

THE COMPLEX EFFECTS OF EQUITY SENSITIVITY ON JOB COMMITMENT AND  
SATISFACTION: A PILOT STUDY

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## ABSTRACT

According to equity theory (Adams, 1963, 1965), employees determine whether they are being treated fairly by comparing what they give to and receive from their organization to that of other employees. Individual perceptions of equity differ in the workplace, a phenomenon Huseman, Hatfield, and Miles, (1987) labeled *equity sensitivity*, which ranges from benevolents, those who accept low levels of equity, to entitleds, who desire more favorable outcomes for themselves. Davison and Bing (2008) developed two components of equity sensitivity, benevolence and entitlement, which are the focus of the present study. These dimensions were tested to examine whether a sense of entitlement negatively affected an employee's commitment to their organization and job satisfaction. This pilot study the underlying equity theory and equity sensitivity theory and used findings to suggest a means by which future studies can help to develop a better measure of equity sensitivity.

## DEDICATION

This thesis is dedicated to my mother, Lisa Gooch-Phifer; my father, Kirk Phifer; my sister, Michelle Phifer; and my fiancée, Madeline Leonard, who have taught me how perseverance, care, hard work, and love are truly manifested. Thank you all for serving as exemplars to me. I dedicate this thesis to Austin Brooks, Matthew Mehlberg, Caleb Wade, Christian Stone, and Drake Terry; thank you each for picking up the phone when I call and listening when I speak, even if the topics couldn't be further from your areas of interest. I also dedicate this thesis to the late Dr. Mark Bing and his wife Dr. Kristl Davison for their contributions to academic research over many years. Finally, I dedicate this thesis to the Society for Industrial and Organizational Psychology, the American Psychological Association, the Tennessee Psychological Association, and the Chattanooga Industrial-Organizational Psychology group.

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## TABLE OF CONTENTS

ABSTRACT.....	iv
DEDICATION.....	v
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS.....	vi
LIST OF TABLES.....	ix
LIST OF FIGURES.....	x
LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS.....	xi
LIST OF SYMBOLS.....	xii
CHAPTER	
I. INTRODUCTION & LITERATURE REVIEW.....	1
Equity Theory.....	1
Equity Sensitivity.....	2
Organizational Commitment.....	4
Job Satisfaction.....	7
Statement of the Problem.....	8
II. METHODOLOGY.....	10
Participants.....	10
Procedures.....	10
Measures.....	11
Equity Sensitivity.....	11
Organizational Commitment.....	12
Job Satisfaction.....	14
III. RESULTS.....	16

IV. DISCUSSION .....	22
Summary of Findings .....	22
Limitations of the Study .....	22
Conclusions and Suggestions for Further Research .....	23
REFERENCES .....	27
APPENDIX	
A. IRB APPROVAL E-MAIL.....	30
B. RESEARCH LETTER TO RECRUITS .....	32
C. INFORMED CONSENT FORM.....	34
D. DAVISON AND BING’S (2009) EQUITY SENSITIVITY INSTRUMENT.....	36
E. MOWDAY ET AL.’S (1979) ORGANIZATIONAL COMMITMENT QUESTIONNAIRE .....	39
F. ZABLAH ET AL.’S (2016) JOB SATISFACTION SCALE .....	43
VITA.....	45



## LIST OF TABLES

2.1	Benevolence Reliability Analysis.....	13
2.2	Benevolence Scale Correlations .....	13
2.3	Entitlement Reliability Analysis.....	13
2.4	Entitlement Scale Correlations .....	14
3.1	Descriptive Statistics .....	16
3.2	Correlations.....	16
3.3	Interaction Testing of Moderating Effect of Entitlement on Relationship Between Benevolence and Organizational Commitment .....	18
3.4	Interaction Testing of Moderating Effect of Entitlement on Relationship Between Benevolence and Job Satisfaction .....	18
3.5	Regression Analysis of Benevolence, Entitlement, and Organizational Commitment With Bootstrapping.....	19
3.6	Regression Analysis of Benevolence, Entitlement, and Job Satisfaction With Bootstrapping.....	19

## LIST OF FIGURES

1.1	3-D scatter plot of benevolence, entitlement, and organizational commitment .....	20
1.2	3-D scatter plot of benevolence, entitlement, and job satisfaction .....	21
1.3	Proposed model of equity sensitivity.....	26

## LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

OCB, Organizational Citizenship Behavior

OCQ, Organizational Commitment Questionnaire

ESI, Equity Sensitivity Instrument

## LIST OF SYMBOLS

$\alpha$ , Cronbach's alpha

$n$ , Number of members of sample

$N$ , Number of members of population

$r$ , Estimate of Pearson product-moment correlation coefficient

$M$ , Mean

$p$ , The probability of finding the observed results when the null hypothesis is true

$\chi^2$ , Chi-square

Adj.  $R^2$ , adjusted proportion of variance accounted for in a multiple regression

$F$ , the ANOVA test statistic

$\beta$ , Standardized regression weight

$t$ , T-statistic

## CHAPTER I

### INTRODUCTION & LITERATURE REVIEW

Organizations are concerned with factors that improve employee performance. Researchers in industrial-organizational psychology have found that high levels of organizational commitment and job satisfaction are related to higher levels of performance (Judge, Thoresen, Bono, & Patton, 2001; Riketta, 2002). Equity theory (Adams, 1963) suggests that employees compare their own efforts and outcomes to those of others. The present study was designed to examine the effect of an understudied construct, equity sensitivity (Huseman, Hatfield, & Miles, 1987) which is a personality variable that reflects individual differences in perceptions of equity. The two dimensions of equity sensitivity proposed by Davison and Bing (2008), benevolence and entitlement, were compared to each other to determine whether higher levels of entitlement resulted in a weaker relationships between benevolence and organizational commitment and job satisfaction. Study results failed to support the hypothesized moderation, but highlighted issues with the existing equity sensitivity measures that need to be addressed in future studies of scale development.

#### **Equity Theory**

Among the many antecedents of commitment and satisfaction identified in literature, researchers have paid significant attention to organizational justice as reflected in equity theory (Adams, 1963). Organizational justice reflects perceptions of fairness at work, which can include

resource distributions or the procedures used to develop those distributions (Colquitt, Conlon, Wesson, Porter, & Yee Ng, 2001). Equity theory states that individuals determine fairness by comparing their ratio of outcomes to inputs with those of a referent other (Adams, 1963). Balanced ratios result in feelings of equity, while an imbalance results in either positive or negative inequity (Adams, 1963). An imbalance motivates the individual to reduce or eliminate the perceived gap between effort and reward to achieve equity, by altering inputs or outputs, altering perceptions of own or other's inputs or outputs, changing the referent, or withdrawing from the situation (Adams, 1965). One suggested problem in this theory, which was challenged over 20 years later, lies in the underpinning of universality; perhaps not all employees seek to achieve fairness at work in exactly the same way.

### **Equity Sensitivity**

Huseman, Hatfield, and Miles (1987) challenged the original concept of equity theory, claiming that although individuals react to an imbalance of compared ratios in consistent ways, they do so in individually different ways because of individuals preferences for equity. Huseman et al. brought forward a new construct of equity, equity sensitivity, which they described as a personality variable that reflects the individual differences in reactions to inequity. Huseman et al. divided equity sensitivity into three classes of individuals represented along the equity sensitivity continuum: benevolents, equity sensitives, and entitleds. *Benevolents* accept, but do not necessarily desire, negative inequity, that is, a situation in which their ratio of outputs to inputs is lower than that of the referent resulting in being under-rewarded. *Entitleds* prefer positive inequity, where their output to input ratio exceeds that of the referent. They tend to be dissatisfied with the situation regardless of its perceived favorability to an objective observer.

Those labeled as *equity sensitives* are those who see a balanced relationship with the referent as the basis for determining whether the situation is equitable (Huseman et al., 1987).

In their reconceptualization of the Huseman et al. (1987) equity sensitivity model, Davison and Bing (2008) split the benevolent-entitled continuum into two dimensions: an input focus, reflecting benevolence, and an output focus, which they labeled entitlement. Individuals could range from low to high on each dimension, expanding upon the classes of individual proposed by Huseman et al. (1987). In this model, individuals can harbor levels of both benevolence and entitlement. Davison and Bing (2008) identified those high in input focus and low in outcome focus as *benevolents*. Individuals low in input focus and high on outcome focus they deemed *entitleds*.

Huseman et al. (1987) were the first researchers to identify elements of cognition and affect present within equity sensitivity. Referring to Adams (1965, 1963), Huseman et al. stated that one proposition of equity theory is that employees work to balance their perceived ratio of inputs and outcomes in many ways, one of which is cognitively distorting those inputs and outcomes. Huseman et al. acknowledged that the greater the inequity an individual perceived, the more distress the individual feels. They proposed that *equity sensitives* experience more negative affect than *benevolents* and *entitleds* due to feeling distressed when being under-rewarded and also feeling guilty when being overrewarded. Schnake (1991) noted that the *sucker effect*, the perception of inequity by way of a lack of group member's performance, is a cognitive decision and, as predicted by Adams, motivates individuals to seek to balance their perceived ratio of inputs and outcomes, often by withholding performance (outcome) or making other adjustments to inputs or outcomes.

Huseman et al. (1987) proposed that equity sensitivity moderates the relationships between perceptions of equity and overall perceptions of organizational justice and organizational outcomes. However, Davison and Bing (2008) added a fourth dimension, which they categorized as *equity indifference*, to account for individuals unconcerned with the input-outcome ratio, suggesting that these individuals would do little to adjust their equity ratios in the face of an imbalance. The present pilot study tested Davison and Bing's (2008) model and identified potential issues with their equity sensitivity measure which should be addressed in future research.

### **Organizational Commitment**

King and Miles (1994) noted the importance of comparative constructs identify predictable overlap with measures of similar constructs without being duplicative (King & Miles, 1994). They identified organizational commitment as dissimilar to equity sensitivity to establish the uniqueness of their equity sensitivity measure. The following literature identifies indirect links between equity sensitivity and organizational commitment.

Meyer and Allen (1991) conceptualized organizational commitment as a three-component construct (including affective, normative, and continuance commitment) which operate together to form an individual employee's desire to remain with an organization. These components include affective, continuance, and normative commitment, or the employee's desire, need, and obligation to remain with an organization, respectively. Meyer and Allen stated that, most often, organizational commitment reflects an employee's affective orientation towards their company, measured most commonly by the Organizational Commitment Questionnaire (OCQ). Affective attachment to an organization is displayed in group emotion and an attachment



to the goals and values of a company (Meyer & Allen, 1991). Further research by Edele, Dziobek, and Keller (2013) found a positive relationship between equity sensitivity and acts of altruism, suggesting that organizational justice includes an element of affect. Organizational commitment also includes an element of cognition that is found in an employee's mental weighing of perceived costs of leaving their company (Meyer & Allen, 1991). This is most often reflected in the loss of an employee's profit associated with leaving the organization as well as finding a new social identity that is involved in making the switch between jobs (Meyer & Allen, 1991).

Relating these components to equity theory, Adams (1963) stated that employees' perceptions of fairness serve as the motivation to behave in a way that brings an employee closer to a balance of the ratio of outcomes to inputs, and organizational commitment was found to correlate strongly with organizational justice (Meyer, Stanley, Herscovitch, & Topolnytsky, 2002). Organizational commitment has generally been indirectly linked to equity sensitivity. For example, Allen, Evans, and White (2011) observed a positive relationship between affective organizational commitment and organizational citizenship behaviors (OCBs). They also hypothesized and found a positive relationship between OCBs and equity sensitivity. Smith, Organ, and Near (1983) identified a two-factor model of OCBs that included altruism and generalized compliance. Allen et al. (2011) found that equity sensitivity moderated the relationship between affective organizational commitment and OCBs, with entitleds exhibiting higher levels of OCBs as affective organizational commitment increased, while there was no significant difference in the relationship for those categorized as benevolent.

Vella, Caruana, and Pitt (2012) made the most direct connection between organizational commitment and equity sensitivity when they observed that organizational commitment

increased as equity sensitivity increased (i.e., moved towards an input-focus/benevolence). Vella et al. found that perceived organizational performance moderated the relationship between equity sensitivity and organizational commitment such that, in low performing organizations, organizational commitment was higher for those low in equity sensitivity (entitleds) than for those high in equity sensitivity (benevolents). This result suggests that the effect of equity sensitivity on organizational commitment differs between similar workplace environments that individual employees perceive performing differently (Vella et al., 2012). Other research suggested that increased levels of benevolence could lead to “overcommitment,” or feelings of burnout and exhaustion (Oren & Littman-Ovadia, 2013). For the present pilot study, past research suggested a direct relationship exists between organizational commitment and perceptions of equity, and organizational commitment can also be used in the development of an equity sensitivity measure.

Prior research provides mixed findings regarding the relationship between organizational commitment and equity sensitivity. The strongest indirect link between organizational commitment and equity sensitivity has been studied through observing altruism as reflected in OCBs; levels of equity sensitivity moderate the relationship between organizational commitment and OCBs, such that the number of OCBs performed and the level of organizational commitment increased as benevolence increased (R. S. Allen et al., 2011; Edele et al., 2013). Other research suggests a positive correlation benevolence and organizational commitment, except in the case of low performing organizations (Oren & Littman-Ovadia, 2013; Vella et al., 2012). I expected to find a direct, negative interaction of the entitlement dimension on the relationship between benevolence and organizational commitment, developing this hypothesis:

- **Hypothesis 1:** Entitlement moderates the positive relationship between benevolence and organizational commitment such that the relationship is weaker as entitlement increases.

## **Job Satisfaction**

Job satisfaction is a comprehensive, affective orientation of employees towards their current overall work roles (Kalleberg, 1977). Just as with organizational commitment, King and Miles (1994) found job satisfaction to be a comparative construct against which an equity sensitivity measure can be tested. Regarding the cognitive and affective components associated with job satisfaction, Jex and Britt (2014) found that job satisfaction consists of feelings, thoughts, and behaviors. Whereas the emotional component of job satisfaction is most often considered, feelings of positive and negative affect, job satisfaction also includes a cognitive aspect, such as if employees perceive their job to be interesting, stimulating, boring, etc. (Jex & Britt, 2014).

Huseman et al. (1987) stated that individuals perceiving inequity at work will also experience lower levels of job satisfaction. Although this direct link has not yet been found in past research, the following studies suggest indirect links between job satisfaction and perceptions of fairness that together form Hypothesis 2 for the present study. Ahmad (2011) studied the moderating effect of group size on the relationship between equity sensitivity and job satisfaction. Ahmad (2011) noted that existing research suggested that highly sensitive people (i.e., *entitleds*) were more dissatisfied with pay inequity than less sensitive people and hypothesized a negative relationship between sensitivity scores and pay satisfaction in large groups, and a positive relationship in small groups. Where all group members received equal pay, large groups tended to perceive pay as inequitable, while small groups perceived it as more

equitable. Therefore, further suggestions within equity theory may suppose a relationship between perceptions of fairness and the number of referents by which employees may compare themselves.

Schmitt and Dörfel (1999) hypothesized a negative relationship between injustice at work and both job satisfaction and employee well-being, and that justice sensitivity, a construct similar to equity sensitivity, moderated the relationship between injustice at work and employee well-being. They administered questionnaires on procedural justice, job satisfaction, psychometric well-being, and justice sensitivity to employees of a German automobile company. They found a negative relationship between injustice at work and both job satisfaction and employee well-being, and that justice sensitivity moderated the relationship between injustice at work and employee well-being.

While existing research has demonstrated that perceptions of equity impact job satisfaction, no study to date has examined the moderating effect of the dimensions of equity sensitivity identified by Davison and Bing (2008) on that relationship. As a first step in that process, the present study was designed to examine the differential and interactive effects of benevolence and entitlement on job satisfaction. I formed further discussion based on findings in the present study and how these findings reflect current equity theory, equity sensitivity theory, and future work in the development of equity sensitivity measures, developing this hypothesis:

- **Hypothesis 2:** Entitlement moderates the positive relationship between benevolence and job satisfaction such that the relationship is weaker as entitlement increases.

### **Statement of the Problem**

Little existing research has measured equity sensitivity using the separate dimensions of entitlement and benevolence identified by Davison and Bing (2008), focusing instead on the

original forced distribution continuum measure developed by Huseman et al. (1987). However, as Davison and Bing pointed out, placing entitlement and benevolence on the same continuum may distort the relationship between two unique constructs. Existing findings do not fully suggest a strong link between equity sensitivity, organizational commitment, and job satisfaction. The purpose of the present pilot study was to test the moderating effects of the equity sensitivity dimension of entitlement on the relationships between benevolence, organizational commitment, and job satisfaction with the model proposed by Davison and Bing. Results and further discussion will remark the inconsistencies found in equity theory and the steps that can be taken next in the development of a new equity sensitivity measure.

## CHAPTER II

### METHODOLOGY

#### **Participants**

Participants in the present study were midlevel managers of two separate organizations in the southern region of the United States. The sample consisted of 53 participants, 41 (77%) of which were employees of a large-sized trucking company and 12 (23%) were employees of a medium-sized consumer healthcare company. Participants were recruited via e-mail through each organization's human resources department to take part in a 29-question survey. No incentives were given to recruits for their participation. Due to the restrictions placed on data collection by the organizations, no demographic information was collected, but I estimate that there was a fairly even split between men and women, and that ages ranged from 25 to 60 years.

#### **Procedures**

I contacted employees at each organization via e-mail through the respective human resources department which included a brief description of the study (Appendix B) along with a link to each organization's respective survey. The surveys were administered through a third-party online vendor, Qualtrics® ([www.qualtrics.com](http://www.qualtrics.com)) which was also used for response collection. I chose to perform this study in the field, in contrast to using a working student population, to enhance the generalizability of the results. By researching two independent organizations for the present study, results can be generalized across the working adults studied

as well as generalized across similar populations. Field research was utilized to target participants of wider ranges in age and work tenure than the suspected sample that would have been gathered using a working student population. By conducting research that can be generalized to and across other populations, Christensen, and Slack and Draugalis (as cited in Ferguson, 2004) found that broader statements can be made to widen the scope of application.

## **Measures**

### **Equity Sensitivity**

I measured equity sensitivity using the modified Equity Sensitivity Instrument (ESI; Bing, Davison, Garner, Ammeter, & Novicevic, 2009; Davison & Bing, 2008; included in Appendix C). Davison and Bing split each of the Huseman et al. (1987) original ESI items into single-stimulus items measured on a 4-point Likert-scale with anchors ranging from (1) strongly disagree to (4) strongly agree. Davison and Bing (2008) reported higher validity in their modified ESI than the original version when measuring the factors of input-focus ( $\alpha = .62$ ) and outcome-focus ( $\alpha = .69$ ). Bing et al. (2009) modified the single-stimulus ESI by introducing a neutral response option creating a 5-point Likert-scale. Reliability testing resulted in coefficients of  $a = .66$  for benevolence (input-focus) and  $a = .77$  for entitlement (outcome-focus). In the present study, I further modified Davison and Bing's (2008) ESI to now use a 7-point Likert-scale ranging from (1) strongly disagree to (7) strongly agree.

Clark, Clark, Foote, and Hanna (2013) provided additional support for Davison and Bing's (2008) model, asserting that constant-sum scales, which potentially force respondents to make a trade-off in responding, incorrectly identify those who are indifferent to equity as *equity sensitives*, when in reality those individuals are low in both benevolence and entitlement in contrast to harboring moderate to high levels of both. Davison and Bing implied that using

separate measurements of benevolence and entitlement refines the assessment of individual differences in equity sensitivity. They claimed that, theoretically, in the forced-distribution format by Huseman et al. (1987), benevolent and entitled participants would respond to each item by giving all of the allotted points to one extreme or the other. By Davison and Bing's (2008) understanding of the classification of being equity sensitive, it would not be possible for a participant to give the maximum number of points to both the entitlement and benevolence statements, therefore their modified ESI measured responses on a 4-point Likert-scale allows participants to respond to each item highly, which would ultimately result in being equity sensitive. Thus far, to test validity of the modified, single-stimulus ESI, correlations have been made with the Money Obsession Scale (MOS) and found to be significant ( $r = -.42, p < .01$ ). Reliability coefficients tested  $\alpha = .66$  for benevolence and  $\alpha = .77$  for entitlement (Bing et al., 2009).

I conducted a reliability analysis for the present pilot study and found Cronbach's alphas of  $\alpha = .602$  for benevolence and  $\alpha = .479$  for entitlement (Table 2.1, Table 2.3). Among benevolence items, only five of the 10 inter-item correlations were found to be significant, and among the ten correlations between entitlement items only three were found to be significant. (Table 2.2, Table 2.4). Potential issues with these dimensions of equity sensitivity as defined by Davison and Bing (2008) and errors in methodology are discussed in Chapter IV.

### **Organizational Commitment**

The Organizational Commitment Questionnaire (OCQ; Mowday et al., 1979; Appendix D) includes 15 items asking respondents to respond on a 7-point Likert scale to their identification with each item; labels for each point of the Likert scale are given.



Table 2.1 Benevolence Reliability Analysis

$\alpha$	$N$	Item-Total Statistics				
0.602	5	Scale Mean if Item Deleted	Scale Variance if Item Deleted	Corrected Item-Total Correlation	Cronbach's Alpha if Item Deleted	
		Benevolence Question 1	23.98	5.980	0.180	0.689
		Benevolence Question 2	22.36	5.734	0.552	0.450
		Benevolence Question 3	22.55	6.099	0.424	0.514
		Benevolence Question 4	21.96	7.537	0.273	0.590
		Benevolence Question 5	23.49	5.562	0.484	0.474

Table 2.2 Benevolence Scale Correlations

		1	2	3	4	5
1. Benevolence Question 1	$r$	--				
2. Benevolence Question 2	$r$	0.150	--			
3. Benevolence Question 3	$r$	0.029	.580**	--		
4. Benevolence Question 4	$r$	-0.123	.391**	.423**	--	
5. Benevolence Question 5	$r$	.362**	.379**	0.256	0.193	--

\*  $p < .05$

Table 2.3 Entitlement Reliability Analysis

$\alpha$	$N$	Item-Total Statistics				
0.479	5	Scale Mean if Item Deleted	Scale Variance if Item Deleted	Corrected Item-Total Correlation	Cronbach's Alpha if Item Deleted	
		Entitlement Question 1	18.04	11.537	0.177	0.470
		Entitlement Question 2	16.32	8.722	0.355	0.347
		Entitlement Question 3	16.94	10.631	0.127	0.518
		Entitlement Question 4	16.08	11.302	0.153	0.485
		Entitlement Question 5	17.60	8.013	0.502	0.229

Table 2.4 Entitlement Scale Correlations

		1	2	3	4	5
1. Entitlement Question 1	<i>r</i>	--				
2. Entitlement Question 2	<i>r</i>	0.036	--			
3. Entitlement Question 3	<i>r</i>	0.086	0.140	--		
4. Entitlement Question 4	<i>r</i>	0.002	.279*	-0.157	--	
5. Entitlement Question 5	<i>r</i>	.304*	.349*	0.219	0.239	--

\*  $p < .05$

Mowday, Steers, and Porter (1979) tested the validity and reliability of OCQ, which included items focused on overall commitment, job involvement, and intent to leave. They found the OCQ to have high internal consistency with Cronbach’s alphas ranging from .82 to .93 among all items across four time periods. For the present study, I used a modified version of the OCQ (Allen & Meyer, 2011). Reliability analysis in the present study found results comparable to existing research with a Cronbach’s alpha of .869.

### **Job Satisfaction**

Job satisfaction was measured using a 3-item scale developed by Zablah, Carlson, Donovan, Maxham, and Brown (2016) which asks participants to respond to the following phrases on a 7-point Likert scale, ranging from strongly disagree to strongly agree. Using confirmatory factor analyses across two testing times, Zablah et al. measured their job satisfaction items against items for customer satisfaction had found high composite reliabilities (Time 1  $\alpha = .98$ , Time 2  $\alpha = .99$ ) as well as high convergent validity ( $r > .90$ ). This measure of

job satisfaction has been adapted from previous research by Aaker, Fournier, and Brasel (2004) and Netemeyer, Maxham, and Lichtenstein (2010). Reliability analysis in the present study found comparable results with a Cronbach's alpha of .927.

## CHAPTER III

### RESULTS

Descriptive statistics and correlations of the relationships between all four variables were calculated first (Table 3.1, Table 3.2). To test the study hypotheses, the interactive effects of benevolence and entitlement on organizational commitment and job satisfaction were considered. Benevolence and entitlement scale scores were standardized and the products of the participants'  $z$ -scores served as the moderator (Table 3.3, Table 3.4). Tests of statistical power and effect size ( $f$ ) were conducted using the program G\*Power.

Table 3.1 Descriptive Statistics

	$n$	$\Sigma$	$\mu$	$\sigma_x$	$\sigma^2$
1. Entitlement	53	225	4.249	.745	.555
2. Benevolence	53	303	5.717	.593	.351
3. OC	53	258	4.868	.953	.909
4. JS	53	286	5.396	1.271	1.616

Table 3.2 Correlations

		1	2	3	4
1. Entitlement	$r$	--			
2. Benevolence	$r$	-.259	--		
3. OC	$r$	-.336*	.350*	--	
4. JS	$r$	-.163	.278*	.728*	--

\*  $p < .05$

To test the hypothesized relationships, I first tested to confirm 1) a significant, positive relationship existed between benevolence and the dependent variables, organizational commitment and job satisfaction ( $r = .350, .278, p < .05$ ), and 2) a significant, negative relationship existed between entitlement and organizational commitment ( $r = -.336, p, .05$ ). However, while entitlement and was related to job satisfaction in the hypothesized direction ( $r = -.163$ ), the correlation was not significant.

I tested the interaction using an analysis of variance (ANOVA) and multiple regression analysis to observe the moderating effect of entitlement on the relationship between benevolence and the workplace characteristics. Beginning with organizational commitment, an analysis of variance was conducted using entitlement, benevolence, and the moderator (product of the z-scores between entitlement and benevolence) as predictors of organizational commitment. The multiple correlation coefficient displayed a weak association between benevolence and organizational commitment when moderated by entitlement ( $R^2 = .189$ ). The interaction of the moderator with the other variables was not found to be significant ( $p = .765$ , Table 3.3). The significant, positive relationship between benevolence and organizational commitment was not significantly moderated by entitlement.

Regarding job satisfaction, the multiple correlation coefficient displayed a very weak association between benevolence and job satisfaction when moderated by entitlement ( $R^2 = .088$ ) and the interaction of the moderator with the other variables was not significant ( $p = .773$ , Table 3.4).

Table 3.3 Interaction Testing of Moderating Effect of Entitlement on Relationship Between Benevolence and Organizational Commitment

	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients		
	B	Std. Error	Beta	t	Sig.
(Constant)	3.778	1.601		2.360	0.022
Entitlement	-0.332	0.171	-0.259	-1.938	0.058
Benevolence	0.439	0.220	0.273	1.991	0.052
Moderation	0.034	0.113	0.040	0.301	0.765

*Dependent Variable: Organizational Commitment*

Table 3.4 Interaction Testing of Moderating Effect of Entitlement on Relationship Between Benevolence and Job Satisfaction

	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients		
	B	Std. Error	Beta	t	Sig.
(Constant)	3.116	2.263		1.377	0.175
Entitlement	-0.160	0.242	-0.094	0.662	0.511
Benevolence	0.520	0.311	0.242	1.669	0.101
Moderation	0.046	0.160	0.041	0.289	0.773

*Dependent Variable: Job Satisfaction*

Given nonsignificant interaction effects, I tested main effects for evidence of different treatments by two equity sensitivity variables on each workplace. To do this, I pulled the moderator interaction from the regression analysis and included confidence intervals into the analysis. Results of the regression for organizational commitment are found in Table 3.5 and job satisfaction results are found in Table 3.6. Main effects displayed trends as suggested by the hypotheses such that entitlement trends negatively with the relationship between benevolence, organizational commitment, and job satisfaction which are displayed in Figure 1 and Figure 2.

As responses of benevolence, organizational commitment, and job satisfaction increased, entitlement scores decreased.

Table 3.5 Regression Analysis of Benevolence, Entitlement, and Organizational Commitment With Bootstrapping

	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.	90.0% Confidence Interval for B	
	B	Std. Error	Beta			Lower Bound	Upper Bound
(Constant)	3.702	1.566		2.364	0.022	1.077	6.327
Entitlement	-0.337	0.169	-0.263	-1.993	0.052	-0.620	-0.054
Benevolence	0.454	0.212	0.282	2.139	0.037	0.098	0.810

*Dependent Variable: Organizational Commitment*

Table 3.6 Regression Analysis of Benevolence, Entitlement, and Job Satisfaction With Bootstrapping

	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.	90.0% Confidence Interval for B	
	B	Std. Error	Beta			Lower Bound	Upper Bound
(Constant)	3.012	2.214		1.360	0.180	-0.699	6.723
Entitlement	-0.167	0.239	-0.098	-0.698	0.488	-0.567	0.233
Benevolence	0.541	0.300	0.252	1.802	0.078	0.038	1.044

*Dependent Variable: Job Satisfaction*

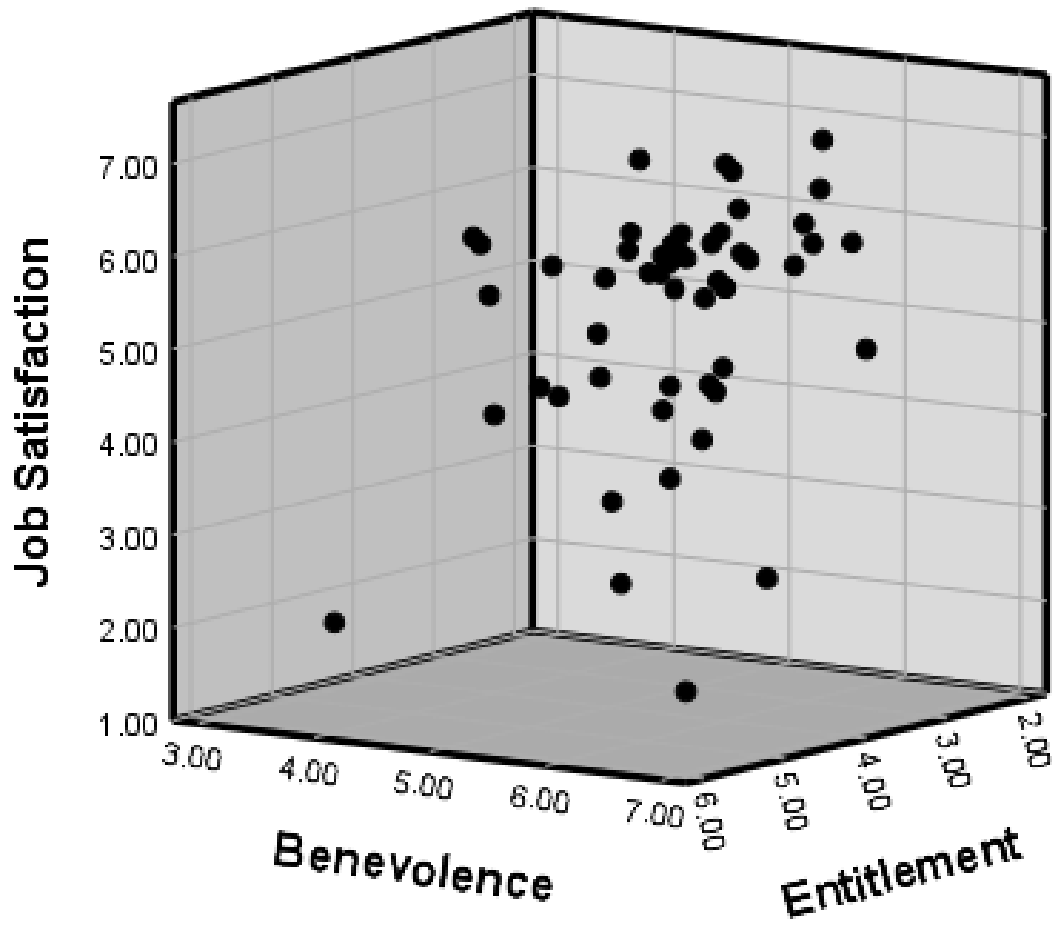


Figure 1 3-D scatter plot of benevolence, entitlement, and organizational commitment



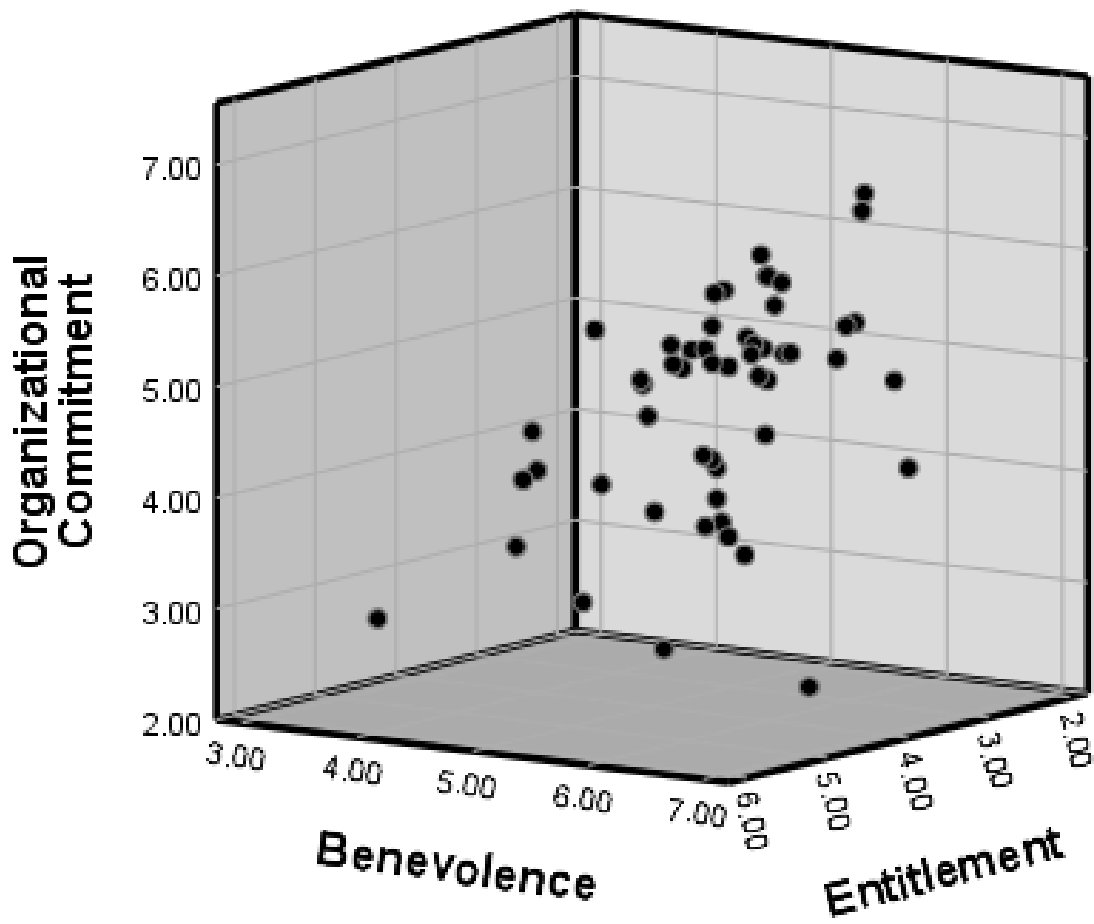


Figure 2 3-D scatter plot of benevolence, entitlement, and job satisfaction

## CHAPTER IV

### DISCUSSION

#### **Summary of Findings**

The study hypotheses were not supported, although each of the subscales of the equity sensitivity instrument developed by Davidson and Bing (2008), benevolence and entitlement, demonstrated unique relationships in the hypothesized directions with organizational commitment and job satisfaction. Results indicated significant, positive relationships between benevolence and both organizational commitment and job satisfaction. They also identified a significant, negative relationship between entitlement and organizational commitment. However, no moderation was found.

#### **Limitations of the Study**

One significant limitation of the present study was a small sample size which was not able to include demographic questions. Despite expanding the sample to a second facility, the response rates were not adequate. As detailed above, the issues with the modified ESI (Davison & Bing, 2008) may also have limited the ability to identify the hypothesized relationship. Despite the observed issues with the ESI, however, it may have helped to design the study to examine the differential effects, if any, of the existing measures of equity sensitivity, including Sauley and Bedeian's (2000) 16-item Equity Preference Questionnaire (EPQ), on organizational commitment and job satisfaction to determine convergent and discriminant validity. The present study could have also been made stronger by including the EPQ as a secondary measure for

further testing of the proposed moderation. Lastly, pilot testing two equity sensitivity measures, developing a version of the ESI that more accurately reflects Davison and Bing's model, could address issues of reliability prior to data collection.

Two forms of bias could also have negatively impacted the study results. The psychological tendency to give an opinion that is more socially correct than one's true opinion, commonly known as courtesy bias, could have led to confusion in the questioning and led to an increase in the number of neutral responses (León et al., 2007). Social desirability bias, the tendency to over report socially desirable characteristics or behaviors in oneself and under-report socially undesirable characteristics or behaviors, could have led to an inflation in responses in which participants believed their response choices would have been viewed as more balanced (Fisher, 1993).

### **Conclusion and Suggestions for Future Research**

The present pilot study tested the Davison and Bing's (2008) equity sensitivity dimensions of benevolence and entitlement. Although the hypotheses were not supported, they provide some support for the separation of the original ESI as conceptualized by Huseman et al. (1987) into benevolence and entitlement subscales. Main effects of benevolence and entitlement on job satisfaction and organizational commitment respectively trended in the anticipated directions.

However, the analyses uncovered some potential inconsistencies in both the composition of the subscales described by Davidson and Bing (2008). As reported above, both scales possessed low reliabilities, particularly the entitlement scale. This indicates that the items associated with each scale may not be measuring the same construct. This possibility is further

highlighted by the low interitem correlations found in Table 2.2 and Table 2.4. This problem may have been exacerbated by the small sample ( $n = 53$ ), although reliabilities for both the established organizational commitment and job satisfaction scales were consistent with previous research. However, the low reliabilities found in the modified ESI may point to a more significant problem with both the construction of the original ESI and the modifications introduced by Davidson and Bing (2008).

As highlighted by Sauley and Bedeian (2000), the scale items were developed and “chosen on an intuitive basis according to their face validity” (p. 887). They further noted that face validity is not content validity. This issue in the original ESI items was further exacerbated when Davidson and Bing created the entitlement and benevolence subscales comprised of items perceived by Huseman et al. (1987) to be opposite anchors of a continuum. Davidson and Bing subsequently arranged these items into subscales using items that may not have loaded on the factors to which they were assigned. Thus, future studies may consider utilizing a 4-point or 6-point Likert-scales to assist participants in properly contrasting benevolence and entitlement items. Moreover, these scales will also disallow the option of a neutral response, which is unnecessary given that *benevolents*, *entitleds*, and *equity sensitives* hold low to high levels of benevolence and entitlement, never an undecided amount.

Response patterns by some participants proved troublesome for data analyses. I believe that some participants were not able to distinguish between equity sensitivity items as opposite anchors of a single construct. This could explain participants responding similarly to two supposedly contrasting statements. There were also many individuals who answered “neither agree nor disagree” for most if not all of the equity sensitivity items. These response patterns call into question the development of items of the ESI as well as the issue created in allowing for a

neutral response option on an odd-numbered Likert-scale. These findings further suggest the need to review the items used to measure equity sensitivity.

Reliability analyses of the modified ESI in the present study found lower alphas than those in either Davison and Bing (2008) or Clark, Clark, Foote, and Hanna (2013). In the present study, the benevolence items had a Cronbach's alpha of .602 and .479 for the entitlement items (Table 2.1, Table 2.3). Tests of internal consistency found there to be inconsistencies with the questions asked, all taken from the original ESI proposed by Huseman et al. (1987), as well as potential flaws in allowing for neutral responses as conducted in Davison and Bing (2008) in contrast to the forced distribution used by Huesman et al. (1987).

Although the equity sensitivity construct appears to have potential to add explanatory power to research in equity theory, little research has been undertaken to explore that potential. One possible explanation for this dearth of research may be a lack of consensus in how equity sensitivity should be measured. Davison and Bing's (2008) 2x2 model, although adding some understanding to the construct, is currently incompatible with other equity sensitivity measures. At the core of equity sensitivity theory, *equity sensitives* harbor a moderate level of equity sensitivity balanced between benevolence on the one pole and entitlement on the other. Davison and Bing proposed that equity sensitivity is not either benevolence or entitlement, but a combination of both at various levels. Neither approach appears to capture the whole picture which can be illustrated in research by Pritchard, Dunnette, and Gorgenson (1972) who found that overall job satisfaction decreased in response to both underreward and overreward. Over time, underrewarded and overrewarded employees utilized cognitive modes of inequity reduction, for which equity theory offers no true explanation. This finding suggests that high levels of benevolence and entitlement do not lead to a balanced ratio, classified by Davison and Bing (2008) as *equity sensitive*, but instead indicates that moderate and equal levels of benevolence and entitlement lead to equity sensitivity.

Therefore, I propose a new model of equity sensitivity (Figure 3) based on the four classifications developed by Davison and Bing (2008). Unlike the Davison and Bing model, the proposed model better reflects the balance reflective of equity sensitives, while maintaining the relative imbalances envisioned by Davison and Bing for benevolents, entitleds and indifferent.

The proposed model is intended to act as a catalyst for further research into the dimensionality and impact of the equity sensitivity construct on perceptions of justice and other organizationally relevant constructs. For example, extending upon research by Ahmad (2011), future studies may consider group inequity and its effect upon employee cohesion. Future research may also explore equity sensitivity as an element of personality by examining the relationships between benevolence and entitlement and established personality dimensions, such as those included in the Big 5.

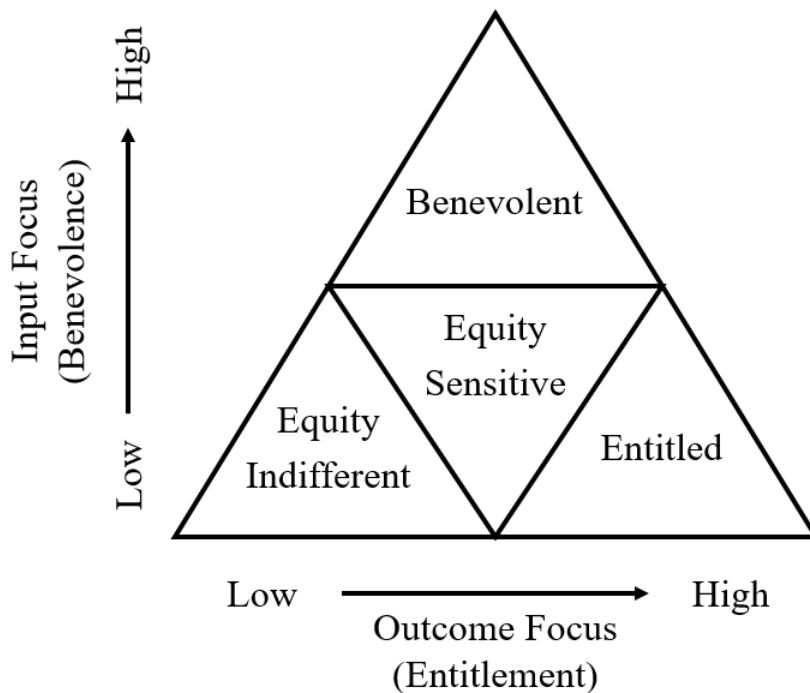


Figure 3 Proposed model of equity sensitivity

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APPENDIX A  
IRB APPROVAL LETTER

**Institutional Review Board**  
Dept. 4915  
615 McCallie Avenue  
Chattanooga, TN 37403-2598  
Phone: (423) 425-5867  
Fax: (423) 425-4052  
instrb@utc.edu  
<http://www.utc.edu/irb>

**MEMORANDUM**

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TO: West G. Phifer **IRB # 17-202**  
Dr. Brian J. O'Leary

FROM: Lindsay Pardue, Director of Research Integrity  
Dr. Amy Doolittle, IRB Committee Chair

DATE: 1/26/18

SUBJECT: IRB #17-202: The Complex Effects of Workplace Equity Perceptions on Job Commitment and Satisfaction

The IRB Committee Chair has reviewed and approved your application and assigned you the IRB number listed above. You must include the following approval statement on research materials seen by participants and used in research reports:

***The Institutional Review Board of the University of Tennessee at Chattanooga (FWA00004149) has approved this research project # 17-202.***

Since your project has been deemed exempt, there is no further action needed on this proposal unless there is a significant change in the project that would require a new review. Changes that affect risk to human subjects would necessitate a new application to the IRB committee immediately.

Please remember to contact the IRB Committee immediately and submit a new project proposal for review if significant changes occur in your research design or in any instruments used in conducting the study. You should also contact the IRB Committee immediately if you encounter any adverse effects during your project that pose a risk to your subjects.

For any additional information, please consult our web page <http://www.utc.edu/irb> or email [instrb@utc.edu](mailto:instrb@utc.edu)

Best wishes for a successful research project.

APPENDIX B  
PARTICIPANT RECRUITMENT LETTER

Hello,

My name is West Phifer, I am a second-year Master's student at UTC in the Industrial & Organizational Psychology program. Thank you for taking the time to read this message. I am conducting thesis research on how employee's perceptions of equity correlate with their reported levels of job satisfaction and commitment to their organization. This research project has been approved by the Institutional Review Board (IRB) at UTC, and I hope my findings will broaden the knowledge base on the topic of equity sensitivity, as it is a relatively new subject matter.

I am reaching out to you to ask if you could take 15-20 minutes of your time, between now and the end of January 2018, to complete the survey in the link provided below. Within the link are 28 items which will each take less than a minute to read and respond. I ask that you respond to each item honestly, but if you are made uncomfortable at any time while taking the survey you may withdraw without penalty. Thank you, and if you have any questions regarding this survey or my thesis research you may reach me at [lwq289@mocs.utc.edu](mailto:lwq289@mocs.utc.edu) or my thesis advisor, Dr. Brian O'Leary, at [brian-o'leary@utc.edu](mailto:brian-o'leary@utc.edu).

Link: XXXXX

Thank you again for you time, sincerely,

West G. Phifer and Dr. Brian O'Leary

Department of Psychology

The University of Tennessee at Chattanooga

APPENDIX C  
INFORMED CONSENT FORM

## Informed Consent

### **PLEASE REVIEW THE FOLLOWING INFORMATION CAREFULLY SO YOU CAN PROVIDE INFORMED CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE IN THIS RESEARCH**

**Purpose of the study:** This study is being conducted by West Phifer, a graduate student in the Industrial-Organizational Psychology program at The University of Tennessee at Chattanooga. This research is being conducted under the supervision of Dr. Brian O’Leary. Please note that participants in this study must be at least 18 years of age, currently work at least part-time in the United States, and be able to read and write in English. The purpose of this survey is to gauge levels of employees’ perceptions of equity.

**What will be done:** If you agree to participate you will be asked to respond to a brief internet-based survey (requiring no more than 15 minutes of your time).

**Benefits of this study:** You will be contributing to a body of research in the Industrial-Organizational Psychology literature, and helping researchers to better understand the topic area of equity sensitivity.

**What are the risks to me?** The risks of this study are limited to the potential inconvenience of taking the survey. If you feel uncomfortable with a question in the survey, you can skip it. You can also withdraw from the study at any time.

**What about my privacy?** Your participation in this research will be kept strictly confidential. All data you provide through this survey will be securely gathered and stored in encrypted and password protected files accessible only by the researchers listed. No names or identifying information will ever be shared with other persons not involved with this research. **Voluntary participation:** It is your choice to participate in this research and you may withdraw from this study at any time. If you decide to quit before you have finished the survey, however, your answers will NOT be recorded. Because we can only make use of fully complete surveys, we greatly appreciate your full participation.

**How will the data be used?** The results of the study will be used for research purposes only. Group-level (not personally identified) results from the study will be presented in educational settings and at professional conferences, and the results may be published in a professional journal in the field of psychology. **Contact information:** If you have concerns or questions about this study, please contact the chair of UTC’s Institutional Review Board, Dr. Amy Doolittle, at amy-doolittle@utc.edu or 423-425-5563 or the faculty supervisor for this study, Dr. Brian O’Leary, at brian-o’leary@utc.edu.

By opting to continue and complete this survey, you acknowledge that you have read this information and agree to participate in this research, with the knowledge that you are free to withdraw your participation at any time without penalty. Thank you in advance for your assistance and participation. Sincerely, West Phifer and Brian O’Leary.

APPENDIX D

DAVISON AND BING'S (2009) EQUITY SENSITIVITY INSTRUMENT



1. In any organization I might work for, it would be more important for me to get from the organization.

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Strongly						Strongly
Disagree						Agree

2. In any organization I might work for, it would be more important for me to give to the organization.

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Strongly						Strongly
Disagree						Agree

3. In any organization I might work for, it would be more important for me to help others.

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Strongly						Strongly
Disagree						Agree

4. In any organization I might work for, it would be more important for me to watch out for my own good.

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Strongly						Strongly
Disagree						Agree

5. In any organization I might work for, I would be more concerned about what I received from the organization.

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Strongly						Strongly
Disagree						Agree

6. In any organization I might work for, I would be more concerned about what I contributed to the organization.

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Strongly						Strongly
Disagree						Agree

7. In any organization I might work for, the hard work I do should benefit the organization.

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Strongly						Strongly
Disagree						Agree

8. In any organization I might work for, the hard work I do should benefit me.

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Strongly						Strongly
Disagree						Agree

9. In any organization I might work for, my personal philosophy in dealing with the organization would be, "If I don't look out for myself, nobody else will."

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Strongly						Strongly
Disagree						Agree

10. In any organization I might work for, my personal philosophy in dealing with the organization would be, "It's better for me to give than to receive."

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Strongly						Strongly
Disagree						Agree

APPENDIX E

MOWDAY ET AL.'S (1979) ORGANIZATIONAL COMMITMENT QUESTIONNAIRE

1. I am willing to put in a great deal of effort beyond that normally expected in order to help this organization be successful.

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Strongly						Strongly
Disagree						Agree

2. I talk up this organization to my friends as a great organization to work for.

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Strongly						Strongly
Disagree						Agree

3. I feel very little loyalty to this organization.

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Strongly						Strongly
Disagree						Agree

4. I would accept almost any type of job assignment in order to keep working for this organization.

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Strongly						Strongly
Disagree						Agree

5. I find that my values and the organization's values are very similar.

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Strongly						Strongly
Disagree						Agree

6. I am proud to tell others that I am a part of this organization.

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Strongly						Strongly
Disagree						Agree

7. I could just as well be working for a different organization as long as the type of work were similar.

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Strongly						Strongly
Disagree						Agree

8. This organization really inspires the very best in me in the way of job performance.

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Strongly						Strongly
Disagree						Agree

9. It would take very little change in my present circumstances to cause me to leave this organization.

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Strongly						Strongly
Disagree						Agree

10. I am extremely glad that I chose this organization to work for, over others I was considering at the time I joined.

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Strongly						Strongly
Disagree						Agree

11. There's not too much to be gained by sticking with this organization indefinitely.

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Strongly						Strongly
Disagree						Agree

12. Often, I find it difficult to agree with this organization's policies on important matters relating to its employees.

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Strongly						Strongly
Disagree						Agree

13. I really care about the fate of this organization.

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Strongly						Strongly
Disagree						Agree

14. For me this is the best of all possible organizations for which to work.

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Strongly						Strongly
Disagree						Agree

15. Deciding to work for this organization was a definite mistake on my part.

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Strongly						Strongly
Disagree						Agree

APPENDIX F

ZABLAH ET AL.'S (2016) JOB SATISFACTION SCALE

1. All in all, I am satisfied with my present job at [company name].

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Strongly						Strongly
Disagree						Agree

2. All things considered, (pay, promotion, supervisors, co-workers, etc.) I am satisfied with my present job.

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Strongly						Strongly
Disagree						Agree

3. Generally speaking, I am very satisfied with my job.

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Strongly						Strongly
Disagree						Agree



## VITA

West Phifer was born in Soddy-Daisy, Tennessee on May 29, 1994 to Kirk Phifer and Lisa Gooch-Phifer. His sister is Michelle Phifer. He was raised in Rogersville, TN and Kingsport, TN where he attended Dobyys-Bennett High School. Upon graduation, he attended Lee University in Cleveland, TN where he studied Psychology. While at Lee University, West conducted research on divergent thinking and workplace aesthetics, but his desire to pursue Industrial-Organizational Psychology began in the 12<sup>th</sup> grade while taking an AP Psychology course. After graduating in December of 2015, he began to work as a runner for a Chattanooga-based law firm, with whom he continued to work until 2017. Then, West began work as an intern at Sanofi CHC (formerly Chattem Inc.) under the HR Benefits Administrator. He graduated in May 2018 with a Master of Science degree in Industrial-Organizational Psychology and plans to continue his career in this field after moving to Knoxville, TN.