

Appraisal-Tendency Framework: Emotions and Perceptions of Social Injustice

Sarah Tucker
Middle Tennessee State University

Theresa DePriest
Middle Tennessee State University

Stacey M. Stremic
Middle Tennessee State University

Alexander T. Jackson, Ph.D.
Middle Tennessee State University

Satoris S. Howes, Ph.D.
Oregon State University

Abstract

This research project studies the Appraisal-Tendency Framework. Specifically, it observes whether emotional dispositions, such as sadness-proneness or trait anger, affect judgements made on whether a situation is just or unjust. In addition, this study also presents the question of whether gender impacts perceptions of fairness. All participants will be recruited from a Southeastern University. This study consists of two parts. For part one, all participants will complete an online survey to assess individual differences. Part two contains the experimental manipulations. This study uses a 2 (emotional induction) x 2 (gender of actor) design. For the emotional induction, participants will be randomly assigned to view a clip meant to induce feelings of sadness or feelings of anger. All participants will be asked to write a short response of a real-life emotional experience matching the emotion of the condition they are assigned to. They will then be randomly assigned to view a clip of an unjust situation carried out by either a female professor or a male professor. The outcome of this study could provide organizations with a better understanding of why certain emotions relate to certain judgements and decisions.

Summary

Background

Research has focused on how decision making can be influenced by emotions. The Appraisal Tendency Framework (ATF) describes how and why emotions affect judgement and decisions. The ATF is based on emotion connecting to an immediate cognitive response or appraisal, leading to an effect on judgement (Lerner, Han & Keltner, 2007). The ATF lays out how certain emotions incited by one event can carry over and affect judgments and decisions in a later, separate event (Lerner & Tiedens, 2006). Certain emotions can relate to either appraising control in an event as situational or as personal. In other words, an event could be viewed as either due to some situational factor or due to some other individual present during the event. Certain emotions have been tied to specific response patterns. For example, the negative emotion of sadness is related to blaming an event on some situational factor. Conversely, the negative emotion of anger is related to blaming an event on a another individual. Judgements of fairness can be affected by these emotions based on appraisals of control (Lerner, Han & Keltner, 2007). While the ATF insists that it applies to both state and trait affect, there are not many studies that address this. Individual differences in emotional dispositions may affect judgements.

Studies of gender and its effect on perceptions of fairness have found connections with female participants judging situations harsher and as more unethical when they are acted out by another female. Similarly, studies have shown that men set other men to higher standards of fair practices (Franke, Crown & Spake, 1997). This study could potentially provide organizations with a better understanding of why certain emotions or dispositions relate to certain judgements and decisions. It could also spur further studies of if and how gender relates to perceptions of fairness within organizations.

H1: Sadness will positively correlate with perceptions of fairness.

H2: Anger will positively correlate with perceptions of unfairness.

Research Question 1: Does gender impact perceptions of fairness?

Participants

Participants will be undergraduates recruited from a Southeastern University.

Materials and Procedure

In part one of the study, participants will complete measures to assess individual differences which include: positive and negative affectivity (PANAS X); guilt-proneness (GASP); locus of control (Rotter's I-E Scale); empathy (TEQ); equity sensitivity (ESI); and the Big Five (IPIP). Part two will use a 2 (emotional induction) x 2 (gender of actor) design. Participants in the anger condition will watch a video clip from the movie *My Bodyguard* and then be asked to write about a time they experienced anger in their own life. Participants in the sadness condition will watch a video clip from the movie *The Champ* and be asked to write about a time they experienced sadness in their own life. All participants will take the PANAS-X again. Participants will then be randomly assigned to view a short clip showing either a male or female professor signing student scholarship checks based on student scholarship applications. It is made clear that one student in the clip is under rewarded, while another is over rewarded. However, it will not be clear whether this under and over rewarding was intentional or done by mistake. Participants will then be asked to complete questions assessing their perception of fairness in the scholarship clip.

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