

Friend or foe? Ingroup identification moderates reactions to outgroup members' allocation behavior

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Abstract

In the present article we build on previous work suggesting that people react more strongly to the favorability of outgroup authority allocations than ingroup authority allocations. Based on theorizing and research on intergroup perception and self-categorization, we refine this argument by suggesting that responses to outgroup authorities depend on people's level of ingroup identification. We present data from an experiment showing that the favorability of treatment by an outgroup member primarily influences decision acceptance among high (vs. low) ingroup identifiers. In line with theory and research based on the relational model of authority, findings of the present study also suggest that ingroup identification has a reversed effect on acceptance of an ingroup authority's decisions. Specifically, the favorability of treatment by an ingroup member primarily influences decision acceptance among low (vs. high) ingroup identifiers. Copyright © 2006 John Wiley & Sons, Ltd.

In the social justice literature a relatively well-established phenomenon is that the extent to which reactions to authorities' decisions are influenced by treatment favorability depends on whether the authority is from a self-relevant ingroup on the one hand or from a less self-relevant ingroup or from an outgroup on the other (Huo, 2003; Huo, Smith, Tyler, & Lind, 1996; Smith & Tyler, 1996, 1997; Smith, Tyler, Huo, Ortiz, & Lind, 1998; Ståhl, Van Prooijen, & Vermunt, 2004; Tyler & Degoey, 1995, 1996). A typical finding from this line of research is that favorability of treatment is a strong determinant of decision acceptance in encounters with authorities from outgroups or groups that are less relevant for the self, while treatment favorability is less important for decision acceptance when the authority is from an ingroup or from a group that is more relevant for the self (e.g., Huo et al., 1996; Ståhl, Van Prooijen et al., 2004). However, little theoretical attention has been paid to the question of *why* favorability of treatment influences reactions in the case of *outgroup* authorities' decisions. Furthermore, research on this topic is relatively scarce. We think this is unfortunate, for theoretical as well as practical reasons. In the present article we address this gap in the literature and examine more closely how people respond in encounters with outgroup authorities. More specifically, the present

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research addresses the question why decision acceptance is affected by favorability of treatment in encounters with outgroup authorities, and examines the conditions under which this is most likely to be the case.

REACTIONS TO OUTGROUP AUTHORITIES' DECISIONS

Why do people react to treatment from an outgroup authority in terms of whether or not it is favorable or unfavorable? A plausible explanation can be found in the literature on intergroup perception. In this literature it is by now well-documented that people generally perceive outgroup members as less trustworthy, less honest, and less cooperative than ingroup members (e.g., Brewer, 1979). In fact, various studies have shown that people expect outgroup members to display ingroup bias in evaluations (Vivian & Berkowitz, 1992) as well as in overt behavior (e.g., Duck & Fielding, 1999; Horwitz & Rabbie, 1982; Kramer, Shah, & Woerner, 1995; Moy & Ng, 1996). These findings are important, as differences in perceptions and expectations of ingroup and outgroup members may help explain reactions to outgroup authorities' allocation behavior. Specifically, because outgroup members are generally perceived as relatively dishonest and untrustworthy, and because outgroup members are expected to favor members from their own group, people may be highly sensitive to whether or not their negative expectations are met in encounters with an outgroup authority. Furthermore, because an outgroup authority is expected to be biased in favor of his/her own group, unfavorable treatment from an outgroup authority might easily be attributed to one's group membership (Duck & Fielding, 2003). In other words, people may be particularly unwilling to accept unfavorable treatment when faced with an outgroup authority because it is interpreted as a case of discrimination.

THE ROLE OF INGROUP IDENTIFICATION

To the extent that perceptions and expectations of outgroup members explain why people accept outgroup authorities' decisions based on treatment favorability, there are reasons to believe that *ingroup identification should moderate such effects*. Research on self-categorization has shown that the extent to which an outgroup is perceived as different from the ingroup is dependent on people's level of ingroup identification. High identifiers, to whom the ingroup is particularly incorporated in the self-concept (Tropp & Wright, 2001), are more inclined to differentiate between the ingroup and an outgroup, and also perceive outgroup members (and ingroup members) as more homogenous (Doosje, Ellemers, & Spears, 1995). Thus, to the extent that people perceive outgroup members as more dishonest than ingroup members and expect outgroup members to favor their own group to a larger extent than ingroup members, these differences in perception and expectations should be larger for people who identify strongly with the group. In support of this line of reasoning, research on stigmatized groups has shown that as people identify more strongly with a stigmatized group, they are more prone to attribute negative outcomes received from outgroup members to discrimination, at least when prejudice cues are ambiguous (e.g., Operario & Fiske, 2001).

Previous research has demonstrated that, compared to low identifiers, the responses of high identifiers to decisions made by an *ingroup* authority are less strongly influenced by the favorability of their outcomes (e.g., Huo et al., 1996). The explanation for this finding is that high identifiers are primarily concerned about their relationship to the authority and about their status in the group. According to the relational model of authority (cf. Lind & Tyler, 1988; Tyler & Lind, 1992), the most relevant information to evaluate one's status in the group is not the favorability of decisions or outcomes, but depends on whether the procedures used by the authority to make decisions are fair or

not. By contrast, for low identifiers, their relationship to the authority and their position within the group are less important as the group is less relevant for their social identity. According to the relational model, low (vs. high) identifiers' willingness to accept decisions should therefore be more strongly influenced by the favorability of treatment received by an ingroup authority.

THE PRESENT RESEARCH

In the present research we investigate the role of ingroup identification in reactions to treatment by an ingroup authority. Based on the relational model, we propose that the negative effect of unfavorable (vs. favorable) treatment on decision acceptance should be larger for *low identifiers* than for high identifiers in encounters with an *ingroup authority*. We also investigate the role of ingroup identification in reactions to treatment from an outgroup authority. Specifically, we test the novel hypothesis derived from insights on intergroup perception and self-categorization that the negative effect of unfavorable (vs. favorable) treatment on decision acceptance should be larger for *high identifiers* than for low identifiers in encounters with an *outgroup authority*. To investigate the combined effect of these two predictions, we will also examine how the authority's group membership moderates reactions to treatment among high versus low ingroup identifiers. Because high identifiers to a larger extent differentiate between the ingroup and outgroups (Doosje et al., 1995), we predict that the authority's group membership should moderate the effect of treatment favorability on decision acceptance to a larger extent among high identifiers than among low identifiers.

To summarize, in addition to the prediction derived from the relational model that high ingroup identification should *attenuate* the effect of treatment favorability on acceptance of an *ingroup* authority's decision (relational model hypothesis), we propose a *reversed moderating role of ingroup identification on reactions to treatment from an outgroup authority*. That is, high ingroup identification should *accentuate* the effect of treatment favorability on acceptance of an *outgroup* authority's decision (intergroup perception hypothesis). Finally, because high identifiers differentiate between the ingroup and outgroups to a larger extent than low identifiers, we expect that the authority's group membership should moderate the effect of treatment favorability on decision acceptance to a larger extent among high identifiers than among low identifiers (group differentiation hypothesis). We investigated these hypotheses in an experiment by manipulating the (natural) group membership of the authority as well as the favorability of treatment, and measuring participants' level of ingroup identification. The main dependent measures assessed participants' willingness to accept the authority's decision (e.g., Huo, 2003; Ståhl, Van Prooijen et al., 2004).

Method

Participants and Design

Ninety-seven students of Leiden University were randomly assigned to conditions in a 2 (Authority categorization: ingroup/outgroup) \times 2 (Treatment: favorable/unfavorable) factorial design. Ingroup identification was measured as a continuous variable. Students participated in the experiment prior to participating in other unrelated experiments. The experiments lasted for a total of 1.5 hours and all participants were paid 20 Dutch Guilders (approximately 8 € at the time) for their time in the laboratory.

Procedure

Participants were seated in separate cubicles, each equipped with a computer. The computers were used to present the stimulus information as well as to collect the data. It was suggested that it was possible for the experimenter to communicate with participants during the experiment, through the computer network. In the first part of the instructions, participants were told that the aim of the study was to investigate differences between Leiden University students and students from the Free University in Amsterdam, in their performance on estimation tasks. This was followed by the authority categorization manipulation. In the ingroup condition, participants were told that the experimenter was from Leiden University. In the outgroup condition, participants were told that the experimenter was from Free University in Amsterdam (cf. Ståhl, Van Prooijen et al., 2004, Experiment 1). It was then explained that they participated in the experiment with another person, a student from the Free University in Amsterdam. Participants were also informed that during the experiment, they would receive messages from the experimenter by means of the computer network (in reality, all information was pre-programmed).

Subsequently, participants were informed that a bonus prize would be allocated at the end of the experiment, which would be given to the person who performed best on the estimation tasks (in reality, all participants were given a bonus prize of 2,5 Dutch guilders \approx 1 € at the time). Then the experimental procedure was explained to the participants. Participants were to perform three rounds of estimation tasks (cf. Vermunt, Wit, Van den Bos, & Lind, 1996). Rectangles of white and black squares were shown on the screen for 5 seconds. Participants were to estimate the number of black squares in the rectangle. After 6 practice trials, participants completed 3 rounds of 10 estimations each. After each round participants received bogus feedback about their performance. They learned that their average deviation from the correct number was 14 squares on the first round, 10 squares on the second round and 5 squares on the third round. Additionally, after each round they were informed that in previous studies the average deviation on this round of estimation tasks was 10 squares.

After completion of this task, it was announced that the winner of the bonus prize was now to be decided. Treatment was manipulated, by informing participants in the favorable condition that the experimenter would only consider the results from the third round when deciding who would get the bonus prize; in the unfavorable condition the experimenter would allegedly only consider the results from the first round. All participants then answered questions measuring dependent variables, level of ingroup identification and manipulation checks. After completing all questions, and taking part in additional unrelated experiments, participants were thanked, fully debriefed, and paid.

All items were measured on 7-point Likert scales (1 = *not at all*, 7 = *very much*). To measure *decision acceptance* four questions were asked (e.g., 'To what extent are you willing to accept the decisions of the experimenter', $\alpha = 0.88$). To measure *ingroup identification* eight items adapted from Tyler and Lind (1992) were used ($\alpha = 0.87$). For example: 'I often think of myself as a student of Leiden University.' In order to check whether the authority categorization manipulation had been perceived as intended we asked: 'To what extent do you agree with the statement that the experimenter was from the Free University in Amsterdam?' To check whether the treatment manipulation had been perceived as intended we asked: 'To what extent do you think the procedure used by the experimenter to make a decision will help you to get the bonus prize?'

Results

Ingroup Identification and Manipulation Checks

Ingroup Identification As intended, a 2 (Authority categorization: ingroup/outgroup) \times 2 (Treatment: favorable/unfavorable) Analysis of Variance on the ingroup identification scale confirmed

that ingroup identification was stable and unaffected by our experimental manipulations (all p s > 0.27). Ingroup identification was then included as a continuous independent variable in all subsequent analyses.

To analyze manipulation checks and main dependent variables, we included authority categorization, treatment (both of these variables were effect-coded, 1 and -1), the continuous ingroup identification variable (centered), all two-way interaction terms (authority categorization \times treatment, treatment, authority categorization \times ingroup identification, treatment \times ingroup identification,) and the three-way interaction term (authority categorization \times treatment \times ingroup identification) in hierarchical regression analyses.

Manipulation Checks As expected, only authority categorization predicted to what extent participants agreed that the experimenter was from the Free University in Amsterdam ($\beta = -0.67$, $p < 0.001$). Participants in the outgroup condition to a larger extent agreed that the experimenter was from the Free University in Amsterdam ($M = 5.42$, $SD = 1.84$) than participants in the ingroup condition ($M = 2.57$, $SD = 1.46$). Furthermore, only treatment predicted to what extent the procedure used by the experimenter was seen as favorable ($\beta = 0.77$, $p < 0.001$). Participants in the favorable condition to a larger extent thought the procedure used would help them to get the bonus ($M = 5.39$, $SD = 1.64$) than participants in the unfavorable condition ($M = 2.04$, $SD = 1.30$). We thus conclude that the manipulations of authority categorization and treatment had been perceived as intended.

Decision Acceptance

The results of the regression analysis on decision acceptance are displayed in Table 1. The regression equation accounted for a significant amount of variance on decision acceptance ($R^2 = 0.20$), $F(7, 89) = 3.19$, $p < 0.01$. Across the board, decision acceptance was predicted by treatment ($\beta = 0.30$, $p < 0.01$). More importantly, however, this effect was qualified by the predicted three-way interaction ($\beta = -0.25$, $p < 0.025$).

Relational Model Hypothesis The relational model predicts that the negative effect of unfavorable (vs. favorable) treatment should be less relevant for high identifiers than for low identifiers in encounters with an ingroup authority. Indeed, inspections of simple slopes indicated that the effect of treatment was not significant for high identifiers ($\beta = 0.06$, $p = 0.79$), while treatment did matter for low identifiers ($\beta = 0.37$, $p = 0.06$). This is consistent with the relational model hypothesis.

Intergroup Perception Hypothesis Our second hypothesis was that the negative effect of unfavorable (vs. favorable) treatment should be more pronounced for high identifiers than for low identifiers in encounters with an outgroup authority. To test this hypothesis we investigated the

Table 1. Decision acceptance as a function of ingroup identification, authority categorization, and treatment

Predictor	β	t
Treatment (T)	0.30	3.16**
Authority categorization (A)	0.10	1.04
Ingroup identification (I)	-0.05	-0.46
A \times T	-0.05	-0.56
I \times T	0.19	2.06
A \times I	0.14	1.41
I \times A \times T	-0.25	-2.56*

Note: * $p < 0.05$; ** $p < 0.01$.

identification by treatment interaction within the outgroup authority condition. As expected, the interaction term significantly predicted decision acceptance in the outgroup authority condition ($\beta = 0.43$, $p < 0.005$). Furthermore, analyses of the simple slopes confirmed that the influence of treatment was significant among high identifiers ($\beta = 0.57$, $p < 0.005$), but not among low identifiers ($\beta = 0.16$, $p = 0.46$). Thus, in line with the intergroup perception hypothesis, ingroup identification moderated reactions to treatment favorability in encounters with an outgroup authority, in the sense that treatment favorability primarily affected high identifiers' (but not low identifiers') willingness to accept the outgroup authority's decision.

Group Differentiation Hypothesis Finally we investigated the influence of authority categorization and treatment among low versus high ingroup identifiers. Because high identifiers to a larger extent differentiate between the ingroup and outgroups (Doosje et al., 1995), it was expected that the authority's group membership should moderate responses to treatment to a larger extent among high identifiers than among low identifiers. Notably, treatment predicted decision acceptance among low identifiers ($\beta = 0.28$, $p = 0.05$), while the treatment by authority categorization interaction term did not ($\beta = 0.15$, $p = 0.29$). These findings show that low identifiers did not differentiate in their responses to treatment from ingroup versus outgroup authorities. By contrast, while treatment predicted decision acceptance also among high identifiers ($\beta = 0.33$, $p < 0.05$), this effect was qualified by a significant treatment by authority categorization interaction ($\beta = -0.29$, $p < 0.05$). Simple slopes analyses show that, among high identifiers, the influence of treatment was significant within the outgroup condition ($\beta = 0.43$, $p < 0.005$), but not within the ingroup condition ($\beta = 0.06$, $p = 0.79$). These findings suggest that people who identify strongly with the ingroup differentiated in their responses to ingroup versus outgroup authorities. In line with our argument derived from research on intergroup perception and self-categorization, favorability of treatment predicted high ingroup identifiers' willingness to accept the outgroup authority's decision. However, in line with the relational model, favorability of treatment did not predict high ingroup identifiers' willingness to accept the ingroup authority's decision (e.g. Huo et al., 1996).

DISCUSSION

In the present research we investigated how people react to decisions of outgroup authorities based on the favorability of treatment. Insights on intergroup perception and self-categorization led us to hypothesize that people who identify strongly with the ingroup should be more strongly affected by the favorability of treatment from an outgroup authority than people who identify less strongly with the ingroup. In general, people perceive outgroup members as less trustworthy and less honest than ingroup members (Brewer, 1979). Furthermore, people generally expect outgroup members to be biased in favor of their own group members. However, because high identifiers' perceptions of ingroup and outgroup members are more differentiated, negative perceptions and expectations of outgroup members should be particularly strong for high identifiers. In addition, because the ingroup is incorporated in the self-concept particularly among high identifiers (Tropp & Wright, 2001) they are also more sensitive to group-relevant information, and are more likely to interpret negative outcomes as discrimination (Operario & Fiske, 2001). Thus, we predicted and found that the favorability of treatment by an outgroup authority should particularly influence decision acceptance among high identifiers. As expected, high ingroup identifiers were less willing to accept the decision when treatment was unfavorable rather than favorable. By contrast, for low identifiers, willingness to accept the decision was less clearly affected by the favorability of treatment by the outgroup authority.

Although we think the phenomenon we observed is interesting in its own right, additional research should further address the psychological processes behind these effects. We propose that differential perceptions of outgroup members, and particularly perceptions of bias, play an important role here. First, we think this is the case because our reasoning based on the intergroup perception framework successfully predicted these responses. Second, in more recent research we found that information about previous displays of ingroup bias by an outgroup authority indeed moderates people's responses to that authority's decisions (Ståhl, Vermunt, & Ellemers, 2004). That is, in line with an intergroup perception perspective, in this research the knowledge that the outgroup authority had discriminated against members of one's group in the past, caused people to respond more strongly to the favorability of the treatment they received from this authority. This strengthens our conviction that perceived bias is indeed an important determinant of people's reactions to decisions made by an outgroup authority, and further supports our interpretation of the present findings.

Aside from moderating reactions to outgroup authority treatment, ingroup identification influenced reactions to ingroup authority treatment as well. As predicted on the basis of the relational model, the pattern was reversed in encounters with an ingroup authority. Specifically, only low ingroup identifiers' willingness to accept the ingroup authority's decision was affected by the favorability of treatment. This pattern is consistent with previous findings from research on the relational model (e.g., Huo, 2003; Huo et al., 1996).

Research on the role of ingroup identification in reactions to ingroup and outgroup authorities' decisions is relevant, not only for theoretical advancement *per se*, but also for practical purposes. Outside of the laboratory, distinctions between ingroup members and outgroup members often become relatively unclear. For example, people may share a superordinate group membership with an authority (e.g., Department of psychology), yet belong to a different subgroup (e.g., social psychology vs. cognitive psychology). In such situations, whether or not the authority is perceived as an outgroup member should to a large extent depend on the individual's psychological attachment to and identification with the superordinate group (cf. Huo et al., 1996). Therefore it is important to investigate not only effects of objective group membership (e.g., Smith et al., 1998; Ståhl, Van Prooijen et al., 2004), but also the causal role of psychological attachment to the group in reactions to decisions. The present study has addressed this issue and our findings indeed suggest that people's level of attachment with the group (i.e., identification) plays an important role in reactions to treatment from ingroup as well as outgroup authorities. Furthermore, our findings suggest that only high ingroup identifiers tend to differentiate between responses to treatment by ingroup versus outgroup authorities, whereas low ingroup identifiers are likely to respond to ingroup and outgroup authorities in similar ways.

A limitation of this study is the fact that ingroup identification was not manipulated but measured, and that measurement took place at the end of the study rather than in the initial stages. The reason we decided to measure identification was that we used natural groups rather than ad hoc groups (cf. Smith et al., 1998; Spears, Doosje, & Ellemers, 1997) in order to optimize the significance of group membership also for low identifiers. In natural groups identity generally is more developed and more consistent across different situations than in ad hoc groups (e.g., Jetten, Spears, & Manstead, 1996). As a result, it would have been difficult to manipulate participants' level of identification experimentally. The main reason we chose not to measure identification at the beginning of the study was that it would have threatened the credibility of the cover story presented to participants about the purpose of the experiment (i.e., to investigate differences in task-performance), and may have alerted people to the true nature of our study. It should be noted here that previous research suggests that when the level of ingroup identification is monitored as a result of experimental manipulations and over time, initial differences remain (Doosje, Spears, & Ellemers, 2002). Furthermore, we checked for any effects of our manipulated variables (i.e. authority categorization and treatment) on level of ingroup identification, and importantly, no effects were found. This strengthens our conviction that the procedure we

used is valid. Nevertheless, it would be useful in future studies to investigate whether our results can be replicated in a context where identification with an ad hoc group has been manipulated.

Because the relationship between identification and procedural fairness has previously received substantial theoretical and empirical attention (e.g., Huo et al., 1996), we decided not to manipulate fairness of treatment in the present study. Instead, to ensure comparability with previous work (e.g., Ståhl, Van Prooijen et al., 2004), we focused on effects of treatment favorability in situations where the authority used relatively unfair allocation procedures (i.e., inaccurate procedures, Leventhal, 1980). However, future research may examine whether the effects obtained here generalize to situations where procedures are more fair.

To summarize, the present research suggests that the influence of treatment favorability on willingness to accept authorities' decisions in general, and outgroup authorities' decisions in particular, depend on people's level of ingroup identification. In encounters with an outgroup authority, high-ingroup identification intensifies the influence of favorability of treatment compared to low identification, which is consistent with theory and research on intergroup perception and self-categorization. However, supporting previous correlational research (e.g. Huo, 2003; Huo et al., 1996), treatment favorability has a stronger effect on decision acceptance among low (vs. high) ingroup identifiers in encounters with an ingroup authority. These findings underline that it is important to consider differences in ingroup identification in order to understand and predict people's reactions to favorability of treatment from outgroup authorities as well as ingroup authorities.

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