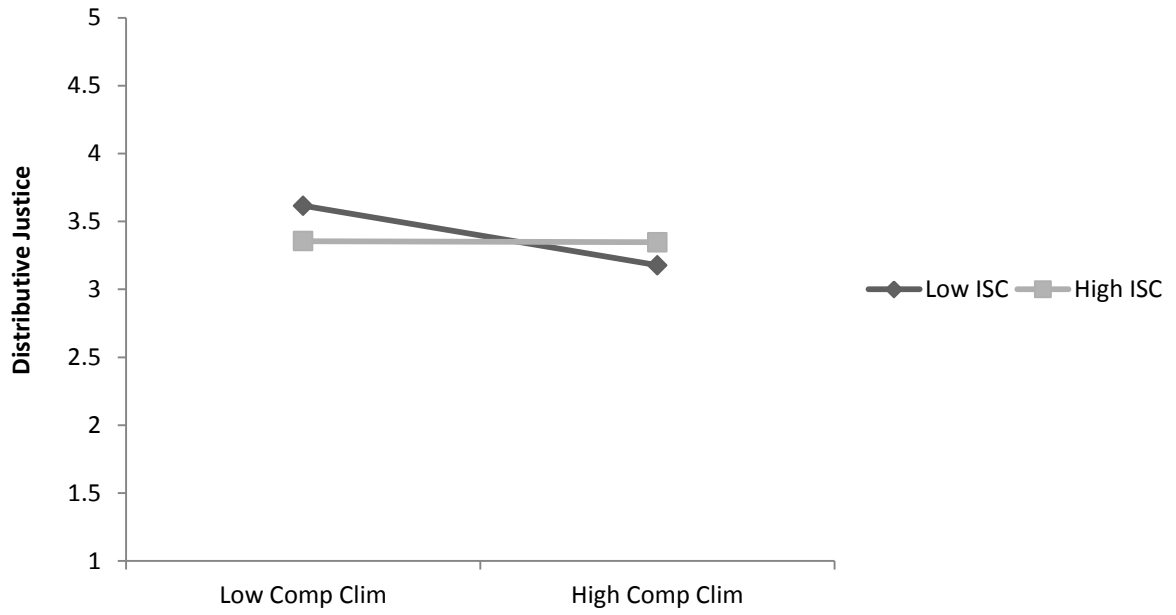


Figure 2.

The moderating role of individual self-concept on the relationship between competitive psychological climate and distributive justice (Hypothesis 5).

Appendix A.

Competitive Psychological Climate (Brown et al., 1998)

1. My manager frequently compares my performance with that of my coworkers.
2. The amount of recognition you get in this company depends on how you perform compared to others.
3. Everybody is concerned with being the top performer.
4. My coworkers frequently compare their performance with mine.

Appendix B

Individual Self-Concept (Selenta's & Lord, 2005)

1. I thrive on opportunities to demonstrate that my abilities or talents are better than those of other people.
2. I have a strong need to know how I stand in comparison to my coworkers.
3. I often compete with my friends.
4. I feel best about myself when I perform better than others.
5. I often find myself pondering over the ways that I am better or worse off than other people around me.

Appendix C

Emotional Exhaustion (Maslach et al., 1996)

1. I feel emotionally drained from my work.
2. I feel used up at the end of the workday.
3. I feel fatigued when I get up in the morning and have to face another day on the job.
4. I feel burned out from my work.
5. I feel I'm working too hard on my job.
6. I feel like I'm at the end of my rope

Appendix D

Distributive Justice (Price & Mueller, 1986)

1. How fair has your company been in rewarding you when you consider the responsibilities you have?
2. How fair has your company been in rewarding you when you take into account the amount of education and training that you have?
3. How fair has your company been in rewarding you when you consider the amount of effort that you have put forth?
4. How fair has your company been in rewarding you when you consider the stresses and strains of your job?
5. How fair has your company been in rewarding you when you consider the work that you have done well?