

## IS MORE FAIRNESS ALWAYS PREFERRED? SELF-ESTEEM MODERATES REACTIONS TO PROCEDURAL JUSTICE

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**Organizational justice researchers have demonstrated that employees are more committed to organizations they believe treat them fairly. Drawing on self-verification theory, five studies showed that the positive relationship between procedural justice and commitment was eliminated among those with low self-esteem. Moreover, results of one study showed that this effect occurred only when self-verification strivings were likely to be salient (i.e., when employees expected their relationships with their organization to be relatively enduring). Finally, an experiment provided evidence that participants' experience of self-verification (feeling known and understood) mediated the interactive effect of procedural justice and self-esteem on their organizational commitment.**

Justice, it would seem, is the *sine qua non* of most institutions in egalitarian societies. Indeed, for members of organizations, the perception of procedural justice—sensing fairness in the methods used to plan and implement resource allocation decisions—is a powerful determinant of work attitudes and behaviors (Tyler & Blader, 2000; Tyler, DeGoey, & Smith, 1996). Placing a premium on justice seems perfectly rational, as fair treatment from superiors may afford people instrumental benefits (Thibaut & Walker, 1975), reduce uncertainty for them (Van den Bos & Lind, 2002), affirm basic moral principles (Folger & Cropanzano, 1998), and reinforce their status in a group (Lind & Tyler, 1988). Being treated in a procedurally just manner also conveys evaluative information that makes workers feel respected and valued and is thus self-enhancing (e.g., Jones, 1973). For these reasons, it would seem that all members of organizations would insist on being treated justly and would react more positively to more procedurally fair treatment.

Yet there are both theoretical and empirical reasons to question whether the preference for positive evaluations conveyed by fair treatment is universal. Somewhat ironically, individuals who suffer from low self-regard may become uncomfortable upon learning that others view them positively. Indeed, social psychological theory and research suggest that under certain, specifiable conditions, the seemingly ubiquitous desire for positive, self-enhancing evaluations may be counteracted by a powerful desire for self-verification, which is confirmation that a person is known and understood by others (Swann, 1983; for a review, see Swann, Chang-Schneider, and Angulo [in press]). Of particular relevance here, self-verification theory suggests that because people with low self-esteem doubt that they are worthy of respectful treatment, they are ambivalent about the positive regard conveyed by fair treatment. Consequently, they may fail to show the clear preference for just treatment that people with high self-esteem display.

Some scattered evidence is consistent with the notion that self-verification strivings may influence reactions to fair treatment. That is, people with low self-esteem have been shown to be less likely to exhibit the positive relationship between procedural fairness and work attitudes/behaviors dis-

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played by their counterparts with high self-esteem (Brockner et al., 1998; Heuer, Blumenthal, Douglas, & Weinblatt, 1999). This evidence must be viewed cautiously, however, for two reasons. First, processes other than self-verification might account for the findings; indeed, self-verification was neither measured nor manipulated directly in any of these studies. Second, other studies have shown that people with low self-esteem may respond more positively than high-self-esteem people to higher procedural justice (De Cremer, 2003; De Cremer & Sedikides, 2005; De Cremer, van Knippenberg, van Dijke, & Bos, 2004).

In this report, we present five studies that examined the moderating role of self-esteem in reactions to procedural justice. The work was designed to extend past research in three ways. First, whereas past researchers have repeatedly identified the ways in which procedural justice benefits organizations, we begin to specify the boundary conditions of such effects (De Cremer, 2003). Second, by testing the relative viability of two distinct, related models of reactions to procedural justice (self-enhancement and self-verification theory), our work answers the call for research to explore the psychological mechanisms underlying procedural justice effects (Folger & Cropanzano, 1998; Lind & Tyler, 1988; Tyler & Lind, 1992). Third, this is the first research to forge links between self-verification theory and the burgeoning literature on organizational justice.

## LITERATURE REVIEW AND HYPOTHESES

At least four distinct theoretical approaches have been used to explain the tendency for employees to respond more favorably (e.g., with higher levels of organizational commitment) when they are treated with greater procedural justice: instrumental theory, the "deonance" model of justice, uncertainty management theory, and relational theory. First, instrumental theory suggests that people prefer greater procedural justice because it leads them to anticipate receiving favorable outcomes in the short or long term (Thibaut & Walker, 1975). Second, the deonance (moral virtue) model of justice suggests that people prefer greater procedural justice because such behavior conforms to ethical and humanitarian standards for interpersonal treatment (Folger & Cropanzano, 1998). Third, according to uncertainty management theory, people prefer high procedural fairness because it addresses their concerns about being exploited by decision-making authorities (Van den Bos, 2001). Fourth, the relational theory argument (Lind & Tyler, 1988; Tyler et al., 1996) is that people react more favorably to higher

procedural fairness because fair treatment leads them to infer that the enacting parties regard them highly. The possibility that some people may not respond more favorably to being treated with higher procedural fairness has received less attention, but it is implicit in some contemporary perspectives on procedural justice. Notably, in suggesting that procedural fairness communicates self-evaluative information to people, relational theory (Tyler & Lind, 1992) implies that procedural fairness could affect them more or less positively, depending upon their self-esteem and associated, self-related motives. Two such self-related motives are self-enhancement and self-verification.

## Self-Enhancement and Self-Verification

According to self-enhancement theory (Jones, 1973), people wish to feel good about themselves and therefore react positively when they receive positive evaluations from others. Considerable evidence supports self-enhancement theory's prediction that people will seek and embrace positive evaluations (for a review, see Baumeister [1989]). In contrast, self-verification theory (Swann, 1983) suggests that a desire to confirm their self-views (their thoughts and feelings about themselves) guides people's reactions to evaluative information. The theory's assumption is that self-views provide people with a crucial source of coherence, a means of organizing experience, predicting future events, and guiding behavior (cf. Lecky, 1945).

According to self-verification theory, once people form self-views, they work to stabilize them by seeking and embracing experiences that match their self-views and by avoiding or rejecting experiences that challenge them. Hence, contradicting self-enhancement theory's assumption that people prefer to be with those who evaluate them positively (Jones, 1973), self-verification researchers have reported that people with low self-esteem preferred interaction partners who evaluated them negatively (e.g., Giesler, Josephs, & Swann, 1996). Similarly, research on people in ongoing relationships, such as married couples and roommates, suggests that people gravitate toward partners who provide self-verifying evaluations, whereas they withdraw from those who do not (Burke & Stets, 1999; Cast & Burke, 2002; De La Ronde & Swann, 1998; Swann, De La Ronde, & Hixon, 1994; Swann & Pelham, 2002).

For people with high self-esteem, self-enhancement and self-verification theory lead to identical predictions regarding reactions to the evaluations implicit in procedural fairness information. That is,

because favorable evaluations are both self-enhancing (in that they help people feel good about themselves) and self-verifying (in that they confirm the positive self-views of people with high self-esteem), people with high self-esteem should react more favorably to procedurally fair treatment than to procedurally unfair treatment.

The two theories lead to opposing predictions regarding the reactions of people with low self-esteem. The simplest version of self-enhancement theory suggests that all people will react positively to high levels of procedural fairness, regardless of their level of self-esteem (e.g., Shrauger, 1975). According to *compensatory* self-enhancement theory, however, people with low self-esteem, who are often frustrated in their desire for positive evaluations, become hungrier for, and hence more drawn to, the positive evaluative information contained in procedurally fair treatment (De Cremer, 2003; Jones, 1973; Leary & Baumeister, 2000). As a result, low-self-esteem people should be more apt to embrace procedurally fair treatment than their high-self-esteem counterparts.

In contrast, according to self-verification theory, people with low self-esteem should be less inclined than their high-self-esteem counterparts to exhibit the typically positive response to procedural justice. That is, because the positive evaluative information inherent in procedurally fair treatment disconfirms their self-views, people with low self-esteem should be less eager to embrace fair over unfair treatment, relative to those with high self-esteem.

Note that self-verification theory merely predicts that low-self-esteem persons are *less* likely to embrace fair procedures than their high-self-esteem counterparts; the theory does not predict the magnitude of this difference. The key here is the assumption that self-verification strivings are stronger insofar as the feedback matches people's self-views (Bosson & Swann, 1999), and it is difficult if not impossible to know in advance the degree to which any given instantiation of procedural justice will match the self-views of people with low self-esteem. Thus, although they may feel unworthy of respect, their negative self-views may not be so negative that they conclude that they deserve to be exploited. For this reason, although low-self-esteem people may be more accepting of unfairness than high-self-esteem people, if the injustice is sufficiently egregious, it may disconfirm even the most negative of self-views. In short, the self-verification theory prediction is that low-self-esteem employees will be less apt to exhibit evidence of the positive relationship between procedural justice and

organizational commitment observed among high-self-esteem employees. However, the theory does not specify whether the positive relationship between procedural justice and organizational commitment will be *attenuated* among people with low-self-esteem (i.e., a positive, but less pronounced, relationship between procedural justice and organizational commitment would be observed); *eliminated* (the relationship between procedural justice and organizational commitment would be nonsignificant); or *reversed* (low-self-esteem people would show *more* commitment to their organization when treated unfairly). Thus, drawing on self-verification theory, we predict:

*Hypothesis 1. Self-esteem moderates the relationship between procedural justice and organizational commitment: people with high self-esteem are more likely to display evidence of a positive relationship between procedural justice and organizational commitment than people with low self-esteem.*

Hypothesis 1 was tested in all five of the present studies. Whereas empirical support for Hypothesis 1 would be consistent with self-verification theory, it would not definitely establish that self-verification strivings accounted for the findings. Hence, using two different research strategies, we evaluated in Studies 4 and 5 whether self-verification processes accounted for the predicted interaction between procedural justice and self-esteem.

If self-verification processes are responsible for the interaction between self-esteem and amount of procedural justice, then the interaction should be stronger when self-verification strivings are more salient—a possibility we assessed in Study 4. Relationships that are more enduring foster more of a concern with self-verification because they present ongoing opportunities to accurately and reliably confirm important aspects of the self. Indeed, prior research has demonstrated that self-verification strivings are especially evident when a relationship is relatively enduring (e.g., Campbell, Lackenbauer, & Muise, 2006; Hixon & Swann, 1993; Swann et al., 1994). Hence, in Study 4 we tested the prediction that the interactive effect of procedural fairness and self-esteem would emerge more strongly when people perceive their relationship with an organization to be enduring.

*Hypothesis 2. The enduringness of the relationship between a person and an organization moderates the interactive effect of procedural justice and self-esteem: the interactive effect is more likely to emerge when people perceive*

*their relationship with their organization to be relatively enduring.*

In Study 5, we directly measured the extent to which participants felt self-verified when exposed to higher or lower degrees of procedural justice. Responses to this measure allowed us to test the extent to which experienced self-verification mediated the interactive effect of procedural fairness and self-esteem on respondents' organizational commitment. We expected that procedural justice and self-esteem would interactively influence the extent to which participants experienced self-verification in such a way that procedural justice and self-verification would be more strongly, positively related among those with relatively high self-esteem than among those with relatively low self-esteem. Participants' experienced self-verification, in turn, was expected to be positively related to their organizational commitment. Integrating these last two points, we posited:

*Hypothesis 3. Experienced self-verification mediates the interactive effect of procedural justice and self-esteem on people's organizational commitment.*

## STUDY 1

### Methods

Participants in Study 1 were employees in a division of a large eastern U.S. telecommunications company that was in the midst of a significant restructuring, which involved reorganization of jobs and tasks as well as some cost-cutting and downsizing efforts. Surveys were distributed to all employees in the division ( $n = 50$ ), with 33 surveys returned (for a 66 percent response rate).<sup>1</sup>

**Dependent variable: Organizational commitment.** We assessed employees' commitment to the organization with 14 items ( $\alpha = .92$ ) developed by Mowday and colleagues (Mowday, Porter, & Steers, 1982). A sample item was, "I am proud to tell others that I am part of [division]." Participants responded to all items in this study using a seven-point response scale with endpoints labeled "strongly disagree" (1) and "strongly agree" (7).

**Independent variables: Procedural justice.** We utilized a five-item scale ( $\alpha = .85$ ) to assess employ-

ees' experience of the restructuring and the selection process by which they were assigned to new positions after the restructuring. The items, which were developed for this study, captured employees' overall perceptions of procedural justice as well as their judgments of the degree to which important decisions were made in ways that suppressed bias and used accurate information. A sample item was, "The selection process for new positions in [division name] has been managed in the fairest way possible."

**Self-esteem.** Our measure of self-esteem was drawn from Heatherton and Polivy's (1991) State Self-Esteem Scale. Although state and trait self-esteem are conceptually distinct, they are strongly associated empirically. For example, Heatherton and Polivy (1991) reported a correlation of .80 between their overall state self-esteem scale and a standard measure of trait self-esteem. Given such overlap, we viewed our measure of state self-esteem as likely to capture much of the variance associated with employees' chronic self-views, as required by self-verification theory.<sup>2</sup>

We utilized 14 items from the 20-item scale ( $\alpha = .89$ ), eliminating those that were irrelevant, in the view of organizational representatives with whom we pretested the survey for this study. A sample item was, "I feel good about myself."

### Results and Discussion

We utilized hierarchical linear regression analysis to test the main hypothesis.<sup>3</sup> Specifically, we entered the main effects of self-esteem and procedural justice into the regression in the first step, and in the second step we added the interaction between self-esteem and procedural justice ( $F[3, 30] = 11.48, p < .001, \text{total } R^2 = .49$ ). Of greatest importance, the hypothesized interaction effect was significant ( $b = 0.26, t = 2.20, p < .04, \Delta R^2 = 7\%$ ).

<sup>2</sup> This measure was not significantly correlated with perceived procedural fairness ( $r = .09, p > .10$ ). Descriptive statistics and correlations for all variables in each study can be obtained from the first author.

<sup>3</sup> Because the sample was relatively small, we conducted a principal components (rather than confirmatory) factor analysis with varimax rotation to investigate the correlation between self-esteem and organizational commitment ( $r = .56$ ). Only one item loaded equally highly on both the self-esteem and organizational commitment factors ("I feel very little loyalty to [the division]"); when that item was omitted from the organizational commitment scale, the results were not materially different from those presented below.

<sup>1</sup> Studies 1–4 (but not Study 5) were part of larger data collection efforts. Data from these studies have been published elsewhere and differ from the present results in several important ways. For example, previously published findings were based on different respondents and/or different independent and dependent variables.



To illustrate the nature of the significant interaction effect, we followed Aiken and West's (1991) suggestion that predicted values of the dependent variable be exhibited at one standard deviation above and one standard deviation below the mean for the independent variables. However, because self-verification theory led us to focus on people with strong and well-formed self-views, here and in Studies 2–4 we show the predicted values of organizational commitment at two standard deviations above and below the mean for self-esteem (and at one standard deviation above and below the mean for procedural justice). Figure 1 shows that the form of the interaction was consistent with self-verification theory. Specifically, for participants with higher self-esteem, there was a strongly positive association between procedural justice and organizational commitment (simple slope  $b = 0.82$ ,  $p < .01$ ). However, this relationship was eliminated among those who were lower in self-esteem (simple slope  $b = -0.41$ , n.s.), suggesting a nonsignificant trend in the opposite direction.

The results of Study 1 provided initial support for Hypothesis 1. For participants with higher self-esteem, for whom self-enhancement and self-verification strivings worked in concert, procedural justice was strongly and positively associated with organizational commitment. In contrast, among those with lower self-esteem, the positive relationship between procedural justice and organizational commitment was absent. One limitation of Study 1 was its relatively small sample, which raised questions about the generalizability of the findings. To address this concern, we examined the moderating role of self-esteem on reactions to procedural jus-

tice in Study 2 in an entirely different context, utilizing different measures of the independent and dependent variables.

## STUDY 2

### Methods

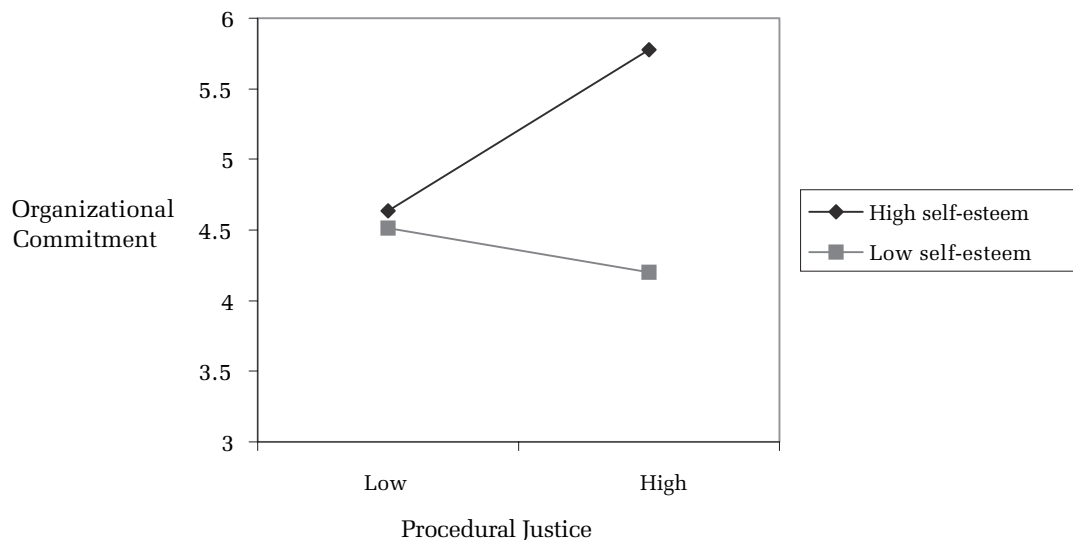
The participants in Study 2 were full-time employees at a large western U.S. utility company that had recently undergone a reorganization and downsizing to respond to its increasingly competitive business environment. Managers randomly distributed surveys to employees; we gave 232 surveys to the managers for distribution, and 179 surveys (77%) were returned to us.

**Dependent variable: Organizational commitment.** We assessed employees' organizational commitment with 11 items developed by Mowday et al. (1982) and 4 additional items corresponding to the internalization and identification dimensions of commitment in O'Reilly and Chatman's (1986) scale. Responses were made on seven-point scales, with endpoints labeled "strongly disagree" (1) and "strongly agree" (7) ( $\alpha = .82$ ).

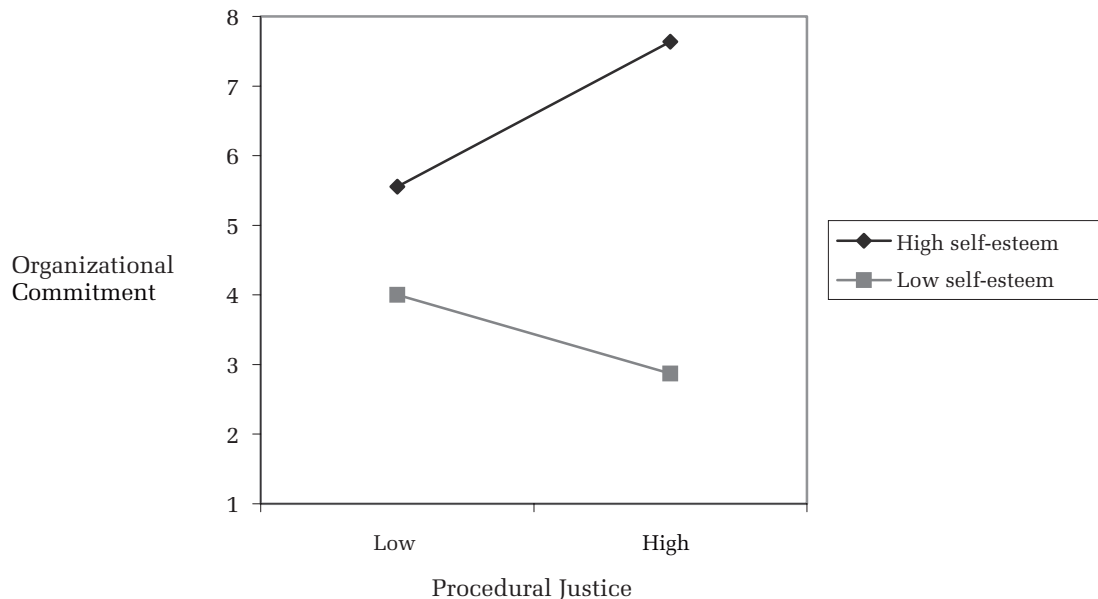
**Independent variables: Procedural justice.** Justice was assessed with a single item, designed for this study, tapping the degree of consistency in the allocation of workload responsibilities (Leventhal, Karuza, & Fry, 1980). We asked, "To what extent is the work load in the unit fairly distributed, rather than some work unit members doing most of the work?" ("not at all," 1, to "to a great extent," 7).

**Self-esteem.** Self-esteem was assessed with items taken from the Rosenberg (1965) trait self-

**FIGURE 1**  
Organizational Commitment as a Function of Self-Esteem and Procedural Justice: Study 1



**FIGURE 2**  
**Organizational Commitment as a Function of Self-Esteem and Procedural Justice: Study 2**



esteem scale. We used four items having the greatest face validity for organizational use to meet the participating organization's requirement that the survey be brief. A sample item was, "I feel that I am a person of worth, at least on an equal basis with others" ("strongly disagree," 1, to "strongly agree," 7;  $\alpha = .69$ ).

**Control variable.** Because level of education has been shown to be inversely related to organizational commitment (Mathieu & Zajac, 1990; Mowday et al., 1982) we included it as a control variable. The item asked respondents to report their highest level of education, with "some high school" (1), "high school graduate" (2), "some college or technical school" (3), "college graduate" (4), and "graduate school" (5) serving as the choices.

## Results and Discussion

A hierarchical multiple regression analysis was used to test our predictions.<sup>4</sup> In the first step, we entered the control variable and the main effects of self-esteem and procedural justice, adding the interaction term in the second step. The overall equation was significant ( $F[4, 167] = 5.43, p < .001$ , total  $R^2 = .12$ ). Moreover, we found a significant

interaction effect ( $b = 0.20, t = 2.03, p < .04; \Delta R^2 = 3\%$ ). We illustrated the nature of the interaction effect using the same procedure as in Study 1; Figure 2 is a graph of the interaction. The form was consistent with our prediction: among people who were higher in self-esteem, we observed a strongly positive relationship between perceived procedural justice and organizational commitment (simple slope  $b = 0.55, p < .001$ ), but among those lower in self-esteem, the relationship was eliminated (simple slope  $b = -0.03, n.s.$ ).

Thus, in a different context from that of Study 1, with a much larger sample, and with entirely different measures of self-esteem and procedural justice, Study 2 provided converging evidence of the moderating role of self-esteem on the relationship between procedural justice and organizational commitment (Hypothesis 1). A potential limitation of Study 2 was that procedural justice was assessed with a single item, but the similarity of the Study 2 findings to the findings of Study 1 is reassuring.

## STUDY 3

A limitation of both studies described above was that the measure of organizational commitment consisted of self-reported attitudes. Finding evidence of the interaction between procedural justice and self-esteem on a behavioral measure of commitment would enhance both the external validity and practical importance of the present findings. Accordingly, in Study 3 we measured employees'

<sup>4</sup> Confirmatory factor analysis of the items used to measure the three factors of self-esteem, procedural justice, and organizational commitment suggested that our model fitted the data well (NFI = .99, NNFI = .98, CFI = .99, RMSEA = .03).

absenteeism as a behavioral proxy for their commitment (Mowday et al., 1982). Study 3 also had a longitudinal (rather than cross-sectional) research design, with the dependent measure of absenteeism largely reflecting the behavior of employees in the period after the independent variables were measured. Another purpose of Study 3 was to test the generality of the moderating effect of self-esteem on procedural justice with the use of a different self-esteem scale, namely, an organization-based measure of self-esteem.

## Methods

A survey was mailed to all employees in the largest state-run hospital in Reykjavik, Iceland ( $n = 1,475$ ), which was undergoing a major cost-cutting initiative involving closing or consolidation of units and significant reductions in work hours for many employees. The survey was translated from English and then back-translated to verify accuracy. We pilot-tested the Icelandic version of the survey on a random sample of 20 hospital employees to assure the reliability of the meaning of the measures. Employees who participated in the pilot test did not take part in the final survey. We received 1,402 completed surveys from the set of 1,475 we distributed, but owing to an absence of data on specific items or in the human resource department's records, we obtained complete data on 608 employees. These individuals represented a wide variety of divisions and positions at the hospital.

**Dependent variable: Absenteeism.** From records kept by the human resources department of the hospital, we collected data on each employee's number of unplanned days of absence for a period beginning two months prior to survey administration and ending ten months afterward. In this organization, absenteeism was reported in terms of eight-hour workdays. However, some employees' shifts were longer or shorter than eight hours, and they could be absent for portions of a shift as well as for an entire shift. Serious illness and vacations were treated as leaves and thus were not included in the absenteeism measure.

**Independent variables: Procedural justice.** The procedural justice measure comprised 15 items based on previous research (Brockner, Wiesenfeld, & Martin, 1995) tapping both the interpersonal behavior of those who plan and implement organizational decisions (e.g., "Management treated employees with dignity and respect during the changes") and the structural attributes of the decision process (e.g., "How much advance

warning did you receive prior to the changes?"). Participants responded to all items on seven-point scales with endpoints of "strongly disagree" or "very little" (1) and "strongly agree" or "very much" (7). The items were averaged into an index ( $\alpha = .94$ ).

**Self-esteem.** The measure of self-esteem consisted of participants' evaluation of themselves as organization members. Participants responded to items from the Organization-Based Self-Esteem (OBSE) Scale (Pierce, Gardner, Cummings, & Dunham, 1989), which assesses self-views that are specific to an organizational context. The entire OBSE scale has ten items. Our survey included the four items with the highest face validity, and our pilot study confirmed their reliability. A sample item was, "I am important around here" ("strongly disagree," 1, to "strongly agree," 7;  $\alpha = .73$ ).

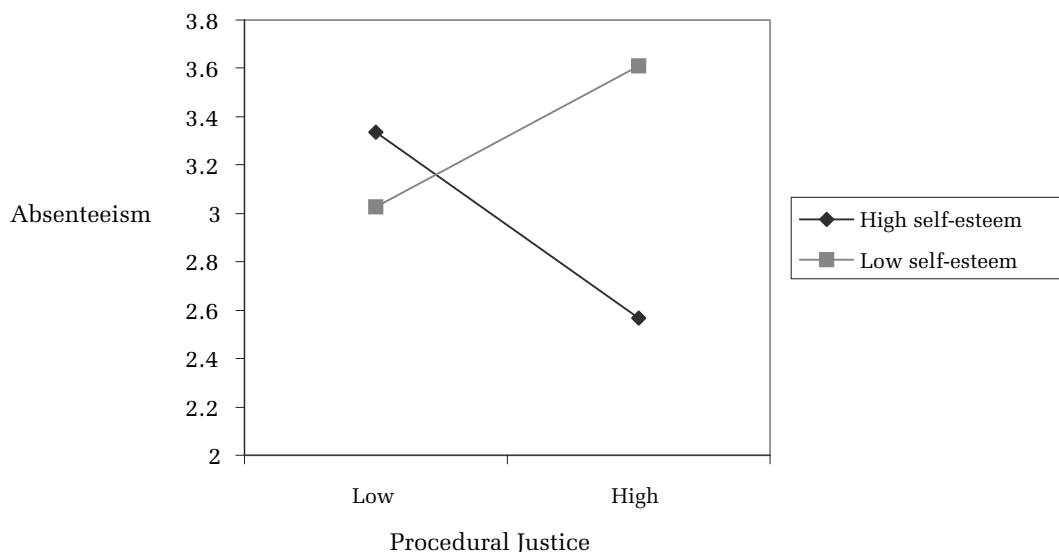
## Results and Discussion

We tested Hypothesis 1 using a hierarchical multiple regression analysis.<sup>5</sup> First, we entered the main effects of procedural justice and organization-based self-esteem, and then we added the interaction term in the second step (overall  $F[3, 605] 2.05$ ,  $p < .10$ , total  $R^2 = .01$ ). Of greatest importance, the interaction effect was significant ( $b = -0.13$ ,  $t = -2.09$ ,  $p < .04$ ,  $\Delta R^2 = 1\%$ ). The same procedure used in the studies reported above was employed to illustrate the nature of the interaction effect, which is depicted in Figure 3. For those higher in organization-based self-esteem, a simple slope analysis showed a significant relationship between procedural justice and absenteeism ( $b = -0.19$ ,  $p = .02$ ). That is, higher levels of procedural justice were associated with reduced absenteeism. However, for those with lower organization-based self-esteem, the relationship between procedural justice and absenteeism was eliminated (simple slope  $b = 0.15$ , n.s.).

The interaction effect in Study 3 thus followed the same pattern as that found in the previous studies, providing further support for the construct validity and generalizability of the findings. However, it is worth noting that the independent variables accounted for much less total variance in the dependent measure in this study than in Studies 1 and 2. This is perhaps not surprising. After all,

<sup>5</sup> Confirmatory factor analysis of the items used to measure the three factors of self-esteem, procedural justice, and absenteeism suggested that our model fitted the data well (NFI = .99, NNFI = .98, CFI = .99, RMSEA = .04).

**FIGURE 3**  
**Absenteeism as a Function of Organization-Based Self-Esteem and Procedural Justice: Study 3**



many factors that are beyond the purview of self-verification or justice processes, such as health and family obligations, are likely to influence absenteeism.

#### STUDY 4

People's self-verification strivings should be more pronounced in relatively enduring relationships because they perceive the other parties to have more accurate information about them. Moreover, people expect to encounter the other parties more often in more enduring relationships, thereby augmenting the benefits of being viewed congruently (in line with their self-views) as well as the detriments of being viewed incongruently. Thus, if enduringness heightens self-verification strivings, and if self-verification strivings underlie the interactive effect of self-esteem and procedural justice on organizational commitment found in Studies 1–3, then the interaction effect should be more pronounced when people expect to have relatively enduring relationships with their organization.

To evaluate this possibility, we included the extent to which employees expected to have enduring relationships with their employers as an additional independent variable in Study 4. Our primary prediction was the three-way interaction effect. We expected the interaction effect found in Studies 1–3 to be especially pronounced among those who expected to have relatively enduring relationships with employers.

#### Methods

Participants were part-time business school students who were also working full-time in a city in the south central United States. Multiple organizations were represented in the sample. All students completed surveys during a class session. Participants indicated whether they had survived a layoff in their organization within the previous year. For respondents who indicated that they either had been victims of a layoff or had not experienced any organizational change ( $n = 78$ ), we used different surveys and omitted responses from the sample. At the time of survey administration, each participant in the sample was a permanent employee of an organization in which a layoff had taken place ( $n = 129$ ).

**Dependent variable: Organizational commitment.** As in Studies 1 and 2, we assessed self-reported commitment, in this case using a 22-item scale ( $\alpha = .96$ ). Eighteen of the items were drawn from a scale used in previous research on employees' reactions to layoffs (Brockner, Wiesenfeld, Reed, Grover, & Martin, 1993). An additional 4 items were drawn from O'Reilly and Chatman's (1986) organizational commitment scale. A sample item was, "If a friend criticized the organization, I would probably argue with him." Responses were made on seven-point scales, with endpoints labeled "strongly disagree" (1) and "strongly agree" (7).

**Independent variables: Self-esteem.** Self-esteem was assessed with the 20-item Heatherton and Polivy (1991) State Self-Esteem Scale ( $\alpha = .86$ ). Responses were made on a four-point scale, in



which participants were instructed, "Write 1 if you don't feel this way at all" to "Write 4 if you feel this way very much."<sup>6</sup>

**Procedural justice.** Procedural justice was assessed with a six-item scale based on previous research (Wiesenfeld, Brockner, & Thibault, 2000) tapping the interpersonal and structural dimensions of procedural justice ( $\alpha = .79$ ). Sample items were, "To what extent were you treated with dignity and respect?" and "How fair were the criteria used to decide which employees were laid off and which were retained?" ("not at all," 1, to "very much," 7).

**Future relationship expectations.** The following item, designed for this study, was used to assess respondents' expectations of their future relationships with their employers: "I don't have much of a future with this organization" ("strongly disagree," 1, to "strongly agree," 7). Note that high numbers indicate weaker expectations of an enduring relationship with an organization.

**Control variable.** As in Study 2, we included education as a control variable. The item asked respondents to report their highest degree earned (high school, 1; associate, 2; undergraduate, 3; master's, 4; and higher, 5).

## Results and Discussion

We assessed our hypotheses using hierarchical multiple regression.<sup>7</sup> The main effects of the control variable and the three independent variables were included in the first step. In the second step, we added the two-way interactions associated with the three independent variables, and in the third step, the three-way interaction of self-esteem, procedural justice, and future relationship expectations. Supporting Hypothesis 1, the two-way interaction between self-esteem and procedural justice was significant, albeit only marginally so ( $b = 1.37$ ,  $t = 1.82$ ,  $p < .07$ ). Using the methodology suggested by Aiken and West (1991), we found that the form of the interaction was identical to that reported in Studies 1–3;

specifically, the relationship between procedural justice and organizational commitment was positive and significant among those who were higher in self-esteem (simple slope  $b = 0.72$ ,  $p < .001$ ), whereas the relationship between procedural justice and organizational commitment was eliminated among those who were lower in self-esteem (simple slope  $b = 0.08$ , n.s.).

Of greater importance, the hypothesized three-way interaction of self-esteem, procedural justice, and future relationship expectations was significant (overall  $F[8, 106] = 11.29$ ,  $p < .001$ , total  $R^2 = .42$ ; interaction  $b = -3.95$ ,  $t = -2.07$ ,  $p < .04$ ,  $\Delta R^2 = 2\%$ ). To illustrate the nature of the significant three-way interaction effect, we show the predicted values of the interactive effect of procedural justice and self-esteem on organizational commitment when enduringness was relatively high (one standard deviation above the mean) and when enduringness was relatively low (one standard deviation below the mean).

As can be seen in Figure 4, the interactive relationship between procedural justice and self-esteem was exhibited only among those who expected to have ongoing relationships with their organization. To evaluate these findings further, we conducted subgroup hierarchical regression analyses. Participants were classified as relatively high or low in their expectations of future relationships with their organization, on the basis of a median split. For these two groups, we then conducted separate regression analyses in which the predictors were procedural justice, self-esteem, and the interaction of the two. Of greatest importance, the results showed that the interaction between procedural justice and self-esteem was significant among those with relatively high expectations of future relationships with their organization ( $b = 1.06$ ,  $p < .001$ ), whereas the interaction did not even approach significance among those with relatively low expectations of future relationships with their organization ( $b = 0.19$ , n.s.). Instead, for those with low expectations of future relationships, we saw a positive main effect of procedural justice on organizational commitment ( $p < .001$ ).

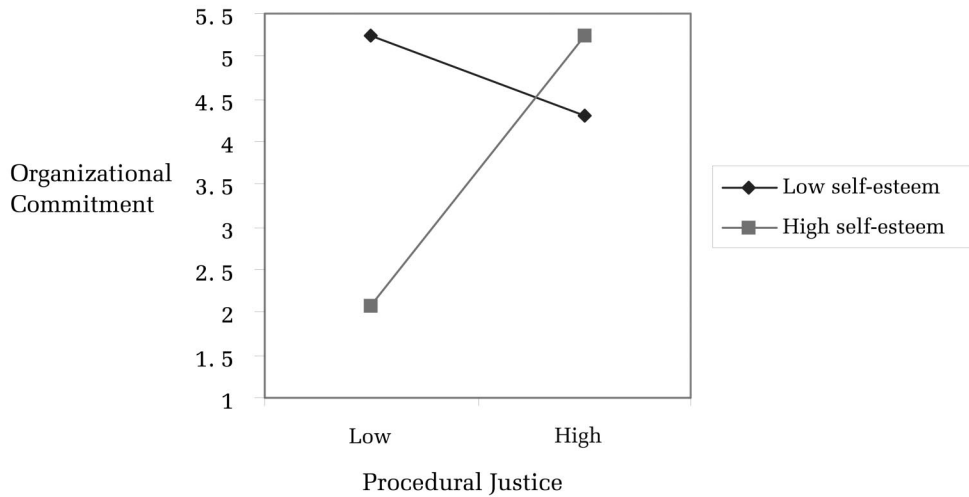
In short, the results of Study 4 support self-verification theory's prediction that expectations of an enduring relationship moderate the interactive effect of self-esteem and procedural justice on organizational commitment. That is, the interaction between self-esteem and procedural justice was more pronounced among those for whom self-verification strivings were likely to be more salient: that is, those who expected enduring relationships with their organization.

<sup>6</sup> We conducted all of the analyses using both the full self-esteem scale and the same shortened scale utilized in Study 1 and found that the main results were highly consistent in both instances. The findings presented are based on the entire scale.

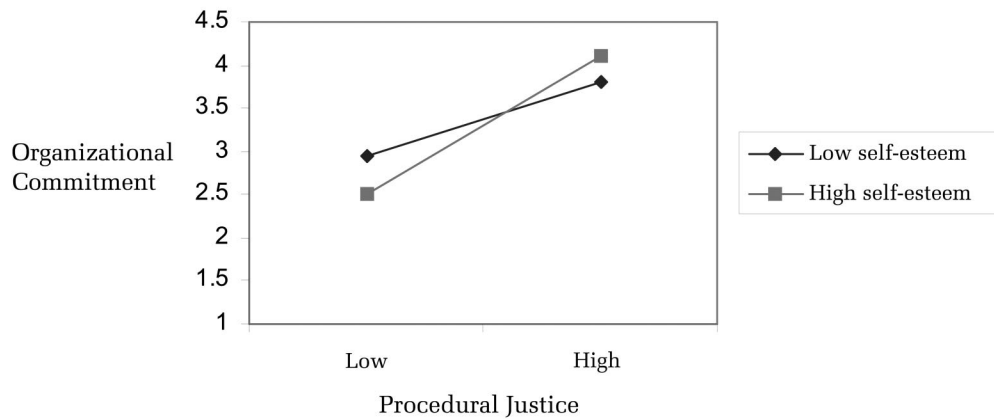
<sup>7</sup> Confirmatory factor analysis of the items used to measure the four factors of self-esteem, procedural justice, organizational commitment, and future relationship expectations suggested that our model fitted the data well (NFI = .88, NNFI = .94, CFI = .97, RMSEA = .04).

**FIGURE 4**  
**Organizational Commitment as a Function of Self-Esteem and Procedural Justice: Study 4**

**(4a) High Future Relationship Expectations**



**(4b) Low Future Relationship Expectations**



**STUDY 5**

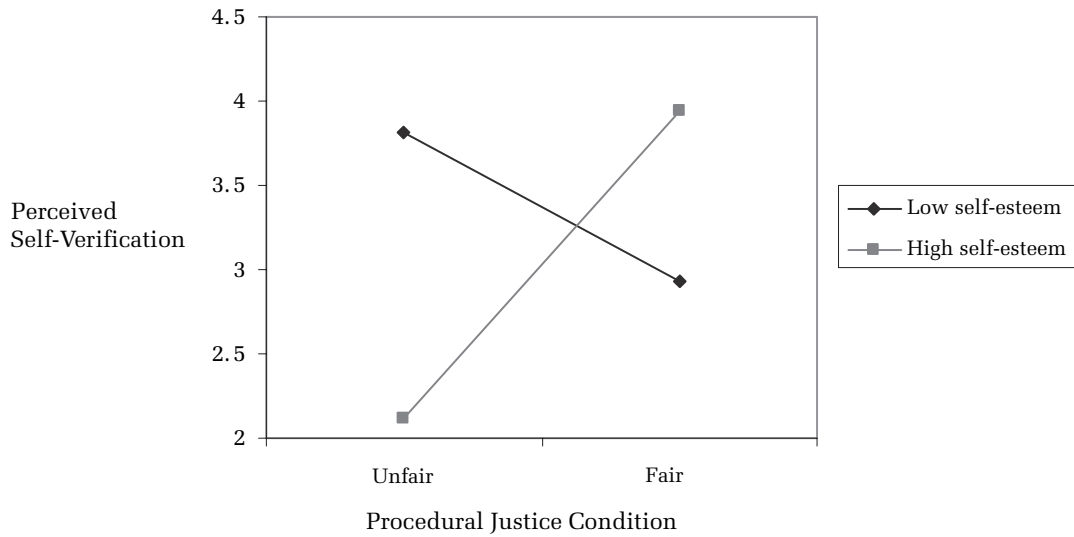
In Study 5, we took a different approach to assessing the role of self-verification strivings in the interactive relationship between procedural justice and self-esteem. In particular, we directly assessed the degree of self-verification that participants experienced as a function of procedural justice and their self-esteem. It was expected that people would feel more self-verified insofar as the level of procedural justice they received matched their self-esteem levels (i.e., high procedural justice for those high in self-esteem and low procedural justice for those low in self-esteem). We also included several measures of organizational commitment, with the expectation that commitment would increase with experienced self-verification. Of greatest importance,

we expected self-verification to mediate the interactive effect of procedural justice and self-esteem on organizational commitment.

Study 5 was also designed to examine the interactive relationship between procedural justice and self-esteem with an experimental methodology, thus affording us a design that increased internal validity. After assessing participants' self-esteem, we randomly assigned them to be treated with high or low levels of procedural justice. Furthermore, Study 5 utilized a measure of self-esteem that focused specifically on perceptions of social worth, the component of self-esteem that self-verification theory suggests should be most sensitive to evaluative information such as perceptions of procedural justice (Tafarodi & Swann, 2001).

**FIGURE 5**

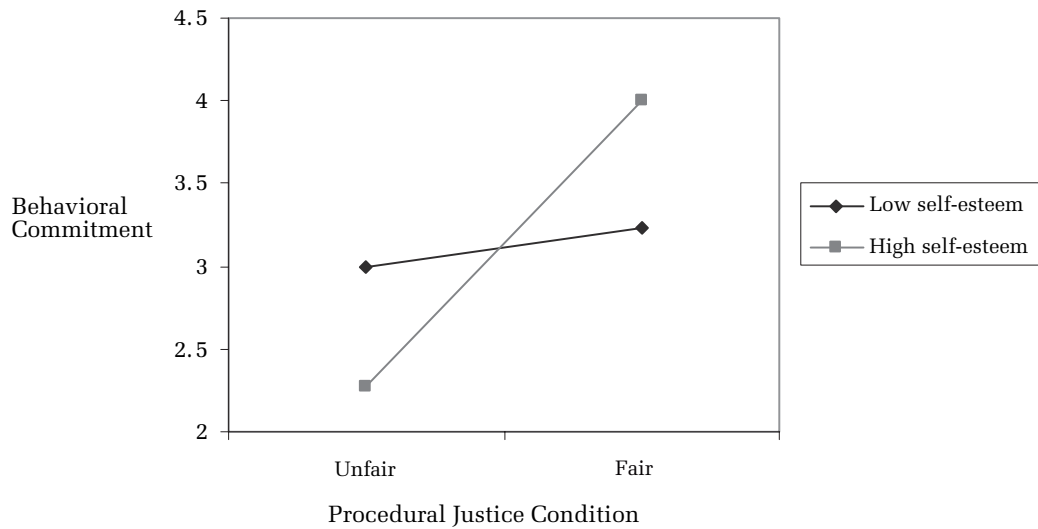
**(5a) Perceived Self-Verification as a Function of Self-Esteem and Justice Condition**



**(5b) Attitudinal Commitment as a Function of Self-Esteem and Justice Condition**



**(5c) Behavioral Commitment as a Function of Self-Esteem and Justice Condition**



## Methods

Study 5 examined the reactions of students at a large public university in the southern United States to a highly salient event of relevance to them. Shortly before the study, the university had announced that a security breach had taken place in which one or more unauthorized persons had gained access to electronic records containing personal information such as social security numbers and other biographical data. Affected parties included business school students, alumni, faculty, staff, and applicants. Whereas the event had already taken place, the official response to it was not fully formulated, thus creating the opportunity for us to manipulate how procedurally fair the response was reported to be.

Participants were 83 undergraduate students enrolled in a management course at the business school (representing a 94 percent response rate). Participants completed a survey assessing their self-esteem with Tafari and Swann's (2001) eight-item self-liking scale one week prior to the study, with a sample item being "I feel great about who I am." Participants used a five-point scale with endpoints labeled "strongly disagree" (1) and "strongly agree" (5) ( $\alpha = .92$ ).

Given previous evidence that self-verification concerns are heightened when people perceive their relationships with others to be relatively enduring, we reminded participants on the day of the study of their prospective long-term relationships with the university as alumni, noting that many alumni return to the university for football games, alumni events, or use of career services. They then read a short explanation of identity theft and were reminded of the security breach that took place at the university. Participants then read one of two simulated updates on how the university was handling the security breach. Those assigned to the high procedural justice condition read the following:

[The university] has implemented new layers of protection to insure information privacy in a thorough and consistent manner. In particular, the university task force in charge of this issue consists of all affected parties: students, faculty, alumni and administrators, and they have taken the same level of care in protecting student information as information from faculty, staff and alumni.

[The university] has decided to remove all Social Security numbers from the business school server, and to disable several administrative programs containing personal information. [The university's] data theft call center was made available to all affected individuals, and has handled over 9,000 calls with

an on-site response team following up with personal calls or e-mails, answering specific questions and gathering updated contact information. In addition, the university has arranged that students, faculty, staff and alumni receive discounts with select commercial service providers who offer credit protection. In short, [the university] is focused on protecting everyone on campus.

Participants in the low procedural justice condition instead read this update:

[The university] has implemented new layers of protection to insure information privacy. These changes will take place immediately for faculty and staff and then later on with other affected parties, including students. However, the date at which the changes leading to the protection of students will take place has not been identified. The university task force that developed this plan consists of administrators, many of whom are former faculty members, and they have not taken the same level of care in protecting student information as information from faculty, staff and alumni.

Therefore, [the university] has decided to immediately remove the Social Security numbers of faculty and staff from the business school server, and to disable several administrative programs containing personal information of faculty and staff, but has not yet done so for students. [The university's] data theft call center was made available to a subset of affected individuals, and has handled calls with an on-site response team following up with personal calls or e-mails for faculty and staff, answering their specific questions and gathering updated contact information. Students do not currently have access to these services. In addition, [the university] has arranged that faculty and staff receive discounts with select commercial services providers who offer credit protection. These new layers of protection could be made available to students at a later time, though recent meetings of the task force have made no mention about when this might occur. In short, at least for the near term, [the university] is focused on protecting faculty and staff.

Participants then responded to a written survey containing the manipulation check items and the dependent variables. The manipulation check consisted of three items assessing perceptions of procedural fairness ( $\alpha = .92$ ). A sample item was, "To what extent do you think [the university] acted fairly in handling the interests of students like you in this matter?"

In an attempt to conceptually replicate the results of Studies 1–4, we included measures of organizational commitment (both attitudinal and behavioral). The attitudinal measure consisted of a four-item scale ( $\alpha = .89$ ). A sample item was, "[The university] deserves my loyalty." To assess behav-



ioral commitment, participants were told that the experimenter was asked to include an additional question separate from the study regarding new initiatives currently under consideration at the university. They were then asked, "To what extent would you be willing to serve as a volunteer to lead tours of [the university] during orientation?" ("not at all," 1, to "very much," 5).

To assess the extent to which students experienced self-verification, we designed a three-item scale for this study ( $\alpha = .85$ ). Sample items were, "The administration of [the university] sees me as I see myself" and "I feel that people at [the university] understand me." When participants had completed the final survey, they were debriefed and thanked.

## Results and Discussion

**Manipulation check.** We used hierarchical multiple regression analysis to examine the results on the manipulation check. First, we entered the main effects of procedural justice (as a dummy variable) and self-esteem, and then we added the interaction term in the second step. The only significant effect to emerge was the main effect of procedural justice ( $b = -1.94$ ,  $t = -11.11$ ,  $p < .001$ ). Subjects in the high procedural justice condition perceived greater fairness ( $\bar{x} = 3.94$ ) than did those in the low procedural justice condition ( $\bar{x} = 2.00$ ), suggesting that the manipulation had its intended effect.

**Tests of hypotheses.** We also used hierarchical multiple regression analyses to test all hypotheses. For self-verification, attitudinal commitment, and behavioral commitment, we first entered the main effects of procedural justice and self-esteem, and then we added the interaction term in the second step. For self-verification (overall  $F[3, 79] = 29.38$ ,  $p < .001$ , total  $R^2 = .51$ ), the interaction was significant ( $b = -3.13$ ,  $t = -8.13$ ,  $p < .001$ ;  $\Delta R^2 = 40\%$ ). The experimental design of this study enabled us to illustrate the nature of the interaction effect by computing actual means (instead of predicted values) as a function of procedural justice condition and participants' self-esteem; participants were classified as high, medium, or low in self-esteem on the basis of a tertile split. We computed the means for the cells growing out of the three by two (self-esteem by procedural justice) design. As shown in Figure 5, those highest in self-esteem experienced greater self-verification in the high procedural justice condition ( $\bar{x} = 3.94$ ) than in the low procedural justice condition ( $\bar{x} = 2.11$ ; simple effect  $F[1, 77] = 62.83$ ,  $p < .001$ ). However, among those lowest in self-esteem, self-verification was experienced to a lesser degree in

the high procedural justice condition ( $\bar{x} = 2.93$ ) than it was in the low procedural justice condition ( $\bar{x} = 3.82$ ; simple effect  $F[1, 77] = 14.85$ ,  $p < .001$ ).<sup>8</sup>

The hierarchical regression for attitudinal commitment (overall  $F[3, 79] = 3.30$ ,  $p < .05$ , total  $R^2 = .08$ ) also yielded a significant interaction effect ( $b = -1.12$ ,  $t = -2.11$ ,  $p < .05$ ;  $\Delta R^2 = 4\%$ ). We illustrated the nature of the interaction effect in the same manner as was done for the measure of self-verification (see Figure 5b). The results indicate that those highest in self-esteem reported greater attitudinal commitment in the high procedural justice condition ( $\bar{x} = 3.99$ ) than they did in the low procedural justice condition ( $\bar{x} = 3.12$ ; simple effect  $F[1, 77] = 5.50$ ,  $p < .05$ ). However, among those lowest in self-esteem, attitudinal commitment was virtually identical in the high procedural justice condition ( $\bar{x} = 3.23$ ) and in the low procedural justice condition ( $\bar{x} = 3.32$ ; simple effect  $F[1, 77] = 0.05$ , n.s.).

Similar results emerged on the measure of behavioral commitment (overall  $F[3, 79] = 14.74$ ,  $p < .001$ , total  $R^2 = .34$ ), and the interaction was significant ( $b = -1.52$ ,  $t = -3.38$ ,  $p < .001$ ;  $\Delta R^2 = 9\%$ ). We used the same procedure to illustrate the nature of the significant interaction effect; the results appear in Figure 5c. Once again, among those highest in self-esteem, behavioral commitment was greater in the high procedural justice condition ( $\bar{x} = 4.00$ ) than in the low procedural justice condition ( $\bar{x} = 2.27$ ; simple effect  $F[1, 76] = 24.91$ ,  $p < .001$ ). However, among those lowest in their self-esteem, commitment was virtually identical in the high ( $\bar{x} = 3.23$ ) and low procedural justice condition ( $\bar{x} = 3.00$ ; simple effect  $F[1, 76] = 0.44$ , n.s.).

To evaluate whether experienced self-verification mediated the focal interaction, we conducted separate regression analyses in which the dependent variables (behavioral commitment and attitudinal commitment) were regressed on the independent variables (self-esteem, procedural justice, and the interaction of the two) as well as the hypothesized mediator (self-verification). Results showed strong support for Hypothesis 3, revealing a mediation effect on both measures of commitment. Controlling for self-verification eliminated the significant interaction between self-esteem and procedural justice on both measures of commitment. More specifically, the  $t$ -value for the

<sup>8</sup> To maximize comparability with the earlier studies, we did not plot the responses of participants with moderate self-esteem. In every case, however, means for the moderates (available from the first author) fell in between those of low- and high-self-esteem participants.

interaction effect was less than 1.00 on both measures of commitment when self-verification was included as a predictor. Moreover, self-verification was a significant predictor of behavioral commitment ( $t = 2.48, p = .01$ ), and it was a marginally significant predictor of attitudinal commitment ( $t = 1.85, p = .07$ ). The results of Sobel tests showed that controlling for self-verification significantly reduced the interactive effect of self-esteem and procedural justice on behavioral commitment ( $t = -4.41, p < .001$ ) and on attitudinal commitment ( $t = -2.92, p < .01$ ).

## GENERAL DISCUSSION

The positive relationship between procedural justice and organizational commitment is an important and robust finding in the justice literature (e.g., Folger & Cropanzano, 1998; Greenberg, 1996; Tyler & Lind, 1992). As reliable as this finding may be, however, our results qualify it in an important way. In five studies, we found a positive relationship between procedural justice and organizational commitment among people with high self-esteem but not among people with low self-esteem. These findings highlight the critical role of people's self-conceptions in shaping their reactions to the evaluative information inherent in procedural treatment.

Prior theory and research have examined how people's reactions to procedural fairness may depend upon their levels of self-esteem. The present studies differ from and extend those that preceded them in several respects. Like Heuer and colleagues (1999), in our Study 4 we argue that high-self-esteem employees perceive unfair treatment as a violation. However, whereas Heuer et al. assumed that participants experienced unfair treatment as a violation of fairness norms (triggering anger), we suggest that high-self-esteem people experience unfairness as a violation of their self-views (triggering uncertainty and confusion rather than anger).<sup>9</sup> Our

<sup>9</sup> In Study 5, we were able to test whether the type of violation underlying the Heuer et al. (1999) findings or the uncertainty and confusion suggested by self-verification theory accounted for the present results because we obtained measures of both participants' feelings of anger (using a single item from the PANAS scale [Watson, Clark, & Tellegen, 1988]) and their feelings of uncertainty and confusion (based on two items, "uncertain" and "confused," which were correlated [ $r = .51$ ] and summed into an index). According to Heuer et al.'s formulation, self-esteem and procedural justice will have an interactive effect on anger. The self-verification formulation suggests a similar interaction on the measure of uncer-

findings also suggest a different underlying mechanism than that presented by Brockner and his coauthors (1998), who reported that people with high as compared to low self-esteem responded more positively to higher levels of voice. Whereas Brockner et al. proposed that people with low self-esteem were less likely to believe that their voice could make a meaningful difference, in the present study self-verification strivings influenced the extent to which employees felt deserving of fair treatment, with low self-esteem undermining employees' sense that they were worthy of high procedural fairness.<sup>10</sup>

Our findings and those of Brockner et al. (1998)

tainty and confusion. We found that the interaction had a marginally significant effect on the measure of anger ( $t = 1.80, p = .08$ ), but the effect of the interaction was stronger on the measure of uncertainty and confusion ( $t = 6.30, p < .001$ ) and took the form specified by self-verification theory. Moreover, controlling for uncertainty and confusion eliminated the interaction effect on the measure of anger ( $t = -0.68, p > .10$ ), but controlling for anger had little effect on the interaction effect on the measure of uncertainty and confusion ( $t = 5.93, p < .001$ ). It thus seems unlikely that our findings were mediated by an anger-based perceived violation of fairness norms as set forth by Heuer et al. (1999).

<sup>10</sup> Empirical evidence also suggests that our findings cannot be explained by the process underlying the interactive effect of self-esteem and voice found in previous research. More specifically, in Studies 1, 2, 4, and 5, the operationalization (measure or manipulation) of procedural fairness did not include voice, suggesting that the interaction was not contingent upon voice being an element of procedural justice. Another possible alternative to the self-verification explanation for the results that we obtained in Studies 1–4 is that if low self-esteem is an indicator that a person has lower capabilities, and greater procedural justice insures that people's outcomes will be more closely aligned with their capabilities, then low-self-esteem people may be ambivalent about procedural justice because they may believe that fair procedures will cause them to receive less favorable outcomes. This reasoning suggests that self-esteem will interact with perceived fairness to predict employees' expectations or experience of their outcomes, in such a way that procedural justice will be more positively associated with the favorability of expected outcomes among those higher in self-esteem, who are more confident of their capabilities. Studies 1 and 4 included measures of expected outcomes, thereby allowing us to empirically test this alternative explanation. For example, in Study 1 participants were asked to report their expectations about the quality of the job they received as a result of the organizational change, and both Study 1 and Study 4 participants were asked to judge the likelihood that they would lose their jobs in the near future. There was no evidence that self-esteem moderated the relationship between procedural

and Heuer et al. (1999) are different from those obtained in tests of the uncertainty management hypothesis (Van den Bos & Lind, 2002; Van den Bos et al., 2005). For example, De Cremer (2003) and colleagues (De Cremer et al., 2004) found that reactions to the fairness of a leader were stronger for people with low rather than high state social self-esteem, and De Cremer and Sedikides (2005) reported that reactions to procedural justice were stronger for those with greater self-uncertainty (people who also tend to have lower self-esteem).

How might those findings be reconciled with ours? One important distinction to keep in mind is that between self-esteem, which we measured, and self-certainty, which was studied in the De Cremer and Sedikides (2005) study and was hypothesized to play a pivotal role in the Van den Bos et al. (2005) and DeCremer et al. (DeCremer, 2003; DeCremer et al., 2004) studies. Self-verification strivings are known to be stronger among those whose self-views are more certain (e.g., Pelham & Swann, 1994; Swann & Ely, 1984; Swann & Pelham, 2002). Thus, when self-certainty is high, self-verification strivings may prevail, so that a positive relationship between procedural justice and organizational commitment will be observed only among people with high self-esteem. When self-certainty is low, uncertainty management may prevail, so among low-self-esteem persons more of a positive relationship between procedural justice and organizational commitment may be evident. Future research that assesses both the *level* of people's self-evaluations and the *certainty* of their self-evaluations is needed to explore this possibility.

### Theoretical Implications

An important postulate of relational theory (Tyler et al. 1996) is that procedural justice conveys self-evaluative information. If that is true, we would expect self-verification theory to shed light on people's reactions to procedural fairness information. Self-verification theory departs from relational theory in suggesting that employees' reactions (such as their organizational commitment) to self-evaluative information are influenced by the extent to which this information matches people's self-views. In addition to showing that people with lower self-esteem failed to display the well-established positive relationship between procedural justice and organizational com-

mitment, our findings also provided evidence that self-verification strivings were responsible for this effect. Study 4 showed that the interactive relationship between procedural justice and self-esteem was stronger when self-verification strivings were likely to have been more salient—that is, among those who expected their relationships with their organizations to be more enduring. Study 5 provided further evidence that self-verification theory might explain the failure of lower-self-esteem persons to embrace just treatment. In particular, higher-self-esteem participants indicated that they felt more self-verified by just treatment, but lower self-esteem participants indicated that they felt more self-verified by unjust treatment. Furthermore, participants' feelings of being self-verified mediated the interactive effect of procedural justice and self-esteem on their organizational commitment.

Why did we not find a significant inverse relationship between procedural fairness and organizational commitment among people with lower self-esteem? After all, in past studies of self-verification, the tendency for people with negative self-views to prefer negative partners has been just as strong as the tendency for people with positive self-views to prefer positive partners (e.g., Giesler et al., 1996). Past research on self-verification has not investigated procedural justice in particular as the source of self-evaluative information. Hence, people may not respond to procedural justice in the same way that they respond to other forms of self-evaluative information, precisely because procedural justice is influential for reasons other than its self-evaluative implications. That is, people may respond positively to higher levels of procedural justice for instrumental reasons (Thibaut & Walker, 1975), for moral reasons (Folger & Cropanzano, 1998), and for reasons related to managing uncertainty (Van den Bos, 2001), all of which would work against finding a reversal effect among low-self-esteem persons. Perhaps this helps explain why those with lower self-esteem in Study 5 were no higher in organizational commitment when they were treated unfairly, even though they indicated that unfair treatment was more self-verifying than fair treatment.<sup>11</sup>

<sup>11</sup> Also, in past self-verification research the researchers could insure that the evaluations that people with negative self-views received matched the negativity of their self-views. Such a match was not possible in the present studies because there was no obvious means of calibrating how much justice should be accorded to someone with any particular self-esteem score.

justice and expected outcomes (all *p*-values were nonsignificant), thereby casting doubt on this alternative explanation.

## Limitations

In the spirit of Brunswick's (1947) call for methodological diversity, in this research we tested our hypotheses with five independent samples in a variety of organizational settings, while employing several different measures of procedural justice, self-esteem, and organizational commitment. The fact that highly consistent results emerged despite all of these differences bodes well for the robustness of our findings, as well as for the ability of self-verification theory to account for them. Nevertheless, each of our studies has limitations. Although acknowledging these limitations, we hasten to add that the weaknesses in each study were compensated for by the strengths in the others. For example, Studies 1–4 did not contain measures of the self-verification strivings that presumably mediated our findings, yet Study 5 did. Furthermore, whereas Studies 1–4 were characterized by the high levels of external validity associated with field research, Study 5 featured the high level of internal validity associated with laboratory experiments. In addition, although cross-sectional survey designs were used in Studies 1, 2, and 4 (compromising internal validity), Study 3 used a longitudinal design, and Study 5 used an experiment (both of which heighten internal validity). Also, despite the fact that we used a shortened scale to measure self-esteem in Study 1, we replicated and extended these findings in subsequent studies using longer scales.

Whereas similar results emerged in two cultures (the United States and Iceland), these two cultures may be highly similar. Thus, a ripe area for future research is to delineate *when and why* there may be cross-cultural differences in the nature of the interactive relationship between self-esteem and procedural justice (Lytle, Brett, Barsness, Tinsley, & Janssens, 1995). It is also worth noting that all of the field studies took place in the context of significant organizational change. If self-verification strivings are more salient in the context of organizational change (after all, in the face of change, people's needs for stability, such as verifying their self-conceptions, may be aroused), then future research is needed to evaluate whether the presence of organizational change played a role in eliciting the present findings.

## Managerial Implications

Managers have devoted considerable time and energy to developing strategies for maximizing organizational commitment, with one such antecedent being procedural justice (see Tyler & Blader

[2000] for a review). Our findings point to the importance of another strategy for fostering commitment: communicating to workers that they are known and understood. Furthermore, insofar as high procedural justice undermines such efforts to communicate employers' understanding of workers, the blanket application of procedural justice as a commitment-building strategy may be counterproductive. That is, although employees with high self-esteem may embrace higher procedural justice, employees with low self-esteem may respond well to commitment-building strategies that do not compromise their self-verification strivings. These strategies include eliciting commitment through the norm of reciprocity, for instance by insuring that employees receive favorable outcomes such as economic rewards, opportunities for career development, and motivating work. Another process for building commitment that is not directly related to employees' self-esteem is retrospective rationality, whereby managers create conditions (e.g., high publicity, high volition) in which employees behave in ways that indicate high commitment and thereby subsequently infer that they must be highly committed (Salancik, 1977). For example, managers can involve organization members in employee recruitment or in other public relations activities. Managers who wish to use self-verification as a commitment-building strategy may also benefit from ensuring that their employees feel verified on self-views other than their self-esteem. For example, they may verify social self-views (e.g., a view of oneself as a woman or as an engineer) that are only indirectly related to employees' global self-esteem. Indeed, providing self-verification through other means may enable managers to behave fairly while diminishing the risk that such behaviors will threaten low-self-esteem employees' self-views (Wiesenfeld, Brockner, & Martin, 1999).

Of course, building employees' commitment through self-verification strategies may require managers to be able to discern their employees' self-concepts. It may seem challenging to do so in the modern workplace, in which flatter structures, teams, and virtual work may make it more difficult for managers to know and verify the many individuals they lead. To the extent that managers have insufficient contact with employees to make accurate estimates of their self-esteem, it may be best to avoid delivering broad evaluative feedback that may challenge employees' global perceptions of self-worth. Instead, it may be more effective to provide relatively specific feedback that is directly tied to the actual behaviors that employees have enacted. Also, organizations and managers may benefit from including unintrusive measures of self-



esteem, such as a recently validated single-item measure from Robins, Hendin, and Trzesniewski (2001) in organizational climate assessments, thereby informing managers about their employees' self-evaluations with little cost.

## Conclusion

The present findings suggest that self-verification may have an important impact on one of the most taken-for-granted motivations in organizational life—the desire to be treated fairly. Employees' commitment to their organizations may not always be directly proportional to how procedurally fairly they are treated; when their treatment furnishes cues that threaten self-verification, the positive relationship between procedural justice and organizational commitment may vanish. Thus, self-verification theory suggests a challenge to the generality of one of society's bedrock assumptions: When it comes to justice, more is always better.

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