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Exploring the Effect of Unfair Work Contexts on the Development of Fairness Beliefs

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This paper examines what happens when individuals who perceive a fair situation discover that the situation is in fact, unfair. In a previous study, women who sued their universities discussed their initial expectations that the university would treat them fairly despite several studies that clearly indicated discrimination at universities is still a problem (Goltz, 2005a). Thus, using interview excerpts from this past study, the current paper explores how these women's expectations of fairness may have been formed, as well as how they changed after a discriminatory experience. Results suggest that the women's expectations of fairness arose in part from three values emerging during childhood: hard work, education, and self-sufficiency. In addition, the interviews indicated the women moved from stage 5 of Kohlberg's model of moral development, where the belief is that justice can be negotiated in accepted social systems, to a belief that this may not always the case, but if enough people continue to pursue justice through accepted means, then the systems will eventually change. Implications of these results for research into models of moral development, psychological contracts, and organizational justice are discussed.

Models on justice and fairness have proposed that the concept of justice is held by all individuals and that justice beliefs assist in regulating interpersonal behavior (e.g., Folger & Cropanzano, 2002; Cropanzano, Goldman & Folger, 2003; Lerner, 1980). For instance, Wright (1994) proposed that the human concept of reciprocity genetically evolved to keep people in touch with the needs of others. In fact, fairness appears to be one of six universal moral principles considered to be of fundamental importance by a large and diversified number of people (Schwartz, 1998, 2002). However, Wright (1994) also suggested that people's sense of justice is a result of environmental forces operating over time.

Moral reasoning appears at a very young age and develops through adulthood (e.g., Enright, Franklin & Mannheim, 1980). Very young children perceive that "bad" behavior has immediate negative consequences (Jose, 1991), and they first tend to allocate rewards based on self-interest, then physical characteristics, giving more to the biggest or oldest child (Damon, 1973, 1975; Enright et al., 1980; Thomson & Jones, 2005). This is called the preconventional level in Kohlberg's model of moral development (1969, 1971). Allocations change as children interact more with peers and learn to negotiate, share, have mutual respect, and understand others' perspectives (Damon, 1973, 1975; DeRemer & Gruen, 1979; Rest, 1983). During this time, strict equality in distributions occurs initially, but later, merit is used, with children allocating larger rewards to the most productive individuals (Damon, 1973, 1975). Thus, social forces help children develop what Kohlberg (1969, 1971) calls the conventional level of moral reasoning (stages 3 and 4) in which respect from others based on following social norms, rules, and laws is important. Most adults function at this level of reasoning and maintain social order without questioning it (Kohlberg, 1969, 1971). Later phases of moral reasoning (stages 5 and 6) involve more cognitive complexity (Kohlberg, 1969, 1971). In the postconventional phase, individuals recognize that compromises are sometimes needed because notions of what is just can differ since the distribution of resources and rewards can be based on a number of criteria, such as self-interest, physical characteristics, need, relationship ties, and behavior or productivity (Damon, 1973, 1975; Duetsch, 1975; Thomson & Jones, 2005). In addition, individuals recognize that maintaining the existing social order is not always beneficial and consider the rights and values that should be upheld (Kohlberg, 1969, 1971).

Presumably, adults carry their current level of moral reasoning with them into the workplace, whether it be preconventional, conventional, or postconventional. Justice in the workplace has become a very active research area in recent years (Fortin & Fellenz, 2008). The early literature in this area concerned only the perceived fairness of outcomes (later termed distributive justice), and similar to the literature on moral development, it indicated that people use different criteria, including equity, equality, and need, depending on the context (Adams, 1963, 1965; Blau, 1964; Homans, 1961; Konow, 2003). Later however, it was suggested that fairness can be assessed in terms of procedures and interactions, as well as outcomes. Procedural justice refers to the perceived fairness of processes used to determine the awarding of outcomes, and interactional justice refers to the perceived fairness of interpersonal relations associated with the distribution of outcomes (e.g., Thibaut & Walker, 1975; Bies & Moag, 1986). Research into these additional concepts indicate that sometimes fairness is perceived when distributive or interactional justice is present although outcomes are not fairly distributed, which have been called the "fair process" and "fair information" effects (Bies & Shapiro, 1987; Folger & Cropanzano, 1998; Fortin & Fellenz, 2008; Van den Bos et al., 1998).

Research indicates, in fact, that which type of justice perceptions are used appears to depend upon which information was available at the beginning of the relationship and that judgments of fairness based on process are often relied on because they occur well prior to experiences of distributions of outcomes (Lind, 2001). Thus, the

research literature indicates that it is difficult to precisely define fairness given that the criteria used to assess fairness appear to be very context dependent (e.g., Cropanzano & Prehar, 2001). However, it has been suggested that what is basic to all perceptions of fairness and unfairness is a judgment about the strength of a relationship with a group or organization (Lind, 2001). Lind (2001) has argued that people experiencing unfairness are less concerned with the material payoff they felt entitled to than with the feeling of rejection they perceived from the group or organization. This is consistent with the literature on social identity, which suggests that identification with a social group is important for self-esteem (Smith & Tyler, 1997). It also could explain the finding that people tend to be satisfied if there is at least one type of justice (interactional, procedural, or distributive) occurring (Goldman, 2003; Cropanzano, Bowen & Gilliland, 2001). Perhaps then, for most people, one form of justice alone is sufficient evidence of acceptance by a group. In practice, this should help managers resolve the "justice paradox" (Folger & Cropanzano, 1998), which refers to the fact that often the most just management practices in terms of distributive justice, such as the use of predictive selection procedures, are not perceived by individuals as being procedurally just. However, since individuals are sometimes unable to observe the distributive justice basis for management practices such as selection methods, the suggestion has been to ensure the more observable interactional justice that can make up for a perceived lack of distributional and procedural justice, such as through respectful and honest interpersonal treatment (Cropanzano et al., 2001).

However, research into perceptions of fairness in the workplace, which is now referred to as "organizational justice", has been criticized for being too focused on managing perceptions of employees and neglecting broader and multi-faceted inquiries into fairness (Cohen, 1985, 1988; Fortin & Fellenz, 2008). In other words, this research has prioritized management interests of making the impression of fairness and has neglected employee interests of experiencing actual fairness, resulting in what Fortin and Fellenz (2008) termed hypocrisies of the organizational justice literature. They noted that researchers even appear disinterested in whether their efforts result in an increase in actual justice in organizations (Bies & Tripp, 1995, 2001). This is especially troubling given that organizations have historically had a track record of impression managing rather than solving real problems related to the equitable treatment of employees. Note for instance, that organizational mechanisms for handling complaints of discrimination have been cited by sociologists and legal scholars as being largely designed to show compliance with the legal system while masking continuing inequities, failing to be effective tools preventing and correcting discrimination (Bergman et al., 2002; Bisom-Rapp, 1999; Edelman, Uggen & Erlanger, 1999; Sturm, 2001). Thus, Fortin and Fellenz (2008) have called for more varied types of investigations, including qualitative ones, to tackle some of the questions that haven't yet been asked about fairness in organizations.

Therefore, this paper uses existing data to further consider the question of what happens when individuals who had expected or perceived a fair situation discover that the situation is in fact unfair. This question deserves some scrutiny because there already is plenty of evidence that unfairness still exists in places many people perceive as being fair. One of these places is academia, where discrimination continues to be a

problem, despite an image of being an egalitarian, nurturing, protected environment (Dzeich & Weiner, 1984; Grauerholz, 1996; Toren, 1990). Women are underrepresented as faculty in academia and inequities persist in terms of rank, salary, and working conditions such as the presence of sexual harassment (Caplan, 1993; Dziech & Weiner, 1990; Grauerholz, 1996; Nettles et al., 2000; Rai, 2000; Valian, 1998; Wylie, 1995). In addition, these inequities increase as women achieve higher education and status (American Association of University Women, 2004; Kite et al., 2001; Krefting, 2003). For example, AACSB, the accrediting body for colleges of business, reported that in 2008, gender differences were still evident, with women still found in smaller proportions in schools with graduate programs, in private institutions, in the highest paying fields, and in the highest rank, full professor (AACSB International, 2008). Research indicates that most of the variance in men and women's career achievements such as pay and rank is discrimination-based (Reskin, 1977; Robinson, 1973; Toren, 1990), with organizational variables and gender role stereotypes often affecting women's opportunities as well as evaluations of their work (e.g., Blum, Fields & Goodman, 1994; Fitzgerald, Hulin & Drasgow, 1995). For instance, women, including those at universities, are consistently underrated, particularly when doing "men's" work (Heilman & Haynes, 2005; Heilman, et al., 2004; Krieger, 1995; Swim et al., 1989; Valian, 1998).

Despite statistics that clearly indicate discrimination at universities is still a problem, women entering academia expect to be treated fairly, as indicated in two recent articles based on a qualitative study that consisted of interviews with fourteen female faculty and students who sued their universities for sex discrimination (Goltz, 2005a, 2005b). One of these articles examined how the women sought to address the inequities they faced at their universities and what resulted from this (Goltz, 2005b). The article found that the women made multiple and varied attempts to address their situations at their universities, but their informal appeals were ignored, and the formal appeals systems at their universities were problematic (Goltz, 2005b).

Results of the other article based on this data (Goltz, 2005a) will be described in greater detail since it stimulated the present investigation. This study examined what expectations the women developed when they chose to enter their particular universities and how they discovered that their expectations were violated. Results from this study suggested that, upon entering their universities, the women expected to exchange their abilities and hard work for the organization's provision of an environment that would foster success as well as provide rewards for that success. For instance, one woman indicated her negotiated psychological contract this way: "Their expectations seemed reasonable in terms of research. So I thought if I worked hard and if I had reasonable success in publication, that I had a good chance at achieving tenure." These expectations were not met when women found they had to work in a difficult environment with inadequate resources and also experienced few rewards from the organization for their achievements. For instance, one interviewee said: "During job searches for open positions in the department, there never was the apparent enthusiasm for a female candidate as there would be for a male candidate, when I would be looking at it thinking, what's he got that's so great?" These kinds of experiences violated the initial expectations the women had formed of a fair university

environment with equal distributions of resources and equitable distributions of rewards. Note that the interviews indicated that the women's assessment of the inequities were not based solely on their perceptions of their own situations, but also included reviewing patterns across the university and across time (Goltz, 2005a). When the women sensed the university had not delivered their part of the exchange, they often sought additional information on context that helped them assess the reasons for this. One type of contextual factor was the pattern of treatment by the university across male and female colleagues. Eleven women reported noticing not only that they were not treated well, but also that other women at the university were not treated as well as male cohorts with equivalent or lesser qualifications and achievements. Women also reported observing many different types of discriminatory treatment at the university and in their individual departments, as well as noticing that some of these behaviors were repeated across time, sometimes by the same people and sometimes by different people. This use of benchmarking by the women, such as in comparisons with the performance of male colleagues, indicates that the women verified their perceptions with additional data.

In order to examine these two research questions concerning the women's expectations, it is helpful to first review literatures that provide insight into the formation of specific beliefs about fair exchanges in the workplace, as well as literature that indicates likely responses to experiences of unfairness. The literature on how exchanges in the workplace are developed and perceived will be reviewed first, followed by a discussion of individual and contextual influences on equity sensitivity. Literature indicating likely responses to perceived unfairness will be reviewed last.

The Development of Beliefs about Workplace Exchanges

In terms of understanding the development of fairness expectations specifically related to the workplace, researchers of organizational justice have relied on the literature on psychological contracts (Cropanzano & Prehar, 2001). Organizational justice beliefs are thought to be based on a negotiated "fair" exchange between two parties, called a psychological contract (Rousseau, 1995). For instance, applicants determine how well they match up to what an organization desires from them and what it has to offer in exchange (Breaugh & Starke, 2000). Once the employee is hired, the organization and worker have expectations of each other based on their negotiations during recruitment, such as future commitments and obligations of each party, which may be renegotiated at different points after the employee has been hired. (Rousseau,1995; Rousseau & Parks, 1993; Turnley & Feldman, 1999). Psychological contracts are based on people's perceptions of the exchange rather than on what actually occurred. Thus, two different employees with the same actual contract with an organization may have different psychological contracts because of their different understandings of it (Rousseau, 2001).

Aside from differences due to differing perceptions, psychological contracts can differ among people for several other reasons. First, psychological contracts can be based on one of two orientations that parallel the concepts of interactional and distributive justice. Relational contracts evolve over time based on interactions and relationships; transactional contracts are more short-term and outcomes focused

(Herriot & Pemberton, 1996; Rousseau, 1995; Saunders & Thornhill, 2006). In addition, psychological contracts might change over time because of changes in interpretations of a contract, or due to responses to organizational change or both (Rousseau & Parks, 1993; Saunders & Thornhill, 2006). Finally, psychological contracts can be based on what has been called "the idiosyncratic deal" (p. 160, Rousseau, 2001), which is an individualized arrangement between a worker and the employer that varies from the employer's arrangement with other workers. This deal not only affects the psychological contract of the worker who negotiated it, but also can affect perceptions of fairness by other workers, who may view this inconsistent treatment of workers as unfair (Rousseau, 2001).

Individual and Contextual Factors in Equity Sensitivity

Not only can psychological contracts in the workplace differ for varying individuals, individual sensitivity to fairness in the workplace can be very different as well. Moral reasoning is affected by genetic variables such as inherited reactivity (e.g., Enright et al., 1980; Kagan, 2005), individual differences that may be context-related such as equity sensitivity (e.g., Huseman, Hatfield & Miles, 1985, 1987; Kickul, Gundry & Posig, 2005; Mudrack, Mason & Stepanski, 1999), and contextual and social variables such as behavioral modeling and social class (e.g., Bandura & McDonald, 1963; Enright, Enright & Lapsley, 1981). As a result of these individual and social factors, the degree to which individuals value justice and the degree to which they see the world as being a just place can differ substantially (e.g., Huseman, et al., 1985, 1987; Lerner, 1980; Rupp, Byrne,& Wadlington, 2003). For instance, individuals higher in "justice orientation," are more sensitive to justice issues, as are "entitleds," who are constantly looking for ways to improve their situations as compared with others (Huseman et al., 1985,1987; Rupp et al., 2003). In contrast, individuals lower in justice orientation and those who are more focused on "giving" are less troubled by unfair treatment (Huseman et al., 1985, 1987; Rupp et al., 2003). In addition, individuals who strongly believe in a just world typically perceive less unfairness, even with personal misfortune because they usually attribute the responsibility for the misfortune to the victim (Dalbert, 1998; Hafer & Olson, 1998).

Thus, we might expect these sensitive individuals to constantly monitor and enforce contract compliance by the other party, exhibiting a tendency for low trust. Trust has been studied and defined in the literature as positive expectations of the intentions or behaviors of others (Rousseau et al., 1998). However, it should be kept in mind that individual differences in sensitivity to justice and therefore the predisposition to trust can be affected by contextual factors. For instance, Kickul et al. (2005) found that equity sensitivity no longer had effects on perceptions of organizational justice when trust was high in the organization. In other words, high justice sensitivity by individuals can be overcome by what has been called institution-based trust, which refers to the promotion of trust through institutional factors, such as the ethical culture of an organization or the laws of a society that can deter behaviors based on self-interest (Rousseau et al., 1998).

Responses to Unexpected Unfairness

Research indicated that violations of psychological contract expectations can occur when the organization either knowingly breaks a promise or when the employee and organization have different understandings about what the employee was promised (Morrison & Robinson, 1997; Rousseau, 1995). Like other experiences of adversity (e.g., see Stoner & Gilligan, 2002), breaches of contracts can induce disillusionment followed by reflection and can invoke a variety of emotions including confusion, concern, and resentment, then stimulate workers to reinterpret the contracts (Saunders & Thornhill, 2006). In addition, these breaches are thought to affect the formation of future contracts and concepts of organizational justice (Alexander, Sinclair & Tetrick, 1995; Cropanzano & Prehar, 2001). These findings are consistent with the literature on cognitive dissonance, which indicates that individuals will become anxious after experiencing inconsistencies such as information or events inconsistent with beliefs or expectations (Bramel, 1968; Festinger, 1957, 1964). The model of cognitive dissonance predicts that not only will people be psychologically uncomfortable with these inconsistencies, but that they are also motivated to try to reduce the dissonance.

Strong belief in a just world.

Dissonance reduction can occur in many ways, but it is expected that individuals will begin with the easiest method; trying to forget about the dissonant cognitions or actively suppressing them (Hardyck & Kardusch, 1968). Thus, one option for individuals experiencing unfairness is to ignore the awareness of unfairness or to reinterpret the situation so it is perceived as being fair. For example, reinterpretation appears to be the method used by individuals with strong beliefs in a just world (introduced earlier in the section on individual differences in justice beliefs), who show greater acceptance of inequality than weak believers in a just world by finding some rationalization for the injustice by assuming the victim must have done something to deserve the outcome (e.g., Dalbert, 1998; Hafer & Olson, 1998; Furnham & Gunter, 1984; Glennon & Joseph, 1993; Smith, 1985).

Wright (1994) suggested that people's tendency to have selective perception at times, including self-deception, probably evolved over time through natural selection principles because of a number of benefits that selective perception offers. For instance, strong belief in a just world is thought to enable people to confront their physical and social environment as if it were stable and orderly (Lerner & Miller, 1978). Indeed, research has found that strong belief in a just world helps individuals cope with stressors and is positively associated with life satisfaction (Dalbert, 1998; Tomaka & Blascovich, 1994). It could be argued that an example of a specific application of the strong belief in a just world that offers advantages of self-deception is the philosophy of so-called "Queen Bees" successful women that reject the notion that many of women's problems are due to discrimination and believe instead that the system is fair and that an individual succeeds on his or her own merits. This seems to occur even when Queen Bees themselves have had to overcome many obstacles to achieve their success (Staines, Tavris & Jayaratne, 1974). The attitude of Queen Bees is thought to be a way to protect their special status as tokens and to rationalize that

they have fairly earned their rewards because otherwise, they might perceive themselves to be in as precarious a position as their female colleagues (Hyde, 1991).

Belief that justice can be negotiated.
However, for some individuals, belief in a just world is too incongruent with their unfairness-related experiences to adopt as a belief system following those experiences. Thus, other dissonance-reducing options have to be explored. One possibility suggested by Kohlberg's 5th level of moral development (1969, 1971) is that individuals see the situation as unfair, but believe that fairness can be negotiated or settled through democratic processes. It could be expected that individuals use this method of reducing dissonance to make use of formal and informal ways of pursuing fairness internal to the organization. For instance, the theory of cognitive dissonance has been used to explain the behavior of whistleblowers to shape other's perceptions of wrongdoing and their reactions to it (Paul & Townsend, 1996). Research indicates most whistleblowers begin with mechanisms internal to the organization before pursuing external methods in their attempts to correct a wrongdoing (Miceli & Near, 1985).

Learned helplessness.
The internal attempts of whistleblowers are often unsuccessful, with firms ignoring or even punishing internal whistleblowers (Miceli & Near, 1994). This raises the question of how dissonance is reduced in the face of very strong evidence that fairness is not negotiable in a situation. One possibility is that individuals will then adopt the belief that unfairness is something to be expected regardless of one's efforts and accomplishments and that accepted systems, even those designed to provide justice, are inherently unfair. This belief is consistent with research on learned helplessness which indicates that the controllability of events is thought to be an important aspect of human development, without which behavioral and physiological disturbances can occur (Seligman, 1975). Individuals who experience or perceive independence between their behavior and important environmental events (such as rewards) have been found to experience symptoms such as learning difficulties, passivity, and depression (e.g., Seligman, 1975).

To summarize, the research literature in a variety of areas suggests three possible fairness expectations in the face of unfairness: 1) sometimes the world seems unfair but it really is fair (i.e., strong belief in a just world); 2) the world is fair and if it is not fair, fairness can be negotiated (Kohlberg's 5th stage), and 3) the world is unfair and outcomes are out of one's control (i.e., learned helplessness).

However, it should be noted that whichever of these beliefs individuals adopt may be affected by numerous factors, including the degree to which they are sensitive to inequity, as discussed previously (e.g., Huseman et al., 1985, 1987; Kickul et al., 2005; Mudrack, Mason & Stepanski, 1999), as well as the extent to which they can work through their disillusionment quickly and the degree to which they have the courage to act on the injustice. For example, Stoner and Gilligan (2002) found that successful managers were able to bounce back from disappointments quickly, reframe their experiences into challenges, and summon the courage to take the next step. Individuals

who are able to do this are not likely to experience learned helplessness in the face of unfairness and may also be unlikely to need to have a strong belief in a just world, instead believing that the next step is to summon the courage to negotiate fairness.

Thus, the data from the Goltz (2005a) investigation was interpreted in the context of the existing literature on the formation of psychological contracts and fairness beliefs and responses to discoveries of unfairness in the attempt to answer two questions: 1) how the women developed their initial assumptions of fair treatment and 2) how they modified these assumptions following their experiences of unfair treatment. This available data set based on qualitative methods was appropriate for the research question that was asked in this investigation because it met the criteria outlined by Bachiochi and Weiner (2002). The research was exploratory; the context and participants' interpretations were central to the research question; and the depth and richness of data was important for understanding changes in women's beliefs as a result of their discriminatory experiences. The women's comments on fairness were organized into themes that could help generate ideas for future theory and research on moral development, psychological contracts, and organizational justice. The specific methodology used in the collection and analysis of this data will be described in the next section.

Review of the Method

The Goltz (2005a, 2005b) study was based on interviews with fourteen women who experienced sex discrimination and later filed court suits against their universities after being unable to resolve their situations within the university. To ensure that the discrimination claims of the interviewees were not spurious—in other words, that actual unfairness existed—the sample was limited to women who had been plaintiffs in discrimination cases with sound legal bases as judged by a panel of eight legal professionals with experience in civil rights cases. The panel had also reviewed a number of documents provided by the plaintiff and her lawyer to establish the validity of the case. These particular cases were drawn from a set of plaintiffs of university sex discrimination cases that had been sponsored in part by a single non-profit organization (the organization required review by the panel prior to the sponsoring of each case). The organization provided the investigator with a list of the plaintiffs it had sponsored, along with contact information. All plaintiffs from the list were sent a letter inviting them to participate in the study. Approximately 40% of the women who had been sponsored by the organization indicated agreement to be interviewed for the study by signing and returning a consent form.

The women were either students or faculty at the universities they sued, which were located across the United States, and their cases concerned various types of sex discrimination, including discrimination in athletics, sexual harassment, discrimination in compensation, and discrimination in promotion. The women filed their court cases between 1980 and 1996. Seven of the cases were settled before trial, and one was settled three weeks into the trial. One plaintiff's case was dismissed for not meeting the statute of limitations. Of the remaining cases, three plaintiffs won at the lower level and two lost at the lower level. Of the cases won by the plaintiffs, two

were appealed by the university and overturned at higher levels of the court system. Both cases lost by plaintiffs at the lower level were appealed. One of these appeals was denied. However, the university provided a small settlement to the plaintiff so she would not appeal the case further. The other case was still in the appeals process when the plaintiff was interviewed. These results are consistent with research that indicated that, compared with other types of discrimination cases, employment discrimination plaintiffs win a lower proportion of hearings and trials, are more likely to have their cases appealed by defendants, and on appeal face more reversals. The results are also consistent with research that indicated that plaintiffs in academic cases fare even worse than plaintiffs in other employment discrimination cases (Clermont & Schwab, 2004; Hora, 2001; Pacholski, 1992; Valian, 1998).

The study used inductive methods meaning that no preconceived framework was used to determine the questions asked other than to draw out the sequence of events in the women's stories. The interview followed a semi-structured format in which a set of initial questions was developed to cover the women's experiences at the university, as well as their various legal experiences. Follow-up probing questions were tailored according to the women's responses. All interviews were conducted by the author. The interviews averaged 2 to 2 ½ hours in length, but varied from one to four hours, depending upon the interviewee who had control over how much or how little was said for each question. (Interviewees were given an estimate of the length beforehand, but also told that it varied by individual. Most interviewees seemed to be stimulated by a chance to have their story heard, which may have given them the energy to complete a long interview. Also, in the longer interviews breaks were occasionally taken.)

Verbatim transcripts were created and provided the basis for content analyses identifying patterns of experiences. Themes of the transcripts were analyzed using software developed for this particular methodology (QSR N5). No preconceived framework was used in the identification of themes in the interview transcripts. Instead, the women's stories were organized into emerging theme clusters that could provide a basis for generating ideas for future theory and research. Similar comments were coded as a theme and themes were then organized into larger clusters of related issues, using the tree structure included in N5. Initial themes and clusters were identified using the first few transcripts. Additional transcripts were examined using the initial themes and clusters, and if a category cluster appeared inaccurate or incomplete, additional themes were added or the cluster was reorganized in N5. Following any reorganization of categories, transcripts previously coded were reexamined and recoded if appropriate. Also, to increase the accuracy, after a cluster was coded, reports which listed all coded phrases within a theme were generated using the software and also used to examine the consistency of the coding. Items that were not coded consistently with other items within the category were recoded. One coder coded all the transcripts with the exception that a second coder coded a sample of the data to determine coding reliability. Overall interrater agreement between the coders was 69%, which is within the range acceptable for drawing tentative and cautious conclusions in exploratory studies (Krippendorff, 1980).

Results and Discussion

The present analysis used the interview transcripts primarily to explore beyond what was examined in previous investigations in terms of the development of the women's fairness beliefs before and after their encounters with discrimination at their universities. Recall that the Goltz (2005a) study reported that the women believed that the universities they joined had environments in which they could meet their goals and that they would be rewarded by their universities for their efforts (Goltz, 2005a), but also found that the women realized in retrospect that they had made an initial assumption that they would be treated fairly at their universities. However, the basis for this assumption was not explored in that study. In addition, the Goltz (2005a) and Goltz (2005b) studies described the violations of expectations the women encountered as well as how they tried to address them, but did not examine the women's discussions of changes in their beliefs about fairness following their discrimination and legal experiences. Therefore, each of these aspects are examined in this paper.

Formation of Assumptions of Fairness
Results of the current examination indicated that the women did not discuss what their universities had done to lead them to make an assumption of fairness. Instead, they discussed how the behavior they encountered at their universities was inconsistent with the values they had and how these values had developed in childhood, suggesting that the women entered their initial interactions with their universities with some level of fairness expectations that had been previously developed.

Prior development of values.
The women's comments in the Goltz (2005a) study certainly indicated that they were quite sensitive to justice issues. This may have been stimulated by organizational contexts with low trust, since justice sensitivity tends to manifest in this type of situation (Kickul et al., 2005). But their sensitivity also may have spurred from aspects of the women's individual development, as suggested by the focus of many of the women on how their experiences at their universities did not fit with their own idea that hard work is usually rewarded. Therefore, during the interviews, the women for whom work ethic was particularly important were asked how they had formed their beliefs that hard work was valued and rewarded. Their comments suggested three values emerging from their childhood experiences: 1) the value of hard work; 2) the value of education; and 3) the need for women to be self-sufficient. For instance, all three of these values were found in one woman's comments:

> "From the very beginning, my parents always had expectations of us that were not like gender-based expectations. Going to college was just assumed at a time when women weren't going to college in big droves. That was the expectation in our household--that we would succeed intellectually and be able to be self-sufficient. We wouldn't have to rely on our husband or whatever was the norm in the fifties. I was brought up with a great sense of fairness, a great sense that you do what is right, and that you work hard and that you're very self-reliant kind of thing."

In addition, the interviews indicated that women with seemingly different childhoods sometimes emerged with similar values. For example, a woman who grew up in the Midwest and a woman with an Asian heritage both discussed the meaning of the work ethic in their families. The first said: "The Midwestern work ethic is you give somebody an honest day's work. That's what I would do. I mean, if you're getting a penny or you're getting ten dollars, you put in the same amount of work." Similarly, the other said: "Ethnically, the Japanese-side of the family [says] work really hard. Do a good job. Do a really good job even if nobody recognizes it. It's just the satisfaction of doing a good job."

Fairness expectations upon entry

Thus, the women's expectations that they would receive equal resources and equitable rewards at their universities was likely influenced by the values they learned from their families related to hard work, intellectual achievement, and self-sufficiency. An examination of the interviews in the Goltz (2005a, 2005b) study suggests that most of the women entered their universities in stage 5 of Kohlberg's model. Their distributive justice expectations were, first, that everyone doing similar tasks should receive equal resources. For instance, one woman, a graduate student and softball coach, indicated her expectation of equality of resource distribution when she said:

> "I didn't even have any paid coaches, I had to ask people to volunteer . . . and yet the counterpart sport had a full-time coach, had a paid assistant coach who was full-time, had a restricted earnings coach, and a graduate assistant . . .And then scholarships . . .I usually had between four and five. Yet again, baseball had their full complement of scholarships—as many as the NC2A allowed. We slept four to a room where the guys' teams would sleep two to a room."

The second distributive justice aspect that emerged from the interviews was that the women expected that rewards such as promotions should be distributed based on productivity (equity) rather than aspects such as equal distribution or group relationships. For instance, three of the women said that, even though they had perceived discrimination on several occasions at their universities, they thought that they would be able to "rise above it" with hard work (Goltz, 2005a) because of their very strong beliefs that hard work would be rewarded. One woman, who was supposed to be part-time, worked ten and twelve-hour days. Another regularly took her labs home, dissecting in her kitchen.

The women's frequent references to expecting to be rewarded for their hard work could be interpreted to mean that they wanted their effort, rather than their performance rewarded, and as is known from expectancy theory of motivation, effort does not always lead to performance (e.g., Porter & Lawler, 1968; Vroom, 1964). While this is a possibility, there are many indications that the women were referring to an expectation that their performance, not just effort, would be rewarded. Although the women did discuss the extra hours they put in and the additional tasks they took on which indicate effort, they also discussed their achievements, such as the scholarly articles they had published, graduate students they had trained, and

grants and high-scoring teaching evaluations they had received (Goltz, 2005a).   In addition, they reported comparing their own records with the records of their male colleagues (Goltz, 2005a).

Initial Responses to Violations of Expectations

However, resources at their universities appeared to have been distributed based on factors other than equality, and rewards appeared to have been distributed based on factors other than equity. These other factors included the recipient's gender or the recipient's relationships with power holders. For instance, one woman said of a male colleague: "They hired him at a higher salary. And I already had more publications than he did." Given their underlying beliefs, the women were often surprised and quite angry when equal resources and equitable rewards were not forthcoming (Goltz, 2005b). The women reported that they and their loved ones experienced emotional pain, financial hardship, and physical illness. While the women's hardships may not be entirely due to their discrimination experiences, the hardships they described are consistent with research indicating that the more individuals perceive discrimination, the more they report feeling negative emotions and physical symptoms and that sex discrimination accounts for additional variance in women's physical and psychiatric symptoms, above–and-beyond that accounted for by generic stressors (Foster, 2000; Landrine et al., 1995).

These very negative emotions and symptoms of individuals experiencing discrimination, such as the women in the present investigation, indicate that more might be occurring than the psychological discomfort predicted by the literatures on cognitive dissonance and psychological contracts violations. In addition, the outcomes individuals lose as a result of discrimination may not fully account for all their negative experiences. Instead, the degree of negative emotional and physical experiences of the women in the current study, as well as those in past studies on discrimination, suggest support for Lind's (2001) notion that what is basic to all perceptions of fairness and unfairness is a judgment about the strength of a relationship with a group or organization and that people experiencing unfairness are less affected by the material payoff they felt entitled to than by the feeling of rejection they perceived from the group or organization. In other words, using language from the psychological contracts and organizational justice literatures, even though the women focused a lot on the transactional (distributive) aspects of the unfairness they experienced during their interviews, the emotional and physical responses they described indicated that perhaps the unfair outcomes experienced were less important to them than the relational (interactive) aspects of the unfairness.

Regardless of their many negative experiences, all of the women in the Goltz (2005a) study sought to address their experiences of discrimination repeatedly, both informally and formally, within the accepted social systems at their universities as well as in the justice system. This indicates that they were able to work through their disappointment quickly enough to be able to take action to seek justice, similar to the successful managers who were found to be able to quickly reframe their disappointments as challenges (Stoner & Gilligan, 2002). Also, as the Goltz (2005b) article indicates, at least at the beginning of their efforts, they truly believed they

would succeed in rectifying their situations. For instance, one woman said of her repeated attempts to address her situation: "I was hoping that they would realize that, yes, what had happened was clearly not right. I felt like, they're going to see the light and they're going to treat me the same way that they treated those guys and somehow, I'll get a position." This behavior suggests moral reasoning that has reached at least the 5th level of Kohlberg's model, where there is awareness that justice may not always be forthcoming given different value systems, a belief that justice sometimes has to be negotiated, and a belief that this should occur through accepted means. Thus, the women appeared to still be predominately at the 5th level of Kohlberg's model during this period.

Modification of Expectations Following Failure of Initial Responses

The women's beliefs that even when justice is not present, it can be still negotiated within accepted systems were also challenged since their repeated attempts at both informal and formal appeals processes within their universities were fruitless (Goltz, 2005b). In fact, their experiences are consistent with research on what has been termed the "deaf ear" syndrome meaning that although organizations have been introducing more ways for employees to voice complaints, they often fail to respond to complaints, particularly informal ones (Harlos, 2001), but formal complaints rarely result in changes either (Nielsen, 2000). Also, note that opportunities for voice have been found to be related to justice perceptions even without the presence of distributive justice (Cawley, Keeping & Levy, 1998). Thus, the "deaf ear" syndrome represents another missed opportunity by universities for creating perceptions of justice. These missed opportunities by universities no doubt served to erode the women's institutional trust further because the mechanisms that were supposed to protect employees were not functioning effectively. This is consistent with research indicating that institutional controls not only can foster trust, but also can undermine it, particularly when organizations substitute legalistic, rigid responses to conflict for more personal, flexible forms of trust and conflict management (Rousseau et al., 1998; Sitkin & Bies, 1994; Zucker, 1986).

In addition, the women's experiences and behavior is consistent with Goldman's (2003) finding about the relationship between justice and filing legal claims for workplace discrimination: claimants are more likely to turn to the legal system when distributive, procedural, and interactional justice are all low. However, these women's experiences in the legal system were only slightly better than their experiences at their universities. The legal system was characterized by delays and game-playing, but the women found that the system was actually effective for accessing information about their situations via the discovery process. Just over half of the women obtained settlements. The remaining women were almost evenly split in terms of winning or losing their cases, and all but one of the women who won their court cases had their case overturned on appeals. The women's university discrimination and appeals experiences, while inconsistent with their own expectations of fair treatment, as well as their expectations that fairness could be negotiated, were very consistent with evidence of discrimination in academia as well as with discussions of biases in the university appeals systems (e.g., Bisom-Rapp, 1999; Edelman et al., 1999) and the

justice system (e.g., Dusky, 1996; Maloney, 1993).

An interesting question is whether the women were able to modify their original beliefs about fairness to represent reality more accurately following their experiences. As discussed previously, the possibilities from the literature on beliefs in the face of unfairness indicate the women might have: 1) continued to believe in a just world (requiring they believe they deserved their experiences); or 2) experienced learned helplessness. The women's comments in their interviews suggested these experiences of injustice and of not being able to successfully negotiate justice within their universities or the legal system did lead to modifications in their belief systems. However, the interviews indicated that none of the women believed they deserved their experiences. This is not surprising given that the characteristics of the sample of women in the study (i.e., women who believed they deserved the inequitable treatment), probably would not have sued their universities. There were occasional indications in the interviews of attitudes similar to what might be found with learned helplessness. For instance, one woman said: "I thought sort of this work ethic: you work really hard and you get rewarded. And now I think you can work really hard and not get rewarded and work really hard and get tremendously rewarded." Her comments are consistent with the notion of the lack of a correlation between behavior and outcomes that is found in individuals with learned helplessness. However, despite the women's acknowledgement of this lack of correlation, they did not display the passivity found in learned helplessness.

For the most part, the women's comments indicated their experiences appear to have stimulated them to begin to move into Kohlberg's stage 6, in which there is an awareness that democratic processes alone do not often result in outcomes that are just. As the women frequently discussed with regard to both systems, they discovered that processes which appear to be just can be quite unjust in reality. For example, one woman said of her university's grievance procedure: "The University had rules on grievances, and they violated those left and right. I don't even remember them, but it generated a list of twenty or thirty precise things that they were supposed to do that they didn't bother to do." Even at their best, these socially accepted systems do not appear to change the status quo. As one woman said, "Probably slightly more often than not, they get it right, but maybe not. The people who win, and the people who lose, if you reversed them, would probably, like with tenure, end up with about the same picture."

So how did the women cope with the challenge to their belief system that at some point, justice would be forthcoming? Kohlberg's model suggests that, at this point, the women might have concluded that it is alright to go outside established social systems to follow moral principles. This is moral reasoning representative of stage 6, in which universal principles take precedence over social contracts, endorsing civil disobedience. Although the need for laws and democratic processes is recognized, laws are viewed as valid insofar as they are grounded in justice, and a commitment to justice carries an obligation to disobey unjust laws. However, that stage is currently viewed as "theoretical" since research indicates that Kohlberg's stage 6 might be problematic, with few individuals found to consistently able to reason at this stage (Colby et al., 1983).

Although the women in the Goltz (2005a, 2005b) study did hold universal principles of justice and did change their beliefs that justice could be negotiated within accepted social systems, they did not then appear to endorse or participate in civil disobedience as a result. Instead, most believed that it was important for individuals to continue to stand up for these principles within the accepted systems. There were two reasons for this. First, the women felt that the simple process of standing up for oneself and for one's principles was very important, not only for themselves, but also for others. According to the interviews, probably the most immediate and memorable aspect of seeking justice was that this allowed the women to obtain material that helped show to themselves and others what happened to them and that it was not just. For instance, one woman said, "It was the only thing I could have done. . .I think there was some benefit to it . . .pushing it through and at least getting something out there that it wasn't my fault." Another woman, who lost her case and was appealing it at the time of the interview said: "I didn't do anything wrong by standing up. I wouldn't change. A lot of people say I wouldn't start again if I would have known. No, no, no. You've got to stand up!" Even the one woman who was able to win her case and not get it reversed on appeal noted that it wasn't the win, but the process that was the most important aspect of her case. Her attorney had told her: "Even more than [it being the highlight of my career], is the opportunity that my daughter had to meet you and to see what it is to stand up for something you believe in." This public aspect of their cases was a significant part of the meaningfulness of standing up. As one woman put it: "There's always going to be a part of me that feels that by fighting this lawsuit I made a contribution to a cause that was larger than myself, that has the potential for helping other people, and that certainly has educated other people."

Second, despite very difficult experiences that took a toll on their lives in many ways, the women still believed in the need for people to continue to pursue justice through accepted means because they believed that these systems would eventually change, albeit very slowly. The women noted that, in general, the changes their universities made in response to their lawsuits were few and superficial. However, although the changes the women saw were minimal, at least some occurred, which hadn't happened often before their appeals and lawsuits. As one woman put it: "It did force them to have to deal with some of these issues, even if it was at a window dressing level. They at least had the inconvenience." Still, most of the women were disappointed in the superficiality of the changes. As another woman said, "It's, let's have meetings, let's have forums, let's have a speaker, let's shuffle paper around, but let's not do the thing that really counts, which is to get the women the positions or get rid of the guys that are responsible for the whole thing." She went on to talk about how a man who was sued by two women was rewarded by the university with a promotion to dean of the medical school. As a result of experiences like this, most of the women perceived that what they were battling was far bigger than themselves and far more difficult to change. As one woman concluded, "institutions change the women far more than the women change the institutions." Another woman attributed this slow response by universities as being due to the fact that universities are made up of hundreds and hundreds of people with biases, but university administrators fail to see that, in part because these people reflect aspects of themselves. She said, "It's a

slow-changing culture and people tend to hire like-minded people," and explained that she didn't expect that, in her lifetime, the people at the university she sued would have the self-reflection that happened at MIT (referring to the response to discrimination at MIT that received media attention—e.g., Miller & Wilson, 1999), even with lawsuits that should serve to stimulate that self-reflection.

Research Implications and Conclusion

To summarize, results suggested that the women's expectations of fairness arose in part from three values emerging from their childhood experiences: 1) the value of hard work; 2) the value of education; and 3) the need for women to be self-sufficient. The women's descriptions of the unfairness they experienced focused primarily on the transactional (distributive) aspects. However, the emotional and physical responses they described indicated that perhaps the unfair outcomes experienced were less important to them than the relational (interactive) aspects of the unfairness—in other words, the feelings of rejection. In addition, the interviews indicated the women were initially in stage 5 of Kohlberg's model of moral development, where the distributive justice belief is that everyone doing similar tasks should receive equal resources and rewards should be based on performance. If this doesn't occur, then justice can be negotiated in accepted social systems. Following their experiences, however, the women had the belief that this is not always the case, but that people should continue to pursue justice through accepted means for two reasons. First, the women felt that this process allows victims to demonstrate to themselves and to others that what they experienced was an injustice. Second, the women believed that if enough people pursue justice through these means, then the systems will eventually change, albeit very slowly.

The tendency of research on organizational justice and psychological contracts has been to focus on dependent variables of greatest interest to managers, even to the extent of examining creating perceptions of fairness when inequities actually exist. As a result, these literatures have not adequately considered the formation of these beliefs over longer periods of time, nor have they considered the impact of contract violations on individuals beyond the context of the workplace. For instance, although the violation of psychological contracts is expected to impact work-related attitudes, behaviors, and future psychological contracts in the workplace (e.g., Alexander et al., 1995; Cropanzano & Prehar, 2001; Saunders & Thornhill, 2006), little has been said in the organizational justice literature about how inequities and the violation of psychological contracts might affect individuals' moral development.

The women's comments about fairness suggest a progression that could be further explored in research into the development of expectations about fair treatment. The women showed a convergence in the prior development of their values. It was clear that the women were sensitive to being treated fairly, perhaps partially as a result of these developmental processes. In particular, they believed their investments in hard work and education would bring self-sufficiency. Their definition of fair treatment at their universities consisted of being provided equal resources and equitable rewards as compared with their peers, especially male colleagues. After their experiences of

discrimination as well as unsuccessful experiences with their university appeals systems and the legal system, they abandoned their beliefs that justice can usually be negotiated within accepted systems, but they did not form beliefs that one should go outside the accepted process. Instead, they felt that these processes had the immediate benefit to allow women to stand up for fair treatment and educate others about unfair situations. In addition, they believed that if people continued to use these processes, eventually, over a long period of time—which may not even be in their own lifetimes—changes would occur.

These results are instructive in a number of ways because, while some of the women's experiences are consistent with past models and research into fairness beliefs, results also indicate a number of areas needing further theory and research. First, the results indicated that the women, although coming from different childhood experiences, all believed that investing in education and hard work would be rewarded and would lead to self-sufficiency. When joining their universities, they formed psychological contracts that indicated an expectation that the university would provide equal resources, but equitable rewards. The justice literatures indicate a variety of possible criteria used to measure the fairness of distributing resources and that the criteria used are very context dependent. One context that hasn't been examined much in this literature is previous developmental experience. In other words, perhaps the women's expectations of equal resources and equitable rewards were very much based on the values of education and hard work developed in their childhoods. Certainly, further research on the relationship between prior values development and the development of psychological contracts or justice perceptions is warranted.

Another interesting aspect of the present investigation is that although the women focused to a large extent on their unequal resources and inequitable rewards, which appear to be mostly related to distributive (transactional) aspects of justice, their emotional responses to these injustices suggest that they were probably reacting as much to the relationship aspects of the inequities, consistent with what Lind (2001) suggested as being basic to all definitions of unfairness. This indicates that perhaps people are more comfortable discussing the distributive aspects of the unfairness they experienced than they are discussing the rejection they felt. Thus, the present results suggest that more research is warranted into the effects of perceptions of distributive, procedural, and interactional justice on individuals' feelings of rejection. This research should not be limited to self-reports since individuals may not be likely to report the rejection from the group they are primarily responding to.

Finally, the women's modified beliefs about pursuing fairness that resulted from their experiences are instructive, indicating another alternative fairness expectation that should receive more attention in the literatures on justice expectations and moral development. This expectation of fairness can be summarized as follows. The world can be very unfair and can seem to remain that way even after individual attempts to change it, but in the long run, many individual attempts will add up, resulting in slow, evolutionary change and it is one's responsibility to be part of this process. This conclusion is more cognitively complex than stage 5 moral reasoning, learned helplessness, or strong belief in a just world. Furthermore, it is more representative of reality, and, unlike Kohlberg's stage 6, it does not require that justice be sought outside

socially established processes. It does require the individual to have patience and subsume immediate individual justice for eventual justice across society, however. Given the research that indicates mixed support for stage 6 of Kohlberg's (1969, 1971) model, it might be productive to research whether the belief the women arrived at as a result of their experiences might be more characteristic of stage 6 reasoning than is civil disobedience. Another possibility is that stage 6 as described in Kohlberg's model may be more characteristic of men, which is entirely possible given that Kohlberg based his model on data from men (Gilligan, 1982).

In conclusion, examining what happens when individuals who had perceived a fair situation discover that the situation is in fact unfair can be productive in identifying areas for further research and theory. The present study revealed that at least three areas needing further theory development and research are: 1) how the prior development of values might affect psychological contracts and the criteria used in distributive justice beliefs in the workplace; 2) whether in certain types of unfair experiences such as discrimination individuals are reacting more to the relational implications (i.e., group belonging) than they are to the distributive, transactional aspects; and 3) whether the modifications in beliefs the women reported might be more representative of moral reasoning at the 6th stage of Kohlberg's model.

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