The Performer's Reactions to Procedural Injustice: When Prosocial Identity Reduces Prosocial Behavior[1]

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Considerable research has examined how procedural injustice affects victims and witnesses of unfavorable outcomes, with little attention to the "performers" who deliver these outcomes. Drawing on dissonance theory, we hypothesized that performers' reactions to procedural injustice in delivering unfavorable outcomes are moderated by prosocial identity—a helping-focused self-concept. Across 2 experiments, individuals communicated unfavorable outcomes decided by a superior. Consistent with justice research, when prosocial identities were not primed, performers experienced greater negative affect and behaved more prosocially toward victims when a superior's decision-making procedures were unjust. Subtly activating performers' prosocial identities reversed these reactions. Results highlight how roles and identities shape the experience and delivery of unfavorable outcomes: When procedures are unjust, prosocial identity can reduce prosocial behavior.

People generally do not enjoy delivering unfavorable outcomes to others. Delivering unfavorable outcomes can evoke strong negative affect in those who perform the deed, including guilt, shame, and distress (Folger &

Skarlicki, 1998; Kets de Vries & Balazs, 1997; Milgram, 1974). In many situations (e.g., layoffs, budget cuts, contract terminations, performance reviews), managers are called upon by their organizations to deliver such outcomes.

Since the advent of equity theory (Adams, 1965) and social exchange theory (Blau, 1964; Thibaut & Kelley, 1952), social scientists have extolled the virtues of fairness and justice in the delivery of unfavorable outcomes. They have done so in large part by documenting the costs of unfairness and injustice, presenting extensive evidence that experiencing decisions and events as unjust generally has a powerful negative impact on people's cognitions, emotions, and behaviors (for reviews, see Brockner, 2002; Brockner & Wiesenfeld, 1996; Colquitt, Conlon, Wesson, Porter, & Ng, 2001; Folger & Cropanzano, 1998; Greenberg & Colquitt, 2005; Greenberg & Cropanzano, 2001). An important insight from justice research is that people do not merely care about *distributive justice*, or whether the outcome of a decision is fair; they also care about *procedural justice*, or whether the decision-making process is fair. Victims and witnesses tend to feel worse when unfavorable outcomes are delivered with procedural injustice, rather than procedural justice (Brockner & Wiesenfeld, 1996; Lind & Tyler, 1988; Thibaut & Walker, 1975).

This body of research has focused primarily on the reactions of victims and witnesses to unfavorable outcomes that are determined by unjust decision-making procedures (e.g., Brockner & Wiesenfeld, 1996; Clay-Warner, Hegtvedt, & Roman, 2005; Colquitt et al., 2001). Relatively little is known about the reactions of the "performers" who are called upon to execute these decisions. Recently, there has been rising interest in the experiences of these performers (e.g., Clair & Dufresne, 2004; Folger & Skarlicki, 1998; Kets de Vries & Balazs, 1997; Molinsky & Margolis, 2005; Wright & Barling, 1998).

Understanding the performer's perspective is important for helping performers themselves deliver unfavorable outcomes. It is especially critical for organizations, because the performer's experience of delivering unfavorable outcomes sets off a chain of events that has key implications for the welfare of the organization, as well as for the parties affected by the unfavorable outcome. In the case of a layoff, for example, the performer's experience affects his or her actions (Folger & Skarlicki, 1998), which, in turn, affect the experiences and reactions of the affected parties, including the layoff victims and survivors (e.g., Brockner et al., 1994; Jones & Skarlicki, 2003; Wiesenfeld, Brockner, & Martin, 1999). The reactions of these affected parties have direct and indirect effects on the organization's welfare (e.g., Colquitt et al., 2001; Lind, Greenberg, Scott, & Welchans, 2000; Masterson, 2001; Shaw, Wild, & Colquitt, 2003). Therefore, it is critical to gain a more

complete understanding of the various factors influencing the performer's experience in delivering unfavorable outcomes.

In the present paper, we advance existing understanding of the performer's experience by proposing that the performer's reactions to procedural injustice are moderated by *prosocial identity*, which is the dimension of the self-concept focused on helping and benefiting others. Although procedural injustice and prosocial identity commonly co-occur in reality, they have not been theoretically or empirically linked. Without considering prosocial identity, existing research has suggested that performers experience more negative affect, express more compassion, and offer more compensation when a superior's decision-making procedures are unjust. Our results suggest that when performers' prosocial identities are elicited, they display the opposite pattern of responses, experiencing more negative affect, expressing more compassion, and offering more compensation when a superior's decision-making procedures are just, rather than unjust. These findings highlight how procedural justice can have unintended consequences for performers whose prosocial identities are salient when they are assigned to carry out the antisocial task of delivering unfavorable outcomes determined by superiors. We show how integrating the justice and identity literatures—and bringing the performer's perspective into the picture—highlights the managerial challenge of crafting an approach that strikes the right balance in helping victims, survivors, the organization, and the performers themselves.

Procedural Justice from the Performer's Perspective

There are three phases of delivering an unfavorable outcome: the determination that it should be performed, the identification of who is to bear the burden of the harm, and the actual execution (i.e., performing the act and imposing the harm; Molinsky & Margolis, 2005). Although it is the case that performers may be involved in or have input in all three of these phases, it is common for performers to solely occupy the role of executor. Performers are often assigned to deliver unfavorable outcomes for which they themselves have had little decision-making input and responsibility (e.g., Folger & Skarlicki, 1998). For example, when layoffs are planned, positions are often assessed by outside consultants or top executives, and the responsibility for informing job incumbents whose positions have been eliminated falls upon direct managers and supervisors. The performers who execute these tasks are thus denied input into, and potential control over, the determination of what is to be done and to whom. We focus on situations in which performers are left with only one phase in which they can exercise control: how the act is to be done.

Existing research has suggested that in these situations, performers are strongly influenced by the procedural justice or injustice of the decisions that determine the unfavorable outcomes they must deliver (e.g., Brockner & Wiesenfeld, 1996; Colquitt et al., 2001). The experience of harming others is distressing to performers: They experience more negative affect when the decisions that lead to these outcomes are procedurally unjust (Folger & Skarlicki, 1998; Kets de Vries & Balazs, 1997). The logic behind this reaction is that when procedures are unjust, performers are associated with an unfavorable process, as well as an unfavorable outcome, which leads them to experience greater negative affect as a result of delivering more negativity to the victims. They may be particularly likely to experience self-relevant negative emotions (e.g., guilt, shame) for the personal role that they have played in meting out the unfairness (Tangney, 2003; Wiesenfeld et al., 1999). As a result of this emotional reaction, performers also react behaviorally. When performers witness others being treated unjustly, they often express concern and compassion (Batson, 1991) and seek to compensate victims for the harm (Lerner, 1977, 2003). Thus, performers not only feel worse about delivering an unfavorable outcome when procedures are unjust, they also tend to express more compassion to the victims and offer them greater compensation.

Prosocial Identity

Our focus in the present paper is on how the performer's psychological and behavioral reactions in delivering unfavorable outcomes may depend on the dimension of the performer's identity salient in the situation. Identity theory and research indicate that people hold multiple identities, or self-concepts (e.g., Stryker & Burke, 2000), and that people's actions and reactions to situations differ in powerful ways as a function of which of their identities is salient (e.g., Bargh & Chartrand, 1999; Brewer & Gardner, 1996; Reed & Aquino, 2003). Yet, justice researchers have paid little attention to the influence of identity on the experience of delivering negative outcomes.

We propose that *prosocial identity*, which is the aspect of the self-concept that is concerned with helping and empathizing with others (Grant, 2007; Grant, Dutton, & Rosso, 2008), is likely to moderate performers' reactions to procedural injustice. Prosocial identity stands out as particularly relevant because it is often elicited naturally to varying degrees in the process of harming others (e.g., Batson, 1991; Eisenberg, 2000; Milgram, 1974; Staub, 1984) and has been linked in previous research to important outcomes, such as helping behavior (e.g., Grube & Piliavin, 2000; Penner & Finkelstein, 1998).

Although most individuals hold and value prosocial identities (e.g., Schwartz & Bardi, 2001), the salience of these identities varies as a function of situational cues (e.g., Batson, 1991, 1998). For example, Nelson and Norton (2005) demonstrated that merely asking individuals to describe the characteristics of a superhero (an exemplar of a prosocial identity) increased their commitment to volunteering in the future and their actual volunteering behavior 3 months later. Situational cues eliciting prosocial identity may be particularly powerful in real organizational settings when managers must deliver unfavorable outcomes to others.

Hypotheses

Our goal in the present paper is to illuminate the performer's perspective by examining the role of prosocial identity in moderating the effects of procedural injustice on two variables that capture the performer's psychological and behavioral responses to delivering negative outcomes. The first variable is the negative affect (i.e., noxious feelings and emotions) that the performer experiences. Information about injustice has a particularly powerful impact on negative affect (e.g., Weiss, Suckow, & Cropanzano, 1999), which can be depleting in the short run as performers are forced to use limited psychological resources to manage their emotions (Eisenberg, 2000). Further, negative affect can accumulate to make performers less capable of handling the next unfavorable outcome they must deliver and, over time, eventually results in burnout (Kets de Vries & Balazs, 1997).

The second variable is the prosocial behavior that the performer expresses toward the victims. Here, we focus on *compassion expressed*, which is the degree to which performers show concern and empathy toward the victims; and *compensation offered*, which is the amount of remuneration that performers give to the victims. These prosocial behaviors are important because they reflect voluntary efforts undertaken by performers to have a positive impact on victims and rectify the harm done, and they are among the most extensively studied behavioral responses to injustice (e.g., Folger & Skarlicki, 1998; Lee, 1993; Molinsky & Margolis, 2005).

Without considering the activation of a prosocial identity, existing research, as discussed previously, has suggested that performers experience more negative affect, express more compassion, and offer more compensation when the decision they are called upon to execute was decided in an unfair and biased manner. When procedures are just, performers are enacting a fair and unbiased decision; they experience little negative affect and are not particularly concerned with helping the victims. When procedures are unjust, however, performers are likely to experience greater negative affect as a result

of being associated with an unfair process. They are especially prone to experience *self-relevant negative affect*—self-conscious emotional states (e.g., guilt, shame) that involve an unfavorable evaluation of the self (Leary, 2007; Tangney, 2003). As a result of experiencing this negative affect, performers seek to help the victims by expressing compassion and compensating them for the harm done.

How does the activation of a prosocial identity alter performers' responses? We draw on cognitive dissonance theory (e.g., Elliot & Devine, 1994; Festinger, 1957) to propose that when performers' prosocial identities are made salient, they display the opposite pattern of responses, experiencing more negative affect, expressing more compassion, and offering more compensation when procedures are just. When these performers are asked to deliver an unfavorable outcome to victims, the awareness of causing harm to the victims highlights a discrepancy between performers' salient prosocial self-concepts and their antisocial actions. Activating their prosocial identities primes them to help, but they face a situation in which they must harm, rather than help, the people affected by their actions. Awareness of this discrepancy between prosocial self-concepts and antisocial actions triggers dissonance-reduction efforts: Performers seek to account for and to diminish the discrepancy (Folger & Cropanzano, 1998, 2001; Wong & Weiner, 1981).

Procedural injustice provides performers whose prosocial identities are activated with an opportunity to reduce their dissonance: They can assign responsibility for the harm externally (Folger & Cropanzano, 1998, 2001) by blaming the decision maker (Brockner, 2002; Schroth & Shah, 2000; van den Bos, Bruins, Wilke, & Dronkert, 1999). This route to dissonance reduction will decrease the negative affect that performers experience and the extent to which performers feel responsible for engaging in prosocial behavior to ease the victims' experiences (e.g., Folger & Skarlicki, 1998; Greenwald, 1980; Milgram, 1974; Weiner, 1986). Indeed, recent research has shown that when procedures are unjust, individuals judge authority figures as more responsible for unfavorable outcomes (Brockner et al., 2007). Thus, when procedures are unjust, performers whose prosocial identities are activated can reduce dissonance by attributing responsibility to the decision maker. This frees performers from feeling personally responsible for the harm, leading them to experience less negative affect and to make fewer attempts to help the victim. On the other hand, when procedures are just, performers whose prosocial identities are activated cannot reduce their dissonance by blaming decision makers. They thereby experience greater negative affect and express greater prosocial behavior toward the victims.

In summary, when prosocial identities are not salient, procedural injustice leads performers to experience greater negative affect and to offer more compassion and compensation. When prosocial identities are salient,

procedural injustice provides performers with an opportunity to reduce dissonance by blaming the decision maker, thus diminishing negative affect and the motivation to offer compassion and compensation. These arguments give rise to the following hypotheses:

> *Hypothesis 1.* Prosocial identity will moderate the effect of procedural injustice on negative affect such that performers whose prosocial identities are not activated will experience more negative affect when the procedure is unjust; whereas performers whose prosocial identities are activated will experience more negative affect when the procedure is just.

> *Hypothesis 2a.* Prosocial identity will moderate the effect of procedural injustice on compassion expressed such that performers whose prosocial identities are not activated will express more compassion toward the victims when the procedure is unjust; whereas performers whose prosocial identities are activated will express more compassion toward the victims when the procedure is just.

> *Hypothesis 2b.* Prosocial identity will moderate the effect of procedural injustice on compensation offered, such that performers whose prosocial identities are not activated will offer more compensation to the victims when the procedure is unjust, whereas performers whose prosocial identities are activated will offer more compensation to the victims when the procedure is just.

Overview

We conducted two experiments to test our hypotheses. Across the two experiments, we operationalized procedural injustice as the degree of unfairness and bias in the formal decision-making process leading up to the delivery of unfavorable outcomes (e.g., Brockner & Wiesenfeld, 1996; Lind & Tyler, 1988; Magner, Johnson, Sobery, & Welker, 2000). We used role-playing experimental methodologies to test our hypotheses for three reasons. First, justice researchers have not systematically examined how procedural justice and injustice affect performers delivering unfavorable outcomes, and experiments allow for this type of systematic investigation with causal inferences. Second, we are interested in understanding how variance in the salience of prosocial identities affects performers, and experiments are an ideal setting for creating this variance. Third, we seek to demonstrate that subtle, minimal

cues activating prosocial identities can have a powerful impact on the psychological and behavioral responses of performers (see Prentice & Miller, 1992).

Experiment 1

Method

Participants and Overview

Study participants were 66 undergraduates in an introductory psychology course at a large midwestern university who participated in a laboratory experiment for 1 hour of course credit. Participants completed an instrument that unobtrusively either activated their prosocial identities or exposed them to a neutral prime. Next, they read about a procedurally just or unjust decision made by a faculty member to take scholarship money away from students. Finally, they wrote a letter communicating the decision to the students and completed a questionnaire assessing their reactions to the experience.

Design and Procedure

The experiment used a 2 (Identity: control vs. prosocial) × 2 (Procedural Injustice: just vs. unjust) between-subjects factorial design.

Identity manipulations. Participants entered the lab and were informed that they would be carrying out two separate studies. The experimenter distributed the forms for the first study, which contained our identity primes. Following past research (e.g., Sanchez-Burks, 2002), we used multiple primes to activate and reinforce prosocial identity. Our first prime, adapted from priming research, was the Scrambled Sentence Task (Srull & Wyer, 1979). In both conditions, the prime was introduced as a language-ability assessment task from cognitive psychologists. Participants were asked to unscramble 30 sentences.

Past research with the Scrambled Sentence Task (Srull & Wyer, 1979) has revealed that when a portion of the sentences contains words associated with an identity or stereotype, people unconsciously act in ways consistent with the identity or stereotype (for reviews, see Bargh & Chartrand, 1999; Bargh & Ferguson, 2000). For example, unscrambling sentences that contain words related to stereotypes of the elderly (e.g., *Florida*, *gray*, *Bingo*) leads people to walk more slowly (Bargh, Chen, & Burrows, 1996). This type of prime has

been used in prior research to activate other identities (e.g., Brewer & Gardner, 1996). In the prosocial condition, half of the sentences contained words related to prosocial cognitions, emotions, and behaviors (e.g., "important is compassionate being to" unscrambled to "Being compassionate is important"; "others help usually when people" unscrambled to "People usually help others"; "our caring decisions are" unscrambled to "Our decisions are caring"). In the control condition, the sentences contained neutral phrases unrelated to any identity or stereotype (e.g., "green tree was a were" unscrambled to "A tree was green"; and "goes normally he very there" unscrambled to "He normally goes there"). The instructions asked participants to unscramble the words to form four-word sentences, leaving one word out.

Our second prime, based on past research on identity priming (LeBoeuf & Shafir, 2003), asked participants to answer four questions about themselves, purportedly to provide background information on students for the Psychology Department. In the prosocial condition, participants were asked questions that increased the salience of their prosocial identities. They were told

> We all help people in different ways, whether our helping is part of our jobs, classes, extracurricular activities, friendships, or relationships with families and significant others. This description may apply to you *some*, *all*, or *none* of the time. For each question, circle the number that best applies to you.

Participants were asked to respond to the following statements: "Overall, my helping behavior has very little to do with how I feel about myself," "My helping behavior is an important reflection of who I am," "Helping others is unimportant to my sense of what kind of person I am," and "In general, helping others is an important part of my self-image." In the control condition, participants were asked to respond to the following four neutral statements: "I read the newspaper regularly," "Most of my classes are interesting," "I sleep at least 8 hours per night," and "I eat breakfast every day." Responses were rated on a 7-point scale ranging from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 7 (*strongly agree*).

Procedural injustice manipulations. After participants had completed these unobtrusive primes, the experimenter distributed the forms for the second study, which contained our procedural injustice manipulations and was framed as a study of writing. All of the participants were asked to read a letter from a faculty member about a decision to cut student scholarship funds that the Psychology Department had recently implemented. After reading the letter, the participant would be asked to communicate this decision to the students. Following past research (e.g., Brockner et al., 1998; Lind

& Lissak, 1985), we manipulated procedural injustice by varying the degree of neutrality and bias in the descriptions of how the decision was made. Participants read a photocopied letter on university letterhead addressed to the faculty and signed by Frederick Strickland, Professor of Social and Organizational Psychology. The letter began:

> The Psychology Department's Honors Thesis scholarships were established in the late 1990s, when the stock and bond markets were at an all-time high. The Joseph Platt Honors Award goes to students writing theses in cognitive and developmental psychology. The Bill Wright Award goes to students writing theses in social and organizational psychology. The purpose of the two scholarships is to enable students from disadvantaged backgrounds to write honors theses, instead of holding jobs during the school year. For the past decade, the Department has been able to provide $6,000 to four students for each scholarship. In recent years, however, the total value of the Department's philanthropic portfolio has shrunk (following general trends in the stock and bond markets), severely impacting the scholarships that we can give. Unfortunately, students were selected in July to receive the two scholarships. Because of our financial hardship, several students will lose the funding they had been promised.

In the just condition, participants read that the decision-making process was unbiased:

> Students on the Undergraduate Psychology Honors Scholarships Committee conducted a 4-month review and prepared a report. Eventually, because the number of students in cognitive and developmental psychology has dropped by 50% in the past 2 years, the students on the committee voted unanimously to cut 50% of funding from the Joseph Platt Honors Award, the award for students in cognitive and developmental psychology. As the faculty adviser, I read their report and approved the recommendation. This means that four Joseph Platt students will each lose $3,000 that they are expecting. This is necessary in order to continue providing for the Bill Wright Award, presented to students in social and organizational psychology.

In the unjust condition, participants read that the decision-making process was biased:

Students on the Undergraduate Psychology Honors Scholarships Committee conducted a 4-month review and prepared a report. However, as the faculty adviser, I have decided to overrule their review. I am cutting 50% of funding from the Joseph Platt Honors Award, the award for students in cognitive and developmental psychology. This means that four Joseph Platt students will each lose $3,000 that they are expecting. This is necessary in order to continue providing for the Bill Wright Award, presented to my students in social and organizational psychology.

Participants turned to the next page and received the following instructions:

The students from the Joseph Platt Honors Award do not yet know that they are losing their scholarships and may not be able to write theses as a result. The Undergraduate Psychological Society Committee must now write letters to the scholarship recipients delivering the news. As former Psychology 100 students themselves, they wanted to get input and guidance on the letter from current students, knowing that research shows that letters from peers are more effective. We are now asking you to write a letter communicating the bad news to the students and then answer some questions. The committee members will draw from your letters when they write the letter to the students. You will have 5 minutes to write your letter.

Measures

Perceived procedural justice. We measured perceived procedural justice as a check on our procedural injustice manipulations using five items from Colquitt (2001). The statement was introduced as "To what extent have these procedures," which was followed by the anchors *been fair*, *been applied consistently*, *been free of bias*, *been based on accurate information*, and *upheld ethical and moral standards* ($\alpha = .86$). Responses were rated on a 7-point scale ranging from 1 (*not at all*) to 7 (*very much*).[3]

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[3]We did not include a manipulation check for the prosocial primes, for two reasons. First, the procedure has been validated by Bargh and colleagues (e.g., Bargh et al., 1996). Second, we were concerned that collecting manipulation-check data would serve as an additional prime that could bias our results.

Negative affect. We measured negative affect by asking participants to rate how they were feeling at the present time, using five adjectives from the Positive and Negative Affect Schedule (Watson, Clark, & Tellegen, 1988). Those adjectives are *disappointed*, *upset*, *ashamed*, *guilty*, and *sad* ($\alpha = .90$). Responses were rated on a 5-point scale ranging from 1 (*very slightly*) to 5 (*very much*).

Compassion expressed. We asked three coders, who were blind to the conditions, to independently rate the degree of compassion expressed in participants' letters, operationalized in terms of the degree to which the letter expressed sympathy and concern for the student. The coders rated the letters as 1 (*not at all compassionate*), 2 (*somewhat compassionate*), or 3 (*extremely compassionate*). For example, an excerpt from a letter rated by all three coders as *not at all compassionate* read "We have less funding than we have had in the past; thus, simply because we do not have the proper resources, we will have to cut your scholarship by 50%." An excerpt from a letter rated by all three coders as *extremely compassionate* read "We are very sorry to announce . . . we will be unable to provide you with the full scholarship amount that you were originally promised. . . . We deeply regret this decision. . . . We hope these remaining funds will be helpful while you pursue your education here." Interrater reliability was strong: $ICC(1) = .74$, $ICC(2) = .89$, $p < .0001$. Thus, we computed means of the three coders' ratings to serve as our measure of compassion expressed.

Results

Table 1 displays the means and standard deviations by condition. We conducted a MANOVA to test our hypotheses. First, our manipulation of procedural injustice was effective: The MANOVA shows the expected main effect of the procedural injustice manipulation on perceived procedural justice, $F(1, 64) = 12.26$, $p = .001$. No other effects were significant. Next, we examined the psychological and behavioral effects of the identity and procedural injustice manipulations on performers.

Negative Affect

The MANOVA shows a significant Identity × Procedural Injustice interaction on negative affect, $F(1, 63) = 4.57$, $p = .04$ (see Figure 1). No other effects were significant. Consistent with Hypothesis 1, a one-tailed planned contrast analysis indicates that participants in the prosocial/unjust and control/just conditions experienced less negative affect than did participants in the prosocial/just and control/unjust conditions, $t(60) = 1.79$, $p = .04$.

Table 1

Means by Identity and Procedural Injustice Conditions: Experiment 1

Condition	Perceived procedural justice		Negative affect		Compassion expressed	
	M	*SD*	*M*	*SD*	*M*	*SD*
Control identity, just procedure (*n* = 14)	3.34	0.88	1.89	0.91	2.11	0.76
Control identity, unjust procedure (*n* = 14)	2.70	1.24	2.20	1.14	2.50	0.59
Prosocial identity, just procedure (*n* = 18)	3.21	0.91	2.59	1.00	2.35	0.61
Prosocial identity, unjust procedure (*n* = 19)	2.13	1.48	1.95	1.13	2.05	0.80

Note. One participant who directly questioned whether the situation was real in the letter to the victims was excluded from all analyses. The correlation between our dependent variables of Negative Affect and Compassion Expressed was relatively weak ($r = .24$, $p = .06$).
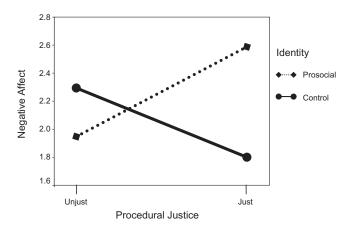

Figure 1. Interaction effect of identity and procedural injustice on negative affect: Experiment 1.
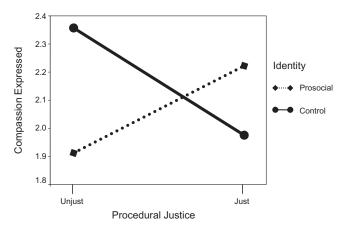
Figure 2. Interaction effect of identity and procedural injustice on compassion expressed: Experiment 1.

Compassion Expressed

The MANOVA shows a significant Identity × Procedural Injustice interaction on degree of compassion expressed, $F(1, 63) = 3.93$, $p = .05$ (see Figure 2). No other effects were significant. In support of Hypothesis 2a, a one-tailed planned contrast analysis indicates that participants in the prosocial/unjust and control/just conditions expressed less compassion than did participants in the prosocial/just and control/unjust conditions, $t(63) = 1.98$, $p = .03$.[4]

Discussion

As predicted, prosocial identity reversed the psychological and behavioral reactions of performers to procedural injustice. Compared to performers

[4]For all contrast analyses, we used lambdas of 1 for prosocial/unjust and control/just; and −1 for prosocial/just and control/unjust. This allowed us to compare the slopes of the responses of performers in the control and prosocial identity conditions. One-tailed simple effects show the following results: (a) Performers in the prosocial identity condition experienced significantly more negative affect, $F(1, 60) = 3.41$, $p = .04$, and trended toward expressing more compassion, $F(1, 61) = 2.07$, $p = .08$, when the procedure was just than when it was unjust; (b) Performers in the control identity condition trended toward experiencing more negative affect, $F(1, 60) = 1.56$, $p = .11$, and expressing more compassion, $F(1, 61) = 2.33$, $p = .07$, when the procedure was unjust than when it was just; (c) Performers in the unjust condition trended toward experiencing less negative affect, $F(1, 60) = .97$, $p = .16$, and expressed significantly less compassion, $F(1, 61) = 3.65$, $p = .03$, when prosocial identities were activated; and (d) Performers in the just condition experienced significantly greater negative affect, $F(1, 60) = 4.66$, $p = .02$, and trended toward expressing more compassion, $F(1, 61) = 1.10$, $p = .15$, when prosocial identities were activated.

whose prosocial identities were not activated, performers whose prosocial identities were activated experienced less negative affect, and expressed less compassion, when the procedure was unjust, rather than just. This suggests that procedural injustice may be a double-edged sword when performers' prosocial identities are activated. On one hand, it makes delivering the harm less distressing. On the other hand, to state the interaction effect differently, it makes performers less likely to express compassion toward the victims. When procedures are unjust, priming or eliciting a prosocial identity may actually reduce the expression of prosocial behavior.

Experiment 2

An important limitation of Experiment 1 is that the effects observed may be artifacts of the research design and measures, rather than robust phenomena. Accordingly, following general guidelines for constructive replication (e.g., Brief & Aldag, 1975; Gordon, Slade, & Schmitt, 1986; Mack, 1951; McNatt & Judge, 2004; Smith, 1970), the research design and measures used in Experiment 2 differ in several important ways from those used in Experiment 1. First, Experiment 2 involves different samples, tasks, and procedures from those used in Experiment 1. Whereas Experiment 1 asked undergraduates to write letters taking away scholarship money to be read by the actual victims, Experiment 2 asks MBA students to respond to a past firing decision and write a sample letter to the victim. Second, Experiment 2 uses a behavioral dependent variable that differs in two ways from the variable used in Experiment 1: It is compensation offered, rather than compassion expressed; and it is measured through self-reports, rather than reports from independent raters.

Method

Participants and Overview

Study participants were 53 MBA students at a business school in the Boston area (hereafter referred to as *Bostonia* to disguise the institution's identity) who volunteered to participate in a 30-min study. Participants completed an instrument that either activated their prosocial identities or exposed them to a neutral prime. Next, they read about a procedurally just or unjust decision made by a university dean to fire a university employee. Finally, they wrote a letter communicating the decision to the employee and completed a questionnaire assessing their reactions to the experience.

Design and Procedure

The experiment used a 2 (Identity: control vs. prosocial) × 2 (Procedural Injustice: just vs. unjust) between-subjects factorial design.

Identity manipulations. The primes were identical in content to Experiment 1. However, they were framed with the following instructions:

> Bostonia engages PerceptSolutions Consulting, a boutique human resources consulting firm, to develop web-based HR tools for screening job applicants. PerceptSolutions was founded by Bostonia alumnus Richard Harrison (class of 1992). For this first part of today's study, we are giving you the opportunity to test-drive two of PerceptSolutions' tools. The first HR tool measures cognitive ability. You are going to take a portion of the real cognitive test that PerceptSolutions uses to screen applicants. Below are several jumbled combinations of 5 words. Please unscramble them to form grammatically correct sentences containing 4 words, leaving one word out of each sentence. Applicants are assessed in terms of the number of correctly unscrambled sentences they can produce within a 10-min time limit.

Procedural injustice manipulations. All of the participants were told that the researchers were partnering with PerceptSolutions on a research project about managerial dilemmas. They were asked to read an article purportedly published in the college newspaper:

> Bostonia Plans Web Application, Fires Admissions Employee, by Christopher Blake
>
> Loyalty took a backseat to efficiency this week as Bostonia decided to eliminate an admissions office position. In an effort to attract a stronger applicant pool, Bostonia has decided to develop a system for applicants to apply to the MBA program via the Web. Bostonia's Associate Dean of Admissions, Frederick Strickland, explained, "We were losing top students to other business schools that had online applications. We had originally planned to develop the system in-house, but in order to stay competitive, we have hired a consulting firm that can deliver the application in time for the fall." As a result, one of two full-time positions in the admissions office needed to be eliminated. Susan Piore, 27, and Heather Martin, 35, the employees facing elimination, both had 3 years remaining on

their employment contracts. Both had advanced degrees in Education Management and had each received commendation as top University employees.

Following past research (e.g., Brockner et al., 1998; Lind & Lissak, 1985), we manipulated procedural injustice by varying the degree of neutrality and bias in the descriptions of how the firing decision was made. In the just condition, participants read that the decision was unbiased:

> The Standing Committee for Fairness and Employment, comprised in equal parts of faculty, students, and employees, had considered various alternatives, including flexible time arrangements. Unfortunately, in the end, the only decision that made financial sense was to lay off one of the two employees. The Committee recommended that the layoff be based on seniority. Strickland followed this recommendation; he kept Martin and laid off Piore.

> According to Ms. Piore, "I am really upset about what happened. I have worked very hard in my career to reach this point. People might not realize it, but it is really hard to find good admission jobs, especially in the Boston area. I don't know what is going to happen now. It puts a lot of pressure on my family because I have two small children and am the sole breadwinner." The new Web application system will be launched September 1.

In the unjust condition, participants read that the decision was biased:

> The Standing Committee for Fairness and Employment, comprised in equal parts of faculty, students, and employees, had considered various alternatives, including flexible time arrangements. Unfortunately, in the end, the only decision that made financial sense was to lay off one of the two employees. The Committee recommended that the layoff be based on seniority, the implication being that Piore would be the one to lose her position. However, Dean Strickland disregarded the Committee's recommendation. He decided to keep Piore, and laid off Martin. One admissions office employee, who requested that his name not be printed, reported that Piore's father and Dean Strickland were college roommates, leading to suspicion about the fairness of the process.

> According to Ms. Martin, "I am really upset about what happened. I have worked very hard in my career to reach this point.

People might not realize it, but it is really hard to find good admission jobs, especially in the Boston area. I don't know what is going to happen now. It puts a lot of pressure on my family because I have two small children and am the sole breadwinner." Strickland declined comment. The new Web application system will be launched September 1.

Participants read either the just or unjust newspaper article, and turned to the next page, which contained the following instructions:

As researchers interested in managerial dilemmas, we would like you to take the role of the Assistant Dean of Admissions. Strickland, the Associate Dean, has made the firing decision and has now assigned you the task of communicating it to the employee whose job is being eliminated. Your task in the next 5 minutes is to draft a note informing the employee of the decision.

Participants wrote their letters. When 5 min had passed, the experimenter collected the letters and distributed a questionnaire containing our measures.

Measures

Negative affect. We measured negative affect with the full set of 10 adjectives from the PANAS ($\alpha = .86$; Watson et al., 1988).

Compensation offered. We measured the degree to which participants were willing to compensate the fired employee by asking "After the firing, for how many months should Bostonia continue to provide health benefits to the fired employee?" Responses were rated on a 6-point scale with the following choices: $1 = 0$ *months*; $2 = 1–2$ *months*; $3 = 3–4$ *months*; $4 = 5–6$ *months*; $5 = 7–12$ *months*; $6 = more\ than\ 12\ months$.

Results

Table 2 displays the means and standard deviations by condition. We conducted a MANOVA to examine the psychological and behavioral effects of our identity and procedural injustice manipulations on performers.

Negative Affect

The MANOVA shows a significant Identity × Procedural Injustice interaction on negative affect, $F(1, 52) = 5.22$, $p = .03$ (see Figure 3). No other

Table 2

Means by Identity and Procedural Injustice Conditions: Experiment 2

Condition	Negative affect		Compensation offered	
	M	*SD*	*M*	*SD*
Control identity, just procedure (*n* = 11)	2.24	0.67	3.38	0.74
Control identity, unjust procedure (*n* = 13)	2.78	0.91	4.42	1.24
Prosocial identity, just procedure (*n* = 14)	2.35	0.60	4.15	0.99
Prosocial identity, unjust procedure (*n* = 15)	1.97	0.68	3.79	1.12

Note. As in Experiment 1, the correlation between our dependent variables of Negative Affect and Compensation Offered was relatively weak ($r = .30$, $p = .04$).
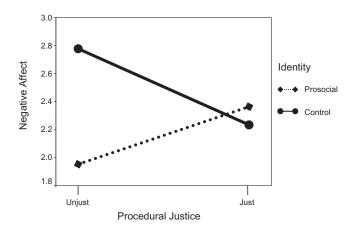

Figure 3. Interaction effect of identity and procedural injustice on negative affect: Experiment 2.

effects were significant. In support of Hypothesis 1, a one-tailed planned contrast analysis indicates that participants in the prosocial/unjust and control/just conditions experienced less negative affect than did participants in the prosocial/just and control/unjust conditions, $t(49) = 2.29$, $p = .01$.

The logic supporting our hypothesis development suggests that procedural injustice and prosocial identity may be most likely to influence self-relevant negative affect. We proposed that when prosocial identities are not activated, being associated with unjust procedures threatens performers' identities, leading to guilt and shame. We also proposed that when prosocial

identities are activated, unjust procedures enable performers to reduce dissonance by attributing blame externally, reducing guilt and shame.

To examine whether the type of negative affect influenced the results, we conducted two ANCOVAs (see Wiesenfeld et al., 1999). The first ANCOVA examined the interactive effects of procedural injustice and prosocial identity on an index of the self-relevant negative emotions (guilt and shame; $\alpha = .78$) while controlling for an index of the other eight negative emotions (*disappointed*, *afraid*, *upset*, *distressed*, *jittery*, *nervous*, *irritable*, *hostile*; $\alpha = .83$) as a covariate. The results indicate a significant Identity × Procedural Injustice interaction on the self-relevant negative emotions, $F(1, 52) = 4.51$, $p = .04$; and the interaction matched the pattern displayed in Figure 3.

The second ANCOVA examined the interactive effects of procedural injustice and prosocial identity on the index of the less self-relevant negative emotions, while controlling for the index of the self-relevant negative emotions of guilt and shame as a covariate. The Identity × Procedural Injustice interaction was not significant, $F(1, 52) = .01$, $p = .92$. Thus, these results suggest that the moderating role of prosocial identity was strongest for the self-relevant negative emotions of guilt and shame.[5]

Compensation Offered

An ANOVA shows a significant Identity × Procedural Injustice interaction on degree of compensation offered, $F(1, 47) = 4.91$, $p = .03$ (see Figure 4). No other effects were significant. In support of Hypothesis 2b, a one-tailed planned contrast analysis indicates that participants in the prosocial/unjust and control/just conditions offered less compensation than did participants in the prosocial/just and control/unjust conditions, $t(43) = 2.22$, $p = .02$.[6]

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[5]We considered a similar analysis of self-relevant negative emotions in Experiment 1. However, an exploratory factor analysis of the five negative affect items using the extraction method of principal axis factoring reveals a one-factor solution (eigenvalue = 3.65; 72.95% of variance explained). Thus, the negative affect items were sufficiently highly correlated in Experiment 1 that it was not appropriate to separate out the self-relevant emotions of guilt and shame. In contrast, an exploratory factor analysis of the Experiment 2 items reveals the expected two-factor solution, with the self-relevant negative emotions of guilt and shame loading strongly on the second factor.

[6]One-tailed simple effects show the following results: (a) Performers in the control identity condition experienced more negative affect, $F(1, 49) = 3.73$, $p = .03$, and offered more compensation, $F(1, 43) = 4.55$, $p = .02$, when the procedure was unjust than when it was just; (b) Performers in the prosocial identity condition trended toward experiencing more negative affect when the procedure was just than when it was unjust, $F(1, 49) = 2.07$, $p = .08$, but did not differ in compensation offered as a function of procedural injustice, $F(1, 46) = .76$, $p = .20$; (c) Performers in the unjust condition experienced less negative affect, $F(1, 49) = 8.46$, $p = .002$, and
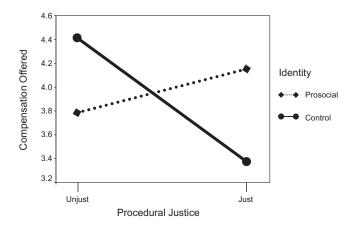
Figure 4. Interaction effect of identity and procedural injustice on compensation offered: Experiment 2.

Discussion

With a different sample, task, scenario, procedures, and prosocial behavior measure, we observed the same pattern of results in Experiment 2 as we did in Experiment 1. Prosocial identity once again reversed the psychological and behavioral reactions of performers to procedural injustice. Relative to performers whose prosocial identities were not activated, performers whose prosocial identities were activated experienced less negative affect and expressed less compassion when the procedure was unjust than when it was just. We also found that prosocial identity primarily moderated the effect of procedural injustice on self-relevant negative affect. Performers whose prosocial identities were activated experienced less guilt and shame when the procedure was unjust.

General Discussion

Taken together, our two experiments indicate that prosocial identity moderates performers' reactions to procedural injustice. Performers typically experience more negative affect—and offer more compensation and express

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trended toward offering less compensation, $F(1, 43) = 2.15$, $p = .08$, when prosocial identities were activated; and (d) Performers in the just condition trended toward offering less compensation, $F(1, 43) = 2.17$, $p = .08$, but did not differ in negative affect, $F(1, 49) = .13$, $p = .36$, when prosocial identities were activated. Degrees of freedom for the compensation analyses are decreased because several participants did not respond to the question.

more compassion to victims—when the procedure is unjust. However, when their prosocial identities are subtly activated, performers' responses follow the reverse pattern: They experience more negative affect and express more compassion and offer more compensation to victims when the procedure is just. Thus, to state the interaction effect differently, when procedures are unjust, a prosocial identity eases performers' negative affect, but reduces their prosocial behaviors. These findings make several important contributions to the organizational behavior and social psychology literatures.

Theoretical Contributions

Our principal contribution is to justice research, where scholars have assembled extensive evidence that the fairness of procedures is an important influence on individuals' psychological and behavioral reactions to situations (e.g., Brockner & Wiesenfeld, 1996; Colquitt et al., 2001). Our results highlight the effects of procedural justice on those charged with imposing harm, revealing that the performer's experience of fairness is shaped not only by the objective fairness of the procedure, but also by the facet of the individual's identity that is salient in the situation. Our findings thus extend the justice literature by suggesting that identity is an important influence on individuals' experiences of and responses to procedural injustice.

The counterintuitive pattern of results for performers whose prosocial identities are activated is particularly interesting in light of recent findings that people with interdependent self-construals are more sensitive to procedural injustice (Brockner, Chen, Mannix, Leung, & Skarlicki, 2000; Brockner, De Cremer, van den Bos, & Chen, 2005). At first glance, it appears that interdependent self-construals and prosocial identities should have similar effects on individuals' reactions to procedural injustice. Both interdependent self-construals and prosocial identities are relationally oriented self-concepts in which individuals are concerned about the welfare of others. It is surprising, then, that prosocial identity had the opposite effect on reactions to procedural injustice as observed for interdependent self-construal in the studies by Brockner and colleagues (Brockner et al., 2005). We believe that these apparently competing findings can be reconciled by considering the effect of roles.[7]

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[7]Another explanation for this difference focuses on the conceptual distinctions between *identity priming*, which focuses on the salience of a particular self-concept, and *self-construal*, which focuses on the strength of a particular self-concept (Holmvall & Bobocel, 2008; Skitka, 2003). From this perspective, priming a prosocial identity may temporarily make personal responsibility for harm-doing more salient, whereas interdependent self-construals imply stronger concern for collective welfare and thereby stronger negative reactions to procedural injustice.

The studies conducted by Brockner and colleagues (Brockner et al., 2005) focused on the reactions of victims and witnesses. When victims and witnesses hold interdependent self-construals, they are concerned with preserving social harmony, and procedural injustice threatens such harmony. Because victims and witnesses are not in the role of performing a task that harms other people, self-protection—that is, shielding oneself from the noxious, dissonance-arousing experience of committing harm—is not a salient concern.

Our studies, however, focus on the reactions of performers in the role of harming others. When performers' prosocial identities are activated, they are at risk for cognitive dissonance and distress: Delivering harm can be such an emotionally difficult process that people seek psychological and physical distance to protect themselves (Eisenberg, 2000; Folger & Skarlicki, 1998). Accordingly, our results suggest that different roles and identities imply different psychological and behavioral responses to procedural injustice. Activating a prosocial identity can change the performer's orienting focus, and, therefore, change the way in which the performer uses information about procedural injustice. These findings accentuate the promise of studying individuals in different roles for developing new insights in justice research.

Our results also contribute to burgeoning evidence about the downsides of procedural justice in organizations. Although the majority of evidence has indicated that procedural justice brings about positive psychological, social, and behavioral consequences, researchers have begun to examine the negative consequences of procedural justice. For example, several studies have suggested that procedural justice may decrease the self-esteem of victims of unfavorable outcomes by leading them to blame themselves for the outcomes (Brockner, 2002; Schroth & Shah, 2000; van den Bos et al., 1999). Our results suggest that procedural justice can have negative consequences for performers as well as victims: Performers whose prosocial identities are activated feel worse about communicating unfavorable outcomes based on procedurally just decisions than on procedurally unjust decisions.

Finally, our findings advance current research on how employees experience the impact of their actions on others. Although scholars have recently developed theoretical frameworks to explain how people experience harming others (Molinsky & Margolis, 2005) and benefiting others (Grant, 2007), few empirical studies have examined the psychological and behavioral dynamics of such experiences (cf. Grant, 2008; Grant et al., 2007; Margolis & Molinsky, 2008). Our findings underscore the importance of identity and procedural justice in shaping employees' experiences of harming and benefiting others.

Limitations and Future Directions

A key limitation of our research is that we did not test the cognitive-dissonance mechanism that we proposed to account for our findings. On the one hand, the results from Experiment 2 showing that prosocial identity moderated the effect of procedural injustice on self-relevant negative affect are consistent with the dissonance mechanism. Performers whose prosocial identities are activated felt less guilty and ashamed when procedures were unjust, suggesting that procedural injustice enabled these performers to reduce dissonance about the roles that they played in doing harm. On the other hand, it will be critical for future research to directly examine whether dissonance reduction explains these findings. Specifically, we recommend that researchers investigate whether performers whose prosocial identities are activated reduce dissonance by externalizing responsibility by blaming the decision maker when the procedure is unjust. We also suggest that researchers consider alternative psychological mechanisms that may mediate the reverse pattern of reactions among performers whose prosocial identities are activated. For example, it may be the case that these performers reduce dissonance when the procedure is unjust by blaming the victims (e.g., Batson, Early, & Salvarini, 1997; Kay, Jost, & Young, 2005; Lerner, 1977, 2003) or by reframing the unfavorable outcome as more beneficial and less harmful (e.g., Ashforth & Kreiner, 1999; Bandura, 1999).

A second limitation of our research concerns the external validity of the experimental manipulations. Our studies used role-playing designs (Greenberg & Eskew, 1993), and took place in relatively isolated experimental settings in which the impact of our identity primes was likely enhanced by the absence of other cues to shape performers' responses. It will be important for future research to triangulate these role-playing studies with studies examining how prosocial identity and procedural injustice interact when individuals are delivering tangible harm to others. This will allow researchers to examine whether similar results emerge if people are actually experiencing the situation, rather than merely playing a role.

Despite these limitations, it is worth noting that the nature of our primes is also a strength of these studies. We obtained a consistent pattern of significant identity effects merely by asking individuals to unscramble sentences and answer a few questions. In organizational settings, identity cues are typically much more powerful and enduring, with multiple redundant cues that have important implications for the self and for others. Prosocial identities are often elicited by organizational cultures, values, norms, ideologies, frames, rhetorics, and reward systems that prize compassion, concern, and generosity (e.g., Aselage & Eisenberger, 2003; Frost, 2003; Rhoades & Eisenberger, 2002). In such organizations, powerful cues that favor prosocial

identities, both explicitly and implicitly, are virtually ubiquitous. On the flipside, organizations may also undermine prosocial identities by valuing self-interest (Ferraro, Pfeffer, & Sutton, 2005; Heyman & Ariely, 2004; Miller, 1999; Schwartz, 1997). Future research should examine the impact of identity cues in field experiments, as well as more stable identities in longitudinal survey studies, on behaviors and psychological experiences.

Finally, we suggest that researchers consider how identity affects responses to procedural injustice when the degree of personal responsibility for the decision varies. Findings in the escalation of commitment literature have suggested that people are more likely to justify decisions for which they are personally responsible (Staw & Ross, 1989). This suggests that our results may be limited to performers to whom the "buck" is passed; performers who have control, choice, or responsibility for the unfavorable outcome may exhibit different psychological and behavioral responses to identity and procedural injustice.

Practical Implications

Unfortunately, people in professional situations often must perform tasks that entail delivering unfavorable outcomes to others. Doing so with procedural justice, our results indicate, can become quite complex. Our studies reveal how procedural injustice can have different effects on performers, victims, and the organization depending on which aspect of the performer's identity is activated. For example, consider an organization mandating a layoff. If the managers performing the layoff are in prosocial mindsets, as they are likely to be as they anticipate the blow to be experienced by fellow employees, procedural justice may make it more difficult for the managers to carry out the layoffs, but may cause them to act with more compassion toward layoff victims and increase their inclinations to compensate the victims. When the performer's prosocial identity is activated, protecting the victim through procedural justice may come at the expense of protecting the performer.

Victims and witnesses generally respond more positively to unfavorable outcomes when they are based on just, rather than unjust, decision-making procedures. Relatively little research has examined how performers responsible for delivering these unfavorable outcomes respond to injustice in the decision maker's procedure. In two experiments, we found that subtly activating performers' prosocial identities moderated their reactions to procedural injustice. Our results underscore the importance of roles and identities in shaping the experience and delivery of organizational justice, and suggest that when procedures are unjust, a prosocial identity can reduce prosocial behavior.

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