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By

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**In Their Own Voice: A Narrative Account of Students' Perceptions of the
Fairness of Decisions Made in a University Setting**

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Fairness of Decisions Made in a University Setting**

by

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Dedication

I wish to dedicate this work to my family. From my father and beloved grandmother who made me believe I could do no wrong, to my mother who made me want to exceed my own expectations and was willing to put in the time to help me realize my potential – you have each shaped me to be the person that I am today, and I could not have done it without you.

To my wife Michele, you have read each and everything I have written dozens of times. In some ways this work is as much yours as it is mine. Thank you for your support, your willingness to challenge me, and your ability to know which one of those I need at any given moment. I love you.

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**In Their Own Voice: A Narrative Account of Students' Perceptions of the
Fairness of Decisions Made in a University Setting**

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Adam Eugene Peck, Ph.D.

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Justice is often perceived by its opposite, injustice. It may be difficult to identify when one has been treated fairly, but injustice is more apparent — more visceral. It may cause feelings of anger, disappointment or disbelief. Coming to an understanding of how these judgments are made is therefore made more complicated, and illustrates the need to understand the bases of these judgments.

In the arena of higher education, the making of fair decisions serves many functions. From a practical standpoint, decision makers want to make decisions that will receive positive responses from the campus community, meet their own ethical standards, and that can serve as a model of ethical decision making to the people whom the decision affects.

This study used qualitative methodology to collect and interpret those elements that college students identify as shaping their perceptions of fairness. Specifically, the present study used unstructured interviews to collect stories in the tradition of narrative

inquiry. These stories were analyzed using grounded theory.

The findings suggest that students know very little about processes and, perhaps as a consequence, are very mindful of outcomes. They have high expectations of the objectivity and fairness of processes, but also expect that decision-making processes that are truly fair will lead to the outcomes they desire.

This study is one of the relative few to assess college students' perceptions of the factors in the process, outcomes and interactions that are most salient in students' determinations of whether or not a decision is fair. Further, it sought to explain how students' perceptions of procedures, outcomes, interactions and punishments guide them in making determinations about the fairness of each.

In total, this study represents one of the most comprehensive and interdisciplinary investigations of perceptions of fairness to date, and does so in a unique arena that has far reaching implication for society as a whole.

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CHAPTER I: INTRODUCTION TO THE STUDY

Introduction

“That’s not fair!” I can recall saying it time and again when I was a child. Almost without fail, the response came time and again, “Life is not fair.” That justice is expected by children, and violations of this expectation are met with outrage (and perhaps even disbelief), is a strong argument for the belief in the natural law of Aristotle and Aquinas. As we grow older, shaped by numerous encounters with justice and injustice, perceptions of fairness become strongly reinforced. For those who receive mostly fair treatment, fair treatment is expected, and violations are met with opposition. For those who receive mostly injustice (or who endure a particularly indelible injustice), more injustice will be expected.

Additionally, research has pointed time and again to the strong effect of outcome favorability in judgments of fairness. This is to say, individuals are most inclined to believe that a process has been fair when it produces outcomes that they desire. This raises important questions for educators. First, how effectively are we teaching students to make ethical distinctions about the behavior of themselves and others if their judgments in this area are so context dependent? And, secondly, if they do not recognize ethical behavior in others, can they practice it themselves?

The focus of this research was on students’ perceptions of fairness in administrative decision making. The present study investigated the factors that the students themselves deem to be most influential; what relationship they perceive to exist within and between these factors; and, how these factors, when considered together, constitute a process for producing judgments of the outcomes and processes involved.

Introduction to the Chapter

This chapter will introduce the importance of the topic of study, as well as what role the present research will play in filling in the gaps with regard to what is known about perceptions of fairness in college and university settings. The research questions will be introduced and the methodology summarized. Assumptions, limitations and delimitations will also be addressed.

At the conclusion of this chapter, the reader should be prepared to address the complex issue of how college students form perceptions about the fairness of student, faculty and administration led decision-making processes.

Statement of the Problem

Most consider objectivity to be highly correlated with fairness, and yet, fairness is a highly subjective concept. Through the fog of self-interest, it can be difficult to see fairness as anything different from one's own point-of-view (Josephson, 2002). The strong influence of the favorability of outcomes in perceptions of fairness (Skitka, Winkler & Hutchinson, 2003; De Cremer, 2000; Krehbiel & Cropanzano, 2000; Tornblom & Vermunt, 1999) may tempt decision makers to please the largest number of people in order to be thought of as fair. In the politically-charged environment of colleges and universities, this 'utilitarian' (Sher, 1979) approach may indeed be a very great temptation (Brown, 2000). But as Procaro-Folley and Bean (2002) point out, one of the primary roles of education in society is teaching ethics, "...in the classroom, outside of the classroom and through an environment suffused with concern for high ethical standards..." (p. 105). De Cremer and Dijk (2003) suggest that the context for studying the ethics of fairness is also a consideration, citing:

...the importance of examining and defining issues of fairness and ethics from a social dynamic perspective. That is, integrating social interdependence characteristics with social phenomena such as fairness and ethics raises important theoretical and practical questions that have the potential to broaden our understanding of why justice matters in social settings and interactions of all kinds (p. 193).

In the wake of high profile ethical lapses in government, business and other pillars of American life, the teaching of ethical behavior has taken new focus. Higher education has enjoyed an elevated status in the minds of the general public in comparison to most institutions (Kors & Silvergate, 1998), and yet this credibility may be slipping (Tarver, Canada & Lim, 1999). While institutions of higher learning are dependent on fairness and claim to teach ethics, there is still much to be learned about this topic (Hegtvedt & Killian, 1999).

Shockingly few studies in the area of justice are directed towards higher education and even fewer address students' concerns about fairness. Felicio and Pieniadz (1999) cite a "...consistent dearth of discussion and information about institutionalized support systems and decision-making frameworks for attempting to resolve ethical dilemmas" (p.54). Most agree that teaching fairness should be part of the educational process (Janosik & Riehl, 2000), and should aid in the moral and ethical development of students (Mullane, 1999). The challenge for educators is not only to teach students to make ethical and just decisions, but to demonstrate to students that a process has been fair without stooping to what Dannells (1997) calls, "creeping legalism" in our institutions of higher education (Gehring, 2001).

Felicio and Pieniadz (1999) suggest that colleges do not pay close enough attention to the way in which decisions are made and call for "...creating institutionally

initiated and maintained social support systems for raising and resolving ongoing ethical dilemmas in the relevant context of the culture and society” (p. 54). These systems should also encourage individuals to review their own processes for decision making and resolving ethical questions (Hardy, 2002).

Fairness: Ends and Means

The bulk of research pertaining to the study of justice and fairness can be divided into four general categories: distributive justice, procedural fairness, interactional and retributive justice (Hegtvedt & Killian, 1999). The hallmark of each is the point of view that it takes in relation to the decision being made. Distributive justice literature looks at the outcome of the decision made, and the reaction of those acting in a given scenario to that decision (Collie, Bradley, & Sparks, 2002). Procedural fairness looks at the issue from the standpoint of the process or procedure of achieving justice (Hegtvedt & Killian, 1999). Interactional justice, a newer concept with a limited foundation of research, looks at the topic area from an interpersonal standpoint, questioning what factors related to the manner in which interactions occur affect the perceptions of fairness perceived by those acting (Collie, Bradley, & Sparks, 2002). Retributive justice looks at the fairness of punishments or the compensation for oppression (Cook & Hegtvedt, 1983).

Each of these areas provides valuable insight into the understanding of how decisions are made, defended, received and refuted. This approach alone, however, is insufficient to understand the subject of interest to this study. Because this study sought to review factors influencing *perceptions* of fairness, one must understand the viewpoint of the actor who seeks justice. The attributions, perceptions and beliefs of these individuals have a strong influence on perceptions of fairness, represent a unique

perspective on studying fairness, and are a central consideration in this study.

Purpose of the Study

If students are to be expected to make fair decisions once they leave institutions of higher education, they must have the opportunity to experience fair processes while they are there. Accomplishing this goal relies upon administrators who understand what a fair process entails, and who are capable of both demonstrating fairness in decision-making situations and guiding students towards the making of fair decisions. As Aristotle articulated in *The Politics*, "...the young must learn to obey a free government of which they will eventually become members; and in doing so they will be learning to govern when their turn comes" (Barker, 1958, p. 314). Educators have the potential to use decision-making processes as opportunities to teach about fundamental fairness. To this end, Galligan (1996) cites "...a maxim often quoted by lawyers," which is that, "...justice should not only be done, but should be seen to be done" (p. 72). So, too should fairness in education be seen to be done as well.

The ability to successfully achieve both of these goals is reliant upon having insight into not only general principles of fairness and a sense of what is right and proper, but also an understanding of what students expect from decision-making processes. This knowledge should not be used to pander to misperceptions of fairness, but help the decision maker to find effective ways to demonstrate considerations of the students' points-of-view.

The purpose of this study was to determine college students' perceptions about the fairness of student, faculty and administration led decision-making processes. The data generated from this study might be useful to college administrators in identifying

factors for studying the development of fair processes on their campuses. Readers should, however, be cautioned that, though it may be a temptation to use the concepts produced by this study as a template for making fair decisions (for which they will most certainly be useful), it is no more possible to create a system that all would perceive to be fair than it would be to paint a portrait that all would perceive to be beautiful. Fairness, like beauty, is in the eye of the beholder.

The perceptions of fairness identified by the study were examined in the students' own words and stories. This second element, story, is key to understanding these perceptions because it underscores the actors on beliefs and attitudes as they relate to real events and the ways in which they were interpreted in context. Stories are also culturally grounded which is well suited to an ethnographic study.

Research Questions

RQ1 – What perceptions do students hold about decision-making processes and the faculty, staff, administrators and students who oversee them?

RQ2 – In what ways do these perceptions affect college students' reactions to decision-making processes?

Topical definitions

The following terms relate to the topic of interest in this study. Topical definitions, according to Hicswa (2003) are "...terms used to describe the context of the study and relevant literature" (p. 8). A definition for the methodological terms used in this study can be found in chapter three.

For the purpose of this study, the terms below are defined as follows:

1. *Fairness* – The end achieved through a combination of procedural,

distributive, and interactional factors which results in a decision based on accurate information, sound criteria, and impartiality.

2. *Justice* – “...the way in which the major social institutions distribute fundamental rights and duties and determine the division of advantages from social cooperation” (Rawls, 1971, p. 5).
3. *Distributive Justice* – “The perceived fairness of the shape, end state, or outcome” (Tornblom & Vermunt, 1999, p. 39) of a decision.
4. *Procedural Fairness* – “The perceived fairness of the process” (Tornblom & Vermunt, 1999, p. 39).
5. *Interactional Justice* – The effect of the manner in which decision-making interactions are conducted.
6. *Retributive Justice* – “...fairness in the allocation of punishments or the level of compensation for victimization” (Cook & Hegtvedt, 1983, p. 220).
7. *Perception* – “The selection, organization, and interpretation of sensory input” (Weiten, 1989, p. 650).
8. *Administrative* – Work done on behalf of a college or university in an official capacity by persons qualified and empowered by the institutions to make decisions (even if the decisions are subject to review).
9. *Decision Making* – A process which yields a judgment which is positive or negative for the person whom the decision affects.

Methodology

This study employed the qualitative paradigm to study college students’ perceptions about fairness in decisions made in a university setting from a number of

different angles. Specifically, it employed narrative inquiry and grounded theory to collect students' stories and experiences about decision-making processes that have affected them, and then, sorted them thematically using constant comparative analysis (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). A full discussion of the methodology used is detailed in chapter three.

Significance of the Study

While college students are often used to study fairness, they are most often used to represent other interests or play another role (frequently related to business and industry). This study is unique in that the subjects of the study are college students representing themselves. As these students assume a place in the work world upon leaving higher education, this study should provide a glimpse into the development of perceptions of fairness over time.

Assumptions

This research is grounded in the following assumptions:

Assumption 1 – That college students understand and can communicate their attitudes and beliefs about fair decision making.

Assumption 2 – That perceptions of fairness influence college students' beliefs about decision-making processes.

Assumption 3 – That perceptions of fairness vary according to demographic factors.

Limitations

While the ethnographic method employed does not yield generalizable results, it should provide ample depth to serve as grounded theory on which a compelling

quantitative study could be based and generalizable findings could result.

Narrative inquiry, like other research methods in the qualitative paradigm, is not without its limitations. In fact, narrative is, at the very least, four steps removed from so-called objective reality (if such a thing exists). First, there is selective perception, or the influence that point-of-view exerts over attributions and memory. We tend to seek out information that confirms what we already believe. This ‘confirmation bias’ (as it is sometimes called) is not something we necessarily do consciously (Miller and Ross, 1975). In fact, we may have little choice but to seek out confirming information. Saleebey (1994) notes, that “...human beings can only build themselves into the world by creating meaning, by fashioning out of the symbols a sense of what the world is all about” (p. 351). Clearly the creation of meaning, given these circumstances, almost feels like an epistemological conflict of interests, in the sense that the individual serves both as collector and interpreter of sensory data. The scales can easily be tipped in the favor of the perceiver.

Secondly, there is selective recall. This supposes that affirming information is considered “more salient” to the listener and is therefore better remembered (Schmitt, Gunther & Liebhart, 2004, p. 625). Of course, this may be seen as an after effect of selective perception rather than an independent phenomenon, but is differentiated by the concept that they actually perceive the information and make a choice (consciously or unconsciously) not to retain it.

Thirdly, there is the fallibility of memory. That eyewitness testimony is unreliable is almost taken as a given in both the justice system, and in popular culture and belief. Huff (2002) estimates that about 7,500 Americans were wrongly convicted of

serious crimes in 1999 (Loftus, 2003). According to Loftus (2003):

Memories are not fixed. Everyday experience tells us that they can be lost, but they can also be drastically changed or even created. Inaccurate memories can sometimes be as compelling and “real” as an accurate memory (p. 231).

Finally, there is selective presentation. Some may call this deception. Buller and Burgoon (1996) suggest that deception is present in nearly one-fourth of the messages we receive on a daily basis. This conclusion relies on a rather broad definition of deception. According to Buller and Burgoon (1996), deception is, “...a message knowingly transmitted by a sender to foster a false belief or conclusion by a receiver” (p. 204). These lies may take many forms. We may lie to fulfill a number of different objectives, some more noble than others. We may lie to protect ourselves, others, or a relationship. As Saleebey (1994) articulates, “We may, as individuals or as families, alter the plot of our story lines and the motives of actors, to suit ourselves and to more comfortably situate ourselves in our own world” (p. 352). Given the suggestion of how often others are deceptive, it seems wise to be dubious of the stories we are told.

Of course, for stories re-told from others, there is an additional generation of this pattern. That is to say, re-told stories may be four levels from “reality” for every teller of that story. There is a popular child’s game called “telephone” that illustrates this concept. A story is passed from person to person, and at each telling becomes more and more distorted. Few would suggest that the “story tellers” in this game are purposefully changing the story. It is more likely that a variety of factors change the story. Whatever these may be, the narrative is definitely changed by telling and retelling a story.

The limitations of narrative inquiry as a research tool, are exactly what makes it an interesting area of study with regard to decision making. The stories we tell and the

stories we hear are both limited greatly in their portrayal of reality. So, if one accepts that they are not reliable forms of inquiry, to what extent can they be used as a basis for making decisions? Of course this begs the question, if stories aren't a reliable basis for making decisions, what is?

In addition, the research must also be relied upon as an instrument to interpret stories, and suggest what they may mean in a greater context. This may be seen as a limitation of the study. Carefully allowing conclusions to emerge logically from the data should help the trustworthiness of the findings.

Delimitations

Fairness is a rather fluid concept. It can easily be related to topics such as social justice, legal issues (such as due process of law), negotiations or bargaining. The college environment also provides a number of interesting applications for the study of fairness, such as fairness in testing, admission procedures, reward allocation and classroom procedures. The focus of this study, however, is undergraduate students' perceptions of fairness in response to decisions made in a college setting at a religiously affiliated, private research institution. This was not limited to any particular type of decision (disciplinary decisions, selection for honors, privileges, or positions, etc.). It was also not limited by the valence of the decision (whether the decision was positive or negative).

On Fairness and Justice

The terms fairness and justice are used interchangeably in this study. It is not that these words do not have a distinct meaning, in fact they do. Fairness is an aspect of justice. One may be treated fairly and still not receive justice. However, the aspect of justice of interest in this study is fairness. To receive justice, in the context of this

inquiry, is to be treated fairly. Thus, when placed in this context, fairness and justice are fundamentally the same.

In addition, this convention is owed to the interdisciplinary nature of the study of fairness which has muddied the waters in this distinction. In order to cite past research in this area by its correct name, this seems to be the simplest solution.

Summary

This chapter has addressed the basis, scope, and importance of studying students' perceptions about the fairness of administrative decisions. In the next chapter, the historical and liturgical basis for this study are discussed. This includes a discussion of Adams' (1965) equity theory, procedural fairness, distributive justice and interactional justice. In addition, previously identified factors influencing perception are discussed, including: valence of the decision (positive or negative), emotion, interactional factors, demographic factors (age, gender, race), voice in the process, moral imperative and trust.

CHAPTER II: REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

Introduction

No one discipline can claim dominion over the study of fairness or decision making. The broad array of literature on these subjects has been situated in philosophy, psychology, law, sociology and business (among others). Each discipline has put its own distinctive stamp on their contribution to what is known about these topics. The result is a contextually rich, historically broad and loosely coupled body of knowledge in the study of fairness in decision making.

There is also relatively little research on this subject that has coupled the ethical dimensions of fairness, with educational goals and administrative practice in higher education. The present study aims to do just that.

The study of fairness and decision making extends back nearly 3,000 years and has benefited from the contributions of a laundry list of fine scholars and philosophers. Since this is not a historical work, and the social scientific aspects are of the greatest interest in this study, the mid 1900s will suffice as an entry point to the chronology of modern thought about fairness and decision making.

Conceptual Approaches to Studying Decision Making

Decision making is at the heart of this study, though it is the response to decisions that is most at issue. Because the ways in which decisions are made are the catalysts for these reactions, it is important to understand the nature of the way that individuals are guided to make decisions. Like the study of fairness, the body of decision-making research is broad and interdisciplinary. A complete review of decision-making research would be beyond the scope of this inquiry, but it is important to have a basis for the

discussion.

There are three main schools of thought in decision making: rationality, bounded rationality and irrationality. Each proposes a frame for how information is gathered, analyzed, and acted upon by decision makers. The first two are prescriptive (in that they propose the way that decisions ought to be made). The last is more explanatory than descriptive. It explains the way decisions are often made, not the way that they should be handled.

For modern organizations, decision making is a complicated business. As Miles and Snow (2003) explain, "... the dynamic process of adjusting to environmental change and uncertainty – of maintaining an effective alignment with the environment while efficiently managing internal interdependencies – is enormously complex, encompassing myriad decisions and behaviors at several organizational levels" (p. 3). This requires a kind of rigor of thought. The concept of rationality uses this rigor as its basis for making important decisions.

Rationality in Decision Making

Rationality has come to mean sound judgment or reason, but its meaning in the context of decision making is more specific. Hoy and Tarter (2004) define decisions as rational, "...if there is a reasonable connection between the means and ends, that is, if decision makers choose wisely the appropriate means for advancing their goals" (p. 3). Simon (1997) explains that, "...rationality has usually been defined in such a way as to imply some form of optimization, for example, maximization of utility" (p. 295). In other words, what is the best possible decision that can be made, and what information is needed to make it.

Rationality requires the individual to understand their goals and values. “When administrators pursue actions that they believe will attain a valued outcome,” Hoy and Tarter (2004) suggest, “...they are making judgments of value between competing goods or the lesser of evils” (p. 4). In short, some goals must be sacrificed to attain more desirable goals. And it should also be mentioned that the usefulness of an outcome does not necessarily make it the right thing to do. This is one of the most significant limitations of this model.

This approach is most often used in situations in which the nature of the problem is “narrow and concrete” and the decision maker can “...predict with certainty the consequences of all alternatives.” This works best when potential outcomes can be represented statistically, and therefore, dealt with rationally (Hoy & Tarter, 2004). But what is done when this kind of information is not available? This question is at the heart of the concept of bounded rationality.

Bounded Rationality

In order to make a rational decision, one must have nearly perfect information, and a clear sense of how each decision may impact a variety of goals. Bounded rationality denotes a style of behavior that is appropriate to the achievement of given goals, within the limits imposed by given conditions and constraints (Simon, 1986). As Simon (1957) explains, “Because it is impossible to guarantee the best solution, people are satisfied by looking for alternatives that meet minimum standards...decisions are made after only a moderate search for options” (in Hoy & Tarter, 2004, p. 3). This does not mean that decision makers make these decisions flippantly or without much thought. Resources and the relative ease of making a decision play into the decision. As Simon

(1997) explains, the process is sort of a sliding scale of effort and work in that, "...if it turns out to be very easy to find alternatives that meet the criteria, the standards are gradually raised; if search continues for a long while without finding satisfactory alternatives, the standards are gradually lowered" (p. 296).

Decisions are seldom made in isolation, however. Collaborative decision making increases the difficulty of making the "perfect decision" that would be seen to be a rational choice. March (1994) asserts, "Decision making in groups, organizations, or societies confronts interpersonal inconsistencies. Different people want different things, and not everyone can have everything he or she desires" (p. 106). Again, bounded rationality takes these concepts into consideration when judging a decision, and is seen as making the best decision possible given constraints of time, value and context.

Some situations, however, do not yield easily to analysis. Some decision-making situations may be seen as irrational, counter-intuitive or even chaotic. In these cases, the garbage can model can often provide an understanding of the forces at work in an organization that confound common reason.

Garbage Can Model

Of course, people do not always base their decision on sound criteria, or even the desire to make the so-called right decision. Sometimes, "...people need to act before they think. This tendency has been analyzed using a garbage can model" (Hoy & Tarter, 2004, p. 59). Hoy and Tarter (2004) explain, "The basic feature of the garbage can model is that the decision-making process does not always begin with a problem and end with a solution, but rather decisions are a product of independent streams of organizational events" (p. 60). This does not necessarily mean that there is organizational chaos.

Though, Warglien and Masuch (1996) acknowledge that, "... in many readers' minds, 'organized anarchies' have sometimes become 'organizational anarchies'" (p.3). They call this belief "...a clear misunderstanding" (Warglien & Masuch, 1995, p. 3). What may appear at first to be chaotic, random and senseless, may be mostly a product of our lack of information about how decisions are made. In other words, "We see confusion and irrationality until we find an underlying behavioral logic dispelling our bewilderment" (Warglien & Masuch, 1996, p. 3).

Some determination as to the cause for a given decision may come after the decision is made. As Hoy and Tarter (2004) assert, "Creative people in organizations construct complicated theories to explain their actions. Sometimes they supplement a technology of reason with a technology of foolishness. Individuals and institutions need ways of doing things (even) for which there are no good reasons" (p. 59). In this way, failures and miscalculations can be justified and explained, and agendas can be hidden. This is a common and useful tool in administrative practice.

Decision making in the garbage can model of organizational choice was summed up by its creators Cohen, March and Olsen (1972) as "...a collection of choices looking for problems" (p. 2). Accordingly, sometimes we cannot experience a problem until a solution is found. In other words, the problem, solution, and means of making a decision must all be present before the solution can be applied. Polkinghorne (1936) suggests that in order to understand (and perhaps interpret) a situation, one needs to see, "...the whole in which the parts participated" (p. 13). This rejects traditional sequences of decision making inherent in the classical and administrative models. Browning, Sornes, Saetre, and Stephens (2004) suggest that this belief reframes decision makers from "problem-

solvers” to “solution-marketers” (p. 8). This is the same phenomenon that Cohen, et al. (1972) called, “decision makers looking for work” (p. 1). In other words, decision makers have preferences for solutions that they are used to and do well with, and will look actively to apply them to situation.

This approach is most common in “...organizations with extremely high uncertainty...problematic preferences, unclear technology, and fluid participation (Hoy & Tarter, 2004, p. 60). This is to say, people do not know what to do, what their goals are, and what resources they have for accomplishing these goals or how to get help from others. Unlike the other models, the garbage can model is not one that individuals should aspire to emulate, but should learn to recognize it when it occurs.

These three approaches point to the goal-centeredness of decision making. Values compete to affect decisions, and the primary value is not always fairness. When institutional objectives are a salient part of the decision-making process, it seems likely that this would impact students’ perceptions of fairness about the decision.

Decision makers may use a number of approaches and may approach decision-making opportunities with a number of approaches in mind. Those who evaluate decisions do so with different backgrounds, criteria and personal histories. For the purposes of this study, these are divided into the four approaches for studying fairness.

Conceptual Approaches to Studying Fairness

Four primary approaches have developed in the study of fairness over the past 45 years. The first, distributive justice, focused on the ends or outcome produced by a decision (Brockner & Wiesenfeld, 1995). Ten years later, the study of fairness began to shift from notions of the ends created by decisions, to the means or process used to reach

a decision (Collie, Bradley, & Sparks, 2002). In the mid 1980s, some began to propose a third framework for looking at fairness which referred to the relational or interpersonal aspect of justice – interactional justice (Bies, 1987). Comparatively less developed is the concept of retributive justice, “...fairness in the allocation of punishments or the level of compensation for victimization” (Cook & Hegtvedt, 1983, p. 220).

There is growing debate over the relationship between the four theoretical approaches to the study of fairness (Brockner & Wiesenfeld, 1995). Questions continue to arise as to what extent these frames capture the complexity of the topic, are distinct from one another, and the amount and affect of their interaction with each other.

This section includes an explanation of the distributive, procedural, interactional and retributive approaches to the study of fairness, the theories that contributed to these approaches, and some background on the ways that these approaches have been shown to interact in previous studies.

Distributive Justice

Referring to, “...the perceived fairness of the shape, end state, or outcome of ...resource allocation” (Tornblom & Vermunt, 1999, p. 39), the distributive justice approach is based on the viewpoint of the outcomes a decision creates (Collie, Bradley, & Sparks, 2002) and considers to what extent subjects, “...perceive their rewards and punishments are related to performance inputs” (DeConinck & King, 2003, p. 516; Price & Mueller, 1986). The viability of this concept has been well supported by previous research that seems to indicate that “...individuals’ decisions are primarily guided by a specific concern for outcomes” (De Cremer, 2002, p. 1339).

Originating in the domain of Social Exchange Theory, Homans’ (1961) notions of

“distributive justice,” defined early study in this area. The initial idea was uncomplicated, that people respond positively to positive outcomes (Homans, 1961). It was Adams’ (1965) equity theory, however, that put distributive fairness on the map. Equity theory, and its parent social exchange, are based on a “quasi-economic” model in which individuals tend to attempt to minimize losses and maximize gains in their interactions with others (Emerson, 1976, p. 336). Deutsch (1975) explains that this is a good fit for the study of justice “...in a society in which economic values tend to pervade all aspects of social life” (Deutsch, 1975, p. 137). “Within the exchange framework” Cook and Hegtvedt (1983) note, “...equity is typically defined as the equivalence of the outcome/input ratio or all parties involved in the exchange. When these ratios are not equal, inequality is said to exist” (p. 218). This is the basis of equity theory.

In this approach, outcome favorability (the extent to which the decision benefits the individual) is a key factor. Favorability influences not only how the person receiving the decision will react to it, but also whether or not that decision will be seen as fair (Kulik & Holbrook, 2000). Adams (1963) has suggested that this effect is perhaps the most important factor (Kulik & Holbrook, 2000). Thibaunt and Walker (1975) label this phenomenon the “self-interest model” (in Hegtvedt & Killian, 1999). This model suggests that, “...individuals are not likely to support policies that will not benefit them or that may impose costs on them” (p. 440). According to Vermunt, Van der Kloot and Van der Meer (1993) “...outcome is judged as an important factor if it influences the interest of the subject” (p. 193).

It is important to note that this approach is not wholly reliant on outcome favorability. As Galligan (1996) points out, “A distinction should then be drawn between

judging a process according to whether or not the outcome is favorable to the parts, and whether it satisfies his normative expectations” (p. 90). In other words, a person may be willing to see a process as fair if they expect to receive a negative outcome, and receive it. This would be consistent with normative expectations about potential outcomes.

These normative expectations may be derived from a number of sources, but frequently are formed by comparing an individual’s outcome with those of others whom the individual feels should receive equivalent outcomes. Studies that have looked at this effect, “Typically show that outcomes are judged to be more fair when one’s own outcomes are equal as opposed to worse than the other person’s outcome (Van den Bos, 2001, p. 2).

Deutsch (1975) identified three dimensions of justice: equity, equality, and need. Equity refers to an aspect of justice “...in which economic productivity is a primary goal” (Deutsch, 1975, p. 143). Equality is governed by what Eckhoff (1974) calls, “the objectivity rule” which refers to allocations that give “...an equal amount to each recipient” (in Cook & Hegtvedt, 1983, p. 220). Deutsch (1975) suggests that this rule be applied when one is interested in “...fostering or maintenance of enjoyable social relations” (p. 146). Need is applied according to “the subjectivity rule” (Eckhoff, 1974) in which the “need or desert” is the primary consideration (in Cook & Hegtvedt, 1983, p. 221). This approach is most appropriate in “fostering the personal development and personal welfare” (p. 146). Decision makers may choose any of these paradigms to frame their decisions. These may be situational, or represent a consistent preference over time. Deutsch (1975) identifies 11 key values in distributive justice. In these values, justice entails the treatment of all people:

(1) So that all receive outcomes proportional to their inputs, (2) as equals, (3) according to their needs, (4) according to their ability, (5) according to their efforts, (6) according to their accomplishments, (7) so that they have equal opportunity to compete with external favoritism or discrimination, (8) according to the supply and demand of the marketplace, (9) according to the requirements of the common good, (10) according to the principle of reciprocity, (11) so that none falls below a specified minimum (p. 139).

Distributive justice, however, is frequently cited for its limitations. First, the strong influence of outcome favorability in this approach does not account for those who receive negative outcomes, and yet perceive a decision to be just. It also cannot account for situations in which someone is satisfied with a negative outcome. There are limits to the economic model approach as well. As Deutsch (1975) points out, "...it is a limiting perspective since it is obvious that issues of justice may arise in noneconomic social relations and may be decided in terms of values which are unrelated to input-output ratios" (p. 137). These limitations necessitate the model of procedural fairness.

Procedural Justice

Procedural justice is defined as, "Fairness in the means by which distributions [or the outcomes of decisions] are made" (Hegtvedt & Killian, 1999, p. 273). In short, procedural justice is interested in processes rather than outcomes, and, more specifically, the means by which "...subjects come to the determination that a given situation is or is not just (Hartman, Yrle, & Galle, 1999, p. 338). According to fair process effect, if a process is considered fair, its outcome will likely be regarded to be fair as well (Collie, Bradley, & Sparks, 2002). The fair process effect, "...refers to the tendency for outcome evaluations and subsequent behavior to be influenced by perceptions of procedural justice" (Collie, Bradley and Sparks, 2002, p. 545) Though the converse is also true. As Simerson, L'Heureux, Beckstein, Ziamian, Dembowski and Freshman (2000) found in

their recent study, if a process is "...irrational, the resultant outcome was almost always seen as inequitable and unfair" (p. 451). As Galligan (1996) explains, procedural fairness:

...can be expressed in this way. First, legal procedures are fair procedures to the extent that they lead to or constitute fair treatment of the person or persons affected. Secondly, within each type of legal process, there are authoritative standards based on the tiers of values relevant to that process that constitute the standards of fair treatment, so that a person treated in accordance with them is treated fairly. Thirdly, the basis for such treatment being fair treatment is the promise of society as a whole to each of its members that they will be treated in the same way (p. 52).

Procedural justice theories assert that there are objective standards by which individuals judge processes. Leventhal (1980) articulated six such standards for evaluating procedural fairness: (1) consistency, (2) bias suppression, (3) accuracy, (4) correctability, (5) representation, and (6) ethicality. These make up a useful framework for judging decision, but is unclear to what extent these expectations conform to the perceptions of individuals in their fairness judgments. Mullane (1999) reports that "...people at higher stages of moral development tend to act with more constancy in their judgments" (p. 87). One limitation of current justice research according to Boudin and Betton (1999) is that, "...theories of justice are, for the most important of them, philosophical. Their aim is, in other words, mainly normative: it is to determine what is good and what is bad" (p. 365). There is a need for research to measure procedural justice (DeConinck & King, 2003). While this research should help account for personal perceptions, Simerson, et al. (2000) propose that new research should, "...bring forth new principles with the potential to account for variance in organizational behavior" (p. 454).

Perceptions of fairness are influenced by many factors. The procedural approach

encompasses many of the most widely accepted and current theories in justice studies.

Thibaut and Walker's (1975) control theory is among the most influential in procedural justice. As an initial idea emerging in the study of justice, this theory enjoyed wide acceptance for quite some time (Blader & Tyler, 2002). As the name suggests, control theory asserts that actors' perceptions of fairness are based primarily on the amount of influence they have over the manner in which decisions are made (Thibaut & Walker, 1975). Thibaut and Walker (1975) explain, "There are many correlated and subsidiary elements of procedural justice, but the key requirement for procedural justice is this optimal distribution of control" (p. 2). Control theory, as defined by Hagedoorn, Buunk and Van de Vliert (1998):

...Assumes that fairness judgments are based on instrumental concerns. People want to control their outcomes, either directly by determining the outcome themselves (decision control) or indirectly by means of the processes which lead to these outcomes (i.e., process control). Thus, procedures that assign much of the control to the people whose outcomes are influenced by the decisions that are made are viewed as fair (p. 43).

In a basic sense, the greater the control, the greater the satisfaction. Since decision control is fairly uncommon, especially in judicial settings, most individuals seek process control, including the opportunity to present one's side, or determine how the decision will be made (Blader & Tyler, 2002). If the individual has neither process control nor decision control, it is less likely that they will regard the process as fair (Hagedoorn, Buunk, & Van de Vliert, 1998).

Fairness theory (Folger & Cropanzano, 1998) asserts that when evaluating the fairness of a decision, possible alternatives are weighed against the actual decision (Collie, Bradley, & Sparks, 2002). The availability of better solutions would cause the

evaluator to see the decision as unfair. It is difficult to tell if those evaluating the decision in this theory are basing their judgments of fairness on the same quality of information available to the decision maker. It seems quite likely that they do not. This is a compelling area for future study.

Though considered a procedural justice theory, fairness heuristic theory (Van den Bos, 1997) bridges distributive and procedural justice theories (Collie, Bradley, & Sparks, 2002). This theory supposes that, because information about the process is much more readily available than is information about outcomes, most perceptions of fairness are based on knowledge of processes. However, when information about outcomes is available, it tends to carry more weight.

Processes are carried out by people, and therefore, are informed by subjective concerns about the relationship of those involved. While some consider the treatment received by an individual seeking justice to be an aspect of the procedure, Bies (1987) has made a case that interpersonal concerns are deserving of their own dimension of justice: interactional justice.

Interactional Justice

The concept of interactional justice is relatively new to justice studies (Collie, Bradley, & Sparks, 2002). Blader and Tyler (2002) define interactional justice as referring to "...the quality of treatment experienced by individuals in their interpersonal interactions with group authorities" (p. 118-119). Previous research has established a link between interpersonal factors and the reduction of negative attitudes with regard to unfavorable outcomes (Hagadoorn, Buunk, & Van de Vliert, 1998). These factors contain a broad range of components. As Heuer, Penrod, Hafer and Cohen (2002) report,

“...numerous studies are supportive of Lind and Tyler’s suggestion that individuals are sensitive to issues such as polite or respectful treatment” (p. 1469). The research of Collie, et al. (2002) for instance, suggests that polite treatment caused participants to perceive, “...significantly higher levels of outcome fairness and satisfaction” (p. 552). In interactive justice, the value of the relationship can also be seen as influential in determining fairness. This effect is dependent on the actors’ perceptions of the character of the other (Sternthal, Phillips, & Dholakie, 1978).

Molm (1991) suggests that, “An actor’s satisfaction with an exchange relation is an affective response to a cognitive evaluation of the relation, based on how ‘good’ or ‘bad’ the actor judges the relation to be” (p. 477). This is to say, there is both an emotional and intellectual component to evaluation of outcomes, and that the interpersonal relationship of those involved is a very important factor (Molm, 1991). Heuer, et al. (2002) suggest that interpersonal information is useful beyond the scope of informing the relationship, it relates to perceptions of fairness of outcomes and processes. “A considerable part of our argument is that people are using procedural information such as trust, neutrality, and standing to inform them about the fairness of their outcomes as well as to inform them about purely relational concerns” (Heuer, Penrod, Hafer, & Cohen, 2002, p. 1470).

The weighing of costs and benefits as they relate to social exchange also goes beyond the value of the relationship. Molm (1991) asserts that the “...most familiar prediction of exchange theorists is that satisfaction varies with the actual value of outcomes received, relative to expected value” (p. 478). The suggestion of social exchange theory in this context is that, while individuals actively pursue important

outcomes, their pursuits are not singularly minded, but tempered by the effect that the interactions may have on the relationship with the other.

Beyond the mere content of a decision, the way in which the decision is made serves as a strong indicator of one's status in a particular group. This is the basis of the group-value model of procedural justice, which asserts that, "...group membership is very important to individual, and how they are treated in that group, signals their standing in that group" (Hegtvedt & Killian, 1999, p. 273; Lind & Tyler, 1988). This model assumes that "...people are concerned about their status with the group because high status validates self-identity, self-esteem, and self-respect" (Hagadoorn, Buunk, & Van de Vliert, 1998).

In other words, to receive unfair treatment is to be less valued as a member of the group. Conversely, if one is treated as a valued member of a group, they are more likely to perceive that they will receive fair treatment. This is highly explanatory with regard to both why fairness is an emotionally charged issue, and why procedure is so important in achieving a perception of fairness. In contrast to control theory, the group-value model assumes that even those who disagree with subsequent rulings may still find a process to be fair so long as the process indicates regard for the person involved and reaffirms their standing as a member of the group (Hegtvedt & Killian, 1999). In group value theory, the need for social acceptance varies in individuals (De Cremer, 2002). Some may rely heavily on social acceptance even when their standing in the group is strong, and others may express disinterest in group affiliation. In relation to control theory, not all individuals desire control over decisions – some are happy to have decisions made for them and will not question the outcome (Hagadoorn, Buunk, & Van de Vliert, 1998).

Though a study by DeCremer (2002) suggests that, although, “Fair treatment communicates specific information about one’s group membership, that is, whether one is respected and accepted by the group and its members” (p. 1336), this effect is most salient to peripheral or marginal members of the group.

In addition, people expect that membership in a particular culture will give them the kind of understanding that will help to predict how that group will behave in given situations. When decision makers behave in a different way from what is expected, it may influence how decisions are viewed. Researchers such as Afifi and Burgoon (2000) have used uncertainty reduction theory and expectancy violations theory to explain these reactions. According to their analysis, people seek to explain and eventually predict the behavior of others (Heider, 1958). Afifi and Burgoon (2000) point out that “...Some communicative acts increase uncertainty, whereas others decrease it, with receiver judgments influenced by the direction of uncertainty change” (p. 204). Some beliefs about the behavior of others are based on our past experiences with a given individual, while others are based on general normative expectations of all of our interactions. Afifi and Burgoon (2000) explain the latter, “First, individuals seem to have a bandwidth, or range of acceptable behavior for individuals, and expectation violations are only those behaviors that fall outside that bandwidth” (p. 205). Violations of our expectancies of the behavior of others can affect perceptions of fairness, although, “...a key postulate of expectancy violations theory is that the valence of a violation is a key determinant of its impact” (Afifi & Burgoon, 2000; p. 203). A study by Fiske (1980) confirms this assumption finding that extreme behaviors are given more weight when they are negative.

One limitation of the interactional justice approach is the difficulty in differentiating it from procedural justice. Indeed, is not the way one is treated in a process part of the process itself? Blader and Tyler (2002) draw a distinction between the formal and informal aspects of procedural justice with formal aspects including the process, whereas the informal aspects include how one is treated interpersonally.

Though interpersonal factors clearly play an important role in students' judgments of fairness, students seem to be more interested in fairness itself than in the interpersonal attributes alone. In Rodabaugh and Kravitz (1994) students rated fairness in their professors as more important than "...warmth, lecturing ability, or course difficulty" (p. 67). What these students perceive fairness to be, however, is quite often a very subjective concept, and highly reliant on individual interpretation.

Retributive Justice

Retributive justice is comparatively less studied than other aspects of justice. "It is based on the principle that the punishment should be relative to the severity of the violation" (Dixon, Turner, Pastore, & Mahoney, 2003, p. 64) "If the punishment is either too harsh or too lenient, it is viewed as unfair or unjust" (Dixon, Turner, Pastore, & Mahoney, 2003, p. 64). "This form of justice" asserts Batson, Bowers, Leonard and Smith (2000) "... is generally considered more primitive than distributive justice, and by some, it is considered more universal and socially significant whether a person has acted morally" (p. 35). Hot topics on college campuses such as reparations for slavery and affirmative action are likely to vary greatly by culture. This topic begs to be applied to the college context.

Affirmative actions is a useful topic to illustrate some common issues in

retributive justice. The term “affirmative action” was coined by President John F. Kennedy in an executive order regarding federal contractors (Wydick, 2002). This highly polarizing issue is illustrative of the concepts inherent in the self-interest model (Malos, 2000). A survey of college freshman suggests that almost 50 percent of respondents supported ending affirmative action (Sax & Arredondo, 1999). Another study conducted by Zogby International asserts that when asked which ideal was of primary importance in admissions decisions, fairness in meeting academic standards or achieving diversity, 86.4 percent selected fairness (Byrne, 2000). While this is certainly interesting, what is perhaps more compelling is the correlation of ethnicity to the likelihood to agree or disagree with affirmative action. In the first survey, “...affirmative action is most strongly opposed by white students, followed by Asian students, Mexican-Americans, and African-American students” (Sax & Arredondo, 1999, p. 451). In fact, white and Asian students were “more than twice as likely to agree somewhat or strongly that affirmative action should be abolished” (Sax & Arredondo, 1999p. 451). Interestingly enough, Thompson and Tobias (2000) report that The University of Texas, in the first-year of its new Ten Percent Plan (an alternative to affirmative action in which students who are in the top 10 percent of their class are guaranteed admission to state universities), the university “...received more applications from students in the top 10% of their class than in the previous year, but the institution primarily attracted Hispanic and Asian applicants” (p. 1129).

White students already comprised the majority of students represented at The University of Texas in 1998, the first year of the Ten Percent Plan, “58 percent of Asians in the top 10 percent statewide applied...compared with 30% of Hispanics, and 14% of

African Americans” (Thompson and Tobias, 2000; Roser, 1998). Taken together, the freshman study addressing affirmative action and students’ access to higher education through the Texas Ten Percent rule illustrate the self-interest model. The four primary ethnicities represented at colleges and universities are increasingly more likely to regard affirmative action as fair in inverse proportion to their access to colleges and universities through more traditional means. Each group is seeking to maximize positive outcomes and minimize negative ones (Hegtvedt & Killian, 1999). This implies a process in which individual interpretations (often influenced by race) are central to the individuals’ interpretations of fairness.

The Interplay of Approaches

How do all of these distinct concepts fit together? The current movement in fairness studies relates to the integration of these concepts. Tornblom and Vermunt (1999), call finding an “integrated approach” to justice research “the next step” (p. 40). Important considerations remain. For instance, to what extent are procedural and interactional attributes distinct, and in what ways do they interact? Vermunt, Van der Kloot, and Van der Meer (1993) were unable to support the hypothesis they tested that interactional effects outweigh procedural ones. But of course this only begins to chip away at the question. Another concern is, to what extent are distributive and retributive justice models different? If distributive justice concerns both positively and negatively valenced decisions, can it not explain the punishment and compensation inherent in retributive justice? “It is deontological” said Batson et al. (2000):

A chance occurrence that shifts the balance of resources, causing one person to be shortchanged, should evoke concerns about distributive justice but not about retributive justice. An unsuccessful attempt to do harm should evoke concerns about retributive justice (although perhaps to a lesser degree than a successful

attempt) but not distributive justice. Thus, although often confused and confounded, these two forms of justice are evoked by different circumstances. Of course, the two sets of circumstances often co-occur (p. 36).

One of the goals of the present study is to draw these four conceptual approaches together and demonstrate the relationships between them.

The final question addressed is, which is more capable of explaining reactions to fairness, the distributive or procedural approach? Current research treats distributive and procedural justice as connected concepts, however, as Hauenstein et al. (2002) suggested, "...researchers rarely address the theoretical or methodological implications of this relationship" (p. 40). According to Hartman, Yrle and Galle (1999) "...distributive justice appears to have more influence on satisfaction with the outcomes, while procedural justice appears more related to attitudes about the relevant institution or authorities" (p. 337). Hauenstein, McGonigle and Flinder (2002) conducted a meta analysis of the literature to determine the strength of the association between distributive and procedural factors and found that it is strong. This was most strongly indicated in dispute resolution, with reward allocation showing a much weaker association. Krehbiel and Cropanzano (2000) assert that "...evidence suggests that process judgments interact with outcome favorability to produce individual reactions to...decisions" (p. 340). Current research cannot adequately explain this relationship. This has led some, such as Tornblom and Vermunt (1999), to suggest "...a concentrated effort to map the relationship between distributive and procedural justice should prove highly valuable..." (p. 40).

The Formation of Perceptions and Attributions

Though the arbitration of complex ethical dilemmas is a decidedly interactive

process, the focus of the present study is *perceptions* of fairness. This implies a process that is deeply rooted in the individual. The following section discusses intrapersonal factors in these judgments, and how an individual's preferences, biases, and beliefs affect their perception of justice.

Humans develop their understanding of how the world works based on their own experiences and assumptions (Sternthal, Phillips, & Dholakia, 1978). We base our judgments on "...the purpose and probable behavior of others" (Hobson-Panico, 2003, p. 1). In other words, why are they doing what they are doing (Hobson-Panico, 2003)? In relation to perceptions of fairness, Adams (1963) asserts that those who do not receive desired outcomes may justify these decisions in a variety of ways (Hartman, Yrle, & Galle, 1999). Described in attribution theory, this "common-sense psychology," as Heider (1958) labeled it, is the culmination of our past observations (p. 79). "In everyday life we form ideas about other people and social situations," Heider (1958) explains, "We interpret other people's actions and we predict what they will do under certain circumstances" (p. 5). As the name implies, common sense is not very dependable. Individuals tend to fall prey to a "self-serving bias" (Miller & Ross, 1975), which causes individuals to, unconsciously or consciously, take in information that confirms what they already believe and reject information that disproves their perceptions (Diveto, 1995). In addition individuals tend to seek to explain their own behavior in a way that strives to make oneself as blameless as possible (Bernstein, Stephan, & Davis, 1979). More specifically, they will seek to blame undesirable outcomes on external factors (like processes and their relative fairness) in order to explain these outcomes (Hartman, Yrle, & Galle, 1999). For example, Hastorf and Cantril (1954) studied attendees at a Princeton

vs. Dartmouth football game to determine how proponents of both teams viewed some violent episodes that occurred at the game. Each group tended to overwhelmingly see the other as the cause. And, Schmitt, Gunther and Liebhart (2004) found that people with strong partisan ties will tend to see news reports as favoring the other side of the political debate in comparison to those with no strong feelings, who tend to see them as more balanced or fair. As Saleebey (1994) put it, "...the dream of discovering truth or reality apart from a people's and a culture's interpretation may be just that – a dream" (p. 352). Of course positive outcomes are viewed similarly. When a decision is made in a person's favor, they are generally attributed to internal factors such as personal standing or understanding the system (Hartman, Yrle, & Galle, 1999, p. 339).

The attributions of the decision maker come into play as well. A study conducted by Mikula and Korltke (1990) found that "...justice behavior is at least partly motivated by the desire to get one's actions accepted and approved" (p. 146). This can actually lead to tailoring an outcome to meet the expected standard the decision maker believes that the other will see as fair.

What factors influence attributions about fairness? Previous research has suggested that distributive, procedural and interactional factors influence perceptions of fairness. Each is discussed in detail next.

Factors Influencing Perceptions of Fairness

Processes, outcomes, and interactions all influence perceptions about what rewards and punishments (retributions) are considered fair, and what decisions will be thought of as unjust. This section concerns the elements in each approach that have been indicated as contributing to these judgments.

Distributive Factors

Distributive factors in judgments of fairness, are those factors which relate to the outcome produced by a decision. The elements which follow are ones which have been identified by previous research as influencing judgments of these outcomes.

Outcome Favorability

People want positive outcomes and overall it would be safe to say that people want to avoid negative outcomes. Some have suggested that this desire for positive outcomes drives many determinations of fairness. Hagedoon, et al. (1998) suggest that, “Rewards that do not meet expectations and unattractive assignments or unfavorable outcomes that may evoke many different reactions from ...nonconfrontation [to] aggression” (p. 41). The previous discussion on outcome favorability, was sufficient to cover the topic, and it seem fruitless to recapitulate it here. But it does, however, bear repeating that the weight of the extent to which outcomes meet expectations, and the extent to which outcomes benefit the recipient, is a very strong factor in perceptions of fairness.

Valence of the Decision

People use different approaches depending on whether they are spreading a desired outcome across a group of people or determining who is to be more greatly burdened by a negative outcome. According to Tornblom and Vermunt (1999), “Contemporary justice theorists are increasingly aware that, in addition to the allocation outcome or procedure, the valence of the outcome appears to be an important element to people’s justice conceptions” (p. 41). People are more willing to accept positive outcomes than negative outcomes. In addition, Landman (1987) demonstrated that in

comparison to the emotions experienced in positive outcome situations, the negative emotions associated with unhappy outcomes were comparatively stronger. This is to say, that those whom a decision benefits will express less positive affect when compared with the negative affect of those who a decision impacts negatively.

People approach positively and negatively valenced decisions differently. Tornblom and Ahlin (1998) found that when making allocations of a positive valence, individuals tend to prefer equality rule, that is to say they tend to prefer to distribute rewards equally. When making negatively valenced decisions, individuals tend to prefer to rely upon the principle of need (which also includes aspects of deserving). For example, a pool of money for raises may be distributed equally, while layoffs might be based on deserving qualities such as length of service. Clearly, valence is an important factor to be considered in how people respond to decisions.

Procedural Factors

Information about processes, as previously mentioned, has a strong impact on judgments about the fairness of processes. In this area, the greatest weight is generally given to the amount of control one has over the process, and the amount of voice one is afforded. These factors also communicate one's standing in the culture.

Voice in the Process

“Voice” is a factor that is a major consideration in perceptions of procedural justice. Defined by Kulik and Holbrook (2000) as, “the freedom participants have to communicate their views and provide information during the decision-making process” (p. 378-379), it was first proposed by Folger (Lind, Earley, & Kanfer, 1990). “The voice effect,” according to Lind, Earley and Kanfer (1990), “...is explained by presuming that

persons given an opportunity to express their views will believe that voice will help them control their outcomes...and that these expectations lead to higher procedural fairness judgments” (p. 952). Although these effects are often mitigated by outcome favorability, those who have voice in the process tend to see processes as more fair than those without voice (Kulik & Holbrook, 2000). LaTour, for example, found that voice had a positive effect on litigants’ perceptions of legal verdicts when the outcomes were unfavorable, and less effect when outcomes were favorable (Kulik & Holbrook, 2000; LaTour, 1978). While this may, on the surface, appear to be counter-intuitive, Kulik and Holbrook suggest that this effect is due to, “...unfavorable outcomes prompt[ing] participants to invest additional effort in scrutinizing and evaluating the process that resulted in the outcome” (p. 379). As Folger, Rosenfield, Grove and Corkran (1979) explain, “...the more voice is available, the more an otherwise intolerable outcome becomes tolerable” (p. 2254).

Voice, however, is diminished unless those involved can trust the credibility of the person or persons who will make the decision (Birnbaum & Stegner, 1979). Perceptions of fairness are highly influenced by judgments about the decision-makers’ expertise, biases, and points-of-view (Birnbaum & Stegner, 1979). In other words, the participants must believe that those in authority have the “...training, experience, and ability” to make the decision, and that they do not have a pre-conceived notion or philosophical position that would limit their ability to make a fair decision (Birnbaum & Stegner, 1979, p. 48). Although one statement of the power of the voice effect was demonstrated by Lind, Earley and Kanfer (1990). The study found that the opportunity for voice influenced judgments of fairness even when there was no opportunity to

influence the decision. The authors explained, “In spite of what seemed to us to be a very strong statement to the subjects about the absence of any possible influence on the decision in the postdecision voice condition and in spite of a clear demonstration of the ineffectiveness of postdecision voice in changing the goal, subjects in this condition reported feeling more control over the outcome than did subjects in the no voice condition” (Lind, Earley, & Kanfer, 1990, p. 957).

While voice may increase perceptions of fairness even when those affected know that it will not impact the decision, a powerful effect can be achieved by giving meaningful voice to stakeholders. Susskind’s (1987) look at impasses characterized the difficulties of decision making that causes decision makers and those affected as being at cross purposes where mutually agreeable solutions may be hard to find. He states, “The laws of...policymaking tend to parallel the laws of physics: for every imposed action, there is an equal and opposite reaction. Thus the act of imposing a decision can trigger a more heated and protracted dispute than the context of the decision originally merited” (Susskind, 1987, p. 6-7).

The extent to which unhappiness results when individuals receive an unfavorable outcome may, in part, be due to the traditional view of voice that tends to lend itself to limiting the input of others to expressions of opinion about how a problem or situation should be handled, and putting decision makers in a position to review this input and make decisions accordingly. Or they may go farther, and suggest that the input of disputing parties be considered, and meaningful compromises be made. However, Susskind (1987) suggests that compromise has limited usefulness because each party has to give up desired outcomes.

This has led to a new paradigm, suggested by Susskind (1987), that focuses on consensus building in which affected parties work together to find mutually agreeable solutions. This method, "...requires informal, face-to-face interactions among specially chosen representatives of all 'stake holding' groups; a voluntary effort to seek 'all gain' rather than 'win-lose' solutions or watered down political compromise" (p. 11). It seems logical that there would be more satisfaction with this kind of decision, that it would lead to substantially more fair decisions, and that these decisions would also be perceived to be more fair because they were arrived at in cooperation with those who might dissent with an unfavorable decision.

This method does more than offer voice in a decision, the act of involving others communicates their validity as partners in the process. This is the basis of the group value model, which is discussed next.

Group Value

The opportunity to have one's viewpoint considered may be highly related to the group value model (De Cremer, 2002). Lind, et al. (1990) suggest that "...the voice effect stems from the implication that those accorded an opportunity to present information are valued, full fledged members of the group enacting the procedure" (p. 952). This may explain, at least in part, why voice alone seems to have such an impact on perceptions of fairness.

Of course, voice may take different forms. DeCarufel and Schopler (1979) studied the result of threat appeals and found that when threats led to success, the subjects were satisfied, but when the threats did not lead to success, there was no greater satisfaction than those who had no voice at all. This seems to indicate, at least in the area of threat

appeal, that voice alone is not sufficient to produce satisfaction with the result.

Interactional Factors

In recent years, many researchers have turned their attention to studying how the manner of an interaction can affect judgments about the fairness of a decision.

Rudimentary theory in communication studies point to the interpersonal and intrapersonal nature of the exchange of information. In the section which follows, the interpersonal and intrapersonal aspects of interactions are considered.

Intrapersonal

The term “intrapersonal” refers to communication within the individual. This encompasses a variety of phenomena including judgments, perceptions, biases, beliefs and interpretive schema. This general area has been underdeveloped by previous justice research. This study aims to rectify these deficiencies in order to better explain the internal processes used to evaluate the fairness of decisions. In this section, the factors of trust, credibility and affect preference are considered.

trust.

Trust is an important consideration in judging the actions of others. In Tyler and Schuller (1990) neutrality and trust were found to be the most influential factors in determinations of fairness (Vermunt, Van der Kloot, & Van der Meer, 1993). This finding was confirmed in a study by Vermunt, Van der Kloot and Van der Meer (1993). Trust, as explained by Tyler and Degoey (1996), is based on attributions of the motives of those empowered to make decisions (Kulik & Holbrook, 2000). If those seeking fairness do not believe that decision makers will act with fairness, there can be no trust (Kulik & Holbrook, 2000). Regardless of the procedures in place, it is this individual

perception about the trustworthiness of decision-makers that can be one of the most influential factors.

Wu and Laws (2003) explain that “Trust, from a psychological perspective, is shaped by an ongoing assessment of whether another part shares one’s interests or diverges from them. To the extent that interests and agendas are perceived to diverge, wariness and protectionism might be mobilized” (p. 335). But for those with whom our interests are similar, trust can be formed. Wu and Laws (2003) continue, “...we associate trust with a shared culture, history, outlook or interests” (p. 330).

Trust, as suggested previously, is based on not only our attributions pertaining to our past experiences with the fairness of decisions that we have encountered, and our expectancies of fairness with those whom we have had past experiences, but also with the demographic characteristics of those with whom we have never interacted (Kulik & Holbrook, 2000; Stephan & Stephan, 1989).

Our history is the basis of these perceptions, say Wu and Laws (2003), “Depending on the specifics of this history, which constitutes the background and upbringing of the individual and the evolution of the relationships implicit in this life a child may view trust relationships as a default mode, or he may be wary” (Wu & Laws, 2003, p. 336). Beyond that, Davidson and Friedman (1998) cite a “persistent injustice effect” which is not bound to the experience of the individuals alone (p. 154). They explain that, “...individuals from social groups that have faced many injustices may not be responsive to causal accounts; perceptions of injustice may persist despite the use of an account” (Davidson and Friedman, 1998, p. 154). In other words, while a good story may go a long way in explaining negative outcomes, the effectiveness of this method can

be greatly limited by an individual's past experience with receiving frequent injustice.

A sizable body of research supports the belief that perceptions of fairness vary by culture (Fischer & Smith, 2003). According to Kulik and Holbrook (2000) people tend to, "...trust cross-race authorities less than same race authorities" (p. 381). This mistrust may not be unfounded considering Crosby, et al.'s assertion that "...whites and blacks are nearly equally likely to discriminate against the opposite race" (in Kulick & Holbrook, p. 381). This mistrust can make the individuals interacting more sensitive to the outcome, thus creating a self-perpetuating cycle. In addition, according to Van den Bos, Maas and Waldring (2003), "...people are more inclined to try to resolve conflicts after having received fair as opposed to unfair outcomes" (p. 152). This means that those who receive unfair outcomes will continue to suffer from injustice due to their failure to seek correction in unfair processes.

Kulik and Holbrook (2000) cite how previous research into cross-race decision makers and outcome favorability related to their findings in a study of bank loan applications in these conditions:

...previous research indicat[es] that both Whites (Stephan & Stephan, 1989) and Blacks (Davidson & Friedman, 1998, Study 4) had more negative reactions to unfavorable outcomes when the outcome resulted from a cross-race encounter than when the outcome came from a same-race encounter. Results indicate that applicants had a more positive reaction to unfavorable outcomes when they received these outcomes from a racially congruent loan officer (p. 394).

In essence, people may be quicker to perceive injustice when dealing with others of a different race. This may be based on unpleasant experiences in past interactions, since they tend to be less fair. In essence, the past actions of individuals (and persons of their same race) may impact credibility and this can harm overall fairness judgments.

credibility.

Beliefs about the credibility of decision makers, and the relative fairness of processes are highly subjective and reliant upon an individual's perceptions, biases, beliefs and other intrapersonal factors. Trust is related to perceptions of the credibility of the other in the interaction. Sternthal, Phillips and Dholakia (1978) define source credibility "...in terms of two components: expertise and trustworthiness. Expertise refers to the extent to which a speaker is perceived to be capable of making correct assertions, while trustworthiness refers to the degree to which an audience perceived the assertions made by a communicator to be ones that the speaker considers valid" (p. 286-287).

emotion and affect preference.

Injustice is an emotional experience (Krehbiel & Cropanzano, 2000). DeCarufel and Schopler (1979) suggest that, "The consequences of injustice involve psychological states roughly equivalent to anger and dissatisfaction. This kind of injustice can also take a physical toll. In a study conducted by Vermunt and Steensma (2003) "...physiological responses measured by heart rate, asystole and systole blood pressure decrease significantly after fair treatment as compared to an unfair treatment" (p. 144). And while clearly some perceived injustices can be more highly charged than others, there is also research to suggest that some interactants may have affect preferences which are, "...stable over time and consistent across situations" (Van den Bos, Maas, Walring, & Semin, 2003, p. 154). Van den Bos, Maas, Waldring and Semin (2003) report that "When exposed to affect-eliciting events, certain individuals consistently manifest stronger or more intense emotional responses whereas other persons show milder or less

intense affective reactions” (p. 154). These preferences generally do not rely on temporal or situational factors. In other words, another salient intrapersonal effect is the tendency of some individuals to demonstrate routinely high or low affect response to a variety of situations. Van den Bos, et al. (2003) were first to demonstrate, “...that affective reactions following fair and unfair events are moderated by people’s propensity to react strongly or mildly toward affect-eliciting events” (p. 163). When decision makers seek to make fair decisions that will be accepted by those whom it will effect, affect intensity can be an important consideration. Though this knowledge should not change the outcome of a fair decision, it should inform the authority figure’s process. Breaches in process are more susceptible to changes in the affect intensity than reaction to outcomes (Van den Bos, Maas, Walring, & Semin, 2003). Having a sense of affect intensity patterns of others can give decision makers insight into a highly subjective aspect of social justice – the emotional response to decisions, both fair and unfair. Hastorf and Cantril (1954) assert that, “The significance assumed by different happenings for different people depend[s] in large part on the purpose people bring to the occasion and the assumptions they have of the purpose and probable behavior of the other people involved” (Hobson-Panico, 2003, p. 27).

The individual perceptions and preferences of the people with whom the process is occurring limit many of the assumptions of research presented in this study. It is important to remember that, while theories of human behavior can be quite explanatory about the ways in which individuals respond to certain stimuli, they do not hold in every case. Some intrapersonal factors may increase an individual’s desire to see decisions as unjust, some may cause them to perceive whatever decision is made to be just (Vohs &

Garrett, 1968).

Emotions are a powerful force. Because they usually occur outside of our control, it is difficult to ascertain their origin. Krehbiel and Cropanzano (2000) found that emotion was highest when a person received an unfavorable outcome by an unfair process. According to Molm (1991), “An actor’s satisfaction with an exchange relation is an affective response to a cognitive evaluation of the relation, based on how ‘good’ or ‘bad’ the actor judges the relation to be” (p. 477). Krehbiel and Cropanzano (2000) report that emotional judgments are made on first impressions. They suggest that, “According to cognitive appraisal theories, emotion is understood to result from primary and secondary appraisals. Specifically, a general emotional response begins with a primary appraisal of an event as relevant to a personal goal, and as either harmful or beneficial to the attainment of that goal” (p. 341). “In other words,” they continue, “because the outcome favorability judgment is part of the evaluation, then procedural justice should not impact happiness, joy or disappointment. Procedural justice comes into play during the secondary appraisal” (Krehbiel & Cropanzano, 2000, p. 342). Considerations of the procedure are less temporally compact than judgments of the outcome. Consequently, outcome judgments are more susceptible to the moderating effects of emotion.

Interpersonal

The term interpersonal refers to communication between at least two people. In the study of fairness, this relates to the ways in which the nature of the interaction affects perceptions about the outcome and process and may involve communication style, empathy, perceptions about race, gender and age.

communication style.

The way in which we choose to communicate, explains a lot about us. This is true in everyday interaction as well as in decision-making encounters. In a study conducted by Bies (1985), a group of job applicants were asked their perceptions about criteria for a fair interview. According to Vermunt, et al. (1993) “The first and most important dimension differentiated events referring to the way people were treated in interpersonal interaction” (p. 185). People expect to be treated courteously, and fairly. Folger and Cropanzano (1998) found that people who are treated inappropriately will tend to feel that they have been treated unfairly. Rook (1984) found that negative interactions have more of an impact than positive ones (Tornblom & Vermunt, 1999). This makes perfect sense. If someone is not treated courteously, or according to his or her expectations, it communicates that the decision maker does not regard the individual as worthy of fair treatment. It may also, in the sense of the group value model, signal low status as a member of the group, which (if the negative of this theory holds true) might lead to negative judgments about the fairness of a decision. This can seriously interfere with other interpersonal attributes, such as empathy, which are essential to interactional justice.

empathy.

Empathy, the ability to experience the emotions or point-of-view of another (Adler, Rosenfeld, & Towne, 1992), is yet another factor in the interactional approach to justice (Page & Nowak, 2002). It is logical to conclude that as understanding and appreciation of another’s frame of reference increases, so too increases the ability to base decisions on criteria valued by the other – in a way the other is likely to accept. Page and

Nowak (2002) relate empathy to fairness, “Empathy means that individuals make offers that they themselves would be willing to accept” (p. 1102). In this way, decision makers will conform their decisions, “...not only by their own ideas of what represents a just solution but also by the recipients expectations and preferences they perceive to exist” (Mikula & Korltke, 1990, p. 146).

Empathy has also been shown to increase feelings of relational intimacy (Adler, Rosenfeld, & Towne, 1992) and valuation. Valuing the relationship demonstrates an appreciation of the individual. This confirms one’s importance to the group and derives many of the benefits of the group value theory. As interactional justice research continues to expand, it should be interesting to see these concepts tested through more rigorous applied research.

racial factors.

We have a tendency to think of institutions of higher education as more enlightened than society in general. For some students, these institutions can be far from enlightened. Since the early 1990s, colleges and universities reported, “...an upsurge in the number and intensity of reported incidents of racist, homophobic and sexist abuse in American universities” (Grey, 1991, p. 489). In considering the perceptions of students of color, it would be impossible to encapsulate their views without considering the impact of previous unfair and hostile treatment.

Our beliefs are shaped by our culture and cultural beliefs differ in their preferences for settling disputes. “Over the last 20 years,” according to Fisher and Smith (2003), “numerous studies have found cross-cultural differences in reward allocation behavior” (p. 251). Erber (1990) adds that, “Cross-cultural researchers suggest that

preference for nonadversarial procedures in non-Western societies may be understood from the vantage of the cultural dimension of collectivism-individualism” (p. 339).

Collectivism refers to a “tightly knit social framework in which individuals are emotionally integrated” (Hofstede, 1983, p. 295). “Individualism, on the other hand, is the preference for a loosely knit social framework in which individuals are supposed to take care of themselves and their immediate families only” (Hofstede, 1980; Erber, 1990, p. 339). Amongst collective culture, there is a preference for equality rather than equity or need (Conner, 2003). This is likely attributable to the connection group members have to each other. As Hofstede (1980) explains, “they expect their in-group to look after them, and in exchange for that they feel that they owe absolute loyalty to it” (Hofstede, 1980, p. 45-46).

Those who have received fair treatment in the past tend to expect fair treatment, and demonstrate higher commitment to the organizations they serve (Van den Bos, Maas, Walring, & Semin, 2003). In contrast, those who have received unfair treatment in the past, tend to show lower commitment to their organizations, and expect unfair treatment in the future (Van den Bos, Maas, Walring, & Semin, 2003). Again, perceptions are reinforced over time. This includes our attributions about various cultures and our expectations when dealing with a particular group. “These expectations,” according to Wu and Laws (2003), “...may affect perceptions of the other that color our expectations and judgment, allowing us to collect further evidence of how difficult it is to work with them” (p. 330).

The present study is primarily concerned with the interaction mix between races in decision-making processes. This is a difficult take. As Hurwitz and Peffley (2002)

explain, “While there is an immense literature on public opinion and race in political science, most of it focuses almost exclusively on the attitudes of whites, or of African Americans, making inter-racial comparisons impossible” (p. 3). In addition, there is limited information about the general expectations of other cultures interacting with each other with regard to fairness. This is a void that should be addressed by the present study and others.

As Deutsch (1975) suggested, “...justice requires effective social cooperation” (p. 141). Social cooperation must be based on trust in the other. It is clear that, at the present time, this necessary trust is lacking and this fact greatly hinders the accomplishing of justice. This lack of trust can best be illustrated through the criminal justice system. For instance, as Hurwitz and Peffley (2002) report, “At a minimum, we know African-Americans are significantly less likely to testify in court, provide information to the police, or even report crimes against them, largely because of a pervasive distrust of the system” (Neville & Pugh, 1997; Hurwitz & Peffley, 2002).

Interactants usually expect, perceive and get less fairness when dealing with cross-race decision makers. What is unclear is how understanding this phenomenon should direct the processes and behavior of the decision maker. Should decisions where fairness may be questioned only be made by authorities of the same race? While this approach may seem beneficial, it could detract from overall fairness. Hopefully a civilized society can one day endeavor to better its track record of inequality. Racial fairness points to a need for students to feel that they are represented in the process, and this may strongly suggest the need for the input and participation of qualified and involved decision-makers of the same race interacting in the process.

gender.

Gender also influences perceptions of fairness. In Kulik and Holbrook's (2000) study of loan officers, the mistrust inherent in cross-racial interactions was not necessarily present in cross-gender interactions. This does not mean that men and women have the same expectations of decision-making processes. Peterson, Rhoads and Vaught (2001) suggest that "Women are assumed to view ethical dilemmas in terms of understanding relationships, responsibilities and compassion for others. On the other hand, it is assumed that men learn to resolve ethical problems in terms of rules, rights, fairness, and justice" (p. 225). Russ and Alexander (1984) report that "In research on equity and justice some investigators have reported that men and women use different allocation norms in distributing rewards; men using an equity rule, and women using an equality rule" (p. 3). When given the opportunity to distribute rewards, women tended to distribute these rewards equally, while men are more inclined to make more power and value-laden distributions (Russ & Alexander, 1984). Jones and Watt (2001) assert that men often prefer a justice model, while women tend to have a preference for an ethic of care model (p. 10). That is to say, men tend to focus primarily on the content of a decision, while women's motives are often more centered in relationships. This supports the conclusion of Sawyer (1966) that women are more "...altruistic and less self-interested in their distribution preferences than men" (Russ & Alexander, 1984, p.4).

Gender influences not only the processes one employs to make decisions, but also the procedures one expects when seeking for others to make a fair decision. This effect is mitigated by the other in the interaction. Women expect more voice from a process when dealing with those of their same sex (Kulik & Holbrook, 2000). Kulik and Holbrook

(2000) articulate this point, “Women have been socialized to expect a great deal of participation when they interact with a person of their own sex and they respond very negatively when these conversational norms are violated” (p. 395).

Are women more ethical than men? Some research suggest that on the whole, the answer is yes. Women are generally assumed to be more altruistic and egalitarian in their distribution of resources (Sawyer, 1966; Russ & Alexander, 1984) In a study conducted by Jones and Watt (2001), “Women...scored significantly higher than men on the following measures of psychosocial development: tolerance, lifestyle planning, educational involvement, instrumental autonomy, interdependence, and salubrious lifestyle” (p.10). Although in contrast, a study of marketing managers conducted by Fritzsche (1988) found that female managers were no more likely to make ethical decisions than were their male counterparts. How do the two genders interact in fairness decisions? What are their expectations from each other? Cohen, Pant and Sharp (1998) suggest that gender biases exist with regard to perceptions of the ethicality of behavior. In their study, “The results indicate some evidence of a gender bias, in that male respondents perceived both actions performed by a woman to be less ethical than when performed by a man on several criteria. In contrast, among female respondents, only one action was seen as less ethical when performed by a woman and on only a few moral criteria” (Cohen, Pant, & Sharp, 1998, p.206).

Women may also be more tolerant of inequity than men. In Russ and Alexander (1984) women reported receiving fewer rewards as being less fair than did their male counterparts, and over-reward as being more fair. Hartman, Yrle and Galle (1999) explain that while, “...there is evidence from several sources that while neither males nor

females are satisfied in an inequity situation, females appear to be somewhat more tolerant of inequity” (p. 339). “One explanation which has been advanced,” according to Hauenstein, McGonigle and Flinder, (2002), “...is that women use other women as comparative others, and where women are underpaid relative to men, they will feel no personal inequity because their comparison others are receiving similar treatment” (p. 339). More research is needed to achieve a greater understanding of the impact of gender mix on perceptions of fairness.

age.

Age is more than the sum total of years since our birth. As humans interact, they do so with a deeply ingrained understanding of what their age communicates to others and act accordingly (Laz, 1998). Age is wrapped in such notions as experience and authority which are sure to infuse the decision-making process. This effect, however, has not been adequately studied. Research in this area will need to address in what ways the age mix of those engaged in the decision-making process affects perceptions of fairness.

Age and maturity surely have an effect on students while in college. The act of maturing, coupled with the curricula of colleges and universities, have frequently been cited by student development researchers as having an impact on students. Jones and Watt (2001) report that, “...considerable support exists for the conclusion that students undergo cognitive, moral, and psychosocial changes during their college years” (p. 2). This means that even though college students may be close in age, even minor differences in age can contribute to vastly different levels of ethical development. This may not be wholly attributable to age. A study by Mullane (1999) found that college students involved in disciplinary cases have a more stunted moral development than other

students.

Jean Piaget was among the first to look at moral reasoning and development (Peterson, Rhoads, & Vaught, 2001). Kohlberg (1969) extended Piaget's work with children, into moral judgments of adolescents and adults, by developing a six-stage model of moral development" (p. 225-226). Peterson, et al. (2001) suggest that "...Ethical beliefs increase with age and that the rate of increase varies by gender" (p. 230).

There are likely differences in the way people respond to just or unjust decision that vary by age as well. For instance, according to Pinquart (2001), "The level of affect balance decreased in younger samples whereas no significant age differences were found in the oldest samples. In addition, we found an age-associated decrease of the frequency and intensity of emotions mainly with regard to high-arousal emotions, whereas emotions with low levels of arousal showed an age-associated increase" (p. 387-392). In short, older people tend to have a preference for less affect in general when compared to younger people.

Conclusion

Literature in the study of justice and fairness is broad and interdisciplinary. It involves the evaluation of outcomes, judgments about processes and assessments of the individuals who direct these processes and determine outcomes as well. Whether one is assigning rewards or punishment has also been seen as salient.

The diversity of perspective in this field has led to what Tornblom and Vermunt (1999) described as "...a scattered and largely unrelated literature with a variety of foci on the relationship between distributive and procedural justice" (p. 40). Interactive and

retributive justice are relatively new, but are beginning to develop similar characteristics to their older counterparts with regard to the lack of synthesis between these particular subject areas and the body of literature as a whole. Tornblom and Vermunt (1999) continue, “It is difficult to assess the theoretical contributions and implications of these studies unless they are systematically connected within a common theoretical framework” (p. 41). This research will address this issue.

CHAPTER III: METHODOLOGY

Introduction

How can one propose to test a belief? Does the identification of a perception in more than one person give weight to that perception? In the positivist tradition, these questions are unanswerable, and yet, they are compelling and interesting lines of inquiry which deserve consideration. Qualitative researchers are sculptors of ice. The product of research in this area can be very detailed and even beautiful, but it is also limited in time. Much like the ice sculpture will eventually succumb to even the most temperate of environments, qualitative research will begin to distort as it is displaced from the context in which it is created.

When designing methods to investigate beliefs, attitudes and perceptions, the theoretical framework for gathering and interpreting these elements must be well defined and carefully considered. Strauss and Corbin (1990) suggest that the main components of a qualitative study are data (how it will be collected), analytic/interpretive procedures, and finally reporting. In this section, the methodology used to arrive at an understanding of how students form their perceptions about the fairness of outcomes and procedures is detailed and framed according to these components. A detailed methodological framework will also be presented. The chapter concludes with a list of methodological terms useful to readers of the present study.

Data Collection

The present study used unstructured, open format interviews to illicit true stories about times when students participated in a decision-making process in which another person determined an outcome that affected them. Kvale (1996) suggests that interviews

are the most preferable means to, "...study people's understanding of the meanings in their lived world, describing their experiences and self-understanding, and clarifying and elaborating their own perspective on their lived world" (p. 105). The researcher presupposed no topics of discussion, but rather was guided by each story to ask for clarification, elaboration, or refutation in order to represent the storyteller's point of view as accurately as possible.

Each interview began by asking students to tell stories that had (1) personally impacted them, (2) in which a decision was made by students, faculty, staff or administration, and (3) that they thought was particularly fair or unfair. The story was then used as a basis for follow-up questions that emerged logically from the story.

This kind of research, according to Clandinin and Connelly (2000), "...is a collaboration between researcher and participants over time, in a place or series of places, and in social interaction with milieus" (p. 20). In this method, "An inquirer enters this matrix in the midst, and progresses in the same spirit, concluding the stories of the experiences that make up people's lives, both individual and social" (p. 20). This philosophy is the impetus of this research. Through professional experience in making decisions in a college setting, counseling students about how to make fair decisions and serving as a liason between administration and students in explaining important decisions, the researcher in this study has a high degree of what Corbin and Strauss (1990) call, "theoretical sensitivity." This is defined as, "a personal quality of the researcher" that "...indicates an awareness of the subtitles of meaning in the data" (Corbin & Strauss, 1990, p. 41). This sensitivity is heightened by observing students over an extended period timeframe at the institution of study.

Because the success or failure of this study was largely dependant upon the depth and clarity of the insight of participants, it was essential that the students chosen for the study meet specific, detailed criteria for selection. Sampling criteria and participant qualification ensured that these demands could be appropriately met.

Sampling and Participant Selection

Sampling

Sampling is, “The method used to select a given number of participants from a population” (Hicswa, 2003, p. 14; Mertens, 1998). The present study employed purposeful sampling (Lincoln & Guba, 1985) which relies upon selecting subjects who are likely to have an understanding and background in the subject of interest.

Participants were obtained through flyers, a snowball campaign via electronic mail, in-class announcements, endorsements from professors and personal invitations from the researcher to participate. For students who were recommended for pre-screening, at no time was the recommending party informed of whether or not the student had been selected for the study.

Participant Selection

This study was based on the stories and experiences of sixteen undergraduate college students enrolled at a private, medium-sized research university in the Mid-western United States. The sample was composed of four white students, four Asian American students, four Hispanic students, and four African American students. Each demographic cluster was comprised of one first-year student, one second-year student, one third-year student, and fourth-year student. Each demographic cluster was further comprised of two males and two females. This entailed using purposeful sampling to

achieve the desired characteristics (discussed later).

Once selected, the exact characteristics of each group were as follows:

Table 1 – Demographic Groups			
African American	Asian American	Hispanic American	White
First-year Female	First-year Female	First-year Male	First-year Female
Second-year Female	Second-year Male	Second-year Female	Second-year Male
Third-year Male	Third-year Female	Third-year Male	Third-year Male
Fourth-year Male	Fourth-year Male	Fourth-year Female	Fourth-year Female

Northcutt and McCoy (2004) suggest that participants should be individuals who are close to and have power over the phenomenon of interest. This study relies on gathering the perceptions of students who care about the outcome of decisions. It was necessary to make sure those students who were selected for the study were actively engaged in the university community, and that they held a stake in the outcome of decisions. Among sophomores, juniors and seniors – only those that held a formal leadership position on campus were selected. This was defined as serving as an officer of a campus organization, or serving as a member of an exclusive or honorary organization. For first-year students, the study’s criteria required that they participate actively in a campus organization. These traits were established according to the sampling protocol through the student’s self-report during the phone screening.

Analytic/Interpretive Procedures

Coding Procedures

After interviews were conducted and transcribed, data were separated into

independent quotations that (whenever possible) expressed one clear and consistent thought. These quotations, retaining the demographic tag (discussed later) of the person to whom it could be attributed, were then sorted into like groups using constant comparative analysis (Northcutt & McCoy, 2004) and three levels of coding: open, axial, and selective coding as suggested by Strauss and Corbin (1990).

In open coding, data were viewed with a wide scope and an eye for how categories are similar or different from one another. Strauss and Corbin (1990) suggest that, "...classification is discovered when concepts are compared to each other and appear to pertain to similar phenomenon" (p. 61). This consisted of making notes within the transcriptions to label each germane entry with an expressed meaning.

In axial coding, according to Strauss and Corbin (1990) codes are related to each other according to their, "...conditions, context, action/interaction, strategies and consequences" (p. 46). In this stage, categories began to be differentiated from one another and sorted accordingly. It is also at this stage that categories were named. When they appeared to represent unique phenomena, they were named by the researcher. When they seemed to match factors that were previously identified in the research of others (and presented in Chapter II), they retained their original name.

Finally, using selective coding, the researcher tested the categories to make certain that they were mutually exclusive and collectively exhaustive in applying the subjects' explanations and descriptions of the phenomenon of interest. This entailed, "...selecting the core category, systematically relating it to other categories, validating those relationships, and filling in categories that need further refinement or development" (Strauss and Corbin, 1990, p. 116). This was accomplished by making a third data sort

that focused on goodness of fit with regard to each datum's placement in each of the categories, and culling through unused data to make sure that it could not be sorted into existing categories or did not represent a phenomenon of interest to the study.

Once all data were sorted into categories, their relationship to each other became of primary importance. In essence, once an understanding of a phenomenon of interest can be acquired from both an individual and cultural perspective, and its major elements can be identified, it is useful to come to an understanding of how these elements function as a process. Quoting Strauss and Corbin (1990), "Bringing process into the analysis is an important part of any grounded theory study. By process we mean the linking of sequences of action/interaction as they pertain to the management of, control over, or response to, a phenomenon" (p. 143). This is the logical end of grounded theory. Strauss and Corbin (1990) add, "Validating one's theory against the data completes its grounding. One does this by laying out the theory in memos either diagrammatically or narrative" (p. 133). These processes are described in Chapter Five.

Reporting

The data are reported in the next chapter. Because this research, as its title suggests, was intended to present students' viewpoints "in their own voice," it was essential that the reader be able to hear the students' thoughts as clearly as possible. In so doing, the backgrounds of stories are used to set them up, and students' thoughts are often presented in long quotations so that they may be presented in their own context.

Demographic Tags

To ensure the confidentiality of participants, students' names were never associated with the data in any way. All tapes and interview notes from each section, and

eventually each quotation, were tagged with a demographic marker. Since each student was different than the other in a demographic sense, this made each marker distinct. Tags are meant to be read from left to right and indicate ethnicity, then gender, then year in school. For example, an African American male in his fourth-year is tagged (AAM4), a Hispanic Female in her sophomore year is tagged (HF2). The following table contains a key for the actual demographic tags used in the study.

Table 2 – Demographic Tags			
African American	Asian American	Hispanic American	White
<i>First-year Female</i> (AAF1)	<i>First-year Female</i> (AF1)	<i>First-year Male</i> (HM1)	<i>First-year Female</i> (WF1)
<i>Second-year Female</i> (AAF2)	<i>Second-year Male</i> (AM2)	<i>Second-year Female</i> (HF2)	<i>Second-year Male</i> (WM2)
<i>Third-year Male</i> (AAM3)	<i>Third-year Female</i> (AF3)	<i>Third-year Male</i> (HM3)	<i>Third-year Male</i> (WM3)
<i>Fourth-year Male</i> (AAM4)	<i>Fourth-year Male</i> (AM4)	<i>Fourth-year Female</i> (HF4)	<i>Fourth-year Female</i> (WF4)

Viewing the categories with demographic tags kept the presentation orderly, and also expressed some important information about the data. If a perception was strongly associated with a particular race or ethnicity, this would naturally emerge when the data were sorted. If a certain perception was strong within a particular age group or gender, this also would be evident. The present study intended to seek differences within these groups, but it also bares mentioning that given the relatively small number of people

interviewed, it would be inappropriate to try to produce generalizable data (discussed in more detail later). It is hoped that in the tradition of a grounded theory study, it might generate testable hypotheses for future studies.

Institutional Characteristics

The institution at which the study took place is a mid-sized church affiliated private university in the Midwestern United States. It is a research-intensive university with a strong reputation.

It seems prudent to mention some factors specific to the institution at which the present study was conducted that should be considered. In the time preceding the study, there were several very well known issues of fairness at the institution. In essence, there have been such strong issues of fairness between students and the university that the details are nearly universally known to all (though the “facts” vary greatly in both depth of knowledge and interpretation). These issues included a sudden enactment of a substantial fee at the end of the academic year, the resignation or dismissal of popular administrators (two separate cases), student election scandals and an issue involving potential theft by student leaders. This created an environment in which students’ perceptions had been greatly refined by careful consideration and quite a bit of discussion with their peers about these issues. In essence, it made for a favorable environment to study fairness because the issue of fairness was already salient to the group; students already had given the issue a lot of thought, and the extent to which they responded to the same events made for a good basis for comparison.

It seems likely that the extent to which these issues share a common knowledge within the community of a medium-sized university would produce the kind of depth of

thought necessary to understand such a complex phenomenon. It might also, however, produce a result that would be less than typical. This distinction is very useful in a study of this nature in which the goal is not to produce generalizable findings, but to explain as accurately as possible the beliefs and attitudes of a specific group of people with a decided locality at a specific point in time. An understanding of the context in which this study is situated should clarify and elucidate the findings.

Confidentiality

Because each session was taped, and subjects could be potentially identifiable by their voices, all tapes were destroyed after they were transcribed. Also, in accordance with the research protocol, no interviews were held back to back in order to prevent participants from seeing each other.

The procedures used to conduct the present study represent a balance of rigor and flexibility in collecting data. The procedures were consistent enough to ensure that the data could be trusted as what the participants intended to say, but flexible enough to capture the complexity of their viewpoints. This design was influenced by a number of methodological traditions within the qualitative paradigm. The next section will detail the philosophical, methodological and epistemological underpinnings of the present study.

Methodological Framework

The present study was conducted within the qualitative paradigm of inquiry. According to Strauss and Corbin (1990) qualitative research is "...any kind of research that produces findings not arrived at by means of statistical procedures or other means of quantification" (p. 17). This method, as Glaser and Strauss (1967) report, is useful in,

“...the discovery of important categories and their properties, their conditions and consequences; the development of such categories at different levels of conceptualization; the formulation of hypotheses of varying scope and generality; and above all the integration of the total theoretical framework” (p. 168). Browning (1978), paraphrasing Glaser and Strauss, elaborates on this relationship, saying:

Qualitative data are more useful than quantitative data for the discovery of variables, substantive categories, and hypotheses, while quantitative research is best used in further exploration and testing theory. The comparative analysis of qualitative data assists in generating theory by creating conceptual categories from evidence; then the evidence from which each category emerged is used to illustrate the concept. A focus on the verification and testing of theory can easily block the generation of a more rounded and dense theory (i.e. theory that accounts for a larger array of variables) (p. 93).

The creation of dense theory with regard to how individuals judge the processes they participate in and the outcomes they receive was the aim of this study.

The selection of an appropriate method for which to conduct social scientific research is contingent on a number of important factors. Paramount was a determination of one’s position towards the causation of behavior. According to Harre and Secord (1979):

Regularities in human behavior may be explained according to several different schemata. Two extremes are: (1) the person acting as an agent directing his own behavior, and (2) the person as an object responding to the push and pull of forces exerted by the environment. The former emphasizes self-direction; the latter, environmental contingencies. Most contemporary social psychologies fall somewhere in between...(p. 8).

The present study emphasizes the role that an actor’s beliefs and culture play in shaping individual attributions about fairness. This was framed using a multidisciplinary approach that combined the use of stories collected in the tradition of narrative inquiry, with the coding procedures of grounded theory. These notions were constructed to be

philosophically consistent with ethnomethodology, symbolic interactionism and phenomenology.

Narrative Inquiry

Narrative Inquiry is often described as being particularly interested in stories, “lived and told” (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000, p. 20). This expresses a concern with not only what the stories have to tell us about the phenomenon of interest, but also what it has to say about the person telling the story. As Fisher (1984) explains, narrative inquiry is based on, “...a theory of symbolic actions – words and/or deeds – that have a sequence of meaning for those who live, create and interpret them” (p. 2). What does the story have to say about the ways that the individual has made sense of what is happening to them? How has their story been shaped by their perspective on the events that they describe? What conclusions can be drawn about the way in which participation in a given culture has impacted this story? And what conclusions can be drawn from listening to different members of a given culture’s stories about a given phenomenon?

The use of narrative inquiry was essential to deriving useful data to generate a holistic view of fairness. People reveal themselves through their stories, and a culture is revealed by its collective stories. Perhaps it can even be said that people reveal themselves at a level which they themselves cannot fully understand. Saleebey (1994) suggests that “...whatever meanings a culture sustains are expressed in...narratives” (p. 351-352). These values are embedded in the text of our language and stories.

Humans use stories to fulfill a variety of objectives. Stories are used as the basis of, and a justification for our decisions. Polkinghorne defined narrative through three presentations. Czarniawska (1997) describes them:

One is a presentation directed towards oneself, a story we tell ourselves to make sense of what we are doing ('I am writing a book'). The second is the presentation of a story to others by telling, writing, or enacting it. The third is reception – interpreting and understanding the story that is heard and read (p. 19).

This research was primarily interested in the third of these presentations, or how people fashion...out of...symbols a sense of what the world is all about" (Saleebey, 1994, p. 351). In short, how did they determine if a process was fair or unfair?

The stories gathered for this inquiry conform to Hyden's (1997) definition of narrative. Specifically, to be considered, each must be, "...an entity that is distinguishable from the surrounding discourse and [have] a beginning, a middle and an end" (Hyden, 1997, p. 48). Every effort was made to provide reasonable assurance that the information gathered was an accurate representation of what the subject intended to say. The analysis also adhered to the caution of Smythe and Murray (2001) who suggested that, "The purpose of narrative inquiry is not to clarify what participants intended to say but, rather, to interpret the underlying meanings behind what they say" (p. 324).

Through the collection and analysis of stories, the researcher can gain insight into a very difficult phenomenon to observe, the ways in which people understand, interpret and express their beliefs regarding things that happened to them. Once collected, these stories were analyzed using the procedures of grounded theory.

Grounded Theory

Taken together, the preceding methodological framework should be sufficient to produce grounded theory, "...a qualitative research approach that was collaboratively developed by Glaser and Strauss. Its systematic techniques and procedures of analysis

enable the researcher to develop a substantive theory that meets the criteria for doing “good” science: significance, theory-observation compatibility, generalizability, reproducibility, precision, rigor and verification” (Strauss & Corbin, 1990, p. 31).

Utilizing constant comparative analysis, grounded theory has the capacity to “...generate theory more systematically...using explicit coding and analytic procedures” (Glaser & Strauss, 1967, p. 102). This raises questions about the generalizability of data derived from qualitative inquiry (addressed more fully later). Though this question is more reliant upon the method chosen, grounded theory is based on the assumption that qualitative research can be used to develop contextually rich environments for generating descriptive theory. Glaser and Strauss (1967), wrote:

Previous books on methods of social research have focused mainly on how to verify theories. This suggests an overemphasis in current sociology on the verification of theory, and a resultant de-emphasis on the prior step of discovering what concepts and hypotheses are relevant for the area that one wishes to research (p. 1-2).

Additionally, Garfinkel (1967) wrote, “When members’ accounts of everyday activities are used as prescriptions with which to locate, to identify, to analyze, to classify, to make recognizable, or to find one’s way around in comparable occasions, the prescriptions, they observe, are law-like, spatiotemporally restricted, and ‘loose’” (p. 2). This hints at a useful metaphor for grounded theory found in the study of law. Grounded theory is analogous to case law; it is local in its origin and application and does not necessarily generalize to a greater context. It is bound by its context and is specific to the time frame in which it was conducted.

Using this method, the researcher was able to collect a very difficult kind of data to access, the feelings and opinions of individuals with regard to the way they make sense

of their world, how these are perpetuated and learned within a given culture, and how these make up a holistic view of the phenomenon of interest. The collection of these data was reliant upon and constructed to be consistent with the tenants of ethnomethodology, symbolic interactionism and phenomenology.

Ethnomethodology

As defined by Heritage (1984), “The term ethnomethodology...refers to the study of a particular subject matter: the body of common-sense knowledge and the range of procedures and considerations by means of which the ordinary members of society make sense of, find their way about in, and act on the circumstances in which they find themselves” (p. 4). The focus of ethnomethodology is on “...the local, moment-by-moment determination of meaning in social context” (p. 2). As Harre and Secord (1979) assert, coming to a knowledge of these means requires the, “...obtaining of *accounts* – the actor’s own statements about why he performed the acts in question, what social meanings he gave to the actions of himself and others” (p. 9). This is a major consideration of ethnomethodology. This study relied exclusively on individual actors’ identification, analysis, and reporting of their behavior and perceptions relating to fairness through stories and narrative accounts of past decision-making processes.

Symbolic Interactionism

The label symbolic interactionism is owed to Blumer (1969) who, along with others in the Chicago School movement of sociology (Lewis, 1981), described it as reliant upon three premises:

The first premise is that human beings act toward things on the basis of the meanings that the things have for them. The second premise is that the meaning of such things is derived from, or arises out of, the social interactions one has with one’s fellows. The third premise is that these meanings are handled in, and

modified through an interpretive process used by the person in dealing with the things he encounters (p. 2).

This study was interested in going beyond discovering a particular individual's perceptions about fairness accessible through the ethnomethodological aspects of this study. Rather, based on the assumption that different cultures have different collective (or at least common) assumptions about this issue, the symbolic interactionist approach was used to determine what collective notions can be discovered.

Phenomenology

According to Marton (1996), phenomenology "...is focused on the ways of experiencing different phenomena, ways of seeing them, knowing about them and having skills related to them. The aim is, however, not to find the singular essence, but the variation and the architecture of this variation in terms of the different aspects which define the phenomena" (p. 2). Building upon the individual meaning present in the ethnomethodological approach, and the group meaning sought by symbolic interactionists, this study is influenced by the tradition of the phenomenologist in their pursuit of what elements make up a complete understanding of the phenomenon of interest. While this researcher does not believe that anything approaching pure description can be accomplished, narrative inquiry will provide a very descriptive model of the subject of interest.

Validity

Traditionally, research has been concerned with notions of validity. In a general sense, researchers hope to establish internal and external validity. To achieve internal validity, the researcher strives to produce findings which, "rule out or make implausible

alternate explanations of results” (Marczyk, DeMatteo, & Festinger, 2005, p. 67).

External validity is also valued, and consists of pursuing results that, “...generalize to other conditions, participants, times, and places” (Marczyk, DeMatteo, & Festinger, 2005, p. 67). And yet, these concerns do not fit well within the qualitative research paradigm. There is not way to make certain that results will lead to internally valid conclusions or apply to other populations.

Instead, these notions are substituted with other yardsticks against which one can tell if good science is being done. One such notion, confirmability (or neutrality) is defined as “...the degree to which the findings of an inquiry are a function solely of the subjects and conditions of the inquiry and not of the biases, motives, interests, perspectives...of the inquirer” (Guba & Lincoln, 1981, p. 290). This present study sought to achieve this end by using an open interview format which allowed participants to guide the conversation, and decide what they thought was important to be considered. This gives added weight to the findings, since they represent a measure of both what participants had to say about a given subject, and also suggested that the topic was also salient and important to them.

Secondly, the present study strived for credibility (or truth value), which Lincoln and Guba (1981) define as establishing, “...confidence in the ‘truth’ of the findings of a particular inquiry for the subjects with which – and the context within which – the inquiry was carried out” (p. 290). Presenting the participants stories in an unedited form, with ample, long quotations, was an essential characteristic in achieving credibility. This allows the reader to judge for themselves the context of the story, and to make their own judgments about if it is reasonable to conclude that the participants thoughts are

accurately represented.

Finally, the previously stated notions of external validity are replaced with concerns for trustworthiness. This refers to a researcher's ability to "... persuade his or her audiences (including self) that the findings of an inquiry are worth paying attention to, worth taking account of" (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, p. 290). Because grounded theory relies on future works to verify or test the theory, the present study will likely be judged by its ability to inform and compel unique and interesting hypothesis. Ultimately, it is the reader who will judge success or failure in this endeavor. But at the conclusion of this study, a wide variety of hypotheses are proposed and supported.

Qualitative research is grounded in time, place and interaction. However, it is the level of descriptiveness that this method can achieve that makes it well suited for determining what people think and believe. Every effort has been made to ensure that the data can be trusted as representing the true thoughts, feelings and opinions of the subjects studied, which work together to create a compelling and thorough picture of the way that these students view the way that they form perceptions of fairness.

Methodological Definitions

Many of the following definitions are scattered throughout this chapter and the chapters to follow. This section is intended to give a ready reference for these terms, and to operationalize some overarching concepts on which this study relies.

1. Coding: "The name given by qualitative researchers to describe the way in which text is represented by abstractions" (Northcutt & McCoy, 2004, p. 95).
2. Credibility (truth value): Establishing "confidence in the 'truth' of the findings of a particular inquiry for the subjects with which – and the context within which –

- the inquiry was carried out” (p. 290).
3. Confirmability: (Neutrality) “...the degree to which the findings of an inquiry are a function solely of the subjects and conditions of the inquiry and not of the biases, motives, interests, perspectives...of the inquirer” (p. 290).
 4. Ethnomethodology: “The term ethnomethodology...refers to the study of a particular subject matter: the body of common-sense knowledge and the range of procedures and considerations by means of which the ordinary members of society make sense of, find their way about in, and act on the circumstances in which they find themselves” (Heritage, 1984, p. 4).
 5. Grounded Theory: “...a qualitative research approach that was collaboratively developed by Glaser and Strauss. Its systematic techniques and procedures of analysis enable the researcher to develop a substantive theory that meets the criteria for doing ‘good’ science: significance, theory-observation compatibility, generalizability, reproducibility, precision, rigor and verification” (Strauss & Corbin, 1990, p. 31).
 6. Interview: The preferable method to “...study people’s understanding of the meanings in their lived world, describing their experiences and self-understanding, and clarifying and elaborating their own perspective on their lived world” (Kvale, 1996, p. 105).
 7. Qualitative Methods: “any kind of research that produces findings not arrived at by means of statistical procedures or other means of quantification” (Strauss & Corbin, 1990, p. 17).
 8. Reliability (Consistency): “...the findings of an inquiry would be consistently

- repeated if the inquiry were repeated” (Guba & Lincoln, 1981, p. 104).
9. Sampling: “The method used to select a given number of participants from a population” (Hicswa, 2003, p. 14; Mertens, 1998).
 10. Trustworthiness: Refers to a researcher’s ability to “... persuade his or her audiences (including self) that the findings of an inquiry are worth paying attention to, worth taking account of” (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, p. 290).

Institutional Review and Human Subjects Research

All research was conducted in accordance with the policies and protocols of The University of Texas at Austin and those of the host institution with regard to research on human subjects. The present study was conducted only after approval had been received by the institutional review boards of both institutions.

Conclusions

If you want to know what a person (or even a society) values, listen to their stories. That is what the present study endeavored to do. Saleebey (1994) wrote that narrative is central to “cultural patterning” and suggested “...whatever meanings a culture sustains are expressed in...narratives” (p. 351-352). By listening to college students’ stories about past decision-making encounters, these values will be revealed, and some assumptions about the meaning of those values can be asserted.

In this chapter, the procedures and protocols for conducting the present study were described. This entailed the collection of stories in the tradition of narrative inquiry, and analysis of these stories using grounded theory. Taken together, they should be sufficient to produce detailed descriptions that assist in understanding how individuals make sense of decision-making processes.

The next chapter will present the results of the present study.

CHAPTER IV: RESULTS

The purpose of the present study was to determine college students' perceptions about the fairness of student, faculty and administration led decision-making processes. The aim was to develop contextually driven, descriptively dense accounts of students' reactions to previous decisions in order to better understand what led them to think of them as fair or unfair.

In open coding, twenty-eight categories of meaning were derived from the procedures described in Chapter Three. These emerged from the data, though some were found to be representative of notions discussed in the literature review. In these cases, the categories shared their names with the previously identified concepts. In axial coding, they were subdivided into larger categories of meaning. The researcher determined that the four contextual approaches discussed in Chapter II best represented the categorization of the data, and made for an elegant and parsimonious structure. These four approaches are distributive justice, procedural justice, interactional justice, and retributive justice. The categories within each major heading are illustrated in the table (1) on the next page:

Table 3 –Factors Influencing Students’ Perceptions of Fairness Sorted by Conceptual Approach			
Distributive Justice	Procedural Justice	Interactional Justice	Retributive Justice
Focus on Outcomes	Objectivity	Communication Skill	Deserving
Garbage Can Model	Bounded Rationality	Credibility	Retributive Empathy
Outcome Favorability/ Self-Interest	Understanding of Processes	Agendas	
Peer Comparison/ Equality Preference	Information Control	Perceptions about Decision Makers	
Utilitarianism	Rumors	Race/Ethnicity	
Persistent Injustice	Direct Voice	Gender	
	Representative Voice	Age	
	Timing	Level of Involvement	
	Group Value	Affect Preference	

Taken as a whole, the categories and sub-categories above should present an interesting frame to view the complex subject of students’ perceptions of fairness. In the sections that follow, each of the following will be defined and explained in the voices of the students from whom this data flowed. The relationship between these factors will also be supposed and explored. How they work together to represent holistic understandings of how students judge the fairness of processes will be explored in depth in the final chapter.

Qualitative studies produce contextually rich, thick descriptions that are not easily separated from their contexts. It is therefore necessary to make sense of them as they are in their context. The results section will therefore address findings at each level of coding, demonstrating not only the categories of meaning that emerged, but also how

they relate to each other. For this reason, as each category is reported, the researcher will be drawing conclusions about the role each played in perceptions of fairness and what role each may play in overall interpretations. In Chapter Five, each are drawn together to suggest how these factors interact to influence students' evaluations of the fairness of outcomes, processes and punishments.

This chapter is organized around the four theoretical approaches to studying justice identified in Chapter Two. Distributive, procedural, interactional and retributive concerns will be addressed one by one. Each will comprised the themes that emerged during data analysis.

Distributive Justice

The distributive justice approach is based on the outcomes a decision creates (Collie, Bradley, & Sparks, 2002) and considers to what extent individuals see their rewards and punishments as being related to their own actions (DeConinck & King, 2003). Previous research has suggested that distributive concerns drive determinations of fairness (De Cremer, 2002). The data below tend to support this belief. The sections below are categories of meaning that the data produced. Some of these factors represent concepts that previous research has already connected to determinations of fairness; some represent new findings. But each, taken together, should aid in clarifying the relationship between students' understandings and perceptions related to outcomes in determinations of fairness.

Focus on Outcomes

Students express that they do not know much about both decision making, and about the processes that lead to decisions. Quite often they do not have all of the facts,

either. Speaking about who he thought would make the best decision, one student (AM4) said, “I would kind of shy away from students because sometimes they don’t have the maturity and understanding of the situation.” Another (AAM4) added, “I don’t know that they [students] have enough experience to make a decision that impacted my life. They aren’t experienced yet.” Yet another (HF4) concurred, “Students just aren’t experienced in making decisions.”

In the present study, it was not uncommon to hear a student express these sentiments, “I’m not entirely sure how the whole process came about” (AF1), or (AAF2) “...I don’t know the process; that’s what I think it is unfair” (AAF2). This perceived lack of knowledge about processes certainly hampers the ability of a student to focus on factors other than the outcome of the process.

College students are affected by the outcomes of decisions (they may raise tuition or fees, create new course requirements, or place other restrictions on them). Since students (and the people that they know) are so greatly affected by these decisions, they will usually learn some version of what the outcome may be. But the processes used to arrive at decisions may be clandestine or confusing, and the number of decisions being considered at any given time would make it difficult to keep up. As one student (AM2) explains, “...the only way to know for sure is to [investigate] it yourself, and I don’t think anybody wants to do that much work.”

This lack of knowledge about processes may actually lead students to consider the outcome first. Students may first conceptualize what a fair outcome may be and work in that direction. One participant (WF1) expressed, “I think the first thing you have to know is who it [the decision] is going to affect most. How is it going to do that?” Another

student (HF4) concurred, stating, “I guess first I’d have to think about how it affects everyone. I wouldn’t want to make a decision that was going to put some people at a disadvantage.” In this second quote, the student focused on the outcome and how some may be disadvantaged by it. One may note that whether some may be more deserving of a positive or negative outcome does not appear to be considered. Some may see a similarity between the outcome focus employed by students and the garbage can model of organizational choice.

Garbage Can Model

As previously discussed, decision-making processes do not always, “...begin with a problem and end with a solution” (Hoy & Tarter, 2004, p. 60). In the case of students, there is support for the belief that students may first imagine what a fair and effective outcome may look like and tailor decisions accordingly. One student (HM3) explains, “If you know that you want a certain outcome to happen, [you may ask yourself] what steps can you take to make that happen?”

Arriving at what outcome is best is based on comparing outcomes. For one respondent (AAF1) the focus is on weighing, “...what effect each decision would have. It’s more about deciding which decision would give me the best possible outcome.” For (HF2) this process included a sort of cost benefit analysis, “I have to look at the outcome and what would be the benefits and disadvantages of that position. It is worth taking a risk, or is it worth the benefits compared to the disadvantages.” Another (AAM4) looked to, “foresee the repercussions of that decision. Is it going to be good; it is going to be bad? What are some unforeseen things?”

Colleges and universities are frequently political institutions. Success or failure

of a given decision may rest in how it is perceived by the group. Chances are, students have seen a decision that has been received badly and has caused a subsequent uproar. A decision that causes unrest and manifests displeasure is not a successful decision in the eyes of these students. By starting at the end and working forward, students attempt to assure that issues will be well received and therefore be perceived to be successful.

It seems plausible that students use this frame in interpreting the decisions of others as well. They assume that some groups have been advantaged from the start, and some have been likewise disadvantaged. Clearly, this might illustrate the effect of outcome favorability in determinations of fairness (as well as the negative effects discussed later with regard to group value model).

Outcome Favorability/Self Interest

It is only natural that people want to maximize positive outcomes and minimize negative ones. “It’s a ‘you want what’s best for you’ kind of thing,” said (AF3), “It’s human nature.” In the real arena of decision making and outcomes, it can be very difficult to be objective about seeking the end results that are desired and needed.

Some students illustrated the challenge of objectivity in stories that were reminiscent of the Princeton/Dartmouth football game studied by Hastorf and Cantril (1954). As one participant (WM2) explained, “In sports, when you see a foul or a penalty against your team, you have a tendency to think, ‘that can’t be right. That must not be right; that wouldn’t be our team.’ But if it’s against the other team, you know, ‘Yeah the other team is trying to foul us.’” Another student (HF2) also employed the sports metaphor, saying, “You see this all the time: ‘I won, so it’s fair.’ Like in a game, if the referee is doing something wrong and it’s your team, you’re like, ‘this is cheating;

this is so unfair.’ But if he’s doing it to the other team you’re like, ‘Oh, he’s such a good referee, we should have him more.’” To these students, these perceptions are not necessarily purposeful, but are the product of how much they care about the outcome. As one participant (AM4) suggested, “...if you are so passionate about whatever you are fighting for, then fair[ness] to that person would probably be whatever pleases them or works out best for them.”

This desire for positive outcomes may drive students to not only accept outcomes that they suspect have unjustly benefited them, but may even drive them to seek and purposefully accept unjust outcomes. To one participant (WF1), “If you are standing on higher ground after a decision is made, your going to think that it is better...even if it wasn’t necessarily fair.” This same student (WF1) in a different context was willing to admit that when she is looking for fairness, she is really looking for “...my kind of fair, meaning they would go with what I would want.” This moves students from the domain of individuals who are willing recipients of positive outcomes that are blinded by self-interest — to people who seek outcomes that they know they do not necessarily deserve (despite how this might affect the outcomes of others).

But even for those who receive what may be objectively fair but undesirable outcomes, the negativity of receiving a result other than the one they wanted may affect how that decision is perceived. One student (AF3) explains that, “...the people who do take the time to be like, well, I didn’t get what I want but that was probably for the best overall – they still don’t necessarily get a joyous feeling because they didn’t like the outcome still [sic]. They just might have the realization that not everyone always gets their way.” One particularly revealing illustration of this came in a story told by another

student (AAM3). The focus of the story was a time when he believed he had not received a fair outcome. In the middle of the story, he stopped, and came to a different conclusion:

I say that it's unfair more so out of...logically and in retrospect, it was a fair decision. If I say that it's unfair, that's really just me being whiny and really poking my lip out at the fact that I got cut out of doing the thing that I enjoyed doing most. I think that twenty years from now, I'll think it was a very fair decision. Even today I can reluctantly say that it was a fair decision.

It is unclear whether these types of revelations are common, they may just take time and perspective to understand. Another (WF4) echoed this belief, "There are decisions that are made that are fair that you don't necessarily understand at the time, that maybe a year later you may see as fair, or maybe you never do, but it really was a decision that was made in your interest. You just have to believe that there are decisions like that."

When a desirable outcome is received, usually any disenfranchised parties are forgotten. This is especially true in cases which offer a positive outcome to a lot of people. In a story told by one student (AF3), an account was framed as a definition of fairness – with no negative consequences expressed:

My accounting teacher, she's an adjunct professor, and she went against university policy to give us extra credit because someone got a 27 percent on our test. So she gave us the option of doing a project – which was really hard, but it was worth it. When she went to the department chair, the department chair was like, 'Well the average grade in accounting class is like a C and your students have an average grade of like B-.'

Another student's (WF1) story closely mirrors the first. In this case, a decision which produced positive effects for seemingly everyone is held up as a win/win situation:

I guess just because everybody would have failed. That wouldn't really make sense. I don't think it would be good on his part, he wouldn't have a very good record then if he failed everybody. And, it wouldn't make it any easier on us, we would have had to take the class over again. So, it kind of worked out in everyone's favor.

What cannot be divined from both of these accounts is, how fair was the testing instrument? Was there a good reason for students to be unprepared for the test? These matters were not discussed, and did not seem to be a part of the judgment that students made about these situations. Likewise, the fairness of students in other class sections, or in previous classes, who did not receive this benefit were not considered. Familiar patterns in attribution may partially explain this phenomenon. Since positive experiences are generally attributed to internal characteristics (deserving), and negative ones attributed to external characteristics (the fairness of decision makers or their processes), one may have difficulty understanding the perspective of disenfranchised parties. One student (AM2) encapsulated the extent to which students are unaware of the potential consequences of unfair decisions on others and extent to which attribution may obscure a student's ability to perceive them, saying, "...just because it serves your best interests doesn't necessarily make it unfair."

Additionally, the way that decisions are processed and evaluated may contribute to the link between outcome favorability and evaluations of decision fairness. In fairness theory, Folger and Cropanzano (1998) assert that when evaluating the fairness of a decision, possible alternatives are weighed against the actual decision (Collie, Bradley, & Sparks, 2002). These alternatives can be based on desired outcomes and the expectation of other available alternatives that can be expected, feared, or hoped for. The availability of better solutions than the one chosen by decision makers can cause the evaluator to see the decision as unfair. As one student (HF2) concluded, "How else are we supposed to judge what's fair and unfair. It's kind of just a matter of opinion. If something you think

is fair and it doesn't happen, then that's unfair. I don't really see how it can be based on anything more than a matter of opinion." Limited experience in seeing and experiencing decisions, and the ways in which they are made, might tend to limit a student's ability to foresee potential outcomes, and tend to cause them to lean more heavily on their desired outcome as the more appropriate outcome. This would be interesting to investigate further.

If students have a choice between fair outcomes and the outcomes they desire, clearly some are willing to accept desired outcomes first and foremost. Whether this is a product of attribution, human nature, or self-interest cannot explicitly be known. There appear, however, to be valuable teaching/learning opportunities involved in helping students to evaluate decisions on their merit rather than based in self-interest and outcome favorability. This requires students to find other sources of information as to possible outcomes. Some achieve a higher understanding of the range of possible outcomes through peer comparison, though this information is funneled through attributional filters. The extent to which student compare outcomes and processes with one another is an interesting finding of this study.

Peer Comparison

Decisions made in a college setting can be quite complex. Understanding these decisions can be difficult as well, let along the complexity of interpreting them. Given students' previous statements with regard to their lack of understanding of decision-making processes, it is logical to conclude that students might rely on each other to understand issues that affect them and the outcomes of these issues. Additionally, Chickering (1972) suggested that students look to other students as a guide to help them

understand how to exist in this new culture.

The present study found evidence that participants looked to each other to develop reactions to decisions and to make fairness evaluations. As one student (HM1) explained, regarding his preference for seeking guidance from older students:

I guess just because they've been here longer, decisions in the past – they know the consequences. They know how past decisions have been made, whereas, I'm new here. I really don't know. So I rely on someone who is older; I'm influenced by them.

But younger students are not the only ones who rely on this guidance. Reliance on one's peers for information may reveal issues of trust as well as a need for information. As one participant (AAM3) explained, "Students are very impressionable, and rather than listening to the person who hands down the decision, they'll listen to the student worker who works with that guy. If I hear a decision is being made, I would want to hear [another student's] thoughts about it."

The viewpoints of others can clearly be quite influential. But the comparison of outcomes is also very important. Previous research has supported the relationship between knowledge of the outcomes of others and perceptions of fairness (Collie, Bradley & Sparks, 2000). One participant (HF4) talked about how peer comparison is central to the academic and social components of the college experience, saying:

By comparing yourself to other people in the same position as you, that's where you kind of determine how well you're doing in your grades or your situation. So I think it is all kind of a comparison. The way you see yourself in comparison with your peers has a huge impact on what you determine to be fair, and how you determine what is unfair.

Clearly the entire concept of grades entails comparing oneself against an ostensibly objective standard. But what are students looking for when they compare themselves to

each other? Collie, Bradley, & Sparks (2000) found that these comparisons favor better or equal outcomes than those with whom the person has compared, “It is worth noting that participants who knew nothing about the outcomes of others rated their own outcomes as significantly fairer than did those who believed their own outcomes were worse than those of others. It appears that knowing someone else has received a better outcome significantly decreases perceptions of fairness compared with not knowing” (p. 552). While students may desire to receive better outcomes than their peers, for students in this study, fairness laid closer to the baseline: equality.

Preference for Equality

The present study confirmed the emphasis placed on outcome favorability in making judgments of the fairness of decisions. It also further explained that students often tailor their outcomes to meet the expectations of others. Accordingly, if students have previously experienced that those decisions that are favorable to individuals are often perceived to be fair, and they tailor these outcomes accordingly, then it is reasonable to think that they would want to give a positive outcome to as many people as possible. This is but one of the ways that the concept of equality was frequently mentioned by participants. Thibaunt and Walker’s (1975) ‘self-interest model’ considered the extent to which students derive their normative expectations by comparing their outcome with those of others whom the individual feels should receive equivalent outcomes. A participant (WM2) relied on past experiences in the search for equivalent outcomes in discussing how he evaluated fairness, saying, “Are there instances where the same thing might have happened? What happened in those cases? Compare it against those cases.”

Participants expressed a belief that equality was an important factor in the determination of fairness. In fact, for a number of students, equality represented the very essence of fairness. For instance one student (AM4) said, “I guess truly fair, in a sense, is [when a decisions is] working for everybody. I guess that is a true definition of fair.” Another student (HM1) added, “I don’t really think there is such a thing as a fair decision. Because fair would be where everyone...agrees about the outcome. And I don’t think that ever really happens.”

Expected outcomes vary by the type of decision-making situation. Tornblom and Ahlin (1998) found that when giving rewards or benefits, people tend to prefer equality; in other words, they tend to prefer to distribute rewards equally to all people. For the college students in this study, there tended to be a preference for equality overall. As a particular participant (AF1) suggested, “If I do the same amount of work, and we’re doing the same thing, I would expect to get the same grade (as other students).” As another subject (HF4) added, “I think you know if you are being treated fairly if everyone around you is being treated the same way. I think you are being treated unfairly if certain students are getting benefits that other students aren’t getting.” But it was likewise true in situations that involved the distribution of punishments as well. As one student (AF3) explained:

[The] people involved, they both did things they shouldn’t have, but they got very different punishments. They both engaged in very inappropriate actions on the same level. They should have received the same punishment or closer punishment. I thought both of them had made poor decisions, and they deserved to be punished equally for those decisions.

These sentiments were echoed by another student (WM2) who said, “In most cases, if two people do the same thing, they should get the same punishment. Most of the time I

would say, same action, same punishment.” But this begs the question, what does it mean to do the same thing? It seems that circumstances are nearly never identical. Even people who do very similar things may have vastly different motives.

Perhaps the lack of context in a lot of situations may explain this phenomenon. Because students do not know a great deal about the context of certain decisions, they do not consider context when making decisions, and expect that decision makers have done the same. Without this kind of information, it is easier to view different situations as essentially the same. But situations seldom are the same. This may lead to viewing decisions that do not conform to the equality rule as being unfair.

One cannot ignore the political aspect of equality as well. It is more simple, and cleaner to make decisions according to the equality rule, because everyone gets the same result without having to consider complexities such as who is most deserving. Decisions made with a basis in equality also have the effect of stifling dissent. To claim injustice is to be forced to say that one is more deserving than others who received the same outcome. Clearly this is a risky maneuver, especially in the highly social climate of colleges and universities. Perhaps this is what led Deutsch (1975) to suggest that an equality focus is appropriate when “...fostering or maintenance of enjoyable social relations” (p. 146).

Finally, when dealing with complexities such as who is more or less deserving, it seems plausible that students (who have previously expressed a belief that their fellow students are ill-equipped to make fine points of distinction) may indeed also not trust themselves to determine who is deserving of a larger share of the positives or negatives that a decision may bring. One student (HF4) explained the complexities of deciding

who is most deserving of going to a desirable conference, saying “So it’s like trying to make the decision as to who should go, who deserves it most. And when you get into who deserves it, it’s kind of difficult to make that decision.” In short, to make decisions based in equality may just be the simplest way to conceive of outcomes being distributed, and this may shape students’ perceptions of decisions that they make themselves, and served as a basis of comparison when evaluating the decisions of others.

Preference for Utilitarian Outcomes

Equality is a hard standard to meet. Students recognize that it will be very difficult, if not impossible, for everyone to be equal all of the time. One participant (HM3) suggested, “I think it’s almost impossible, depending on the size of your group, to please everyone.” Another student (HF4) echoed, “...you can’t make everyone happy.” “In the end,” another student (HM1) posits, “...someone is going to think it’s unfair. I guess you can’t make everyone happy. But you try to, at least, make sure it impacts the group in a positive way.”

With equality being such a difficult standard to meet, many may settle for utilitarianism, or the most good for the most people. This sentiment was echoed time and again:

You just try to weigh in your mind what you think is the best route to go, and what will do the most good (WM2).

When you make a decision, you have to think of what the greater good would be (AAF1).

I would make sure that the decision was at least fair to the majority of the people affected” (AAF2).

You’ve got to...make the decision...that helps the majority (HM1).

For these students, utilitarianism seemed wrapped up in the political aspect of decision making. One student (WF4) stated this connection explicitly, “You don’t necessarily look at what is more fair; it’s more of a democratic outlook, ‘What does the majority get?’”

Of course the appeal of a utilitarian approach is that the majority receives a positive benefit, and therefore, likely thinks of the decision as fair. The downside, as expressed by one student (HF4) is, “Someone is always going to be left out.” Another student (AAF1) added, “I think that any outcome will exclude some people. In a lot of ways, someone always ends up being the loser in any situation.”

Despite this limitation, the utilitarian approach is often favored. One participant (AM2) articulated the basis for this belief in an exchange with the interviewer:

We were talking about this in my philosophy class...utilitarianism. There are some points of view that you don’t consider when you do the most good for the most people. [Interviewer’s Question: So if you were put in charge of making an important decision, would you use a utilitarian approach?] Yes. Because you want to satisfy as many people as possible.

As the data was sorted, a small ripple of a trend emerged in the very small data set. Those who seemed most committed to the idea of utilitarianism were underclasspersons (first or second-year students), white or both. One clear downside to this approach is that there will always be up to 49 percent of the people who do not receive the outcomes they want, or even perhaps a fair outcome. Students who were either minorities, or third or fourth-year students, were the ones in the group studied who pointed out a perceived shortcoming in the utilitarian approach. One student (AF3) offered this explanation, “A lot of people are quite familiar with getting what they want, so if you always get what you want, you don’t know what the other half feels like.” Even

for one student (WF4) who previously expressed a belief in the value of the utilitarian approach, there were limits, “If a majority of students wanted to set the president’s house on fire I wouldn’t lead the charge. Ultimately I have to believe that it’s the right decision.”

Perhaps it is the recognition of the shortcomings of the utilitarian approach which leads to such widespread acceptance of equality as a desirable goal for this small sampling of college students. Negative outcomes produce negative feelings and undesirable outcomes. Utilitarianism still has the potential of making the majority of students unhappy. As one student (HF4) said, “...if majority rules, there are still going to be somebody left out. The main goal is to try to please everyone.” This may seem to be an impossibly high standard, but because students in this study mostly expressed their expectations about the decisions of others, the difficulty of meeting this standard was not relevant to them – it is a measure of how they judge others, not how they believe that they would (or perhaps even should) be judged. And given no restrictions, clearly in the minds of some students, if there is to be justice done, it must be done for all.

Persistent Injustice Effect

Another problem with a utilitarian approach is that it may often be the same people who are repeatedly disenfranchised. The more someone experiences injustice, the more likely they are to see it in future interactions as well. Wu and Laws (2003) found that trust is linked to one’s background and experience with the fairness they have previously encountered. These experiences may make trust “...a default mode,” and the absence of it may make someone perpetually vigilant of injustice (Wu & Laws, 2003, p. 336). Beyond that, Davidson and Friedman (1998), in their explanation of the “persistent

injustice effect,” expand the effects of injustice as reaching beyond the individual to, “...individuals from social groups that have faced many injustices” (p. 154).

From the previous section, clearly one can see how being in the minority can carry with it a dynamic of decreased power. A student (WM3) explains, that, “There really is a low percentage of minorities on this campus, and by default they are going to feel uncomfortable and feel like stuff is less equal for them.” Another student (HM1) adds, “...there is going to be a minority that will not be heard.”

This would seem to put a lot of people in a similar situation. But even those who found themselves facing a kind of persistent injustice, may be in competition with others in the same situation. One participant (HF2) explained:

But sometimes I think...I haven't lived through it, but my Mom has told me that sometimes people from your same race are the ones who hurt you the most. My uncle has experienced this. Instead of it helping him out for his coworker to be Hispanic – if his coworker wants to get ahead he is going to hurt him. It's like competition between his same race. But, I've never experienced something like that.

For those who have not experienced persistent injustice, it is difficult to imagine. One student (HF2), talked about her preferences with regard to the race of decision makers.

In choosing between someone of her race and someone of another race, she stated:

It's hard to say, but I've never had a negative experience with something like that. I've always had the positive side of it. So, I couldn't really say, 'I want to choose a Hispanic person because we're from the same race and they'll do the best for me.' Or I can't say I would choose, like, a white person I guess, because they [sic] would choose good or bad for me.

But, for those students who have experienced persistent injustice, there appeared to be a strong and salient connection between the experience and their reaction to decisions. The impact of race in general, discussed later, may also be a salient concern.

So students' past experiences with injustice may be an important consideration in judging decisions. But their perception of the injustices of others may also be important. Perhaps it is this second factor that can partially explain the shift from preferences of utilitarianism early on in college to preferences for equality later in college years. Maybe even those students who do not come from groups that have been disenfranchised over time, but who come to better understand the struggles of others as they interact in a college setting, decide that 50 percent satisfaction is not enough. In order to come to this conclusion, something would have to occur that is more significant than the passage of time. This something may very well be increased integrative complexity.

Integrative Complexity

For the students in this study, there was a very interesting relationship between age and a tendency to express the belief that ideas have more than one valid viewpoint. Older students tended to express this belief most of all. In fact, there were five students in six separate statements that seemed to demonstrate integrative complexity, at least at the moderate range. These students represented three of the four demographic groups, and each was a third-year or fourth-year student. This tends to confirm that within this group, their development in school tended to lead them to be more integratively complex in their approach to issues.

Integrative complexity (IC) grew from the work of Kelly's (1955) personal construct theory and is closely aligned with the cognitive styles approach (Suedfeld, Tetlock, & Streufert, 1992). In short, IC focuses on, "the complexity of information processing and decision making, complexity being defined and measured in degrees of differentiation and integration" (p. 393). In simpler terms, IC researchers are concerned

with the level at which individuals accurately perceive the viewpoint of others, and the degree of certainty that they express with regard to what they believe (Sorrentino, Roney, & Hanna, 1992). “Such connections,” according to Suedfeld, Tetlock and Streufert (1992), “...are inferred from references to trade-offs between alternatives, a synthesis between them, a reference to higher order concepts that subsumes them, and the like” (p. 393-394).

IC exists on a continuum between two factors. On one end of the spectrum, there is low integrative complexity in which a person views issues from one perspective only, and perspectives may hold binary relationships (e.g. good vs. evil). When moving further toward complexity, the individual may see more perspective, but see them as unrelated to one another. As one moves closer to IC, there is an understanding of multiple perspectives along with the understanding of the negotiation of possible solutions with neutrality and balance. In short, in an individual whose perspectives exhibit IC, there is a reduction in dogma and zero-sum thinking, and increased willingness to see different opinions in a value-neutral way (Suedfeld, Tetlock, & Streufert, 1992).

The author has found no studies to date that investigate the link between the development of college students and changes in integrative complexity. In fact, there is still some debate surrounding whether IC is, as some theorize intelligence to be, a static and unchanging capacity (Suedfeld, Tetlock, & Streufert, 1992), though similar concepts such as critical thinking have been shown to be impacted by development in college (Gellin, 2003).

These students seemed to understand that they could see the point of view of others better than many of their peers. Such was the case for one student (AF3) who said,

“I am normally the one who says, ‘Well you don’t know all the details, so you can’t be rash about whether or not.’ I mean I don’t always agree with the decision but I try to take into account both sides.” Additionally, they seemed to understand that this ability to see both sides was attributable to the cumulative effect of their experience at the university. One student (AM4) addressing this said, “With maturity and understanding, you kind of see both sides of the fence, not just what you are thinking, or getting too focused on your issue, but you think about all of the issues that are involved.” Another student (WM3) added, “I truly – more so in the last two years – truly see both sides. I always know that there are two sides to every story. It’s hard to get the original text to the story.”

Further, these students expressed a belief that their participation in co-curricular activities was an additional factor in increasing their integrative complexity. As one participant (AM4) stated, “I think when you are more involved in the decisions, you’re more ‘in’ whatever is happening. You might have a better understanding than those who aren’t as involved. Just dealing with people, who I know firsthand, who really lobbied for decisions, and who deal with administration - you can really see both sides.” Another student (WF4) concluded:

I never understood the complexity of decisions until I attended [a university administration] meeting. Because as a student you don’t think about the faculty doing research, you don’t think about the people working down in HR. There are so many different aspects of the university’s daily function that you don’t see as a student. You only see the classroom, you see your deans, and you see your tuition dollars and fees. And there is so much more to it than that. And for me to argue that tuition should be ‘X’ percentage is not fair unless I can look at the entire university budget. Because just to say that students shouldn’t have to pay more, well, that means that faculty can’t get increases in their salary. It means something else needs to be taken away.

Another student (AAM3) added:

I think with my experiences... If I hear that a certain decision is made, the typical

student might say, ‘This damn school!’ My immediate thoughts are, why was this decision made? Let’s get all the facts. Because of my experience, I view decisions more rationally than most. I am more willing to learn more about the decision. And I think I immediately kind of think that there is some fairness to it, and want to learn what the reasons for it were. So while other students might immediately think it’s unfair just because it is an act of the administration, I withhold that judgment until I learn more.

Among this small group of students, clearly there is a belief that their maturation, continued matriculation, and participation in co-curricular activities contribute to an increased willingness to seek out an understanding of the viewpoints of others. This is borne out slightly by the absence of similar expressions by underclasspersons. In the true tradition of grounded theory, this could generate some interesting hypotheses for future studies.

Procedural Justice

As previously discussed, students do not know much about the ways in which decisions are made. But they do have strong feelings about how they *should* be made. They express a strong belief that decisions ought to be objective and impartial, that they should be made on good quality information, and that stakeholders should have some sort of say in the process. One student (WF4) told a story that exemplified her perception of effective process:

I think that is a prime example of a good decision – one that followed all of the necessary steps. They realized there was a problem, they gathered input from faculty and students and kept them in the loop. They let them see the suggestions that were made to the provost before the provost announced it, and were made aware of the final decision before the student body at large. I would say that the elements of a good decision are including anyone who could be affected by the decision, allowing them to participate in the decision-making process, and then informing necessary people prior to announcing it to the greater community.

But beliefs about something as complex and personal as fairness can create cognitive

dissonance in that beliefs about processes (as discussed previously) are often conflicting. This is especially true regarding objectivity, where students may have vastly different expectations of decisions that impact them than for those that don't.

Objectivity

Objectivity seems like a definitional aspect of fairness. It has come to represent the absence of bias and personal agendas, or the likelihood of being swayed by emotional factors unrelated to the decision at hand. To these students, if one is being objective, clearly they are acting in the best interest of everyone. This belief was expressed by participants in the present study, including one student (AM2) who said, "If you...go and insert yourself in it (decisions), it makes you form a bias." Another student (WF4) concluded, "You have to look at things objectively because if you look at them emotionally – your decisions will be irrational." Yet another student (HM1) also expressed that, "It's important to be objective. I guess it's good to view things that way, not being a part of it, just because in the end you'll be more fair. You lean toward the best decision for everyone instead of a decision that maybe [sic] would favor a certain group."

Objectivity is seen as being even more important when one is making a decision for which they (or those close to them) have a vested stake in the outcome. One participant (HF2) explains:

I've had situations where I've had to make decisions that affected my friends or my family. What I've tried to do is actually look at it from the outside, take relationships out of the situation. Because I think that can persuade you to do something else. My decision should be made not on my personal relationship with that person, but on what I should be doing. What my purpose is, and what I think is more logical to do, and not just be guided by feelings or my relationship with that person.

Clearly this is a difficult thing to do, to take one's self-interest out of decisions. Some suggest that it is even impossible. One student (AAF1) who held this belief said, "...you can't be completely objective, there's no way. You can't remove yourself from the decision, because that's not how decisions are made."

One way that students try to remain objective is by stripping situations of their context and by attempting, whenever possible, to quantify them. One participant (HF4) explained, "...the way I am going about it, is I am going to say, who has put the most time in, who's the most active." It is hard to compare richly contextual situations. If contextual factors can be made into numbers, however, numbers can be compared. The comparing of numbers is easier, and the values of numbers are harder to dispute. So to some in this study, objectivity and rationality are related to the ability to quantify decisions, thus separating them from their contextual components.

Some concluded that a balance of objectivity and context was in order. This was true for one participant (WF4) who said, "I wouldn't want someone to make a decision who wasn't objective, but specifically with a university, I think you really need to weigh the outcome of the decision...maybe not equally, but close to objectivity." Another student (AAF1) added:

People sometimes separate themselves from a situation too much, and in trying to be objective, they don't realize that they are not talking to a statistic; they aren't handling a statistic, they are handling a person. They're handling a breathing person who has thought processes and feeling, and has so much more to them than the decision they are handling.

The balance of objectivity and context is tenuous, and what students expect is very difficult to achieve. They seem to want decisions made with objective criteria that indicate knowledge of what the impact of the decision could be on the people who

receive it. They want people to get what they deserve, unless that outcome is overly taxing or negative for the person who receives it. What they want are decisions tailored to meet their objectives and that balance quantitative values with qualitative ones. What students want is bounded rationality.

Bounded Rationality

Decision making is difficult business. As one student (AAM4) noted, “Making a fair decision is by no stretch of the imagination, easy. I don’t think that everyone will be happy with any decision that’s made.” Another participant (WF1) concluded, “Not everybody is going to be happy, but you have to understand that going into it.” But why is decision making so complicated? As yet another student (WM3) explained, “We’re human, and that human trait, that non-machine trait, will always keep it interesting.” Another student (AM2) concurred, “I think that mankind is innately good. I think that...we want to do good, but there are so many distracting things out there.”

That people, especially college students, find true rationality in decision making difficult (if not impossible) confirms the basis of bounded rationality. Limitations in the ability to make the kind of objective decisions that students expect to represent fairness call for a different kind of decision making. Students want a process that makes the best of the knowledge that they possess, and limits the factors that may confound decisions. One student (AM2) expressed the need to overcome these obstacles, saying, “I think there is always going to be an X factor, but from what information you know, you try to make the best decision.” Simon (1957) explains this concept, acknowledging that, “...it is impossible to guarantee the best solution; people are satisfied by looking for alternatives that meet minimum standards.” Therefore, “...decisions are made after only

a moderate search for options” (Hoy & Tarter, 2004, p. 3). In the absence of this kind of perfect decision, there is something else, something described by one participant (AM4):

There is never going to be where everybody is happy, I don't think in any situation. You can't just please however many people there are in [the college] with one decision. But I guess if there is a fair compromise, a good compromise, where somehow all parties are really considered, there is fairness.

So how does one go about making a decision based on bounded rationality? As one participant (HF4) explained, “When I have to go and make a decision, I think of the best possible way it can benefit everyone with the least amount of negative side effects.” These judgments are linked to other notions such as the political aspects of decisions and preferences for decisions that meet the goals of the decision maker. But to do so effectively, requires knowledge of how decision-making processes work, and that is something that students know little about.

Understanding of Processes

As previously discussed, college and university settings are quite different than the decision-making environments described by Van den Bos' (1997) in fairness heuristic theory. Students know about outcomes. An outcome is something that affects them, raises their tuition or fees, fires a beloved administrator or denies a popular professor tenure. What they do not have ready access to is knowledge about how these processes are constructed or how they operate. Many of the statements by participants drove this point home. In a story about selection for a leadership position, one student (AF1) observed, “She didn't interview me, but I don't know about the others. I'm not entirely sure how the whole process came about.” Another student (AM2) also expressed a lack of understanding as to how a decision was made, “Well, I wasn't even aware of the

process and how they made the decision.” Yet another (HF2) adds, “I don’t think we know the whole story. We don’t know what happens behind doors.” Another participant (AAF2) cited as an example an unpopular fee and her lack of information about the process in deciding to levy it, “I don’t know the process, that’s what I think is unfair. I know the outcome; the outcome is, that it’s \$75! But how did you get to it? I don’t even know what the \$75 is for!”

So why is it that students do not know about processes? There are a number of laws that regulate what information may and may not be shared with parties who are not directly related to a particular situation. There are laws protecting the confidentiality of student educational, academic, disciplinary and health records. Institutions are usually tight-lipped about personnel matters. Fear of legal repercussions and political realities may present difficulties in sharing information openly. This is especially true at private institutions who are not bound by open meeting statutes, sunshine laws and open records requirements. This ability to maintain privacy is addressed by one participant (WF4), who said, “Particular to this university, we uphold confidentiality and don’t allow much input in decisions because that undermines confidentiality. Now that works to the advantage of the university as a whole, but not necessarily to the perceptions of the students.” Institutions may choose to limit information because it has the potential of stifling dissent. This may be an effective strategy, but at what cost to perceptions of fairness?

Information Control

In some instances, it may be advantageous for institutions to strategically control or limit what information is known. The more information that is known, the more

ammunition others may have to question the decision. Information control, for the purposes of this study, is the intentional limitation of information in order to gain a strategic advantage.

As one participant (AM2) noted, “If you want to push your opinion and your view, I think you definitely need to constrict what information gets out there. I think you need to play your side as much as you can.” Individuals weigh possible alternatives against actual decisions in order to determine fairness (Folger & Cropanzano, 1998). If an alternative is thought to be more advisable than the eventual decision, that decision will tend to be viewed as less fair (Collie, Bradley, & Sparks, 2002). Controlling the amount that is known could reduce this effect significantly, because individuals may find it more difficult to envision alternatives when information about the process and issues are limited. This was the point made by one participant (HF2) who said:

Once you know all of the information you might say, ‘why didn’t you do this instead of doing it another way.’ The less you know, obviously you don’t have those tools to question the decision. You don’t know the whole story behind it, so how can you make a judgment about something you don’t really know that much about.

Limiting information can also make decisions harder to refute. As one student (AM2) pointed out, “I guess if you are ignorant about it, you don’t have a basis to deny it. So like, you can’t argue that they are wrong, because you don’t know what’s going on.”

Another student (AM4) concurred, “I feel like I’m one of those people who, if I’m not totally informed I don’t feel like I know the whole situation, I’d be hesitant to argue for or against it because I don’t have all of the facts; so if your misinformed or not informed, it’s hard to fight.” This approach may not only stifle dissent, but may also limit students’ fairness judgments as well. One student (HF2) made the following point:

It's hard for me to say it was fair or not, because I don't know. But I think that it kind of cheated the students to say, 'we're going to do this when nobody is here' instead of saying, 'we are going to do this out in the open because we don't have anything that we are scared of because we have all of the proof that this is the right decision.'

Without all of the information, some students will conclude that determinations of fairness are impossible.

For others, the very lack of this information is cause to question the fairness of the decision. Certainly this was so for one participant (WM2) who commented that, "The lack of information makes me believe that there is no information. Once you've heard so much that 'the university can't talk about that' or 'the university can't divulge that information' it makes you believe maybe there is no information and maybe it was a decision based on bad motives." Another student (AAF2) added, "If there's no explanation for something, then it doesn't make sense. If there's a reason why they thought it was fair, they should tell us. When someone does not offer me an explanation, it tells me that they are hiding something."

Certainly, as was previously mentioned, there are good reasons to choose not to disclose information. Institutions may be legally barred from sharing some types of information, although it may also be true that sometimes colleges and universities hide behind such laws in order to control information. This possibility is not lost on students. One student (WM3) noted:

I don't understand the reason why they can't divulge more information. If it's something that is affecting us...it is right for people to know, even if it's something that is going to hurt them, or something that is going to make them not like you, it's just the right thing to do.

Regardless of the reason, the lack of information makes it harder to determine if a process

was fair. This has an effect on students. There is good reason to question the limiting of information as an administrative strategy over the long term. Even if short-term goals are met, the damage to the relationship may have negative unintended consequences. One student (WF4) offered the following caution to those who use this approach, “More than administrators realize, students understand what happens and really just want to know the logic behind it.”

Of course information quality may suffer for other reasons. In the absence of (or sometimes instead of) official information, individuals may develop plausible explanations of their own. These may be passed freely from person to person, and be changed by each step along the way. The issue of rumors was addressed by students, and with interesting results.

Rumors

Decisions about whether or not a process is fair may not necessarily be based on the best information, or even truthful information. In an atmosphere in which information may be limited, rumors can sometimes fill the void. They may purport to tell the “real story” behind an administrative decision, or suggest hidden criteria or motives for decisions. In the present study, rumors emerged as an important consideration for students in determining if processes were fair. The cases of the terminated administrators were highly polarizing issues on campus, and the university was understandably tight-lipped about what it saw as private personnel issues. But rumors quickly swirled. For one participant (AM2), “...the whole [issue involving two dismissed administrators] seemed to be kind of outlandish...just out of the blue. They made it seem like he [one dismissed administrator] was the bad guy...you can’t really just take everything...there is

always something behind it.” Another student, whose demographic tag is withheld in this instance to further protect confidentiality, having heard conflicting rumors about the firings, offered the following account, “I guess [the high ranking administrator] had told [one of the other administrators] to go and [the other administrator] stood up behind him and so they both got fired. It doesn’t seem like there is much of a case from the public standpoint.” Later, the student heard a conflicting rumor, “After talking with [another administrator] he said that the two people would go to parties with kids and drink, and have kids in their room and drink. After learning that, it becomes more apparent that they were probably fired for the right reasons. But from the view of most the students, they feel that it was unjust.” In essence this student, who had previously spoken of a personal relationship with the reportedly dismissed administrator, chose to believe the worse of the two explanations. “At the beginning when I didn’t know all the facts, I believed that it was unjust. But then after learning most of the reasons that it [the decision] *actually* took place, it was more apparent that it was justified.” Why this student was more likely to accept a worse account about someone they knew and liked bears investigating.

This two-phase rumor process may be a pattern that students perceive. Another student (AM2) noticed this pattern as well, “At first it does seem unfair, but that’s just because when you first learn of it, it’s from people who have either misheard, or taken the information and misinterpreted it.” The implication is, that the second story that comes along behind it is more likely to be the truth. Perhaps students perceive the second story to be the “real” story coming out to rectify inaccuracies in the first account, or perhaps the old adage is true: the first liar doesn’t stand a chance.

When asked why he/she trusted the second story more than the first, the answer

provided an interesting look at the power of source credibility, “That person [who provided the information] obviously knew the information and why it took place and knew all the details [about] it, and that the word on the street, the stuff that was said in the papers, wasn’t the whole truth. I just think that if they are going to be [in a high-ranking position] they are obviously credible.” To this particular student, the credibility of some administrators is so strong that accounts shared by them are, in their view, indistinguishable from objective fact. This view represents a belief that knowing the truth guarantees that one is telling the truth, and that administrators do not have something to gain by distorting the truth.

In the absence of an official statement, students may be asked to choose between competing rumors, or choose not to believe rumors at all. For the students who talked about rumors, all of them expressed a hesitant belief in rumors. One participant (AF1) concluded, “You’re not supposed to always trust rumors, but if I heard something and I wouldn’t know if it were true or not, I would still kind of be suspicious, because how would that rumor start if there weren’t [sic] a little bit of truth?” This belief that rumors must contain at least a kernel of truth was held by others as well. One student (AF1) expressed a belief that she would accept a rumor, even though she would understand that it was probably skewed in some way, “I would accept it, but would wonder how it got started like if something got twisted.” A story told by another respondent (AF1) illustrated this belief:

In my high school...I didn’t have him, but he was a religion teacher and some of my friends had him. And supposedly, he just like up and left and the teachers all said he just didn’t want to work here. But then, like, other people heard he would make comments to girls, like inappropriate, and that’s what most of the people focused on. It might have been different for me because I didn’t have him for class so I didn’t care as much.

Perhaps it is the titillating quality that rumors possess that makes them so hard to resist. Perhaps because students tend to lack direct access to quality information, and desire to know about important issues, they want to believe the rumors that they hear. Knowledge is a powerful marker of inclusion in the group, and being included is important to students. They want to know why important decisions are made, and also have a strong desire to have a say in how they are made. The extent to which voice affects perceptions of fairness, and how it affects fairness judgments, are compelling findings of this study.

Direct Voice

Voice is a persistent factor in determinations of fairness. Being given or denied voice and the subsequent effect of that on determinations of fairness was a consistent feature of stories told by students regardless of year in school, race or gender. The following examples typify the responses:

I guess the people who would be affected by the decision, I think you should ask, and see how they feel about it (AM2).

...it would have been nice for her to talk to me about it first and ask me how I would feel if I were just a regular staff member (AF1).

Also, try to look at who it is going to affect and try to get input from them. That's probably the most important thing. If you are going to make a decision that impacts everyone, then everyone should be aware of it (HM1).

These quotes illustrate the level of importance most students place on voice in decision-making processes. Kulik and Holbrook (2000) concluded that those who have voice in a process tend to see processes as more fair than those without voice. Students expressed agreement with this premise. One student (HF4) concluded, "If someone is...including you in the decision-making process, you are more likely to believe that it is fair because

there is a consensus, and you had a part in that decision.” Another student (AM2) felt similarly, and added “...I would say that you wouldn’t necessarily need to include me to make me believe that a decision was fair, but it would make me think more often that it’s fair.” In this way, having the opportunity to input directly can increase perceptions of fairness.

Not only do students equate voice with the fairness of the outcome, they tend to see processes that do not provide voice as being inherently unfair. One participant (AM2) articulated this belief, “I guess, it’s unfair because, personally like, you don’t have a say in it.” Another (WF4) made a stronger case, suggesting that without voice, the likelihood of students seeing a process as fair is minimal, “... regardless of the fairness of the outcome, if you don’t have fair input, people won’t see it that way.” Some suggested that students did not need real voice in the process, sometimes just asking for an opinion was enough. One individual (AF3) stated, “...they at least made the pretense that they were going to take my opinion into account. Yeah, that was enough.” The fair process effect supposes that individuals may conclude that if a process is fair, it will lead to fair outcomes (Collie, Bradley, & Sparks, 2002). Perhaps this theory explains this phenomenon. Since students think that voice is instrumental in fair process, that belief may influence the belief that a process, and therefore the decision is fair.

Sometimes it is politically expedient to gather input even when it will not be considered, or even when the decision has already been made. A participant (AF3) discussed a time when this happened, saying, “They polled students, but it was very obvious that regardless of what the outcome of the poll was, they were going to do what they wanted.” Students seemed to express with clarity the perception that this happened

quite often. One student (WM3) explained, “They made a decision without students’ input on it prior; that’s something that’s really common at this university – there are a lot of decisions made without student input.” To another participant (AAM3), asking for student input is a competency issue for decision makers, “I think there are a lot of things that are announced that clearly don’t have the student feedback that they should have had. Some administrators are better at that than others, and some might just be perceived at being bad at it.”

Voice differs from merely asking for opinions about potential outcomes, but entails, according to one participant (WM3), an actual dialogue that can affect outcomes:

The manner in which it was done was totally unfair. The way it was handled made it totally unfair, just swiping it from us with no prior information about it or warning. They should have talked to the students about it in a ‘throwing it out there’ kind of manner. Also, they haven’t really explained why they had to take it away. When I said, ‘throwing it out there,’ I mean, when I make a decision I don’t come with papers saying, ‘this is what we’re doing.’ I am going to do that at the next meeting. The first is about hearing what they have to say. Because what I have is all the information that they have, and they [students] are going to feel an investment in the decision.

Of course asking for student input can be problematic, especially when decision-making processes are expected to lead to a certain outcome. A participant (WF4) talked about a time when she asked an administrator for more input from students in order to make a decision:

...when I asked if there could be student input in the decision, I was told that, ‘I hope it’s only about where to get the money, not how much it’s going to be.’ So it was really left as – as opposed to a discussion – it was a decision that was made that had no input except for the administrators.

Voice is not a zero-sum, all-or-nothing, proposition. It occurs in degrees ranging from no voice or input in a process, to voice in choosing from possible outcomes, to

determining how decisions will be made – all the way up to allowing one to make the decision. This “throwing it out there” approach referenced by one student (WM3) sounds quite a bit like Susskind’s (1987) consensus approach. Students may indeed be more satisfied by an approach that gives them apparent voice, or voicing preferences between different pre-established choices (as described by one student, WF4). But meaningful choice that allows students to shape actual outcomes along with other stakeholders could be very powerful in creating student buy-in on a decision. Testing the extent to which satisfaction with decisions increases consistently at each level would be an interesting area for future study.

Representative Voice

When conditions limit the ability to ask all of the individuals affected by a decision to provide meaningful input, participants may need to settle for being represented by others. When this occurs, individuals have expectations as to how they should be represented. If they do not feel that they are being well represented, it is less likely that they will see processes or outcomes as being fair. Leventhal (1980) identified representation in the process as a key standard for evaluating procedural fairness. This is categorized as representative voice, which differs from the kind of actual voice discussed in the last section (direct voice), in that the participant is not given the opportunity to be personally heard, but is represented by another person.

In order for representative voice to be effective, it must first be demonstrated that it enhances fairness in the same way that direct voice does. To some, clearly the impact is similar. To one student (WM1) this was the case, “When I am being represented, if there are students involved, I ...I guess I trust them, and it makes me feel better to know

that they are involved.” Another student (AM2) added, “Most college students would probably feel the same way about issues. If there was a college student who was a part of the decision-making process, I’d feel more secure about supporting it.” But for other students, additional conditions need to be met.

Representative voice can enhance fairness, but students do express some reservations. First, they need to believe that the person has been chosen to truly represent students – not as a political move. As one participant (WM3) expressed, knowing the difference between being in a decision-making process to make decisions, and being there to fulfill an agenda is important:

...sometimes, you just know that you are a puppet. I don’t have enough experience to know if I am just a puppet because they need student representation – or if they think, ‘yeah he’s really saying something, we didn’t look at it from that perspective.’

In addition, students tend to believe that the number of students involved is related to representation and that the more students involved, the more the representation.

As one participant (AAF2) articulated:

I don’t have to be approached personally, but you can’t pick specific students. I know that [the student government president] is a leader, but I wouldn’t say just consult them [sic], because they’re [sic] just one student. What about all of the rest of the students who are being affected? You can’t just go through a specific group of students and then just pick out those five students and then say, ‘I interviewed students’ when they only talked to five.’

Another (HF4) felt similarly:

There is a big difference between administration having one or two students on a board, and the student government which is made up entirely of students. I still think that administration that only has input from one or two students, it’s like having no students, because one or two students can’t represent the entire student population. Whereas student government has a lot of different participants representing different majors representing different housing...so it’s more like representative of the population.

Students seem to equate more representation with better representation. Perhaps this is because with more representation, there can be more diversity. As a respondent (AAF2) explains, “You can’t make decision alone. You need input from many people and many perspectives. You need people from different backgrounds, a lot of different socio-economic statuses, a lot of different ethnicities, a lot of different religions. You need the opinions of all to make the best decisions for everyone.”

Although another student (AAF1) expressed a slightly contrasting opinion, that seemed to indicate that the quantity of representation trumps even the quality of representation:

Decisions, to be made fairly, should not be made by one person. I think they should be made by – it doesn’t even need to be a representative body – because sometimes that’s just hard to achieve, but by more than one person so that the decision can be adequately made for the good of the whole group.

These students also equated a lack of diversity with a lack of representation. This includes not only ethnic diversity, or gender diversity, but diversity of perspective as well. As one student (AM2) explained, “If what I thought was not represented, I figure that it wasn’t well represented; not diverse enough.” Another student (AF3) concurred, and told a story about a decision effecting the addition of plus/minus grades in the calculation of grade point averages (GPA), which illustrated the importance of finding students who could relate to all of the possible effects of the decision:

I think it is more fair, but the students who were on the committee didn’t represent the students of the university as a whole well. It was two or three students who had 3.8, 4.0 GPAs, and for them they were never going to get a ‘minus’ grade, so it wasn’t a concern for them. I guess it is more fair, but it’s not fair enough.

The last line established an interesting vantage point on representative fairness – that

groups that are not diverse are still more fair than having no voice, but not sufficient to meet students' standards of fairness. In order for representative voice to work, participating students must truly represent those whom they serve. Representatives must demonstrate that their voice is more than cosmetic, that they can understand the perspectives of a vast array of constituencies. Finally, there was the novel conclusion that decision makers who would like strong buy-in from students, might go a long way just by involving a large number of students.

Timing of the Process

In this study, timing was frequently mentioned as important in determining fairness. A persistent belief among participants was that the university often used timing as a tactic for stifling dissent. Put bluntly, one student (AAM3) said, "Students here are at the point where they expect to get screwed at the end of each year."

This belief mostly related to two incidents that have been recurring themes throughout this analysis, the dismissal/resignation of two popular administrators and the timing of a graduation fee proposed at the end of the spring semester. To students, the timing of both seemed dubious. One student (AF3) explained, "This summer, two [administrators] were asked to leave – they resigned but were really asked to leave, and they did it over the summer because that way students couldn't really have as much of an uproar." If the intent was to quell any possible uproar, there are some that suggest that it may have worked. As one student (WF4) explained, "As a result of timing, there were three of four months between the decision and students arrived back at campus. I think it was more of an acceptance when they returned because of the timing. So, you were not as compelled to question it when you came back."

So perhaps as an administrative tactic, this method may have had its desired result, but what about perceptions of fairness? To one participant (HF2) there was little doubt that fairness was harmed by this approach:

I think that was really unfair – especially to do it during the summer. I think that the university was kind of scared that if they had done it during the school year, there would have been people who were mad about it, and protesting. So, I thought that was pretty unfair to let everyone know after we were already gone in June when nobody was here.

Another student (AF3) agreed that making important decisions when students are gone is, “... much less fair. And from a student perspective, it's really annoying because you come back from school and you're like, ok now you have all these new policies.”

But just giving students the opportunity to know that a decision may be coming may help them to prepare for it mentally, and see it with more objectivity. One participant (AF3) articulated this belief:

I think if you are told about a decision, that they're going to make a decision, and then one comes out, even if you don't agree with it your like, 'at least I knew it was going to happen.' I think if you knew about it in advance, you'd have the opportunity to express your opinion.

Failure to do so carries with it a host of possible negative associations. To another student (AM4) “...it just seemed really cowardly.”

There are others who question whether this tactic, which is definitely not isolated to the institution in the present study, accomplishes its intended goals either. One participant (WF4) cited the example of the graduation fee to make this point:

Students weren't told about it until a week before graduation. Now, yes it's something that we need or tuition is going to have to increase more. We needed to pay for the graduation costs. That is a fair thing to say. But to announce it a week before graduation and to suggest that students have to pay, that's not fair.

In essence, to this student, manipulating the timing of the decision, if that is indeed what

happened, actually took a decision she was willing to accept as fair, and changed her perception of it based on the timing alone. Another student (AAM3) explained further, “It’s a far better thing to have students on your side and accept the fact that tough decisions have to be made rather than springing it on them and putting the students who would have supported you in a position where they can’t.”

It seems plausible to say that one reason timing is important to students is that being denied appropriate time to hear about a decision, or the possibility of a decision, denies students the opportunity to express their dissent. The ability to express dissent with a decision that has been made has been previously identified as being important in determinations of fairness (Leventhal, 1980). This was true for the students in this study as well. One student (HM4) agreed with this premise:

Even if it’s not more fair, it’s difficult for anyone to disagree or have problems with it because we knew in advance that it was coming. It’s not unforeseen. I think that there’s at least some dialogue.

To some, stifling dissent by controlling the timing of decisions may have just the opposite effect of what was intended. It may cause them to think that decisions that they would have ordinarily thought of as fair were in actuality unfair. This takes a position that they would have normally supported and makes them unable to do so. In addition to allowing students to participate in decision-making processes as a means for making decisions that are *perceived* to be more fair, including them may also aid in making decisions that actually *are* more fair than they would have been without this input.

Group Value

Everyone who has experienced the sting of a disappointing outcome knows that it is a painful experience. When that experience is coupled with feelings of injustice, it can

be very difficult to bear. But being treated unfairly frequently carries with it and additional burden, the feeling that one is not being valued by the group and that the injustice that they have suffered is a result of a diminished importance in comparison to others.

Students expressed the feeling of being treated unfairly. To one student (AM4), “Being treated unfairly, it’s not fun [laughs].” Another student (AM2), added, “You feel like you are helpless. You can’t do anything about it. You want to fix it, but you can’t. It’s up to other people.” Yet another participant (AAF1) expressed it this way, “I think we were all broken a bit. And sometimes when you are treated unfairly, that’s the effect – brokenness.”

So why is being treated unfairly so devastating? Certainly there are issues of the rights, privileges and material advantages of which the person feels deprived, but some have suggested that it is much more. Hegtvedt and Killeen (1999) assert that, “...group membership is very important to individuals, and how they are treated in that group, signals their standing in that group” (p. 273; Lind & Tyler, 1988). This concept was confirmed many times by the participants of this study:

Most of the time when you are being treated unfairly...it’s condescending...it makes you feel like ‘I am not good enough to be treated fairly’ (AM2).

I think a lot of times it's perceived as, they just don't like me. Or they don't care about my opinion or me as a person (AF3).

Being treated unfairly gives me less of a sense of worth and let’s you know whether you matter or not - whether you seem like a valuable part of something here at the institution or if you are just a dollar sign. If you are treated unfairly, it makes you question who you are and makes you lose trust, lose hope (WM3).

...a total disregard for me as a person. I take that as personally as the administrator saying to me, ‘I don’t value what you do as a worker at this institution’ (WF4).

The remarkable consistency with which students communicated about what unfair treatment signaled to them about their standing in the group, especially the way that this concept seemed to transcend demographic factors, may suggest a strong relationship between the theory of group value and the population of college students in general. Clearly the work of Chickering (1972) and others focuses on the important of social factors on developing college students.

Embedded within this group value model are other messages about status. Students reported feeling less respect when they felt they were treated unfairly. Interestingly, both students who spoke of unfairness as a lack of respect were Hispanic. One student (HM1) said:

When I feel treated unfairly, it feels just like a lack of respect. It seems more respectful when you approach someone about a decision that affects them. I guess I feel let down. Why didn't they think of me?

Another Hispanic student (HF4) added:

When you are being treated unfairly, it's like a lack of respect. If people don't treat me fairly, I feel like they don't respect me. They don't view me in as high a regard as other people. I guess I just feel really upset, I feel like I should be the same as everyone else.

Clearly respect is a salient feature. It would be interesting in future studies to investigate whether the issue of respect is culturally imbued.

To others, being treated unfairly may cause one not only to assume that they have a diminished standing in the group, but to attribute that to some personal characteristic as well. One student (AM4) explained:

I think that the first thing I thought of is, if you treat me unfairly you obviously, for some reason, don't take into account my needs or think of me as worthy enough to be considered. And I think that upsets me, it's like, why am I not important enough to be considered?"

The answer to the last question is one some students find too tantalizing to not answer. One student (AAF1) connected this feeling with a belief that it might lead others to question her intelligence, “First of all, to be treated unfairly feels like the person doesn’t care about you, doesn’t care that you have feelings. When I’m treated unfairly, I think the person underestimates my ability to understand what took place.”

Finally, the belief that a decision was unfair not only causes an individual to question their standing in the group and what might have led to that, but also to some, represented a separation from the group. A participant (HM3) explained, “I guess there is a feeling of alienation, your input is not even being valued or you don’t get input at all. Somebody else is on the top of the agenda.”

Clearly injustice is an emotional experience, and experiencing injustice carries a heavy emotional price. At each level, decision-making processes are infused with procedural and interpersonal concerns that are connected to those processes. A recent movement, however, has led to the view that these interpersonal and intrapersonal aspects of decision-making processes and evaluation of outcomes may be distinct. This was a salient consideration for students, and the factors that make up the judgments inform decision makers in the effort to make decisions that are not only fundamentally fair, but decisions that also appear fair on the surface as well.

Interactional Justice

If this study were exclusively about fairness as it occurs in a vacuum, there would be no need to discuss anything but processes. Because surely fair processes would lead to fair outcomes, and fair outcomes would be universally perceived to be fair. But this

study is about *perceptions* of fairness, and this implies something quite different – something rooted in individual interpretation – and something over which an ability to communicate would have some sway. This is the basis of the concept of interactional justice, that interpersonal skill and intrapersonal preferences are a part of determinations as they relate to whether or not one has received fair treatment. Related issues that emerged from the data include determinations of credibility, the presence (or salience) of agendas, perceptions about decision makers, perceptions related to race/ethnicity, perceptions about how gender relates to decision making, notions of age (including how students change in their perceptions and preferences as they age and develop in college) and finally, how preferences for displaying emotion may make these factors easier or harder to detect. Though the factors in this area are quite different, they each represent one component part in two very compelling questions: how much of what we believe is dependent on the skill of others to convince us? And how do we come to form the framework on which we base these interpretations? Both questions will be addressed in this section.

Communication Skill

Decisions demand an explanation – a good story to explain how and why decisions are made. This relies upon a skilled communicator. A good story, or social account, has been linked by the work of Bies (1987), Shapiro (1991), and others to mitigating (to a certain extent) the effects of negative outcomes. The ability to do so requires a decision maker with two very valuable qualities, communication skills and standing with the group.

This first quality, skilled communication, was also identified by students as being

important. One student (AM4) commented, “If they can talk you to the point where you are siding with them, I guess if they can talk you into thinking something’s fair, your going to think it’s fair... I think communication is definitely key.” Another student (WF4) added,

...the way that outcomes are explained, or the way they are *not* explained, is easily manipulated. You can think of a nice way to phrase any decision. And you can always think of an alternate way of explaining it that is more appealing to the general public.

In essence, effective communication is an inherently persuasive activity because the accounts of effective communicators invite the listener to agree.

Standing with the group is also important. Molm (1991) demonstrated that a bad relationship will tend to cloud perceptions about the outcomes of decisions. This also resonated with the students in the study. As one student (WF4) stated, “I think, as with any decision, if there is not a personal connection, you are less likely to support that decision. Another participant (HM3) captured the essence of this quality in one word, “Facetime.” “Just seeing people around on campus,” he continued, “...how available are they, how approachable are they...I think that it just a key for me. The more you see somebody, even if you’ve never spoken to them, that is definitely going to have an impact – the fact that you can put an idea of somebody or their roles and responsibilities to a face.”

The way a decision is conveyed is also important. “If you’re told in an environment that is hostile to you,” according to one student (WM2):

...where you feel uncomfortable – you will feel more hostile towards that decision, than if you are told in a more comfortable environment. Or the way someone told you – whether that person was a person that could give more of a warm personality instead of a person with a cold face who doesn’t seem nice.

Not only were the surroundings important to the students in this study, but also appearances. Some questions considered by another student (AAF2) were, "...do they look trustworthy, do they sound trust worthy? Is what they are saying making sense?"

There is also a certain intangible quality that students spoke of with remarkable similarity. This quality was the "gut reaction." As a student (AAF2) put it, "I don't know. It [determinations of trustworthiness] has always been a gut reaction for me, I don't know about anyone else." Another (AM2) added, "It's a gut feeling, I guess" still another (WM2) also concluded, "It's a gut feeling most of the time." Though as difficult to quantify, somehow students find a way to determine if a decision maker is credible. Some of the better-known factors in doing that are discussed in the next section.

Credibility

The notion of credibility is central to determination of fairness. If one is not believable, then any account that they give for a description will not necessarily be believed. Individuals who lack credibility may find their decisions immediately questioned before any contextual factors emerge. One student (AAF1), explained,

If I think somebody made a decision, and I know that they have biases or if I know that they are the kind of person who is only looking out for them, then I kind of don't trust the decisions that they make. But, if I know someone who is trustworthy or has proven that they work hard towards common goals or for the benefit of others, then I am usually okay with the decision.

To students, source credibility and the credibility of the message are entwined. As one student (WM2) put it, "...when you are hearing [something] from a credible source, you deem it more credible." For decision makers who already possess credibility, it can greatly aid perceptions of fairness. Poorly delivered decisions can lessen credibility as well.

So what makes a decision maker credible? This determination is based on a host of factors. One student (AM4) said, “I think consistency is definitely important.” For another (AM4), expertise was definitional with regard to credibility, “I think of credibility as experience.” Student also closely watch the behavior of a decision maker and use judgments based on their past actions. This can be challenging.. As one student (AF3) explained, “It’s really hard to decide is somebody is trustworthy because even when you think that somebody might be trustworthy, they might not. I think you have to go with their history.” For another participant (AM4) judgments were based on a lot of intangible, hard to perceive qualities, such as, “...how they handle themselves on a day-to-day basis consistently [and] that’s not always something you can see.” What students do see, they use to make judgments using several important factors as markers. One factor, raised by a participant (HM3) concerned the degree of student-focus of the decision maker, “[A particular administrator] is always there advocating for the students, actually advocating for both sides, for the administrators as well. It’s impacted me a lot being able to sit in a room with administrators who actively engage in dialogue with students.” Later, he (HM3) continued, “I would look at them [decisions] more favorably because I know that they have open dialogue. But someone else, someone I don’t see very much and I don’t know who they are, I am much more skeptical of them.” So, to this student, just knowing the decision maker gives them more credibility than someone who is unknown.

There is an interesting relationship between students knowing a decision maker, their acceptance of decisions, and their assessment of the decision makers’ credibility. If students’ past experiences have been good with the decision maker, they will tend to give

them credibility and therefore leeway. If their experiences have been bad, credibility is diminished. A participant (WF4) told a story that illustrated this point:

Particularly [a former administrator], there were times when she made decisions that students didn't agree with. And we knew deep down that she had the students' interests at heart – and that she was an administrator as well. Now, there are administrators that I know are not good people and they do not have the students' interests at heart – and that's not what they think about when they make decisions. So when they tell me something, I am not empathic with their decisions.

When fairness is in doubt, credibility can make the difference, and sometimes students are willing to give decision makers the benefit of the doubt. One student (AAM4) explained:

[A] former [high level administrator], could walk down the quad and she'd have to speak to fifty, sixty people. She was more of a hands-on, almost a motherly role. It's one of those things, where people always felt comfortable coming right to her. So she had more of a cushion when she made a decision because people knew her, and liked her.

In the game of inches that is decision making, most would be pleased to have some sort of cushion in the responses to their decisions. “In the end,” according to one student (HM1), “...I trust the person who – I don't want to say had a relationship with the group, but at least understood the impact that the decision would have on the group.” For those who have a relationship with the students there is a sort of implicit in-group status that carries messages of care and concern for their well being. According to these students, this is an important message to send when determinations of fairness are being made.

These personal relationships, and the credibility that they can bring, really aid a decision maker. But how students make these judgments when there is little information about the decision maker's credibility is a compelling question. One participant (WM3) addressed this question:

A person is credible from past experience, but if someone is in a new role, it's just wait and see. It's always a gamble. There are people who establish a person's credibility by making the decision to have him or her there. It's a reflection of that person. If I appoint a chair for a committee...it's a reflection of me. Your credibility affects others, because we were all put in our positions by others. In that way it's an interconnected network of credibility.

This is an interesting notion, that in the absence of other information, students may base judgments of credibility on those who selected the decision maker, and other factors related to the organization in an "interconnected network of credibility."

Another student (AAM3) offered a different explanation, in which unknown quantities start off *tabula rasa*, saying:

I think people start off with a clear slate, credibility wise, until they mess up. You come into an institution with a certain reputation, I think. You come in with a resume, but you've got to have those positive notches before you can start pissing off people on campus.

Both are interesting notions and create interesting questions for future study. Is credibility something that people possess in their natural state and lose when their actions warrant it? Do people start with no credibility and build it over time? Or is credibility, as (WM3) suggested, "...an interconnected network" where social, perceptual, and organizational factors interact to determine how much (or how little) a person begins with. This is yet another interesting area for future investigation.

Credibility has been correlated with the believability and acceptability of social accounts. If a person is credible, you will be more likely to believe their justifications and excuses relating to negative experiences (Shields, 1979). High status has been connected in previous research to higher believability and an increased ability to justify one's actions (Shields, 1979) and the assertion of the fairness of outcomes (Heuer, Penrod, Hafer, & Cohen, 2002). Status was definitely a factor in determining credibility

in this study, but there was an interesting additional effect as well. Students who were first or second-year students tended to express a stronger preference for titles in determining credibility:

I think that titles are important. Because then it makes that person more credible when they have that big title (HM1).

If they are the vice president or the president or something, you usually think that they might be more trustworthy, might be more credible (WM2).

Their judgments are not based on the title alone, but also weighed the features that come with it. They know that key positions in the university are usually only filled after extended and exhaustive searches, and that individuals are usually well qualified. This impacts students' impressions of the decisions made by these individuals, too. As one participant (AF1) said, "I assume that a vice president would consider all of the factors in a decision." But there are limits to what credibility can do. No matter how strong a person's credibility is with students, they will still need to provide explanations for important decisions. This is the point made by one student (AAF2):

Going back to the fee thing for graduation, I thought it was outrageous. There was no explanation. If you have no background and no backing to your reasoning, then it makes no sense that you expect people to believe you. You can't just throw it out there and say, you have to believe me because I say so.

Older students, for the most part, were less enamored with titles. One student (HM3) explained, "Titles aren't important to me at all. A lot of people, I don't even know their titles." Another student (AM4) added, "You can't just go off of titles. A title is just a title to me. I am sure that those people have been around, but that doesn't mean a title is the best decision maker." This leads one to wonder what causes this change in viewpoint between the first two years of school and the last two years of school? One

can't help but wonder if this is based on the displeasure students expressed throughout the study with outcomes they had received in the past made by these same "big titles" referred to by younger students. Since decisions are often made by those high up the chain, and more exposure to those decisions can tend to make one more wary in the future, perhaps students build up resentment over time. Sanford (1979) also found that college students tend to be high in authoritarian attitudes (with a high trust in authority) initially, and that this affect decreases with exposure to the university setting. This may explain the skepticism of authority possessed by older students, and the extent to which it is absent in younger students.

Credibility is enhanced or detracted by a number of factors. If a decision maker has made effective and fair decisions in the past, students seem to be willing to give that decision maker the benefit of the doubt. If they are well known to students, and this relationship reflects a knowledge of what students want and need, decision makers may likewise receive "a cushion." But one factor in particular was isolated as undermining trust and credibility to a large extent: agendas.

Agendas

Trust is related to perceptions of the credibility of the other in the interaction. In past research, trust has been found to be the most influential factor in determining fairness (Vermunt, Van der Kloot, & Van der Meer, 1993). In this study, trustworthiness was largely determined by the lack of self interest in the decision, or the absence of a self-serving agenda. In a political setting, students expressed an understanding of the usefulness of agendas, but determining that a decision maker's agenda is not self-serving is very important. One student (WM3) explained, "Everyone has an agenda. What that

agenda *is* makes all the difference. Is it a selfish one? Or is it an agenda where they seek and strive for the development of everyone?” Another student (WF4) concurred:

So, as with any political situation, people have motives. They have ulterior motives, they have alliances, and you don't know whether or not what they are telling you is because they want you to know, or they want you to side with them, there's a lot of underlying politics – especially with these high profile positions.

The agendas are often conflicting, especially between certain groups whose agendas remain relatively constant. Another participant (AAF1) explained:

People always have their own agenda. They always have their own thing going on. Students always have their own goals. Administrators have the schools interest in mind and faculty, they all have their own work to do. It's kind of like, every person has a bias, it's just how it has to be. We all make decisions based on how we feel, so that means we have a bias in some way shape or form. So I think, interests always get in the way, especially at a university. Because you want to do what's right for students, but it may not always be cost-effective for the university.

Students expect that agendas are relatively consistent. In determining if an agenda undermines fairness, students establish whether the agenda conflicts too much with their own. Wu and Laws (2003) explained that “Trust, from a psychological perspective, is shaped by an ongoing assessment of whether another party shares one's interests or diverges from them” (p. 335). This involves a judgment of the motives of others. As one student (AAM4) explained the importance of knowing motives, he questioned, “Is this the popular action? Or is this the right action? Are we doing something to send a message, or are we doing this because it's the right thing to do?”

Finally, students want to know that someone is being honest with them. “Truth” to one student (WM3) “...is something that I value deeply. Is a decision being made for the right reason, or does someone have their own agenda?” In establishing the credibility of one decision maker, another student (AM2) spoke about an individual who lost her

trust, “He lied, which kind of damaged his credibility. So you’re less likely to believe or trust someone who’s dishonest rather than someone who is honest.” Others (WF4) want to make sure that decision makers are, “...being open about motives” and making sure they know, “...whether people are working for or against you when you’re not around.”

Perceptions of Decision Makers

Biases are a reflection of our own experiences as they have been shaped by our culture. Individuals’ reactions to things that have happened to them, and to people they know, are filtered through their attributions. Conclusions are drawn and used to guide future actions. The participants in this study revealed, through their stories, accounts of decisions that have affected them, and, by extension, the perceptions that they hold with regard to how different decision-making groups go about the business of making decisions. In the next few sections, the beliefs and perceptions association with three groups of frequent decision makers are addressed.

Students

Among the clearest findings of the present study is that the participants do not trust other students to make decisions. Clearly they want to be involved themselves, and even feel better about decisions when their peers are involved, but feel more trusting of outcomes when student participation is limited to voice rather than a great deal of decision-making authority. This belief is articulated by one student (AF3) who said:

I don’t trust students. We’re really stupid sometimes. We don’t consider all options, nor do we have enough information to make an informed opinion. Students should have some input, but they shouldn’t have final input. We don’t know enough to make an informed decision.

There was remarkable consistency with regard to concerns about student decision makers

across demographic groups. One primary concern was expressed by a participant (HF4) who said, “Students just aren’t experienced in making decisions.” This belief was also echoed by others. One student (AM2) said, “...lots of times students don’t have much real-world experience and kind of jump ahead of themselves.”

That students are perceived to be simple-minded, or not yet developed enough to make effective decisions, was also a recurring theme. One participant (AM4) made the point, “I would kind of shy away from a student because sometimes they don’t have the maturity and understanding of the situation.” Another student (AAF1), added, “...and students, sometimes I think we’re kind of naïve in our thoughts, and we don’t think things all the way through.”

In the perception of the subjects in this study, the naiveté of students may come from lack of experience, and cause students to be indecisive as well. This point was made by one participant (AAM4) who said, “Students are a little fickle. I don’t know that they have enough experience to make a decision that impacted my life. They aren’t experienced yet.”

There was also an often-cited belief that students would not be as capable of being objective, a quality already established as being of high importance. As one participant (HM1) put it:

...it seems like they would probably make decisions that would favor them. Maybe they wouldn’t consider every person as a whole, maybe just certain groups. Because even at our age, we’re still in our little groups.

This lack of constancy and objectivity makes decisions made by students hard to predict. The ability to predict how important decisions might be made, and the extent to which they conform to expected outcomes is an important quality. The perceived lack of

quality makes students fairly unpopular decision makers. As one participant (AM2) explained, “Students are kind of the X factor, I don’t know if you can trust them. For the most part, faculty and administrators seem like they are more stable...more consistent.” The extent that this inexperience stems from lack of information about processes or meaningful participation in decision-making process is an interesting hypothesis, and could be a very interesting subject for a future study.

Administrators

Administrators get high marks as decision makers in a number of important characteristics. They are generally found to be “the most knowledgeable” (AF1), and are believed to be, “most qualified because [of] experience, just more logical” (AF1). Decision making is thought to be, “...more their job, deal[ing] with issues of decision making everyday” (WM2). This experience, mixed with the belief that making decisions is part of the duties of an administrative position, produces predictability. As one participant (WF4) put it, “An administrator...I think the decision would be standardized – instead of on a case-by-case basis.” The quality of predictability through standardization is very desirable to students.

But negative perceptions about administrators as decision makers are also strong. One student (HF4) makes the point strongly, “I really wouldn’t trust the administration. They’d be the last people I would trust.” This distrust may have less to do with qualifications and more to do with history. Many of the most unpopular decisions made at the institution of study have been made by high-ranking administrators, and the most common belief is that they are made without enough student input. One student (HF4) explained, “...we know that decisions are made, pretty much without our consent – a

majority of them are made without our consent.” A history of this kind of decision making at this particular institution has created a wary relationship between students and the administration and was discussed in Chapter 3.

It is quite likely that there is more to students’ skeptical perception of administration at this particular institution. For instance, the perception of standardization in administrative decision making, while ostensibly positive, may come with an additional belief that perhaps administrators are forced to adhere too closely to the rules and do not have enough flexibility to ground decisions in context. This will be explored more with regard to retributive decision making.

Of course, there was also a persistent belief that administrators did not really know what was going on. This was expressed by a number of students:

I feel like administration is kind of out of the loop. It’s not like they meet with students on a regular basis, so how are they supposed to know how I feel (HF4).

I think administrators might not have that close of a tie to students (HM3).

I wouldn’t so much trust an administrator because even though they’re high up, sometimes they are out of the loop (AAF1).

Within the context of the quotes above, is the impression of administrators as powerful, yet uninformed, decision makers. This power dynamic was an important part of explaining the lack of trust for administrators. Powerful and uninformed is a combination that makes students nervous. As one student (HM1) explained:

If you see an administrator, you think of them as the final say, the final input on the decision. And they have higher power. Maybe to students that may seem unfair that they have that much power.

Another student (AM4) concurred, “I don’t feel comfortable with that [administrators making decisions] because usually, more often than not, I feel that they are removed from

the actual situation. They're calling shots, but they don't really understand the situation...not on a personal level." In light of these findings one might question, will any decision maker appeal to students, or is the act of making decisions by its very nature polarizing?

Faculty

If students are the porridge that is too hot, and administrators are too cold, then are faculty just right? In a way, yes...and in a way, no. There was a common belief among younger students that faculty were somehow in the middle with regard to decision making. Students in general seemed to believe that faculty knew more about students than administrators, and that they knew more than students about decision making and institutional policies and guidelines. As one student (HF2) explained:

I think that the faculty are the most fair, because they are in the middle. They know the student population – they interact with you so they kind of know what is going on with the students. They also know the administration, they know the laws of what should be and shouldn't be done.

Another student (AAF1) agreed:

I think that I trust faculty above everyone else, because they are the person in the middle. They see the struggles of the students, but they also understand the position of the administrator a lot of times. They're like the middle men.

Another student (HM1) was more explicit about the dynamic of decision making between faculty, administration and students, "I mean, you have students here way at the bottom, and administrators way at the top; I feel like faculty are the middle ground."

But this potential to make fair decisions, based on their position in the college pecking order is not something that students tend to see faculty realizing. Students tend to see faculty as knowledgeable about students, and knowledgeable about policy, but

generally too wrapped up in other things to be effective. One student (WM2) asserted, “I think that faculty are more geared to teaching classes and writing papers on their field of study.” Another student (AF3) added:

I am a little biased, but I am not big on faculty members making decisions because in the past I have seen that not go well. I think faculty sometimes are more worried about themselves or their research or getting tenured. The faculty I’ve met are less concerned about students and more concerned about their real job or getting paid.

To some students, this focus on other things limits the perspective of faculty members and, therefore, limits their abilities as decision makers. This is the point made by one participant (AAM4) who suggested, “Faculty members, don’t...have a broad enough overview of different aspects. I think they teach their subject, and are very good at their subject, and that’s all that their wiggle room is.”

Students do not seem to have a ringing endorsement of any common decision makers at colleges and universities. Perhaps this is biased by the lingering effect of past decision making. Because negative memories have more sting, they can often be more immediately recalled. Fairness is harder to define, and would less likely be remembered in a scenario like this. If students remember most the decisions that they felt to be the most unfair, it seems plausible to believe that their negative experiences would predominantly guide their perceptions of decision makers.

Of course there appears to be another dynamic at play that relates to the power of decision makers and the knowledgability of decision makers. This will be explored more fully in Chapter Five.

Race/Ethnicity

In the wake of the civil rights movements, and for a generation too young to

remember a time of complete segregation in America, students have an uneasy relationship with issues of race. Perhaps it is students' strong preference for equality that most troubles them most with regard to this issue. It is as if saying that students perceive a difference in the way that other races view decisions as being somehow unequal in their treatment of others, or is evidence of inequality. This was particularly difficult for some white students. One student (WM3) in particular struggled to put his thoughts on this matter into words, "I'd like to think it wouldn't matter. I hope that it wouldn't matter. I'd like to say it wouldn't matter, but maybe it does."

For minorities, there was slightly more persistent belief that race was a factor in determinations of fairness. As one participant (AM2) explained, "I mean, you just see it. Each group has their own opinions and their own views. What they think is right and wrong...each have their own viewpoints, their own values." For others, limited access to the viewpoints of others as they are influenced by race, made it harder to determine if race mattered in determinations of fairness. One student (AF3) explained, "I don't think my views are different here, but I don't really know that I have the opportunity to hear other people's views to see if they are different." Clearly this is a complicated and perplexing issue for students.

Family Centeredness

One group that did seem to experience a difference in the way students of their race/ethnicity evaluated decisions were Hispanic students. To them, decision making involved an element that they did not experience when interacting with students of other cultures – notions of family:

In Mexico, the values are just so different that it just sort of evolves into decision making. Like in Mexico, everything is based around your family and then there's

your friends. Whereas here, once you reach a certain age, there's your friends and then there is your family. So, if you wanted to make a decision in Mexico, you'd go to your family (HF2).

Every culture is going to respond to things in a different way. I think I do. I come from a different background. I think that Hispanics, we're more family-oriented in general. It's going to be a factor in it. When I make a decision in my family, I have to think of my brothers and sisters and how it will affect them. I have to think of people other than myself (HF4) .

This emphasis on a family-oriented decision may go beyond the family unit itself and create a preference for consensus over majority rule. Because as one student (HF4) explained, "...if majority rules, there are still going to be people who are left out. The main goal is to try to please everyone." She explained that a preference for consensus originates in the family, explaining that, "When you have to make decisions in your family, you can't do something that will benefit like two or three of your sisters. You have to try to do something that will make everyone happy, because it makes the family happier."

Empathy

Wu and Laws (2003) found that empathy was connected to trust, which has been previously associated with determinations of fairness. Wu and Laws (2003) found that individuals, "...associate trust with a shared culture, history, outlook, or interests" (p. 330). Empathy, or an understanding of the perspective of others whom the decision affects, was an important consideration for the students in the present study.

To these students, empathy led to the making of decisions that the student themselves would find more pleasing and be more willing to accept. This was particularly true for white students, who were the only ones to indicate that a preference for decisions that affected them be made by individuals of their same race. As one

student (WF1) explained, “It’s not that I think people of other races would not make decisions that I would like, but maybe the familiarity of someone of my race would make it easier.” Another student (WM2) agreed, “...just because I would know better where they would be coming from in making the decision. I would think that most people who are like me would make decisions based on the same criteria.”

It is the second part, making a decision based on the same criteria that others keyed in to, that seemed to indicate an increased focus on outcome favorability when responding to a decision made by someone of one’s own race. One participant (HF4) expressed this sentiment:

Since someone is from the same background, they’ll more understand my mindset when they’re making their decision. So I think that their decision will ultimately be more like what I would want. So if someone else is going to make a decision for me, I would want them to make the decision that I would make.

But for students of color, this is a double-edged sword. Some were more likely to be skeptical of decisions made by persons of their same race, or at the very least, that violations of the expectancy that similarities will lead to empathy (leading to more favorable decisions) were expected to lead to external causal attributions that place the blame on decision makers. A previously identified quote from one student (HF2) viewed in this light, takes on a new meaning, “... instead of helping him out for his coworker to be Hispanic – if his coworker wants to get ahead, he is going to hurt him. It’s like competition between his same race.” Another student (AAF1) expressed a similar belief, saying:

I wouldn’t expect, necessarily, a decision biased towards me, or even special treatment. Because sometimes it feels like the person of your race...that, that person might be soft on you. But that is not necessarily the case.

It might be that the effect of race in determinations of fairness is strongly tied to outcome favorability, and relates more to increased satisfaction with favorable outcomes, whereas unfavorable outcomes are met with increased skepticism. In short, minorities may expect unfair treatment from decision makers of a different race, but when they receive unfavorable outcomes from those of their same race, it may sting a little more.

In the case of most students, whether race or ethnicity were important characteristics in how an individual judged the fairness of a decision was not the primary concern. Empathy was the driver in this situation, and other characteristics were considered similarities that either strengthened or weakened the power of empathy. To many students, empathy was more greatly enhanced by factors other than race. One participant (AF3) expressed the belief that the greater the similarity in other factors, the greater the satisfaction with a decision:

I think that race and ethnicity matters less than how your grew up, not necessarily by racial/ethnicity standards, but it's a lot easier to get along with someone of a socio-economic background, or you were raised with a family with two parents – you know those kind of similarities I think are more founded than, well she's also Asian so she is going to make the same kind of decision that I would.

To others, the criteria were more broadly defined. The belief that there was a great deal of similarity in the experiences of college students, created a bond between students.

This was expressed by one student (AAF1):

I don't think there is much difference in the way that students of different races look at decisions on a day to day basis. We go through the same thing, we go through the same daily grind. I think that day to day, we all make decisions to do what we need to do to get out of here.

Another student (WM2) agreed, saying, "I think that my kind of demographic...the college student, if there was a decision made by the administration, I am sure that most

college students would react in the same way.” Another participant (HF2) also articulated this connection, “Sometimes I don’t even notice the difference between being a Hispanic girl or being a college student.” To another student (WM2) it was less a matter of inherent similarity, but more that college students better relate to each other than to other decision-making groups on campus:

I think that the difference between race and ethnicity and gender is so much smaller than the difference between being a high school student and a college student, or a college student and a middle-aged faculty member. I think that being a college student makes you think a certain way, and makes you in a special kind of group that kind of makes your brain work differently. And the difference between that of a college-aged person and someone else is a lot more distinctive than being of a different race or gender.

But this begs a very important question: If the similarities between college students (and the empathy that these similarities generates) is such an important factor, then why do students express so little trust for decisions made by students? If it is as they explain it, they know that students understand their desired outcomes and will make decisions as they would like. However, students also know that other students are outcome-focused and will tend to tailor outcomes to the group with whom they most closely align. This means that if someone is not in the “right group” to be advantaged by a particular decision, they may receive an unjust outcome. This makes college students less desirable decision makers, except of course if they are looking at a punishment – which may make college students a more worthwhile gamble. This connection will be addressed in the section on retributive justice.

It seems likely that students who were able to personally select students to represent them might feel adequately represented. But the participation of individuals unknown to them or those chosen by administrators or faculty, might concern students.

These appointed students represent a wildcard because, being an unknown quantity, their fellow students would be unable to predict what they might do, how different or similar their perceptions might be to the student seeking a particular outcome, or what (if any) groups to whom this person most closely relates. In this case, students may prefer a more standardized outcome because they could rely on the objectivity and standardization they believe other (non-student) decision makers to possess.

Finally, students did recognize a connection between reactions to decisions by race, but mostly when the decisions themselves had a racial/cultural component. One student (AM2) said, “I think that people are more geared to be fired up if they are singled out.” If a group is “singled out” others may feel a need to represent the needs of that group to others. This was true for another student (AM4) who said, “Like me being the president of [a student cultural group] sometimes I feel like a lobbyist for culture. If it has something to do with that culture, I’m definitely going to support it, to work towards that as much as I can.”

But if issues do not relate directly to race or culture, students seemed to express a belief that students would tend to look at it similarly. One student (HM1) explained:

To me it depends on the decision. I read something about the new meal plan the other day, and I can’t see looking at that as a race thing. And I don’t think that people of different races would look at it differently. I think, as a whole, everyone would look at it differently. I think that the issue itself needs to be related to race. It’s more that we are all college students, not that we are different races. I guess right now we have more in common as far as college goes than anything else.

To another student, determinations of the impact of race on perceptions of fairness boiled down to a question of numbers. “The more people it affects,” explained one student (HM3) “...the less likely it is to be different because of race.” This may stem from a

belief that white students do not constitute a race group. It would be interesting to investigate the extent to which the perspectives of the dominant culture influence the dialogue regarding issues that do not relate to race. This may be another interesting area for future inquiry.

Gender

There are two beliefs about gender in American culture that are reinforced quite often – that women and men are quite different, and that they do not understand each other very well. The findings in this area do not necessarily support those beliefs, but they would also be impossible to refute using these data.

Students did not often mention the gender dynamics of decisions. When they did, they tended to stick to the script pretty closely with regard to what is often said about gender. It is difficult to know if these statements represented their actual experiences, or if they just seemed like culturally validated responses that indicated an understanding of the issue.

The results in this section also elucidated the extent to which people (let alone women and men) do not understand how others evaluate decisions. The findings mostly address perceptions about how people of other genders make decisions. This is interesting from an expectance violations perspective. Previous research has investigated the way gender roles effect reactions to managerial and communication style. These preferences, as students expressed them in this study, establish a potential basis of comparison with regard to how these participants expect decision makers to behave according to their gender.

To derive as much meaning as possible (since results were so similar) it seemed

advantageous to divide responses into four groups: what men said about men's decision-making preferences, what men said about women's decision-making preferences, what women said about women's decision-making preferences, and what women said about men's decision-making preferences. Some interesting findings emerged.

Men about Men

Men tend to perceive that their preference was for rational or fact-based decision-making processes; although that rationality is considered a hallmark of male decision making was supported by male and female study participants alike. A participant (WM2) articulated this belief, saying, "...men more often would probably try to make it on cold, hard facts...try to have some mathematical equation so that you can run it and see who comes out the winner." This tends to represent a kind of objectivity that neither women nor men seemed to truly possess, nor did it seem to be desired by the students in the study.

It would be interesting to study whether men would express more satisfaction with a highly-objective decision-making process that produced a negative outcome for them (based on the expressed belief that high objectivity and rationality are desirable). Again, this might make an interesting hypothesis for a future study, but there is no basis in the findings relating to voice in the process to indicate that men have any less of an interest in making sure that their point of view is heard or considered in decision-making processes. Additionally, men also previously expressed (with frequency) the belief that contextual factors should be considered in decisions that affected them. Men also seemed to indicate a similar level of self-interest and dependence on outcome favorability to determine if decisions were fair. This all seems to negate the belief that men practice, or expect, the high level of objectivity that they or others believe to exist.

Men about Women

The men offered conflicting views of their perceptions about the ways that women make and evaluate decisions. One student (WM2) saw female decision makers as falling into the rather typical paradigm as being in touch with their emotions, and relying more on feelings than men:

I think guys tend to hold more things in than women do. I think women are more comfortable speaking their feelings than men do. I see women as being more empathic to other people's feelings. So I think that when women make a decision, they would care more about what other people thought, the social effects of the decision.

Another student (AAM4) saw it quite differently:

The women here are more logical than emotional. The overall stereotype is that women are emotional, men are logical on a baseline. I find that most of the women here, when they hear about a decision or they make one, it's straight logical...the facts only.

It is interesting to note that both men tended to see the gender dynamics of decision making and evaluation as being in a binary relationship between logical and emotional. One cannot help but wonder if this student's (AAM4) assessment of women represented his true experiences, or an effort to turn the traditional (or perhaps even stereotypical) belief around as a strategy for demonstrating enlightenment. Regardless, it is clear that for men, gender differences can be boiled down to a somewhat dichotomous relationship between emotion and logic.

Women about Women

Women did not differ in any substantial way from men in how they saw their own decision-making styles. Most women seemed to indicate some version of the emotion versus logic dichotomy. One participant (HF2) explained:

Girls are more led by feelings. If they are dating someone, the decisions are made

by how they feel about that person. A guy could be cheating on them, but they are like, “Oh, but I love him; I’m going to stay with them.”

Another student (WF4) had a different perspective on the same phenomenon, “...women tend to be more emotional and irrational. In a position like mine, you need to be more rational and objective than emotional. But being emotional, being in touch with that emotional side, is necessary to work with people.” Women tended to take a deficit model view of their own decision-making preferences – as if femininity carried with it an inherently negative quality that needed to be remediated in order to make fair decisions. A comment by one participant (AF3) illustrated this viewpoint, “...women are definitely more rash at first but then they kind of, I think, look at it and say, “Okay, I was kind of crazy just then, and I need to think about how it really happened or if it was fair or not.”

These findings also emphasize the weight of objectivity as a consideration for students. If one accepts that women truly believe that they tend to base decision more on emotions or by qualitative factors such as those expressed by a student (AAF1) which involve, “...looking more into what is going on with the person, what kind of background are they bringing to the table,” then one might surmise that women must believe in the primacy of objectivity to such a great extent that they try to reverse their own perceptions, beliefs and preferences to accommodate it.

Women about Men

Women tended to see men in very similar terms as to how they view themselves. One participant (WF4) explained, “I think in general men tend to be more objective and rational.” Another student (HF2) opined, “...a guy, they are less emotional...more logical.” Women tended to see men as concerned with facts, or as another student (AF3)

put it, “the black and white of the issue.”

It is interesting how much similarity existed between what men said about themselves and what women said about men. This finding seems to conform to some notions about muted group theory that suggests that those with power tend to control the definition of terms (Ardener, 1978). Orbe (1998) explained, “Those groups that function at the top of this social hierarchy determine to a great extent the communication system of the entire society. Over time, the structures of this system – that reflect the worldview of dominant group members – are reinforced as the appropriate communication system for both dominant and non-dominant members” (p. 8). This theory was created as a feminist theory and its application here is hardly a stretch. That in this study, men seemed to believe something about themselves that is unsupported by the data, and that women seem to believe it too, is a strong indication that this theory represents a good explanation of the dynamics of gender perceptions among college students.

The remarkable clarity and consistency in beliefs about how differences in decisions and their interpretation vary by gender is cause to ask a very important question, one that has implicit social and cultural ramifications: Is this belief persistent because it is true, or does it ring true because it is so persistently expressed by a dominant culture? The present study cannot answer this questions, but has hopefully provided some interesting fodder for future discussion of this issue.

Age

This study has repeatedly pointed to the relationship between similarities between decision makers, and those who the decision affects, as a basis of connection or to feelings of empathy. It has also explored the connection of empathy to perceptions that

decision makers will know and follow the kind of processes that would be desired by the person whom the decision affects. From that perspective, it should not be too great of a surprise to discover that students did not feel a high level connectedness to decision makers who are considerably older. This was apparent in statements such as one made by a student (HF4) who saw most decision makers as being, "...not in touch with the students. I feel like it's just older people making decisions. They don't have a relationship with the students. It's difficult for them to have that personal relationship with students."

While age may breed less of an expectation for positive outcomes in decision-making processes, one student (WF1) articulated the expectation that being closer in age comes with a belief that decision makers would be more understanding, "I would hope that a student would be more understanding because they are closer to my age. They understand what students go through and stuff like that."

Objectivity has repeatedly been identified as a positive trait in decision-making processes in general. And yet, empathy has also permeated the discussion. One might assume that the factor of age is, as is the case with many factors in this study, mediated to a large extent by the notion of outcome favorability. In other words, when evaluating a decision that gave the student a positive outcome, a student may see the decision as a product of wisdom or experience in decision making; whereas negative outcome may be attributed to a lack of connection due to age and a host of other factors.

It is difficult to conclude if the lack of salience of this concept (that it was rarely addressed by students) is due to its lack of importance in determinations of fairness or some other unknown factor. Clearly students expressed a very low degree of trust in their

peers with regard to making important decisions, and higher trust in people who were older (faculty and administrators). Unfortunately, the low amount of data regarding this factor makes it worthy of note, but also makes it difficult to draw conclusions.

Level of Involvement

Universities are complex entities. They are frequently multi-million dollar enterprises with multiple constituencies and varying (and often conflicting) perspectives. To understand decisions made in this setting, one must have a broad perspective on the goals and operation of an institution of higher education. To attain this kind of perspective takes exposure, and exposure relies on time and a desire to be exposed. These are some of the findings of this study.

For younger students, the complexity of the university environment can be dizzying. As one student (WF1), explained:

I've only been here for a semester. Since I haven't really been here that long, like, I guess things that go around on campus...I'm not really "in it" yet. It doesn't feel like it affects me. I don't know if that's good or bad. I guess I'm not really that informed right now because I don't really have that experience that a lot of the upperclassmen do so it doesn't necessarily hit home as much.

Another student (HM3) recalls the experience of being a first-year student:

Freshman year, I didn't see too much. I didn't even know I had a senator representing me. So coming to sophomore, junior year, as I came to understand better how decisions were made, and actually seeing us having a say in what's going on, it's different for sure.

As one continues in school, there are more opportunities to understand the context in which decisions are made. Certainly most students know more about colleges and universities the longer they are present, but some take more advantage of this opportunity than others.

Other students may choose to stay as uninvolved as possible and may do so for a number of different reasons. One student (AM4) explained why he was not as involved or knowledgeable about issues on campus, “For me I think it’s more an issue of time, not that I don’t want to get involved in it, but I would be spread too thin and I just really don’t have the time.” But students point out that being uninvolved does not necessarily mean that students will not form an opinion about issues. Another student (AF3) illustrated this belief, telling a story about a time when she knew that decision makers had tried to gather opinions from those who were affected by a decision, “So, they did make an effort, but I think most students didn’t see it though. They didn’t answer the poll, or they wouldn’t fill out the survey. Then they complain about it.” She (AF3) cited as an example a roommate who is uninvolved on campus, and the difference in the way that she perceives campus events:

I am very involved in student-life-type aspects. My other roommate...has no kind of involvement at the university. And you can tell how involved we are by how we judge university decisions. The one who has no involvement, she thinks everything is unfair if it goes against what she wants.

In other words, level of involvement may mediate outcome favorability to a certain extent. Those who are more involved may be more able to see the reasoning behind decisions, accept opportunities to voice opinions, or hear and accept official accounts of why decisions were made. Those who are less involved may only have the impact or outcome of a decision on which to base their judgments of fairness.

It almost seems inevitable that the longer students continue on at a university, the more they would learn about how the university operates, and the more favorable perceptions they will develop about key players in the university. But students indicated

that there is more to acquiring a more complex understanding of university affairs. They expressed a belief that they learned more about decision making by participating in leadership positions on campus.

Students indicated that they had learned much about decision making from participating in leadership positions, especially student government. This was the case with one participant (HM3) who explained how his understandings changed based on involvement in student government “I didn’t realize there were so many faculty who work well with students. Being in student government has helped me to see that. Another student (AAM3) explained the difference between someone who is involved and someone who is not:

I think that a student who is not involved on campus will fail to realize the role of student government and the fact that the student government president has meetings with the president of the university, and fails to appreciate the idea of shared governance and the fact that there is communication there, and the fact that there are administrators who bounce ideas off of students before making recommendations to their bosses. That’s something that uninvolved people don’t know.

Students expressed the belief that knowing more about the ways in which things work added to the understanding of decisions and might make them more accepting of them.

This was the case for one student (AAM4), who explained

I think that...some of the decision that the administration has made, I find myself in tune with them. I tend sometimes to take it a little bit differently because having been involved in student government, I know things in a different way that they do.

But this was not always the case. One student (HM3) admitted to being, “...much more skeptical, based on my experience with student government,” adding:

When I was a freshman, when something came out, you just take it. You take it in, you say, ‘that was the decision that was made.’ You don’t even know that you have a senator, or to ask, ‘What is student government doing about this?’ So, the

fact that I have this different perspective as to how things are done, I am definitely more skeptical.

This may at first seem puzzling and contradictory. Why would exposure to more information about the context and processes of decision making cause some students to be more accepting of decisions, and some to be more skeptical? It may be that some students may find themselves in both situations. Clearly an understanding of why and how decisions are made does remove some of the mystery in decision making. To an involved student, having a basis to question a decision, and then finding that decision to be consistent with their expectations about what should happen, could be powerfully affirming.

But why would students be more skeptical? Previous research has established a link between participation in co-curricular activities and sizable increases in critical thinking (Gellin, 2003). According to Gellin (2003):

The opportunity for students to interact with other students and faculty are continually available on college campuses. Students who take advantage of these opportunities are exposed to diverse points of view through their interactions with peers and/or faculty. In addition, each involvement activity may also provide a unique perspective and learning experience that enhances critical thinking (p. 774).

In other words, students who know more can question more. The experience of being involved on campus does more than expose students to information, but may provide them with the tools and inclination to question the decisions that affect them.

Affect Preference

People express emotions in different ways and have preferences for the way that they display affect (or emotion). One person may react with high emotion to even the smallest sleight, and others may display very little emotion to life altering decisions. Van

den Bos, Maas and Waldring (2003) found that “When exposed to affect-eliciting events, certain individuals consistently manifest stronger or more intense emotional responses, whereas [others] show milder or less intense affective reactions” (p. 154). The participants in this study tended to indicate that this was a factor for them.

Two of the four people, for whom this factor was salient, indicated that their preference was for lesser affect. One student (WF1) explained, “I am an optimist so I tend to think things are better even when they aren’t. But I know that with school-related things, if a decision is made and it’s not what I wanted [because of the optimism], I tend to tell myself, ‘Well, it’s for the best.’” Another student (WM2) indicated, “I tend to be easy-going. If something happens that doesn’t really...that makes me mad or doesn’t go with what I think should happen, I usually just blow it off.”

Another student’s (AAF2) self-reported preference was for strong affect with regard to decisions that she did not like, “I’d probably get upset. No one should be treated unfairly. If I am one of those people, I take a lot of those things personally.”

Finally, another student (AF1) felt that her initial reaction was for strong affect, followed by a decreased affect over time, “Initially, I always get really upset. But the more I think about it, I realize it’s not so important. I guess that’s just my personality.”

It is impossible to tell to what extent these findings confirm a belief that individual affect preferences have an impact on perceptions of fairness. However, within the demographic factors, there appeared to be a small, but visible, cultural dynamic at play. Again the small number of participants for whom this factor was salient made it difficult to draw any conclusions, However, the fact that the two students who expressed decreased affect in relation to decisions were both white, and that the students who

expressed, at least initially, strong affect were both minorities, may be an interesting dynamic to investigate further.

It would be interesting to know to what extent, if any, their finding relates to notions of the history of civil rights in America. For African Americans, liberties were hard-won and advancement continues to be a struggle today. This conforms to the beliefs of persistent injustice theory – that those who believe that they have been the recipients of persistent injustice may be quicker to perceive injustice.

Interestingly enough, there is some support for the belief that perceptions of social justice may be involved with regard to affect preference. The same student (AAF2) who expressed an increased affect preference as part of her personality talked about the impact that slavery has had in determining her reaction to situations. She said:

Slavery is always going to be a factor in how I view things, because it happened in the past, but we still need to find a way to overcome the disparities and endure everyday, like poverty, welfare, projects, unemployment, things of that nature. I'm not saying that white people don't have to deal with these things, but we are usually categorized in those places. It kind of frustrates me. But in the same way, you can't always use those things that happened to us as an excuse. Just because that happened to us, doesn't mean that we have to dwell on it. You have to find a way to outshine the negative.

Interestingly enough, one of the two white students (WF1) who expressed a lower affect preference, also tangentially referenced the issue of slavery, saying:

I think about the application process; a lot of times, race comes into play. We were told that if it came down to it, a lot of times they'll [other races] get it over a Caucasians because they were discriminated against way back when. And that always made me mad. Because I understand that their ancestors were discriminated against, but I had nothing to do with it. My grandparents had nothing to do with it. My parents had nothing to do with it.

These two pieces, when considered together, tell a story of one individual whose affect preferences have been shaped by an awareness of injustice, and one who may perceive

that the injustices of others are used as grounds for justifying decisions that have deprived her of desirable benefits. Generally, it is not necessary for those in the dominant group to fight for the kind of basic rights of which minorities have been deprived. And so unrest, or emotion may very well represent the inconvenience and discomfort of dealing with accusations of inequality that have the potential of threatening desirable benefits.

The reaction of one respondent (AF1) when viewed through this frame, were particularly interesting as well. Again, from a purely speculative perspective, one might surmise that as a minority, this student (AF1) may have perceived persistent injustice. This has the potential to arouse anger in her in much the same way as it did for the student who was impacted by slavery (AAF2). But perhaps it is the mitigating effect of the high context of many Asian cultures (Devito, 1995) that deemphasize the self in favor of collectivist notions. According to Devito (1995), high context cultures, "...place a great deal more emphasis on face-saving. For example, they are more likely to avoid argument for fear of causing others to lose face" (p. 31). There may also be an element of conforming to expectations of Asians as the model minority (Lee, 1996). It would be difficult, if not impossible, to confirm these explanations based on any data derived from the present study, but it might provide an interesting line of inquiry in future studies.

There are many interpersonal and intrapersonal factors that appear to influence and be influenced by interactions with decisions and decision makers in the college setting. To this point, this inquiry has been limited to the distribution of positive outcomes and the extent to which students see them as meeting conditions of fairness. The final section relates to the distribution of something quite different: punishments.

Retributive Justice

Retributive justice refers to preferences and procedures dealing with the allocation of punishments or penalties. By definition, these are not enjoyable experiences, and it is likely that students would have mostly negative experiences with being punished.

Colleges have many contexts for decisions that may result in negative outcomes. Grades, for instance, may represent both reward and punishment. A student whose work does not meet the professor's expectations may receive a failing grade. Failing grades may cause dismissal from the university, loss of scholarships, or other negative conditions. Students may be punished for violating conduct or academic policies or lose campus leadership positions for perceived misconduct.

In addition, it may be more difficult to understand punitive processes because traditional-aged college students rarely exercise or possess the ability to punish others. It may also be difficult to escape the need for favorable outcomes because the stakes are often comparatively higher when punishments are involved.

This could create an atmosphere of fear and uncertainty regarding retributive processes. One student (AAF1) captured the essence of the belief of many others when she said, "I don't like it when people are punished as a whole."

Deserving

People tend to prefer equivalent outcomes in the distribution of rewards, but punishments tend to be based on notions of need (which includes assessments of who is more deserving of a penalty) (Tornblom & Ahlin, 1998). This was also true for participants in this study. Students expressed a belief that those who were punished ought to have deserved it. This means, not only did those who were punished do

something that was worthy of being punished, but also that the particular punishment was fitting for what was done. One participant (HM1) talked about a reaction of students at his high school who were compelled to tutor other students during study hall time, “They thought, this is unfair – this is our free time. We shouldn’t be obligated to help these students. It’s not our fault that they don’t work as hard.” The attribution in this case was interesting. The statement implied that poor academic performance was the result of a lack of hard work (and implicitly good academic performance was based on hard work), and that lack of hard work is a basis for punishment (poor grades). Good academic performance was deserving of rewards, and not of having additional requirements placed on them.

But when students do deserve punishment, others expect that they will receive it.

One student (HF4) discussed an incident of plagiarism:

My freshman year, there was this student who was caught plagiarizing by the teacher. And rather than turn them in, which was the protocol, they [the teachers] knew very well that that was going to be the punishment...expulsion. But the teacher didn’t do anything; she just made him rewrite the paper. It was kind of unfair because I put my time and effort into not plagiarizing, and for all I know we could have gotten the same grade.

In this case, breaking the rules was deserving of punishment. In contrast, putting “time and effort” into a paper was deserving of a good grade (with a noticeable absence of any information about the quality of the paper). In this case, expectations of deserving were not met according to the student, and this violation of expectancy was met with a belief that it was not fair.

Retributive Empathy

Previous sections focused on students’ perceptions about what makes for a fair

process. While some have confirmed the effect of outcome favorability, in most cases students have expressed (with remarkable clarity) their belief in a number of constant features for making fair decisions. They have talked about the influences of being given or denied voice, of having outcomes explained to them, and, of course, the importance of objectivity in making fair decisions.

When the chips are down, however, most were willing to admit that they would be willing to subvert fairness in punishment situations in order to receive their desired outcome: leniency.

The present study used an open format and did not presuppose questions. However, when students would mention situations which either caused or had the potential to cause punishments, they were consistently asked one question as a follow-up: “If you were going to be punished in this situation, and you could choose a student, faculty member, or administrator to do it (not a particular person, but someone from that category) whom would you choose?” The answers were as telling as they were consistent:

The student would...probably give you the easiest punishment. Probably because they understand where you are coming from, and they probably wouldn't want to be going through the same thing, too (AM4).

If I was being punished, if I was being totally honest, I would definitely go with students. Regardless of what happened, I think that students would have much more in common. Just the same as a court case, you want a jury of your peers (HM3).

Students know, they're like, 'Man, I have been there. So I know that she did not mean to do that. So I am going to punish you because it was stupid that you did that, but I am not going to grind you into the ground like other people would do' (AAF1).

Students clearly expect understanding from each other with regard to being

punished. They also expect that this understanding will lead to leniency. This belief illustrates the impact of empathy in creating expectations of outcomes.

What was even more telling is that many students expect that other students will not only punish them less, but will actually make unfair decisions in their favor:

I would choose the student, just because I feel they would be the most lenient. Students are more laid back, and while I wouldn't choose them to make the most fair decision, but at the same time if they were going to punish you, you'd choose them because you aren't going to be punished as well (HF4).

Whereas a faculty member or administrator would probably in the end be fair with the decision that they make but I'd probably pick the student because they'd be a little easier; or unfair in my favor, to be honest (HM1).

(AF1) Student, because I think the student, like at the same age level, would understand more....whereas the administrator would only see, like, the rules and...I think that students might say, I've been in their situation before. Yeah, I don't know if it's really fair, but I do think I'd pick 'em.

Again, it might be difficult to see past outcome favorability if one were to receive a negative outcome from a fellow student; because students have such a strong expectation that others will be unfair in their favor. Violating that expectation could be seen as an unfair thing to do, and could possibly result in negative attributions about the motives of the decision maker. One participant (AF3) articulates this, "I think students, especially those who would sign up for a judicial board, I think, harder on each other because they are like, 'I wouldn't do something like that, so why should you get away with it.'" In a way, it represents a kind of reverse empathy, in which students who cannot relate to the actions of others, place themselves in a position to dole out punishments accordingly.

But for students, empathy was the norm, along with the expectation that more empathy leads to more leniency. As one student (HM1) explained, "...as a student they'd understand me more. Maybe whatever it was I was being punished for, they'd be more

likely to put themselves in my position, and think of what was going through my head. And they'd probably not be as harsh with my punishment." Another participant (AM4) agreed, and said, "The student would...probably give you the easiest punishment. Probably because they understand where you are coming from, and they probably wouldn't want to be going through the same thing, too." Another student (WM2) added, "... a student could empathize with the kind of issues that I could be going through. They could empathize and they might think, yeah I might have done that too, and give me a less severe punishment." And finally, one student (WF4) added, "Students empathize with one another, and when you are a student you remember. You know that you've messed up too, so you are more likely to be lenient."

Clearly students in this study knew more about fairness that may have been initially expected. But it is also clear that they understood the stakes of receiving the outcomes they desired. They wanted to receive as many benefits as they could while receiving the least negative outcomes possible. They may not expect much from each other regarding making a fair decision, but they have high hopes that students will empathize and help them to escape undesirable outcomes. Concerning perceptions of fairness, a number of factors work together to create the complex environment in which decisions are made and interpreted. In Chapter Five, the implications of the findings in this study are discussed and some assumptions about the way in which they work together to form a process for interpreting fairness is supposed and supported.

CHAPTER V: DISCUSSION

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to determine college students' perceptions about the fairness of student, faculty and administration-led decision-making processes. This was accomplished through open format interviews in which students were encouraged to tell stories of their experiences with making and interpreting decisions.

Research Questions

The present study was primarily interested in answering the following questions:

RQ1 – What perceptions do students hold about decision-making processes and the faculty, staff, administrators and students who oversee them?

RQ2 – In what ways do these perceptions affect college students' reactions to decision-making processes?

The findings of this study, with regard to the first research question could easily be described as substantial, highly explanatory and potentially robust. The students in this study had high (and fairly consistent) expectations of decision-making processes. For instance, they expected advance notice of decisions and decision-making processes, they valued objectivity, and tended to seek equality. Additionally, they had relatively consistent beliefs (and perhaps even biases) with regard to who is making decisions. They tended to expect the most fairness from faculty, the most consistency from administrators, and the most empathy from students. In addition, they preferred to connect the appropriate decision maker to the type of decision to be made. This will be discussed in more detail in the Key Findings section.

If the present study were only able to address what perceptions students held, it

might still be interesting, but would lack the kind of breadth that could most direct future research and guide administrative practice. This study was able to provide substantial insight into how these students used the beliefs that they hold about appropriate processes, outcomes and decision makers to explain how they might react to the decisions that result from them. For instance, participants expressed that voice was an important concern, but there was also evidence to suggest that students felt a high level of satisfaction with decisions made with the input of others who represented them. They also suggested that asking for one's opinion heightened perceptions of fairness – even when it was clear from the onset that this input would likely not affect any eventual positions.

The key findings of this study illustrate students' evaluations about the outcomes of decision-making processes (distributive), the processes used to make these decisions (procedural), and the decision makers themselves (interactional). Taken together, the findings of the present study address how these perceptions guide their evaluations of the outcomes of decision-making processes.

Key Findings

This study presents a complex array of findings that are woven into the framework of four conceptual approaches to studying fairness: distributive, procedural interactional and retributive justice. The findings in each, while providing a holistic view of fairness and justice, also make for a compelling vantage points from which to view each perspective on decision making processes and outcomes as a whole. As the data from the present study were coded and analyzed, connections began to emerge. Corbin and Strauss (1990) suggested that this is common in effectively planned grounded theory

inquiry. What quickly became apparent was that perceptions of fairness were not established through one process for interpreting events, but through several interconnecting processes. These were based on the following: perceptions of the process, perceptions of the decision maker, attributes of the perceiver, and evaluations of the outcome. In a way, each heading is like a miniature model for viewing how information pertaining to each aspect of the decision is evaluated.

Describing a process as complex as the formation of perception, the assignment of causation, or the creation of an attribution of one's own behavior and the behavior of others is a complex thing. But the grounded theory aspects of this study greatly aid in doing so. Strauss and Corbin (1990) suggest that, "The grounded theory that emerges when process is built in is a dynamic one. Process is a way of giving life to data by taking snapshots of action/interaction and linking them to form a sequence or series" (p. 144). In addition, every effort has been made to, "...capture as much of the complexity and movement in the real world as possible" (Strauss & Corbin, 1990 p. 111). This is a difficult thing to do.

To represent each of these interactions, it was important that the researcher eschew any simplified notions of linear relationships. Most factors had many recursive properties which defied simple explanation. In this chapter, each process will be explained based on the researcher's interpretations and impressions of the present data. This data will then be presented in terms of the theoretical propositions that became evident as this data came together.

Distributive Justice: Evaluations of the Outcome

Considerations of the outcome of decisions have permeated every level of the

present study. When students make decisions, they tend to consider outcomes first. When they evaluate decisions, the valence of the outcomes is an important indicator not only of fairness, but also of one's standing within the group. Van den Bos' (1997) fairness heuristic theory investigated the relationship between knowledge of processes and outcomes. This theory supposed that information about processes is much more readily available than is information about outcomes, and therefore, most perceptions of fairness are based on the process. The findings of this study seem to question this theory.

As previously noted, college students are affected by the outcomes of decisions. Because students are affected by these decisions, they will usually learn some version of what the outcome may be. But it is the processes used to arrive at decisions that many of the students in this study did not seem to understand. Perhaps because decision making in a university setting is complex, and involves considerations and information that students may have difficulty understanding. Perhaps is a willful intent to withhold information in order to stifle dissent. But the end result is that students know much more about outcomes than they do about processes. This is a reversal of fairness heuristic theory. Perhaps it is this lack of knowledge about processes that may lead students to consider outcomes first. Students may first conceptualize what a fair outcome may be and work in that direction.

In addition, this lack of understanding of processes may also explain students' reliance on social comparisons to make determinations of fairness. Students have a strong preference for equality in distributions of resources and reward allocations, but use equality as a baseline in retributive situations. Younger students tended to express a preference for making utilitarian decisions – decisions in which the greatest good is given

to the greatest number of people; however, it was unclear to what extent this notion informed their perceptions about decisions made by others. It would seem logical that utilitarian outcomes would be judged through a lens of outcome favorability. In essence, if students found themselves in an advantaged group, they would see utilitarian outcomes as fair, and unfair if they were in the disadvantaged group (especially if they frequently found themselves in the disadvantaged group).

Outcomes are an important factor in determining perceptions of fairness. However, they are but one part of a complex process for doing so.

Procedural Justice: Perceptions of the Process

Students do not know much about how decisions are made, but they have plenty of expectations about how they *should* be made. Students' perceptions of procedural fairness illustrate the complexity and problematic nature of trying to understand human behavior. Students have a lot of conflicting beliefs about how decisions should be made. On one hand, students have high expectations of decision makers. Students expect decision makers to be objective, to suppress self-interest and bias and to gather and use the highest quality information. Students know very little about how decisions are made, but they do have at least minimum expectations of decision-making processes. They expect to be given advanced notice of a decision that affects them, and they expect to be given at least some voice in the process (although they report that even a small amount of input increases their satisfaction with the decision). If students themselves cannot be consulted, they expect to be represented in the process. This involves making sure that those students who are selected to represent others come from diverse backgrounds and represent diverse perspectives. Participants in this study were skeptical of decisions

made by one person, and seem to increasingly find processes credible when more people are involved in making the decision.

When students are charged with making decisions themselves, they tend to consider outcomes first. They look at how different people and groups will be affected, and tailor outcomes to meet their objectives. That is to say, students tend to seek to arrive at outcomes that they believe others will think of as fair, and work backwards through processes (garbage can model) (Hoy & Tarter, 2004). This is a decidedly non-objective approach. They seek out solutions that rely on the information available (bounded rationality) and rarely look for disconfirming information (Simon, 1986).

While students did not seem to perceived a lack of ability to make fair decisions themselves, they were quite skeptical of other students' ability to make effective decisions. They thought of other students as easily swayed, self-interested, simple-minded, short-sighted and preferential to their friends and related groups. Ironically, one can easily see how decisions made using the approach discussed in the previous paragraph could lead to decisions that would be described by many of the characteristics listed above.

Self-interest is often used to describe both poor decision making by students, and the basis of their interpretation of decisions that affect them. In essence, some suggested that students make decisions to benefit themselves and their friends, and decisions that do not benefit them or their friends will be seen as unfair. This may be true in some cases, but for most others it was more complicated.

The data in this study supported the belief that students want to make good decisions; they want to make fair decisions. However, because these students rely on

very little information (and the quality of that information is often lacking either as a result of information control or by the indirectness of its source), and because they desired to provide favorable outcomes to as many people as possible, they tend to think in terms of outcomes first. This entails deciding who receives favorable outcomes, and who, by extension, does not. Whether they have a preference for utilitarian outcomes (which gives the majority of students the outcome they desire) or an equality approach (which focuses on giving all students a compromised version of fairness) students may take solace in knowing that they can, for the most part, anticipate the reaction of other students by knowing who the outcomes will please and whom it will not.

The paradigm suggested by the data is that processes are very much centered in the individual. The credibility of the process is often inexorably linked to the credibility of the person who designs or leads that process. For this reason, it is essential to know the factors within the individual that most influence the way that both processes and outcomes are communicated and evaluated.

Interactional Justice: Perceptions of the Decision Maker

Decision making often gets personal. When one person is making a decision that impacts another, the way that this decision is perceived may be wrapped up in a number of important considerations – not the least of which involves judgments about the decision maker themselves. This judgment may involve prior history, their communication ability, as well as stereotypes about them.

Stereotypes were often a consideration for students. Most were based on membership in various common decision-making groups (i.e., students, administration, or faculty), but some were based on demographic considerations. Few of these were related

to race. Students were very reticent to express their opinions with regard to decision makers of various races. It is most likely that this was not due to a lack of belief about how decision makers of various races operate, but more that students know that to make broad generalizations about persons of different (or even their own) race is not a socially acceptable thing to do.

Stereotypes about gender tended to follow the common paradigm of men as objective and rational and women as emotional and irrational. Students also expressed some distrust of people who were considerably older. Overall, fairness judgments seemed to be commingled, once again, with empathy. Students expected that those who were more like them would better understand their condition, and be more willing (and more likely) to give them desirable outcomes. This was especially true in retributive conditions.

Students had the most to say about the different decision makers that they most often encountered in the university setting: students, administrators and faculty. The collective experience of these students with regard to each group were remarkably similar and seemed to represent clear preferences and cautions for each.

Students

Students, as previously discussed, did not trust each other to make decisions. They did not think that other students have the maturity, perspective or inclination to make objective decisions. Ironically, this made students very desirable decision makers when their fellow students were looking for favorable outcomes – especially when the stakes are high. For students considering who would make the best decision maker in retributive conditions, there was a considerable expectation for high levels of empathy

and understanding from other students. They further expected that this empathy would translate into favorable outcomes. When students receive favorable outcomes, they will tend to see them as fair because decision makers acted predictably. Receiving unfavorable outcomes from other students, however, represented a major violation of expectancy. Even when students were denied outcomes that they suspected were undeserved, they had a tendency to place the blame on the decision maker because of their strong expectation of empathy as a driver of decisions.

Administrators

Administrators are expected to make decisions. Decisions made by them are expected to be based on knowledge of the rules, and a somewhat regimented process for applying these rules to situations. Students expected objective decisions that did not indicate a high level of empathy, or consideration of factors unrelated to the facts of the case.

Perhaps as a consequence, students often perceived administrative decision makers as unconnected to students, or not knowledgeable (and perhaps uncaring) about their particular circumstances. Students also suspected that administrators have personal agendas that carried more weight than the consideration of students' opinions or fairness of outcomes chosen. For this reason, students were suspicious of decisions made by administrators.

This did not make the case hopeless for decision makers. Credibility was an important factor, and attaining it relied on a fairly simple formula – a decision maker, and by extension an administrator, was credible when they were seen as actively seeking student input, representing students' points of view to others with regard to important

decisions, and working actively with student groups to find win/win solutions. When students ascribe credibility to an individual, they tend to view their decisions with more openness, and perhaps even with an added “cushion” (as one participant called it). This cushion may give the administrator more leeway in making unpopular decisions, and more credibility when making decisions in which favorable outcomes result.

Faculty

Faculty were quite often seen as the “middle men” or women with regard to decision-making authority on campus. Students expected that decisions made by faculty would be based on more contextual knowledge of the plight of the student. Students also expected that faculty had fewer hidden agendas. While students perceived these characteristics as desirable for decision makers, they also perceived that faculty were more likely to withhold this contextual knowledge because of their absorption in other responsibilities.

When students judged processes and outcomes of decisions, they were really, in effect, judging the decision makers who were at the heart of these processes. What biases did they bring to the table, and what commonly held attributions may give an indication of how they might react? This second aspect is surely grounded in a history of previous interaction, but also involves the internal/intrapersonal skill of the decision maker in justifying or explaining the basis of a decision.

The stakes for guessing correctly how a decision maker might act, and the extent to which they will understand and take into account a students’ particular situation is important in any decision-making situation. It is especially critical when punishment is at stake.

Retributive Justice: Perceptions of Punishment

As one might expect, students did not like being punished. While some recognized the educational objectives that punishment fulfilled, they were also fairly consistent in saying that they hoped to minimize punishment whenever possible. While they may have espoused a belief that objectivity was an essential element in fair decisions, fairness did not appear to be a primary consideration when one was facing a potentially negative outcome.

What students expressed was that they most valued empathy in retributive conditions. They were hopeful that the decision maker would understand their situation and think of how they themselves would prefer to be punished. Not surprisingly, they expected that those most similar to them will be most likely to empathize; namely students. They expected that faculty and administrators would be compelled to follow the rules too strictly, or that they would be too committed to educational outcomes to let students escape the consequences of their actions.

When students evaluated the fairness of the punishments of others, they tended to seek equality and expressed that similar cases ought to be treated the same. This begs the question: can two situations truly be equal? In the absence of equal outcomes or punishments, students needed to clearly understand why one situation was deserving of a lesser (or more severe) consequence. If they did not understand why this was so, they tended to think that the decision was unfair.

The four conceptual approaches to fairness provided both the structure and the theoretical grounding of this study. Considered separately they are each compelling in their own right, but taken together, they provided a basis for the most compelling

theoretical propositions from this study.

Theoretical Propositions

As previously mentioned, the purpose of grounded theory is to discover new theory, suggest new directions for research and perhaps guide practice. When fairness is viewed in totality, and as the various processes converge, there are some interesting findings that could suggest and guide future research. The most compelling potential of this study was the possibility of creating theoretical propositions that could reach across the continua of the four approaches of fairness; this is something that has been lacking in the literature. The present study has raised several interesting propositions. They include: 1) the objectivity paradox, 2) the connection of affect preference to persistent injustice, 3) the connection of level of involvement and integrative complexity, and 4) the connection of levels of power and knowledge in determinations of fairness.

The Objectivity Paradox

Students expected objectivity because they believed that it was essential in making fairness decisions. They also believed that decision makers should consider the outcome or effect that a decision would have on people before making a decision. This creates an objectivity paradox. Students wanted factors unrelated to the “facts” of the case taken into account (e.g., prior good acts, intentions, extenuating circumstance) for processes that affect them, but considered this a “bias” when a decision was being made in this way for others with whom they were unaffiliated.

This may lead some to identify outcome favorability as the driver of this paradox. Clearly students wanted favorable outcomes for themselves (and some even expressed a willingness to benefit from an unfair decision in their favor). Students truly believed that

objectivity made for fair decision making, but they feared not receiving the outcomes they wanted or needed, so they looked for decision makers with enough empathy to know their situation and to tailor the outcomes to their needs. When their needs were met, students thought that justice has occurred. But when students' needs were not met, they tended to view both the decision and decision maker negatively. There is reason to conclude from the data in this study, that the interplay of outcome favorability and the group value model may be particularly instructive in explaining this apparent paradox.

Among the frames that students used to make sense of decisions was their understanding of the way that they themselves make decisions. It seems reasonable to conclude that students assumed that decision makers decided what person or group would be advantaged, and who would not, before processes even began. When students received an unfavorable outcome, they assumed that there was some reason why they had been singled out. A decision that was perceived as unjust carried with it a strong indication of one's standing within a group. Students may have not only assumed that it was their lower standing in the group that caused them to receive an unjust result, but that the higher standing of others was the reason for them being advantaged by a favorable decision. This made students feel alienated and angry.

When viewed in this way, outcome favorability takes a light in which it has not previously been seen. While it is generally assumed that the strong impact of outcome favorability is based on self-interest, selfishness or a lack of objectivity, it is more complex than that. Not getting what one wants feels like one is being overlooked, and that their opinion was not important or taken into account. To students, as a matter of perspective, that experience was indistinguishable from being treated unjustly.

Knowing about this phenomenon is very important in attempts to lessen the impact of the objectivity paradox. A decision maker who has high credibility and standing in a group, or a person who is known to take all perspectives into account, may be less susceptible to negative reactions based on this concept. This will be especially true for individuals with strong communication skills.

Explanations or accounts of credible persons that are purposeful in demonstrating that different perspectives were considered and given weight in the process should also lessen this effect – especially when the decision can be traced back to representative groups as the decision makers. This mitigation would be made more powerful by intentional statements of inclusion with regard to groups that were disadvantaged by a particular decision, as well as credible accounts of how decisions were the result of intentional processes that balanced the objective consideration of information with the humane consideration of the potential impact on persons and groups. The ability of a decision maker to effectively manage such a difficult task is reliant upon a number of important considerations.

Affect Preference/Persistent Injustice

Few students in this study expressed affect preference as a salient concern in the way that they evaluated the fairness of decisions; those who did implied a very compelling paradigm that suggests a connection between affect preference and persistent injustice. Those who experienced what they perceived to be a disproportionate share of unfair treatment (or who had seen, or believed the accounts of others who witnessed or experienced injustice) came into decision-making situations with a belief that the decks were already stacked against them. This heightened sensitivity may cause an individual

to perceive that they have been treated unjustly more frequently, and also caused a more pronounced reaction to these situations. These reactions, of course, are culturally bound. One may respond to the fairness of situations that are culturally valued and reinforced. Such was the case of the Asian American and African American females in the study, whose affect preferences seemed to align with cultural expectations.

For those who had not personally or historically been disadvantaged, there seemed to be a preference for lesser affect, and a devaluing of the legitimacy of expressions of persistent injustice. There is reason to believe that these students tended to view decisions impacting historically disenfranchised groups as based on characteristics of the current decision-making environment, and not of past mistreatment. They also eschewed expressions of emotion in reaction to decisions by limiting it within themselves (perhaps as a means of modeling what is thought to be a proper dispassion with regard to negative outcomes).

One's background and experience may provide a powerful basis for explaining decisions, but when an outcome is decided, one's background may become but a prologue for evaluating the end state of processes.

Level of Involvement/Integrative Complexity

One of the most salient perceptual factors expressed by students was their level of involvement. Sometimes this paralleled year in school, and sometimes it did not. Younger students (even if they were highly involved) tended to express a belief that their older peers knew more about important issues on campus and were better equipped to decide if an issue was fair or not. They also expressed a tendency to seek out the council of their older peers. Upperclasspersons echoed this belief, relating that they had

experienced a difference in their understanding of campus issues as they spent more time in school.

Additionally, there was a persistent belief that those who were more involved in co-curricular activities (especially student government) were better able to understand how decisions were made, and better able to determine if decisions were fair.

Older students also explained that they felt more capable of seeing both sides of the issue, and connected this ability with their age and year in school. This is potentially one of the most interesting findings of the study, as the researcher has been unable to find any studies that link integrative complexity to student development.

The Power/Knowledge Dynamic

Overall, the perceptions of decision makers revealed an interesting dynamic. Students expressed a lack of acceptance of other students as decision makers – based primarily on the belief that students did not possess adequate knowledge or experience to make decisions. It was also thought that students' affiliation with certain groups and knowledge of the particular context of that group made them unable to be objective. Administrators were mostly perceived to be unfavorable decision makers based on the belief that they possessed too much power and too little knowledge. Faculty were largely thought to be effective decision makers because they represented the median of both of these qualities.

Power/knowledge levels that were not within the mid-range were considered problematic. High power indicated the kind of unchecked authority that made students weary; high knowledge was seen as inhibited objectivity. Low power indicated fruitlessness in the decision, because the decisions are unlikely to be accepted or

followed. Low knowledge meant that decisions would not be as contextually bound, or possess the expected understanding of the effect of the outcomes.

But when power and knowledge are in balance, and within the mid range, there is sufficient power to gain acceptance for a decision so long as constituent groups agree. This is a sort of check and balance to prevent the implementation of unpopular decisions. Knowledge in the mid-range means that objectivity is sufficient to prevent decisions that appeal to a specific group or individual self-interest (though power would be insufficient to implement such a decision anyway). But in the mid-range, knowledge is sufficient to produce the kind of local knowledge that students valued in this study.

These conclusions are strongly supported by data relating to perceptions about decision makers, beliefs about objectivity, and self-interest. The relationship between these variables would make for very compelling hypotheses for future studies. In so doing, it would be interesting to see if this perception would occur again with a larger group of students, and if this dynamic also exists for other groups. Additionally, if this relationship can be quantified, it would make an interesting tool to guide administrative practice when assembling representative groups. Beyond the general mixing of faculty, administrators and students (with an eye for diversity as well), greater effectiveness may be attained by assuring that decision-making groups contains an appropriate range of power and knowledge.

Implications for Future Research/Administrative Practice

The present study suggests many interesting avenues for future research, and though it is limited in its generalizability, may also suggest some advisable practices for increasing acceptance and buy-in of important decisions. The utility of framing this

study in the context of student perceptions stems from the need to seek out gaps in their understanding as a means of identifying opportunities to teach students about fairness, as well as enhancing the ability to provide meaningful accounts to explain decisions and demonstrate their fairness to students involved. In so doing, both administrative and educational goals can be attained.

Future Research

At the onset of this study, some may have been tempted to view outcomes as primary to determinations of fairness; outcomes however, are not viewed in isolation. They are an extension of the process that arrived at the decision, and are framed by the perceptions that students hold of decision makers. When taking a holistic view of how students perceived decisions to be made, and what factors caused them to think of decisions as fair or unfair, each phase must be equally considered.

There was a marked similarity in the way that students viewed the way that decisions ought to be made and how they would feel if they were not made in this way. This similarity may suggest two very interesting hypotheses, both of which may be correct. One is that perceptions of fairness are deeply rooted in one's local culture. In other words, that cultures may teach and reinforce these perceptions. As Shein (1992) describes it, these perceptions are part of "...a pattern of shared basic assumptions that the group learned as it solved its problems...that has worked well enough to be considered valid and, therefore, to be taught to new members as the correct way to perceive, think, and feel in relation to those problems" (p. 122). If this is the case, then future studies might find a similarity of beliefs within the local context without overarching themes that might be reliably found in other settings.

The far more tantalizing possibility is that commonalities in the beliefs of the subjects in this study are due to the fact that they are a common and wide-spread reactions to fairness interpretations that could be found in other populations and cultures. In this view, these the beliefs that these subjects espoused may be common or replicatable at different institutions, and may even apply to other settings as well.

In the tradition of grounded theory, the present study has suggested many interesting areas for future study, including:

- Is there a connection between student involvement in co-curricular activities and the development of integrative complexity?
- Is there a connection between continued matriculation in college and the development of integrative complexity?
- Would men express higher satisfaction with highly objective decision-making processes?
- What organizational factors influence perceptions of credibility in the absence of knowledge about an individual's past decision-making behavior?
- Is there a connection between students' self-identified lack of effectiveness in decision making and their expressed belief that they do not understand decision-making processes?

Each of these questions could make for some very compelling and original hypotheses for future study.

Administrative Practice in Colleges and Universities

Additionally, while the findings can only be applied to the present context, there are some implications that would seem advisable to consider when making decisions that

rely on a favorable student reaction. First, students would like to have ample advanced notice of important decisions, provide meaningful input (and dissent if necessary) and prepare for any future consequences that the decisions may hold for them. Students expect representation from credible and knowledgeable decision makers who they feel know the situation well enough to be empathic to students' concerns, and mindful of potential consequences.

Adherence to the suggestions above does not guarantee a fair outcome, nor will it assure that the outcome will be universally accepted as fair. Processes which match the qualities of fairness expressed throughout the present study should achieve the kind of openness, transparency and reason that can result in more than just a fair outcome for a given person. These considerations provide an opportunity to meaningfully pursue the conscientious quest for fairness that teaches students about how justice is achieved, and therefore benefits the society as a whole.

Conclusion

This study has viewed interpretations of fairness from four conceptual perspectives. These interpretations were displayed through the lenses of sixteen very different students – representing different years in school, genders and ethnicities. In comparison to previous research, it represents a very comprehensive, broad-ranging and interdisciplinary look at fairness in decision making. Additionally, it applied these concepts to an arena that had been previously overlooked with regard to this topic: higher education. The findings were contextually rich, and provided description of the phenomenon that should be sufficient to spark discussion and compel future research.

Democratic institutions rely on fairness and democracies rely on higher education

to produce leaders who are capable of determining what is fair and what is not. The present study may not be capable of ensuring fairness in decision-making processes, but providing a common language for the discussion of how to make decisions that are both fundamentally fair and likely to be seen as such, is a fair start.

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Vita

Adam Eugene Peck was born in Belleville, Illinois on March 22, 1973 to William E. Peck and Marsha L. (Bush) Peck. He was raised in St. Elmo, Illinois, a town of fewer than 2,000 people. He attended Belleville Area College, McKendree College and, in 1995, earned a Bachelor of Arts in Theatre with a minor in Human Communication at Lewis University. Shortly after graduation, Adam accepted the position of Theater Manager at Belleville Area College. He served there for two years before accepting the position of Residence Hall Director at McKendree College in 1997. He was later promoted to Director of Student Activities in 1999. During that time, he attended Southern Illinois University at Edwardsville, where he also served as a graduate teaching assistant. He completed a Master of Arts in Speech Communication in 2000.

After four years of service to McKendree, Adam accepted the position of Director of Student Activities and Student Center at Texas Lutheran University in Seguin, Texas. In 2001, Adam accepted the position of Senior Student Affairs Administrator for The Texas Union at The University of Texas at Austin (UT). While at UT, Adam was accepted into the Ph.D. program in Educational Administration, where he specialized in Higher Education.

In 2005, shortly after advancing to candidacy, Adam accepted the position of

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This dissertation was typed by the author.