

## 12. Policies to Redress Social Injustice: Is the Concern for Justice a Cause Both of Support and of Opposition?

D. RAMONA BOBOCEL, LEANNE S. SON HING,  
CAMILLA M. HOLMVALL, AND MARK P. ZANNA

As documented by the research in the current volume, people are profoundly affected by social injustice. Fortunately, efforts to remedy many forms of social injustice have been undertaken by our legal and political institutions. Yet, despite many well-intentioned efforts to remedy injustice at the societal level, a paradox exists: Often the policies designed to redress injustice are themselves criticized as unfair and, in turn, are opposed. As a result, there is mounting polarization at the societal level in terms of support for, or opposition to, the policies designed to redress social injustice. There is also a rising divergence of opinion among researchers in the psychological literature, due to evidence demonstrating that there are both possible benefits (see Crosby & VanDeVeer, 2000) and burdens (e.g., Heilman, Block, & Lucus, 1992) associated with such policies. In the hope of closing the chasm, we believe that it is necessary to better understand the basis of this paradox. As society diversifies and people question what is or is not fair, research in this vein is especially relevant.

In one line of research at the University of Waterloo, we have been investigating the basis of the paradox, following in the tradition of Mel Lerner, both theoretically and methodologically. Theoretically, our overarching approach derives from what is perhaps Lerner's central legacy: his firm conviction that people have a fundamental or core justice motive (Lerner, 1974; Lerner, 1977; Lerner, 1980; Lerner & Lerner, 1981; Lerner & Miller, 1978). Specifically, our research has been guided by the assumption that researchers can better understand both positive and negative reactions to social policies designed to redress injustice by adopting a justice perspective. In one series of studies, we have examined whether people's concern for justice can be a genuine determinant of opposition to certain policies designed to redress social in-

justice. In a second line of research, we have examined whether objections rooted in the concern for justice can be mitigated by situational variables; from a justice perspective, we have focused on the role of situational variables that highlight unfairness in the status quo – in particular, the violation of meritocracy in the distribution of outcomes. The principal argument we hope to make in the present chapter is this: By truly appreciating the idea that justice matters to people, researchers can better understand why people sometimes oppose certain social policies designed to redress injustice; on the basis of that knowledge, they can then elucidate conditions under which people's reactions will be less polarized. From a methodological perspective, Lerner advocated the importance of studying justice issues within situations that are highly psychologically involving, in order to allow researchers to uncover the complexities of the justice motive. As we will describe in the next sections, we have followed Lerner's tradition in the design of our research, as well as in our theoretical analysis.

The chapter is divided into three main sections. In the first section, we describe an initial series of studies in which we set the stage by asking whether the concern for justice can be a genuine cause of opposition to social policies. In the second section, we describe a more recent line of research examining whether justice-based opposition can be mitigated. In particular, we describe two sets of studies using different research paradigms that converge on the idea that opposition may be reduced when people perceive a violation of meritocracy in the status quo. In the third section, we summarize and highlight the central implications of the research program.

### Can the Concern for Justice be a Genuine Cause of Opposition?

As stated earlier, for almost every public policy decision that claims to redress social injustice, there are people who express opposition to it on the grounds that the policy is unfair. A common rejoinder by advocates is that opponents are in fact being disingenuous. One argument is that opponents' claims of unfairness are a cover-up for prejudice, self-interest, or other variables related to maintaining an unfair status quo.

Perhaps the context that best exemplifies the debate over justice-versus prejudice-based sources of opposition to social policies is affirmative action. On one side of the debate are people who claim that they oppose affirmative action because it is unfair. In particular, these people argue that affirmative action is unfair because it violates the merit

principle of distributive justice. According to the merit principle, outcomes are fair when they are distributed among people in proportion to their relative contributions or inputs (e.g., Deutsch, 1975; Lerner, 1974). Thus, to the extent that an affirmative action policy advantages less qualified target-group members (according to traditional indices of qualifications), it is perceived in the eyes of most people as violating the merit principle of distributive justice. Moreover, even when a policy upholds traditional definitions of the merit principle, it may be perceived as violating the consistency principle of procedural justice. According to the consistency principle of procedural justice, allocation procedures should treat all potential recipients identically (e.g., Leventhal, 1980). Thus, to the extent that an affirmative action policy treats target-group members and nonmembers differently in hiring and promotion decisions, it is perceived as violating the consistency principle of procedural justice. Numerous studies are consistent with the idea that justice considerations are a relevant predictor of reactions to affirmative action (for two examples, see Kravitz et al., 1997; Nacoste, 1987). According to a *justice hypothesis*, then, opposition to policies aimed at redressing injustice may be derived, at least in part, from people's fundamental concern over the violation of valued justice principles.

On the other side of the debate is the *prejudice hypothesis*, which suggests that people who oppose affirmative action do so because of negative attitudes toward the potential beneficiaries. Indeed, there is evidence to show that the more negative people's attitudes toward women or blacks, the more they oppose the general concept of affirmative action (e.g., Kluegel & Smith, 1983; Sidanius, Pratto, & Bobo, 1996). It has further been suggested that opposition to affirmative action on the grounds that it is unfair may itself reflect a rationalization of prejudice. The idea that prejudice may manifest itself in this manner is consistent with theorizing and research on the "modern" forms of prejudice (e.g., Murrell et al., 1994; Tougas et al., 1995; Gaertner & Dovidio, 1986).<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> It is noteworthy, however, that in some of the past research demonstrating links between the modern forms of prejudice and opposition to the general concept of affirmative action, the items purportedly measuring the more subtle forms of prejudice often solicit people's attitudes toward policies such as affirmative action. In other words, people's attitudes toward affirmative action are sometimes taken as an indicator of prejudice. Although the latter operationalization is consistent with the conceptualization of a more subtle form of prejudice, it raises an obvious construct validity problem in research on attitudes toward affirmative action (for more details, see Davey et al., 1999).

Whereas undoubtedly prejudice is one determinant of negative attitudes toward some social policies designed to help the disadvantaged, is prejudice the entire story? If justice-based opposition is merely a manifestation of prejudice, then this casts doubt on the validity of the paradox outlined earlier. That is, we could attribute people's justice-based objections to motivations other than the concern for justice per se. This is an important issue, because the interpretation of the causes of people's opposition ultimately influences how social and organizational psychologists study attitudes in this domain and how society develops and implements policies designed to redress injustice.

It is interesting to note that, in the broader psychological literature on procedural and distributive justice, there is virtually no debate about the validity of people's justice-based objections to a number of different kinds of workplace or public policies, such as drug testing, performance monitoring, and smoking bans (for reviews, see Folger & Cropanzano, 1998; Lind & Tyler, 1988). Nor is there debate on the effects of such perceptions on work attitudes and behaviors. From a theoretical perspective, it is not clear why justice concerns should have a lesser role to play in the domain of affirmative action than in other domains. Thus, in the same way that adopting a justice perspective has advanced researchers' understanding of reactions to work policies that do not necessarily involve group membership (or which involve lines of group categorization other than sex and race), we believe that adopting a justice perspective can advance researchers' understanding in the domain of affirmative action.

On the basis of the preceding concerns, our primary objective in a first series of studies was to test whether people's concern for justice can indeed be a *determinant* of their attitudes toward affirmative action, or whether objections in the name of fairness are necessarily rooted in people's prejudices toward those who purportedly benefit most from the policy (e.g., women, the disabled, visible minorities).

If the concern for justice is a genuine cause of opposition rather than solely a rationalization of prejudice, then by deduction two predictions follow. First, we would expect that the extent to which people value a particular justice principle should predict their opposition, but only when evaluating a policy that violates the relevant justice principle. For example, the more strongly people endorse the idea that outcomes ought to be distributed according to the merit principle of distributive justice, the more strongly they should oppose a policy that violates this principle. By contrast, people's endorsement of the merit principle should not predict opposition to a policy that upholds the merit

principle (indeed, it could predict support for the policy). Second, the effect of justice values should be independent of people's prejudice level. In fact, whereas it may seem counterintuitive, we reasoned that prejudice level might have a relatively small or no significant effect on attitudes when a policy explicitly violates a justice principle. If (a) justice values and prejudice are independent constructs, and (b) justice-based objections are genuine, then, depending on people's justice values, it is possible for those who are relatively nonprejudiced and those who are relatively prejudiced to be equally opposed to a justice-violating policy. Our prediction regarding the role of prejudice is supported by two prior studies. In one study investigating students' attitudes toward four affirmative action programs designed to increase representation of black students at their university, Nosworthy, Lea, and Lindsay (1995) found that racism contributed as a predictor of opposition to only the mildest of the four possible programs (e.g., targeted ads versus enrollment quotas). In addition, in a large survey aimed at validating a unidimensional conceptualization of forms of racism, Kleinpenning and Hagendoorn (1993) found that Dutch secondary school students' scores on racism were correlated more highly with their opposition to a question about equal opportunity in society than to a question about preferential treatment in job hiring. In summary, the data from these studies are consistent with our idea that, for policies that violate valued justice principles, prejudice may have a lesser or nonsignificant role as a predictor of attitudes.

By contrast, if prejudice were the whole story of opposition, then there should be no independent effect of people's justice values over and above their prejudice level, nor should justice values predict differentially as a function of whether the policy violates or upholds the relevant justice principles.

We have conducted a series of experiments to test this logic (see Bobocel et al., 1998). For example, in one study, in an initial phase, we assessed University of Waterloo students' endorsement of two justice principles, using measures we had created in some of our previous research. One measure (fifteen items) was designed to tap people's preference for allocations that are based on the distributive justice principle of equity or merit, which states that to be fair outcomes or "goods" ought to be distributed on the basis of people's relative contributions (i.e., the Preference for the Merit Principle Scale; for details, see Davey et al., 1999). An example item (rated on a five-point scale with end points labeled disagree and agree) is: "In organizations,

people who do their job well ought to rise to the top" (positively keyed). The other measure (twenty items) was designed to tap, in a variety of social domains, people's preference for the consistency principle of procedural justice, which states that to be fair people ought to be treated identically in decision making (Son Hing, 1997). An example item (rated on a five-point scale with end points labeled extremely unfair and extremely fair) is: "To treat everyone the same, all taxpayers ought to pay for highway maintenance even though some people use the roads more than others" (positively keyed). Finally, we also assessed people's level of prejudice, using existing measures of sexism (e.g., Tougas et al., 1995) and racism (e.g., McConahay, 1986). To provide a clearer test of the hypotheses, we designed our justice measures to be free of content of constructs related to prejudice and the desire to maintain the status quo, such as social dominance orientation, authoritarianism, and the belief that the world is currently just (for scale details, see Bobocel et al., 1998; Davey et al., 1999). In addition, we deleted items from previous prejudice measures (e.g., sexism) that appeared to have substantial content overlap with the criterion of interest: attitudes toward affirmative action (see note 1, p. 206).

In a separate experimental session held about one month later, a random sample of these participants were invited to participate in what was ostensibly an unrelated corporate survey. In brief, participants were told that a local company was gathering reactions from several constituents regarding various workplace policies that they were considering implementing, and that because University of Waterloo students are potential "employees of the future," the company was interested in their views. To make the situation as psychologically involving as possible, we bolstered the cover story by conducting the study outside of the psychology building; the experimenter was dressed in a business suit; the experimental materials were professionally designed; and we told participants that their opinions would determine whether or not the company implemented the policies in question. Indeed, we further created the sense that participants were providing the company with their "vote" by having them seal their ratings in an envelope and drop them in what appeared to be a ballot box.

Participants evaluated the following three specific workplace affirmative action policies (counterbalanced in order), which by design did or did not violate the relevant justice principles. A *preferential treatment* policy violated the merit principle of distributive justice by stating that, as long as they were minimally qualified, women, visible minorities,

and the physically challenged would be hired or promoted over nontarget-group members even if the former were relatively less qualified. A *tie-break* policy violated the consistency principle of procedural justice by stating that target-group members would receive preference in jobs or promotions in instances of “tied” merit. This policy thus treats people differently as a function of group status, but it does not violate the merit principle per se because in no case would a less qualified target-group member be advantaged. Finally, an *equal treatment* policy violated neither justice principle by stating that new programs such as flexible hours, maternity/paternity leaves, and mentorship programs would be available to all employees as a means of removing systemic barriers.

Not considering individual differences for the moment, we found that participants were in general most opposed to the preferential treatment policy and most favorable toward the equal treatment policy. Attitudes toward the tie-break policy fell in between (at about the neutral point on the scale). The principle results – predicting opposition to each policy as a function of individual differences – are presented in Table 12.1. In line with the justice hypothesis, we found that, over and above people’s prejudice level, strength of endorsement of justice principles predicted opposition, but only when the policy violated the relevant justice principle. That is, when the policy violated the merit principle (preferential treatment policy), opposition was significantly and uniquely influenced by participants’ preference for the merit principle of justice. The more strongly people endorsed the merit principle, the more they opposed this policy. When the policy violated

**Table 12.1. Standardized regression coefficients (betas) for the within-cell regressions of opposition on the predictors**

Predictor	Affirmative Action Policy		
	Equal Treatment	Tie-break	Preferential Treatment
Prejudice	.34**	.16	.12
Endorsement of the consistency principle	-.03	.18 <sup>†</sup>	.03
Endorsement of the merit principle	-.01	.05	.35**

Note: Adapted from Bobocel et al., 1998.  $N = 86$ . \*\*  $p < .01$ , <sup>†</sup>  $p < .10$ .

the consistency principle (the tie-break policy), opposition was predicted by participants’ preference for the consistency principle. The more strongly people endorsed the consistency principle, the more they opposed this policy. Finally, when the program violated neither justice norm, attitudes were not influenced by justice values; rather, it was in this case that prejudice significantly distinguished those who were relatively more opposed from those who were relatively more supportive.

Thus, in line with the prejudice hypothesis, we indeed found that the greater the prejudice, the more the opposition. Yet this was true only for the policy that did not explicitly violate justice principles. It is of further interest to note that, in follow-up mediation analyses, we found that prejudiced individuals were more opposed to the equal treatment policy compared to less prejudiced individuals because they construed it as justice-violating. This finding is consistent with the idea that, for prejudiced people, justice concerns may indeed serve as a rationalization for opposition to the equal treatment policy. In two related follow-up studies, we have replicated the prejudice effect on attitudes toward the *global concept of affirmative action*, which, as noted earlier, is the dependent variable most often examined in past research examining the role of prejudice. In one study, 455 University of Waterloo students completed the measures of justice values and prejudice, as well as providing their attitudes toward and construal of a “typical affirmative action program.” The results showed that prejudice, but not justice values, predicted opposition to the undefined program. In an effort to test whether this effect of prejudice generalizes to a nonstudent population, we included a shortened version of our measures (in this case, only modern racism, attitudes, and justice construal were assessed) as part of the Kitchener–Waterloo Metropolitan Area Survey 1998 (Bobocel, Son Hing, & Zanna, 1998). This was a larger community survey that was mailed to a random sample of adults whose names were obtained from the tax assessment rolls for the local area. The primary sample details are as follows: 62% response rate;  $N = 307$ ; mean age of respondents = 47 years; 53% women; 60% employed full-time. Again, we found that prejudice predicted attitudes toward the undefined affirmative action program. Moreover, as in the case of the equal treatment policy, in both of the latter studies mediation analyses confirmed that prejudiced people were more opposed than were their less prejudiced counterparts in part because of their construal of the undefined affirmative action policy as justice-violating.

The data from our initial line of research thus clearly indicate that, for some policies – those that are non-justice-violating or are undefined – opposition on the grounds that the policy is unfair may derive from motivations other than the concern for justice per se – in this case, prejudice. People who have negative attitudes toward the beneficiaries may oppose social policies aimed at redressing injustice with the claim that the policies are unfair. Whether this claim of unfairness is applied after the fact to cover up their dislike of the policy, or whether prejudice directly influences people's beliefs about the fairness of the policy is not clear from our data. Likely, both processes occur. What is clear, however, is that prejudice was most likely to predict reactions when the policy is – in the minds of most people – not explicitly justice-violating.

By contrast, when the policy did violate traditional justice principles, we were unable to predict attitudes simply by knowing participants' levels of prejudice; people were generally more opposed to these policies, regardless of their level of prejudice. However, rather than prejudice level, attitudes were predicted by participants' justice values. Participants were more opposed to policies that violate norms of merit and consistency as a result of their endorsement of those justice principles. This implies that, when policies explicitly violate certain justice norms, we can expect people who most strongly endorse those norms to be especially opposed. In other words, in line with the justice hypothesis, sometimes people will reject policies aimed at redressing social injustice out of a genuine concern for justice.

### **Can the Concern for Justice Reduce Opposition?**

Our initial studies revealed that people who strongly endorse certain justice principles tend to be particularly opposed to policies that violate those principles. Yet, is this always the case? We believe that the answer is no. Whereas the concern for justice may affect attitudes in this manner under ordinary circumstances, we also believe that there are conditions, derived from a justice framework, in which the typical effect is reduced.

In brief, if people object to social policies that violate certain justice norms as a result of their endorsement of those norms, then opposition should be reduced under conditions that highlight the unfairness or potential unfairness of the status quo. For instance, if bias exists in the manner in which merit is assessed in an organization's selection pro-

cedures, then this situation should offend people who strongly endorse the merit principle, because the existence of such bias would violate meritocracy. Under these conditions, we propose that people who strongly value the meritocratic distribution of outcomes will face a conflict: Ordinarily, they would oppose a merit-violating policy like our preferential treatment policy, because it offends their justice principles; however, the existence of bias in the workplace also offends their justice principles, because it too is merit-violating. In this set of "dual justice-violating" conditions, it is possible that people's typical justice-based objections to the policy would be overridden by their more specific beliefs about unfairness in the status quo. Indeed, in line with previous theorizing by Crosby and her colleagues (e.g., Crosby, 1994), it is possible that, in this situation, people will be more supportive of the policy because it is perceived as enhancing meritocracy. In the next two subsections, we review two sets of studies that converge on these ideas.

#### *The Effect of the Perception of Workplace Discrimination in Mitigating Opposition to Affirmative Action*

In one series of studies (see Son Hing, Bobocel, & Zanna, 2000), we used the same methodology as in our earlier research and examined the role of the perception of workplace discrimination in moderating justice-based opposition to an affirmative action policy. In particular, we focused on potential moderation of the effect of participants' endorsement of the merit principle of distributive justice on opposition to the preferential treatment policy. In a first study, in addition to assessing students' endorsement of the merit principle in an initial session, we measured their perceptions of discrimination in the workplace, using an eighteen-item scale that we had previously developed. On the basis of our conceptualization of workplace discrimination as a form of merit violation, a subset of the scale items was designed to tap people's perceptions of bias in the assessment of minority group members' merit. An example item (rated on a five-point scale with the end points labeled disagree and agree) is: "Typically, the criteria used to measure employee performance reflect male-dominated norms of professional behavior (e.g., competitiveness) and thus criteria are biased against female employees" (positively keyed). As in our earlier studies, we obtained participants' attitudes toward the preferential treatment policy one month later.

The results showed that, as before, participants' justice values predicted opposition to the preferential treatment policy; the more strongly participants endorsed the merit principle of distributive justice, the more they opposed the policy. As predicted, however, there was a significant interaction between justice values and perceptions of workplace discrimination. As shown in Figure 12.1, the effect of justice values on opposition was significant only among people who perceive little workplace discrimination; by contrast, among those who perceive high workplace discrimination, the effect of justice values was entirely mitigated.

In a second follow-up study, we used the same general methodology except that, rather than measuring participants' perceptions of workplace discrimination, we experimentally manipulated this variable before participants evaluated the affirmative action policy. We induced the perception of workplace discrimination by altering the wording of a subset of the items in the measure we had used in the preceding study. Specifically, in one condition (low workplace discrimination), the items were difficult to agree with by virtue of the qualifiers used in the items; by contrast, in the other condition (high workplace discrimination), the items were worded so that they were easy to agree with (e.g., "[Typically/Sometimes], the criteria used to measure employee performance reflect male-dominated norms of

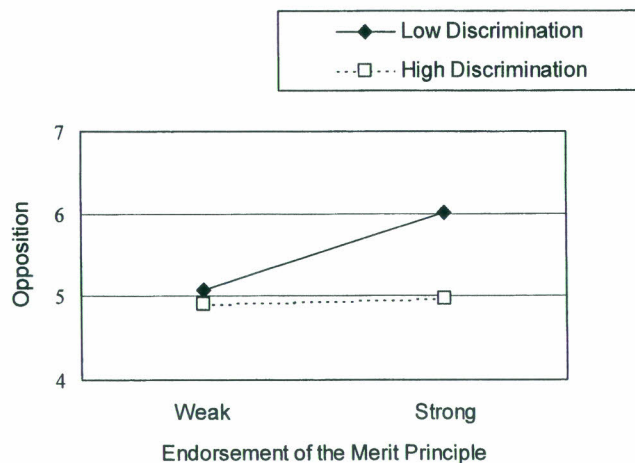


Figure 12.1. Relation between participants' endorsement of the merit principle and their opposition to the preferential treatment policy, as a function of perceived workplace discrimination ( $N = 107$ ) (adapted from Son Hing et al., 2000).

professional behavior and, thus, criteria [are nearly always/may be] biased against female employees"). By inducing people to either systematically disagree with or endorse these items, we expected to manipulate their beliefs about the existence of workplace discrimination through a self-persuasion mechanism (Salancik & Conway, 1975; Schwarz, 1994).

The results, shown in Figure 12.2, were virtually identical to those of the previous study. That is, we found a significant interaction between justice values and experimental condition, such that the usual effect of justice values on opposition to the merit-violating policy was observed, but only in the low discrimination condition. By contrast, in the condition in which participants were induced to perceive high discrimination, people who strongly endorse the merit principle of distributive justice were no longer especially opposed (indeed, the pattern of these data suggests that they were slightly in favor of the preferential treatment policy compared to people who endorse the merit principle less strongly). In addition, we also found that, when induced to perceive high discrimination, people who strongly endorse the merit principle believe that qualified target-group members are more likely to be identified by the policy. Thus, it is possible that the reason why people who strongly endorse meritocracy are less opposed to the preferential treatment policy in conditions of high discrimination is that

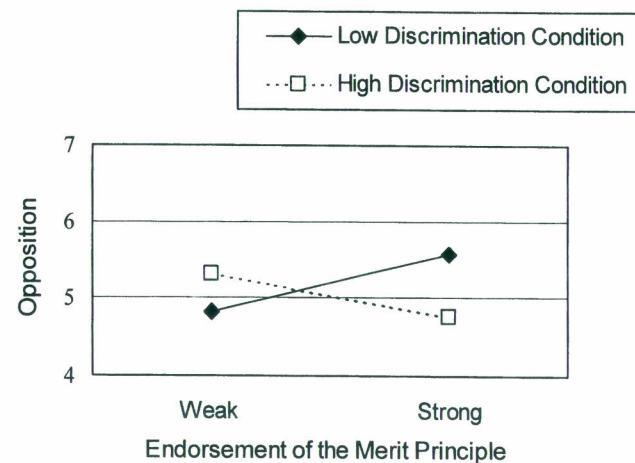


Figure 12.2. Relation between participants' endorsement of the merit principle and their opposition to the preferential treatment policy, as a function of experimental condition ( $N = 82$ ) (adapted from Son Hing et al., 2000).

these individuals believe that the policy increases the probability that deserving candidates will be hired.

To summarize thus far, whereas we have found that justice-based objections to certain social policies can be genuine, our more recent research suggests that the usual effect of justice values on opposition is not absolute. The preceding studies show that, under conditions in which people perceive that there is workplace discrimination – in particular, bias in the assessment of minority group members' merit – those who strongly endorse the merit principle of distributive justice object substantially less to the preferential treatment policy compared to when they perceive little workplace discrimination.

It is noteworthy that the results were the same whether we measured people's preexisting beliefs about bias in the workplace or whether we experimentally manipulated these beliefs. Thus, we can more firmly conclude that the preference for the merit principle of distributive justice and the perception of bias in the measurement of merit in organizations are independent constructs. In other words, it is not the case that those people who value the merit principle are necessarily less likely to perceive bias in the status quo. These findings add further support for the construct validity of our Preference for the Merit Principle Scale as an index of people's preference for how outcomes *ought* to be distributed versus how they are perceived to be distributed *at present* (see Davey et al., 1999).

#### *The Effect of Disadvantage in Mitigating Opposition to the Violation of Procedural Justice*

In the preceding set of studies, we found that people who strongly value the merit principle of distributive justice and who were ordinarily most opposed to a merit-violating policy (preferential-treatment affirmative action) were less opposed under situational conditions in which they perceived that bias exists in the measurement of merit.

In a related experiment (see Bobocel et al., 2000), we have examined the effect of a similar situational variable on people's reactions to the violation of procedural justice. The primary goal of this study was to directly test the idea that people may in general (regardless of justice values) be less opposed to policies that violate procedural justice when the policies enhance the likelihood of achieving the meritocratic distribution of outcomes. We reasoned that, in the context of allocating resources such as pay, promotions, and selection decisions, most people

are predominantly concerned with distributive justice, and in particular with the equitable distribution of outcomes (Deutsch, 1975; Lerner, 1974). In this situation – where distributive justice concerns are paramount – people may object less to procedural justice violations to the extent that such violations enhance the likelihood of achieving meritocracy. Indeed, one might argue that one reason why people ordinarily prefer consistent treatment during outcome allocations is because being treated in the same way as all others is most likely to yield the fair distribution of outcomes (Rawls, 1977; Thibaut & Walker, 1975). In other words, it is possible that, at least in certain contexts, people's concerns for traditional procedural justice norms may be secondary to their concern for achieving distributive justice. This idea could also help to explain another justice paradox: that is, why sometimes people want to be treated identically to others during allocation decisions (procedural consistency), but at other times want to be treated differently than others (procedural inconsistency; Crosby, 1994; Folger, 1994; Folger, Sheppard, & Buttram, 1995).<sup>2</sup>

Thus, our goal in this study was to examine whether violating one principle of procedural justice – namely, procedural consistency – is more acceptable to people when it has implications for the meritocratic distribution of outcomes. As in our earlier studies, we sought to create a psychologically involving situation in the lab. To accomplish this, we brought participants into the lab individually, under the guise of conducting a study to examine the link between people's personalities and the basic cognitive abilities that are presumed to predict successful job performance. Accordingly, in a first phase, the participants completed a three-page personality inventory, ostensibly to assess their personalities; in a second phase, they completed a visual-spatial test under time pressure, ostensibly to assess their cognitive abilities. (The latter test comprised fifty problems derived from cognitive ability measures in the literature.) As part of the cover story, we told participants that, to simulate real-world conditions in which people are paid for on-the-job performance, participants would be financially rewarded on the basis

<sup>2</sup> Researchers sometimes conceptualize people's concerns about procedural justice and distributive justice as reflecting concerns about microjustice (the fairness of rewards to individual recipients) and macrojustice (the aggregate fairness of rewards in a society), respectively (see Brickman et al., 1981). Whereas it is possible to conceptualize the procedural–distributive justice and micro–macrojustice distinctions in this manner, it is also possible to consider them independently. In the present study, our goal was to present participants with a conflict between two forms of microjustice concerns.

of their performance on the visual-spatial task (i.e., the better they performed relative to others, the more money they would earn).

Participants were University of Waterloo students who had indicated in an earlier mass-testing booklet (administered to all introductory psychology students) that English was their first language. They were led to believe that we were running the study in small groups, and, on their arrival to the lab, they encountered an accented female Asian confederate, who presumably was another participant. Following the introduction to the study, participants completed the personality inventory. For half of the participants (in the *disadvantage condition*), the confederate expressed difficulty with the English language during this phase. (She asked for the meaning of several adjectives on the inventory and took five minutes longer to complete the test.) For the other half of the participants (in the *control condition*), the confederate expressed no such difficulty. Following the manipulation of disadvantage in phase one, participants were then asked to complete the visual-spatial task under time pressure. We had altered the visual-spatial test so that it required participants to read rather lengthy written instructions in order to understand how to complete the problems. We told participants that, given the nature of the test, difficulty with the English language could affect one's performance on the visual-spatial test; accordingly, more time and a dictionary would be granted to participants, namely the Asian confederate, who in mass testing had reported English as a second language. Participants were told that they and the confederate would thus have twenty and twenty-eight minutes respectively for the test, and the participant and confederate were separated, ostensibly to minimize distractions. Thus, procedural consistency was violated in both conditions, because the confederate always received a dictionary and (40%) more time to complete the visual-spatial test. The potential implications of the procedural inconsistency for distributive justice varied, however, as a function of the experimental condition. In the disadvantage condition, in which the confederate exhibited difficulty understanding English, allowing the confederate more time and access to a dictionary could in fact enhance the assessment of merit. By contrast, in the control condition in which the confederate exhibited no disadvantage, these additional resources could hinder the assessment of merit. To the extent that participants are concerned with ensuring the fair and, in this case, meritorious distribution of outcomes, we expected that they would object less to the violation of procedural consistency in the disadvantage condition relative to the control condition.

After participants' twenty-minute work period had elapsed, they were asked to respond to a questionnaire, ostensibly to provide anonymous feedback to the researchers on a variety of aspects of the study while the experimenter scored their tests. Embedded within a number of non-fairness-related questions, we asked participants to report (on seven-point rating scales) their attitudes toward the experimental procedures and their perceptions of the likelihood that the procedures would ensure the fair distribution of rewards. Once the measures were completed, the true purpose of the study was explained to participants, and their names were entered into a lottery for a cash prize.

The results showed that, as expected, participants were significantly less opposed to the procedural inconsistency in the disadvantage condition compared to the control condition. In addition, as shown in Figure 12.3, a mediation analysis revealed that this effect of the disadvantage manipulation on opposition ( $r = -.34, p < .05$ ) was due to participants' enhanced perceptions of distributive fairness. In other words, when the confederate was disadvantaged, participants perceived that inconsistent treatment was more likely to be distributively fair; in turn, the greater participants' perceptions of distributive justice, the less they opposed the procedures. Finally, when perceptions of distributive justice were controlled, the effect of the disadvantage manipulation on opposition was no longer statistically significant ( $\beta = -.20, ns$ ). These data are in line with the notion that people may object less to the violation of consistency in procedures during outcome allocation,

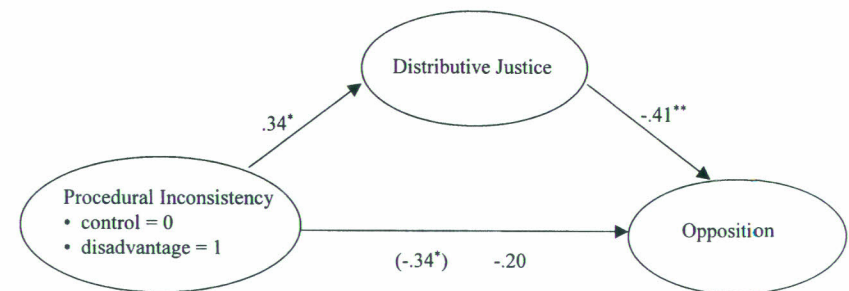


Figure 12.3. Path analysis depicting the mediating role of perceived distributive justice. Inconsistent treatment is constant across experimental conditions (coded 0,1). The total effect between condition and opposition is given inside parentheses; the direct effect (controlling for justice perceptions) is given outside parentheses ( $N = 41$ ) (adapted from Bobocel et al., 2000). \* $p < .05$  \*\* $p < .01$



under conditions that enhance the likelihood of achieving distributive justice.

As a follow-up to this study, we recently conducted a second experiment using the same paradigm and the same manipulation of disadvantage; the only difference was that the confederate did not receive the extra resources. In other words, our procedures treated the participant and the confederate *consistently* by giving them the same amount of time to complete the visual-spatial task (and neither received a dictionary). If people are indeed concerned with distributive justice, then we reasoned that they should be more *opposed* to procedural consistency when the confederate is, in fact, disadvantaged in the way that merit is assessed. The results are in line with this prediction. In addition, a mediation analysis is consistent with the idea that the effect of the manipulation of disadvantage on attitudes was due to the perception that maintaining procedural consistency under these circumstances would reduce the likelihood of achieving meritocracy.

To summarize, the findings of the two sets of studies reported in this section converge on the idea that objections to policies that violate traditional justice principles are not necessarily absolute. The first set of studies showed that, when people perceive or are induced to perceive discrimination in the workplace (in particular, bias in the assessment of minority group members' merit), those who strongly value the merit principle of distributive justice were less opposed to a policy that violates this principle than ordinarily would be the case. Our data suggest that this is because these individuals perceive that the policy will identify deserving target-group members. Similarly, the second set of experiments showed that, in a situation in which another person was disadvantaged in terms of how merit was assessed, participants (a) objected less to the violation of the consistency principle of procedural justice and (b) objected more to the maintenance of procedural consistency, compared to a situation in which there was no disadvantage. Our data suggest that this occurs because of the perception that distributive justice would be enhanced.

One interesting difference between the two sets of studies reported in this section deserves to be highlighted. In the first set of studies, not all participants were affected by the perception of workplace bias; only people who most strongly value the merit principle reduced their opposition to the policy. By contrast, in the second set of studies, we found similar effects regardless of justice values. Although it is premature to draw firm conclusions, we believe that reactions may differ

depending on the "strength" of the justice violation in the policy. Further consideration of this issue in our future research will undoubtedly add to the present analysis.

### Conclusion and Implications

We began this chapter with the problem of understanding why people sometimes object to policies aimed at redressing social injustice on the grounds that the policies are themselves unfair. We have taken a justice perspective in approaching this problem, guided by Lerner's fundamental theoretical assumption: justice matters deeply to people. On the basis of our research, we have argued that, first, such objections can be genuine. Our findings that (a) people's endorsement of procedural and distributive justice principles significantly predicts their opposition to affirmative action, but only when the policy explicitly violates the relevant justice norm, and that (b) the effect of justice values holds over and above any effect of prejudice are, taken together, consistent with the idea that justice-based objections can be genuine. Yet we have also found that justice-based objections are not necessarily absolute. Indeed, we have begun to illuminate conditions under which objections to social policies can be mitigated, as a result of people's concern for justice. Taken as a whole, our data suggest that reactions to policies – which ordinarily may be opposed because they violate traditional justice norms – will be more favorable in the context of other conditions that highlight the violation of meritocracy in the status quo. It is interesting to note, however, that depending on the norm that is violated by the policy (e.g., procedural versus distributive justice), the effects could be more or less sweeping in terms of who is most affected. This is a question for future investigation.

What are the broader implications of our analysis for understanding the paradox we began with? We believe that, by adopting a justice framework, we can offer two central contributions, of both theoretical and practical significance. In Figure 12.4, we provide a heuristic device to highlight the implications of our analysis. We close the chapter with these implications.

First, most importantly, we suggest that both strong opposition to and strong support for social policies aimed at reducing social injustice can stem, at least in part, from the same underlying process: people's concern for justice. As shown in the top path of Figure 12.4, when people encounter a policy that violates traditional norms of

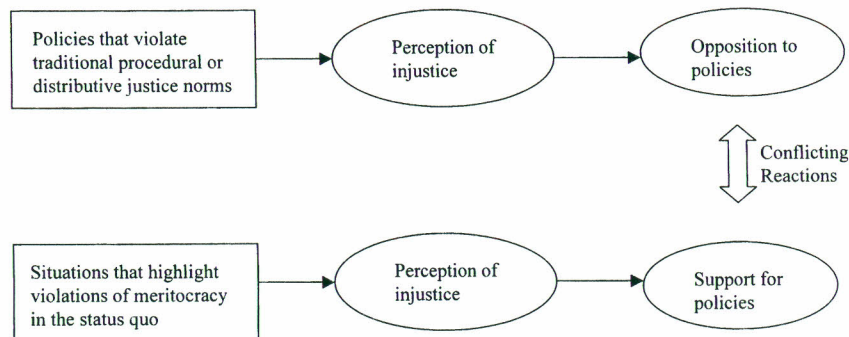


Figure 12.4. Heuristic framework derived from the present analysis.

distributive or procedural justice, they will, all else being equal, perceive an injustice; in turn, due to people's fundamental concern for justice, they will strongly *oppose* the policy. As shown in the bottom path, when people encounter situations that potentially violate meritocracy in the status quo – they will also, all else being equal, perceive an injustice, and, due to a concern for justice, they will strongly *support* the policy designed to redress the injustice. But consider both paths together. When both of these conditions are salient, people may experience conflicting reactions: opposition and support. As a consequence of these conflicting reactions, people's attitudes toward the policy may become more moderate or less polarized. Thus, by adopting the view that the concern for justice can indeed be a genuine determinant of opposition as well as of support, our research begins to delineate conditions that might help to reduce backlash against certain policies on the grounds of perceived unfairness.

Second, our analysis may help to explain the rising divergence in the literature on attitudes toward social policies (such as affirmative action) aimed at redressing social injustice. It is our contention that researchers have most often focused their research and theorizing on the processes depicted by either the top or the bottom path in our heuristic framework. But there has been relatively little consideration of the two paths in conjunction with each other. This may, in turn, account for a rising divergence of opinion at the societal level. It is our hope that, by adopting more complex theoretical and research approaches, social and organizational psychologists will gain a better understanding of how we as a society might balance the equally desir-

able goals of maintaining people's sense of justice and at the same time attempting to redress social injustice.

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