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Punishing an "unfair" leader: People as pragmatic politicians with in-group but fair-but-biased prosecutors with out-group

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Abstract Contrary to the fairness expected in the modern world, people seem to treat in-group members (us) better than out-group members (them). Do people then defend in-group members as politicians but prosecute out-group members in a fair-but-biased manner? Given information about injustices by a male or female manager, participants made outrage, attribution, attitude, and punishment responses to the manager. In-group defence held in the first three responses but fairness in punishment. However, the seeming fairness in punishment arose from bias suppression by outrage and mediation by attitude, and the order of mediation was from outrage to attitude and not vice versa.

Introduction

People navigate their social world by (a) using broad categories such as man *vs* woman, young *vs* old, or native *vs* immigrant, and (b) regarding the category that includes them as *in-group* (*us*) but the category that excludes them as *out-group* (*them*). One consequence of such categorisation is that the in-group, relative to the out-group, is provided with more rewards, resources, and opportunities (see, e.g., Dovidio & Gaertner (2010); Hewstone, Rubin, & Willis (2002) for reviews). Although such intergroup differentiation is widely prevalent, modern societies also censure those who appear to be blatantly unfair (Tetlock, 2002). How do people, then, resolve the conflict between the goals of favouring the in-group (Turner, Brown, & Tajfel, 1979) and also appearing as fair-minded persons (Branthwaite, Doyle, & Lightbown, 1979)? We provide a novel answer to this longstanding question, using the social-functionalist models of people as pragmatic politicians and prudent prosecutors (Tetlock, 2002).

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People belong to interdependent groups. For their effective functioning in the group, they have developed accountability procedures: *Who should report to whom under what circumstances*. The cultural norms, religious scriptures, and the constitution of a nation are examples of such accountability procedures. These procedures are believed to be in the best interests of the members at large. Thus, people belonging to the collective (1) respect those procedures, (2) meet the demands of those procedures, and (3) place those demands on others. Adaptive challenges from the respective first, second, and third roles with accountability procedures turn people into *principled theologians*, *pragmatic politicians*, and *prudent prosecutors* (see, e.g., Skitka & Wisneski (2012) for a discussion).

Justice is a sacred value in modern organisations (Clay-Warner, Culatta, & James, 2013). Short-cuts with such a value in Singapore, a country known for fairness (Crisp & Hewstone, 2001; Hewstone & Ward, 1985), should, therefore, activate the theologian mindset among organisational members for whom the top priority is re-affirming that value. Nevertheless, righteous defence of sacred values gets complicated when the encroacher belongs to one's in-group (Marques, Abrams, & Serodio, 2001; Valdesolo & DeSteno, 2007) and also holds the leadership role (Abrams, de Moura, & Travaglino, 2013; Karelaia & Keck, 2013). To proclaim high standards of (i) conduct within the in-group that endows a positive social identity and (ii) fairness for the sake of personal identity (Singh, Choo, & Poh, 1998), people adopt a strategy that facilitates simultaneous pursuit of these contradictory goals. In Singh et al. (1998), for example, the goal of favouring the in-group was achieved by evaluating the in-group superior to the out-group in competence but the goal of fairness was achieved by considering them as socially equal in Singapore. Such compromise was also observed in subsequent studies in Europe (Mucchi-Faina, Costarelli, & Romoli, 2002; Mucchi-Faina, Pacilli, Pagliaro, & Alparone, 2009). The moderation of the intergroup discrimination by group status is also interpretable as a compromise strategy (van Prooijen & Lam, 2007). Because the adaptive challenges to pragmatic politicians (Tetlock, 2002) come essentially from the desire to make a positive self-presentation to others, any such compromise reflects on the politician mindset. Therefore, our central hypothesis is that people simultaneously try to defend their in-group and present themselves as fair-minded persons as if they were pragmatic politicians.

Simply demonstrating that the *in-group favouritism* prevails in some responses but *fairness* in other responses cannot be a crucial test of our hypothesis. We need to show both fairness and in-group favouritism in every response taken. If organisational injustice is an encroachment upon the sacred value by group interests, then any leader alleged of doing injustice should be punished more than the leader not alleged so. Statistically, therefore, only the main effect of injustice on punishment (see the left graph of Fig. 1) should be significant if the fairness goal alone were operative. This prediction would also come from an alternative model of people as prudent prosecutors who punish wrongdoers to uphold the normative order (Tetlock et al., 2007).

In the centre graph of Fig. 1, punishment is again shown to be higher when there is injustice than when there is no injustice. Importantly, punishment responses to the two leaders are similar in the condition of no injustice (i.e., fairness or pro-norm stance, Abrams, Marques, Bown, & Henson (2000); Marques et al. (2001)) but different in the condition of injustice (i.e., an in-group protection or out-group prosecution, Abrams et al. (2013)). Given such divergent strategies of fairness and discrimination in the same response, the Categorisation × Injustice effect should be significant. That is, social categorisation should *moderate* the effect of injustice or deviance on punishment (Abrams et al., 2013; Pinto, Marques, Levine, & Abrams, 2010; Travaglino, Abrams, de Moura, Marques, & Pinto, 2014).

People usually stereotype the out-group as *homogeneous* (i.e., they all are alike) but the in-group as *heterogeneous* (i.e., we are so different from each other, see Ostrom & Sedikides, (1992), for a review). Thus, the same information might be more important in diluting the stereotyping of the homogeneous out-group than the heterogeneous in-group (Linville, Fischer, & Salovey, 1989). In this cognitive view, the steeper slope for the out-group line than the in-group one, as in the centre graph of our Fig. 1, might not have any bearing on the motivated in-group favouritism that supposedly maintains one's positive social identity.

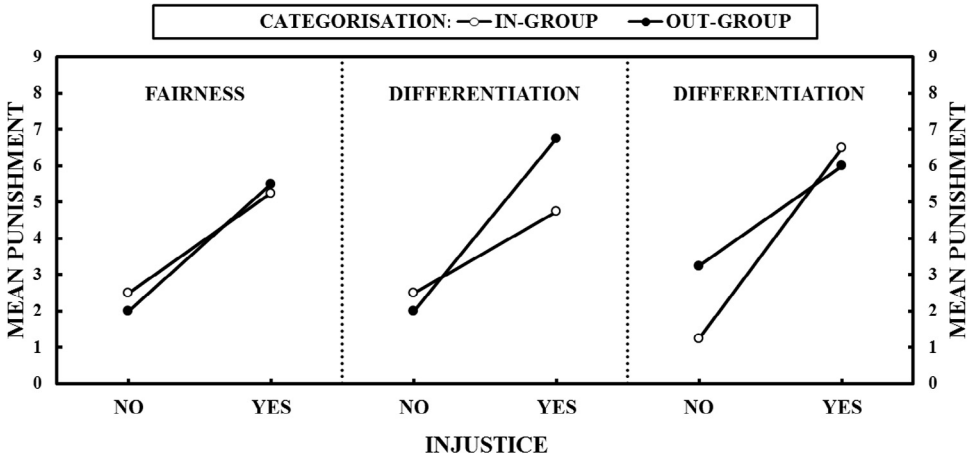

Figure 1 Predicted patterns in the Categorisation × Injustice effect by the goal of fairness and that of intergroup and intragroup differentiation.

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