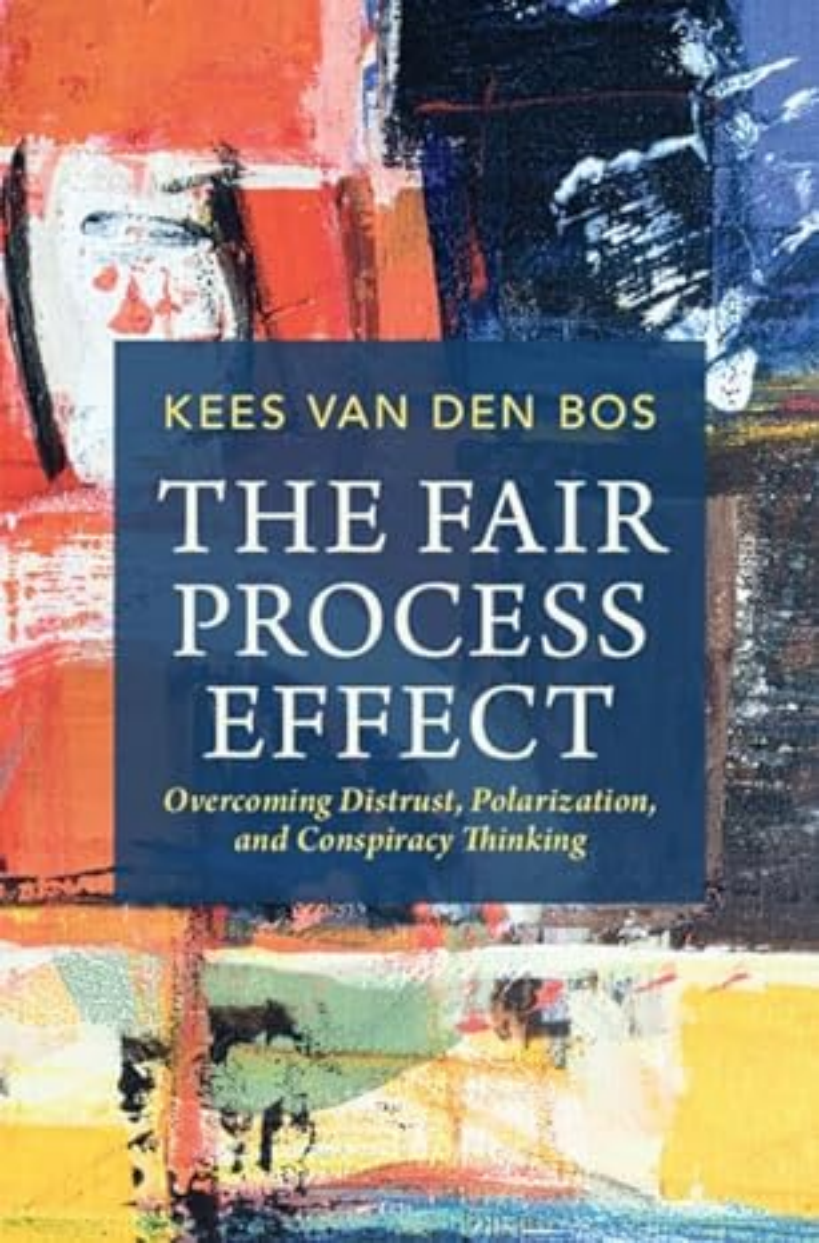
KEES VAN DEN BOS
THE FAIR PROCESS EFFECT
Overcoming Distrust, Polarization, and Conspiracy Thinking

THE FAIR PROCESS EFFECT

The Fair Process Effect aims to shed light on why there are so many instances of distrust, polarization, and conspiracy thinking in our world and what we can do about this. The book focuses on the fair process effect as a mechanism that may help to start overcoming these important issues of societal discontent. The fair process effect is a positive effect that people exhibit when they have been treated in genuinely fair and just ways by fellow human beings and societal authorities. Current insights presented in the book aid the understanding of why people may experience discontent, distrust, and disillusionment. Furthermore, these insights can be used to start countering exaggerated levels of distrust, heightened polarization, and unfounded conspiracy thinking. To this end, Van den Bos develops a coherent and modern account of the fair process effect, targeted at understanding and managing these pertinent issues.

Kees van den Bos is Professor of Social Psychology and Professor of Empirical Legal Science at Utrecht University, the Netherlands. His research answers basic questions as to why perceived fairness and justice matter so much to people. These insights are used by citizens, practitioners, and governments to understand and prevent conflicts and discontent in society.

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Preface

People are social creatures. They like to interact with others, and most of them work together in cooperative ways most of the times. Not all people are good or social, but quite a number of us are and like to behave in predominantly prosocial ways. This is one of the reasons why growing levels of distrust, polarization, and suspicion in our societies are a concern. For example, current distrust not only includes (sometimes warranted) skeptic attitudes about politicians and government, but also tends to spread to fundamental distrust in basic societal institutions that aim to hold our societies together, such as law and science, and authorities associated with these institutions, such as judges and scientists. Furthermore, many countries and communities in our world face growing levels of polarization between different groups, making it more difficult for people to work together in fruitful manners and to improve mutual understanding and our way of living. Moreover, different kinds of people are getting more and more suspicious about what is happing in their worlds. Some go so far that they search for evidence that elites and others have joined together in secret agreements to achieve hidden and malevolent goals. Certain people even strongly believe in conspiracies by elites and others, although there is no strong evidence for their suspicions and sometimes no evidence at all.

Too many and unwarranted levels of distrust, polarization, and suspicion or conspiracy thinking can threaten people living and working together in a peaceful manner. This can constitute a danger to the way we want to live in modern democratic societies. Furthermore, these different forms of discontent with society can cause the deterioration of the institutional basis of our democratic societies, including the rule of law, and can pose a real threat to individuals associated with these institutions and to others who may end up in situations of possibly violent conflict. Indeed, it can well be argued that these societal issues are among the most challenging that we humans currently face.

The current book aims to provide an open-minded evaluation on why there are so many instances of distrust, polarization, and conspiracy thinking in our world. In particular, the book focuses on a mechanism that may help us to start overcoming these important issues of societal discontent. This mechanism is the fair process effect, the positive effect that people show when they are treated in a genuinely fair and just manner by societal authorities and other fellow human beings. This effect is conceptually interesting, I argue, and has been found to be empirically robust in various domains of human life, including work organizations, legal settings, and several other important contexts in society. In fact, we now understand the fair process effect to such an extent that we know why the effect is relevant and empirically robust in so many different societal settings in which people may become discontent about certain issues. Therefore, the book argues that the fair process effect can be used as an key mechanism to start countering the important issues of distrust, polarization, and conspiracy thinking. To this end, this book develops a coherent and modern account of the fair process effect, targeted at understanding and managing these issues.

Importantly, this book notes that it is crucial to stay critical about social authority, such as that of government officials, judges, and also scientists. It indeed would be wrong to take any form of distrust in societal authorities, intergroup tension, or suspicion against institutions to be incorrect and misguided. Thus, I adopt a constructive but also critical approach toward governmental agencies, the functioning of the legal system, and the incentives used in science as an institution as well as the quality of various research findings and how these findings are communicated by researchers. In short, the goal is to critically analyze what is wrong and should become better.

The book also warns against treating the fair process effect as a solution for all problems. Indeed, the fair process effect is no "super glue" that on its own will fix all societal issues at hand nor will it be able to glue together all parts of society that have been broken over several years. The fair process effect probably works best among those who are still willing and capable to work cooperatively with others in their environments. When people have been damaged severely and for a long time by the societal system or repeatedly and brutally by important societal authorities, it is very hard to recover from these terrible encounters, and fair treatment and fair processes alone are probably not sufficient counter these hurtful experiences. Furthermore, most people will see through insincere attempts by some authorities to employ ostensibly fair procedures. Thus, the fair

process effect should not and cannot be used as a superficial measure to repair what is fundamentally wrong with the status quo and current societal arrangements and structures.

On basis of the science of the fair process effect we can be optimistic about the importance and relevance of the fair process effect in the process of starting to overcome or prevent exaggerated levels of distrust, polarization, and conspiracy thinking. This noted, I also warn against simplifications of the effect that will do no good, and in effect may harm communities, societies, and the world at large. What is needed, then, is a good, solid, and scientific account of the fair process effect and what it does and does not have to offer for the understanding and managing of different instances of distrust, polarization, and conspiracy thinking. The current book aims to provide this relevant and nuanced scientific account of the fair process effect and its implications.

Taken together, the book offers a scientific yet accessible account of the fair process effect, which helps us to understand and start managing various conditions of societal discontent, particularly focusing on societal distrust, polarization, and conspiracy thinking. The book sketches avenues for future research and explores how we can open up our thoughts, feelings, and behaviors by embracing the science of fairness judgments and its implications.

Acknowledgments

I dedicate this book to Riël Vermunt, who introduced me to research on the fair process effect thirty years ago. Riël was the advisor of both my MA and my PhD theses, and I could not have wished for a friendlier, more conscientious, and internally motivated supervisor and mentor than Riël.

When writing this book, I rested on the shoulders of many scholars who grounded the line of reasoning on the fair process effect put forward in this book. In particular, I would like to mention Allan Lind, Tom Tyler, Joel Brockner, and Rob Folger for their input throughout the years. Without their research and theorizing on the fair process effect, this book could not have been written.

I acknowledge David Repetto and Rowan Groat of Cambridge University Press and Stephanie Sakson for their expert help in putting this book together. I am grateful to the feedback provided on the manuscript by Lisa Ansems, Rob Folger, Anne Janssen, and Allan Lind.

Finally, I would like to thank Asteria, who supported me when preparing and writing this book, although life did not treat her fairly at that same time.

PART I

Introduction

CHAPTER 1

A Framework for Understanding Societal Discontent

This book aims to provide a framework for understanding and possibly managing various conditions of discontent in our societies. The book studies antecedents of societal distrust, heightened polarization, and increased levels of conspiracy thinking. The book analyzes these different instances of discontent in society, focusing on three key points: First, distrust, polarization between individuals and groups, and conspiracy thinking play an important role in our world and seem to occur more and more frequently across our globe.[1] Thus, what we can do to somehow manage these instances of social discontent deserves our attention. Second, it can be quite hard to handle these issues. Therefore, we need scientifically grounded tools that help to prevent unwarranted levels of distrust, polarization, and thoughts about conspiracy from inflating to levels that democratic societies cannot deal with in legitimate and orderly ways.[2] Third, it is crucial that we as individuals, groups, and societies allow for, and indeed applaud, appropriate critical attitudes of the various terrible things that are going wrong in our world. In other words, we should not go overboard and respond too harshly to every occurrence of some form of discontent in our societies.[3]

The science of what has become known as the fair process effect[4] provides a framework for how to respond to these points. When people are treated in a polite manner and with respect, when they are able to voice their opinions, and when their opinions are seriously listened to by competent and professional authorities and others who matter in our communities, then it is likely that the fair process effect will occur.[5] That is, when people feel fairly and justly treated, and hence feel to be

[1] Thayer, 2021. [2] Van den Bos, 2018. [3] Dahrendorf, 1959.
[4] Folger, Rosenfield, Grove, and Corkran, 1979; Lind and Tyler, 1988; Tyler, 2006; Van den Bos, 2005, 2015; Walker, LaTour, Lind, and Thibaut, 1974.
[5] Van den Bos, Van der Velden, and Lind, 2014.

members of their group, community, or society who matter, they are more likely to trust other people and are more willing to work together with them in cooperative ways and to do what is good for society at large.[6] As this book will make clear, the fair process effect is a psychological phenomenon that can help to repair important instances of distrust, can temper hot and affective reactions within and between polarized groups, and may help to prevent suspicious ideas about conspiracies among elites or other authorities in this world.

The fair process effect has been shown in many different domains of human life and quite often is surprisingly powerful in unleashing the prosocial quality of many individuals.[7] People are also very good at distinguishing sincere instances of fair and just treatment from not so sincere attempts to lure them into something that is not good for them and not so well intended. Thus, people are often able to differentiate between genuinely fair treatment and "quasi-fair" treatment that looks fair, but in fact is rooted in not so good intentions.[8] The implication is that the fair process effect is quite sturdy against potential abuse by persons with no good objectives. To be explicit, the fair process effect is not a mechanism that can be used to mend everything that needs to be mended in this world, but the effect is conceptually rich, empirically robust, and practically relevant such that it can help us to start overcoming at least some crucial issues of discontent in our various societies.

In what follows in this chapter, I introduce what the fair process effect entails, and what it does not entail. I then note important caveats when studying the effect. I further explain that, given the current state of knowledge and the impressive body of research on the effect, the fair process effect can be used effectively to start developing approaches and interventions to counter important instances of societal discontent, in particular, distrust, polarization, and conspiracy thinking. I close this chapter by giving an overview of the chapters that follow.

What the Fair Process Effect Is

The fair process effect holds that when people experience being treated in a fair and just manner, they respond more positively toward important issues at hand than when they are treated in less fair and less just ways. In other words, when people perceive the way in which they are treated to be fair

[6] Tyler and Blader, 2000; Tyler and Huo, 2002; Van den Bos, 2005, 2015.
[7] Lind and Tyler, 1988. [8] Greenberg, 1990.

and just, they respond positively toward subsequent events. The implication of these ostensibly simple observations is that perceptions of what we call "procedural fairness" and "procedural justice" play a crucial role in how people respond to what is going on in their environment.[9]

How do people come to evaluate whether they have been treated in fair and just manners? Different experiences can lead to these assessments. Here, I note that when people receive an opportunity to voice their opinions about important decisions to be made, and when they have the impression that important authorities in their group, community, or society are paying appropriate attention to their opinions, this can contribute to the evaluation that they are treated in fair and just ways. Being treated respectfully and with politeness also has a positive influence on perceptions of procedural fairness. Furthermore, the general impression of fair and just treatment by competent professionals who know what they are doing is important when forming procedural fairness perceptions.[10] In short, the perception that you are viewed by important members of one's group, community, and/or society as a full-fledged member of that group, community, or society is key to the formation of perceptions of procedural fairness and justice.[11] Chapter 2 introduces at more length the criteria that people can use to form procedural fairness perceptions. Chapter 3 examines the psychological processes that play an important role in the formation of procedural fairness judgments.

The perception that you are treated in fair and just manners is an important precondition before the fair process effect can occur. In other words, once the impression that your treatment was fair and just, then subsequent positive reactions toward issues at hand may follow.[12] Chapter 4 discusses the various contexts in which the fair process effect is found. Chapter 5 surveys the psychological conditions under which the fair process effect is especially likely to occur. The chapters that follow will then examine potential fair process effects on important issues of societal discontent: Chapter 6 studies how the fair process effect may lead to the lowering of distrust in society; Chapter 7 inspects how the fair process effect can help to dampen polarization in society; and Chapter 8

[9] Although the terms "procedural fairness" and "procedural justice" are quite often used interchangeably in the literature, it certainly is possible to make relevant distinctions between these two notions. In this book, however, I will focus on what the concepts have in common, and will therefore use the two labels as synonyms, unless explicitly stated otherwise.

[10] Van den Bos, 2005, 2015; Van den Bos et al., 2014. [11] Lind and Tyler, 1988.

[12] Van den Bos, 2005.

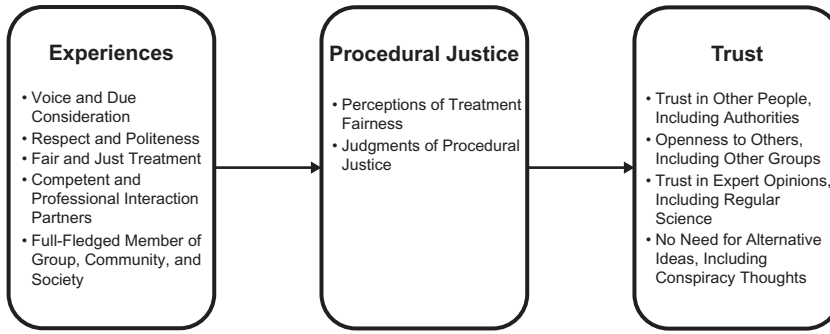

Figure 1.1 Model of various experiences leading to perceptions of treatment fairness and judgments of procedural justice, resulting in more trusting responses to other people, groups, and societal institutions.

focuses on how the fair process effect can lead to the prevention of suspicious thoughts.

Figure 1.1 shows the general model that is studied in this book. Chapters 2–8 examine the various components of this model in detail. Chapter 9 explores the implications that follow from the model, and Chapter 10 scrutinizes what we do not know yet and need to study in future research.

What the Fair Process Effect Is Not

The previous section sketched some of the criteria that people use to assess whether they have been treated in fair and just manners, and how this perception of procedural fairness and justice can be positively related to trust in other people, groups, and institutions. Follow-up chapters will discuss these issues and processes in more detail. Here, I note explicitly that it is not only imperative to examine what the fair process effect entails, but also important to understand what the fair process effect is not.

Central in the analysis of the fair process effect is the notion that we are studying *perceptions* of *procedural fairness*.[13] Let me examine this basic observation in more detail.

Key to understanding the fair process effects that we study in this book is the role of *perceptions*. Fairness, as examined here, is really in the eye of

[13] For an earlier description of the issues discussed in this section, see Van den Bos, 2005.

the beholder.[14] The fair process effect in essence is a psychological effect, constructed in the head of the recipient of the treatment and procedure. The important implication of this assumption is that objective conditions that scholars and decision makers may think are fair or unfair do not have to be viewed that way by people forming their perceptions.[15] Furthermore, because these perceptions are deeply felt as real and genuine, they tend to have real consequences[16] and can affect people's judgments of trust, feelings of polarization, and thoughts about conspiracies in important ways.

It is also crucial to realize that we are focusing here on *fairness*. Compared with the related notions of justice and morality, fairness better connotes the subjective, ready judgment that is and has long been the true topic of psychological study.[17] Participants and respondents in research studies tend to find it easier and more relevant to provide judgments of fairness than judgments of justice or morality. This is the reason why most psychologists who study the fair process effect usually ask people to rate judgments of fairness, rather than to indicate judgments of justice or morality. And this is the rationale why the central topic of consideration of this book is called the "fair process effect" and not the "just process effect" or "moral process effect." The former simply reflects better both common research practices and the core belief under study. Thus, notwithstanding the fact that I tend to treat "fairness" and "justice" (and sometimes "morality") as synonyms in this book, in essence I am referring to fairness perceptions as the major antecedent of the effects examined.[18]

I further want to make explicit what I mean by the term "procedure." The label is derived from the law literature and especially from the work by social psychologist John Thibaut and law professor Laurens Walker. These authors and their associates were inspired by the psychological differences they saw between different legal procedures. In their pioneering procedural justice experiments the authors took these differences as a starting point for their investigation of participants' reactions toward procedures that varied the amount of process control that participants experienced in simulated court trials. Thus, Thibaut and Walker combined their mutual interests in social psychology and law, and as a result they placed their studies under the heading of "procedural justice" research. However, this label should not be taken too literally, since these authors clearly saw their experiments

[14] Adams, 1965; Lind, Kanfer, and Earley, 1990; Mikula and Wenzel, 2000; Tyler, Boeckmann, Smith, and Huo, 1997; Van den Bos and Lind, 2002.
[15] Van den Bos, 2005. [16] Thomas and Thomas, 1928; Van den Bos, 2018.
[17] Van den Bos, 2005; Van den Bos and Lind, 2002.
[18] Lind and Van den Bos, 2002; Van den Bos, 2005.

as a first step toward understanding the psychology involved in fair and just treatment and were intrigued by the implication of their findings that how people are treated in courts of law can have a strong impact on their reactions to judges' verdicts.[19]

Following this pioneering research, scientists have deepened our understanding of the psychological processes hinted at in the Thibaut and Walker work and rightfully noted that the psychological processes involved in the Thibaut and Walker simulations could be expanded to incorporate how people react to fairness and justice in contexts other than legal settings, such as work contexts and society at large.[20] Furthermore, during the advancement of research and theory on procedural justice it became clear that what by then had become known as "procedural justice" effects were really effects of how fairly people felt they had been treated in the particular context under investigation.[21]

In correspondence with this, the fair process effect research that is studied in this book is about the effect of the fairness of the way in which people feel they have been treated in their group, community, or society. Thus, procedural fairness and justice as they are being used here refer to the way people are treated. So, in essence, fair treatment in interpersonal, social, and societal interactions is the issue we are focusing on in this book.[22]

It is important to note that this conception of "procedural justice as treatment fairness" overlaps with the concept of what some call "interactional justice."[23] One could argue that a danger of using the procedural justice label is that it may be a bit of a misnomer and that people may wrongfully misinterpret the concept to mean to refer to formal, law-like procedures. The interactional justice label has as an advantage that it clearly refers to the justice and fairness aspects of social interactions that are so important in understanding the majority of the fairness effects reported in the psychological literature. Its main disadvantage, however, is that when researchers start using this concept they usually feel forced to redefine the concept of procedural justice in terms of *formal* decision-making procedures. However, this formal aspect was never meant to be important in the work by the founders of procedural justice. On the contrary, Thibaut and Walker were really referring to the more informal

[19] Thibaut and Walker, 1978; Van den Bos, 2005; Walker, LaTour, Lind, and Thibaut, 1974.
[20] Folger, 1986; Folger et al., 1979; Greenberg, 2000; Greenberg and Folger, 1983; Lind and Tyler, 1988; Tyler and Lind, 1992; Van den Bos, 2005; Van den Bos and Lind, 2002.
[21] Lind and Tyler, 1988; Van den Bos, 2005. [22] Van den Bos, 2005.
[23] Bies and Moag, 1986; Bies and Shapiro, 1987.

way in which people were treated in decision-making processes. It is this latter conception, the fairness of informal treatment, that I think the literature should focus on,[24] and I will refer to this by means of the notions that were originally developed for these effects: "procedural justice perceptions"[25] and the "fair process effect."[26] Treating these concepts in a formal, as opposed to an informal way, would be a major error.[27]

When examining the fair process effect, it is also important to distinguish criteria (such as voice and due consideration) that lead to the formation of procedural fairness or justice perceptions, and the dampening effects these perceptions subsequently may have on people's distrust in other people, their polarizing feelings toward other groups, and their conspiracy thoughts. Effects of voice and due consideration are not fair process effects, but are antecedents of procedural fairness judgments, and the effects of these judgments on subsequent reactions is the fair process effect that we study here.[28]

Finally, I want to note that it is my assumption that the fair process effect works not because it pampers people but rather because it addresses both rights and duties of people who matter in their group, community, and society.[29] In the chapters that follow, I will work out the several issues briefly mentioned in this introductory chapter.

Caveats

The strength of this book may be the detailed psychological account of the fair process effect (Chapters 2–5), combined with the careful attention to its implications for overcoming important instances of societal distrust, polarization, and conspiracy thinking and an open eye to not only what we learn from this but also what we do not yet know (Chapters 6–10).

Your strength is also typically your weakness. Thus, the psychological analysis put forward has some important advantages, but comes with potential disadvantages as well. One such caveat is the inherently subjective quality of the analysis of both the fair process effect and what to do about societal discontent. Yes, perceptions do matter, and what people perceive to be as real and genuine tends to have important effects on what they do,[30] but the focus on perceptions runs the risk of losing sight of how objective conditions, such as situations that are objectively fair or unfair,

[24] For a similar argument, see Tyler and Bies, 1990. [25] Thibaut and Walker, 1975.
[26] Folger et al., 1979. [27] Van den Bos, 2005. [28] See figure 1 in Van den Bos, 2005.
[29] Lind and Tyler, 1988; Van den Bos, 2018. [30] Thomas and Thomas, 1928.

are important as well. In the more reflective parts of this book,[31] I will try to pay attention to these issues and what we can learn from them by adopting multidisciplinary accounts from various scientific fields and different domains of policy decision making.

Another important caveat is the individualistic notion of some parts of the analysis put forward here. As so many psychologists, my starting point is the individual perceiving certain things in their environment. However, I am also a *social* psychologist, thus paying appropriate attention to the social aspects of such individuals perceiving, feeling, and acting in social environments in interaction with other people. Furthermore, I am a social psychologist studying why fairness perceptions matter to people. One thing fairness research shows is that fairness is so important to people because fairness is where the individual meets the group.[32] That is, fairness matters because when you receive fair treatment this signals that you are valued by important people from your group, community, or society. And unfair treatment hurts so badly because this communicates that your group, community, or society does not care that much about you. Thus, I am aware of the importance of the social aspects that are crucial in studying societal discontent, and I hope the fairness account put forward here helps in examining these issues.

Psychological research can also legitimize the existing status quo. Perhaps not intentionally, but a focus on what people think, feel, and do can distract and direct attention away from important issues that are wrong in society and that cannot be overcome with some opportunities to voice your opinions. Indeed, research shows that when repeated voice opportunities are followed by rejection of the opinions being ventilated, this can lead to people becoming frustrated[33] and angry about the blockage of their goals.[34] Furthermore, being allowed to participate in allocation decision making, and to express your opinions about the decision at hand, should be genuine in order for it to be perceived as procedurally fair. Thus, fair treatment cannot be a scam and still have positive effects on people's reactions.

Related to this, I note explicitly that this book focuses mainly on exaggerated instances of distrust of science, polarization among diverse stakeholders, and illogical conclusions based on objectively false premises and sometimes emotional extremes of others whose polarizing influences are objectively misguided. Thus, I focus on the erosion of trust in experts in science or authorities such as judges who fulfill pivotal functions in our

[31] Such as Chapters 9 and 10. [32] Lind, 1995; Lind and Tyler, 1988. [33] Folger, 1977.
[34] Leander et al., 2020; McGregor, Nash, and Prentice, 2011.

societies. This focus should not be understood to mean that there is an absence of lousy scientists or that there are no underperforming judges or other malfunctioning societal authorities and institutions that may well contribute to their credibility challenges. It is important, indeed crucial, to stay critical about the current state of science, our legal system, and other societal institutions. It would be wrong to take any form of distrust in scientists or societal authorities (including government and judges) to be wrong and misguided. I try to adopt a truly academic, thus critical but also constructive approach toward science and the dissemination of scientific insights as well as toward governmental agencies and the functioning of the legal system. It is this critical-constructive attitude that drives my scientific work and that also provides a major impetus of the current book.

From Insight to Interventions

It is important to realize that the fair process effect works only under some conditions. The fair process effect probably works best among those who are still willing and capable to work cooperatively with others in their environments. The effect is most likely to have the biggest impact in attempts to repair relatively mild forms of societal discontent. The effect cannot be expected to mend what does not want to be mended. For example, when authorities or others have blocked important goals of people repeatedly,[35] a simple act of fair treatment by one new person cannot be expected to lead to very positive effects.

We also know that the fair process effect tends to occur when people perceive their outcomes to be favorable, but often is even stronger when outcomes are unfavorable to people.[36] Thus, procedural justice matters under normal circumstances, and matters even more when things are going wrong.[37] This probably has to do with sense-making processes: Especially when conditions are worsening and outcomes are disappointing, we try to make sense of what is going on and to explain what happened. Receiving fair treatment by important people in those conditions helps you to stop ruminating and get on with your life and the tasks at hand.[38] In other words, when the going gets tough, fair treatment helps you to toughen up and to get going.

[35] Folger, 1977; Leander et al., 2020; McGregor et al., 2011.
[36] Brockner and Wiesenfeld, 1996; Grootelaar and Van den Bos, 2018. More on this issue in Chapters 4 and 5.
[37] Brockner, 2010, 2016. [38] Greenberg, 2006.

We are learning more and more about the conditions under which the fair process effect is likely to work, and when it is less likely to have an impact on people's reactions. Now is the time, I argue, to bring the most important insights on the effect together in an attempt to analyze how the effect can help us to understand and, hopefully, prevent or even repair important instances of societal discontent. This analysis is the main goal of this book.

A careful analysis of what is going on is always the starting point for practical interventions. In fact, Kurt Lewin, the founder of modern social psychology and a proponent of the importance of combining theory and practice in the social and behavioral sciences, famously stated that there is nothing as practical as a good theory.[39] The analysis of the fair process effect that is provided in this book can be used by scientists and practitioners to start developing practical interventions against unwarranted levels of societal discontent. To this end, those who understand the psychology of the fair process effect (including readers of this book) can team up with people in the field (who know important details about the social conditions under which the effect is assumed to work) to try to analyze and ultimately start overcoming exaggerated distrust, polarization, and conspiracy thinking in their societies.

Overview of the Book

This book consists of ten chapters. The chapters are arranged in five parts and each chapter is broken down into five sections, enhancing the readability of the book. This chapter (constituting Part I) has introduced what the fair process effect entails, and what it does not entail. Important caveats when studying the effect were noted. This chapter further explained that, given the current state of knowledge and the impressive body of research on the effect, the fair process effect now can be used effectively to start developing approaches and interventions to start countering important instances of societal discontent, in particular, distrust, polarization, and conspiracy thinking.

Part II and Chapters 2 and 3 describe how people form perceptions of procedural fairness. After all, before we can understand and work with the effects of perceptions of perceived procedural fairness, we need to know how these perceptions are formed in the first place. To this end, Chapter 2 examines criteria that people use when forming perceptions about whether

[39] Lewin, 1943; Marrow, 1969.

they and others have been treated fairly or unfairly. One of the important criteria that people use in evaluating the fairness of how they were treated is whether they were given sufficient opportunities to voice their opinions about important issues at stake. It is also crucial that voiced opinions are given due consideration. Being treated in polite and respectful manners by people, and especially people of power, is also among the core criteria for evaluating procedural fairness. Generally being treated in fair and just manners by competent and professional authorities is also among the important criteria of perceived procedural fairness. Taken together, perceived procedural fairness boils down to the feeling of being treated as a full-fledged member of your community, society, and, ideally, the entire world.

Chapter 3 examines the psychological processes that are important when people are forming perceptions of procedural fairness. The psychology of perceived procedural fairness discussed here argues that quite often people start out with a general hunch that things do not feel right. Cognitive processes help us to understand how to interpret this hunch, allowing people to start forming perceptions of procedural fairness in more confident ways. Groups may facilitate this process, for example, by communicating certain frames of how to interpret what has happened and what group members should do about it. People need to know that they are making progress toward meaningful goals, and this also plays a crucial role in the formation of fairness judgments. How these psychological processes work out in institutional contexts is also important and is discussed as well.

Part III and Chapters 4 and 5 review why perceptions of procedural fairness can have strong and reliable effects on people's subsequent reactions. In particular, Chapter 4 gives a basic review of the fair process effect. Research conducted in laboratory settings is able to study the fair process effect with causal control. This has revealed insights into basic reasons why the fair process effect is important for people. Studies done in work organizations typically have more difficulty showing the causal quality of the effect, but are important in showing the relevance of positive associations between employees' perceptions of procedural fairness and other reactions, such as trust in management and organizational citizenship behavior. Similarly, research in legal settings indicates that citizens are more willing to trust the legal system and voluntarily accept decisions by important legal authorities, such as police officers and judges. Related to this, in various societal contexts, high levels of perceived procedural fairness are associated with positive reactions and constructive behaviors, such as voting in democratic elections and efforts to improve one's

community. In contrast, low levels of perceived procedural fairness are linked with negative reactions and destructive behaviors, such as radicalization into violent extremism and terrorism. Chapter 4 also warns against unwarranted simplifications about the fair process effect. Preventing these simplifications from happening is important in order for the fair process effect to realize its full potential. It is this realistic perspective on the fair process effect that we can use to fight fundamental distrust, exaggerated polarization, and unwarranted conspiracy thinking in our societies.

Chapter 5 focuses on the psychology of the fair process effect. The chapter notes that although the effect is often there, it is important to study it in the context in which it is supposed to appear. After all, the relevance of various criteria and psychological processes may vary across different contexts and the different people present in those contexts. The chapter also notes that it is important to specify which types of dependent variables, such as trust or protest intentions, are most likely to be affected by the fair process effect under consideration. Relevant moderators (such as personal uncertainty) and mediators (such as perceived legitimacy) are discussed as well. The chapter ends with discussing the systemic aspects that are important when understanding the functioning of the fair process effect and how to prevent the effect from being misused in system-justifying ways.

Part IV and Chapters 6–8 explore different instances of what we may call discontent in society. In doing so, this book will not repeat the many excellent books and other publications that have been written about societal distrust, polarization between different groups, and conspiracy thinking about various issues, in both the past and present. Instead, the book will concentrate on important psychological components of distrust, polarization, and conspiracy thinking and what insights the analysis of the fair process effect provided here can contribute to what we can do to start overcoming these different forms of societal discontent. In this way, the book aims to provide new avenues that may help in the process of overcoming important aspects of distrust, polarization, and conspiracy thinking.

Chapter 6 focuses on distrust in different forms in society, including distrust between individual persons, distrust in management and work supervisors, and distrust in social institutions – such as government, law, and science – and people associated with these institutions – such as civil servants, judges, and scientists. The chapter will point out that people's searching for information plays an important role in starting to understand different forms of distrust. People especially tend to be oriented toward what authorities think of them and how they evaluate them. One reason for this is that authorities have power over people and can exclude them

from important groups or grant them permission to become full-fledged members of those groups. Related to this, how institutions evaluate you conveys important symbolic information on whether you are viewed as a valuable member of society. In turn, when you suspect that your views are not taken seriously into consideration, this increases the chances of distrust in the social institutions at hand, and the people representing those institutions. People tend to be oriented toward information that conveys that they can trust or should distrust a certain person in society, such as an individual representing a particular societal institution. Processing information about what happens in society in abstract ways tends to facilitate the formation of distrusting attitudes. A central theme of the current book is that fairness and justice are taking place where the individual meets the group. That is, whether your group (including your community and society) treats you in fair ways reflects how the group and important members of the group think of you. In this process, being evaluated in a negative way and experiencing concrete instances of unfair treatment have special significance and increase the chances of judgments of distrust to develop and flourish.

Chapter 7 examines the detrimental effects that polarization between different groups can have on individuals, groups, communities, and societies. The book thereby contrasts itself explicitly with more positive perspectives on polarization conflict in society. One important aspect that ultimately may lead to group polarization is how you responds to dissenting opinions, and the affective and defensive responses dissenters may trigger. Fairness concerns come with an important dark side. For example, people may go to great lengths to protect their view that they live in fair and just societies and that their group and culture are involved in what is morally right. Indeed, desperately wanting to be involved in what is morally pure can strengthen important aspects of group polarization in our modern society. This is especially the case when groups have clear group boundaries, when they involve some form of (authoritative or moral) directive leadership, and when group members think their tribe is fighting for a worthy moral cause. Starting to think of individuals who are members of other groups in abstract terms facilitates enemy thinking between different groups. As such, people tend to adhere more to fairness principles when they act out of their own individual responsibilities than when they feel responsible to defend their group interests.

Chapter 8 studies antecedents of people becoming suspicious about what is happening in their world and explaining events or situations by pointing to conspiracies by sinister and powerful groups, when other

explanations are more probable. The chapter tries to delineate what we can do about this so that people do not fall into the trap of believing in conspiracy theories that resist falsification and are reinforced by circular reasoning. As with the other instances of societal discontent discussed here, belief in conspiracy theories often starts by looking at important societal authorities and a certain amount of suspicion about these authorities. The chapter examines when conspiracy thinking feels so good that people exaggerate their levels of suspicion about what is actually going on in society. The chapter also explains how the online quality of our modern ways of living tends to amplify levels of suspicion and the ease with which conspiracy theories are spread as well as the strength with which people may believe in these theories. In particular, the book distinguishes between three different motivations that often are equated with each other, yet that drive conspiracy thinking in different ways. One important motivation is epistemic and concerns people trying to make sense of what is going on in their world. Another important motivation is existential and concerns people trying to deal with threats in their lives. Yet another motivation is related to group identification. This includes people wanting to be a part of unique groups that give them a sense of belonging. Importantly, the three motivations thus distinguished are related yet differ from each other, and provide impetus to different ways of trying to intervene when people start falling for exaggerated suspicion and non-falsifiable conspiracy thoughts.

Part V and Chapters 9 and 10 of the book discuss what we have learned and still need to learn about the fair process effect. Chapter 9 discusses the implications of the fair process effect for how to deal with various issues of discontent in society and how we can open up ourselves to start overcoming these issues, at least to a certain extent. Based on what is shown in this book, the chapter notes that it would help if we learned to think differently and tried to stay away from abstractions that may, in effect, make us more discontent about what is happening in society than is sometimes warranted or desirable. We also may need to train ourselves to accept that sometimes unfair things happen to us. This may lead us to accept the unpleasant feelings that come with these experiences. This may also increase the chances of us being able to tolerate or even embrace dissenting opinions, which may turn out to provide the main impetus to real change. Increasing the level of genuine empathy for other people's feelings is also among the core aspects that we may attempt to learn. Trying behaviors different from those we are used to, and then observing the effects of these different behaviors, is among the more important lessons that we humans can learn and adapt ourselves to accordingly.

Finally, Chapter 10 of the book reflects on what we do not yet know about the fair process effect and its implications for the understanding and handling of distrust, polarization, and conspiracy thinking. The chapter discusses different types of scientific studies that need to be done to fully get a grip on the science of the fair process effect and its potentially alleviating effects on various developing instances of societal discontent. This includes, but is not limited to, carefully conducted field experiments in settings that really matter in this world. Research also needs to be carried out to better understand psychological processes that possibly serve moderating or mediating roles in the effects of perceived procedural fairness on people's reactions. This encompasses a series of experiments and other studies on the important role of trust and other issues, such as perceived legitimacy, state and trait self-esteem, and personal and informational uncertainty. That is, the fair process effect seems to be so powerful because it increases judgments of trust, and these judgments, in turn, impact various responses that are positive for both the people involved and the group, community, and society in which they are living. This noted, we also need to understand the possible downsides of the fair process effect better. For example, there is some evidence that sometimes people use unfair procedures to conclude that they are not to blame for what happened to them, potentially stopping people from learning from their mistakes. There also seems to be an asymmetry between positive and negative responses following the experience of fair procedures, with at least the fair process effect dampening people's negative responses, such as distrust, polarization, and conspiracy thinking.

Importantly, Chapter 10 further notes important normative implications about the fair process effect and that we should be aware that the effect can be used to justify the current status quo and legitimize power structures in our societies. The chapter concludes by giving directions for the development of practical interventions that may be used on the basis of this book to counter intensified distrust, heightened polarization, and strong beliefs in unfounded conspiracy theories. Much needs to be studied in detail about the fair process effect, but for now the effect seems to be robust and meaningful in a large variety of contexts. Ultimately, using the insights on the fair process effect that are conveyed in this book may lead us to become better and more sociable beings, which in the end may increase the chances of us living in a better world.

PART II

Perceiving Procedural Fairness

CHAPTER 2

Criteria

Before we can inspect the working of the fair process effect, we need to know what criteria and psychological processes people use when forming an impression about whether they have been treated in fair and just ways.[1] And this is what we will explore in this part of the book. To this end, this chapter will focus on the criteria of perceived procedural justice. Chapter 3 will examine the psychological processes that indicate why these criteria are important for people.

I note immediately that these issues are not always easy to get a good handle on, in part because what people believe is fair and just tends to vary across different contexts.[2] Indeed, this is the core notion of the field of social psychology. That is, the key assumption of that domain of research is that what people think, feel, and do differs as a function of the social context in which they find themselves.[3] This also applies to the social psychology of procedural fairness and justice judgments: What people think and feel constitutes fair and just treatment varies across situations, over time, and between different people receiving the treatment, and various persons enacting the treatment.

The observation that situational and personal variables influence procedural fairness and justice judgments is part of what makes the science of the fair process effect so exciting. After all, the dynamic quality of perceived procedural fairness and justice makes it a subject that never is the same and constantly varies, at least a bit. However, the downside of this aspect is that we currently are lacking a widely accepted scale of perceived procedural justice that is commonly accepted in the field. There definitely are some important scales out there,[4] but quite often earlier measures of procedural fairness and justice tend to focus on formal aspects of decision-making procedures, and do not focus on the fairness of the way people feel

[1] Tyler, 1988. [2] Lind and Tyler, 1988. [3] Allport, 1968.
[4] See, for example, Colquitt, 2001; Moorman, 1991.

Box 1. The Perceived Procedural Justice Scale

To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statements?

I am able to voice my opinions.
My opinions are seriously listened to.
I am treated in a polite manner.
I am treated with respect.
I am treated fairly.
I am treated in a just manner.
The people with whom I interact are competent.
The authorities with whom I deal are professional.
I am treated as an important member of my group.
I feel that I am treated as a person who matters.

Please indicate your answers on a seven-point scale, ranging from 1 (*totally disagree*) to 7 (*totally agree*).

they have been treated, which I argue is the core aspect of the fair process effect studied in this book.[5]

In short, I think there are several reasons why it would be good to have a scale that measures perceived procedural justice as defined here. Based on various sources in the scientific literature, I propose that perceived procedural justice can be accurately measured by asking people to indicate whether and how much they agree with the statements mentioned in Box 1.

People can answer these questions on seven-point Likert-type response scales or on other answering options, such as five-point scales or ten-point report grades. In each study, the Perceived Procedural Justice Scale should be adapted to the specific research context on which the study focuses. For example, "authorities" might well be replaced by "management," "government," "the judge," or other labels that are appropriate in the research study. Similarly, the label "my group" could be specified, by focusing on the respondents' community in which they live, the organization in which they work, or the society in which they are a citizen. It also is wise to pilot test the scale thus constructed among some of the potential respondents.

[5] See also Van den Bos, 2005.

In my experience this scale tends to cover most aspects of perceived procedural justice covered in this book.[6] In what follows in this chapter, I will examine these criteria in more detail.[7]

Voice Opportunities and Due Consideration

In the field of procedural justice, the most generally accepted and best-documented finding is that allowing people an opportunity to voice their opinions about a decision enhances their judgments of the fairness of the decision-making procedure.[8] This finding has been termed the voice effect.[9] This effect has been found in many different contexts, using various research methods.[10] As a result of these numerous studies, we now know that the voice effect is one of the most important forces that operates on perceptions of procedural fairness and justice:[11] When people receive an opportunity to voice their opinions, they evaluate the way in which they are treated to be more fair and more just, compared with when they are not allowed such an opportunity. This effect is there when people are explicitly denied an opportunity to voice their opinions or when they are simply not told that such an opportunity exists.[12]

A crucial precondition that needs to be fulfilled before voice opportunities can lead to positive perceptions of procedural fairness and justice is that the person or organization to whom the voiced opinions are directed listens carefully to what is being said. It is only when appropriate due consideration occurs that voice will indeed lead people to conclude they have been treated in fair and just manners.[13]

Allowing voice while simultaneously not really listening to what is communicated does not work and, in fact, may backfire and lead people to become frustrated and angry about the voice procedure, especially when this happens repeatedly.[14] This may be one of the reasons why large-scale

[6] See also Colquitt, 2001; Grootelaar and Van den Bos, 2018; Lind and Tyler, 1988; Moorman, 1991; Van den Bos, Van der Velden, and Lind, 2014.

[7] In doing so, I use the terms "procedural justice perceptions" and "procedural justice judgments" interchangeably. The effect of these perceptions or judgments on people's subsequent reactions is commonly termed the "fair process effect." In this book, I adhere to these conventions, and I note appropriate nuances when necessary.

[8] Van den Bos, Vermunt, and Wilke, 1996.

[9] Folger, 1977; see also Folger, Rosenfield, Grove, and Corkran, 1979; Hirschman, 1970.

[10] For overviews, see, for example, Folger and Cropanzano, 1998; Lind, Kanfer, and Earley, 1990; Lind and Tyler, 1988; Thibaut and Walker, 1975, 1978; Tyler, 1987; Tyler and Lind, 1992; Tyler, Rasinski, and Spodick, 1985.

[11] Van den Bos et al., 1996. [12] Van den Bos, 1999. [13] Tyler, 1987, 1989.

[14] Folger, 1977.

participation in decision making may not always work. For example, so-called participation evenings in which civilians can voice their opinions about political decisions that are to be made, and in which there actually is not much room to alter the intended decisions, can lead to the perception of pseudo-participation[15] and the judgment that the voice procedure was scam. This can easily cause the citizens involved to become frustrated and upset about the political system.

It is also important to emphasize that the frequently replicated positive effects of voice should not lead to the conclusion that participation in decision making always works and is always appreciated among those allowed to participate. Participation in decision making is appreciated when it is in line with the current abilities, needs, or expectations of the people involved.[16] This observation does not imply that voice can be withheld quite easily when it would not fit those deciding about important issues – quite the contrary – but it is important to realize that people can view a voice opportunity to be inappropriate when it involves decisions that are beyond their expertise or do not really belong to their responsibilities.[17] Furthermore, voice opportunities should be given at times when the voiced opinions can still be meaningfully processed and taken into consideration. Sometimes this is not possible, and in those circumstances being allowed voice about what happened has positive effects on fairness judgments,[18] but as a rule voice should be allowed only when due consideration can be given to what is conveyed during the voice opportunities.[19]

For now, we conclude that opportunities to voice their opinions and due consideration to the voiced opinions are among the most important criteria that people use when forming judgments of procedural fairness and justice. In general, voice in combination with due consideration tends to affect procedural fairness judgments and other human reactions in positive ways. Proper attention should be paid to whether voice is allowed in timely ways about decisions that are considered to be appropriate and relevant for the people who are asked to voice their opinions.

Respectful and Polite Communication

Another pivotal aspect of perceived procedural justice is respectful and polite communication. It is only when voice opportunities, due consideration, and other criteria of perceived procedural justice are communicated

[15] Greenberg, 1990. [16] Dachler and Wilpert, 1978. [17] Van den Bos and Spruijt, 2002.
[18] Lind et al., 1990. [19] Tyler, 1987, 1989.

in such a way that they are truly experienced as being signs of respect and politeness that people can come to the conclusion that real fair and just treatment has taken place.[20] Thus, communication is part and parcel of perceived procedural justice.[21]

What matters is how variations in procedure and treatment are experienced by those to whom the communication is directed. This illustrates the important point that when studying perceived procedural justice and its implications for the practice of managing societal discontent, it is crucial to go beyond the formal qualities of procedures, and to pay explicit attention to the interpersonal context in which procedural justice takes place and how fairness of treatment is communicated and perceived.[22]

The important role of respectful and polite communication does not imply that fair treatment or perceived procedural justice can or should be equated with the pampering of people – quite the contrary. For example, when people are demanding that radical changes need to take place in society, the procedural justice literature suggests that it is crucial that these persons should be able to voice their opinions and that due consideration to these opinions should be paid at proper moments where their opinions can be meaningfully taken into consideration when important decisions are being made. In other words, people have the right to a fair process, even when their opinions diverge sharply from majority rule. These rights should be defended by the legal system and other social institutions, and democratic principles should be made to function in such a way that these rights are indeed secured and defended when necessary.

Importantly, the rights of recipients of fair process go together with proper attention to the duties that all people have. In my opinion, this includes respect for the rule of law, the adherence to democratic norms and values, the communication of your concerns in a polite manner whenever possible, and the willingness to achieve your goals by peaceful means.[23] All this does not mean that one cannot and should not be critical about how laws are constructed, how law enforcement is taking place, what court rulings are made, and how the democratic or not so democratic system in your country functions. However, it is crucial to stay within the boundaries of law whenever possible and to try to achieve changes in a peaceful manner within the boundaries of the democratic system. I will examine these issues in more detail in Part IV of this book.

[20] Tyler, 1987, 1989. [21] Lind and Tyler, 1988. [22] Tyler and Bies, 1990.
[23] Van den Bos, 2018.

Fair and Just Appraisals

When measuring whether people perceive that they are treated in fair and just ways, it makes sense to actually ask them whether they are treated fairly and in just manners. When we forget to assess fairness and justice perceptions in direct ways, we end up measuring the concepts we are interested in indirect ways only, and in general this is not desirable.[24] This is one of the reasons why my Perceived Procedural Justice Scale includes items that ask people whether they are treated fairly and in a just way. It represents a direct measurement of the core construct we are interested in.

It is also important to assess people's perceptions of fair and just treatment in this way, because quite often people are busy forming impressions of how fairly and justly they are treated.[25] Thus, asking them about this often fits naturally with what they are interested in. People's answers to questions that assess this frequently tap into what people feel, is on their minds, and is affecting their behavior.

This is not to say that assessing fair and just treatment in this way is not without problems. For example, sometimes reality is quite complex, and assessing what is going on can be quite overwhelming. In these circumstances, in which it is not so clear whether we have been treated fairly and justly, we tend to rely on our gut feelings to form an impression of perceived procedural justice.[26] In other words, when it feels right, it must be right. And when it feels wrong, it must be wrong. In this way, we are appraising whether fair and just treatment is taking place.

Already in the eighteenth century, the philosopher David Hume noted that it often is very difficult or impossible to think through in a careful manner whether justice has taken place. Instead, justice judgments are derived from feelings, not from reasoning.[27] I think this is an accurate description of what many people tend to do: People tend to form large parts of their impressions of fair and just treatment by a combination of what they think *and* feel must be fair and just treatment.[28] What we call "perceived procedural justice" tends to be a combination of our thoughts *and* feelings about whether fair and just treatment has taken place. This combination of thoughts and feelings is sometimes labeled "hot cognition,"[29] and it is precisely because people think and feel so strongly

[24] Lind and Tyler, 1988.
[25] Lind, 1992, 1994; Lind and Van den Bos, 2002.
[26] Van den Bos, 2003.
[27] Hume, 1739; cf. Kant, 1785; see also Beauchamp, 2001.
[28] Van den Bos, 2007.
[29] Ibid.

about perceived procedural fairness and justice that the fair process effect is impacting many of our behaviors.[30]

I note here that measuring perceived procedural justice in direct ways may not always be the best option. In fact, this is precisely why the Perceived Procedural Justice Scale also contains other items as well, including questions that assess more factual experiences, such as whether opportunities to voice opinions were present or absent. It is this combination of different criteria that probably is most likely to assess perceived procedural justice in a reliable manner such that it predicts people's subsequent reactions. Some overlap between the items of the Perceived Procedural Justice Scale is to be expected, and indeed may be desirable to some point in that the items of the scale need to hang together to form a reliable scale with sufficient internal consistency.[31]

Competent and Professional Authorities

Another set of criteria that often is important for people when assessing whether they have been treated in fair and just ways involves the matter of whether the persons or organizations with whom they interacted were competent and acted in a professional manner. This is an important issue, I argue,[32] in part because it conveys how an individual and their group are viewed by the authorities.[33] Competence and professional behavior on the part of the authorities signals that the authorities know what the individual is talking about. Furthermore, authorities are important because they tend to represent important groups or society at large, and as such their interaction with an individual has important symbolic value.[34] In this way, competent and professional authorities are a prerequisite for voice and due consideration to work properly, for respectful and polite communication to take place, and for fair and just impressions to be able to form.

Competence and professionalism are important not only for authorities in your group, community, work organization, and society, but also more generally for every person with whom you interact and whom you evaluate in terms of whether fair treatment has occurred. An important aspect of being competent and acting in professional ways is to be neutral when this is appropriate. Indeed, neutrality is a core aspect of judges and whether they treat litigants in a fair and just manner.[35] Thus, in the legal

[30] Van den Bos, 2015. [31] Van den Bos, 2020a. [32] Van den Bos et al., 2014.
[33] Tyler and Lind, 1992. [34] Blumer, 1969; Mead, 1934.
[35] Ansems, Van den Bos, and Mak, 2020; Bradford, 2011; Tyler, 1989.

domain and other contexts neutrality is a core aspect of perceived procedural justice.

I emphasize again that it is important to adopt a contextual approach to perceived procedural justice.[36] This includes paying appropriate attention to the context in which treatment fairness is taking place and to assess carefully which procedural justice criteria are especially important in the context at hand. Two general contexts in which perceived procedural justice is examined are work settings and the legal domain. Work and legal contexts tend to share similarities in how they are experienced, but they also differ in important ways. For example, a tentative hypothesis is that neutrality might be especially important in legal contexts, in which judges, prosecutors, and other legal professionals make decisions that somehow reflect how society is looking at an individual, and in which that person should be treated as equal to others in society.[37] Status related to competence may be particularly important in work contexts, in which supervisors must reflect in their communications with employees that they understand what is relevant for employees' task performance and the evaluation of that performance. In short, competence and professionalism are important criteria, and how they are interpreted and weighed may differ across different contexts.

Full-Fledged Member of Your Group

The last set of criteria of perceived procedural justice that I would like to discuss here includes the relevance of being considered a full-fledged member of your group. That is, before people are willing or able to conclude that they have been treated in fair and just manners, it is essential that they perceive that the treatment they experienced is a signal that they are considered to be a valuable and worthwhile member of their local community, their work organization, the society to which they belong to, and/or the global community across our world.[38]

We derive important aspects of who we are from the social groups to which we belong.[39] We humans are social animals who want to belong to other people and affiliate with groups that are important to us.[40] It should not come as a surprise, therefore, that social identity concerns are an

[36] Lind and Tyler, 1988. [37] Ansems et al., 2020.
[38] Lind and Tyler, 1988; Tyler and Lind, 1992. [39] Tajfel and Turner, 1979, 1986.
[40] Aronson, 1972; Baumeister and Leary, 1995; Leary, 2010.

important aspect of perceived procedural justice.[41] Justice is where the individual meets the group.[42] That is, fair treatment by important members of your group signal that you are valued and respected by that group. In contrast, unfair treatment conveys that your group does not consider you to be an important member of the group. In this way, perceived procedural justice communicates something about your standing and social status within the group.[43]

The psychology of perceived procedural justice and the fair process effect tends to focus on how the individual perceives how they are treated in fair or unfair manners, but the social identity aspect of perceived procedural justice makes the science of perceived procedural justice and the fair process effect fundamentally social in nature. Being allowed voice opportunities, due consideration, and respect by people who matter in a certain group and who signal to them that they matter and are considered an important element of the group is very nice and fulfills important needs, including the need to stay connected to others.[44]

Because there are many different groups in this world, we often can switch and start affiliating with other groups, for example, because our earlier groups did not treat us in fair ways.[45] However, leaving old groups and identifying with new groups is not always easy. Furthermore, unfair treatment hurts as this is an important indication that you are being excluded from certain social connections and groups. This affects us deeply,[46] even when we do not affiliate strongly with the group that excludes us.[47] Thus, an important aspect of perceived procedural justice boils down to treatment that conveys that you are being considered as a full-fledged group member.

In closing, I want to emphasize that there certainly are other criteria that people use to form perceptions of procedural justice than the issues mentioned in this chapter. Furthermore, of course, the Perceived Procedural Justice Scale discussed here is in need of more empirical research and extensive validation across various social domains, different research participants, and numerous cultural contexts. The exact number of procedural justice criteria, and the precise operationalization of these

[41] Lind and Tyler, 1988; Tyler and Lind, 1992. [42] Lind, 1995, 2001.
[43] See also Lind and Tyler, 1988; Tyler, 1989; Tyler and Lind, 1992; Van Prooijen, Van den Bos, and Wilke, 2002.
[44] Baumeister, Twenge, and Nuss, 2002. [45] Ellemers, Wilke, and Van Knippenberg, 1993.
[46] Eisenberger and Lieberman, 2004; Eisenberger, Lieberman, and Williams, 2003.
[47] Gonsalkorale and Williams, 2007.

criteria, needs to be examined carefully and pilot tested whenever possible in research studies and practical interventions as there are many different contexts, situations, and circumstances in which treatment fairness is perceived by different people and groups of people. For now, I hope you will agree with me that we have some basic understanding of the criteria that people use when assessing perceived procedural justice. Now it is time to study how people use these and other criteria in the psychological processes that are driving perceptions of procedural justice.

CHAPTER 3

Psychological Processes

After having explored some of the basic criteria that people rely on to assess whether they have been treated fairly and whether procedural justice has occurred, it is now time to examine in more detail the psychological processes that people use in evaluating treatment fairness and procedural justice. After all, it is one thing to know objectively that opportunities for voice were allocated and appropriate attention was given to the voiced opinions, but what also matters a lot is how this is interpreted by the recipients of voice and due consideration. For example, did those expressing their opinions in fact experience that they were given proper voice opportunities and sufficient due consideration? Are they interpreting this to be instances of sincere treatment or to be scam procedures? Or were they thinking that much more voice and consideration to their opinions was given than decision makers actually gave or could give?

Similarly, it is important to understand how people interpret and make sense of whether polite and respectful treatment has occurred. This is not always an easy task. Furthermore, the psychology of whether people think they were treated in fair and just manners by truly competent and professional authorities that view them as full-fledged members of their community and/or society deserves our attention. In short, it is important to study psychological processes that people use to form judgments of treatment fairness and procedural justice.

Different psychological processes play a crucial role when people are forming perceptions of procedural fairness. In this chapter, I will examine the relevant information that people would like to rely on when forming fairness judgments. I will also explore the general appraisal processes that people rely on as they often start with a general hunch that things do not feel right or hunky dory, especially when relevant information is missing or ambiguous. Furthermore, groups moderate these processes, for instance, by conveying how to interpret what has happened. People's orientation toward goal progress also serves an important role in the formation of

fairness judgments. Moreover, these psychological processes often take place in institutionalized contexts. In what follows, I will study these psychological processes in more detail.

Cognitive Processes

An important part of how fairness judgments are formed involves the information people have and to which they are responding. As it turns out, quite often the most relevant information is ambiguous or outright missing. People will then rely on information that is available to them.[1]

For example, as discussed earlier, the issue of whether or not people are allowed an opportunity to voice their opinions about decisions to be made is an important aspect of the perception of procedural justice. However, in reality the absence of voice often goes unnoticed and is not as clear as is often thought. After all, people sometimes are not informed that possible voice opportunities exist and hence implicitly are not allowed an opportunity to voice their opinions. This can be contrasted with situations in which people do know that opportunities to voice opinions exist, but are explicitly denied such opportunities.[2]

When information about procedure is not available (as in the case of implicit no-voice procedures), people may find it difficult to decide how they should judge the procedure. In these situations of informational uncertainty they rely on other information that is available. For instance, they then use the fairness of their outcome to assess how to respond to the procedure. As a result, the procedural judgments of these people show strong fair outcome effects. However, persons who are explicitly denied voice do have explicit information about procedure and hence have to rely less on outcome information, yielding weaker fair outcome effects on procedural judgments.[3]

Relatedly, when people are forming judgments about whether the outcome they received is fair they ideally would like to know what outcomes other persons who are in a similar situation received. For example, when you know that a working colleague who has about the same level of training and experience as you have receives a salary that is comparable to what you are getting you will find your salary to be fair. Quite often, salaries of coworkers are not widely known and are considered to be private information. Similarly, when you need to pay a fine because the judge rules that you made a certain criminal transgression, for example, by

[1] Van den Bos, 2001a; Van den Bos and Lind, 2002. [2] Van den Bos 1999. [3] Ibid.

making a mistake on your tax forms or speeding on the motorway, you want to know whether your outcome is comparable to those who made similar transgressions. However, as a lay person you often do not have access to good, reliable information about jurisprudence that informs you whether your outcome is indeed fair.

What you do in these situations of informational uncertainty is that you rely on information that is available.[4] Frequently, information about treatment fairness is available. For instance, you have a good impression of how fairly your supervisor or management is treating you. And you do form an impression of the fairness in which the judge treated you in your court case. You thus will rely on your perceptions of treatment fairness and think your outcome is more fair and more satisfying when you have been treated fairly as opposed to unfairly.[5]

Other cognitive processes that are reported to influence perceptions of procedural justice include the observation that at least sometimes information received early in an interaction tends to affect fairness judgments more strongly than information received later.[6] Furthermore, when people are told to expect no opportunities to voice their opinion, they sometimes think their procedure is more unfair when they then suddenly do receive voice as opposed to no voice, suggesting that they prefer being treated consistently rather than receiving voice.[7] To conclude, cognitive processes, and especially the information that is available to people, plays an important role in forming fairness judgments, including judgments of procedural fairness and justice.[8]

Things Do Not Feel Right

People's fairness judgments, including their judgments of procedural fairness and justice, are influenced not only by cognitive processes but also by their gut feelings. Indeed, as referred to earlier, the Scottish philosopher David Hume famously stated that morality depends on "some internal sense or feeling."[9] In fact, it is my assumption that the fairness judgment process should be understood as often being a "hot-cognitive" process,[10] that is, a process in which cognitive and affective factors work together to

[4] Van den Bos, Lind, Vermunt, and Wilke, 1997. [5] Ibid.
[6] Lind, Kray, and Thompson, 2001. [7] Van den Bos, Vermunt, and Wilke, 1996.
[8] Van den Bos, 2001a. [9] Hume, 1777, p. 224. [10] Abelson, 1963; Kunda, 1999.

produce people's judgments of what they think is fair or unfair, just or unjust, and right or wrong.[11]

The notion of hot cognition is important, I think, because it can be contrasted with lines of thought that emphasize reasoning processes and basically view fairness, justice, and morality as cold-cognitive processes. For example, the developmental psychologist Lawrence Kohlberg proposed that morality is cognitive and that moral mechanisms are cognitive processes.[12] I think this one-sided cognitive explanation underestimates the role that feelings play in what people view as fair, just, and moral. In particular, I think it is important to understand how the interplay of cognitive and affective factors can influence what people find fair.

For example, when forming judgments about fairness, justice, and morality it is not uncommon for people to lack information that is most relevant in the situation at hand. In these conditions of informational uncertainty, people may construct their fairness and other judgments by relying on how they feel about the events they have encountered. Judgments of fairness, justice, and morality may hence be strongly influenced by affect, feelings, and moods. Findings indeed show that in information-uncertain conditions, the affective states that people had brought in prior and unrelated to the fairness event strongly influenced their fairness judgments.[13]

For example, people who were not aware that voice opportunities could exist in a laboratory experiment, and who in fact experienced an implicit no-voice procedure in the experiment, judged the way in which they were treated to be more fair and more just when they had been brought into a positive affective state in an unrelated earlier part of the experiment. The procedural fairness and justice judgments of these participants were more positive than the judgments of those who had been brought into a neutral affective state. And these latter participants viewed the way they had been treated to be more fair and just than participants who had been brought into a negative affective state.[14]

These findings show that affect that is objectively unrelated to the fairness judgments that people are forming still can impact the fairness judgments. However, when information about procedure was explicitly available, such as when people received an opportunity to voice their opinions or were explicitly denied such an opportunity, then people relied on that cognitive information, and their procedural fairness and justice

[11] Van den Bos, 2007. [12] Kohlberg, 1971, pp. 230–231. [13] Van den Bos, 2003, 2007.
[14] Van den Bos, 2003.

judgments were not influenced by their earlier affective states.[15] This indicates that both cognitive and affective factors influence what people think is fair, just, and moral.[16]

Furthermore, even when things are very clear and there is no informational uncertainty, affect may also play a role in judgments of fairness, justice, and morality. For instance, when moral decisions become personally more involving, brain areas are activated that people use when processing a combination of both cognitions and emotions.[17]

Based on these and other insights, it is my working assumption that quite often people rely on their gut feelings to form early impressions of what is right or wrong, just or unjust, and fair or unfair. These impressions then anchor information that they encounter later on. This is especially true in cases where things do not feel right. In other words, when things initially do not feel right, we often end up concluding that they are not right, and that, for example, we may not have been treated in fair and just ways. In contrast, when things feel fine from the start, then we may not worry that much about how we have been treated and tend to view how we have been treated as fair and just. In short, not only what we think but also what we feel tends to impact our procedural fairness and justice judgments.

Group Processes

Importantly, judgments of procedural fairness and justice do not develop in isolation, but are formed in social contexts. The group context is especially important here.[18] We as human beings derive core aspects of who we are from groups, and thus identification with groups is crucial for us.[19] We want to belong to other people and groups of people, in part because we obtain self-esteem and feelings of self-worth from the relationships with others and the groups with which we identify.[20]

Thus, how you are valued by your group is important.[21] You derive standing from your group and you want to know how your group is evaluating you and where you stand in the perception of important group members, such as group leaders or other social authorities.[22] Thus, besides issues such as trust and neutrality, standing and social status in your group

[15] Ibid.. [16] Van den Bos, 2007.
[17] Greene, 2005; Greene, Sommerville, Nystrom, Darley, and Cohen, 2001.
[18] Lind and Tyler 1988. [19] Tajfel and Turner, 1979, 1986.
[20] Baumeister and Leary, 1995; Leary and Baumeister, 2000. For more detailed discussions, see, for example, Tajfel, 1978, 1982; Turner, Hogg, Oakes, Reicher, and Wetherell, 1987.
[21] Lind and Tyler, 1988. [22] Tyler, 1987, 1989; Tyler and Lind, 1992.

matters.[23] Importantly, "group" is defined broadly here, and includes small groups (such as your family or school class), but also larger groups (such as your local community or work organization), or even larger groups (such as the subculture to which you belong or the society in which you live). How fairly and justly you are treated by important members of those and other groups communicates how much the groups value you.[24] This is one of the important reasons why perceived procedural justice matters so much to people and why the fair process effect tends to have strong effects on various reactions.[25]

Furthermore, you need others to help you interpret whether what you recently experienced is fair or unfair, just or unjust. What members of your group think of this is important in this respect. For example, peers help you to make sense of outcomes and treatments that you just experienced. When peers do not convey information on which you can build, you tend to rely on your personal experience of how you were treated.[26]

Moreover, when others from your group report their experiences of unfair treatment, this affects how you think your group is being treated. For example, the explicit denial of voice to a fellow group member tends to influence your perception of whether group fairness is there. Thus, not only direct, personal experiences of injustice matter, but the experiences of other people, and especially others from groups with which you identify, weigh in heavily.[27] This is an important insight, in part because experienced group unfairness can lead people to radicalize into violent extremism, for example, because they want to fight against the injustices done toward their group.[28]

Thus, identification with groups and the associated fairness and justice perceptions do not necessarily result in behaviors that are beneficial to the greater good or can be labeled as prosocial behaviors. In part, this is because valuing one group tends to result in devaluing other groups. Strong ingroup identification thus can lead to strong intergroup conflicts. Identification with larger groups that encompass the smaller groups may be important in this respect. For example, focusing on society at large or what is best for the world, and valuing what is fair and just for these larger groups, may help to prevent polarization between smaller groups within society or the global community.[29] I will discuss these and other

[23] Smith and Tyler, 1997; Van Prooijen, Van den Bos, and Wilke, 2002.
[24] Lind and Tyler, 1988. [25] Van den Bos, 2005, 2015.
[26] Folger, Rosenfield, Grove, and Corkran, 1979. [27] Lind, Kray, and Thompson, 1998.
[28] Van den Bos, 2018. [29] See also Huo, Smith, Tyler, and Lind, 1996.

implications of group-value justice at more length in Chapter 7, where I focus on polarization and what we can do about this.

Progress toward Goals

Cognitive processes, appraisal processes, and group processes are so important to us humans, in part because they help us to make sense of what is going on in our lives and the situations in which we find ourselves.[30] For example, one important function of identification with groups is that they give us a sense of direction and purpose in life.[31] Extreme groups that adhere to radical ideology or zealous religion thus are sometimes appealing as they give solace for our uncertainties.[32] Furthermore, appraising what has happened, making sense of our feelings and emotions, and trying to sort out the many ambiguities we often encounter in our lives are central issues with which we are busy in many different circumstances.[33] In these processes of sense-making we need to know that we are making meaningful progress toward goals that matter for us personally and that are important in this world.[34]

Common elements of meaning that people often turn to for relief in uncertain circumstances are cultural codes of conduct, morality, and fairness. We can see this in the prevalence of cultural norms such as social contracts,[35] the Protestant work ethic,[36] or the belief that the world is a just place where bad things happen only to bad people.[37]

Just-world theory proposes that people have a basic need to believe the world is a just place, where good things happen to good people and bad things happen to bad people. Adopting the belief that the world is just serves the psychological function of keeping the world manageable and predictable. "People want to and have to believe they live in a just world so that they can go about their daily lives with a sense of trust, hope and confidence in their future."[38] Thus, the belief in a just world allows people to engage in long-term and goal-directed behavior. This belief develops early in childhood, when children learn to forgo immediate gratification in exchange for delayed bigger rewards. So, if people work hard and invest time, money, and energy into what they are doing now they can be confident that they will get what they deserve in the end, but only if they

[30] Hogg, 2011; Hogg, Adelman, and Blagg, 2010; Van den Bos and Lind, 2013. [31] Hogg, 2011.
[32] Hogg, 2004, 2005, 2011. [33] Van den Bos and Lind, 2002, 2013.
[34] Van den Bos, McGregor, and Martin, 2015. [35] Hobbes, 1651. [36] Weber, 1958.
[37] Lerner, 1980; Van den Bos et al., 2015. [38] Lerner, 1980, p. 14.

live in a just world in which good things happen to good people and bad things happen to bad people. Thus, adopting the belief in a just world is a way to tolerate the personal uncertainty people experience when they have to delay gratification and focus on the future.[39]

Personal uncertainty in delayed-return cultures[40] can also be managed by impressions of how fairly one has been treated by important people in one's culture or subculture.[41] After all, one possibility for coping with personal uncertainty can be social integration.[42] Therefore, when you are focused on social integration it is important to evaluate the quality of the relationship with the group (or groups) to which you belong. A good proxy for relationship quality can be fairness information. That is, being treated in a fair manner communicates that you are valued and respected by your group, whereas being treated in an unfair manner signals that this is not the case. Thus, unfair treatment violates people's cultural worldviews, whereas fair treatment bolsters people's cultural worldviews.[43] As a result, under heightened levels of personal uncertainty, people become especially averse to unfair treatment and react in particularly positive terms toward fair treatment.[44]

The blockage of their personal goals also leads people to focus more on how fairly they have been treated. I assume that most of the time it is important for people to feel at least somewhat certain about core aspects of themselves. Thus, I propose that feeling uncertain about ourselves[45] blocks a goal that is important for many people in various circumstances. Viewed from this perspective, it is interesting that most of the empirical findings that have been reported thus far suggest that people who are busy with personal uncertainty concerns respond with stronger reactions toward how fairly they themselves have been treated. These stronger responses to fair or unfair events do not show that fairness matters more in a general way. Rather, they show that one's own personal fairness matters more.[46] Specifically, these findings indicate that under conditions of personal uncertainty people react more positively toward their own fair treatment and more negatively toward their own unfair treatment. This suggests that under conditions of personal uncertainty, personal treatment and personal fairness matter more when trying to explain people's reactions. This is an

[39] Bal and Van den Bos, 2012; Hafer, 2000. [40] Martin, 1999. [41] Van den Bos et al., 2015.
[42] Hogg, 2007.
[43] Van den Bos and Lind, 2002, 2009; Van den Bos, Poortvliet, Maas, Miedema, and Van den Ham, 2005.
[44] Van den Bos, 2009; Van den Bos et al., 2015.
[45] Van den Bos, 2001a; Van den Bos and Lind, 2002. [46] Van den Bos and Lind, 2009.

important insight, because notions of fairness and the fair process effect do not necessarily imply that the fairness of how other people are treated becomes a more important issue for people when they are confronted with personal uncertainty.[47] The implications of this observation will be examined in Chapter 9, where I will discuss how we can open up in our attempts to overcome societal discontent.

Institutions

Cognitive and affective processes pertaining to fairness judgments as well as group values and goal progress often take place in the context of social institutions,[48] such as government, law, and science.[49] There are various definitions of social institutions, emphasizing varying levels of formality and organizational complexity.[50] I focus on institutions as stable, valued, recurring patterns of behavior,[51] referring to mechanisms that govern the behavior of people within a given community or society, with the purpose of giving direction to people's behaviors, for example, by providing important rules that aim to direct behavior. Institutions also tend to involve integrated systems of rules that structure social interactions.[52] Thus, the way I use the term "institutions" applies to both informal institutions such as customs or behavior patterns important to a society and to formal institutions created by law and other official agencies and that have a distinctive permanence in ordering social behaviors.[53]

It can be good to follow critically those who hold positions of power in society.[54] In fact, adopting a somewhat skeptical view on powerholders underlies important assumptions of the proper functioning of the rule of law and democratic systems and often may be quite appropriate and indeed warranted.[55] Furthermore, some social institutions do not work that well and thus should be viewed even more critically, with a keen eye toward necessary improvements. This being said, there are several reasons why we should worry about waning trust in institutions that are intended to give social structure and to help our societies to function in an open manner and to fulfill important human needs.[56] After all, trust in certain norms and values is also needed when we want to maintain social order and stability and keep our societies as open as possible.[57]

[47] Van den Bos and Lind, 2009; see also Loseman, Miedema, Van den Bos, and Vermunt, 2009.
[48] Durkheim, 1895. [49] Van den Bos, in press. [50] Calvert, 1995; Streeck and Thelen, 2005.
[51] Huntington, 1996. [52] Hodgson, 2015. [53] Van den Bos, in press. [54] Ibid.
[55] Hobbes, 1651. [56] Albright, 2018. [57] Popper, 1945.

Trust in social institutions may be decreasing because many people experience personal uncertainties, which constitutes an alarming experience to most people, leading to lower levels of trust in institutions that have power over them.[58] The provision of good, reliable, and accessible information about how institutions actually work can lead to calmer responses and higher levels of trust in institutions. This is not an easy process that always works, for one thing because there tends to be a lot of informational uncertainty about how social institutions operate and function. Furthermore, whether institutions have legitimacy is often difficult to ascertain. From the literature on perceived treatment fairness it follows that in circumstances in which personal and informational uncertainty are high, the perceived fairness of persons representing social institutions is relied on.[59] This means that the individual civil servant, politician, judge, lawyer, and scientific researcher and teacher have important responsibilities: When they act in ways that are truly fair and honest, giving people opportunities to voice their opinions at appropriate times, carefully listening to these opinions, and thus treating people with respect as full-fledged citizens of their society, this can increase trust in institutions and prevent unwarranted levels of distrust.[60] I hope that the social psychology on perceived fairness may help to firmly build or rebuild warranted trust in social institutions.[61] I will examine the implications of this line of reasoning in more detail in Chapter 6, where I will focus on distrust.

[58] Van den Bos, in press.
[59] Van den Bos, 2005, 2011, 2015; Van den Bos and Lind, 2002, 2009.
[60] Van den Bos, Van der Velden, and Lind, 2014. [61] Van den Bos, in press.

PART III

The Fair Process Effect

CHAPTER 4

Basic Review

Now that I have introduced a definition and an operationalization of the fair process effect, and have explored important criteria and core psychological processes that people use to form perceptions that they have been treated in a fair or unfair manner, it is time to review the effects these perceptions can have in different contexts and to examine why these effects are often so strong. Part III of this book will do precisely that and reviews the fair process effect in the different contexts in which it operates and examines why the effect is often so prominent in these contexts.

In Chapter 4, I will provide a basic review of the fair process effect in laboratory settings, work organizations, legal settings, and societal contexts. The result of this review will be that the fair process effect is found frequently and tends to be a robust effect. Of course, this does not imply that the effect always will be found and can be used as an intervention technique that works all the time. It is important, therefore, to also scrutinize the psychological processes that are responsible for the fair process effect to occur as well as the processes that tend to dampen or alter the effect. After all, once we understand these processes in detail, we have a better idea of how to employ the fair process effect in successful interventions to the greater good. Therefore, in Chapter 5 we will discuss psychological processes underlying the fair process effect.

Laboratory Settings

The first studies on the fair process effect used experiments in laboratory settings that offer tight experimental control and allow for a precise testing of causal relationships. After all, in laboratory experiments, it is easy to randomly assign participants to the various experimental conditions. You can also exert control over the exact stimulus materials participants are reacting to and when they do this. And you can assess many dependent

variables in a controlled manner. In short, for reasons of internal validity and experimental control, laboratory experiments have many advantages.[1]

Social psychologist John Thibaut and law professor Laurens Walker, together with many other colleagues, most notably Allan Lind, pioneered experimental studies on the fair process effect. The first study that they conducted was reported in 1974.[2] In this experiment, undergraduate students participated in a business simulation of a controversy that placed them in the position of defendants in a trial. Some participants were assigned some control over the process used in the trial (this was called an adversary procedure), whereas other participants were not (this was labeled a nonadversary procedure). Another manipulation varied whether participants received a verdict that was favorable or unfavorable to them. The study examined the effects of the adversary and nonadversary procedures, the favorableness of the judgment, and participants' prior beliefs about guilt on their perceptions of the adjudication.

Results showed that participants viewed the adversary procedure as the most fair. Importantly, participants also showed a fair process effect, such that they were more satisfied with judgments resulting from the adversary procedure than the nonadversary procedure. These effects were independent of participants' pretrial beliefs or the favorableness of the verdict. These results, and the findings of other experiments, were interpreted by the researchers as evidence that the outcome of a court trial and the manner in which the trial is conducted form two separable aspects of legal settings that can affect litigants' judgments of fairness.[3]

Rob Folger and colleagues were the first to coin the term "fair process effect."[4] What they did in their experiments in 1979 was to create a work context. In this context, the authors examined the effects of "voice" (participating in allocation decision making by expressing an opinion about the preferred allocation) on participants' responses to an inequitable allocation. That is, some of their participants were informed that although the decision maker in the experiment would be making the final decision about how lottery tickets would be divided, they were given the opportunity to let the decision maker know what they thought would be a fair allocation of tickets. Other participants were not informed about voice opportunities and did not receive such opportunities. In the experiments reported, there was evidence for a fair process effect such that participants

[1] Van den Bos, 2020a. [2] Walker, LaTour, Lind, and Thibaut, 1974.
[3] Thibaut and Walker, 1975. [4] Folger, Rosenfield, Grove, and Corkran, 1979.

who received an opportunity to voice their opinions expressed greater satisfaction than those who did not receive voice opportunities.

Allan Lind and colleagues deepened these effects to include both instrumental and non-instrumental effects of fair procedures.[5] In their experiment, participants were allowed to voice their opinion either before the experimenter had decided about the outcome (predecision voice), after the experimenter had decided about the outcome (postdecision voice), or not at all (no voice). The findings indicated that participants who received predecision voice judged the procedure to be more fair than participants who received postdecision voice, and that postdecision voice participants gave higher ratings of procedural fairness than participants who received no voice. In this way, the experiment established not only that people who have process control will judge the procedure as more fair than people who are not allowed process control, but also that persons who have no process control, yet are given an opportunity to voice their opinion, may judge the procedure as more fair than those who are not allowed voice. The experiment also showed that task performance was higher in the predecision voice condition and the postdecision voice condition than in the no-voice condition, suggesting that fair procedures lead to increased compliance with task demands and better performance on these tasks than unfair procedures.

In her dissertation, Jacqueline Modde extended these effects by showing that unfair treatment in an experiment led participants to steal more money from the experimenter than fair treatment.[6] In the experiment, participants were given the opportunity to take their own pay after the experimenter had to leave the laboratory.[7] Results indicated that participants took more money than allowed when they had been treated in a rude and disrespectful way in the experiment. This fits with notions that especially unfair procedures have strong effects on people's reactions.[8]

Work Organizations

Following the initial studies on the fair process effect in laboratory conditions, the effect was examined in important real-life conditions. In particular, the fair process effect has been examined in various work organizations, where researchers such as Jerry Greenberg[9] and many others

[5] Lind, Kanfer, and Earley, 1990. [6] Modde, 2001.
[7] The experimental setup used was similar to the study by Greenberg, 1993. [8] Folger, 1984.
[9] Greenberg, 1987a, 1987b; Greenberg and Folger, 1983.

examined how employees perceived how fairly they were treated by their supervisors and management, and how these procedural fairness perceptions hang together with relevant thoughts, feelings, and behaviors of employees in their work contexts.[10]

Most of the studies in this domain that is widely known as "organizational justice" use quantitative surveys and sometimes diary studies to examine the fair process effect and related constructs.[11] These ways of doing research are excellent in work contexts and well suited to explore the associations between perceptions of procedural fairness and variables such as employees' rumination about the upcoming reorganization process,[12] their satisfaction with how they are treated by their supervisors,[13] their acceptance of performance evaluations,[14] rule-following behavior when stakes are high,[15] and how well they fare when they are laid off following reorganization processes.[16] On all these variables, and many others, fair process effects have been found.

Of course, the correlational designs of these studies do not allow for a precise test of the causal quality of these associations, thus making it difficult to establish the fair process effect with certainty, but combined with insights from experimental studies, the notion that perceived procedural justice hangs together with a host of many relevant employee variables has been firmly established.[17] In other words, what the studies on organizational justice might miss in terms of internal validity, they compensate successfully by bringing external validity to our insights on the fair process effect. After all, findings collected in this domain suggest that perceived procedural fairness is very important in contexts that play a large role in many people's lives.

Furthermore, the many different research methods used in organizational behavior and human resource management in general, and organizational justice in particular, have made it possible to allow for an easy comparison between procedural fairness perceptions and relevant other constructs, such as outcome favorability. For example, Joel Brockner and Batia Wiesenfeld showed that perceived procedural fairness tends to be

[10] I will not repeat the many reviews that have been reported of this field. Instead, I refer to earlier excellent reviews, such as Brockner, 2010, 2016; Colquitt, Conlon, Wesson, Porter, and Ng, 2001; Colquitt, Greenberg, and Scott, 2005; Cropanzano and Ambrose, 2015; Cropanzano, Bowen, and Gilliland, 2007; Cropanzano and Greenberg, 1997; Folger and Cropanzano, 1998; Greenberg, 1987c, 1993, 1997, 2000; Greenberg and Lind, 2000.

[11] Greenberg, 1987b. [12] Greenberg, 2006. [13] Sweeney and McFarlin, 1993.

[14] Greenberg, 1986a, 1986b. [15] Tyler and Blader, 2005. [16] Brockner, 1990, 1994.

[17] Van den Bos, 2005, 2015.

reliably associated with many different variables when outcome decisions are relatively favorable to people involved in these decisions. Importantly, these associations tend to be even stronger when outcomes are relatively unfavorable.[18] Treatment fairness also seems to have the strongest effect when employees find themselves in uncertain situations in their work context.[19] Thus, fair procedures matter when things are going well, but are even more important when circumstances are harsh.[20]

Many different organizational studies explore what procedural justice and related constructs entail precisely in the work context.[21] Again, I note here that, in my view, it would be wrong to focus the fair process effect on formal procedures only or mainly. Instead, I refer to the definition of perceived procedural fairness as the fairness with which people are treated.[22] In the work context, procedural justice typically involves being treated fairly by your supervisor and/or the management of the organization where you work. I also warn against distinguishing between too many dimensions of procedural and organizational justice. It is true this may work fine in one study or a set of studies, but in many other contexts employees and other individuals might not distinguish between all these different dimensions. This is one of the reasons why I think using the Perceived Procedural Justice Scale presented in Chapter 2 may strike a good balance between nuanced insights while not overdoing the dimensionality of the construct at the same time.

Most research on the fair process effect has focused on effects on individuals. Interestingly, organizational justice also has been shown to affect groups of individuals. For example, employees are influenced by colleagues in their perceptions of justice, and this can lead to team-level perceptions of organizational justice in the form of a justice climate.[23] Furthermore, fair treatment and especially unfair treatment have been shown to trigger various kinds of emotions,[24] including anger at management[25] and the wish to revenge injustice being done.[26] These effects are particularly strong when people's moral principles have been violated in

[18] Brockner and Wiesenfeld, 1996.
[19] Lind and Van den Bos, 2002; Thau, Aquino, and Wittek, 2007; Thau, Bennett, Mitchell, and Marrs, 2009.
[20] Brockner, 2010, 2016.
[21] See, for instance, Colquitt, 2001; Moorman, 1991; see also Bies, 2015; Bies and Moag, 1986; Bies and Shapiro, 1987.
[22] See Chapter 1 of this book and Van den Bos, 2005, 2015; but see also Bies, 2005; Cropanzano and Ambrose, 2001.
[23] Li and Cropanzano, 2009. [24] Cropanzano, Weiss, Suckow, and Grandey, 2000.
[25] Folger and Baron, 1996; Folger and Skarlicki, 1998. [26] Bies and Tripp, 2001.

the work context.[27] This explains why fair treatment at the workplace tends to lead to organizational citizenship behaviors that are good for the organization where the person is working.[28] In contrast, unfair treatment is associated with counterproductive work behaviors that, although sometimes understandable from an individual point of view, can be detrimental for the organization at large.[29]

The Legal Domain

Perhaps one of the most important instances of the fair process effect is found in the legal domain. Here, where the research on the effect started by integrating social psychological and legal insight,[30] the fair process effect seems to be especially paramount. This further contributes to the external validity and social relevance of the fair process effect.

People follow legal rules and try to obey the law when they have the impression that they and others are treated in a fair manner by their society and the authorities representing society.[31] When authorities such as judges or police officers treat citizens in a fundamentally fair manner, this increases citizens' cooperation with the police and courts because they put trust in these authorities and hence society.[32]

The work by Tom Tyler and colleagues is especially important in this respect. Their work shows, for example, that defendants involved in traffic, misdemeanor, and felony court cases are more satisfied with legal authorities when they are treated fairly. This fair process effect is more robust than the effect of outcome or instrumental concerns on attitudes toward judges and courts.[33] The effects on rule-following behavior are also found when large sums of money are at stake.[34]

Related to this, corporate and individual litigants involved in federal tort and contract actions that were subject to court-ordered arbitration were more likely to accept the arbitrator's decision to award or reject their case when they were treated in a fair and just manner. Furthermore, much or all of the effect of outcome evaluations on award acceptance was mediated by

[27] Cropanzano, Goldman, and Folger, 2003; Cropanzano, Massaro, and Becker, 2017; Cropanzano and Stein, 2009; Folger, 2001, 2012.
[28] Moorman and Byrne, 2005.
[29] Cohen-Charash and Spector, 2001; Zoghbi-Manrique-de-Lara and Verano-Tacoronte, 2007.
[30] Thibaut and Walker, 1975, 1978. [31] Tyler, 2006. [32] Tyler and Huo, 2002.
[33] Tyler, 1984; see also Casper, Tyler, and Fisher, 1988; Tyler, Casper, and Fisher, 1989.
[34] Tyler and Blader, 2005.

procedural justice judgments, which had a stronger effect than either subjective or objective measures of the arbitration award.[35]

Fair process effects are also found in other legal contexts, among various litigants involved in different types of legal cases. For example, Dutch citizens involved in cases concerning motoring fines, criminal cases before a single judge, or administrative law cases indicated that they trusted judges in the Netherlands more when they had been treated in a fair way in their court cases. Importantly, this association was found when outcomes were relatively favorable and was even stronger when outcomes were relatively unfavorable.[36]

The fair process effect seems to be especially strong when legal authorities such as judges operate in neutral ways, suggesting that neutrality is especially important in legal contexts.[37] Indeed, the whole justice system, including the criminal justice system, is oriented toward determining the truth. This does not imply that the law as a system is always able or even good at finding the truth, and it also does not mean that "the" truth is always simple to uncover, but it does suggest that officials working for the law should be oriented toward ascertaining the truth. This basic principle of law is what many people first think of when reflecting on psychology and the law. And it indeed is a very important part of what psychological insight can offer to the field of law.[38]

Furthermore, the fair process effect is found in the legal domain when procedural justice involves own treatment as well as the treatment of others.[39] The fact that perceived procedural justice also matters for those merely observing how others are treated is a central issue in the research program on the fair process effect.[40] Obviously, fair processes matter for those involved in legal cases, but also for those observing the cases or observing how legal authorities, including judges and police officers, are treating other citizens. This important observation is sometimes overlooked in legal studies on this matter. When deciding in strictly legal ways about court cases, a crucial variable is whether people have material interests at stake. And these interests are important. This noted, perceived procedural justice, the legitimacy of the legal system, and the amount of

[35] Lind, Kulik, Ambrose, and De Vera Park, 1993.
[36] Grootelaar and Van den Bos, 2018.
[37] Ansems, Van den Bos, and Mak, 2020.
[38] Van den Bos, 2021; see also Ellsworth and Mauro, 1998; Kovera and Borgida, 2010; Tyler, 1987, 1989.
[39] Thibaut and Walker, 1975.
[40] See, for example, the pioneering experiments by Thibaut and Walker, 1975, where observer conditions are part of the experimental designs.

trust that is put into that system and the officials affiliated with it are not only relevant for those directly involved in court cases and those who have direct, material, or other interests in those cases. How fairly we perceive legal cases to be handled also affects us deeply when our personal material interests are not at stake.[41]

Societal Contexts

Perceived procedural justice matters for people, not only in work organizations and the legal domain, but also in society at large.[42] Fair process effects are therefore found in various societal contexts. For example, citizens tend to evaluate their political leaders much more positively when these leaders behave in procedurally fair ways. Political leaders who act in procedurally fair ways are also more endorsed more strongly.[43]

These findings are important, in part because there is, and has been for some time, an important concern about a lack of public support for national political leaders and institutions.[44] As it turns out, behaviors perceived as procedurally unfair play a crucial role in creating dislike for and distrust of leaders and societal institutions. These effects are often stronger than beliefs about the level of outcomes the political system is providing to its citizens. In contrast, the engagement in procedurally fair behaviors can lead to a strong endorsement of political leaders and institutions.[45]

Citizens are also more willing to restrain themselves during social dilemmas that occur in societies. For example, during a California water shortage people were more willing to support authorities who made water conservation decisions when these authorities used fair decision-making procedures. These fair process effects were primarily based on concerns for having positive, relational bonds to the authorities. These relational effects were found to be stronger for those respondents who identified more with their community. These findings suggest that the effectiveness of authorities is primarily linked to the nature of their social bonds with community members.[46]

Related to this, inclusive decision making in Honduras, where communities were systematically involved in decisions surrounding the metering of the intake of water supplies, led to higher perceived fairness of the process and appropriateness of the metering decisions. This also led people

[41] See also Sunshine and Tyler, 2003. [42] Tyler, Boeckmann, Smith, and Huo, 1997.
[43] Tyler and Caine, 1981. [44] Van den Bos, in press. [45] Tyler, Rasinski, and McGraw, 1985.
[46] Tyler and DeGoey, 1995.

to expect the resulting management of the water system to be more effective and sustainable.[47]

Similarly, in a process for the development of a strategic reserve in water for Indigenous groups in the Northern Territory of Australia, a top-down process initiated by the Northern Territory Government was perceived to be unfair by the traditional owner groups and led to inadequate acceptance of the resulting outcome. In another case study, the traditional owner groups were engaged by the government in a consultation process, but it commenced with a unilateral offer of how to allocate water to the strategic reserve. This offer was not formulated in a collaborative way. As a result, traditional owners considered the process unfair and, in turn, viewed the allocation offer as unfair. These insights were then used to outline an alternative and collaborative process to support engagement by decision makers with Indigenous groups that promotes water allocations and outcomes that are just, sustainable, and have broad-based community support.[48]

The fair process effect is especially important when you feel uncertain about yourself and your role in society.[49] This effect is especially prevalent when there are possible tensions between different groups within society.[50] For example, the diversity of American society raises concerns about whether authorities can maintain social cohesion amid competing interests and values. The literature on the fair process effect suggests that societal authorities function more effectively when they are perceived as fair and hence act in benevolent, neutral, and respectful ways. Such relational evaluations are effective when people identify with society at large[51] and view the distance between themselves and powerful authorities to be relatively small.[52] These findings suggest that the degree to which authorities can gain acceptance for themselves and their decisions through providing dignified and respectful treatment is influenced by the cultural values of the citizens involved.[53]

Robust Effect, but No Panacea

Positive associations between perceived procedural fairness and a range of different variables are found in numerous contexts, such as controlled

[47] Grillos, Zarychta, and Nuñez, 2021. [48] Nikolakis and Grafton, 2014.
[49] Van den Bos, Euwema, Poortvliet, and Maas, 2007; Van den Bos and Lind, 2002; see also Syme, 2014.
[50] Tyler et al., 1997. [51] Huo, Smith, Tyler, and Lind, 1996. [52] Tyler, Lind, and Huo, 2000.
[53] Tyler et al., 2000; see also Huo, 2003; Huo and Tyler, 2001; Tyler, Lind, Ohbuchi, Sugawara, and Huo, 1998; Tyler, Smith, and Huo, 1996.

laboratory experiments, important work organizations, various court cases and other legal settings, and different societies. These findings have been found with different research methodologies and a multitude of research participants, attesting to the robustness of the research domain. Taken together the research suggests that the fair process effect tends to be important for many different people in many different contexts.

Of course, scientific insight is always preliminary. After all, scientific progress is achieved by constant questioning and continuing to improve insights with new studies, using more advanced research methodology, and more relevant research contexts. This also applies to the field of the fair process effect. For example, as already noted, many studies are relying on correlational data in which perceptions of perceived procedural justice and associated variables, such as trust in authorities and rule adherence, are measured at the same time. This implies that the resulting findings are suggestive associations – very important associations, but associations nevertheless.[54]

To be sure, there are field studies that address the issues of causality using repeated data collection and time-based path analyses. These studies suggest that causality is flowing from judgments about treatment fairness to variables such as filing claims about wrongful termination of labor contracts (rather than from claiming behavior to fairness judgments).[55] Furthermore, there certainly have been experiments that show the causal quality of the fair process effect on variables such as satisfaction ratings and acceptance of outcomes. This noted, many laboratory experiments are hampered by a reliance on artificial stimulus materials.[56] Although one can argue that it is important to distinguish between reality created in experimental situations[57] and reality encountered outside the laboratory,[58] the artificial quality of the stimulus materials used and the somewhat limited range of research participants in these experiments[59] make the findings of these experiments less relevant for what is happening in the real world.

In short, for now we can be confident that the fair process effect is likely to exist in many different contexts. This being said, appropriate scientific humbleness combined with eagerness to pursue future research studies as well as conceptual exploration is also needed. After all, as scientists we

[54] Van den Bos, 2020a. [55] Lind, Greenberg, Scott, and Welchans, 2000.
[56] See, for example, Van den Bos, Vermunt, and Wilke, 1996, 1997.
[57] This is sometimes labeled "experimental realism"; Wilson, Aronson, and Carlsmith, 2010.
[58] What we often call "mundane realism"; Wilson et al., 2010.
[59] Henrich, Heine, and Norenzayan, 2010; see also Dogruyol, Alper, and Yilmaz, 2019.

always should be keen to learn more about the issues that we are studying and be willing to reflect on the research methods with which we have been examining these issues.

Future research is also warranted because sometimes the fair process effect works out in some unexpected directions. For example, when people feel that they are very favorably evaluated but receive an unfavorable outcome, they may start looking for causes that explain why they received this outcome. Unfair procedures may provide an opportunity to attribute an unfavorable outcome to external causes, whereas fair procedures do not. As a consequence, people may react more negatively following fair as opposed to unfair procedures. Findings indeed show such a reversal of the fair process effect, in both controlled experiments[60] and in important work settings.[61]

These reversal effects are particularly likely to emerge when self-evaluative concerns are truly salient[62] and when people are busy trying to prevent bad things from happening to them.[63] When it is not easy to use unfair procedures as external attributions, reversals of the fair process effect are not likely to found. For example, unfair procedures in the legal context tend to signal that the entire legal system of the country in which you are living is having serious problems. This may make it less likely for unfair legal procedures to be used as excuses for your own possible misdeeds.[64] Clearly, future research is needed to explore these suggestions.

For now, we conclude that experiencing high levels of procedural justice tends to hang together with a multitude of important other variables and tends to lower discontent in social relationships, at the workplace, and in society. This suggests the fair process effect is robust. However, the effect is no cure for each and every instance of social misconduct or societal malpractice. We thus should embrace new insights that shed more light on the methodological robustness and psychological working of the fair process effect. It is to this latter issue to which I turn in the next chapter.

[60] Van den Bos, Bruins, Wilke, and Dronkert, 1999. [61] Brockner, 2002; Brockner et al., 2003.
[62] Van den Bos et al., 1999. [63] Brockner, De Cremer, Fishman, and Spiegel, 2008.
[64] Ansems, Van den Bos, and Mak, 2021.

CHAPTER 5

Psychological Processes

When we want to comprehend and appreciate the working and functioning of the fair process effect, it is crucial to understand the psychology that drives the effect. After all, these processes tend to determine whether the fair process effect occurs, and why it tends to occur in such a powerful way when it occurs.[1] Therefore, this chapter reviews core psychological processes that strengthen or explain the effects that perceived procedural fairness can have on people in different contexts and on their various reactions. To this end, this chapter examines the different contexts in which the fair process effect is found and how the effect works in these settings and among the different people involved in these settings. The chapter also examines the different types of dependent variables that are most likely to show the fair process effect. Furthermore, this chapter reviews variables that strengthen the fair process effect. These moderating variables include people feeling uncertain about themselves, and other variables. The chapter also discusses important variables that explain why the fair process effect often occurs. These mediating variables include people's level of self-esteem, and other variables. The chapter closes by discussing the systemic factors that are important when understanding the working of the fair process effect.

People in Context

When we want to understand the psychology of the fair process effect, we need to examine the psychological processes that play an important role in the phase between perceiving fair or unfair treatment and people's reactions to these perceptions of procedural fairness. The current chapter focuses on this issue.

[1] Van den Bos, 2005, 2015.

Understanding the context in which fair and unfair procedures and other forms of treatment are perceived is crucial in this respect. After all, the field of social psychology reveals that what people think, feel, and do is influenced to a large extent by the situation in which they find themselves.[2] Thus, it is always important to stay away from adopting general rules of the fair process effect that are isolated from the various contexts in which different people are responding to perceptions of fair and unfair treatment. Instead, if we truly want to understand the fair process effect, we always need to specify the contexts and the unique people in these contexts who are responding to their perceptions of procedural fairness.

Furthermore, as Kurt Lewin, the founding father of modern social psychology, famously stated: People's behavior is a function of their personality and the situation in which they find themselves.[3] Applied to the fair process effect, this implies that insight into how different people in different social contexts act and respond to perceived procedural fairness is crucial for our understanding of how, when, and for whom the fair process effect can work and impact behaviors.

Moreover, the fair process effect is not merely an instance of perceptions of people only. After all, an important dictum in psychology holds: "If people define situations as real, they are real in their consequences."[4] In other words, what is unfair is really in the eye of the beholder, and because these perceptions are deeply felt as real and genuine, they tend to have real consequences and reliably affect people's behaviors.[5] Thus, it is important to put individual persons in context, and to see how they perceive and respond to what is happening in these contexts. The psychology of the fair process effect thus plays an important role in this chapter and throughout this book.

Somewhat surprisingly, there are few studies that examine the relationship between the well-known Big Five personality factors[6] and the fair process effect. There are some exceptions, of course, such as research that examined the role of the Big Five personality factors among law enforcement applicants. This work shows that personality is related to perceptions of law enforcement applicants, including their social fairness perceptions and responses to these perceptions.[7] In particular, findings suggest that neuroticism and agreeableness are important factors among police

[2] Allport, 1985. [3] Lewin, 1935. [4] Thomas and Thomas, 1928, p. 572.
[5] Van den Bos, 2018. [6] McCrae and Costa, 1989.
[7] Truxillo, Bauer, Campion, and Paronto, 2006.

recruitment applications. This fits with the idea that neurotic individuals tend to experience events more negatively than others and to cope less effectively with stress, an effect that may be heightened during selection and other uncertain circumstances.[8] Furthermore, agreeable persons tend to be adaptable and cooperative and to believe that others will react positively to them, and this may affect their responses in hiring situations, leading them perhaps to show stronger fair process effects than individuals who are not heavily focused on agreeing with other people.

We also know that individuals who hold high levels of approach motivation show stronger fair process effects than those low in approach motivation. In particular, people's approach responses to the occurrence or anticipation of rewarding events seems to be an important factor here.[9] Furthermore, people differ in how many persons they include in their moral realm, affecting the extent to which we treat others with care. This moral expansiveness depends in part on the distinctions they make between entities deemed worthy or unworthy of moral consideration.[10]

Understanding these individual differences matters when we try to explain the role of procedural fairness in diverse societies where intergroup issues play an important role. For example, the diversity of American society raises concerns about whether authorities can maintain social cohesion amid competing interests and values. The literature on the fair process effect suggests that societal authorities function more effectively when they are perceived as fair and hence act in benevolent, neutral, and respectful ways. Such relational evaluations may be effective especially if authorities represent a group with which people identify.[11]

Furthermore, societies, organizations, and other groups often recognize the importance of members treating each other in a fair manner. This type of fair treatment is key to fostering individuals' sense of belonging in the group. However, while a sense of belonging is important, individuals also need to be shown that they have some distinct value to the group – enabling them to not only fit in but also to stand out. In other words, people want to identify with groups, but also want to be recognized for being unique human beings.[12] Thus, fairness of *distinctive treatment*, whereby important persons show interest and appreciation for one's distinguishing, group-relevant qualities, matters. This suggests that

[8] Ibid.; see also Lind and Van den Bos, 2002; Van den Bos, Maas, Waldring, and Semin, 2003.
[9] Van Prooijen, Karremans, and Van Beest, 2006.
[10] Crimston, Bain, Hornsey, and Bastian, 2016; see also Opotow, 1993.
[11] Huo, Smith, Tyler, and Lind, 1996. [12] Brewer, 1991.

promoting fair treatment in groups is important, but not sufficient. Experiencing fair distinctive treatment is also key.[13]

Dependent Variables

I repeat that it is pivotal to differentiate between perceiving a certain treatment as fair or unfair and responding to these fairness perceptions. The psychological processes involved in the formation of procedural justice judgments[14] may well be different from the processes that drive people's responses to their perceptions of procedural justice.[15] This has important implications for which types of dependent variables we study in research on the fair process effect. In particular, I want to emphasize that people can respond with thoughts, feelings, and behaviors toward experiences of fair and unfair treatment. In other words, the fair process effect may be reflected in people's cognitive, affective, and behavioral processes.

For example, after people perceive that they were treated in extremely unfair ways, they may respond with cognitively rigid thinking styles, in which certain responses are considered either correct or incorrect, with little room for nuanced thinking.[16] People may also respond with strong affective responses to perceptions of fair or unfair treatment, making them very pleased or angry, respectively.[17] And these cognitive and affective processes may influence the behavioral responses that people may show, such as behaving in a cooperative way following fair treatment[18] and in a selfish way in attempting to undo unfair treatment.[19]

Interestingly, it is often not only cold-cognitive processes or emotions that impact people's responses. Frequently, it is the combination of both thoughts and feelings that influence what people do in response to fair and unfair treatment. In other words, the fair process effect is often a hot-cognitive process,[20] in which cognitive and affective processes combine to impact people's behaviors.[21] Thus, the fair process effect tends to involve a combination of cognition and affect. These combinations of thoughts and feelings also include emotions and the appraisals of these emotions.[22] The strength of the fair process effect on people's behavioral responses is also determined by people's individual differences in how intensely they respond in affective terms to things they perceive,[23] and their level of

[13] Begeny, Huo, Smith, and Ryan, 2021. [14] See Chapter 3. [15] See the current chapter.
[16] Van den Bos, 2018. [17] Folger and Cropanzano, 1998; Lind and Tyler, 1988.
[18] Tyler, 1999, 2013. [19] Folger and Cropanzano, 1998; Greenberg, 1993.
[20] Abelson, 1963; Kunda, 1999. [21] Van den Bos, 2007. [22] Frijda, 1986.
[23] Van den Bos, Maas, Waldring, and Semin, 2003.

self-control in dampening, or not dampening, these affective responses.[24] Dependent variables, used to assess the fair process effect, should reflect the psychological processes that are influencing the reactions of the specific research respondents involved in the particular study at hand.

Cold-cognitive processes[25] pertaining to justice judgment processes involve the careful evaluation and weighing of relevant information before a justice judgment, or a judgment about what is right and wrong, is formed.[26] Intuitionist notions, in contrast, suggest that justice judgments are strongly influenced by affective factors, that people's intuitive feelings about what is right or wrong cause moral judgments, and that reasoning pertaining to justice and morality is usually a post-hoc construction, generated after justice or moral judgments have been reached on the basis of people's gut feelings.[27]

There has been a tendency in the literature to claim that either rationalist or intuitionist models are true. In contrast, I propose that in some situations people seem to construct justice judgments in a thorough way, weighing all relevant information carefully in an impartial manner, whereas in other circumstances people's gut reactions seem to lead to snap judgments. Thus, rather than continuing the ancient and ongoing impasse of believing in either rationalist or intuitionist conceptions, I propose that it makes more sense and that it is scientifically more exciting to adopt an integrative approach, in which social conditions are studied that influence the relative importance of rationalist (e.g., cognitive) and intuitionist (e.g., affective) factors on the justice judgment process.[28] And, following this approach, I think it makes sense to focus on the combined influence of cognitive and affective factors on the fair process effect, understanding the effect as often stemming from hot-cognitive processes,[29] in which people's cognitions are colored by their feelings.[30]

These insights can be used when studying the fair process effect. For example, trust in social authorities tends to be a good dependent variable in research on the fair process effect. After all, assessing how much trust people put in their work supervisor, police officers, judges, or politicians

[24] Van den Bos, 2018. [25] Abelson, 1963; Kunda, 1999.
[26] See, for example, Kohlberg, 1969; Piaget, 1932; Turiel, 1983.
[27] See, for example, Haidt, 2001; Kagan, 1984; Wilson, 1993; Van den Bos, 2003, 2007.
[28] Van den Bos, 2003. [29] Van den Bos, 2007.
[30] For more extensive introductions, see, for example, Abelson, 1963; Kunda, 1999; see also Van den Bos, 2003, 2007.

tends to involve both what people think of these officials and their affective responses toward these authorities.[31]

The feelings involved in the fair process effect are not always mild. Rather, people can be quite upset by unfair treatment. For example, when people are confronted with potentially problematic events or personal uncertainty-provoking experiences, such as experiences of unfair treatment, this tends to signal to them that something may be going on that warrants their attention. As a result, the individuals involved are likely to engage in psychological processes of trying to make sense of what is going on and what they should expect to be happening. Because perceived procedural fairness has important informational value for people, it follows that people are susceptible to issues of treatment fairness in many alarming or triggering situations that people are trying to make sense of, especially when they are interacting with supervisors, those in management, or other social authorities. Therefore, information that conveys fair treatment by authorities or other important people triggers positive reactions among the individuals involved.[32] In contrast, information that indicates unfair treatment instigates all sorts of negative responses.[33] In short, this suggests that an alarm-system perspective on the psychology of the fair process effect is warranted.[34] And, ideally, dependent variables used to study the fair process effect should be tailored to match the state of alarm research respondents are in.

The object of what is assessed in questions tapping the fair process effect, and other responses, is also important. For example, the two-factor model suggests that in work organizations the fair process effect is related to organization-level variables, with employees being more committed to the organization following fair treatment, for example.[35] In contrast, the fair or unfair distribution of outcomes in work organizations also matters, primarily affecting person-level variables, such as employees being more satisfied with their salaries following fair distribution of outcomes. The accuracy of the two-factor model has been challenged, as the findings do not always replicate, but an important lesson of the research that did support the model is that, when trying to measure the fair process effect and related effects, it is crucial to pay careful attention to what type of object people are responding to.

[31] Van den Bos, in press. [32] Van den Bos, 2005. [33] Folger and Cropanzano, 1998.
[34] For more information on this perspective, see Van den Bos, 2015; Van den Bos, Ham, Lind, Simonis, Van Essen, and Rijpkema, 2008.
[35] Greenberg, 1990; Sweeney and McFarlin, 1993.

Moderating Variables

The effect of perceived fairness of treatment on variables such as satisfaction with outcomes, confidence in management, trust in judges, and other dependent variables is often influenced by another set of variables. We call these variables moderators.[36] These variables have moderating effects on the fair process effect. This means that when these variables increase or decrease, the strength of the fair process effect on the dependent variables under investigation becomes stronger or weaker. Thus, these moderating variables influence the relationship between perceived procedural fairness and dependent variables such as outcome satisfaction, management confidence, and trust in judges. These variables do not necessarily change the meaning of perceived procedural fairness. In other words, the moderators we discuss here have an effect not necessarily on people's perceptions of procedural fairness but rather on how people respond to their perceptions.

One important moderating variable includes the extent to which people feel uncertain about themselves.[37] In many circumstances we may feel uncertain about ourselves, for example, when our working organization is going through a reorganization process and we may lose our jobs as a result of this. It is in these conditions that people tend to be in need of fair treatment by their management. They therefore respond in strong positive terms when they are being treated fairly by their supervisors and the people responsible for the reorganization process. In contrast, they respond with a lot of anger, loss of sleep, and other strong negative reactions when they perceive to be treated unfairly.[38] When people are feeling not so uncertain about themselves, or have not been reminded about their personal uncertainties recently, they may respond in much weaker terms to what they perceive to be fair or unfair.[39]

One of the reasons why personal uncertainty may be an important moderator of the fair process effect is because it amplifies the hot-cognitive responses people show toward perceived fair and unfair treatment. It should not come as a surprise, therefore, that individuals' propensity to react strongly or mildly toward affect-related events is an important moderator of the fair process effect. People with high individual levels of affect intensity show strong affective reactions following the experience of

[36] Van den Bos, 2020a. [37] Van den Bos and Lind, 2002. [38] Lind and Van den Bos, 2002.
[39] Van den Bos, 2001b; see also Syme, 2014.

procedural fairness. In contrast, when affect intensity is low, weak or no significant fair process effects are found.[40]

Related to this, when people feel uncertain about themselves, this signals to them that something may be going on that warrants their attention. In other words, personal uncertainty activates the human alarm system. Furthermore, when people subsequently experience fair treatment, this switches off the alarm system, causing people to respond in a relatively calm and positive manner. In contrast, when they experience unfair treatment, this activates the human alarm system even more strongerly, thereby increasing the fair process effect on a host of dependent variables.[41]

Another crucial set of moderators of the fair process effect are people's outcome concerns. Joel Brockner and Batia Wiesenfeld show that procedural justice and outcome favorability in combination influence individuals' reactions to their encounters with other people, groups, and organizations.[42] This effect is also found in people's reactions in courts of law.[43]

Outcome favorability tends to moderate the fair process effect because it triggers processes of sense-making. People strive to make sense of their environments to regulate their behavior. Behavioral self-regulation is threatened by events that are perceived to be unexpected, negative, or both. It is not surprising, therefore, that people are especially likely to seek sense-making information in response to events viewed as unexpected, negative, or both. Now we know that unfavorable outcomes are typically experienced as negative and are often not expected. This is one of the reasons why people are in need of perceived fair treatment when they view their outcomes to be relatively favorable, and are even more strongly in need of fair treatment when they perceive their outcomes to be relatively unfavorable. When unfavorable outcomes do not instigate strong sense-making processes, outcome favorability does not tend to function as a reliable moderator of the fair process effect.[44]

Mediating Variables

The fair process effect often shows itself on dependent variables such as outcome satisfaction, cooperation with management, and trust in societal

[40] Van den Bos, Maas, Waldring, and Semin, 2003.
[41] Van den Bos, 2015; see also Van den Bos, Ham, Lind, Simonis, Van Essen, and Rijpkema, 2008.
[42] Brockner and Wiesenfeld, 1996. [43] Grootelaar and Van den Bos, 2018.
[44] Brockner and Wiesenfeld, 2005; see also Walker, LaTour, Lind, and Thibaut, 1974.

authorities through its effect on other variables. Such types of intermediating variables are called mediators. These variables mediate the effect of perceived procedural fairness. Simply put, this means that when people perceive something to be fair or unfair, this has an effect on certain variables, and these variables in turn affect the ultimate dependent variable under consideration.[45] Thus, what we call the "fair process effect" in reality is frequently a chain of effects. When trying to understand the fair process effect – and its possible workings on distrust, polarization, and conspiracy thinking – we need to pay appropriate attention to all of the relevant variables involved in the chain relevant to the present situation.

Research suggests, for example, that when it is important for people to be treated in a fair and good manner, receiving unfair treatment really hurts and therefore affects people's levels of self-esteem. This lowered state of self-esteem, in turn, may influence people's subsequent reactions. These reactions may be found on the various dependent variables often studied in research on the fair process effect, such as satisfaction with outcomes received.[46]

A noteworthy mediator is also perceived legitimacy. Research by Tom Tyler focuses on this issue, among other things. This research examines why people voluntarily cooperate and comply with social authorities and societal institutions.[47] Tyler notes that authorities and institutions are viewed as more legitimate, and, therefore, their decisions and rules are more willingly accepted when they exercise their authority through procedures that people experience as being fair.[48] This is the case because perceived legitimacy is considered to be a psychological property of an authority, institution, or social arrangement that leads those connected to it to believe that it is appropriate, proper, and just. Because of legitimacy, people feel that they ought to defer to decisions and rules, following them voluntarily and cooperating with what authorities and societies want from them.[49]

Recent research also suggests that perceptions of distributive justice may mediate the fair process effect. For example, when evaluating the behavior of a police officer during a hypothetical traffic stop, people's perceptions of procedural justice affected how fair or unfair their outcomes were.

[45] Van den Bos, 2020a.
[46] Koper, Van Knippenberg, Bouhuijs, Vermunt, and Wilke, 1993; see also Vermunt, Van Knippenberg, Van Knippenberg, and Blaauw, 2001.
[47] Tyler, 1990, 1997. [48] Tyler, 2006.
[49] See also Tyler, 2009, 2010; Tyler and Fagan, 2008; Tyler, Goff, and MacCoun, 2015; Tyler and Jackson, 2014; Tyler and Jost, 2007; Tyler and Wakslak, 2004.

These judgments of distributive justice, in turn, affected people's perception of the legitimacy of the officer's behavior. This suggests that perceived distributive justice plays an important role in the effect of perceived procedural fairness on legitimacy evaluations.[50]

I note explicitly that mediation processes can be difficult to study, in part because of the difficulty of measuring the mediating variables. Because measurement of psychological concepts is not 100 percent accurate, but involves error,[51] different mediation studies sometimes yield different results. Therefore, it often is preferable to assess the effects of perceived procedural fairness on potential mediators such as the state of self-esteem and perceived legitimacy in one set of studies, and to examine the effects of systematically varied levels of self-esteem and legitimacy on dependent variables such as cooperation, compliance, and trust measures in another type of study.[52]

Justifying the Societal System and Status Quo

An issue that sometimes is overlooked at times in the psychology of the fair process effect is that research on the fair process effect, and interventions that follow from that research, can result in a justification of the existing societal system and the status quo within that system. This issue is very important and should not be neglected in any treatment of perceived procedural justice and the fair process effect.[53]

For example, research suggests that perceived procedural justice tends to affect legitimacy of societal authorities and that this perceived legitimacy, in turn, leads people to voluntarily comply with the decisions of those authorities and the organizations and societal institutions they represent.[54] Of course, voluntary compliance can be a wonderful and very positive reaction.[55] Furthermore, most people see through insincere attempts by authorities to heighten perceived procedural justice.[56] Nevertheless, having available a mechanism that can be used to increase perceived legitimacy, compliance, and acquiescence in society also creates a huge responsibility for those who understand and possibly use the mechanism.

Thus, I note explicitly that insights from research on the fair process effect should be used with care by scientists studying the effect, and by

[50] McLean, 2020. [51] Van den Bos, 2020a. [52] Spencer, Zanna, and Fong, 2005.
[53] Tyler and Jost, 2007; see also Jost and Banaji, 1994; Kohlberg, 1971; Lerner, 2003; Sidanius, Levin, Federico, and Pratto, 2001; Sidanius and Pratto, 1999; Thorisdottir, Jost, and Kay, 2009.
[54] Tyler, 2006. [55] See, for example, Van den Bos et al., 2011.
[56] Greenberg and Folger, 1983.

practitioners applying the effect in their interventions to create better social environments and improve society at large. This also means that scientists and practitioners should reflect on their intentions. Furthermore, they should examine whether good intentions nevertheless may result in negative consequences. After all, as the saying goes, the road to hell is paved with good intentions.[57] We also should not be naïve about the malicious intentions of some people in this world and the organizations for which they work.

Moreover, when we examine how individuals change as a result of the fair process effect, we should not forget to consider the effects that perceived procedural justice may have at the system level. An influential line of thinking in behavioral science is that many of society's most pressing problems can be addressed cheaply and effectively at the level of the individual, without modifying the system in which individuals operate. The result of this approach is to frame policy problems in individual terms, and to somewhat overlook systemic aspects that are important, and perhaps need to change as well.[58] Paying appropriate attention to contextual factors, such as culture, that can help or thwart attempts to generalize past successes is crucial in this respect.[59] These are important issues that should be addressed carefully in the science and application of the fair process effect. In the chapters that follow, I examine some of the implications that follow from our insights on the effect.

[57] Van den Bos, 2018. [58] Chater and Loewenstein, 2022.
[59] Schimmelpfennig and Muthukrishna, 2022.

PART IV

Examining Societal Discontent

CHAPTER 6

Distrust

As we have seen throughout this book thus far, the fair process effect works in different contexts. This includes circumstances where the effect is studied under controlled conditions as well as in many important social and societal contexts where multiple issues are at stake. The review of the fair process effect presented here was not exhaustive. That would not be possible and is not the goal of this book. Rather, the aim of this book is to get a coherent view and firm grip on the modern psychology of the fair process effect and to examine how we can use the insights thus obtained to understand and perhaps prevent and counter unwarranted discontent in our societies. This part of the book will focus on this issue. Specifically, I will examine exaggerated distrust in this chapter, dysfunctional polarization in Chapter 7, and unfounded conspiracy thinking in Chapter 8.

In this chapter, I focus on distrust in society. In doing so, I will explore how people search for information about whether they can trust authorities and whether they can trust institutions such as law, government, and science. I note that low levels of trust and distrust are not the same and that people can find it difficult to form trust judgments on abstract entities such as societal institutions and authorities whom they do not know. Quite often, people are much more comfortable judging whether they trust or distrust a particular person with whom they interact, and they use these personalized judgments of trust and distrust to form impressions of the trustworthiness of more abstract concepts, such as the legal system and other social institutions.[1] Furthermore, being treated in fair manners by important representatives of these institutions signals that you matter and are valued as a worthwhile person. In contrast, being treated unfairly by these representatives or other authorities hurts because it conveys that you do not matter that much in the eyes of these important persons and the

[1] Van den Bos, 2011, 2021.

organizations for which they stand. This is one of the core reasons why the fair process effect can yield such a powerful influence on people's reactions.

I note here explicitly that it can be difficult to differentiate between "warranted" and "unwarranted" levels of societal discontent. For example, sometimes we have good reasons for warranted distrust and detect malign motives among powerholders. On other occasions, however, distrust may be exaggerated and we miss the good intentions that others with whom we are interacting actually have toward us. Thus, there can be a thin line of demarcation between warranted and unwarranted distrust. Similarly, sometimes it is good to stand up for your own group's interests and accept some levels of polarization with other groups as a result of this process. This noted, levels of polarization can also be dysfunctional, for both you and your group, making you lose sight of the goals with which you entered in what now has become a conflicted and polarized situation. Related to this, it is often quite appropriate to meet authorities who have power over you with some sort of skepticism, for example, regarding their competence. However, sometimes people aim to discover hidden motives and agendas among the elite where there in fact are none, and perhaps raising competence levels among powerholders would be a better tactic than assuming only malicious motives.

Again, I do emphasize that sometimes there are good reasons to distrust societal authorities and institutions. After all, there are clear instances in which these agencies do not function properly. For example, there are toxic supervisors at work,[2] malfunctioning judges,[3] politicians committing terrible acts, and sometimes small groups of elite decision makers pulling the strings of what is going on in certain societies. In these kinds of conditions, it is genuinely warranted to be aware of what is going on and to be at least moderately distrusting of the motives and actions of the persons and organizations under scrutiny. There can be good and valid reasons why trust in authorities and institutions that should aim to hold societies together is waning or may even turn into distrust in these people and agencies. It is important, indeed crucial, to stay critical about the current state of social institutions, such as government, law, and science. It would be wrong to take any form of distrust in these and other institutions to be inaccurate and misguided.

Furthermore, some individual scientists clearly failed to live up to the high levels of scientific quality and research integrity that society expected them to adhere to.[4] Related to what I noted in Chapter 5 on system-justifying processes, I emphasize that we also should be keenly aware that traditionally

[2] West, 2022. [3] Van Koppen, 2002, 2017. [4] Levelt, 2012; Van den Bos, in press.

trusted sources, such as scientists, may be influenced by nonscientific considerations that, when acknowledged, could reveal possible bias that affects not only scientific conclusions but trust in the process that preceded them. This might contribute to some of the credibility challenges that scientists nowadays face. Thus, I emphasize that we should be conscious of any overt or subtle bias that could color the evidence presented on the fair process effect and conclusions drawn from it. This is also important because this book focuses not only on the audience in the communication chain but also on the messenger in that chain.[5] After all, exploring relevant issues from both perspectives is needed. We should be as open and as critical as possible in our attempts to understand where along the communication continuum the seeds of distrust are sown and cultivated.

Moreover, some scholars propagate the idea that distrust can fulfill a constructive function and that reasonable, well-organized distrust of those elites is to be applauded.[6] Inquiring whether matters are properly arranged and whether the government, law, and science are to be completely trusted at all times is indeed part of the democratic scrutiny that may be expected of citizens. Nevertheless, too much distrust in government, law, or science is often undesirable, both at a social level[7] and at a psychological level.[8] Thus, I believe that we should not enthusiastically embrace simplified notions of the constructive value of distrust.[9] I am particularly skeptical about the extent to which such conflict models[10] actually describe the real behavior of citizens, and I suspect that they may naïvely overestimate the positive role conflict can play in society and interpersonal relationships.[11]

In sum, sometimes there are unwarranted levels of distrust in society. It is on the analysis of this aspect of societal discontent that the remainder of this chapter focuses.

Searching for Information

Trust is a complex issue[12] and can be defined in many different ways.[13] Here, I define trust as the conviction that others will not harm us

[5] In other words, we are examining both "reactive" and "proactive" procedural justice; see Greenberg, 1987c.

[6] Hobbes, 1651; see also Schul, Mayo, and Burnstein, 2008.

[7] See, for example, Ely, 1980; Warren, 1999.

[8] See, for example, Kramer, 1994; Kramer and Cook, 2004.

[9] Van den Bos, in press.

[10] Dahrendorf, 1959.

[11] Etzioni, 2004.

[12] See, for example, Alesina and La Ferrera, 2002; Das, Echambadi, McCardle, and Luckett, 2003; Evans and Krueger, 2009; Fukuyama, 1995; Nummela, Sulander, Rahkonen and Uutela, 2009; Warren, 1999; Zaheer, McEvily and Perrone, 1998.

[13] See, for instance, different conceptual perspectives by Castaldo, Premazzi, and Zerbini, 2010; Deutsch, 1958; Ely, 1980; Evans and Krueger 2009; Gambetta, 1987; Goold, 2002; Johnson,

intentionally if they can avoid doing so, that they are well-intentioned toward us, and that they will consider our interests if possible.[14] Viewed in this manner, distrust is the belief that others are out there with the aim to harm you intentionally, that they do not have good intentions against you, and that they are not interested at all in your concerns.[15]

The willingness to rely on others is dependent on the situation in which people find themselves. For example, in situations where there is a lot of uncertainty, trust propensity may be lower than in conditions where there is a lot of certainty about how others will behave. Furthermore, individuals differ in the level of trust propensity. Some are inclined to have high levels of trust in others. Other persons are much more distrusting of other people's motives and may be inclined to default to distrusting organizations that have power over them. Moreover, although the concepts are related to each other, trust can be distinguished from trustworthiness. In essence, trust is an action performed by the person concerned, while trustworthiness is a characteristic ascribed by that person to the trustee.[16] Trustworthiness or reliability can be regarded as the most important moral trait for the assessment of others.[17]

Judgments of trust, distrust, and associated concepts are also complex issues, because it often is not that easy to figure out whether you can trust or should distrust certain persons or the agencies for which they are working. Furthermore, because people often ask themselves whether they have good connections with other people and belong to certain groups, they often wonder whether they can trust others not to exploit or exclude them from important relationships and groups.[18] Thus, information search processes play an important role in the formation of trust and distrust judgments.

As it turns out, people often use their judgments of whether they have been treated by a certain person in fair or unfair manners as indicators of whether they should trust or distrust the person and/or the organization they represent.[19] Perceived procedural fairness thus has a special role in people's search for information about trust and distrust. Fair treatment by

1996; Kramer, 1999; Kramer and Cook, 2004; Kramer and Isen, 1994; Maddox, 1995; Messick, Wilke, Brewer, Kramer, Zemke, and Lui, 1983; Rotter, 1980; Stanghellini, 2000, and many others.

[14] Sztompka, 1999; Van den Bos, 2011, in press; see also Colquitt, Scott, and LePine, 2007.

[15] See also Kramer, 1999; Kramer and Cook, 2004; Kramer and Isen, 1994.

[16] More on this in Colquitt et al., 2007; Van den Bos, 2011.

[17] Brugman, Oskam, and Oosterlaken, 2010.

[18] Lind, 1995; see also Huo, Smith, Tyler, and Lind, 1996; Lind and Tyler, 1988; Smith, Tyler, Huo, Ortiz, and Lind, 1998; Tyler and Lind, 1992.

[19] Van den Bos, Van Schie, and Colenberg, 2002; Van den Bos, Wilke, and Lind, 1998.

an organization or person representing it – in the form of giving you voice, paying appropriate attention to your concerns, and the other criteria discussed in Chapter 2 – tends to signal that you probably can trust the person and organization. In contrast, unfair treatment conveys that the person and organization are not be trusted and that you perhaps are better off by distrusting those who treated you with no respect and are not viewing you as a full-fledged person who matters. This suggests that the fair process effect has such a powerful effect on people's responses because people can use it in very meaningful ways when they are searching for information about whether they can trust or distrust others.[20] These processes have to do with ceding authority to other people who can hurt and exclude you and the question of whether you can trust abstract institutions in society. The next two sections examine these topics in more detail.

Authorities

In our daily lives and complex worlds, we often have to deal with authorities who have power over us in some way. For example, they can withhold access to valuable goods or can exclude us from important group memberships.[21] Because ceding authority to another person raises the possibility of exploitation and exclusion, people frequently feel uneasy about their relationship with authorities and about the outcomes they receive from the authority. This line of reasoning suggests that when people are trying to find out how to react to an outcome they received from an authority, they want to have information about whether they can trust the authority.[22]

However, direct information about whether a certain authority is to be trusted is often lacking. If people do not have information about whether they can trust the authority who can have a great impact on their lives, they are interested in trying to find out how to appraise the authority and their actions. It is in these situations in which definitive information about the authority's trustworthiness is missing that people refer to the fairness of the authority's procedures to decide how to react to the outcome they received from the authority. In other words, in situations in which definitive trust information is lacking, procedural fairness is used as valuable information in the process of deciding how to judge the actions of the authority and fair

[20] Van den Bos, Wilke, and Lind, 1998; Van den Bos et al., 2002. [21] Lind, 1995.
[22] Van den Bos, Wilke, and Lind, 1998.

process effect is strongly affecting people's reactions. This is indeed what research findings suggest is the case.[23]

Evidence for these predictions was found in experiments conducted in the psychology laboratory. These studies allowed for high levels of control, but also relied on artificial stimulus materials.[24] Perhaps more interesting, therefore, is that we also found these predictions to hold among parents who were confronted with a new organizational authority that was responsible for their children's day care. Our findings indicated that when parents were not certain whether they could trust the organization, their perceptions of the organization's procedures strongly impacted their reactions toward the organization. In contrast, when parents were certain that the organization was to be trusted, they did not need their perceptions of the organization's procedures and less strong procedure effects were found on the reactions of these parents.[25] These are correlational findings that need to be backed up with powerful samples obtained in other domains of life to see whether this line of reasoning turns out to be robust. For now, I conclude that the fair process effect seems to be especially powerful when people are busy answering the question of whether they can trust the authorities who have some sort of power over them.

This line of reasoning has implications for situations in which the amount of trust or distrust an individual can put in the powerholders present can vary.[26] Furthermore, individuals can also differ in whether they tend to trust or distrust powerholders. It appears that trust propensity is a personal trait that affects not only the extent of trust itself but also important aspects of trustworthiness: the ability, benevolence, and integrity of authorities involved.[27] Thus, the extent to which someone is regarded as trustworthy depends not only on how trustworthy they actually are but also on the personality of the trustor.[28]

Research on the fair process effect suggests that when you are fairly treated by a certain authority, it is more likely that you will start trusting the authority.[29] Conversely, when the authority is treating you, your group, or other people in blatantly unfair manners, this may well lead you to start distrusting the authority.[30] In other words, people often use procedural fairness information to assess whether they can trust or distrust social authorities.

[23] Van den Bos, Wilke, and Lind, 1998; Van den Bos et al., 2002.
[24] Van den Bos, Wilke, and Lind, 1998. [25] Van den Bos et al., 2002.
[26] Van den Bos, Wilke, and Lind, 1998; Van den Bos et al., 2002. [27] Van den Bos, 2011.
[28] Brower, Lester, Korsgaard, and Dineen, 2009. [29] Tyler and Huo, 2002; Tyler and Lind, 1992.
[30] Van den Bos, 2018.

Government, Law, and Science

Trust in government, law, and science plays an important role in the functioning of our societies. Government, law, and science are social institutions. Institutions involve integrated systems of rules that structure social interactions.[31] They refer to mechanisms that govern the behavior of people within a given community or society, with the purpose of providing important rules that direct or are supposed to direct people's behaviors.[32] Furthermore, social institutions are stable, valued, recurring patterns of behavior.[33] Thus, the way I use the term "institutions" applies both to formal institutions created by law and custom and that have a distinctive permanence in ordering social behaviors and to informal institutions such as customs or behavior patterns important to a society.[34]

One type of trust in institutions concerns trust in government. Government as an institution can be defined as the machinery that is set up by the state to administer its functions and duties. The function of the government as an institution, thus defined, is to keep the state organized, run its affairs, and administer its various functions and duties. Viewed in this manner, a government is an institution through which leaders exercise power to make and enforce laws. A government's basic functions are providing leadership, maintaining order, providing public services, providing national security, providing economic security, and providing economic assistance.[35] Being treated in a fair manner by representatives of government can lead to higher levels of trust in government.[36] In contrast, clear unfair treatment can lower trust and even lead to the instigation of distrusting attitudes toward government.[37]

Another important topic has to do with trust in law.[38] The law as a system can be defined as a codified set of rules developed to regulate interactions and exchanges among people.[39] As such, the law constitutes an arrangement of rules and guidelines that are created and enforced through social and governmental institutions to regulate behavior. This regulation of behavior includes conflict resolution and sentencing decisions and ideally takes place in such a way that a community shows respect to its members.[40] An issue that is sometimes overlooked is that lay people often respond to legal decisions under conditions of high informational

[31] Hodgson, 2015. [32] Durkheim, 1895. [33] Huntington, 1996.
[34] Van den Bos, in press. [35] Ibid. [36] Van den Bos, Van der Velden, and Lind, 2014.
[37] Van den Bos, 2018. [38] Tyler and Huo, 2002; Van den Bos, 2021, in press.
[39] Tyler and Jost, 2007. [40] Robertson, 2013.

uncertainty. After all, many lay citizens do not have access to formal jurisprudence or have a hard time interpreting earlier legal rulings and verdicts.[41] We have seen that it is under these conditions that the fair process effect has a special function and tends to impact people's reactions strongly. Thus, it should not come as a surprise that being treated fairly influences people's trust in law.[42] Unfair treatment can lead to people to distrust the legal system. This can happen both when people experience treatment unfairness in the courtroom themselves and when they experience the legal system to malfunction but not affect themselves in a material way.[43]

Trust in science is another issue that deserves our attention. Science has important characteristics of an institution, as it can be "regarded as a body of rules and related objects which exist prior to and independently of a given person, and which exercise a constraining influence upon the person's behavior."[44] Science constitutes an important domain of human life, in part because it involves reliability of insight on which we want to build our lives. Science also involves the trustworthiness of scientists and the integrity of research findings. Furthermore, when scientific findings are difficult to understand or are not accessible because they are behind pay walls, people form their judgments of trust in science under conditions of informational uncertainty. This also includes trust in scientific organizations and persons representing those organizations, such as those who are managing crises (such as the Covid-19 crisis) while they themselves are still learning about the causes of the crises. It is precisely because science is so important and at the same time difficult to understand that fair behavior by scientists who explain in clear terms what their scientific findings entail is so important. Breaches of scientific integrity and other instances of scientific misconduct can lead people to distrust scientific findings. Moreover, because science tends to be work in progress and typically involves preliminary insights,[45] people may find it difficult to build confident judgments of trust in science. This is especially the case when scientific results are unfavorable to them. This observation is important for the current purposes, as we have seen how important fair treatment is when outcomes are relatively unfavorable.[46]

In short, there are several reasons why trust in social institutions such as government, law, and science is impacted by perceived procedural justice. Moreover, distrusting social institutions may start with experiences of

[41] Van den Bos, 2021. [42] Tyler and Huo, 2002. [43] Van den Bos, 2021.
[44] Hartung, 1951, p. 35. [45] This book is no exception! [46] Brockner and Wiesenfeld, 1996.

procedural injustice, done to yourself or inflicted on others with whom you empathize. This is pivotal because there are good reasons to assume that trust in institutions such as government, law, and science is decreasing.[47] Furthermore, many surveys and trust barometers tend to overestimate the level of trust in these institutions and sometimes tend to miss outright, unwarranted distrust in these important domains of human life.[48]

The fair process effect may help us to better understand these processes and give insight in how to perhaps counter them. This is not always easy and does not work all the time. For example, it is often not clear how social institutions operate and function. Furthermore, whether institutions have legitimacy is often not self-evident. These caveats noted, from the literature on the fair process effect it follows that in circumstances in which personal and informational uncertainty is high, people rely strongly on the perceived fairness of persons representing social institutions. This means that the individual civil servant, politician, judge, lawyer, and scientific researcher and teacher have important responsibilities: When they act in ways that are truly fair and honest, giving people opportunities to voice their opinions at appropriate times, carefully listening to these opinions, and thus treating people with respect as full-fledged citizens of their society, this can increase trust in institutions and prevent unwarranted levels of distrust.[49] The following sections may also help us to understand these issues better.

Personalized Process

It is important to realize that when we examine issues such as trust and distrust in abstract entities, such as government, law, and science, people often have difficulty judging whether they should trust or distrust the abstract institutions or other abstract agencies at hand. This is one important reason, I argue, why people rely on experiences of fair or unfair treatment. When they themselves are treated fairly by authorities or other representatives of these agencies, this may lead people to infer not only that the persons doing fair things are to be trusted, but that this may be indicative for the broader organization they represent. In contrast, when people are treated unfairly, they may decide that there are good reasons why they should distrust these persons and the organizations they stand for.[50]

[47] Albright, 2018. [48] Hulst, 2017. [49] Van den Bos, in press; Van den Bos et al., 2014.
[50] Van den Bos, 2001a; Van den Bos, Wilke, and Lind, 1998.

These effects are also present when the fair or unfair treatment is not experienced by people themselves, but is inflicted on other people and is merely observed by those making the inferences. In the case of others' experiences, instead of your own encounters, these effects are likely to be weaker, but are still noticeable, in part because people can become quite upset when they see others being treated in blatantly unfair ways.[51]

Note that I draw a distinction between trust in institutions and trust in other people. The former is often referred to as "political trust" and the latter as "social trust."[52] Political and social trust typically operate in different directions: Political trust is generally vertically oriented, toward people or organizations at a higher hierarchical level (such as politicians or government agencies), while social trust often acts horizontally, toward people at the same social level in your environment (such as spouses, partners, or neighbors). I therefore refer to political trust as "vertical trust" and social trust as "horizontal trust." I further will argue[53] that insights gained from the study of horizontal trust can be used to understand vertical trust.[54]

Here I assume that the basic psychological mechanisms underlying vertical and horizontal trust overlap to a certain extent. I also point out that there are important differences between vertical and horizontal trust. In particular, vertical trust exists in hierarchical settings in which important power differences exist.[55] Furthermore, it involves trust in abstract entities and organizations.[56] Nevertheless, I argue that because direct information about trust in institutions is often missing,[57] political or vertical trust is often personalized: When forming judgments of political or vertical trust, people frequently focus on trust in persons representing social institutions. In particular, how fairly persons such as individual civil servants, politicians, judges, or scientists act serves as an important indication of whether the institution the person represents can be trusted or not.[58]

The implication of this line of reasoning is that fair and unfair treatment by key members of society have important symbolic value, with unfair treatment and your own personal experiences having the strongest effect on judgments of trust and distrust. It may be very difficult to overcome

[51] Folger, 1993; Van den Bos, 2018; Van den Bos and Lind, 2001.
[52] Hetherington, 1998; Newton, 2007; Schyns and Koop, 2010.
[53] With the necessary caveats; see, for example, Brehm and Rahn, 1997; Hetherington, 1999.
[54] Van den Bos, 2011, in press. [55] Lind, 1995. [56] Van den Bos, 2011.
[57] Van den Bos, Wilke, and Lind, 1998; Van den Bos et al., 2002.
[58] Van den Bos, 2011, 2018, in press; see also Blumer, 1969; Mead, 1934.

unfair experiences,[59] but multiple experiences of fair treatment from various sources may help to buffer against earlier experiences of unfairness and associated distrust. This may be especially true when multiple fairness experiences are encountered before a single unfair event happens,[60] especially when people feel they are valued and respected members of their group, community, and society.[61]

Justice Is Where the Individual Meets the Group

Perceived justice matters so much to people because how fairly and justly you are treated by others is an indication of how they, and the groups they represent, think of you. In other words, justice is where the individual meets the group.[62] Thus, fair treatment is important because it signals how much you are respected by the group to which you want to belong, by the organization for which you work, by the community where you live, by the society of which you are part, and so on. In contrast, being treated unfairly really hurts, in part because it is indicative that your group, work organization, community, and society do not respect you as a full-fledged member of that social category.

These effects are particularly strong when the unfair treatment is originating in groups to which you want to belong.[63] Furthermore, being excluded from groups even hurts when these groups are not very important to you.[64] This reflects the social quality of us human beings, and how much we value and need social connections with other people.[65]

The fair and just distribution of outcomes also can have this value-expressive function. This noted, it is not always easy to know with confidence whether the distribution of outcomes was indeed fair and just, in part because information about other people's outcomes is lacking or ambiguous. This is why the fair process effect often impacts people's reactions so strongly, as information about fair and unfair processes tends to be accessible with relative ease.[66]

The fair process effect can help to increase trust in others' intentions, in part because many people – not all, but many – want to cooperate with others and tend to appreciate good social relationships. In fact, research on

[59] More on this in Part V of this book. [60] See also Van der Linden, 2019.
[61] Lind and Tyler, 1988. [62] Lind, 1995. [63] Lind and Tyler, 1988.
[64] Gonsalkorale and Williams, 2007.
[65] Aronson, 1972; see also Douglas and Sutton, 2023; Douglas, Sutton, and Cichocka, 2017.
[66] Van den Bos, Lind, Vermunt, and Wilke, 1997; Van den Bos, Wilke, Lind, and Vermunt, 1998; but see also Van den Bos, 1999.

social value orientations shows that a small majority of people[67] tend to adhere to cooperative values as stable preferences for how they approach important issues in their lives. There are certainly also people who adopt more individualistic values[68] or who want to outcompete others.[69] These more pro-self kinds of values certainly exist, and we should not underestimate those reactions. But we also should not forget that many people want to work together with others in cooperative ways.[70]

The social and cooperative orientation of many people is also one of the reasons why it is difficult for most of us to prolong distrusting attitudes toward others. Keeping up a distrusting attitude all the time is cognitively taxing,[71] and most of us – again, not all, but most of us – find this too challenging most of the time.[72] I am not saying that this always is a good thing, but, building on what I observe, I do propose that most of the time, most people want to build a trusting relationship with others. Being treated in genuinely fair and just manners may help in this process, especially when the other party involved also adheres to a trusting attitude. Conversely, treatment that is clearly unfair and unjust will strengthen distrusting attitudes, and quite rightfully so. Furthermore, sham procedures that are not sincerely fair and just are likely to backfire, as many people will see through this.[73]

I also note that whether an individual will trust or distrust others depends on a number of psychophysiological processes. Summarizing these very briefly, it has been argued that the amygdala is stimulated when we distrust others.[74] The amygdala is a structure in our brain that regulates our emotions. The emotion of distrust is associated with feelings of fear.[75] A rise in the concentration of the neuropeptide oxytocin can reduce these feelings of fear and lower the activation of the amygdala.[76] In line with this, oxytocin is sometimes called the hormone of trust.[77] It is assumed that oxytocin facilitates awareness of the social cues we receive from others, thus promoting social behavior.[78]

[67] In many studies, approximately 60–70 percent of the research participants; Van den Bos and Lind, 2013; Van den Bos et al., 2011; Van Lange, Otten, De Bruin, and Joireman, 1997.
[68] Approximately 20 percent of the research participants; see, for example, Van Lange et al., 1997.
[69] Approximately 10 percent of the research participants; ibid. [70] Van den Bos and Lind, 2013.
[71] Schul, Mayo, and Burnstein, 2004. [72] See also Fiske and Taylor, 2008.
[73] See also Greenberg, 1993.
[74] Adolphs, Tranel, and Damasio, 1998; Winston, Strange, O'Doherty, and Dolan, 2002.
[75] Kirsch et al., 2005. [76] Unkelbach, Guastella, and Forgas, 2008.
[77] Kosfeld, Heinrichs, Zak, Fischbacher, and Fehr, 2005; Mikolajczak, Gross, Lane, Corneille, De Timary, and Luminet, 2010.
[78] Heinrichs, Meinlschmidt, Wippich, Ehlert, and Hellhammer, 2004; Van den Bos, 2011.

It is my assumption that genuinely fair treatment about issues and by persons that matter is one of these core social cues. And this is why the fair process effect can help to dampen distrust and can contribute to people working and functioning together in productive and human ways. This can also help people in their important task of distinguishing between when distrust is warranted and needed versus when distrust is not warranted and even may get poisonous for all parties involved, including the distrusting parties. This issue is related to polarization between groups and some forms of conspiracy thinking. Chapters 7 and 8 focus on these important topics.

CHAPTER 7

Polarization

The fair process effect may also be of value when different groups in society are opposed against each other. People may think differently from other persons, adhere to very different cultural worldviews, and hold very different opinions on issues having to do with rights and values, ideology, politics, and religion. Importantly, these are not merely thoughts, but people may feel very deeply and strongly about the issues at stake. This may lead them to think in not only affective terms about the issues at hand, but also in moral terms: "This is wrong, whereas our opinions are right!" Furthermore, these combinations of thoughts and (moral) feelings deepen conflicts quickly and quite easily, especially when important material or immaterial concerns are at stake.[1]

When people are grouped together and face other groups of people who have different views and associated feelings on important matters, the negative effects of polarization in society can easily worsen and deepen.[2] Moreover, cognitive and affective polarization can lead people to start adhering to extremist views and engage in illegal and violent behaviors targeted at members of the much hated and morally despised other groups.[3] Polarization not only leads to conflicts between groups and extremist behaviors, but may also threaten democracy by reducing interest in the political system[4] and by increasing a disdain for the rule of law and important principles in constitutional democracies.[5] These are among the important reasons why I disagree with positive views on polarization, reflected in the saying "without friction no shine." Society is not a brass doorknob that needs to be polished every now and then, and we should not treat it as such.

[1] See, for example, Sherif, Harvey, White, Hood, and Sherif, 1961.
[2] See, for instance, Tajfel, 1978; Tajfel and Turner, 1979; see also Schopler et al., 2001.
[3] Van den Bos, 2018; Van Prooijen and Krouwel, 2019.
[4] Bednara, 2021.
[5] Van den Bos, 2020b.

Polarization can have detrimental effects on individuals, groups, communities, and societies. Furthermore, these effects can be manifested in different forms in different societies and historical contexts. Thus, there are good reasons to explore what the fair process effect can do to prevent polarization from occurring and how it perhaps even can help dampening polarization once that has occurred. To this end, this chapter examines how we react to those who hold opinions that dissent from what we believe in. These reactions entail not only affective responses; often, they also involve moral responses and a striving for moral purity. Moral judgments can lead to prosocial and positive behaviors, but moral judgments also can have a dark side, in that they can tempt us to consider other viewpoints to be morally inferior to ours. This chapter discusses how these issues play out in intergroup contexts. Notably, we tend to respond very positively toward those who uphold our own moral values, and we may respond very defensively and with increased polarization toward other groups. The fair process effect can help to counter these latter processes, in part because they go against abstract enemy thinking and the adherence to strong intergroup boundaries.

Dissenting Opinions

Polarization in society often begins with people thinking differently about important matters. When people adhere very strongly to their beliefs, they can be tempted to engage in cognitive rigidity.[6] This may lead people to start thinking in terms of "us'" versus "them" when reflecting on the groups to which they do not belong. These kinds of social categorization processes can further thoughts, sometimes illusory thoughts, about your own group being superior and other groups being inferior. These thoughts of superiority have to do not only with issues of competence but also with notions of morality: "We are good and they are bad."[7]

When opinions are ventilated that dissent sharply from your own opinions, this can lead to strong feelings: People are upset and easily become angry about these dissenting opinions,[8] especially when they originate from "them," members of the other groups that sometimes[9] are considered to be inferior to your own group and the opinions and values to which the group adheres. People also can respond so strongly to dissenting opinions because these opinions can indicate that other people may potentially block goals that are important and perhaps even pivotal to

[6] Van den Bos, 2018. [7] Greene, 2013; see also Jost, Baldassarri, and Druckman, 2022.
[8] Minson and Dorison, in press. [9] Secretly or not so secretly.

them.[10] Furthermore, when dissenting opinions are ventilated repeatedly, people's responses of annoyance may result in stronger feelings, such as hate and contempt.[11]

Thus, what I discuss here in a nutshell is that polarization in society often starts with processes of cognitive polarization. These processes can trigger strong affective responses to dissenting opinions. In other words, cognitive polarization can easily lead to affective polarization. The fair process effect can perhaps help to bridge differences between groups.[12] After all, when people are treated in fair and just manners, with respect and with dignity, indicating that they are worthy and valued persons in society,[13] this may help to buffer them against potential threats and for them to not stick rigidly to their own beliefs and associated group boundaries.

It also would be important when people counter cognitive polarization in an early stage. After all, preventing or repairing earlier forms of polarization is less difficult than trying to manage well-established forms of polarization that have been around for a long time and about which people feel very strongly, quite often in moral terms, and sometimes with strong vested psychological or material interests.

Furthermore, combating cognitive polarization is also important, in part because sometimes dissenting opinions are first met with reactions of annoyance, but in the long run it may be quite good for organizations or society at large. For example, sometimes we need whistleblowers or social activists to achieve necessary changes in the organizations where we work or the society in which we live. Thus, it quite often is good to somehow control our first annoyance and to try to listen to dissenting opinions and learn from what they have to say.

In closing, I want to emphasize that I do not advocate that we agree with everything that is being ventilated, that all different opinions are good, and that we should follow each piece of advice and every dissenting opinion. But sometimes we learn and improve our working and living environments by listening to what we initially thought was nonsense.

Moral Purity

Acting on the basis of moral beliefs has led to the most beautiful and worthwhile instances of human behavior that we as mankind have seen.

[10] Berkowitz, 1993.
[11] Tausch, Becker, Spears, Christ, Saab, Sing, and Siddiqui, 2011; Van den Bos, 2018.
[12] Huo, Smith, Tyler, and Lind, 1996. [13] See also Fernández et al., 2022.

After all, because of moral concerns people have been brave enough to step up against what is blatantly wrong, even at the danger of losing their own lives. And moral beliefs are often the reason why people dare to speak up and convey their dissenting opinions that, in the long run, may be conducive for the greater good. Thus, trying to be moral and to do the right thing are commendable, and society at large probably would benefit if we all acted more in line with sound moral principles.

However, moral behavior can come with a price. That is, when you strive to do what is right, you try to stay away from what is not right. In fact, it can be tempting to focus on what you think is right and denote many or all other things as not right, as something that is wrong. Thus, moral concerns and fairness judgments can come with a potential dark side: moral purity.[14] When you work very hard to do the right thing, those behaviors that deviate from this are judged negatively, even when they deviate only slightly or when they hold some kernel of truth that your own views perhaps miss and for which you may have a blind spot.

When we are confronted with people who hold opinions that dissent from what we strongly believe in, our reactions reflect not merely a breach of what we prefer, but also involve moral judgments: "This is wrong and I probably should act against this!" The implication is that quite often those who hold different opinions are not simply wrong; they are also morally wrong. To put it differently, when we are busy constructing moral judgments, we often are focusing on what is morally pure. Any deviations from this moral pureness tend to be judged as morally wrong. Because of this striving for moral pureness, moral judgments often revolve around a dichotomy of right and wrong. Furthermore, moralizing about certain issues frequently tends to result in a focus on what is morally most righteous. Everything that deviates from this tends to be judged as morally inferior.

I emphasize here explicitly that I am not advocating a postmodern kind of view on morality and fairness in which anything goes when reflecting on what is right and wrong, Certainly not. There are clearly moral and immoral, just and unjust, fair and unfair ways of behaving, and we should strive to upgrade and update our behaviors so that we all act more in line with what is best for society at large, including groups in that society whose interests are often overlooked.

[14] For some reflections on moral purity, see, for example, Gino, Kouchaki, and Galinsky, 2015; Gray, DiMaggio, Schein, and Kachanoff, in press; Horberg, Oveis, Keltner, and Cohen, 2009; see also Sherman and Clore, 2009; Sherman, Haidt, and Clore, 2012; Uh, 2016.

This noted, moral concerns can yield a kind of black-and-white thinking that can contribute to cognitive polarization and indeed behavioral polarization in our world. When people feel they are respected and given due consideration to their voiced opinions, it may be easier for them to stay away from this dichotomous thinking that focuses on relatively small differences between different moral behaviors. In other words, when being treated in genuinely fair manners by people and groups that matter in society, people may appreciate other viewpoints a bit more and see that people adhering to these perspectives may well team up with them to work together to improve living and working in their community, organization, and society.

Moral Tribes

The dark side of morality not only plays out in our thoughts about moral purity alone; it also involves intergroup dynamics that form a central part of who we are as human beings. These issues play a particularly important role when we are busy defending our views on how the world should look.

One important worldview that we tend to learn during our childhoods, and continue to believe in for the rest of our lives, is the notion that the world is a just place where good people get good things, and bad people deserve bad things.[15] People may go to great lengths to protect their just-world beliefs. For instance, when they see an innocent person falling victim to crime and the perpetrator of the crime is not caught, it can be tempting to start looking at the victim's behavior and point at what the person may have contributed to the crime. Thus, rape victims are sometimes asked questions such as: "Why were you were wearing a short skirt while walking through the park late at night?" In short, the behavior of the innocent victim may be blamed for what has happened, and people may start pointing at what they perceive as flaws in the personality of the victim.[16] The harsh implication is that because we care so much about fairness, justice, and morality, we sometimes end up blaming and derogating innocent people for terrible things that happened to them. Secondary victimization is often the result of these kinds of processes.[17]

Furthermore, people may strongly adhere to the culture and groups to which they belong, and may defend their culture and groups very strongly

[15] Lerner, 1980. [16] Bal and Van den Bos, 2010, 2012.
[17] Hafer, 2002; Van den Bos and Bal, 2016.

when these are criticized or otherwise threatened.[18] People can indeed go to great lengths to protect their culture and the groups they identify with. For example, people may justify the existing status quo and turn a blind spot to the systemic inequalities and injustices that their society may entail.[19] Related to this, nationalism, greed, stupidity, and misunderstandings between members of different groups all yield intergroup conflicts on a regular basis in our world.[20]

A large part of intergroup conflict and worldview defense revolves around the issue that you like to think that your view, group, and culture are better than other views, groups, and cultures. This includes the issue of moral superiority. When you strongly adhere to your ideas and identify strongly with certain social categories, it becomes tempting to start thinking of your worldviews, group, and culture to be morally superior, compared with others. Perhaps an individual adheres to this idea of moral superiority in explicit and open manners. Or perhaps you do this in ways that are more hidden and secretive, to both you and other people.[21] Belongingness, social identification, and adherence to cultural worldviews can bring forth some of our best behaviors and are related to the social core of who we humans are. But, this said, these same social psychological principles can also yield the most despicable actions, in part because we want to do what is good and moral for those who belong to us.

As Josh Greene famously stated,[22] we live in moral tribes: We do what is morally right for those who belong to our group, community, organization, and society. And we can behave in strongly antagonistic ways toward those who do not belong to these social categories, and we can act in immoral ways toward members of other groups. Indeed, moral inclusion simultaneously involves moral exclusion.[23] A group or other social category exists because there are other groups and other categories. Thus, separation from other groups is something that tends to come naturally with group identification. As a consequence, when we identify with one group, we quite often distance ourselves from other groups and members of those groups. And this distancing also includes moral distancing. Sometimes, or perhaps frequently, it may be tempting to think in open or secret ways: "My tribe is the best, also in moral terms!"

[18] Becker, 1973. [19] Thorisdottir, Jost, and Kay, 2009. [20] Van den Bos, 1996.
[21] Banaji and Greenwald, 2013. [22] Greene, 2013.
[23] See also Opotow, 1990, 1993, 1994, 1995, 2008.

Abstract Enemy Thinking

Polarization and associated behaviors such as political violence are often preceded by a dehumanization phase. Opponents are not merely opponents; they become abstract enemies. In this process, these enemies can get derogatory labels and become associated with the commitment to foul behaviors. The next stage is making violence against those dehumanized opponents seem more normal. In this way, dehumanization normalizes the idea that harming dehumanized opponents somehow is legitimate.[24] The moralization of abstract enemy thinking indeed forms a crucial aspect of many different forms of polarization in society.[25]

To deny or overlook the humanity of others is to exclude them from a core category membership that all people share. Nevertheless, research suggests that individuals engage in dehumanization surprisingly often, both in subtle ways and, in certain contexts, by blatantly associating other groups with "lower" animals.[26]

To counter these processes involves complex issues and sophisticated methods,[27] including both psychological and systemic change. After all, moral exclusion is common. This implies that justice principles are quite often not applied to those members of groups that you hate or have started to think about as abstract enemies. This can easily increase polarization, create social problems, and spur destructive conflicts. However, from this analysis also follows part of the possible solution: Countering moral exclusion and abstract enemy thinking necessitates moral inclusion and personalizing people you meet or interact with, either face to face or online.[28]

In the process of moral inclusion, humanizing the "other" is essential to overcome devaluation and the danger of violence.[29] How can this be done? One way to reduce explicit blatant dehumanization is by correcting exaggerated meta-perceptions of how negatively you think other groups think about you and your group. After all, when blatantly dehumanizing a group of people undermines the moral restraints against harming them, then reversing this process is paramount.[30]

Another issue that is very important in processes of dehumanization is to foster deep contact in the form of significant engagement between people across group lines. This can work as a fruitful starting point to

[24] Sargent, 2022. [25] Bandura, 1999. [26] Kteily and Landry, 2022. [27] Coleman, 2021.
[28] Opotow, Gerson, and Woodside, 2005. [29] De Lange, 2007.
[30] Landry, Schooler, Willer, and Selic, in press.

overcoming devaluative stereotypes and hostility.[31] It is my hope and belief that the fair process effect may help in this process. After all, the emphasis on fairness principles, resource sharing, and concern for the well-being of all may help to start countering polarization and enemy thinking.[32] In this way, moral inclusion by means of the fair process effect can be used as a tool for starting to bring about a world in which justice applies to all.

Cooperative Individuals, Competitive Groups

People's responses to dissenting opinions, their intentions to act in moral pure ways, their living together in moral tribes, and their engagement in abstract enemy thinking can be related to the context in which they are interacting: Are they interacting as individuals with other individual persons, or are they busy responding as group members when reacting to other groups? In other words, an important issue for understanding polarization is to distinguish individual responses from group reactions.

Research findings are certainly not definitive about this issue, but for now it is my assumption that quite often individuals strive to do what is right and act on their moral beliefs. There are certainly people who adhere to individualistic or competitive values, but a striking observation frequently is that the majority of people tend to adhere to cooperative values.[33] Indeed, I hypothesize that many people want to adhere to prosocial values and tend to have a genuine concern for fairness principles.[34] This changes when people start to interact as group members and as such interact with members of other groups.

Identifying with social groups constitutes an important human motivation.[35] Furthermore, we can achieve more when we work together in groups.[36] In short, groups and group behavior can result in all kinds of positive things. This said, intergroup dynamics easily come with a dark side, for instance, that we want to defend our own groups against other groups and perhaps outcompete with these other groups.[37] Thus, in intergroup contexts people are likely to start feeling responsible to defend their group interests. This is especially the case when there are clear boundaries between groups, making it easier to distinguish between "us" versus "them." When it is not easy to cross these boundaries and perhaps

[31] Staub, 2018. [32] Opotow et al., 2005.
[33] See Chapter 6; see also Van den Bos et al., 2011; Van Lange et al., 1997.
[34] Van den Bos and Lind, 2013; see also Lerner, 1980. [35] Tajfel and Turner, 1979.
[36] Forsyth, 1990.
[37] See also Reicher and Haslam, 2016; Tajfel, Billig, Bundy, and Flament, 1971.

become a member of another group,[38] intergroup competitiveness is more likely to emerge.

Thus, there seems to be a tipping point when acting out of individual cooperative or fairness principles to group-defending responses. This is related to groups quite often acting in more competitive ways than individuals do,[39] and dyads[40] acting more cooperatively than larger groups that consist of more than two persons.[41]

The fair process effect can help people to step over possible group boundaries and push people to adopt cooperative values more strongly.[42] Indeed, there are good reasons to speculate that sincere experiences of procedural justice may lead to a decline in violence and violent attitudes between groups and may create and sustain more peaceful attitudes between different groups in society. After all, being heard and respected in genuinely fair and just ways creates cooperative mindsets, increasing the chances that people will open up and act in more cooperative and less polarized ways.[43]

[38] Ellemers, Wilke, and Van Knippenberg, 1993.
[39] For reviews, see, for example, Insko and Schopler, 1998; Schopler and Insko, 1992, 1999.
[40] Two people interacting with each other.
[41] See, for example, Peperkoorn, Becker, Balliet, Columbus, Molho, and Van Lange, 2020; see also Parks, Joireman, and Van Lange, 2013.
[42] Huo, Smith, Tyler, and Lind, 1996.
[43] Tyler, 1999, 2012, 2013; Tyler and Blader, 2000; Tyler and De Cremer, 2006; Tyler and Huo, 2002.

CHAPTER 8

Conspiracy Thinking

Sometimes people believe that others have joined together in secret agreement in order to achieve malevolent goals[1] while the evidence for this belief is not very strong, illogical, far-fetched, and perhaps simply ridiculous.[2] Often these thoughts focus on plots in which powerful persons from the elite secretly team up to achieve awful aims that typically have detrimental effects on public life.[3] These secret plots help to explain important events that happened in the world, including but not limited to political events.[4] Conspiracy beliefs have the power to influence the smooth functioning of societies, as they may inspire violence and extremism and can have dangerous consequences for public and personal health, democratic citizenship, and intergroup relations.[5] This chapter asks what the fair process effect can do to prevent people from strongly adopting these conspiracy beliefs.

One of the things I will be arguing is that when important figures in society, such as societal authorities, treat others in sincerely fair ways, this may help to prevent a large number of people from believing in conspiracy beliefs. After all, when people's opinions are asked for and listened to, when those people are seen as people who matter in their community and society, and when they are treated as such by persons who clearly are experts and professionals, then this may facilitate that people open up and are able and willing to process information provided by these experts and others that the conspiracy theories are in fact not very strongly grounded and that other explanations are also there that can help to explain what has happened. People may also experience fewer existential fears and feel they really belong to their community and society when they are treated in

[1] Van Prooijen, 2018, p. 5. [2] Van Prooijen, 2018, p. vii.
[3] Douglas and Sutton, 2023; Douglas, Sutton, and Cichocka, 2017; see also Albarracin, Albarracin, Chan, and Hall Jamieson, 2021; Kreko, in press.
[4] Imhoff et al., 2022. [5] Jolley, Marques, and Cookson, 2022.

genuinely fair and just ways. In short, the fair process effect may impact various aspects of why people start to believe in conspiracy beliefs.[6]

I mention explicitly that asking critical questions about important events in our world – about the elite and power holders, about the functioning of social institutions, and so on – is not necessarily a sign of conspiracy thinking. Not at all. It can be good to be critical of those who hold positions of power in society. In fact, adopting a skeptical view on power holders underlies important assumptions about the proper functioning of the rule of law and often may be quite appropriate and indeed warranted.[7] Furthermore, some power holders and social institutions truly do not function properly or malfunction in terrible ways. These persons and agencies should be viewed even more critically, with a keen eye toward necessary improvements.[8] We also should not dismiss all aspects of conspiracy theories when some aspects of the theories are falsified. For example, there still may be a kernel of truth to some aspects of the specific theory that need appropriate checking and that demand action to address the faults in society thus revealed. This being said, sometimes people overdo it and see faults, errors, and conspiracies while the evidence for this is very weak or even irrational. It is on these more dysfunctional issues that this chapter focuses. To this end, I explore how the fair process effect may help to prevent people from falling into the trap of unwarranted conspiracy thoughts.

In what follows, I examine why people are attracted to conspiracy theories and why it may be so tempting to fall for these theories. I also discuss how our Internet world, in which we exchange information rapidly through a growing variety of platforms, helps to strengthen the appeal and effects of conspiracy theories on what people think, feel, and do. I then focus on how making sense of what is going on by processing information actively sought or passively received may be one important reason why conspiracy theories exert strong effects on thoughts, feelings, and behaviors. Another important motivation that conspiracy theories tend to provide are illusory beliefs that existential fears may be soothed by these theories.

Throughout the chapter, I will especially focus on those aspects of conspiracy thinking that perhaps may be prevented or even countered by means of the fair process effect. Most notably, the search for information about what is going on as well as existential fears may become less important motivations for people when they are treated fairly and justly

[6] Douglas and Sutton, 2023; Douglas et al., 2017. [7] Hobbes, 1651. [8] Van den Bos, in press.

by important people who convey to them that they matter, genuinely belong to their group, and are full-fledged members of their society. Importantly, I especially focus on how the need to identify with unique groups is an important reason why believing in conspiracy thoughts can be so tempting, and how the fair process effect may provide people alternative group memberships, such as sound identification with your community and society at large.[9]

The Lure of Conspiracy Theories

It is my assumption that we all can fall for what others may label as conspiracy theories. After all, there is a thin line between analyzing critically what is going on in your community and society and overdoing it by drawing conclusions that, in fact or in retrospect, are not backed up with firm evidence. Furthermore, it can be tempting to start believing strongly in lines of reasoning that ostensibly reveal in very clear terms what is going on in our world and thus far was hidden from your and the public's knowledge. Moreover, once we have committed ourselves to certain opinions and have ventilated these opinions openly to ourselves and publicly to others, it may be difficult to admit that we were wrong and need to adjust our opinions accordingly.[10] Thus, I think it is important to realize that, under the right circumstances, we all can be caught in a trap and fall for conspiracy theories.[11] In this chapter, I try to examine the lure of these theories and how the fair process effect can help to address some of the more undesirable consequences.

Obviously, why people believe in conspiracy theories is a complex issue.[12] Many factors play important roles in this process.[13] Quite often, people start believing in conspiracy thoughts when they are looking at experts, the elite, the status quo, or other power holders in society, for example, during times of turmoil, uncertainty, or crises.[14] When people do not trust these persons and the system they represent, this may lead them to be more susceptible to alternative views, including what observers may view as conspiracy thoughts.[15] This absence of trust or presence of distrust may be the result of people not being able to digest the expert information

[9] Huo, Smith, Tyler, and Lind, 1996.
[10] Festinger, 1957.
[11] See also Sutton and Douglas, in press.
[12] Uscinski, Enders, Klofstad, and Stoler, 2022.
[13] For a review, see, for example, Ecker et al., 2022.
[14] Hebel-Sela, Hameiri, and Halperin, in press; Wagner-Egger, Bangerter, Delouvée, and Dieguez, 2022.
[15] Ecker et al., 2022.

provided to them, for example, because the information is not accessible to them. Or they may not like the information the experts are providing them, for instance, because it may have far-reaching implications for how they like to live their lives.[16] People may also have developed a genuine hatred for the elite and other power holders who are able to control or impact important parts of their lives.[17] In short, in many different circumstances, people look to authorities to give them answers and directions about where to go with their lives. When these authorities do not deliver satisfying answers in return, then people may turn to other sources of information. This can then include what is commonly viewed of as misinformation or unwarranted theories of secret and malevolent conspiracies of the elites against them.

Now, we know from the literature on the fair process effect that this effect is there in large part because it involves the fair and respectful communication by important authorities, who thereby convey that they value your concerns and that you matter as a person.[18] Furthermore, the fair process effect is even more important under conditions of uncertainty[19] and when things are tough.[20] Thus, I think that perceived procedural justice constitutes one important mechanism that can counter the occurrence of strong conspicuous thoughts that arise among large groups of people.

Again, I emphasize that conspiracy thinking involves many different variables. Furthermore, as noted earlier, it is of pivotal importance that authorities engage in sincere forms of fair treatment. This also involves communicating in just ways the reasons for certain decisions that were made. Furthermore, regarding scientific expertise this includes conveying in a clear and very accessible way what scientific insights reveal and what scientists do not yet know. Moreover, both genuinely fair treatment by authorities and accessible scientific dissemination is not as widely available as we often think or want it to be.

Whatever the exact processes involved, and notwithstanding the important differences between the various theories out there, the result of people falling for conspiracy thinking often includes a steady moving away from ideas grounded in reality to beliefs that are much more detached from reality.[21] As a result, it is difficult to falsify conspiracy theories once people

[16] Sprinzak, 1991, 1995. [17] Van den Bos, 2018.
[18] Lind and Tyler, 1988; Tyler and Lind, 1992.
[19] Van den Bos, 2001b; Van den Bos and Lind, 2002. [20] Brockner, 2010, 2016.
[21] See, for example, www.conspiracychart.com/.

have started to believe in these theories. Furthermore, adhering to extreme opinions can be quite nice, because it can make you feel smart about yourself. Moreover, extreme opinions, and people who communicate these opinions, can be entertaining. Indeed, some narratives told by conspiracy theories are often perceived as interesting, exciting, and attention-grabbing. Such entertaining appraisals are positively associated with belief in them.[22] In contrast, more mundane explanations for certain events can be viewed as quite boring.[23]

Variation in conspiracy beliefs can be accounted for with two dimensions: The first regards partisan and ideological identities, while the other is composed of antisocial orientations, such as narcissism,[24] Machiavellianism, psychopathy, and acceptance of political violence. Conspiracy beliefs also group together by substantive content, such as those regarding partisan actors or science and medicine.[25]

Political orientation is also often linked with beliefs in conspiracy theories. For example, Republicans and conservatives are viewed as more likely to believe in conspiracy theories than Democrats and liberals.[26] Evidence for this proposition might not be as strong as initially believed. Instead, the strength and direction of the relationship between political orientations and belief in conspiracies seems to be dependent on the characteristics of the specific conspiracy beliefs employed by researchers and the sociopolitical contexts in which those ideas are considered.[27]

Related to this, it is important to distinguish between generalized worldviews suspecting conspiracy at play (conspiracy mentality) and specific beliefs about the existence of a certain conspiracy (conspiracy theory). In contrast to measures of beliefs in specific conspiracy theories, those of conspiracy mentality are more stable and less influenced by ideological or convictions or political orientations.[28]

For now, it is my assumption that cognitive rigidity plays an important role in the development of conspiracy mentality and conspiracy beliefs[29] and that various individuals and many different groups may be susceptible to at least some sort of conspiracy thinking. While some groups and social categories definitely seem to be attracted more easily to conspiracy theories than others,[30] there are many reasons why all of us may be susceptible to the lure of conspiracy thinking, at least to some extent.

[22] Van Prooijen, Ligthart, Rosema, and Xu, in press. [23] Van Prooijen, in press.
[24] Cichocka, Marchlewska, and Biddlestone, 2022. [25] Enders et al., 2021.
[26] Hofstadter, 1964. [27] Enders, Farhart, Miller, Uscinski, Saunders, and Drochon, in press.
[28] Imhoff, Bertlich, and Frenken, 2022. [29] Van den Bos, 2018.
[30] See also Jost, Baldassarri, and Druckman, 2022.

Living Online

An important question that I often get about social discontent and societal unrest is whether distrust, polarization, and conspiracy thinking have increased over the number of years. Frankly, I am not sure about this.

There are good reasons to argue that violent protests have occurred less frequently in recent decades or centuries.[31] Furthermore, it has been argued that trust in politics has decreased, but that social trust between people has not seen similar instances of decline, and that also political trust and trust in social institutions tends to go not only down, but often also up, thus oscillating between low and high levels. Lowered levels of vertical trust may attract attention from media and people in general, but perhaps this bounces back after some time.[32] Furthermore, I am not a historian. So, I need to rely on historical sources reported to me, and sometimes I find it difficult to interpret certain historical trends presented in this manner to me.

All this noted, I am concerned that, because of various reasons that have to do with both research methodology and developments in our world, we may miss growing levels of distrust, increased polarization, and strengthened conspiracy thoughts. For example, the issue of a growing number of people not taking part in trust surveys and other studies in the social and behavioral sciences is worrying to me. It seems to me that nonparticipation is not spread evenly across different groups in our world,[33] making it easy for scientists and research institutes to miss out on growing discontent and hidden levels of social unrest.[34] I find this bothersome, in part because I do not often see reflections on these issues in reports on trust, intergroup dynamics, and what people think, feel, and do in society.

In short, I am not entirely sure about the current levels of distrust, polarization, and conspiracy thinking, as compared with historical trends. What I do want to note, however, is that what has changed not so long ago is the Internet. Indeed, the Internet is now available to many of us most of the time. In particular, the introduction of modern mobile devices, such as mobile phones, led to a drastic change in how and what information we receive and how we respond to this information.

For example, it used to be the case that access to different sorts of information was much more difficult before the arrival of the Internet.

[31] Pinker, 2011. [32] Bovens and Wille, 2011.
[33] See also Henrich, Heine, and Norenzayan, 2010.
[34] See also Van den Bos, Hulst, Robijn, Romijn, and Wever, in press.

Personally, I grew up in a small village, and I relied on information brought by television, teachers, books found in the local library, and a subscription to one newspaper. All this has changed, quite often for the good. Various sources of information are now much more and much faster available than it used to be. This makes it easier to be more informed about many issues and to see (and know about) different points of view on important issues. Furthermore, with a growing demand for freely available reports of scientific studies there is reason to believe that various sorts of information will be even more rapidly available in the upcoming years.

In short, the Internet is great and has brought us many good things. However, our Internet society also comes with important disadvantages. This includes the reliance on rather unreliable sources of information, the building of snapshots of information with associated emotional responses, and the sharing of misinformation through various platforms. In science, the trend to put research findings on the Internet without proper review procedures, and not caring that much about these procedures, has worrisome aspects as well.

I propose that the Internet often facilitates unwarranted distrust, growing polarization between groups, and enhanced conspiracy thinking. Already in 1999, this issue was discussed in a now famous interview of David Bowie by Jeremy Paxman on BBC Newsnight. Bowie, an Internet pioneer, talked about the fragmentation of society that he saw as beginning in the 1970s and correctly predicted that the Internet would further fragment things away from a world where there were "known truths and known lies" toward a world where there are "two, three, four sides to every question," something that would be simultaneously "exhilarating and terrifying" and would "crush our ideas of what mediums are all about."[35] Indeed, the Internet and social media can easily lead people to start adopting exaggerated levels of distrust in social institutions, to let go of self-control, to have inflamed emotional responses, and to sympathize with attempts to break the law in order to reach their goals.[36]

To be explicit, I do not think that the Internet is the direct source of all evil in this world. But I do believe that the Internet can function as an important moderator of the appraisal process that people use to make sense of what is going on. After all, on the Internet people can easily find information that helps them to assess what is happening, what is wrong

[35] "Bowie talks to Paxman about music, drugs and the internet," BBC News video, January 11, 2016, www.bbc.com/news/av/entertainment-arts-35286749.

[36] Van den Bos, in press; see also Van den Bos et al., 2021.

about this, and what can and should be done about the injustices thus observed.[37] The next section will focus on this process in more detail.

For now, I conclude that the opinions found on the Internet, and the algorithms used in various platforms, can easily suck people into adhering to extreme beliefs, including unfounded conspiracy theories. The introduction of modern mobile phones happened only fifteen years ago or so.[38] This development, and other devices that allow quick access to the Internet, have changed dramatically our worlds and how we process information, including information about conspiracy theories. Sometimes this yields the kind of quick and emotional responses that are not the slow, scientific kind of ways that we know is good when we would like people to make informed and balanced decisions. I hope that in the next fifteen years we will learn to use the Internet more wisely and responsibly, at least some of the time. I will say more about this in the next chapter.

Making Sense of What Is Going On

People may be drawn to conspiracy theories because these frameworks promise to satisfy the desire for understanding what is going in the world. This desire is related to the need to know the truth and have clarity and certainty. This motivated searching for information is called the epistemic motivation for why people believe conspiracy theories.[39]

This motivation is important, because many people want to find causal explanations for events that happened. After all, most of us want to build up a stable, accurate, and internally consistent understanding of the world.[40] Furthermore, the motivation is especially important for people when they are curious to know what happened but do not have sufficient information to answer this question. Moreover, the need for sense making is enhanced when people feel their groups are threatened. For instance, people living through violent intergroup conflicts experience high levels of threat, which elicits the need for sense making. This sense-making process can eventually result in the adoption of conspiracy theories.[41] Also, when available information is conflicting or when events seem random, finding meaning is important and people are willing to defend their beliefs against disconfirming evidence.[42]

[37] Van den Bos, 2018.
[38] For example, the iPhone 3 was introduced in 2009.
[39] Douglas et al., 2017.
[40] Heider, 1958.
[41] Hebel-Sela, Hameiri, and Halperin, in press.
[42] Douglas et al., 2017.

Importantly, conspiracy theories may not actually help people to ultimately fulfill this motivation, but conspiracy theories have attributes that set them apart from other types of explanations for events and other worldviews that aim to provide a stable, accurate, and internally consistent understanding of the world.[43] For example, conspiracy theories posit actions that are hidden from public scrutiny, postulate the coordination of multiple actors, and are resistant to falsification, in part because they imply that people who try to debunk conspiracy theories are themselves part of the conspiracy.[44] Relatedly, conspiracy theories can protect cherished beliefs (such that vaccination is harmful or that climate change is not a serious concern) by casting doubt on scientific findings and other evidence as the product of the conspiracy.[45]

Making sense of your world is nice and can be deeply fulfilling. By offering people worldviews with meaning and purpose, conspiracy theories are rewarding. For example, conspiracy theories enable alternative realities in which perceivers can perceive themselves and their groups as important, can rationalize their beliefs and actions as legitimate, and are entertained through the opportunity to uncover a mystery in an exciting tale. These are short-term benefits that can provide people with a form of instant gratification.[46]

Conspiracy theories may have beneficial short-term psychological benefits, but in the long run can have detrimental effects on both the people believing in the theories and society at large.[47] Nevertheless, the sense-making aspect of conspiracy theories can provide people with a form of instant gratification.[48] This may be one reason why some people strongly believe in multiple conspiracy theories that – in effect – are contradictory with each other.[49] In other words, the search for information may lead to irrational thought processes.

Related to this, although conspiracy theories involve doubt and skepticism, conspiracy believers are not really more deliberative in their thinking styles. In fact, conspiracy beliefs are linked to an overreliance on intuition and a lack of reflection.[50] In fact, the main reason why people reject explanations from science seems to be a lack of critical thinking.[51] This suggests that teaching reasoning skills may be key to counter conspiracy theories.

[43] Ibid. [44] Lewandowsky et al., 2015. [45] Lewandowsky, Oberauer, and Gignac, 2013.
[46] Van Prooijen, 2022. [47] Douglas et al., 2017. [48] Van Prooijen, 2022.
[49] Zezelj and Petrović, 2022. [50] Binnendyk and Pennycook, 2022.
[51] Pennycook, Bago, and McPhetres, in press.

Much more research needs to be done on conspiracy thinking, but for now I would like to conclude that scientists need to step up and start presenting reliable and relevant insights that help people from different cultures and societies to make sense of what is going on in the world. This does not mean that people need to accept all scientific findings that are out there. After all, good science is always work in progress. Good scientists know this and act accordingly, and hence their findings should be open for discussion. It also does not mean that science is just an opinion and that we are always living in conditions about which it is impossible to find the truth.[52] Quite the contrary. The principles of modern science and research methodology, when followed conscientiously and practiced properly, can help to sooth real and genuine problems in our world. Furthermore, we need to improve the accessibility of our scientific findings. Scientists adopting the implications of the fair process effect conveyed in this book may do a good job conveying in clear and trustworthy terms what science tells us, and what we do not yet know from our scientific research projects. This may provide many people with a sense of direction and meaningfulness that may be beneficial in the short and long run for both the people and the societies in which they live.

Dealing with Threats

Another motivation that is very important for why people start believing in conspiracy theories has to do with the need to feel safe, secure, and to have at least some control over things that are happening around us. This is called the existential motivation for conspiracy theories.[53]

Quite often, searches for information are motivated by people's existential fears. We can be consciously aware of our fears, but these fears can also have an unconscious influence on what we think, feel, and do. It is important for all people to feel safe and secure in their environment and to exert some control over the environment as autonomous individuals and as members of collectives.[54] People turn to conspiracy theories when these needs are threatened. For example, people who lack control over their progress toward goals that are important to them may be attracted to conspiracy theories because these theories offer them the opportunity to reject official narratives and can give them a feeling that they possess an alternative account that provides meaning and direction.[55]

[52] See also Garrett, 2017; Lewandowsky, Ecker, and Cook, 2017. [53] Douglas et al., 2017.
[54] Tetlock, 2002. [55] Goertzel, 1994.

People indeed are likely to turn to conspiracy theories when they are anxious[56] and feel powerless.[57] Furthermore, conspiracy beliefs are strongly related to a lack of sociopolitical control or lack of psychological empowerment.[58] Moreover, conspiracy beliefs are heightened when people feel unable to control outcomes and are reduced when their sense of control is affirmed.[59]

Furthermore, times of crisis and uncertainty may trigger existential fears, and psychological needs are likely to be particularly frustrated. People who feel uncertain, out of control, or threatened often start looking for ways to cope with difficult circumstances. Conspiracy theories might seem to offer some relief. For example, conspiracy theories often promise to reduce uncertainty because they provide a simple explanation for a complex event. These theories also tend to promise giving back a feeling of control, or to make people feel better about themselves because they know things that other people do not know.[60]

Conspiracy theories hold a promise to make people feel safer by reducing or neutralizing important threats.[61] However, there is little evidence that believing in conspiracy theories does indeed make people feel better. If anything, conspiracy theories appear to make people feel worse. For example, after reading about conspiracy theories, people tend to feel less powerful and experience higher levels of uncertainty. Believing in and spending a lot of time reading about conspiracy theories may therefore not alleviate people's feelings of frustration, and instead make them feel more frustrated.[62] Furthermore, people often believe in conspiracy theories to address feelings of anxiety, but these beliefs only amplify the negative experience of anxiety, uncertainty aversion, and existential threat. This creates a self-reinforcing cycle, leading people to become even more motivated to strongly believe in some sort of conspiracy theory.[63]

In short, the evidence obtained thus far suggests that conspiracy beliefs likely do not have beneficial consequences, but may even reinforce the negative experience of anxiety, uncertainty aversion, and existential threat.[64] Perhaps the fair process effect may yield a more functional approach to handling our existential fears. After all, being treated in genuinely fair and just ways by people who matter to you and who signal that you, in turn, matter to them may really help to manage your personal

[56] Grzesiak-Feldman, 2013. [57] Abalakina-Paap, Stephan, Craig, and Gregory, 1999.
[58] Bruder, Haffke, Neave, Nouripanah, and Imhoff, 2013.
[59] Douglas et al., 2017; Van Prooijen and Acker, 2015. [60] Douglas et al., 2017.
[61] Bost and Prunier, 2013. [62] Douglas et al., 2017; Van Prooijen, in press.
[63] Liekefett, Christ, and Becker, in press. [64] Ibid.

uncertainties and existential fears.[65] Thus, uncertainty management by means of the fair process effect may be more fulfilling than adhering to conspiracy theories that may not uphold their promises to make sense of the world and address existential threats.

Belonging to Unique Groups

We all are social animals who want to identify and feel positive about ourselves and the groups to which we belong.[66] Besides the desire to obtain and maintain a positive image of ourselves and the need to belong, we also want to be unique, both as an individual and with respect to the groups with which we identify.[67] Affiliating with conspiracy theories can fulfill all these important needs: When we embrace a certain conspiracy theory, there is the promise to feel good about ourselves because we identify with a group that uniquely has discovered the truth that thus far was a secret to most other people and groups. We can label this as the identification motivation for conspiracy theories.[68]

While conspiracy theories may offer benefits to those who believe in them, they can also foster intergroup conflict and threaten democracy.[69] For example, exposure to conspiracy theories decreases trust in social institutions, even if the conspiracy theories are unrelated to those institutions.[70] It also causes extreme dissatisfaction with politicians and scientists.[71] Furthermore, conspiracy theories can erode social capital and social cohesion in our societies.[72]

One of the reasons why these negative effects exist is because people may start to believe in conspiracy beliefs for defensive reasons. Conspiracy theories are therefore particularly appealing to people who find the positive image of themselves or the group with which they identify to be threatened.[73] For example, people start to believe more strongly in conspiracy theories once they have been excluded from important groups.[74] Furthermore, conspiracy theories have the tendency to be very positive about people believing in the theories by blaming others for the negative

[65] Van den Bos, 2009; Van den Bos, Heuven, Burger, and Fernández Van Veldhuizen, 2006; Van den Bos and Miedema, 2000.
[66] Aronson, 1972; Baumeister and Leary, 1995; Douglas et al., 2017; Tajfel and Turner, 1979; Turner, Hogg, Oakes, Reicher, and Wetherell, 1987.
[67] Brewer, 1991; Snyder and Fromkin, 1980. [68] Douglas et al., 2017.
[69] Robertson, Pretus, Rathje, Harris, and Van Bavel, in press. [70] Einstein and Glick, 2015.
[71] Jolley and Douglas, 2014. [72] Douglas et al., 2017.
[73] Cichocka, Marchlewska, and Golec de Zavala, 2016. [74] Poon, Chen, and Wong, 2020.

outcomes that the believers have obtained. For instance, the group of people believing in the conspiracy theory is seen as competent and moral but as sabotaged by powerful and unscrupulous others.[75]

Again, although people are clearly attracted to conspiracy theories when their social motivations are frustrated, it is not at all clear that adopting these theories is a fruitful way to fulfill these motivations. In fact, it is plausible that believing strongly in these theories is not only a symptom but also a cause of the feelings of alienation and anomie: feelings of personal unrest and lack of understanding of the social world.[76] Related to this, conspiracy belief is associated with personal and collective narcissism: People believing in conspiracy theories tend to have an inflated view of themselves and the groups to which they belong.[77] While not all aspects of conspiracy theories need to be wrong or worrisome, there is accumulating evidence that those who believe in conspiracy theories are at risk for various antisocial outcomes, harming both themselves and broader society.[78]

Importantly, because conspiracy theories can fulfill important social functions and social needs, understanding the social motivations that attract people to conspiracy theories may be key to creating successful interventions to reduce socially harmful conspiracy theories.[79] Personally, I think that, when trying to combat conspiracy theories, we often start by focusing on epistemic motivations. For example, we begin to argue that those who believe in conspiracy theories rely on faulty information. However, many conspiracy theories and people who believe in these theories are resistant to this tactic. Furthermore, this approach will not soothe people's existential fears. I therefore think that quite often a preferable approach is to pay appropriate attention to the social dynamics of conspiracy thinking. Social motivations may be critical to fully understanding why people believe in conspiracy theories, how they spread, and what scholars and policy makers might do to mitigate the spread of conspiratorial information.[80]

The fair process effect may be one important social dynamic that may come into play when trying to combat conspiracy theories. For example,

[75] Douglas et al., 2017.
[76] See, for example, Abalakina-Paap, Stephan, Craig, and Gregory, 1999; Douglas et al., 2017; Durkheim, 1897.
[77] Cichocka et al., 2016; Sternisko, Cichocka, Cislak, and Van Bavel, in press.
[78] Robertson et al., in press; see also Imhoff et al., 2022; Jolley, Meleady, and Douglas, 2020; Van der Linden, 2015; Van Prooijen, 2018.
[79] Robertson et al., in press. [80] Ibid.

when a relative, good friend or colleague, or someone else starts to believe strongly in a conspiracy theory, consider treating this person in fair and just ways, communicating to them that you will still be there for that person and want to include the person in your group, community, and society. Perhaps "agreeing to disagree" on some important information underlying your and the other person's opinions, but still being there for that person as a family member, friend, colleague, or member of your community or society, may work here. Fulfilling the social motivations of the person involved, and not excluding the person from your group, may work, for example, in the long run when the person may start to have some doubts on some aspects of the conspiracy theory or may have second thoughts about those who defend the theory in a strong or aggressive manner. Being there for that person, and continuing to engage in procedurally fair behaviors toward the person, may be one way in which some people may open up at some point.[81] This brings me to the topics of Part V of this book.

[81] See also Emily Reynolds, "How should you talk to a loved one who believes in conspiracy theories?," British Psychological Society website, July 6, 2021, www.bps.org.uk/research-digest/how-should-you-talk-loved-one-who-believes-conspiracy-theories.

PART V

Overcoming Societal Discontent

CHAPTER 9

Opening Up

Thus far, this book discussed how people perceive that they have been treated in fair manners and what effect these perceptions can have on their reactions. In doing so, the fair process effect was used as a framework to explore some implications that may be used when trying to prevent unwarranted distrust, polarization, and conspiracy thinking in society. In this last part of the book, I would like to focus on a general theme underlying the fair process approach put forward in this book. I will examine this theme in the current chapter. In Chapter 10, I discuss important loose ends of things that we do not know yet and which need to be examined further in order to prevent and counter unfounded levels of distrust, polarization, and conspiracy thinking.

The theme that I would like to explore in this chapter is the issue of how we can open up ourselves in such a way that we adopt critical-constructive attitudes toward what is happening in our world. This includes how we behave toward power holders, social institutions, and our peers. For example, I am interested in how we can strike the right balance between, on the one hand, adhering to somewhat skeptic attitudes toward those who occupy important positions of power in society and not believing everything they are saying or dictating, while, on the other hand, not overdoing our skepticism and not seeing malfunctioning or abuse of power when, in fact, there is none. Similarly, I note that social institutions sometimes underperform, or do not function properly at all, but quite often also function to improve our way of living in democratic societies.[1] How, then, can we put trust in these rather abstract agencies about which we may not have much information? Related to this, we meet many, many people in our daily lives. How can we trust these people, and the groups with which they are affiliated? How do we know they are not malicious toward us?

[1] Van den Bos, in press.

This book developed and grounded in several ways the proposition that the fair process approach may be an effective way to cope with these and other issues. Taken together, the evidence discussed throughout the book suggests that when you are able to voice your opinions, when these opinions are seriously listened to, when you are treated in polite, respectful, fair, and just ways by competent and professional people who treat you as an important member of your group and as a person who matters in society, you are more likely to open up and combine critical attitudes with positive attitudes toward powerful people, the organizations they work for, and other people in your environment.[2]

Again, I note explicitly that the fair process effect will not work all the time and in all types of circumstances, in part because there are clearly instances in which others have malevolent attitudes toward us or malfunction in other ways. So, we should not be naïve about the severity of realistic conflicts[3] and dysfunctionality of being anti-everything out there.[4] This noted, I think the fair process effect can be used as a framework to explore how we can open up and try to prevent the occurrence of exaggerated distrust, heightened polarization, and strong beliefs in unfounded conspiracy theories. In what follows, I examine this proposition and the process of opening up in more detail. To this end, I will discuss the possible implications of the fair process approach to people's thoughts, their feelings about themselves and others, and ways of trying different behaviors that may help to prevent exaggerated distrust, dysfunctional polarization, and unfounded conspiracy thinking from arising.

Think Differently: Stay Away from Abstractions

Obviously, many different aspects play an important role in whether people open up toward others. One aspect that is very important involves people's thoughts and thought processes. We humans are incredibly smart, and it is very easy for us to construct rather abstract thought constructions about what is going on in our world and who is to blame for what aspects are going wrong in this world. Quite often, it would be good when we would stay away from these abstractions and instead focus more on constructive-critical conversations with concrete persons, preferably in face-to-face interactions in which we coordinate carefully what we are

[2] Lind and Tyler, 1988; Tyler, 2006; Weisburd et al., 2022; see also Estaji and Zhaleh, 2022.
[3] See, for example, Sherif, Harvey, White, Hood, and Sherif, 1961.
[4] See, for instance, Schermer, 2004; Staub, 1989.

saying and what impact this has on the persons with whom we are interacting.

In contrast, when those who have power over us and/or think differently from us are rather abstract figures whom we do not meet personally and about whom we do not know much, then communication with and about these persons can become inflamed quite easily, leading to the usage of strong emotional terms, sometimes combined with insufficient control on the language we use, especially when we hold very different views and communicate about severe conflicts. Not seeing the other persons as concrete individuals and reduced awareness of the others' feelings plays an important role in these types of emotional and abstract communications.[5] This is particularly the case when we respond on the Internet, which easily creates conditions that can lead to disinhibited online communications, in part because social cues are lacking that are available in face-to-face communication.[6]

We may also try to start understanding and accepting that other people may think differently from us. Sometimes we overestimate how much others think similarly as we do. Furthermore, when others think differently, this may be annoying at times, but does not necessarily imply that these others are wrong or immoral. Thus, my recommendation is to start processes of opening up by understanding that other people think differently, and to accept that. For example, in conflicts of political polarization, we often miss that the other parties really view reality in different terms than we do. For example, one party may focus strongly on the threats they see to their local community or their country, whereas another party sees mainly violations of human rights and democracy. Understanding what is important to others is often a good starting point for successful negotiations and communications between the different parties involved.[7]

Furthermore, it is my assumption that flexible minds make more moderate views, leading us to trust people whom we do not know well, compared with when we adopt more inflexible mindsets and more extreme views.[8] Bringing ourselves to adopt more flexible mindsets thus can help to reduce biased information processes.[9] Learning to be receptive to opposing views and thus train our willingness to access, consider, and evaluate

[5] Kiesler, Siegel, and McGuire, 1984; Kiesler and Sproull, 1992; Kiesler, Zubrow, Moses, and Geller, 1985.
[6] Suler, 2004; see also Van den Bos and Lind, 2013.
[7] See, for example, Hirschberger, in press; Kahn, Björklund, and Hirschberger, 2021.
[8] Winter, Scholl, and Sassenberg, in press; see also Van den Bos, 2018.
[9] Sassenberg, Winter, Becker, Ditrich, Scholl, and Moskowitz, 2022.

contradictory opinions in a relatively impartial manner may be conducive in this respect.[10] Some individuals tend to be better at this, in part because they are more open to new experiences.[11]

Another implication is that we need to train ourselves better in critical thinking skills. For example, the main reason why some people reject scientific evidence seems to be a lack of critical thinking. Data suggest that more sophisticated thinkers from different political parties are generally more accurate in evaluating evidence and accepting the evidence on its merits. This suggests that teaching reasoning skills is a key element in processes of depolarization.[12]

Furthermore, always try to analyze what is going on and what information people have available and are responding to. Focus on providing information that is both of high quality and easy to process. And then focus on those who want to learn and are inclined to adhere to cooperative intentions of working together with others.[13] Moreover, arrange that opposing views are listened to and embraced, rather than frowned upon and responded to with annoyance. Make structural arrangements[14] so that opposing views are seriously taken into consideration, not dismissing these views too soon. But be also prepared to defend scientific truths and always be willing to explain these views and how they were derived, thus striking the right balance between openness and quality of views.[15]

And, in all this, try to stay away from big, abstract concepts. Perhaps using such kinds of concepts may be appreciated within your own group, but quite often they convey some notion of moral superiority, and this is not always good when we sincerely attempt to prevent distrust, polarization, and conspiracy thinking.

Accept Your Feelings: Sometimes You Are a Sugar Cookie

I am not suggesting that the suggestions presented in this book are always easy to follow. Quite the contrary. This is also because when we come into contact with others who think and behave in fundamentally different ways than us, we tend to find this to be an annoying and aversive experience.[16] Thus, it is my assumption that frequently our first responses are quite

[10] Minson and Chen, 2022.
[11] Goldberg, 1993; McCrae and Costa, 1989; McCrae and John, 1992.
[12] Pennycook, Bago, and McPhetres, in press. [13] Van den Bos and Lind, 2013.
[14] Such as appointing someone in your team to play the role of devil's advocate; see, for example, Janis, 1972; Janis and Mann, 1977.
[15] See also Van den Bos, 2018. [16] Van den Bos, 2018.

negative toward those individuals and groups who hold fundamentally different opinions about issues that are important to us. We also tend to respond negatively toward those who distrust us or agencies that we trust or would like to trust. And we also can become irritated quite quickly when we hear someone telling stories that we consider to be conspiracy theories. These negative feelings are certainly there. And it is quite human to experience these emotions and see these reflected in our initial responses.

However, I also propose that when time allows and when we are sufficiently motivated, we can overcome our initial negative reactions, and respond in more open ways in situations of conflict and polarization.[17] Again, this is not always easy and does not always occur, but it can be done. We humans are capable of overcoming many aversive situations and associated feelings, once we make the opening-up process an important goal that can then motivate our behavior. This is especially the case when important authorities treat us in a fundamentally fair and just, respectful and dignified manner.[18]

Of course, fair and just treatment is not always there; sometimes clearly unfair and unjust treatment is a part of life. Some training programs teach people to cope with this. In a famous speech, Admiral William McRaven describes how the US Navy Seals teach this principle to their young military students.[19] McRaven, once one of the Navy Seal students, describes how several times a week, instructors would line up the class and do a uniform inspection. This inspection process was exceptionally thorough. When you failed the uniform inspection, there was a severe penalty: "The student had to run, fully clothed, into the surf zone and then, when wet from head to toe, roll around on the beach until every part of his body was covered with sand. The effect was known as a 'sugar cookie.' You stayed in that uniform the rest of the day, cold, wet, and sandy."[20]

Importantly, at some point during training it seemed that no matter how much effort the student put in, it was considered not good enough and the instructors would find something wrong. The result was that the student ended up being cold, wet, and sandy for the rest of the day. Although this was fundamentally unfair, McRaven tells his audience that this was an important purpose of the training program: "Sometimes no

[17] For a grounding of this assumption, see Van den Bos, 2018, Chapter 6. [18] Van den Bos, 2009.
[19] The speech can be found in McRaven, 2017, and in clips on the Internet (see, for example, also www.youtube.com/watch?v=pxBQLFLei70).
[20] McRaven, 2017, p. 115.

matter how well you prepare or how well you perform you still end up as a sugar cookie. It's just the way life is sometimes."[21]

Training people to cope with unfair treatment can be very hard. For instance, the recipients of the unfair treatment may need time to accept their unfortunate fate.[22] It may be less difficult to do this when at other times you are treated in fair and decent manners as a worthwhile person who matters in important groups and society. For example, training to deal with unfair treatment in the military or sport teams tends to work better when the trainers inform their trainees why they were subjected to unfair treatment in the training program. For example, McRaven tells about how when he was in training, one of his drill instructors asked him: "Do you have any idea why you are a sugar cookie this morning?" When McRaven indicated that he had no clue, the instructor responded: "Because . . . life isn't fair and the sooner you learn that the better off you will be."[23]

What I take from this is that a fair process climate[24] in which people normally are treated in fundamentally fair and just manners will lead them to feel secure enough to cope with the aversive feelings that they will experience at other times, for example, when life throws them a curveball, when things are rough, when there are basic conflicts with other people and other groups, or when they are subjected to unfair experiences for training purposes.[25] Creating appropriate structural arrangements can also be helpful in this respect. For instance, as a team leader you can appoint someone in your team to play the role of devil's advocate. In this way, you ensure that a person in your team is responsible for putting forward diverse opinions. This can prevent groups from shielding themselves too quickly from other viewpoints. This can work very well, especially in times of stress and turmoil,[26] particularly when you inform your working group why this person is placed in this position and thus will be coming forward with viewpoints that initially may lead the other team members to be annoyed and to experience aversive feelings.

Work on Empathy and Compassion: We Are All Bonobos

Besides looking at our own thoughts and feelings, we also need to pay appropriate attention to what others are thinking and feeling. What is

[21] McRaven, 2017, p. 116. [22] See also Lerner, 1980. [23] McRaven, 2017, p. 39.
[24] Boudrias et al., 2010; Brimbal, Bradford, Jackson, Hartwig, and Joseph, 2020; Colquitt, Noe, and Jackson, 2002.
[25] Brockner, 2010, 2016; McRaven, 2017; see also Jackson and Delehanty, 2006.
[26] See, for example, Janis, 1972; Janis and Mann, 1977.

more, sometimes we need a bit of encouragement to really understand how other people are perceiving the world and what role their feelings play in their responses to their perceptions. To this effect, it can help when we try to adopt an empathic and compassionate mindset regarding what others are thinking, feeling, and experiencing. To be sure, while doing this, important constraints can be put into place. For example, you may point to the rule of law, democratic principles, and even ideals that you derive from notions such as the scientific enlightenment as boundary conditions of what you find acceptable and what flexibility of behavior you have.[27] This noted, it is my assumption that genuinely trying to think through and feel what other humans are experiencing is key for the prevention of too much distrust, polarization, and conspiracy thinking in this world. "Love your neighbor like you love yourself" may be good starting point for this, something that might be easier to do when you have been treated in fair and just manners by people who are important in your community and society.

Sometimes it is thought that empathic and compassionate responses to those who are truly different from ourselves is not really possible and that we are, deep down, fundamentally self-centered and egocentric by nature. I indeed believe that we all have a selfish core and that this will show when we are too busy with ourselves, for example, when we focus on the personal uncertainties that we encountered or are preoccupied with other personal issues.[28] However, I also think that we can correct for this egocentrism and can adjust our responses to others accordingly so that we open up and act in much more cooperative ways.[29]

Perhaps it is also time that we rephrase how we think of ourselves and others. For example, the biologist Frans de Waal studies expressions of empathy and cooperation among higher primates that share a host of traits with us. Not all of these parallels are appealing, De Waal argues. The chimpanzee, for example, can be as vicious and manipulative as any human. However, our noblest qualities – generosity, kindness, altruism – are as much a part of our nature as are our baser instincts. After all, we share them with another primate: the lesser-known bonobo. As genetically similar to humans as the chimpanzee, the bonobo has a temperament and a lifestyle vastly different from those of its genetic cousin. Where chimpanzees are aggressive and territorial, bonobos are gentle and loving.[30]

[27] Van den Bos, 2018. [28] Van den Bos et al., 2006.
[29] See, for example, Van den Bos, 2018; Van den Bos and Lind, 2013; Van den Bos et al., 2011.
[30] Chimpanzees are also hierarchical and bonobos are erotic animals. Indeed, sex for bonobos is as much about pleasure and social bonding as it is about reproduction; De Waal, 2005.

Indeed, bonobos have rich, social emotional lives and are known for their kind and friendly character.[31] De Waal proposes that while the parallels between chimp brutality and human brutality are easy to see, the conciliatory bonobo is just as legitimate a model when we explore our inner core. This is related to our desire for fairness and morality.[32]

Interestingly, in social animals such as bonobos, the fast detection of others' emotional expressions promotes swift and adequate responses, which is crucial for the maintenance of social bonds and ultimately for survival as a group. Specifically, protective and affiliative behaviors are pivotal in bonobo society and therefore attract immediate attention in this species, more so than in humans.[33] Perhaps we all can try to act more like bonobos? Perhaps we can learn to be more strongly oriented toward what others are experiencing? Indeed, behavioral, cognitive, and social neuroscience studies indicate that humans can come to understand the emotional and affective states of others. Key to this empathic orientation are shared representations of what is happening. Other important issues include people's ability to monitor and regulate cognitive and emotional processes to prevent confusion between themselves and others.[34]

I know that compassion with other people who are really different from us is not easy. Furthermore, empathy can be a volatile emotion, drifting away quite rapidly. And although most of us want to work together with others most of the time, not all of us want this, and we do not want to cooperate all of the time.[35] Thus, empathy with and compassion for those who are really different from you tends to be very hard. Nevertheless, I do think that there are good reasons to argue that the fair process effect can increase empathetic, compassionate, and cooperative orientations toward others. When you have repeatedly been treated in fair and just manners, and hence know that you are a person who matters and who is valued by those who are important to you and to your community and society, this contributes to a buffer that you can use to open up, at least temporarily, toward those who hold other viewpoints and adhere to other worldviews. During this open time slot, chances are there that you will find some basis to work cooperatively with those who are so different from you, for example, because psychologically you are more removed from your

[31] Kret, Jaasma, Bionda, and Wijnen, 2016. [32] De Waal, 2005. [33] Kret et al., 2016.
[34] Decety and Jackson, 2006.
[35] Van den Bos, 2018; Van den Bos et al., 2006, 2011; Van Lange, Otten, De Bruin, and Joireman, 1997.

personal concerns and societal positions.[36] This may be conducive to the prevention of heightened distrust, polarization, and conspiracy thoughts.

Try Different Behaviors: It Is Time for a Change

Sometimes when I look at the amount of distrust, polarization, and conspiracy thinking in our modern world, I sigh and think of the famous line by the Rolling Stones in "Sympathy for the Devil" that it is time for a change, signaling the need for structural change in society. I am also reminded of the David Bowie song "Changes," which reflects on how you can achieve personal change, defy critics, and step out on your own. Furthermore, I tend to believe in the somewhat optimistic assumption from which the field of social psychology works, namely that, under the right circumstances, personal change can lead to social change in how people and groups of people interact with each other, and ultimately this can contribute to positive change in the functioning of society at large.

An exercise that is sometimes used in social psychology to explore personal and social change is to start behaving in different ways toward groups and then see what follows from that. For example, Elliot Aronson, Tim Wilson, and Robin Akert make use of the self-fulfilling prophecy and ask you to examine some of your own schemas and expectations about social groups, especially groups you do not particularly like. You can ask yourself why you do not like members of this group. Perhaps one reason is that whenever you interact with these people, they seem cold and unfriendly. And you might be right. Perhaps they do respond to you in a cold and unfriendly fashion, but perhaps this has something to do with them responding to the way you have treated them.[37]

Aronson and colleagues then ask you to counteract this action-reaction pattern of behaviors. Perhaps you can do this by finding someone who is a member of a group you dislike and start a conversation with the person. In particular, I would like you to imagine that this individual is a friendly and kind person who deserves to be treated in a fair and just manner. Do not go overboard, but really treat the person in a fair and just way. Treat the person with respect, listen to the person's opinions, and act as if you expect the person to be extremely pleasant and friendly. Now, observe the person's reactions. Perhaps you will be surprised by how positively the person responded to you. Perhaps people you thought were inherently cold and unfriendly behave in a warm and friendly manner in response to

[36] See also Rawls, 1971. [37] See Aronson, Wilson, and Akert, 2013, p. 55.

the fair and just way you have treated them. If this does not work on your first encounter with the person, try it again on one or two later occasions. In all likelihood, you will find that the fair process effect often does breed friendly and positive responses,[38] and note how I adapted their exercise to the central issue of this book, the fair process effect.

Another type of intervention makes use of moral exemplars. For example, Sabina Čehajić-Clancy and Michal Bilewicz note that solving intergroup conflicts and building cooperative and trusting relations is quite a challenge. One of the reasons why this is the case has to do with the fact that people tend to evaluate other groups in negative ways, often perceiving members of those groups as morally bad. Such perceptions of immoral groups form the basis for hate and discrimination and reduce the likelihood for social change, conflict prevention, and successful intergroup reconciliation. The moral exemplar intervention technique aims to challenge these beliefs by exposing people to stories about individuals who have risked their lives to save the lives of other social groups' members or who showed exemplary moral behavior in other ways.[39]

The moral-exemplar intervention relies on the idea of exposing people to new and unexpected information. The focus on moral behavior by members of groups whom you do not expect to behave in this manner may work especially well. After all, morality is an important criterion on which individuals and groups are evaluated. Furthermore, in intergroup conflicts, people tend to perceive other groups as predominantly immoral and evil. The main idea underlying the moral-exemplar intervention is that changing judgments about group morality can be an important way to effectively facilitate prosocial intergroup responses.[40]

Interestingly, both self-fulfilling prophecy[41] and moral exemplar interventions[42] make use of good and moral behaviors that are unexpected. The implication could well be that when you unexpectedly behave in fair and just ways toward other groups,[43] and when important members of those other groups unexpectedly engage in genuinely fair and just behaviors,[44] this may work quite well, in part because others and you were not expecting this and because fair treatment is such a powerful signal of trustworthiness, which may help people to open up toward groups to whom they normally do not open up.

[38] See Aronson et al., 2013. [39] See Čehajić-Clancy and Bilewicz, 2021. [40] Ibid.
[41] Aronson et al., 2013. [42] Čehajić-Clancy and Bilewicz, 2021. [43] Cf. Aronson et al., 2013.
[44] Cf. Čehajić-Clancy and Bilewicz, 2021.

For Yourself and Others (and Ultimately Society and a Better World)

Obviously, trying to overcome unwarranted distrust, polarization, and conspiracy thinking is a daunting task, and we may easily be overambitious in trying to pursue this task. Nevertheless, it is something we need to try, for ourselves, for other people, and ultimately for society at large and a better world.

A recent inventory of concrete interventions showed that attempts to reduce anti-democratic attitudes, anti-elite thinking, and animosity between political groups can work quite well. The project, spearheaded by Jan Voelkel, tested twenty-five interventions. Impressively, twenty-three of the interventions worked.[45] My grouping together the most successful interventions led me to believe that at least three types of interventions are important when we want to counter distrust, polarization, and conspiracy thinking.

One type of intervention focuses on fostering respect and sympathy for democratic principles. For example, democratic misperceptions can be combated by presenting participants with data showing that rival partisans do not hold as strong of anti-democratic attitudes as participants assumed.[46] People can also be taught about the dangers of the collapse of democratic principles. For instance, in an interesting approach, participants are asked to watch a video about countries where democracy collapsed. The video explains what the rulers tried to do to stay in power by using violence and violating electoral rights. This approach can lead people to want to protect democracy, albeit not when their own political party is targeted directly in the video.[47] Adopting the essence of the fair process effect may contribute to people's respect and sympathy for the rule of law and democratic principles.[48]

Another type of intervention focuses on the elite. In these interventions, participants may be asked to watch a video with a Democrat and a Republican candidate who are running against each other to be governor. Each candidate emphasizes that all votes will be counted and that they will honor the peaceful transfer of power. Both candidates explain that this is what their county is built on. Participants thus learn that office seekers on

[45] Voelkel et al., 2022.
[46] Braley, Lenz, Adjodah, Rahnama, and Pentland, 2022; Voelkel et al., 2022.
[47] Clayton and Willer, 2021; Voelkel et al., 2022. [48] Van den Bos, 2018.

both sides respect democratic elections.[49] This approach fits with one of the key reasons why the fair process effect works so well in many circumstances: Societal authorities acting in genuinely fair, just, and respectful ways foster social cohesion and societal cooperation.[50]

A third type of intervention concentrates on establishing good, meaningful, and positive contact between members of different groups. In these studies, participants are invited to watch a video that shows people with opposing political views working together, bonding, and deciding to spend time together despite their political disagreements.[51] Or, when watching another video, people learn that the extent to which Democrats and Republicans agree is much more than they expected. The viewers thus learn that partisans are not nearly as different as they typically think.[52] Indeed, intergroup contact can effectively reduce prejudice between majority and minority group members,[53] especially when people from different groups need to work together on an overarching goal that they cannot complete with their own group only.[54] It is essential that the contact between the members of the different groups is positive and meaningful.[55] And from our review of the fair process effect, it seems likely that fair and just interactions between different groups are one of the key mechanisms that can foster positive, meaningful, and successful intergroup contact.[56]

I also propose that being treated in genuinely fair and just ways by authorities and other important people may inoculate you, at least to some extent, against distrust and conspiracy thinking.[57] After all, what we have discussed in this book is reason to believe that the fair process effect can create a buffer that empowers you to deal with negative information and keep on functioning without the need to rely on strong levels of distrust or conspiracy thinking.[58] Furthermore, forgiving other people and reconciliation with others is something that you do not only for noble or altruistic

[49] See https://tinyurl.com/3fwvvhe6; accessed February 14, 2023, from Stanford University's website www.strengtheningdemocracychallenge.org/winning-interventions; see also Voelkel et al., 2022.
[50] Tyler, 2006, 2013; Tyler and Blader, 2000; Tyler and Lind, 1992.
[51] See https://tinyurl.com/2hd6zyy5; accessed February 14, 2023, from Stanford University's website www.strengtheningdemocracychallenge.org/winning-interventions; see also Voelkel et al., 2022.
[52] See https://tinyurl.com/6rht98vc; accessed February 14, 2023, from Stanford University's website www.strengtheningdemocracychallenge.org/winning-interventions; see also Voelkel et al., 2022.
[53] Allport, 1954. [54] Sherif, 1958.
[55] See, for example, Crisp and Turner, 2012; Paolini et al., 2014; Zhou, Page-Gould, Aron, Moyer, and Hewstone, 2019.
[56] See, for example, Lind and Tyler, 1988.
[57] See also Roozenbeek, Van der Linden, Goldberg, Rathje, and Lewandowsky, 2022.
[58] See, for example, Brockner and Wiesenfeld, 1996; Koper, Van Knippenberg, Bouhuijs, Vermunt, and Wilke, 1993.

reasons but also for yourself. For example, forgiving a person for a certain misconduct gives you the opportunity to stop thinking about the misconduct you noticed in others' behaviors, and you then can go on with your life. This may be easier following experiences of genuinely fair and just treatment in other domains of your life. Indeed, the fair process effect lowers people's need for revenge and heightens their willingness to forgive and engage in processes of reconciliation.[59]

All this being said, I hasten to note that we should not forget what we do not yet know about the fair process effect and the solid prevention of unwarranted distrust, polarization, and conspiracy thinking. The caveats surrounding our current knowledge about these issues are the subject of the next chapter.

[59] Aquino, Tripp, and Bies, 2006; see also Staub, Pearlman, Gubin, and Hagengimana, 2005; Van Tongeren et al., 2015.

CHAPTER 10

The Future

In this book, the fair process effect was used as a mechanism to explore what we possibly can do in our attempts to prevent and overcome unwarranted levels of societal distrust, heightened levels of polarization, and unfounded conspiracy thinking. I think that on the basis of fifty years of research on the effect,[1] we are on safe and firm grounds when formulating our assumptions on the working and implications of the fair process effect. This noted, I do want to point out in no uncertain terms that many things that I put forward in this book are in need of further reflection and thorough testing. As with any good scientific research project, we never should be satisfied about what we think we know. This also applies to the science of the fair process effect.

This last chapter of the book will discuss some important issues that I think are needed to better understand the fair process effect and its implications for unsettling conditions of societal unrest and discontent. This discussion is relevant not only for the fair process effect but perhaps also for our understanding of distrust, polarization, and conspiracy thoughts. I note explicitly that what I discuss in this chapter and in this book is by no means exhaustive, but is indicative of some future lines of reflection and future research. The issues that I examine in this chapter focus on future research that needs to be done on the fair process effect. The findings from this research, combined with future theorizing about the effect, should stimulate our understanding of the psychological processes that are important for the working of the effect. One important issue also concerns that we should stay away from equating positive effects of fair treatment with negative effects from unfair treatment. Indeed, the psychology of the fair process effect can be quite different from the psychology

[1] See, for example, Brockner, 2010; Folger and Cropanzano, 1998; Lind and Tyler, 1988; Tyler, 2006; Walker, LaTour, Lind, and Thibaut, 1974.

of an *un*fair process effect,[2] and we should not treat these effects as if they are all the same.

I also emphasize that we should incorporate possible downsides of the psychological approach to the fair process effect and societal discontent presented in this book. In particular, the systemic context in which the effect is assumed to work, and the possible maintaining of the status quo, are issues that we need to be aware of with any psychological approach. This also includes my psychological account of the fair process effect and its possible associations with dampening of distrust, polarization, and conspiracy thinking. The book closes with some reflections on how to move forward and start setting up sound, solid, balanced, practical interventions that I hope can yield better societies and a better world.

Conducting Research

In science, and the application of scientific insights, we always should treat our findings, and the insights that we think follow from them, as what they are: preliminary findings and temporary and incomplete insights. In other words, proper scientific modesty is always in order. I explicitly want to state that this is also the case with respect to the science of the fair process effect, and my perspective on what I think are the implications that follow from this scientific research.

One thing we need to be aware of is that research on the fair process often has been conducted in survey studies. As a result, we now know much about the relevance of perceived procedural fairness and justice in various different contexts, such as important interpersonal, work, legal, and societal settings. However, given the fact that many surveys involve respondents filling out a questionnaire at one moment in time, what results from these studies are associations between the different variables that were measured in the questionnaire. Survey data can yield very insightful insights into patterns of respondents' answers, but these associations are what they are: associations. Importantly, these correlational relations between respondents' answers do not tell us anything about causal relationships between different variables.[3]

In research on the fair process *effect*, we ideally would like to know whether perceived procedural fairness truly influences other variables, rather than hanging together in some unspecified way with these variables. For example, we want to determine whether it is the case that when a judge

[2] Folger, 1984. [3] Van den Bos, 2020a.

listens carefully to what a litigant says, this positively influences how fairly the litigant thinks they have been treated by the judge, and how satisfied and compliant they will be with the judge's decision. In general, respondents' answers to survey questionnaires do not show conclusively that one variable (such as the judge's procedural fairness) affects another variable (such as the litigant's satisfaction and acceptance of the outcome of the court trial). Thus, the correlational quality of survey research means that you cannot rule out alternative causal mechanisms, and this typically constitutes an important limitation of survey studies.[4]

The correlational aspect of many studies discussed in this book is important when we want to understand and ultimately deal with unwarranted levels of distrust, polarization, and conspiracy thinking in our communities and societies. For example, it is often difficult to establish with certainty what is cause and effect regarding conspiracy thinking, making it hard to ascertain the influence of exposure to conspiracy theories on beliefs, and the impact of conspiracy theory beliefs on behaviors. Thus, it is also possible that individuals' predispositions, worldviews, and identities predict their exposure to conspiracy theories, their willingness to believe conspiracy theories, and their behaviors simultaneously.[5]

From the beginning of the research on the fair process effect, experiments have been done on the effect. For example, experiments conducted in laboratory settings showed that procedures and treatment that are considered to be fair and just tend to lead to more satisfaction with outcomes and acceptance of these outcomes in simulated court trials and fabricated work settings.[6] However, field experiments that combine high levels of both external and internal validity and use real-life circumstances and a variety of research participants are relatively rare in the field of procedural justice.[7] It also would be good when researchers establish the relationships between different variables in their conceptual models, and then ascertain in carefully controlled studies the causal quality of these relationships,[8] thus determining in multiple studies the validity and relevance of their models, and the practical implications that follow from them.

There is also a relative lack of studies that use in-depth, qualitative interviews to examine procedural justice and its meaning and relevance to

[4] Ibid. [5] Uscinski, Enders, Klofstad, and Stoler, 2022.
[6] See, for example, Folger, 1977; Van den Bos, Lind, Vermunt, and Wilke, 1997; Walker, LaTour, Lind, and Thibaut, 1974.
[7] Hulst, 2017; Van den Bos, Hulst, Robijn, Romijn, and Wever, in press.
[8] Spencer, Zanna, and Fong, 2005.

different people.[9] Indeed, the issue of how well the current insights on the fair process hold up in different research populations and different research contexts need to be examined in more detail in future research.[10] This also includes the testing of the Perceived Procedural Justice Scale presented in Chapter 2, and how well this scale holds up when contextualized to fit the perceptions, feelings, and behaviors of different research respondents in different settings.

Future research should also focus on the differences *and* similarities between constructs such as fair treatment, procedural justice, and doing the right thing. For now, it is my impression that these issues reflect constructs that are different in important aspects, but also share many similarities. Future research is needed to examine the differences and similarities between these constructs and how they relate to what people think, feel, and do in society. In short, we know a lot about the fair process effect and its possible implications, and we need to know[11] much more about this exciting effect by means of future research, thorough theorizing, and ingenious applications.

Examining the Psychology of the Fair Process Effect

One issue that has received a lot of attention, and that always will be in need of future research and more in-depth theorizing, is the psychological processes that are driving the fair process effect. We know a lot about the effect, but we should stay humble and realize that much more needs to be learned by means of thorough conceptual reasoning and robust empirical research. Thus, I note explicitly that studying the psychological processes that are underlying the fair process effect, and the social contexts in which the effect takes place, is and remains pivotal.

For example, as mentioned earlier, there is some evidence that sometimes people use unfair procedures to conclude that they are not to blame for what happened to them, potentially stopping people from learning from their mistakes. For instance, sometimes when people receive an unfavorable outcome, they start looking for causes that explain why they received this outcome. Unfair procedures provide an opportunity to attribute unfavorable outcomes to external causes, whereas fair procedures do not. As a result, people may react more negatively following fair as opposed

[9] But see, for example, Ansems, Van den Bos, and Mak, 2020; Finkel, 2001.
[10] See also Henrich, Heine, and Norenzayan, 2010.
[11] I am noting this as a researcher who wants to do more research on the exciting fair process effect.

to unfair procedures. This reversal of the fair process effect is indeed sometimes found, for example, when unfavorable outcomes strongly instigate attribution-seeking processes.[12]

These findings suggest that sometimes unfair procedures have nice aspects. More generally, this indicates that people can use perceived procedural unfairness in a self-protective way such that unfair procedures can help them to conclude that they are not to be blamed for what happened when they are looking strongly for reasons that they are not at fault. However, these effects are not always found[13] and may be short-lived, as they may stop people from learning from their mistakes and reflecting on how they can improve their performance in upcoming situations. Clearly, we need to understand the possible downsides of the fair process effect better.

In studying possible caveats of the fair process effect, it may be worthwhile to realize the subjective quality of the effect. That is, in our attempts to get a better grip on the effect, it might be tempting to refer to formal procedures or legal, philosophical, political, or other normative reflections on the fair process and procedural justice. These accounts can indeed be very meaningful for understanding the fair process effect, but in essence the effect is a psychological effect, something that is in the eye of the beholder and in this way influences what the beholder thinks, feels, and does.

Related to this, researchers may be tempted to introduce new criteria to the research literature that people may use when talking about perceived procedural justice. Indeed, it may well be the case that in some studies some research participants may use many criteria and show detailed responses to measures of perceived procedural justice.[14] However, these nuances and details may not always be replicated by other research studies, thereby potentially damaging one of the current strong points of the fair process effect, namely, the empirical robustness of the effect in various contexts among different research participants. Thus, I think that those in the field should be working toward distinguishing a sufficiently large number of criteria that people use in many different research contexts, while not going overboard and not introducing too many criteria of procedural fairness and justice. The Perceived Procedural Justice Scale presented in Chapter 2 is an attempt to come up with a detailed measure, while simultaneously not overdoing it and trying to focus on criteria that will matter to most people most of the time. Again, I note the importance of tailoring and contextualizing the measure of perceived procedural justice

[12] Van den Bos, Bruins, Wilke, and Dronkert, 1999; see also Brockner, 2002.
[13] See, for example, Ansems, Van den Bos, and Mak, 2021.
[14] See, for example, Colquitt, 2001.

to the research context, participants, culture, country, and language under consideration.

It is also important to realize that the key mechanism through which the fair process effect seems to work is trust.[15] That is, a core assumption of the current book is that various judgments of trust are raised substantially when you are treated in genuinely fair and just ways and in respectful and polite manners by important and competent authorities who ask for your opinions, are interested in these opinions, and convey that you matter to them and society. This increases trust in these authorities, the organizations and institutions that they represent, and the group, community, or society of which they are core members. There are several instances of discontent in our societies, and sometimes for good reasons. While perceived procedural justice certainly cannot solve each and every of these sources of discontent, it may certainly help to counter the spreading of unwarranted distrust, polarization, and conspiracy thinking. One of the reasons why this is the case has to do with the effects of perceived procedural fairness and justice on the forming of solid trust in authorities and society, boosting morale, and empowering you to take some punches that life can throw at them. Thus, the association between perceived procedural justice and trust is key to understanding the fair process effect. I therefore recommend always studying the association with trust in conceptual reasoning and empirical study on the fair process effect.

Furthermore, informational uncertainty seems to have a special role in the forming of procedural fairness judgments,[16] and personal uncertainty seems to be especially important as a source that can strengthen the fair process effect on judgments such as trust in authority and society.[17] Other variables such as state and trait self-esteem and legitimacy need to be examined in future research as well.[18]

Disentangling Fair and Unfair Process Effects

A crucial topic that stands out when we want to understand the fair process effect is that it is important to realize that, in fact, we are talking about two different effects: the *fair* process effect and the *unfair* process effect.

[15] Tyler and Huo, 2002; Van den Bos, in press.
[16] Van den Bos, 1999.
[17] Van den Bos and Lind, 2002; see also Syme, 2014.
[18] See, for example, Brockner et al., 1998; Koper, Van Knippenberg, Bouhuijs, Vermunt, and Wilke, 1993; Vermunt, Van Knippenberg, Van Knippenberg, and Blaauw, 2001; Wolfe, Nix, Kaminski, and Rojek, 2016.

That is, the literature on perceived procedural fairness and justice tends to focus on the positive effects on people's reactions following their experiences of fair and just treatment.[19] Thus, research on the *fair* process effect concentrates on how fair and just procedures encourage positive issues such as cooperation in groups,[20] obedience to the law,[21] trust in authorities,[22] and trust in law.[23]

Another approach in the justice literature examines the negative effects of people's responses after experiencing unfair and unjust events.[24] Thus, research on what I call here the "*unfair* process effect" examines how unfair and unjust treatment leads to a response on negative variables such as people's resentment,[25] employee aggression,[26] and radicalization into violent extremism.[27]

The current book aims to combine both traditions in that it focuses on the positive effects of fair and just treatment on a decrease, preferably prevention, of negative variables that are associated with societal discontent, most notably unwarranted distrust, polarization, and conspiracy thinking.

While doing so, I want to note explicitly that it is important not to gloss over differences between the various issues and topics discussed in this book. Thus, I argue that it is pivotal not to equate the fair process effect with the unfair process effect. The two effects are different, are perceived differently, and lead to different responses regarding what people think, feel, and do. For example, when you perceive someone acting in unfair and unjust manners, this tends to convey a lot of information about the person, making you want to stay away from the person or protest against the person's behavior. In contrast, when a person treats you in fair and just ways, you tend to open up, not only toward that person but possibly toward other people as well. Furthermore, in general, negative information, such as unfair and unjust treatment, tends to have stronger effects on human responses than positive information, such as fair and just treatment.[28]

I also want to stipulate that what I tried to bring together under the umbrella term "societal discontent" contains many different responses and instances of human behavior in various societies. I hope the current treatment of distrust, polarization, and conspiracy thinking may help future researchers and practitioners.

[19] See, for example, Lind and Tyler, 1988; Tyler, 1986, 1999. [20] Tyler and Blader, 2000.
[21] Tyler, 2006. [22] Tyler and DeGoey, 1996. [23] Tyler and Huo, 2002.
[24] See, for instance, Folger, 1984, 1993. [25] Folger, 1987. [26] Folger and Skarlicki, 1998.
[27] Van den Bos, 2018.
[28] Folger, 1984; see also Baumeister, Finkenauer, and Vohs, 2001; Peeters, 1971.

My aim in this book has been to focus on what I view as negative issues in our societies, and to see what we can learn from the science of the fair process effect – and, to a lesser extent, the unfair process effect – regarding the possible dampening and prevention of unfounded distrust, sharpened polarization, and over-the-top conspiracy beliefs. In this way, this book adopts a positive view on what we can do to make our world a better place. In particular, my focus has been on what you can do as a person: as a citizen, civil servant, judge, police officer, politician – in short, as an individual and social human being showing your cooperative intentions and your capacities to overcome negative mindsets and exhibit more positive responses, to the outer world and thereby to yourself and others around you.

This approach thus adopts a perspective that for some may appear to be a bit naïve. Indeed, research on the fair process effect is often met with skepticism, pointing at the role of instrumental and self-centered notions that would reflect what humans really do. I admit that I also started out researching the fair process effect quite skeptically. But when I saw the data of study after study indicating the strong and robust qualities of the effect in many different contexts, I became convinced about the important role the fair process effect can play and does play in our lives. This is not to rule out that instrumental issues,[29] self-centered behaviors,[30] and realistic conflicts[31] do not impact what we do. Quite the contrary. But these issues might be less important than we at first sight are inclined to think.[32] In contrast, the fair process effect might be stronger than we often tend to assume initially.

Noting Normative Issues with the Status Quo

When studying how the fair process effect may help to counter societal discontent, in particular, extensive levels of distrust, polarization, and conspiracy thinking, it is crucial to stay vigilant about the normative issues this implies. After all, the fair process effect as studied here focuses on what individuals think, feel, and do. This individualistic notion can obscure fundamental errors in the societal system. Thus, we need to be aware that sometimes not only is the fair process effect needed, but systemic change may be needed as well, sometimes even radical change.

[29] Thibaut and Walker, 1978. [30] Van den Bos, Peters, Bobocel, and Ybema, 2006.
[31] Sherif, Harvey, White, Hood, and Sherif, 1961. [32] Miller, 1999.

Furthermore, the key mechanism of how the fair process effect is assumed to work operates through social authorities. Thus, treatment that is perceived to be fair and just leads to trust in social authorities and from there follow positive things, such as the prevention of unwarranted distrust, heightened polarization, and strong beliefs in unfounded conspiracy theories. Indeed, the fair, just, and respectful behavior of authority figures who are important in our group, community, and/or society can influence our thoughts, feelings, and behaviors in powerful ways. Quite often we are very good at seeing through people who are malintentioned against us. Thus, we tend to notice when what seem to be fair and just procedures are actually a scam.[33] This noted, sometimes there are malicious authorities who fool us with their fake intentions and their bogus engagement in what seems to be fair and just treatment toward us.

Moreover, not only can we misperceive fair and just treatment; sometimes authorities are not to be trusted at all. This can be because of motivated behavior by these authorities or cognitive underperformance by these authorities. Thus, both malicious and stupid behaviors occur, and quite often happen more frequently than we like. Importantly, we can come to acknowledge this too late, in part because we often want to trust those who hold power over us. For instance, it takes a lot of energy and cognitive capacity to keep a distrusting attitude toward power holders, and many of us do not have the time or energy to tax our cognitive system in this way. Thus, we should be aware that sometimes we fool ourselves into trusting some power holders who in fact cannot be trusted or at least should be treated with a bit more skepticism than we initially treated them. Indeed, a solid social psychological account of the fair process effect includes attention to both psychological processes and power issues in our societal systems. The fair process effect operates in the context of the societal system, and we should keep a keen eye on the systemic issues and power differentials between authorities and recipients of genuinely or ostensibly fair treatment and just procedures.[34]

Related to this, we can ask whether reduced distrust always is a good thing. Perhaps a certain amount of skepticism and distrust against some authorities is warranted at times. Furthermore, isn't polarization sometimes needed to create necessary societal change? And is conspiracy thinking indeed unfounded or are there good reasons why we should suspect the

[33] Greenberg, 1990.

[34] Sidanius, Levin, Federico, and Pratto, 2001; Sidanius and Pratto, 1999; see also Jost and Banaji, 1994.

elite and other authorities of not being well intentioned toward us or more generally not doing the right thing? We should be aware of these issues, while simultaneously not overdoing it and seeing sources of distrust, reasons for polarization, and indications of warranted conspiracy thinking when there is, in fact, no strong evidence for these notions of societal discontent.

I also want to state explicitly that a pivotal normative issue concerns what is too much. When can we speak of "unwarranted" discontent, "unfounded" distrust, "too much" polarization, and "very strong" beliefs in conspiracy theories? When does it become too much? Who decides that? At a bare minimum we should not be drawing conclusions too easily and too hastily that there are clear indications of "too much" discontent. For example, perhaps these indications are signs that things need to change in our societal system. This is especially important, because what entails fair and just treatment often is viewed through the eyes of the societal system. Perhaps this is one reason why the fair process effects sometimes is weaker among those with very little power in our societies.[35]

We also should not be naïve about several issues that are at play in our modern world. For example, some social institutions are underperforming, dysfunctional, or even malfunctioning toward the greater social good.[36] This can exacerbate conflict, solidify gridlock in society,[37] and lead to quite warranted distrust in these institutions and the authorities affiliated with them.[38]

Furthermore, some individuals may have self-centered motives that are diametrically opposed to our interests. Some people also do not shy away from furthering distrust, polarization, and conspiracy thinking in society for their own instrumental reasons. These can include monetary benefits from actions against the societal system and psychological outcomes as feeling valued as leaders of the conspiracy pack. The Internet can facilitate these behaviors quite easily.

It can be good to take a normative standpoint against things that are wrong in our world. Personally, I seek this through a respect for democratic principles and the rule of law in open and liberal societies, while simultaneously not being blind to the risks that can associated with these notions.[39] In line with Karl Popper's defense of tolerance and the open

[35] Overheul, Rijnhout, and Van den Bos, 2022; see also Brockner et al., 2001.
[36] Van den Bos, in press. [37] Hartman et al., 2022. [38] See also Fallon, 2018.
[39] Van den Bos, 2018.

society, I think that it is good to realize that in order to maintain a tolerant society, the society must retain the right to be intolerant of intolerance.[40] Doing so by adopting the responsible usage of the fair process effect as a key operationalization of tolerance, respect, fairness, and democracy may be one way to create societal systems that better help those in need.

Developing Practical Interventions

This is not primarily a practical book, heavily oriented toward developing practical interventions. This would go beyond the scope of this book and, quite frankly, beyond the scope of my expertise. This noted, I do think that the various insights put forward in this book can be used by other people in future projects to develop, test, implement, and evaluate these kinds of interventions.

I would applaud the kinds of interventions that use the fair process effect to stimulate the groups, communities, and societies in which we live. After all, when you want to understand complicated issues such as distrust, polarization, and conspiracy thinking, you need to try to alter these issues in our world.[41] After what we have seen in this book, the fair process effect may well be one of the mechanisms that can work to prevent and perhaps change some of these issues of societal discontent. If future projects indeed will reveal some of the usefulness of the fair process effect to counter what sometimes may go wrong in our societies, this would imply that the social psychology of the fair process effect does have meaningful input and perhaps could contribute towards a better world. This would mean that we have come a long way since the first experiments on the effect.[42]

Personally, I think that combining the insights on what the fair process effect entails, with psychological processes underlying distrust, polarization, and conspiracy thinking, and normative principles such as respect for democracy and the rule of law, could well yield meaningful, concrete, and practical interventions.

Thus, I propose that any good intervention should include properly contextualized aspects of procedural justice as mentioned in the Perceived Procedural Justice Scale introduced in this book: Am I able to voice my opinions and are my opinions seriously listened to? Am I treated in a polite manner and with respect? Am I treated fairly and in a just manner? Are the

[40] Popper, 1945. [41] Lewin, 1939. [42] Walker, LaTour, Lind, and Thibaut, 1974.

people with whom I interact competent, and are they professional in their conduct? Am I treated as an important member of my group and as a person who matters?

When these criteria of perceived procedural justice are related in meaningful ways to judgments such as trust in important authorities and social institutions, I suggest this can lead to the successful prevention of distrust, polarization, and conspiracy thinking.

This is especially the case when proper attention is being paid to core psychological principles that are pivotal in these indications of societal discontent. Importantly, do not label every indication of distrust as a sign of "unwarranted" distrust. Furthermore, we should continue to acknowledge differences between various groups and also differences between different people who are members of one group. Moreover, we should distinguish different motivations regarding conspiracy thinking and take all of these motivations seriously: People's need to know (epistemic motive) is related to but not the same as their need to feel secure (existential motive). Similarly, people's need to belong (identification motive) should not be equated with the former two motives. It is my impression that the last motive may be worthwhile to explore in our attempts to counter conspiracy thinking. And, again, we should not be so quick to use the label of "conspiracy" thinking. We should dig in deeper and think twice before using such a label.

Furthermore, we should not be shy and stay away from developing our normative standpoints. We all tend to have normative perspectives on issues such distrust, polarization, and conspiracy thinking. I think it is important to make our assumptions explicit. And that is why I conveyed my reliance on respect and working hard for the proper and improved functioning of democracy and the rule of law. This also implies that we should be quite adamant in our analyses and attempts to counter instances where democratic principles are violated, the rule of law is considered to be irrelevant, or when social institutions do not function well enough to create meaningful democracy and a proper operation of the rule of law.[43]

I repeat that the fair process effect certainly is a robust effect, but it is not a cure that can repair everything that is wrong in this world. This noted, the effect is powerful and tends to be found in many contexts in which it is studied. This makes the fair process effect very relevant as a potential intervention technique. With the appropriate caveats, social interventions

[43] Van den Bos, 2018, in press.

can work quite well.[44] I am not pessimistic that this also can be the case with the fair process effect, especially when we make use of the insights put forward in this book, including the proper contextualization of the effect in the setting in which it is supposed to operate and when we keep on understanding and exploring the social psychology of the fair process effect and its relationship with our attempts to overcome distrust, polarization, and conspiracy thinking.

[44] See also Hartman et al., 2022.

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