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Third-Party Reactions to Performance Feedback

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THIRD-PARTY REACTIONS TO PERFORMANCE FEEDBACK

by

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ABSTRACT

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Although the provision of feedback has traditionally been treated as a dyadic event, I argue for the existence of a neglected third-party - the witness. Drawing from the dual process model of vicarious mistreatment and feedback intervention theory, I hypothesize that 1) third parties experience negative [positive] affect when witnessing an unjust [just] feedback event, 2) negative [positive] affect is stronger when feedback cues are self-referenced [task-referenced], and 3) negative [positive] affect is related to a subsequent decrease [increase] in feedback seeking intentions. Results from a 2x2 between-subjects experiment with 470 participants provide partial support for the hypotheses. Third-parties experienced negative affect after witnessing an unjust feedback event, which lead to decreased feedback seeking intentions. This relationship occurred in both the self-referenced and in the task-referenced feedback cue conditions, but significantly stronger when task-referenced. Comparatively, third parties only experienced positive affect and increased feedback seeking intentions after witnessing a just feedback event if the feedback cues were task-referenced. I discuss the theoretical and practical implications of the existence of third parties to feedback events, third-party affective reactions, and the importance of feedback cues when providing feedback.

I want to thank Allah first and foremost, who has gifted me with every supportive person, great opportunity, and useful resource needed to reach this point. I have come this far and have accomplished this much not because of my own capabilities or wit, but because of the blessings I have been surrounded with.

This dissertation is dedicated to my parents, Sabriya and Mohammed Jalil, who deserve my utmost gratitude. They brought our family to America as refugees to escape war and genocide with no money, no education, and no idea of what the future would hold. Yet they managed to create a beautiful life for their four children. I draw my inspiration from their unimaginable sacrifices and unyielding courage.

I also want to give special thanks my dear husband, Danial, for being the constant source of patience, love, and encouragement in my life and keeping me grounded. My spirits remained high and hopeful from the support of my siblings (Dehat, Deelan, Lava, Diar) and girlies (Soma, Sana, Byana, Zaytoon, Aurvan, Hawer, Emily, Doha) who always cheered me on. It is only through the support and encouragement of these people in my life that I have reached this goal and I will forever be grateful for all they have done.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

A global survey of more than 1,000 organizations located across 53 countries found that nearly every organization (94%) conducts performance reviews (Mercer, 2013). Performance reviews fall under the larger umbrella of performance management, which contain both formal and informal practices and processes aimed at aligning the behaviors and goals of employees with their organization through the provision of feedback and evaluation of performance (Murphy et al., 2019). These practices and processes often serve as the basis for compensation, termination, and career development decisions that can have long lasting effects on an individual's career (Murphy et al., 2019). Given the potential implications performance management has, it comes as no surprise that scholars consider performance feedback events a "critical justice event" (Elicker et al., 2006 p.532). The justice lens is often adopted when studying various components of a feedback event, ranging from what feedback is given to the employee, how the employee is treated, what decisions the supervisors make, and how the supervisors make those decisions (e.g., Jawahar, 2010; Keeping & Levy, 2000; Levy & Williams, 2004). Although these feedback events have historically been treated as dyadic events involving a feedback giver (i.e., the supervisor) and receiver (i.e., the employee) as the two sole parties (Jawahar, 2010; Levy & Williams, 2004; Smither et al., 2004), an emerging stream of research from the justice literature suggests that justice can evoke reactions from people outside the immediate dyad. A witness, or third-party, to injustice is defined as an individual "who observe[s] or become[s] aware of others being mistreated" (Dhanini & LaPalme, 2019, p. 2323). Given that feedback is a critical justice event (Elicker et al., 2006), I propose that we can apply

the concept of a third-party from the justice literature to the feedback literature to establish the presence of a third party to feedback events.

The performance feedback shared between a dyad can extend to third parties for two reasons. First, there are many opportunities for an individual to observe a coworker receive feedback, as feedback can occur spontaneously in everyday casual conversations rather than solely behind closed doors in one-on-one meetings (Pulakos et al., 2015; van der Rijt, 2012). Second, individuals often pay attention to others and compare themselves to people in their environment to attain feedback information and gauge their own performance (Ashford et al., 2003). Therefore, as information about a feedback event spreads to third parties, the reactions to feedback and subsequent effects may also spread to third parties. However, we do not currently understand how these third parties may react to feedback despite the potentially large implications their reactions may have. My primary objective is to establish the existence of a third-party to feedback events, which I define as any individual who observes the provision of performance feedback (Dhanini & LaPalme, 2019). I also ask: Do third parties experience affective reactions when witnessing a feedback event? How do feedback cues impact third party affective reactions to unjust events? How are third-party affective reactions related to subsequent feedback seeking intentions? To answer these questions, I use the dual process model of vicarious mistreatment (Dhanani & LaPalme, 2019) and feedback intervention theory (Kluger & DeNisi, 1996) as the guiding theoretical frameworks for an experimental vignette study.

By answering these questions, this paper contributes to the literature in three meaningful ways. First, I move beyond the dyadic understanding of feedback and introduce the third-party. The absence of research on third party reactions to feedback events is a point of concern because there are many possible third parties for a single feedback event (Skarlicki & Kulik, 2004;

Skarlicki & Rupp, 2010). These third parties vicariously learn about the treatment they should expect from their organization when witnessing injustice and adjust their attitudes and behaviors (e.g., psychological withdrawal, interpersonal deviant behaviors; Woolum et al., 2017; Zoghbi Manrique-de-Lara & Suarez-Acosata, 2014) accordingly (Skarlick & Kulik, 2004). I argue that reactions to feedback events extend beyond the dyad to individuals who witness the feedback. By examining the third-party's reactions to feedback, I expand our knowledge of the effects of feedback to encompass a larger population of individuals.

Second, I test the moderating role of feedback cue, an argument consistent with feedback intervention theory (FIT; Kluger & DeNisi, 1996). Although FIT has been cited over 8,000 times since its publication in 1996, some arguments central to the theory remain largely neglected. Specifically, FIT argues that feedback messages contain cues that shift the receiver's attention between hierarchically organized levels of goals. Feedback containing cues that draw attention to higher-level goals (i.e., self-referenced goals) make feedback less effective than feedback that draws attention to lower-level goals (i.e., task-referenced goals; Kluger & DeNisi, 1996). In essence, FIT argues that feedback cues moderate the effectiveness of feedback on performance. However, to my knowledge, few, if any, studies examine the moderating role of feedback cues. In the current study, I provide a test of the moderating role of feedback cue on feedback seeking intentions, a foundational meta-cognitive behavior for learning and performance (Ashford et al., 2003; Ashford et al., 2016). Because the feedback literature remains largely theoretical, testing arguments that are at the core of our understanding can help move the field forward by either challenging, confirming, or adapting current theories.

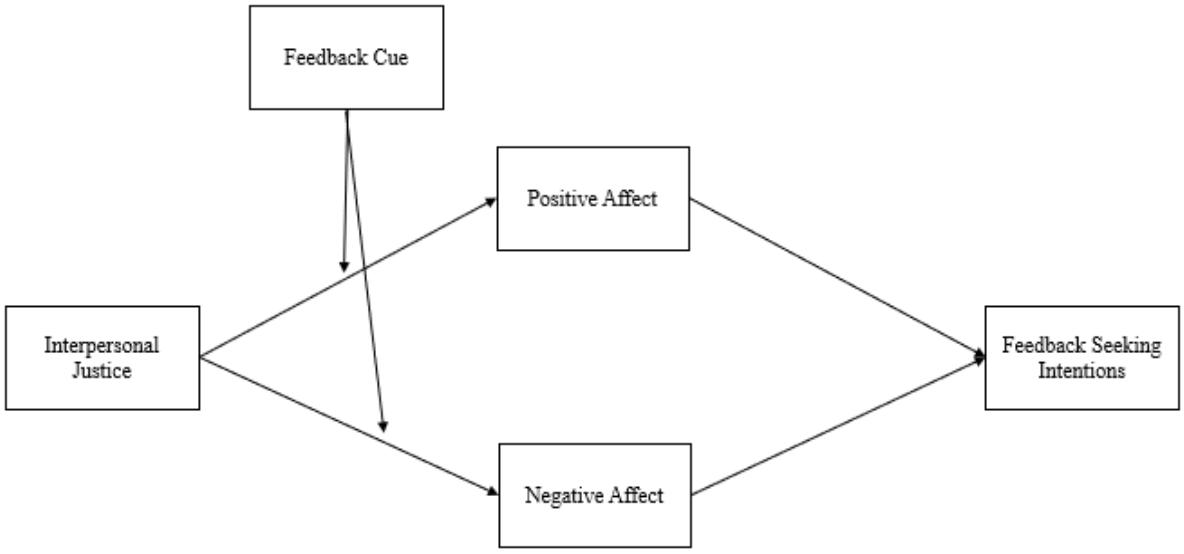
Finally, I examine affective feedback reactions as mediators between witnessing unjust feedback and feedback seeking. Scholars have lamented that mediators such as emotions or

affect are often invoked, but rarely tested, as processes through which various third-party negative outcomes occur after witnessing injustice (e.g., Dhanini & LaPalme, 2019; Skarliki & Kulik, 2004). Further, most justice research that does examine affect takes a piecemeal approach by primarily examining negative affect (Barclay & Kiefer, 2014) despite the "fundamental theoretical differences between positive and negative emotions that point to the importance of differentiating between them" (Barclay & Kiefer, 2014, p. 1859). In the current study, I provide a formal test of affect as a mediator between witnessing injustice and feedback seeking intentions. Testing mediators becomes even more critical when considering the accumulating research suggesting that witnesses and victims of injustice do not consistently react to injustice in the same manner and may even differ drastically (Skarlicki & Kulik, 2004; Skarlicki & Rupp, 2010). Examining the mediators between witnessing an unjust event and subsequent reactions to those events can help us better understand why third-party reactions may parallel those of the victim in some instances and differ to a large degree in other instances, which can inform justice theory and methodology (Skarlicki & Kulik, 2004).

Cumulatively, the purpose of this study is to introduce the third-party witness to performance feedback events and investigate the role justice and feedback cues play in affective reactions and subsequent feedback seeking intentions after witnessing a feedback event. I use Dhanini and LaPalme's (2019) dual processing model of vicarious mistreatment as a framework for this investigation. I propose a 2 (just vs unjust treatment) x 2 (task-referenced vs self-referenced feedback cues) between subject factorial design. I propose examining the participant's affective (i.e., positive and negative affect) feedback reactions after witnessing a feedback event and their subsequent feedback seeking intentions (see Figure 1 for the proposed theoretical model).

Figure 1

Proposed Theoretical Model



Theoretical Development

Supervisors often give feedback, or information regarding the execution of a task, to improve an employee's performance (Jawahar, 2010; Kluger & DeNisi, 1996; Murphy et al., 2019; Pulakos et al., 2015). Some of the most influential theories spanning across several disciplines, including goal setting theory (Locke & Latham, 2019), self-regulation theory (Lord et al., 2010), and social cognitive theory (Bandura, 1989), discuss the critical role of feedback in the learning process. Employees play an important role in their own learning and performance by seeking feedback throughout their regular workdays rather than waiting on their supervisors to provide it (Ashford et al., 2003; Ashford & Tsui, 1991). Feedback seeking is "the conscious devotion of effort toward determining the correctness and adequacy of behavior for attaining valued end states" (Ashford, 1986 p. 466). It is an important metacognitive behavior linked to

goal attainment and enhanced performance (Ashford et al., 2003). Despite the potential benefits of feedback seeking for employees, employees may experience an array of reactions to the feedback environment (Ashford et al., 2003; Erdogan, 2002) that can hinder their willingness to seek feedback.

I examine interpersonal justice violations as one of these feedback environment characteristics that may hinder feedback seeking through negative feedback reactions. When describing organizational justice, Cropanzano, Bowle, and Gilliland (2007, p. 34) explain that organizational justice is "the very essence of individuals' relationship to employers. In contrast, injustice is like a corrosive solvent...hurtful to individuals and harmful to organizations." Justice is central to an organization, as it can provide a sense of stability, safety, social cohesion, and meaning for employees (Rupp et al., 2017). Justice plays an important role in feedback events (Elicker et al., 2006), which is reflected in the sizable portion of justice research that either deals with or is related to performance appraisals (Murphy, 2019). All three major types of justice have the potential to be violated when feedback is given. For example, procedural justice may be violated if feedback is not based in agreed upon standards while distributive justice may be violated if feedback is not as favorable as one feels they deserve (Murphy et al., 2019). Further, when giving feedback, if the feedback receiver is not treated with respect and dignity, interpersonal justice may be violated (Murphy et al., 2019).

Although these justice violations have solely been examined from the two perspectives of the feedback receiver and giver, evidence from the third-party literature (e.g., Dhanani & LaPalme, 2019) suggests that feedback witnesses may also be keen to justice violations when feedback is given. To examine how third parties react to injustice in a feedback context, it is critical to understand the different types of information processing that can occur when

witnessing injustice (Skarlicki & Kulik; 2004; Skarlicki & Rupp, 2010). In their synthesis and review of third-party reactions to mistreatment, Dhanani and LaPalme (2019) present a dual process model of third-party reactions to capture the information processing routes through which witnessing injustice affects third parties. The first information processing route is System I[1] processing, which is a fast and automatic heuristic mode of information processing (Dhanini & LaPalme, 2019). This processing is relatively effortless and reflects an evolutionary system that allows for quick appraisal of and response to situations (Evans & Stanovich, 2013). Judgements created through System I processes can reflect initial impressions (Gawronski & Creighton, 2013) and are thought to be linked to emotional appraisals (Dhanani & LaPalme, 2019). On the other hand, System II processes are intentional, deliberative, conscious, controlled, slow, and effortful (Bago & De Neys, 2017; Melnikoff & Bargh, 2018; Pennycock et al., 2018). System II processing involves complex cognitive evaluations (Dhanini & LaPalme, 2019).

I argue that System I and System II information processing presented in the dual processing model of third-party justice (Dhanani & LaPalme, 2019) drive third-party affective and cognitive feedback reactions experienced after witnessing a feedback event (London & Smithers, 2002). Specifically, third-party affective feedback reactions (i.e., positive and negative affect) are driven by the automatic and emotional nature of System I processes while third-party cognitive feedback reactions (i.e., justice perceptions) are driven by the deliberative and effortful nature of System II processing. In this paper, I focus solely on affective feedback reactions driven by System I information processing (Dhanini & LaPalme, 2019) because affective

[1] Dual processing models span across several domain, resulting in differences in the language used to refer to these information processes (Evans & Stanovich, 2013). Some theorists refer to the processes as Type 1 and Type 2 processing (Evans & Stanovich, 2013), and some as System I and System II (i.e., Gawronski & Creighton, 2013). Since I draw from Dhanini and LaPalme's (2019) framework, I use the same labeling as they do and refer to the dual processes as System I and System II.

reactions are a frequently cited but understudied explanatory mechanism in the feedback literature (Ilies & Judge, 2005). In this study, the affective reactions examined will be in response to only negative feedback. Negative information tends to be more effective in vicarious learning and has a stronger and longer lasting effect compared to positive information (Bai et al., 2019; Baumeister et al., 2001), making it an appropriate starting point to examine third-party reactions to feedback.

Interpersonal Justice

I apply the dual process model of third-party reactions (Dhanini & LaPalme, 2019) to the feedback context by examining interpersonal justice violations. Within a feedback context, interpersonal justice reflects how the feedback message is *delivered,* representing the fairness and quality of interpersonal treatment people receive (Chory et al., 2009; Erdogan, 2002; Murphy, 2019). Interpersonally just treatment involves consideration, respect, and dignity while unjust treatment involves rudeness and disrespect (Colquitt, 2001; Steelman et al., 2004). Although each type of justice is relevant in a feedback event, I focus primarily on interpersonal justice for several reasons. First, interpersonal justice captures the day-to-day exchanges that occur even when resource allocation is not involved (i.e., promotion decisions; Scott et al., 2007), similar to how feedback can be given in daily contexts rather than only in a formal performance appraisal. Managers have more discretion in these interactions and therefore more opportunities to either violate or uphold justice rules (Scott et al., 2007; Scott et al., 2009). Second, when asked to report an experience of injustice, people more frequently describe interpersonal violations of justice compared to other forms of justice, suggesting that it is a prototypical form of injustice that is easily recognizable (Lizzio et al., 2007; O'Reilly et al., 2016). Third, from a methodological standpoint, interpersonal violations require relatively less

contextual information to be perceived as unjust compared to distributive or procedural justice violations (O'Reilly et al., 2016).

Dominant third-party justice models that align with System I information processing are the deontic and morally motivated response models (Dhanini & LaPalme, 2019; Folger et al., 2005; O'Reilly & Aquino, 2011). These models argue that witnessing interpersonal mistreatment can activate heuristic moral judgments and can result in near instantaneous emotional reactions, such as anger or outrage (Dhanini & LaPalme, 2019; Folger & Cropanzano, 2001; Skarlicki & Kulik, 2004). I argue that individuals who witness interpersonally unjust feedback will experience negative affective reactions, or a distressed and aversive mood state (Watson et al., 1988). Specifically, when a feedback receiver is treated in an undignified manner and with disrespect, it violates basic morality rules of how humans *should* be treated (Folger & Cropanzano, 2001). Indeed, interpersonal justice rules are "viewed almost universally as ethical and virtuous" (Zapata et al., 2016 p. 1150) and violations of interpersonal justice are easily recognizable as a threat to a person's humanity and can elicit anger from third parties (O'Reilly et al., 2016). Witnessing interpersonal injustice also signals a threat to the witnesses' own welfare, safety, and potential for exploitation (Skarlicki & Kulik, 2004; Williams et al., 1999). In feedback contexts, when individuals witness others receive feedback, they consider the potential threats to oneself that arise from receiving or seeking feedback (VandeWalle, 2003). That is, when an employee sees a coworker being mistreated, it signals to them that they may also be mistreated (Skarlicki & Kulik, 2004), which can elicit negative affect (Barclay & Kiefer, 2014). These emotional reactions are likely driven by System I processes, as they rely on heuristic decision making and biological responses (Dhanani & LaPalme, 2019). Therefore, third parties

who witness their coworker receive interpersonally unjust feedback should experience negative affective reactions.

Comparatively, third parties who witness feedback delivered within interpersonal justice standards (i.e., fairness, consideration, dignity) should experience positive affect. Justice can create a sense of safety, stability, and social cohesion for employees (Rupp et al., 2017). It can address concerns related to morality, relationships, and belonging (Barclay & Kiefer 2014). Witnessing just treatment can signal to employees that they are in an environment that is safe and provides a sense of belonging and need fulfillment (Barclay & Kiefer, 2014; Cropanzano et al., 2001; Rupp, 2011; Rupp et al., 2017). Therefore, third parties who witness their coworkers receive interpersonally just feedback should experience positive affect.

> Hypothesis 1a [1b]: Third parties who witness an unjust [just] feedback event will experience negative [positive] affect.

Feedback Cues

While interpersonal justice broadly reflects how the feedback message is *delivered,* feedback cues reflect the *content* of the feedback message. Specifically, feedback cues refer to the presence or absence of information within a feedback message that can shift attention among three hierarchically organized levels of goals: task learning, task motivation, and meta-task goals (Kluger & DeNisi, 1996). Although attention is normally directed to the middle of the hierarchy (task-motivation), attention can be diverted to the lower, detail-oriented level or the higher, self-concept level based on feedback cues (Kluger & DeNisi, 1996).

At the top of the hierarchy are meta-task goals. Feedback containing cues that direct attention to the meta-task level of goals (i.e., self-referenced feedback) directs attention to the self and links the focal tasks with higher order goals of the self (Kluger & DeNisi, 1996). Goals

at this level are central to one's sense of self and identity (DeNisi & Kluger, 2000). Take the example of a defense attorney conducting a cross examination (DeNisi & Kluger, 2000). Feedback about the cross examination that either affirms or questions the lawyer's identity as a defense lawyer would direct attention to the meta-task level. According to FIT, feedback that appraises the maintenance or (lack of) progress towards an important goal linked to one's self-concept can elicit strong affective reactions such as despair or elation (DeNisi & Kluger, 2000; Ilies et al., 2007; Kluger & DeNisi, 1996). Indeed, information about the self can be emotionally charged (Ashford et al., 2003) and feedback events are affect-laden experiences (Chawla et al., 2019; Ilies et al., 2007). When an individual receives feedback that is self-referenced and linked to one's self concept, they are likely to be concerned with reasserting or defending their self-image (DeNisi & Kluger, 2000).

On the other hand, feedback containing cues that direct attention to the bottom, task-learning level of goals directs attention to the details or actions involved in performing a task (Kluger & DeNisi, 1996). In the lawyer example, feedback about the different ways to approach a witness on the stand would draw attention to the task learning level (DeNisi & Kluger, 2000). This feedback focuses on the details of the task at hand, actions needed to complete the task, and reevaluating how the task is completed to improve performance (Kluger & DeNisi, 1996). Because task-referenced feedback draws attention to behaviors that are largely the result of controllable efforts and behaviors that can be changed (Henderlong & Lepper, 2002), it is not as closely linked to one's self-concept and less likely to evoke concerns with one's identity or self-presentation (DeNisi & Kluger, 2000). Rather, it can create environments where the feedback receiver feels psychologically safe (Anseel et al., 2011) and experiences positive affect. Indeed,

this type of feedback is typically found useful and informative, particularly compared to self-referenced feedback (VandeWalle, 2003).

Drawing on feedback intervention theory (Kluger & DeNisi, 1996), I argue that feedback cues that direct attention to different levels within the hierarchy can moderate the affective reactions third parties experience when witnessing (un)just feedback. Specifically, negative affective reactions to witnessing unjust feedback delivery will be exacerbated if the feedback is self-referenced. Because self-referenced feedback can question aspects of an individual's sense of self that is central to their identity, witnesses may think that self-referenced feedback is more "off limits" than other types of feedback (DeNisi & Kluger, 2000; Kluger & DeNisi, 1996). Witnessing an individual receive feedback that draws attention to the self may also heighten the potential threat to self that third parties perceive when witnessing interpersonal mistreatment (Skarlicki & Kulik, 2004). It signals to the witness that goals central to one's identity are subject to scrutiny by others, making the witness's own goals and self-concept vulnerable to similar treatment. Indeed, when individuals witness events that can affect their own goals or self-concepts, they can experience affective reactions (Barclay & Kiefer, 2014). Essentially, when witnessing feedback delivered in an unjust manner that is self-referenced, both the *delivery* of the feedback and the *content* of the feedback violate standards of morality (Skarliki & Kulik, 2004).

Comparatively, negative affective reactions to witnessing unjust feedback delivery should be buffered if the feedback contains cues that draw attention to the task and away from the self. Because feedback that draws attention to the task-level is generally found useful and informative (VandeWalle, 2003), it is less likely to be seen as a moral violation and subsequently may weaken the negative affect evoked when witnessing an individual receive unjust feedback.

Witnesses may not feel as strong of a threat to themselves, as the feedback given about the task on hand does not have as clear or direct implications about one's sense of self or identity.

On the other hand, third parties who witness negative feedback delivered in a just manner with cues that draw attention to the task-level may be the most likely to experience positive affect, as both the delivery and content are within morality standards. Both interpersonal justice and task-referenced feedback can create environments where employees feel psychologically safe (Anseel et al., 2011; Barclay & Kiefer 2014). Indeed, existing evidence indicates that feedback given in a considerate manner is linked to positive reactions among the receiver, even when the feedback is negative (Steelman et al., 2004; Steelman & Rutkowsi, 2004) and feedback receivers typically respond positively to task-referenced feedback (VandeWalle, 2003). Comparatively, the positive affect resulting from witnessing just feedback is likely weakened when the feedback is self-referenced. Because negative self-referenced feedback can threaten one's identity, the safety fostered through justice may be jeopardized. That is, witnesses may receive mixed signals when witnessing feedback delivered in a just manner but self-referenced. As such, I present the following predictions:

Hypothesis 2: Negative affect after witnessing an unjust feedback event is stronger when the feedback cues are self-referenced compared to when they are task referenced.

Hypothesis 3: Positive affect after witnessing a just feedback event is stronger when the feedback cues are task-referenced compared to when they are self-referenced.

Feedback Seeking

Scholars argue that affective reactions can drive goal directed (Ilies & Judge, 2005; Seo et al., 2004) and meta-cognitive behaviors (Chawala et al., 2019), such as feedback seeking (Ashford et al., 2003). For example, both Ilies and Judge (2005) and Chawla and colleagues

(2019) argue that affect operates as an important mechanism between receiving feedback and future goal-directed behaviors. Specifically, experiencing negative affect can demotivate individuals and prime individuals towards avoidance and withdrawal behaviors (Barclay & Kiefer, 2014; Chawla et al., 2019; Ilies et al., 2010; Ilies & Judge, 2005). On the other hand, experiencing positive affect tends to motivate individuals and prime them to engage in approach behaviors (Barclay & Kiefer, 2014; Chawla et al., 2019; Ilies et al., 2010; Ilies & Judge, 2005). In the context of this study, experiencing negative affect should make avoidance behaviors more readily accessible to third parties witnessing unjust feedback (Barclay & Kiefer, 2014) and subsequently reduce their feedback seeking intentions. Meanwhile, experiencing positive affect should reinforce approach behaviors (Barclay & Kiefer, 2014) and increase feedback seeking intentions. Existing evidence supports both the mediating role of affect between receiving feedback and meta-cognitive behaviors (i.e., Chawla et al., 2019; Ilies & Judge, 2005) and the link between affect and feedback seeking. For example, scholars have found that individuals in a positive mood are more open to receiving negative feedback than individuals in a negative mood (Trope & Neter, 1994). Nifadkar and colleagues (2012) found that positive and negative affect in response to their leader's supportive or aggressive behaviors were related to subsequent feedback seeking. Therefore, third parties who experience negative affect after witnessing a feedback event should have fewer feedback seeking intentions while those who experience positive affect should have more feedback seeking intentions.

> Hypothesis 4a [4b]: Third parties who experience negative [positive] affect will have fewer [more] feedback seeking intentions.

In sum, Hypotheses 1a-4b suggest moderated mediation. Specifically, the indirect effect of witnessing feedback on feedback seeking intentions is mediated via affect and moderated by feedback cues. As such, I make the following set of predictions:

Hypothesis 5: The negative indirect effect of witnessing unjust feedback on feedback seeking intentions is mediated through negative affect; feedback cue moderates the indirect effect such that it is stronger when feedback cues are self-referenced.

Hypothesis 6: The positive indirect effect of witnessing just feedback on feedback seeking intentions is mediated through positive affect; feedback cue moderates the indirect effect such that it is stronger when feedback cues are task-referenced.

CHAPTER II

METHODS

Sample

I collected data from Amazon Mechanical Turk (MTurk) workers using the CloudResearch recruitment platform (Douglas et al., 2023; Eyal et al., 2021). MTurk is an increasingly popular online data collection platform among social science researchers that provides easy access to an employed population (Zikar & Keith, 2022). It is a valid and reliable surveying platform that provides data with similar psychometric properties to data collected using other methods (Buhrmester et al., 2011; Keith et al., 2023). The MTurk population of workers are approximately representative of the U.S. population for gender, race, and ethnicity (Moss, 2020). To participate in the study, MTurk workers were required to be employed, working 26-45 hours a week, hold an approval rating of at least 95%, and could not have completed more than 5,000 hits (Robinson et al., 2019; Zikar & Keith, 2022). Participants were paid $2.50 for completing the survey, which took approximately 12 minutes to complete.

Using the Monte Carlo Power Analysis for Indirect Effects (Schoemann et al., 2017), I estimated that I needed approximately 500 participants to provide sufficient power to detect the indirect effects in the proposed model. I first conducted a pilot study to test that the manipulations were effective and to ensure timing was reasonable (N=55)[2]. Once the study was piloted, I collected data from 505 participants. I removed 35 participants after screening for data quality[3], resulting a final sample size of 470 participants. Approximately 59% of the sample

[2] Results from the pilot data can be found in the Appendix C.

[3] The following techniques were used in accordance with Zickar and Keith's (2022) recommendations for safeguarding data quality. First, I screened for bots by implementing a CAPTCHA image in the survey and preventing multiple submissions in the survey development platform. Second, I placed an instructed item (i.e., "please select strongly disagree") and a bogus item ("I am planning a vacation to Mars") among survey items that had a similar length and stem. Third, I asked three questions about the scenarios participants read (i.e., "What is the name of the supervisor?", "What job does Pat have?" and "What task did Pat complete?"). These items were opened-ended items to help identify potential bots and careless responding. A total of 26

identified as female, 71% identified as white, 28% worked in a managerial role where they supervised at least one employee, and the average age was 37.83 years old (*SD* = 10.28).

Manipulation

Participants read a vignette describing a situation in which Pat, a lawyer, solicits feedback from their supervisor, Lee, regarding a cross-examination Pat just completed. I asked participants to assume the role of Pat's coworker and Lee's employee (making Lee a shared supervisor) and respond to a series of items and demographic questions. To reduce potential bias towards any specific characters in the vignette, I omitted all pronouns and gender identifying information in the scenario and selected the names Pat and Lee, which are considered gender neutral names (Fleet & Atwater, 1997). The experiment was a 2 (unjust treatment, just treatment) x 2 (self-referenced feedback cue, task-referenced feedback cue) between participants factorial design with random assignment, resulting in 4 unique conditions (Unjust x Self, US; Unjust x Task, UT; Just x Self, JS; Just x Task, JT).

The interpersonal justice manipulation was adopted from two third-party experimental studies that manipulated interpersonal justice (O'Reilly et al., 2016; Skarlicki & Rupp, 2010). The studies were designed "according to the accepted criteria of interpersonal and informational justice, namely, justification, truthfulness, respect, propriety, and adequacy of explanations" (Skarlicki & Rupp, 2010, p. 947). For the feedback cue manipulation, I drew from the example of a defense lawyer that DeNisi and Kluger (2000) provide in their discussion of feedback cues. I also pulled from the examples, experiments, and survey scales that distinguish between person (i.e., ability) and process (i.e., effort) feedback (Dweck & Yeager, 2019; Kamins & Dweck,

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participants who failed to recall information from the scenario or to answer the bogus or instructed item correctly were removed. Fourth, I collected timing information for each page of the survey and total response time. A total of 9 participants who were considered extreme outliers (four were speedy, five were slow) in the time they spent on survey pages that measured the mediators or outcomes were removed.

1999; Lin, 2017; Schunk, 1983). Specifically, person feedback focuses on the ability within the person whereas process feedback focuses on use of strategies and exerted effort (Dweck & Yeager, 2019; Kamins & Dweck, 1999), which map onto self and task feedback cues.[4] The complete manipulation materials and survey items can be found in Appendix A and B.

Measures

Manipulation Checks

I measured interpersonal justice perceptions with four items from Colquitt's (2001) organizational justice measure, a scale used as a manipulation check in other third-party interpersonal justice experiments (i.e., O'Reilly et al., 2016). Participants indicated the extent to which their manager, Lee, treated their coworker, Pat, "in a polite manner", "with dignity", "with respect" and "refrained from improper remarks or comments" ($\alpha = .97$; 1 = *not at all*, 5 = *extremely*). The feedback cue manipulation check comprised of two items from Lin (2017; $\alpha = .70$[5]; 1 = *strongly disagree*, 4 = *strongly agree*). The items were, "According to Lee, Pat performed poorly because of Pat's lack of effort in preparing for the case" and "According to Lee, Pat performed poorly because of Pat's lack of ability as a lawyer."

[4] Manipulating feedback cues proves to be more difficult than manipulating interpersonal justice. In their analysis of feedback cues, Kluger and DeNisi (1996) list *many* variables that differ across level of specificity, content, and delivery all as feedback cues. For example, Kluger and DeNisi (1996) list feedback sign (positive vs negative), feedback frequency, and *14 different types of feedback content* (correct vs incorrect, attainment level, velocity, normative information, norms, feedback designed to discourage, feedback designed to praise, verbal vs written vs computer mediated, group performance feedback) all under feedback cues. Subsequently, feedback scholars focus on different aspect of feedback as feedback cues. To my knowledge, there is no consistent or general way to measure feedback cues. Given how much the variables that are considered feedback cues differ, I take the approach of manipulating feedback cue as it is defined. That is, rather than making the logical leap and assumption that a variable can draw attention to different levels, I take a more direct approach to drawing attention to the self or to the task by providing feedback that talks about the self or the task through person and process feedback (Kamins & Dweck, 1999; Lin, 2017).

[5] Because the manipulation was designed so that participants received either effort or ability feedback, the two items on this scale should ideally have very low reliability. The item measuring ability was reverse coded before measuring the reliability of the feedback cue manipulation check. Because the scale was two-items, I used the Spearman-Brown reliability estimate (Eisinga et al., 2013).

Affective Feedback Reactions

To capture third-party positive (α = .88, 10 items) and negative (α = .92, 10 items) affective reactions, I used the 20-item Positive and Negative Affect Schedule (PANAS; Mackinnon et al., 1999; Watson, Clark, & Tellegen, 1988). Participants indicated on a scale of 1 (*to a small extent*) to 5 (*extremely*) the extent to which they experienced the emotions described by the PANAS adjectives (i.e., inspired, determined, distressed, upset, nervous) in response to the interaction between Pat and Lee.

Feedback Seeking Intentions

Feedback seeking intentions were measured with three items adapted from the inquiry dimension of the feedback seeking scale (α = .97; Ashford & Tsui, 1991). Participants reported how likely they would be to directly ask Lee "for information concerning your performance", " 'How am I doing?' ", and "for an informal appraisal" on a scale of 1 (*very unlikely*) to 5 (*very likely*).

Control Variables

I controlled for several individual differences. First, I controlled for neuroticism, one of the Big 5 personality traits, because this personality trait can affect how individuals respond to feedback (Ilies & Judge, 2005; Kluger & DeNisi, 1996) and injustice (Dhanani & LaPalme, 2019). It was measured with five items from the mini-IPIP (α = .66; Donnellan et al., 2006). Second, I controlled for feedback orientation. Feedback orientation refers to "an individual's overall receptivity to feedback and the extent to which the individual welcomes guidance and coaching" (London & Smithers, 2002 p. 82). I used the 20-item feedback orientation scale (α = .91; Linderbaum & Levy, 2010). The scale captures four dimensions (feedback utility, feedback self-efficacy, accountability, and social awareness), each with five items. Third, moral identity,

or if morality is highly valued, has been identified in reviews as an individual difference that affects third-party responses to mistreatment (Dhanini & LaPalme, 2019; O'Reilly & Aquino, 2011). Moral identity was measured with Aquino and Reed's moral identity scale ($\alpha = .76$; 2002). To measure moral identity, I presented a list of 10 characteristics of a moral person (i.e., honest, kind) and measured the degree to which the moral traits are central to their self-concept by asking how much they agree on a scale of 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 5 (*strongly agree*) with five statements (i.e., "I strongly desire to have these characteristics"). I also controlled for the demographic variables of age and gender, as they tend to be related to retribution tendencies and moral identity (Aquino & Reed, 2002; Skarlicki & Rupp, 2010). Across all scenarios, I held other important characteristics of the feedback environment (i.e., credibility and reputation of the feedback giver, task performed by feedback receiver) constant (Kluger & DeNisi, 1996).

CHAPTER III

RESULTS

Basic Assumptions

Before testing the hypotheses, I first checked that the basic assumptions of regression had been met. I checked for normality and outliers in mediator and outcome variables by creating histograms and box plots (Aguinis et al., 2013). I also checked for homoscedasticity of the residuals with Levene's test for equality of variances (Darlington & Hayes, 2017). I found that the distribution of values in the mediator and outcome were approximately normal but the variance in positive affect [$F(3, 466) = 8.58$, $p < .001$] and negative affect [$F(3,466) = 35.98$, $p < .001$] were significantly different across conditions. To address violating the homoscedasticity of residuals assumption, I ran all hypotheses tests using the Huber-White bootstrapping method, which provides robust standard errors in instances when residuals are not homoscedastic (Mansournia et al., 2021). Bootstrapping is also a robust approach to non-normal data (Darlington & Hayes, 2017). After the regression assumptions were checked, I examined the descriptive statistics (i.e., grand means, cell means, standard deviations) of all study variables, which can be found in Table 1.

Table 1

Descriptive Statistics

		Full Sample			Unjust x Self			Unjust x Task			Just x Self			Just x Task		
Variables	α	N	M	SD	N	M	SD	N	M	SD	N	M	SD	N	M	SD
Injustice perceptions	.97	470	2.08	1.31	120	1.22	0.63	120	1.36	0.67	115	1.97	0.93	115	3.82	0.95
Positive affect	.88	470	2.10	0.77	120	2.00	0.67	120	2.02	0.71	115	2.00	0.71	115	2.41	0.90
Negative affect	.92	470	2.13	0.88	120	2.46	0.87	120	2.38	0.87	115	2.19	0.78	115	1.49	0.61
Feedback seeking intentions	.97	470	2.39	1.22	120	1.73	0.90	120	2.18	1.06	115	2.13	1.05	115	3.54	1.05
Feedback orientation	.91	470	3.86	0.48	120	3.83	0.44	120	3.89	0.45	115	3.82	0.46	115	3.90	0.54
Neuroticism	.66	470	2.59	0.78	120	2.59	0.76	120	2.57	0.75	115	2.67	0.84	115	2.54	0.79
Age	-	470	37.83	10.28	120	40.17	10.65	120	38.52	10.78	115	37.83	9.84	115	37.83	10.28
Moral identity	.76	470	4.39	0.61	120	4.39	0.53	120	4.37	0.69	115	4.37	0.64	115	4.44	0.58
Gender	-	470	1.67	0.57	120	1.62	0.51	120	1.63	0.50	115	1.61	0.53	115	1.67	0.57

Note. For gender 1 = male, 2 = female, 3 = non-binary, 4 = prefer not to say.

Manipulation Checks

I tested whether the random assignment was effective by running one way ANOVAs on the following individual difference variables: agreeableness [$F(3,466) = 0.92$, $p = .430$], extraversion [$F(3,466) = 1.08$, $p = .356$], openness [$F(3,466) = 0.34$, $p = .799$], conscientiousness [$F(3,466) = 0.03$, $p = .993$], age [$F(3,464) = 1.33$, $p = .264$], race [$F(3,466) = 1.08$, $p = .358$], and gender [$F(3, 466) = 0.31$, $p = .820$]. The lack of significance on the various individual difference variables across the four conditions provides evidence that the random assignment was effective and eliminates these individual differences as potential counter explanations for my findings. This also addresses concerns expressed by Wulff and colleagues (2023) regarding cherry picking a subset of personality dimensions as control variables rather than controlling for all dimensions.

I also checked for the perceived gender of the supervisor (Lee) and employee (Pat). For the supervisor, 73% perceived Lee to be a male, 7% perceived Lee to be female, and 21% said Lee was equally likely to be male or female. This may be due in part to the gender stereotype that men are leaders (Eagly & Sczensy, 2009). I ran a one-way ANOVA and found that perceived gender of the supervisor did not vary according to experimental condition [F (3,466) = .466, $p = .720$)]. I also tested the model with and without perceived gender of the supervisor as a control variable and found that the results remained the same, so I ran all models without perceived gender as a control variable. For Pat, the employee, 35% perceived Pat to be male, 32% perceived Pat to be female, and 33% said Pat was equally likely to be male or female.

Justice Manipulation

I tested for the effectiveness of the justice manipulation by comparing the cell means of the perceived justice measure (i.e., the manipulation check) across the different experimental groups (Skarlicki & Rupp, 2010). When collapsed across feedback cue, participants in the just

conditions (M = 2.90, SD =1.32) compared to participants in the unjust conditions (M = 1.29, SD = 0.66) reported significantly higher justice perceptions $t(468) = 16.80$, $p < .001$, $d = 1.55$. When collapsed across justice condition, participants in the task-referenced condition (M = 2.57, SD = 1.48), compared to participants in the self-referenced condition (M = 1.60, SD = 0.88), reported significantly higher justice perceptions, $t(468) = 8.72$, $p < .001$, $d = 0.80$. Finally, when comparing mean justice perceptions across all four conditions, there were significant differences $F(3,466) = 256.00$, $p < .001$. Post hoc comparisons using the Tukey HSD test indicated that the JT condition (M_{JT} = 3.82, SD_{JT} = 0.95) had significantly higher justice perceptions than all other conditions (M_{US} = 1.22, SD_{US} = 0.63, p <.001, d = 3.23; M_{UT} = 1.37, SD_{UT} = 0.67, $p < .001$, d = 2.99; M_{JS} = 1.98, SD_{JS} = 0.93, $p < .001$, d = 1.97). The mean justice perceptions were significantly different across all conditions except for between the UT and US conditions (p =.526, d = .22). These results indicate that, overall, the justice manipulation was effective.

Feedback Cue Manipulation

The manipulation check for feedback cue comprised of asking participants to report their agreement[6] with whether Lee believed Pat performed poorly due to Pat's lack of ability (i.e., self-referenced feedback cue) and/or Pat's lack of effort (i.e., task-referenced feedback cue). I collapsed the justice conditions to create a task-referenced and self-referenced condition and conducted a Chi Square test of Independence for the two statements. The Chi Square tests of independence was significant for both the effort (i.e., task) statement $\chi^2(1) = 247.09$, $p < .001$ and the ability (i.e., self) statement $\chi^2(1) = 247.58$, $p < .001$. Specifically, the results indicate that participants in the self-referenced conditions were significantly more likely to agree that the feedback Pat received was ability based and disagree that it was effort based. Similarly,

[6] Although the scale originally had a 4-point response option, I collapsed the options into 1 = *disagree*, 2 = *agree* for more parsimonious reporting. The results were consistent across both the 4-point and 2-point response options.

participants in the task-referenced condition were significantly more likely to agree that the feedback Pat received was effort based and disagree that it was ability based. These results indicate that the feedback cue manipulation was effective.

Hypothesis Testing

I tested the model via the PROCESS macro (Model 7) in SPSS and the bootstrapped bias corrected 95% confidence interval (O'Reilly et al., 2016). Model results can be found in Table 2, Table 3, and Figure 4. Hypothesis 1a, which predicts that witnessing unjust feedback will result in negative affect, was supported (b= -0.30, SE = .11, p = .006). Hypothesis 1b, which predicts that witnessing just feedback will result in positive affect, was not supported (b = 0.02, SE = .09, p = .80).

Hypothesis 2 predicts that negative affect after witnessing an unjust feedback event is stronger when the feedback cues are self-referenced compared to task-referenced. The Justice x Feedback Cue interaction term was a significant predictor of negative affect (b = -0.59, SE = .14, p <.001; Figure 2). Follow up simple slope analyses indicate that task-referenced feedback cues were a stronger (b = -0.89, SE = .10, p < .001, 95% CI [-1.07, -.70]) moderator of the relationship between justice and negative affect than self-referenced feedback cues (b = -0.30, SE = .11, p = .006, 95% CI [-.51, -.09]). The significant difference in simple slopes indicates that the difference in negative affect when going from just to unjust treatment is larger when the feedback is task-referenced compared to when self-referenced, contrary to Hypothesis 2.

Hypothesis 3 predicts that positive affect after witnessing a just feedback event is stronger when the feedback cues are task-referenced compared to when self-referenced. The Justice x Feedback Cue interaction term was a significant predictor of positive affect (b = 0.40, SE =.13, p = .003; Figure 3). In support of Hypothesis 3, positive affect after witnessing a just

feedback event was stronger when the feedback cues were task-referenced (b = 0.42, SE = .10, p = <.001) but no significant changes in positive affect were present when the feedback cues were self-referenced (b = 0.02, SE = .09, p = .803).

Figure 2

The Interaction Between Justice and Feedback Cue on Negative Affect

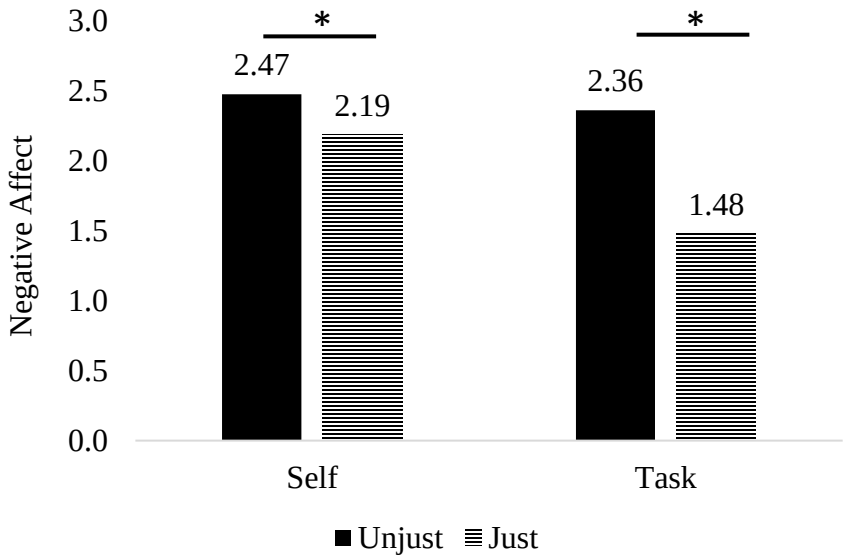
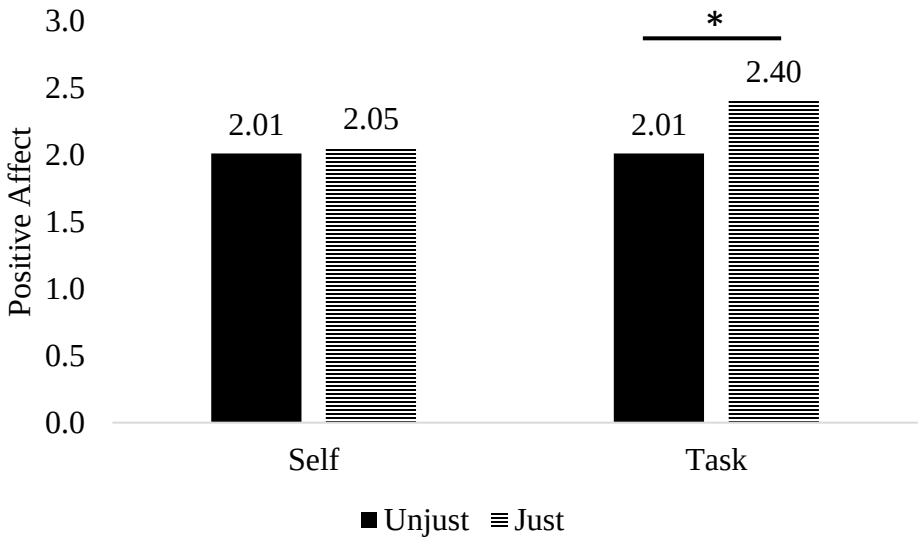


Figure 3

The Interaction Between Justice and Feedback Cue on Positive Affect



In support of Hypothesis 4a and Hypothesis 4b, negative affect was related to decreased feedback seeking intentions (b = -0.46, SE = .05, p <.001) while positive affect was related to increased feedback seeking intentions (b = 0.65, SE =.06, p < .001).

Hypothesis 5 predicts that the negative indirect effect of witnessing unjust feedback on feedback seeking intentions through negative affect will be stronger when feedback cues are self-referenced compared to task-referenced. Although both conditional indirect effects were significant, contrary to Hypothesis 5, the indirect effect through negative affect was stronger when feedback cues were task referenced (b = 0.41, SE = .06, 95% CI = [.29, .53]) compared to self-referenced (b = 0.14, SE =.05, 95% CI = [.04, .24]), as indicated by the index of moderated mediation (b = 0.27, SE = .07, 95% CI = [.13, .42]). Thus, Hypothesis 5 was not supported.

Hypothesis 6 predicts that the positive indirect effect of witnessing just feedback on feedback seeking intentions via positive affect will be stronger when the feedback is task-referenced compared to self-referenced. In support of Hypothesis 6, the indirect effect via positive affect was stronger when feedback cues were task-reference (*b* = 0.27, *SE* = .07, 95% CI = [.14, .42]) compared to self-referenced (*b* = 0.14, *SE* = .06, 95% CI = [-.10, .13]), as indicated by the index of moderated mediation (effect = 0.26, *SE* = .09, 95% CI = [.09, .45]).

Table 2

Results for Estimated Coefficients of the Moderated Mediation Model

	Positive Affect			Negative Affect			Feedback Seeking Intentions		
Variables	*b*	*SE*	*t*	*b*	*SE*	*t*	*b*	*SE*	*t*
Age	0.01	.00	3.46**	-0.01	.00	-1.63	-0.00	.00	-0.19
Gender	-0.05	.07	-0.74	0.08	.07	1.08	-0.06	.08	-0.75
Neuroticism	-0.04	.04	-0.86	0.15	.05	3.21**	0.09	.06	1.51
Moral identity	-0.23	.07	-3.09**	-0.02	.07	-0.22	-0.32	.07	-4.12***
Feedback orientation	0.42	.09	4.49**	0.19	.09	2.03*	0.46	.11	4.00***
Justice	0.02	.09	0.25	-0.30	.11	-2.76**	0.48	.09	5.22***
Feedback cue	0.00	.09	0.00	-0.10	.11	-0.95			
Justice X Feedback cue	0.40	.13	3.03**	-0.59	.14	-4.10***			
Positive affect							0.65	0.06	11.32***
Negative affect							-0.46	0.05	-9.06***
Constant	1.12	.45	2.47**	1.53	.45	3.40**	1.27	0.60	2.10*
R^2	.39			.47			.66		
F	9.88***			22.23***			66.52***		

Note. N =468 ; Justice 0 = unjust, 1 = just; Feedback cue, 0 = self-referenced , 1 = task-referenced; For gender, 1 = male, 2 = female, 3 = non-binary, 4 = prefer not to say. Unstandardized regression coefficients are reported.

* p < .05 ** p < .01 *** p < .001

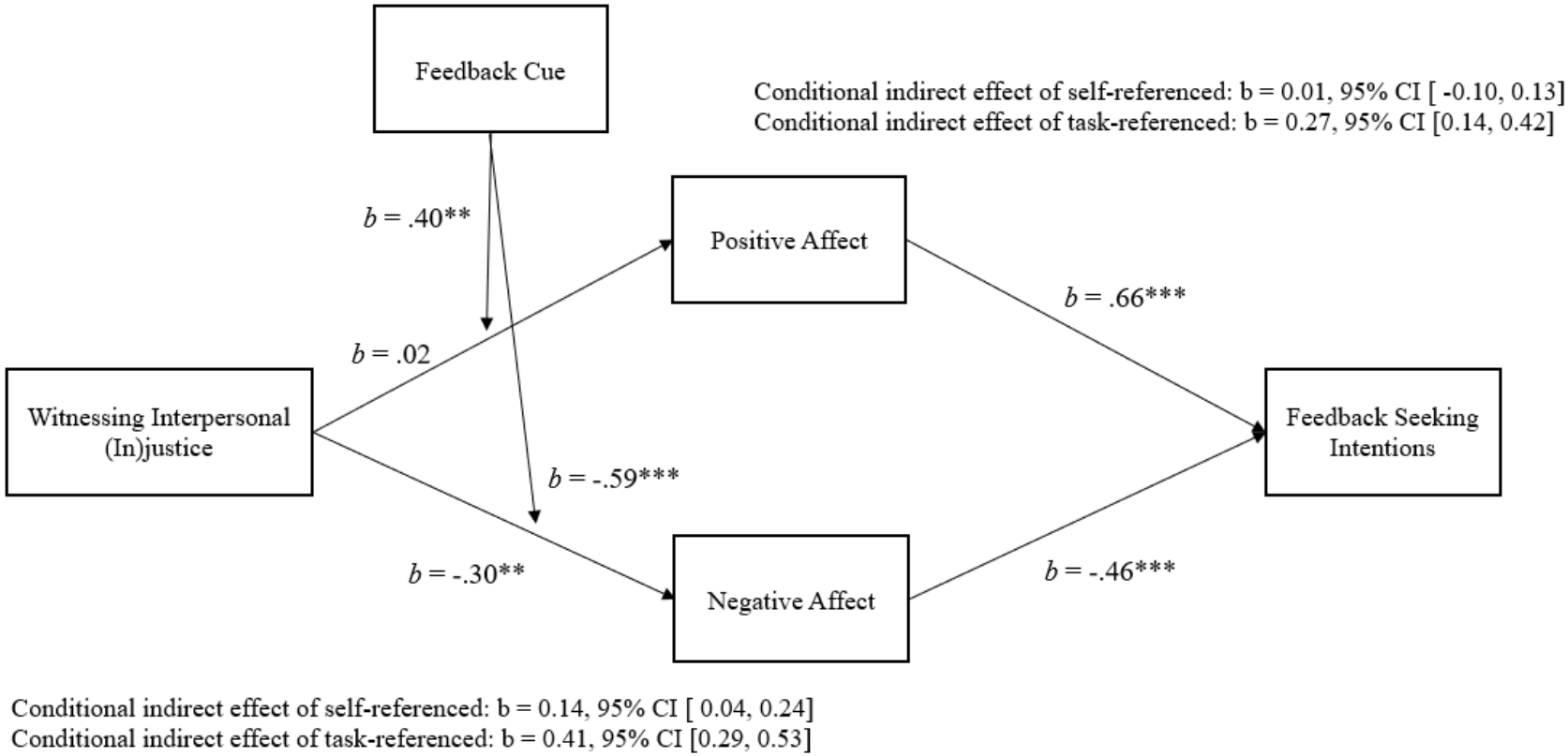
Table 3

Summary of Indirect Effects and Conditional Indirect Effects

Paths and effects	Estimates	SE	95% CI
Justice → Positive Affect → Feedback Seeking Intentions			
Conditional indirect effect: Self-referenced feedback cue	0.01	0.06	[-0.10, 0.13]
Conditional indirect effect: Task-referenced feedback cue	0.27	0.07	[0.14, 0.42]
Index of moderated mediation	0.26	0.09	[0.09, 0.45]
Justice → Negative Affect →Feedback Seeking Intentions			
Conditional indirect effect: Self-referenced feedback cue	0.14	0.05	[0.04, 0.24]
Conditional indirect effect: Task-referenced feedback cue	0.41	0.06	[0.29, 0.53]
Index of moderated mediation	0.27	0.08	[0.13, 0.42]

Figure 4

The Model with Path Estimates



Note: Witnessing (in)justice: 0 = unjust, 1 = just; Feedback cue: 0 = self-referenced feedback, 1 = task-referenced feedback; coefficients are unstandardized; 95% confidence interval; * p < .05 ** p < .01 *** p < .001

CHAPTER IV

DISCUSSION

The provision of feedback has predominately been treated as a dyadic event and this study is the first to move beyond the dyad and introduce a third-party to feedback events: the witness. Drawing from the dual processing model of third-party justice (Dhanini & LaPalme, 2019) and FIT (Kluger & DeNisi, 1996), I examined whether witnessing unjust [just] feedback events results in negative [positive] affect and subsequent decreased [increased] feedback seeking intentions. I also examined the moderating role of self and task-referenced feedback cues. I found that the negative [positive] affect resulting from witnessing an unjust [just] feedback event was related to decreased [increased] feedback seeking intentions, and task-referenced feedback cues strengthened these indirect relationships. This research meaningfully contributes to the literature in several ways.

Theoretical Implications

First, my research contributes to the feedback literature by introducing the existence of third parties to feedback events. The provision of feedback is a critical justice event (Elicker et al., 2006), and poor feedback delivery (e.g., being disrespectful, rude) can violate basic interpersonal justice rules surrounding the morality of how one should be treated (Skarlicki & Rupp, 2010). For the third-party, witnessing violations against the feedback receiver after asking for feedback can highlight their own potential for exploitation if they seek feedback (Skarlicki & Kulik, 2004). The finding that third parties experience negative affect and lower feedback seeking intentions after witnessing an unjust feedback event suggests that the consequence of providing feedback extends beyond the receiver to encompass other organizational members. This has implications for our current understanding of what shapes a feedback environment, or

the extent to which the workplace encourages feedback seeking (Whitaker et al., 2007). For example, current literature focused on feedback environments takes a dyadic approach by examining the supervisor-subordinate processes (Steelman et al., 2004, p.166) by measuring characteristics of the feedback (e.g., delivery, quality) and the feedback giver (e.g., credibility, source; Steelman et al., 2004). Some scholars have acknowledged that the current conceptualization of feedback environments is limited in its focus and does not address contextual variables (Whitaker et al., 2007). My findings that witnessing a feedback event can impact feedback seeking intentions suggests that third-parties may contribute to the development of a positive or negative feedback environment.

Second, by examining affect as a mediator between witnessing justice and feedback seeking intentions, I contribute to the third-party justice literature. Affect is an often invoked but rarely tested process through which outcomes occur after witnessing injustice (e.g., Dhanini & LaPalme, 2019; Skarliki & Kulik, 2004). Guided by Dhanani and LaPalme's (2019) dual processing model of third-party justice, I examine negative and positive affect as mediators in the System I information processing route, which reflect fast and automatic emotional appraisals. I found that negative affect was a consistent mediator between witnessing an unjust feedback event and decreased feedback seeking intentions across both task and self-referenced feedback cues. On the other hand, positive affect was only a mediator between witnessing justice and increased feedback seeking when the feedback cues were task-referenced. The strength of the conditional indirect effect of self-referenced feedback cues on negative affect were stronger than that of positive affect, which were non-significant. The consistency of negative affect compared to conditionality of positive affect as a mediator is in line with the "bad is stronger than good" principal (Barclay & Kiefer, 2014; Baumeister et al., 2001), which argues that negative

experiences and emotions can have a stronger and longer lasting impact than positive experiences (Baumeister et al., 2001). Similarly, the finding that there was a main effect of witnessing injustice on negative affect but no main effect of witnessing justice on positive affect suggests that injustice can evoke affect more easily than justice, which may need more information present to elicit positive reactions. These distinctions can inform the vast body of justice research that either explicitly or implicitly evokes emotions as explanatory mediators between justice and outcomes (Barclay & Kiefer, 2014).

Relatedly, phenomena like emotional contagion, where emotional reactions can spread across people and effect organizational performance (Vijayalakshmi & Bhattacharyya, 2012), may be relevant when considering the broader implications of third-party affective reactions to feedback. Third parties who experience affective reactions represent a unique source of affect outside of the dyad that can spread across a team. An additional source of affect may potentially exacerbate or buffer negative affect spreading across a team depending on their reactions to what they witnessed to impact a variety of outcomes (Barsade et al., 2018), such as relational outcomes with the manager.

Finally, by examining the moderating role of task and self-referenced feedback cues, I contribute to our understanding of a central but understudied tenant of FIT (Kluger & DeNisi, 1996). I found mixed support for the moderating role of feedback cues. Consistent with FIT, task-referenced feedback cues strengthened the indirect positive relationship between witnessing just treatment and feedback seeking via positive affect. Task-referenced feedback is generally found to be useful and informative (VandeWalle, 2003), as it draws attention to controllable actions and strategies the person can engage in to improve their performance. FIT also suggests that self-referenced feedback should strengthen the indirect negative relationship between

witnessing unjust treatment and feedback seeking via negative affect. While there was support for this relationship, task-referenced feedback cues were a stronger moderator of negative affect than self-referenced feedback cues. One potential explanation for this finding is a ceiling effect in negative affect in response to justice violations in the self-referenced conditions. Specifically, when comparing negative affect in the two self-referenced conditions (just and unjust), both conditions contain at least one aspect of injustice because both conditions have self-referenced feedback. Third parties are sensitive to justice violations and can experience strong reactions to injustice even if they have no relationship with the one being mistreated (Jones & Skarlicki, 2005; Skarlicki & Kulik, 2004; Skarlicki & Rupp, 2010). As such, there may have been a ceiling effect in negative affect and thus a weaker interaction between the self-referenced feedback conditions. However, when comparing negative affect in the task-referenced conditions (just and unjust), one condition had a justice violation whereas the other had no justice violations. This difference may have allowed for a stronger interaction between the task-referenced conditions.

Practical Implications

Negative feedback can be difficult for managers to give, and when tasked with giving negative feedback, managers may delay providing feedback, avoid the process, or distort the feedback to be more positive to avoid backlash from the receiver (Murphy et al., 2019). To make matters worse, this study highlights that the potential reactions from witnesses should also be on a manager's radar when providing feedback. I provide two practical recommendations to managers tasked with giving negative feedback to reduce potential negative backlash from witnesses. Managers often have a lot of discretion in their interpersonal interactions with their employees and therefore many opportunities to either violate or uphold justice rules (Scott et al., 2007; Scott et al., 2009). As such, managers should be cognizant of how they speak and treat

their employees from an interpersonal standpoint (e.g., respect, dignity, politeness), particularly when providing negative feedback. Employees pay attention the treatment their coworkers receive and draw conclusions on what to expect from their managers based on the treatment (Skarlick & Kulick, 2004). Second, managers should provide feedback that is detailed, relevant to the task, and focused on controllable behaviors to elicit more positive reactions to negative feedback. Simply put, managers should take extra caution when delivering negative feedback to ensure that they are treating their employees with respect and dignity. Providing feedback that is both respectful and detailed can elicit positive reactions from any potential witnesses and develop a more positive feedback environment.

Limitations and Future Research

The results of the study should be interpreted with consideration of its limitations. Although experimental designs allow for stronger causal inferences, their generalizability and ecological validity is limited, particularly for vignette studies where participants are asked what they would do in a situation (Hershcovis & Bhatnager, 2017). For example, I measured feedback seeking intentions in a hypothetical setting rather than actual feedback seeking behaviors. Real scenarios, compared to hypothetical ones, may elicit strong reactions from third parties (Hershcovis & Bhatnager, 2017). Examining third-party feedback reactions and feedback seeking within an employment setting through research designs such as longitudinal survey studies can supplement the current research and strengthen the ecological validity of the current findings.

Relatedly, the experimental design used in this study involves randomly assigning participants to levels of the independent variable (X) and measuring the mediating (M) and dependent variables (Y). This common type of experimental design is limited in its ability to

fully assess mediation, as it provides statistical, but not causal, evidence of a mediation relationship (Pirlott & MacKinnon, 2016). Specifically, mediation models contain multiple causal paths (i.e., X → M, M→ Y), but the current experimental design only enables causal interpretation of the X→M relationship. The M→ Y relationship is still correlational, and thus suffers the same limitations that correlational designs suffer (e.g., lack of random assignment and potential for confounding variables). Future studies should consider supplementing the current findings with a design that manipulate the mediators to determine the casual effects of M on Y (see Pirlott & MacKinnon, 2016 for a detailed discussion on the topic).

Despite these limitations, the topic of third parties to feedback is an area ripe for research and there are several avenues scholars can take to expand our current understanding. The first avenue is to qualify the current findings through the examination of moderators and contextual variables. This includes examining whether characteristics (i.e., race, gender, personality, credibility) of the feedback giver, receiver, and/or witness match or differ from one another and how that may influence third-party reactions. Variables like third-party relationship with the victim and victim's own reactions can also play a role in third-party reactions (Dhanini & LaPalme, 2019).

A second avenue researchers could take is expanding our current findings by examining different mediators or antecedents. For example, Dhanini and LaPalme's (2019) dual processing model of third-party reactions to mistreatment presents both System I and System II information processes as mediators of third-party reactions to witnessing mistreatment. In the current study, I focused only on positive and negative affect, which fall under System I processing. To gain a wholistic understanding of how third parties react to feedback, future studies should also study the System II information process route through the examination of cognitive reactions such as

feedback utility and cost. Similarly, my primary focus in the current study was interpersonal justice. While third parties are particularly concerned with interpersonal justice violations, they can still react to procedural and distributive justice (O'Reilly et al., 2016). It would be beneficial to examine reactions to these other forms of justice, as they have long-term implications in the feedback context (i.e., who gets a promotion, Murphy et al., 2019). This can be done by studying third-party reactions in a more formal feedback setting, such as in a performance appraisal.

A third avenue researchers can take is a methodological one. In the current study, I solely focused on witnessing feedback events firsthand. However, scholars argue that an individual can be a third party to justice either by witnessing it firsthand or through secondhand accounts (i.e., by hearing about it; Skarlick & Kulik, 2004). The distinction between witnessing an event firsthand or secondhand may impact affective reactions, with potentially stronger reactions when witnessing it directly (Dhanani & LaPalme, 2019). Further, the firsthand witness's own interpretations, emotions, and biased or selective memory of the event (Levine & Pizarro, 2004; Schacter et al., 2011; Tversky & Marsh, 2000) can alter how they retell the event to others, potentially biasing the reactions of third parties who only hear about the event rather than witnessing. Examining this distinction in the types of feedback witnesses (i.e., directly witness vs heard about the event from the feedback receiver vs giver vs other witnesses) can help researchers better understand third parties' reactions across situations. This distinction can also lend way to future research in the emotional contagion and social network literature (Barclay & Kiefer, 2014). It would be valuable to examine how the affect that a firsthand witness experiences spreads or flows among their network as they retell the feedback event to secondhand witnesses, who may also retell the event, to impact team and organizational outcomes. Variables such as how connected a firsthand or secondhand witness is, and who they

are connected to (i.e., feedback receiver or giver) can provide nuance and depth into our understanding of how affect may spread among a team and the complex ways a feedback environment develops.

CHAPTER V

CONCLUSION

This research provides meaningful contributions to the feedback literature by expanding our understanding of feedback events from dyadic events to multi-party events. By drawing from the dual processing model of third-party mistreatment (Dhanani & LaPalme, 2019) and feedback intervention theory (Kluger & DeNisi, 1996), my study reveals that third parties experience affective reactions to feedback events and subsequent feedback seeking intentions, which are stronger when feedback content focuses on the details and actions involved in completing the task. These findings underscore the importance and widespread implications of the delivery and content of feedback messages.

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APPENDIX A

MANIPULATION MATERIALS

This section of this appendix contains the four different scenarios that were presented to participants, representing the four experimental conditions (Unjust x Task, Unjust x Self, Just x Task, Just x Self).

The following scenario takes place between an employee (Pat) and their leader (Lee).

- Both Pat and Lee are lawyers working on the same case.
- Lee is a leader who does a satisfactory job as a leader, and you and your team members feel neutral Lee. While not a terrible leader, Lee is also not an exceptionally motivating and inspirational leader.
- Pat is a junior lawyer. He loves being a lawyer and hopes to have a successful law career.
- Please assume Pat is your coworker and Lee is your leader.

You, Pat, and Lee are working on an important case. Pat just completed an important cross examination of a witness. During the cross-examination, Pat made a few mistakes. After court is adjourned, you and your team meet outside of the courthouse to informally discuss the case. During this team meeting, Pat seeks feedback from Lee, asking "How did I do with the cross examination?"

Unjust Treatment x Self-Referenced Feedback:
Lee your supervisor, told Pat rather harshly that they could only discuss the cross-examination for a few minutes. Lee was rude and discourteous with Pat. Lee proceeds to tell Pat in the team meeting: "My job as the leader is tougher than your cross-examination. Your career is the last thing on my mind. You lack the ability and competence to cross-examine. I'm very disappointed in you. Conducting a cross-examination is the Lee of a true lawyer. Do you have what it takes to be a lawyer if you can't do this right?"
Unjust Treatment x Task-Referenced Feedback:
Lee your supervisor, told Pat rather harshly that they could only discuss the cross-examination for a few minutes. Lee was rude and discourteous with Pat. Lee proceeds to tell Pat in the team meeting: "My job as the leader is tougher than your cross-examination. Your career is the last thing on my mind. You made a few mistakes. Not enough effort was put into developing your questions. You didn't read the documents carefully to understand the details of the case. You didn't structure your questions in the right format for a cross-examination."
Just Treatment x Self-Referenced Feedback:
Lee, your supervisor, told Pat rather softly that they could only discuss the cross-examination for a few minutes. Lee was kind and courteous with Pat. Lee proceeds to tell Pat in the team meeting: "I assume this cross-examination is important for your career goals, so I want you to know that I'm taking my job of giving you feedback seriously. You lack the ability and competence to cross-examine. I'm very disappointed in you. Conducting a cross-examination is the Lee of a true lawyer. Do you have what it takes to be a lawyer if you can't do this right?"
Just Treatment x Task-Referenced Feedback:
Lee, your supervisor, told Pat rather softly that they could only discuss the cross-examination for a few minutes. Lee was kind and courteous with Pat. Lee proceeds to tell Pat in the team meeting: "I assume this cross-examination is important for your career goals, so I want you to know that I'm taking my job of giving you feedback seriously. You made a few mistakes. Not enough effort was put into developing your questions. You didn't read the documents carefully to understand the details of the case. You didn't structure your questions in the right format for a cross-examination."

APPENDIX B

SURVEY INSTRUMENT

This appendix contains the items I asked participants to answer, including the manipulation check and attention checks. Items that have a (R) at the end of them reflect reverse scored items. Text that is italicized reflects the prompts that were presented to participants.

Interpersonal Justice Perceptions Manipulation Check
To what extent (1= not at all, 5 = extremely) has:

- Lee treated Pat in a polite manner.
- Lee treated Pat with dignity.
- Lee treated Pat with respect.
- Lee refrained from improper remarks or comments.

Feedback Cue Manipulation Check
According to Lee, Pat performed poorly because of (1= strongly disagree, 4 = strongly agree):

- Pat's lack of effort in preparing for the case
- Pat's lack of ability as a lawyer

Affect
Please indicate the extent (1= not at all, 5 = extremely) to which you feel the following emotions in response to the interaction between Lee and Pat.

- Excited
- Enthusiastic
- Alert
- Inspired
- Determined
- Interested
- Strong
- Proud
- Attentive
- Active
- Distressed
- Upset
- Scared
- Nervous
- Afraid
- Guilty
- Hostile
- Irritable
- Ashamed

Feedback Seeking Intentions
How likely (1 = very unlikely; 5 = very likely) would you be to:

- Directly ask Lee for information concerning your performance
- Directly ask Lee "how am I doing?"
- Directly ask Lee for an informal appraisal

Age

- How old are you?

Gender

- What gender do you identify with?
  - Male
  - Female
  - Non-Binary

Work Role

- Which of the following most closely describes your **work role**?
  - Individual contributor (does not manage a team, not a supervisor)
  - Manager/Supervisor (supervisor of one or more individual contributors)

Feedback Orientation

Please indicate whether you agree with the following statements (1= strongly disagree, 5 = strongly agree):

- Utility
  - Feedback contributes to my success at work.
  - To develop my skills at work, I rely on feedback.
  - Feedback is critical for improving performance.
  - Feedback from supervisors can help me advance in a company.
  - I find that feedback is critical for reaching my goals.
- Feedback Self-Efficacy
  - I feel self-assured when dealing with feedback
  - Compared to others, I am more competent at handling feedback
  - I believe that I have the ability to deal with feedback effectively.
  - I feel confident when responding to both positive and negative feedback.
  - I know that I can handle the feedback that I receive.
- Accountability
  - It is my responsibility to apply feedback to improve my performance.
  - I hold myself accountable to respond to feedback appropriately
  - I don't feel a sense of closure until I respond to feedback
  - If my supervisor gives me feedback, it is my responsibility to respond to it.
  - I feel obligated to make changes based on feedback.
- Social Awareness
  - I try to be aware of what other people think of me.
  - Using feedback, I am more aware of what people think of me.
  - Feedback helps me manage the impression I make on others.
  - Feedback lets me know how I am perceived by others.
  - I rely on feedback to help me make a good impression.

Moral Identity

Listed below are some characteristics that may describe a person. The person with these characteristics could be you or it could be someone else. For a moment, visualize in your mind the kind of person who has these characteristics. Imagine how that person would think, feel, and act. When you have a clear image of what this person would be like, answer the following questions (1 = strongly disagree, 5 = strongly agree).

Caring
Compassionate
Fair
Friendly
Generous

Hardworking
Helpful
Honest
Kind

- It would make me feel good to be a person who has these characteristics.
- Being someone who has these characteristics is an important part of who I am
- I would be ashamed to be a person who has these characteristics. (R)
- Having these characteristics is not really important to me. (R)
- I strongly desire to have these characteristics.

Big 5 Personality

Please think about yourself in general when responding to the following statements (1 = strongly disagree, 5 = strongly agree):

- Extraversion
  - I am the life of the party.
  - I talk to a lot of different people at parties.
  - I don't talk a lot. (r)
  - I keep in the background. (r)
- Agreeable
  - I sympathize with others' feelings
  - I feel others' emotions.
  - I am not interested in other people's problems. (r)
  - I am not really interested in others. (r)
- Conscientiousness
  - I get chores done right away.
  - I like order.
  - I make a mess of things. (r)
  - I often forget to put things back in their proper place. (r)
- Neuroticism
  - I have frequent mood swings.
  - I get upset easily.
  - I am relaxed most of the time. (r)
  - I seldom feel blue. (r)
- Openness
  - I have a vivid imagination.
  - I am not interested in abstract ideas. (r)
  - I have difficulty understanding abstract ideas. (r)
  - I do not have a good imagination. (r)

Attention Checks

- "Please select the 'strongly disagree' response option"
- "I am planning a trip to Mars" (true/false)
- "What was the name of the supervisor in the story?"
- "What job does Pat have?"
- "What task did Pat complete?"

APPENDIX C

PILOT DATA

This appendix contains a description of the pilot sample data and the results from the analyses ran on the data.

Pilot Data Results

The total sample size was 56 after removing six participants due to data quality (i.e., missing attention checks or careless responding). 52% of the sample was male, 43% were in a managerial role, 79% were white, and the average was 40 years old (*SD* = 11.09). I asked participants the gender they perceived Lee, the supervisor, to be and 64% reported they perceived Lee to be male, 16% reported female, and 18% said Lee was equally likely to be male or female. For Pat, the employee, 43% perceived Pat to be male, 30% female, and 27% said Pat was equally likely to be male or female.

I tested for the effectiveness of the justice manipulation by comparing the cell means of the perceived justice measure (i.e., the manipulation check) across the different experimental groups (Skarlicki & Rupp, 2010). When collapsed across feedback cue, participants in the just conditions (*M* =3.28, *SD* =1.25) compared to participants in the unjust conditions (*M* = 1.57, *SD* =0.87) reported significantly higher justice perceptions $t(54) = 5.87$, $p < .001$, $d = 1.57$. When collapsed across justice condition, participants in the task-referenced condition (*M* = 2.99, *SD* =1.46), compared to participants in the self-referenced feedback cue condition (M =2.02, SD =1.15), reported significantly higher justice perceptions, $t(54) = 2.76$, $p = .008$, $d = .74$. Finally, when comparing mean justice perceptions across all four conditions, there were significant differences $F(3,52) = 22.96$, $p < 001$. Post hoc comparisons using the Tukey HSD test indicated that the JT condition (M_{JT} =4.11 , SD_{JT} =0.51) had significantly higher justice perceptions than all other conditions (M_{US} =1.58, SD_{US} =0.87, $p < .001$; M_{UT} =1.57, SD_{UT} =0.90, $p < .001$; M_{JS} = 2.50, SD_{JS} = 1.25, $p < .001$). These results indicate that, overall, the justice manipulation was effective.

The manipulation check for feedback cue comprised of asking participants to report their agreement[7] with whether Lee believed Pat performed poorly due to Pat's lack of ability (i.e., self-referenced feedback cue) and Pat's lack of effort (i.e., task-referenced feedback cue). I collapsed the conditions to create a task-referenced and self-referenced condition and conducted a Chi Square test of Independence for the two statements. The Chi Square tests of independence was significant for both the effort (i.e., task) statement $\chi^2(1) = 16.77$, $p < .001$ and the ability (i.e., self) statement $\chi^2(1) = 16.07$, $p < .001$. Specifically, the results indicate that participants in the self-referenced conditions were significantly more likely to agree that the feedback Pat received was ability based and disagree that it was effort based. Similarly, participants in the task-referenced condition were significantly more likely to agree that the feedback Pat received was effort based and disagree that it was ability based. These results indicate that the feedback cue manipulation was effective.

[7] Although the scale originally had a 4-point response option, I collapsed the options into 1 = *disagree*, 2 = *agree* for more parsimonious reporting. The results were consistent across both the 4-point and 2-point response options.

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Education

Ph.D. **Old Dominion University, Expected 2023**
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Major: Psychology, GPA: 4.0/4.0
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M.S. **Old Dominion University; Norfolk, VA (2019)**
Major: Psychology; GPA: 4.0/4.0
Thesis: *Who receives more family related support in the workplace? A meta-analysis of gender differences in family related support.*

B.S. **James Madison University; Harrisonburg, VA (2017)**
Major: Psychology; Minor: Statistics; GPA 4.0/4.0
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Job Experience

Associate Researcher*, Society for Human Resource Management;* *5/19 - current*

- Support the survey development, data analysis, and reporting for the research department on topics including the future of leadership, pay equity, paid family leave, women in leadership, and skills-based hiring
- Project lead for a longitudinal study of the impact of COVID-19 on employee mental health and well-being
- Develop technical and public research reports for SHRM members

Peer-Reviewed Journal Publications

Xu, X., Peng, Y., Ma, J., & **Jalil, D.** (2023). Does working hard really pay off? Testing the temporal ordering between workaholism and job performance. *Journal of Occupational and Organizational Psychology*. https://doi.org/10.1111/joop.12441

Xu, X., Jiang, L., Probst, T. M., Shoss, M. K., & **Jalil, D**. (2022). How national culture shapes employee reactions to job insecurity: The role of national corruption. *European Journal of Work and Organizational Psychology, 32,* 60-78.

Jalil, D., Xu, X., Jiang, L., & Wang, H. (2022). Do not ask, but you shall receive: Newcomer reactions to receiving negative gossip. *Stress & Health, 38,* 989-1000. https://doi.org/10.1002/smi.3150

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