

## Of Different Minds: An Accessible Identity Model of Justice Reasoning

Linda J. Skitka

Department of Psychology  
University of Illinois at Chicago

*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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Requests for reprints should be sent to Linda J. Skitka, University of Illinois at Chicago, Department of Psychology (m/c 285), 1007 W. Harrison Street, Chicago, IL 60617-7137. E-mail: lskitka@uic.edu.

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),<sup>1</sup> 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

<sup>1</sup>However, 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.

### 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

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.

### 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)

identity concerns are not particularly salient. Contexts that prime the material self and values therefore include negotiations of price, wages, interest, rents, tithes, property, or even marriage contracts (to the extent that they are implicitly understood as about the costs and benefits to the parties involved; Fiske, 1991).

Anthropological research reveals that proportionality of entitlements to contributions, or equity rules, most frequently define fairness in market contexts, a finding that is robust across cultures (Fiske, 1991). Social psychological research also provides support for the role of equity considerations in market pricing contexts. For example, people tend to allocate economic surpluses in proportion to the participants' discretionary contribution to transactions (Knez & Camerer, 1995), become physiologically distressed at either underpayment or overpayment (Markovsky, 1988), and adjust their level of effort and productivity to restore equity if they are disproportionately underpaid or overpaid (see Adams, 1965; Berkowitz & Walster, 1976; Walster, Walster, & Berscheid, 1978, for reviews). Consistent with the notion that equity concerns are connected to people's sense of identity, equitable allocations of financial rewards also lead to more positive views of the self<sup>2</sup> (Hegtvædt, 1988; Schafer, 1988).

Even if there is considerable evidence that people use the equity norm in market contexts, one should not conclude based on the present review that people always prefer equitable distributions of material or economic goods or see these distributions as fair. People allocate economic resources as a function of other criteria as well (e.g., need or equality; see Deutsch, 1985, for a review). As is elaborated shortly, people shift to other justice norms, like need and equality, when values associated with their social or personal, rather than their material, identity drive their current efforts to self-regulate.

The AIM also posits that identity accessibility will influence perceptions of procedural justice. For example, formal aspects of procedures, like procedural accuracy and consistency in assigning value to labor or goods, would seem to be especially important when material identity concerns and values dominate the perceiver's working self-concept, whereas interactional treatment (e.g., communicating dignity, respect) may be less important in relatively routine and impersonal market exchanges. However, little or no research has addressed the question of whether perceptions of procedural fairness vary as a function of the relative sa-

lience of material or personal identity; rather research has focused only on the relative salience of social identity as a moderator of people's concern with procedural fairness. Future research needs to examine whether different features of procedures are more or less important in different identity-relevant contexts.

### When Social Identity is Salient

According to the group value and relational models of justice (Lind & Tyler, 1988; Tyler & Lind, 1992), people care about justice because fair treatment conveys information relevant to their social identity needs (e.g., inclusion and status). Consistent with this theoretical perspective, people are influenced more by socio-emotional outcomes like standing, status, and respect as the relative salience of their social identity concerns increase. For example, people care more about procedural treatment than concrete outcomes when (a) social identity needs are particularly strong (Brockner, Tyler, & Cooper-Schneider, 1992, Study 1; Huo, Smith, Tyler, & Lind, 1996; Platow & van Knippenberg, 2001; Wenzel, 2000), (b) perceivers are of low rather than high status (Chen, Brockner, & Greenberg, 2002), (c) status concerns are primed (van Prooijen, van den Bos & Wilke, 2002), and when (d) they are high rather than low in interdependent self-construal and interdependent self-construal is primed (Bobocel & Holmvall, 2002; Brockner, Chen, Mannix, Leung, & Skarlicki, 2000).

In a related vein, people are more likely to accept negative or unfavorable material outcomes when they are the result of fair rather than unfair procedures (the "fair process effect," e.g., Folger, 1977; Greenberg & Folger, 1983; van den Bos, Lind, Vermunt, & Wilke, 1997). In short, people sacrifice material interests to serve social identity needs and goals, presumably when social identity needs are more salient than material ones.

Almost all research that has demonstrated the importance of the connection between social identity and procedural justice has been conducted in relational systems characterized by asymmetric positions of power (what Fiske, 1991, called authority-ranking relational systems), and has exclusively focused on subordinate reactions to the decisions made by authorities. However, people seek to define, sustain, and improve their social identities in other relational contexts as well. Although less frequently studied in recent years, justice emerges as a concern in interdependent relationships with equal peers, in communal contexts like the family, and when one is in the role of an authority rather than subordinate (rather than only the converse).

Available research indicates that variables related to social identity influence people's judgments of distributive justice in some of these other contexts. For example, people primed with solidarity and group harmony goals (Deutsch, 1985), who are chronically higher in communal or interpersonal orientation (Major & Ad-

<sup>2</sup>I cite justice as supporting self-esteem to demonstrate that justice and the self have close connections. Despite the emphasis of the Accessible Identity Model on identity and the self, I do not think people primarily care about justice because they want to maintain or improve self-esteem. Instead, I think that the ability to pursue individual needs and goals in fair systems mostly serves to enhance people's subjective well-being, or sense of life-satisfaction, something relatively independent of self-love (see Diener, 2000, for a review).

ams, 1983; Watts, Messé, & Vallacher, 1982), or who take a group rather than an individual level perspective (Hegtvedt, 1987), are more likely to allocate material rewards equally than equitably, and to rate equal allocations as more fair than equitable ones. Other research indicates conceptions of fairness vary as a function of the social role of the perceiver. For example, when one's social role as a parent is more highly activated, one is more likely to perceive allocations based on need as fairer than those based on equity or equality (Drake & Lawrence, 2000; Prentice & Crosby, 1987).

In addition, Greenberg (1983b) and Kernis and Reis (1984) found that participants whose attention was directed to their social self conformed to a manipulated group norm when allocating a shared pool of resources (in one study the group norm was manipulated as equity, and in the other, as equality). In short, attention to the social self moved behavior in opposite directions in the two studies; what was important was people's conceptions of the group norm. In contrast, increased self-focused attention led participants in the same studies to adhere to their personal distributive values rather than what they believed was the group norm. It seems likely that judgments of procedural fairness will be similarly affected by whether group norms and social roles, rather than material or personal identity concerns, are more salient guides for behavior in different relational systems.

In sum, the relative salience of values tied to social identity concerns has a clear influence on people's procedural and distributive justice reasoning. Features of procedures influence reactive justice judgments (at least in authority ranking relationships), and salient group norms, rather than personal values, shape people's perceptions of justice when social identity concerns loom large, and other concerns loom comparatively small.

### **When Personal Identity is Salient**

When personal identity needs or concerns dominate the working self-concept, people's fairness reasoning will be shaped less by conventional norms, like the equity rule, or by status considerations. Consistent with this idea, recent research reveals that when people are pursuing an achievement goal, their reasoning about fairness is not influenced by procedural treatment, that is, that aspect of procedures that directly communicates information about status and standing. Instead, people's reasoning is influenced by the structural aspects of procedures, such as accuracy (e.g., Brockner et al., 2003). People can only make an internal attribution for an achievement if it is the result of an accurate procedure; therefore, people's attention is focused more on structural aspects than relational aspects of procedural fairness in these settings.

Achievement is only one example of a self-relevant value or goal that serves people's personal identity needs. Recall that personal identity is rooted in people's internalized notions of "ought" and "should" (e.g., Bandura, 1986; Higgins, 1987; Steele, 1988, 1999; Tetlock, 2002) and therefore is related not only to the value people attach to achievement, but also to the value they may attach to the social goals such as equality, freedom, or the sanctity of life (see Rokeach, 1973). How people judge social policies and third-party justice is likely to be shaped more by whether these values were achieved than by material or social identity. Consistent with this idea, people attempt to restore justice when members of their group behave unfairly toward an out-group, even when they themselves have not, so long as their commitment to the group is relatively shallow (Doosje, Branscombe, Spears, & Manstead, 1998). Presuming that people's personal identity concerns are more accessible when social identity concerns are only weakly activated, these results support the accessible identity hypothesis.

Other situations independently prime personal identity concerns with social justice by posing a threat to a moral value people hold especially dear (and therefore to their sense of moral authenticity). For example, a controversial custody case required a choice between granting a 5-year-old Cuban boy (Elián González) political asylum in the United States versus returning him to Cuba to his father. Skitka and Mullen (2002) tested the hypothesis that people who saw the case as connected to their core moral values would be relatively impervious to whether the case was handled in a procedurally fair way, and would focus instead on whether the outcome supported or threatened moral values. Consistent with the accessible identity hypothesis, people's postresolution judgments of procedural fairness, outcome fairness, and decision acceptance were predicted solely by prerelation assessments of the strength of moral mandates associated with the value political freedom or parental rights (Skitka & Mullen, 2002; see also Bobocel, S. Hing, Davey, Stanley, & Zanna, 1998; Rasinski, 1987; Skitka, 2002; Skitka & Houston, 2001, for related research).

### **Coping With Threats to Identity and Fairness Reasoning**

One way people can cope with identity threatening feedback is to decide that the negative feedback was not only fair but was also deserved, and therefore their identity should be revised accordingly. People choose their identities, and therefore can choose to revise or update them. However, given the high value placed on consistency and coherence (Festinger, 1957), especially with respect to identity (Steele, 1988; Tesser &

Cornell, 1991), this coping strategy is likely to be one of last resort unless the threatened identity is a relatively trivial one; one has failed to achieve the challenged identity goal so many times that it becomes impossible to sustain resistance to disconfirmation, or resisting disconfirmation is particularly costly. Instead, people will typically cope with threats to identity by (a) finding evidence of injustice in the threatened domain of self, and therefore externalize the source of threat; or by (b) seeking affirmation of a nonthreatened aspect of identity (Steele, 1988, 1999).

### Motivated Searches for Injustice

If identity revision is the option of last resort, people should be motivated to cope with identity threat using strategies that allow them to avoid accepting negative feedback, treatment, or outcomes as legitimate. Because people pay particular attention to features of situations that elicit negative feedback (Wegner & Vallacher, 1986), the identity threat hypothesis would predict—with some qualification—that people should also be most likely to first look for violations of justice norms that protect the currently activated province of identity. Therefore, when people's material interests are threatened, they will first look for violations of the equity norm, and when their social status or standing is threatened, they will first look for evidence of procedural impropriety (e.g., a biased judge) or violations of group norms.

How one reacts to threats to one's personal identity, however, is complicated by whether the threat is the result of something one has done and involves specific feedback about one's personal incompetence or moral inauthenticity (a direct threat) or instead involves a situation where one becomes aware of a third party injustice or moral transgression (an indirect threat). Indirect threats can involve conflicts between the actions of the group and one's personal values (e.g., if one's group has behaved in a discriminatory fashion in the past, in violation of the individual's personal values, e.g., Doosje et al., 1998), as well as intuitive and visceral reactions to threats to personal moral values (Haidt, 2001).

When people experience a direct threat to personal identity, they will no doubt feel it is disingenuous to try to externalize the failure to achieve a competency goal or to live up to their internalized moral standards. In fact, when personal identity is highly accessible, attributing negative feedback to injustice may compound the dissonance created by the threat. Recasting the event in either material or social identity terms, however, may allow people to seek evidence of justice or injustice in the material or social domains with greater ease than they could within the province of personal identity. However, as is explained shortly, doing so is unlikely to compensate for a threat to personal identity.

### The Identity Shift Hypothesis

When people cannot find evidence of injustice in the specific context of a threat to material or social identity, they will be motivated to shift identity focus and to search for evidence of justice or injustice in an alternative province of the self. For example, imagine that Joey sought to enhance his material self-interests by shoveling his neighbor's driveway after a big snowstorm. When he receives appreciation for his efforts instead of money, he may not be able to identify a violation of the equity norm or other justice criteria that supports the value he places on monetary gain (after all, the neighbor did not contract to the exchange of money for his labor). Joey is likely to therefore recast the situation in terms of values related to his social or personal identity as a good neighbor or generous person (values and goals that were validated by the neighbor's gratitude), a strategy that circumvents the threat to his material identity because it was just from a social identity perspective. Similarly, finding evidence of injustice in an alternative domain would facilitate the maintenance of self-coherence because he could then externalize the source of threat.

In sum, shifting identities can act to protect, preserve, and even affirm a consistent sense of self and related values and goals through one of two different pathways. People can identify injustice in the context of an alternative identity (thereby externalizing the source of threat) or find evidence of just treatment (thereby affirming an aspect of identity). In support of the identity shift hypothesis, research indicates that people have considerable flexibility in accessing different identities (Brewer, 1991; McGuire et al., 1986; Turner, 1985, 1999). For example, when people experience a threat to their social identity, they will often shift to a focus on individual self-categorizations (Lee & Ottati, 1995; Smith, Spears, & Oyen, 1994), or to an alternative social identity to preserve self-esteem (Mussweiler, Gabriel, & Bodenhausen, 2000). Moreover, affirmation of a nonthreatened identity is often effective in restoring self-esteem (Simon, Greenberg, & Brehm, 1995; Stone, Wiegand, Cooper, & Aronson, 1997; but see also Aronson, Blanton, & Cooper, 1995). Especially important to the focus of the AIM, people who self-affirm a nonthreatened identity express lower levels of distress in response to injustice than those who do not have an opportunity to self-affirm (Wiesenfeld, Brockner, & Martin, 1999).

### The Hierarchy Hypothesis

Theories of the self predict that identities vary in their contribution to overall well-being. How positively or negatively people see their personal identity contributes the most to overall self-regard, followed by social and then material identity (Deci & Ryan, 1985;

James, 1890; Sedikides & Gaertner, 2001; see also Finjeman, Willemsen, & Poortinga, 1996, and Freeberg & Stein, 1996, for supporting cross-cultural research). Few people should therefore be willing to sacrifice the relationships they hold dear to enlarge their material holdings; likewise, people should be unwilling to forfeit their achievements or moral authenticity to enhance their social status.

Consistent with the notion that the self and related values are hierarchically organized, threats to more primary foundations of self-definition elicit stronger needs for identity protection than threats to less primary self-definitions (Campbell & Sedikides, 1999; Sedikides & Gaertner, 2001). Consequently, people should find that shifting up rather than down in the self-hierarchy will more effectively compensate for the distress created by an identity threat, because identities higher in the hierarchy have greater impact on well-being.

Similarly, justice norms associated with more primary goals or identities should be seen as more psychologically compelling and have a stronger connection to overall assessments of justice done than those that are less central to people's overall sense of self. Therefore, people should implicitly or explicitly agree that fairness requires that lower-level justice criteria (e.g., the equity rule) cede to higher-level justice criteria (e.g., need) whenever these criteria come into conflict, or whenever people enter into transactions with others who are pursuing goals or values that are at odds with their own.

The hierarchy hypothesis also has implications for what forms of identity shift will effectively compensate for threats to different levels of the self. Specifically, the hierarchy hypothesis predicts that when material values are threatened, being able to externalize negative outcomes to injustice at any level of the self (material, social, or personal) should bring well-being back to close to prethreat levels. Similarly, being able to externalize the source of threat to violations of interactional justice or group norms should buffer self-regard or well-being when social values are threatened, but externalizing the threat to violations of justice norms designed to protect material values will not. Making legitimate external attributions to unfair procedures when failing to make an achievement goal may appease identity threat, but little short of reaffirmation of one's commitment to moral values should appease a threat to one's sense of moral authenticity.

The hierarchy hypothesis also predicts that finding evidence of fairness will also have a contingent capacity to compensate for identity threat, and that fairness will ironically sometimes lead to lower rather than higher levels of self-regard. For example, finding evidence that a threat to material identity or values is the consequence of fair application of the equity rule will make the threat to one's material values more rather

than less severe. However, when one finds evidence that the inequitable material outcome was the result of applying a higher order value related to social identity concerns (e.g., the promotion of group harmony) or personal identity concerns (e.g., moral values), the latter will have compensatory effects and return well-being close to or even higher than prethreat levels.

Some research provides preliminary support for the hierarchy hypothesis. For example, the hierarchy hypothesis provides an interesting account of the fair process effect (i.e., the tendency of people to be more likely to accept negative or unfavorable material outcomes when they are the result of fair rather than unfair procedures). Because social identity contributes more to one's well-being than one's material gains or losses, justice norms associated with social identity will trump those associated with one's material identity. Also consistent with the hierarchy hypothesis is research that finds that personal moral values emerge as stronger predictors of fairness reasoning than procedural treatment in contexts likely to prime personal identity concerns related to social justice (Skitka, 2002; Skitka & Houston, 2001; Skitka & Mullen, 2002).

In sum, the hierarchy hypothesis makes a number of contingent predictions about how well externalization or self-affirmation is likely to compensate for identity threat as a joint function of the threatened identity and the domain that people attempt to find compensatory justice or injustice. The hierarchy hypothesis also makes predictions for how people cope with mixed motives on the part of themselves and others.

### **Cognitive Conceptions of Self and Self-Interest**

Whether one accepts self-interest as a possible motive that is related to people's justice reasoning seems to have become an ideological, rather than purely an empirical or theoretical, question. Some seem to see any acknowledgement of self-interest as a possible motive that relates to fairness reasoning as undercutting the possibility of a "real" concern with justice (e.g., Folger, 2001; Lerner, 2002).

Self-interest refers to a focus on maximizing one's own utility, without regard to the needs and concerns of others. The AIM clearly acknowledges that people can be motivated to maximize their own gain (particularly when material identity dominates the working self-concept; see Table 1), but once this goal is activated, concerns about justice will similarly be made highly accessible. Once justice concerns are activated, people by definition will consider others' concerns. Justice is fundamentally an interpersonal construct, one that would be unnecessary if people lived in isolation from others. Any conception of justice by definition therefore requires a regard for the concerns of oth-

ers. The AIM therefore does not posit that people's conceptions of justice are motivated by self-interest even if it posits close ties between self-relevant goals and the accessibility and likely activation of justice as a concern.

In addition, it is important to emphasize that even if material, social, and personal identities are similar in function and structure across persons, these identities may be quite dissimilar in content. For example, Machiavellians, sociopaths, and even some economists may construe enlightened self-interest as the ultimate moral good, and therefore incorporate enlightened self-interest into their personal identity as an autonomous moral value that then trumps other values. Similarly, justice concepts like honor and obligation could be conceived of as role demands (and therefore connected to social identity) or as postconventional moral values (and therefore more likely to be connected to personal identity).

In sum, positing that identity accessibility shapes how people reason about justice is not the same thing as positing that material or rational self-interest is implicated in justice reasoning. According to the AIM, different conceptions of justice are simply more or less accessible in memory (and therefore more or less likely to shape reasoning) as a function of which aspect of identity is most accessible at a given time.

### Individual and Group Perspectives on Justice

Clayton and Opatow (this issue) also argue that perspective is key to understanding how people reason about justice, and the links between identity salience and conceptions of fairness. The AIM predicts that how people define what is fair and unfair varies as a function of individual-level identity salience, whereas Clayton and Opatow posits that what matters is whether one takes an individual- or group-level perspective. They argue that to understand how people reason about fairness, one needs to know whether they are taking the perspective of themselves as individuals or of more morally inclusive entities (e.g., women, all of humanity, or all living things). Although the AIM is likely to view many of these latter viewpoints as either various social identities (e.g., women) or expressions of core moral values and therefore related to people's personal identity (e.g., the moral value an individual might attach to the sanctity of life, irrespective of species), group-level concerns about fairness remain a very important area of inquiry.

As Clayton and Opatow's (this issue) review reveals, people's individual perspective is only one layer of justice concern. Although there are important differences as a function of whether one takes a group or individual perspective, there may also be important simi-

larities in the psychological processes that underlie justice reasoning in both contexts. Groups also have material, social, and moral values and concerns. Therefore, even when one takes on a more inclusive rather than individualized view, how one reasons about justice may be shaped by the relative salience of the group or constituency's material, social, or personal and moral needs, goals, or values. In short, although the AIM is focused on the individual level of analysis, an interesting avenue for future research will be to explore whether similar identity issues play out at a more macro level of analysis as well.

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