

Of Different Minds: An Accessible Identity Model of Justice Reasoning

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An accessible identity model (AIM) of justice reasoning is introduced to explain when people become concerned about justice and how they define what is fair or unfair once justice concerns are activated. This model has two core propositions: (a) People are most likely to think about justice and fairness when self-relevant values and goals are highly accessible or activated, and (b) how people define fairness depends on which aspect of the self (i.e., material, social, or personal and moral) dominates the working self-concept. A review of the literature indicates that this general model provides an integrative account for when and how people become concerned about both procedural and distributive justice, and provides a cogent explanation for known effects and results previously thought to be anomalies. Finally, the model generates novel hypotheses about how identity threat may lead to motivated perceptions of fairness or unfairness.

Sometimes people think about and express their concerns in terms of what is just or fair in a given situation. Other times, they ignore justice concerns. To date, we have not developed very sophisticated ways of understanding when people think carefully about whether their own or others' behavior is fair and when they are unlikely to think about fairness. In addition, some social psychologists pit self-interest against justice concerns (e.g., Folger, 2001; Lerner, this issue), which may imply to some that justice concerns by definition must be altruistic and unrelated to the self.

This article takes a very different tack. It presents a model, labeled the Accessible Identity Model, or AIM, that links justice reasoning with people's self-concepts or self-schemas. The model endeavors to account for variations in the likelihood of engaging in justice reasoning and for how people think about justice once it becomes accessible as a concern. At the core of the model are two fundamental propositions. First, to know whether people will approach a situation in terms of justice, one needs to know if the situation engages

some aspect of the self. Second, to understand how a person reasons about fairness, one first has to know which aspect of the self is currently most cognitively accessible to him or her.

The AIM is an extension and integration of several theoretical perspectives of the self (e.g., self-schema, self-categorization, and self-regulation theory, e.g., Carver & Scheier, 1998; Markus, 1977; Turner, 1985, 1999) with current theoretical conceptions of distributive and procedural justice. Self-schema, categorization, and regulation theorists assume that self-definition is a dynamic and basic categorization process that has important implications for virtually all human thoughts, feelings, and behavior through its activation of personal strivings or goals (Emmons, 1986). Although values and goals are organized and regulated by the self, they can range in focus from the individual (one's own preferences and desires) to values and goals that involve others (e.g., affiliation, social justice). Because people's lives are fundamentally organized and grounded around the pursuit of a range of values and goals, the self and self-regulation should also play an important role in justice reasoning. In sum, the AIM is premised on the notion that "before we can judge others and decide how to behave ourselves, we have to decide who we are" (Spears, Doojse, & Ellemers, 1999, p. 63).

The Link Between Self-Awareness and Justice Reasoning

The AIM posits that people should be more likely to think about and frame their behavior in terms of justice when they are more rather than less self-aware (the "self-awareness hypothesis"). If conceptions of justice

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are stored in memory in close connection to the self, they will be more cognitively accessible when people are more rather than less self-aware. In support of the self-awareness hypothesis, increased objective self-awareness is associated with decreases in egocentric bias and increases in adherence to internalized justice norms (Greenberg, 1980, 1983a; Kernis & Reis, 1984), although sometimes only when personal identity concerns, such as moral values, are explicitly primed (Batson, Thompson, Seufferling, Whitney, & Strongman, 1999). For example, high self-awareness is associated with greater efforts to restore equity after receiving an inequitable overpayment (Reis & Burns, 1982), and people rate inequitable overpayment as fairer when they are high rather than low in cognitive busyness or load (Peters, Ybema, & Bobocel, 2002). In a related vein, people tend to steal (Beaman, Klentz, Diener, & Svanum, 1979) and cheat more (Vallacher & Solodky, 1979) when self-awareness is low rather than high.

Taken together, this research supports the prediction that self-awareness and thinking about fairness are intimately entwined phenomena. Whether people think about justice or behave justly depends on whether they have sufficient cognitive resources available to allow for self-awareness, by the degree to which they are in fact self-aware, and by the relative accessibility of moral norms and goals.

The Identity-Relevance and Threat Hypotheses

If identity accessibility makes conceptions of fairness more cognitively accessible, then people should also be more concerned about justice in contexts that activate identity-relevant concerns than those that do not (the "identity-relevance hypothesis"). Similarly, how deeply people think about justice and fairness is likely to vary as a function of outcome valence. People should devote more thought and analysis to whether an encounter was fair or unfair if the encounter threatens rather than affirms the perceiver's currently activated identity and associated goals and values (the "identity-threat hypothesis").

For example, imagine that Joey received a bad grade on a test. Unless Joey embraces academic achievement as a value, there is nothing to prompt him to spontaneously consider whether the grade was fair or unfair. Of course, if one asked Joey directly whether his test grade was fair, he would be able to manufacture a superficial response, but it would not be something he would consider without the prompt.

The identity-relevance hypothesis has at least one important implication. Because people have some choice over their identities and therefore which values they internalize, their identities and values will be relatively idiosyncratic in content. Therefore, when people

will be spontaneously concerned about fairness should be equally idiosyncratic. Consistent with this idea, research has found that priming different aspects of identity (e.g., independent or interdependent self-construal, or the relative salience of a social category like "woman") has little effect on behavior or justice reasoning unless identification—that is, internalization of that identity—is also high (Bobocel & Holmvall, 2002; Ellemers, Spears, & Doosje, 1997).

The notion that people will more systematically scrutinize the fairness of situations that threaten rather than support important self-relevant goals also has substantial empirical support. For example, inconsistent information about the self leads to distress and anxiety (e.g., Higgins, 1987; Steele, 1988, 1999) that in turn is associated with more systematic processing of information (e.g., Forgas, 1992; Lazarus, 1991). Similarly, negative events elicit more attributional activity than do positive events (Peeters & Czapinski, 1990). Failing rather than succeeding to meet goals, for instance, produces more spontaneous and intensive attributional analysis (Weiner, 1985). Taken together, this research is consistent with the hypothesis that negative events invoke more systematic appraisal than positive events. Although the identity-threat hypothesis is consistent with these research findings, future research will need to examine whether people specifically systematically think about fairness in these contexts.

Conceptions of Self

Self-theorists contend that the cognitive structure of the self begins nearly blank and gradually fills up as a function of an interaction of personal choice and reflected appraisal (e.g., Baumeister, 1999). For instance, when people present themselves as being a certain kind of person, they can internalize that view of self and eventually become that sort of person (Jones, Rhodewalt, Berglas, & Skelton, 1981). That said, people only successfully internalize chosen identities that are socially validated, a process mediated by getting others to confirm one's perception of self (Schlenker, Dlugolecki, & Doherty, 1994; Tice, 1992). Although social confirmation is a necessary feature of constructing self-perception, people nonetheless selectively reject views of themselves projected by others when they are inconsistent with their personal views of self (Snyder & Swann, 1978). Taken together, people's conception of self is simultaneously personally constructed and socially negotiated, and a major goal of social interaction is the creation and maintenance of self-coherence and verification (e.g., Carver & Scheier, 1998; Swann & Read, 1981; Vallacher, Nowak, Froehlich, & Rockloff, 2002).

Research that has explored how people's self-views affect human functioning provides an important empirical foundation for the AIM. Specifically, research on

the self reveals that (a) people have multiple levels of self or identity; (b) not all aspects of identity can be equally accessible at any given time; (c) the relative accessibility of a given identity in the working self-concept is influenced by the perceiver's past experience, present expectations, current motives, and goals, in combination with cues from the social context; and (d) a shift in identity focus similarly shifts the accessibility of associated expectations, motives, values, knowledge, and goals (see Baumeister, 1999; Brewer, 1991; Carver & Scheier, 1998; Markus & Kunda, 1986; McGuire, McGuire, & Cheever, 1986; Showers, 2002; Turner, 1999, for relevant reviews and research).

Layers of Identity and Justice

Although the specific content of the self-concept varies, there tends to be a great deal of similarity in major categories of the self across individuals (Bugental & Zelen, 1950; Rentsch & Heffner, 1994). Three layers of identity—the material, social, and personal or moral—appear to be central in how people organize their self-views. Interestingly, different theories of both procedural and distributive justice have similarly focused on each of these (i.e., material self-interest, social identity needs, or personal moral values) as having important connections to how people reason about justice. However, there has been little effort to integrate these different theories of procedural and distributive justice into a unified theory of justice reasoning; they are often treated as competing explanations instead (e.g., Tyler & Smith, 1998).

Rather than considering these theories about why people care about justice as different or competing theoretical perspectives, the AIM proposes that these theoretical orientations can be combined and organized around identity accessibility to provide an account for how people reason about justice. The task here is to specify when different conceptions of justice are more likely to apply, and to explore the implications of this unified and integrated approach to justice reasoning.

Material identity. Equity theorists (e.g., Adams, 1965) and process control theorists (e.g., Thibaut & Walker, 1975) argue that people care about justice because it serves their long-term material interests. This can also be understood in terms of the values and goals associated with the pursuit and maintenance of one's material identity. More specifically, material identity consists of the body and its adornment, family members to the extent that they are contextually understood as material extensions of the self (e.g., "my wife," or "my child," and the value attached to having acquired a wife or a child),¹ as well as one's home and hearth, ac-

quisitions, and accumulated wealth. People define and sustain their material identity by endeavoring to acquire and maintain things like property, goods, and wealth (Belk, 1988; James, 1890).

Social identity. Some justice theorists argue instead that people primarily care about justice because it serves their need to belong, and because it validates their status and standing in groups they deem important (e.g., group value theory, Lind & Tyler, 1988, and the relational model of procedural justice, Tyler & Lind, 1992). Like the AIM, contemporary procedural justice theory is explicitly grounded in concerns about identity maintenance. However, unlike the AIM, the group value and relational model focus only on people's desire to maintain a positive sense of social identity. Social identity is shaped by the groups people belong to, their social role in those groups, and the reflected appraisal or standing that they have vis-à-vis other group members. People have as many different social selves as there are distinct groups of persons about whose opinion they care (e.g., Leary, Tambor, Terdal, & Downs, 1995; Turner, 1985). Although not currently emphasized in justice theorizing, it would seem that people should also be more sensitive to group than personal norms of fairness when social identity dominates the working self-concept (e.g., Carver & Scheier, 1998; Turner, 1999).

Personal identity. In addition to material and social identity concerns, personal identity concerns can also play an important role in how people define what is fair or unfair (e.g., Skitka, 2002). Personal identity refers to the experienced self, or that aspect of identity that provides a sense of personal continuity. The personal self is "the most enduring and intimate part of the self, that which we most verily seem to be ... it is what we think of our ability to argue and discriminate, of our moral sensibility and conscience, of our indomitable will ..." (James, 1890, p. 315), and is believed to be the self one wakes up to every morning. One can accept or reject material goods, spouses, social roles, or any other aspect of one's material or social identity without losing a basic sense of identity or personhood. Only when one's sense of personal identity is altered does one feel to be *alienatus a se*, or no longer oneself. People seek to define and defend their sense of personal identity through achievement, mastery, and moral authenticity. People's ability to live up to internalized notions of "ought" and "should" therefore has an important impact on personal identity (Bandura, 1986; Higgins, 1987; Steele, 1988, 1999; Tetlock, 2002), and on how people think about fairness (e.g., Skitka, 2002).

Although one could posit more or less abstract categories of self, the present organizational framework provides a useful heuristic to guide theorizing about the connections between identity and justice reasoning. In

¹However, when the concept of family activates specific roles (mother, father) or one's belongingness needs, family will be associated with social rather than material identity concerns.

addition, the hypothesis that people have different conceptions of fairness that are organized in memory in close association with material, social, and personal identity concerns converges with recent theorizing and research in moral reasoning. The neo-Kohlbergian theory of moral reasoning posits that moral schemas emerge in the form of a developmental hierarchy (Rest, Narvaez, Bebeau, & Thoma, 1999). The self-interest moral schema emerges first, and is an egocentric and interpersonal perspective that focuses on the stakes of the actor and those with whom the actor has a particularly close relationship. The conventional norms schema emerges in early adolescence, and is characterized by the recognition of the need for systematic cooperation, the uniform application of laws and social norms, and is a duty, authoritarian orientation. The postconventional schema (the most complex of the three) is characterized by personal definitions of right and wrong that transcend normative convention (Rest et al., 1999). These moral schemas map relatively neatly unto what we know to date about how people tend to define fairness in contexts that are likely to be associated with the pursuit of material, social, or personal values and goals, as is discussed in some detail later (see also Table 1). Work on moral reasoning also corroborates the reasonableness of the focus of the AIM on material, social, and personal identities as guides for justice reasoning.

guides for appropriate conduct. Although general self-awareness and identity-relevance increase the likelihood that people actively think about justice, the accessible identity hypothesis adds that how people define what is fair or unfair varies as a function of which aspect of identity dominates the working self-concept.

The accessible identity hypothesis builds on Crosby's (1982) observation that employed women who were objectively treated less fairly than their male counterparts nonetheless felt that they received fair salaries. However, when asked to shift from an individual to a social identity perspective—that is, when asked about women's treatment as a group—the women clearly recognized and were aggrieved by gender inequity (results that have been subsequently widely replicated across different social groups; see Crosby & Ropp, 2002, for a review). Other research has similarly found very different perceptions of fairness as a function of whether the person takes a more individual (e.g., a material or personal identity) or social identity perspective (e.g., Kessler, Mummendey, & Leisse, 2000; Smith, Spears, & Hamstra, 1999; Wenzel, 2001). The review presented next is an attempt to build on the fundamental insight that perspective matters by describing how people define fairness as a function of three different perspectives: material, social, and personal identity.

The Accessible Identity Hypothesis

In most contexts, people will not think deeply about whether their behavior or that of others is fair or unfair, but instead will use well-rehearsed associations between identity-relevant goals and values as heuristic

When Material Identity is Salient

Material identity goals and concerns are the most explicitly "self-interested" or "selfish" aspects of the overall self-concept, and are most likely to be activated when (a) there is a possibility of material gain, (b) the relational context is defined in market terms, and (c) other

Table 1. *Self-Categories, Moral Schemas, and Conceptions of Fairness*

	Material Identity	Social Identity	Personal Identity
Self Categories and Related Needs, Values, and Goals (e.g., James, 1890)	The physical manifestations of self—the body, family members ("my wife," "my child," home, and hearth) Acquisition of material goods, the fruits of labor, personal wealth	Belonging, acceptance, regard, status and standing, honor, obligation, roles	Achievement, mastery, sense of personal competence, independent of its connection to either material goods or status Personal and societal notions of living up to "oughts" and "shoulds," conscience, moral authenticity
Moral Schemas, or Continuum of Moral Reasoning (Rest, Narvaez, Bebeau, & Thoma, 1999)	Self-interest Moral Schema Normative convention, formal rules, deference to authority	Normative convention, Moral Schema	Postconventional Moral Schema
Relevant Justice Constructs	Primal justice Equity (Adams; 1965; Walster, Walster, & Berscheid, 1978); market pricing (Fiske, 1991); structural aspects of procedures (e.g., accuracy, consistency; Leventhal, 1980)	Respect, status, and standing (e.g., Lind & Tyler, 1988); interactional justice (Bies & Moag, 1987); group and role specific distributive norms (Deutsch, 1985)	Attributional clarity (e.g., Brockner et al., in press); Structural aspects of procedures (e.g., accuracy, consistency; Leventhal, 1980) Postconventional personal values, for example, freedom, equality (e.g., Rokeach, 1973; Skitka, 2002), social justice, ethicality (Leventhal, 1980)

