Geographic Differences in Reactions to Perceived Injustice at Work

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This study tested geographic differences in the relationships between three forms of justice (distributive, procedural, and interactional) and three outcomes (job satisfaction, pride in one's employer, and intent to quit) in a large nationally representative sample. Consistent with previous research, all three forms of justice were significantly related to all three outcomes. As predicted by the culture of honor theory, people in the Southern United States responded more negatively to perceived injustice than did people outside the South.

INTRODUCTION

The relationships between perceived injustice and employee reactions are perhaps the most commonly studied in all of organizational behavior. This may be true because justice has relatively large relationships with a variety of important outcomes (Cohen-Charash & Spector, 2001; Colquitt, Conlon, Wesson, Porter, & Ng, 2001; Colquitt, Scott, Rodell, Long, Zapata, Conlon, & Wesson, 2013). Despite the size of these effects, it has become apparent that some people react more strongly to injustice than do others. Whereas some research has explored the origins of these differential reactions, there are many gaps yet to be filled. Some researchers, for example, have studied cultural differences as moderators of various justice-outcome relationships (e.g., Kim & Leung, 2007). But researchers in this tradition often equate "cultural" with "national" differences and, therefore, ignore cultural variation with national boundaries.

The purpose of this study was to examine the relationships between justice perceptions and employee attitudes in different geographical settings theorized to represent different cultural norms within the United States. Specifically, there is a growing body of research that suggests people in the Southern region of the United States adhere to a "culture of honor" (Nisbett & Cohen, 1996). The culture of honor includes a belief that insults to one's honor and threats to one's social identity should be met with anger and even physical violence. This body of research suggests that people in the South may be more sensitive to injustice in general, and more sensitive to workplace injustice in particular.

BACKGROUND AND HYPOTHESES

Management scholars and practitioners are interested in justice perceptions because they predict such a wide array of important outcomes. Over the years, researchers have discovered that different forms of justice have different causes. Distributive justice, for example, is the perceived fairness of one's outcomes. It is predicted by judgments regarding the extent to which decision outcomes follow certain allocation norms such as equity, equality, or need (Adams, 1965; Deutsch, 1985). Procedural justice, on

the other hand, is predicted by the extent to which decision makers follow rules that are consistent, free from bias, and correctable (Leventhal, 1980; Thibaut & Walker, 1975). Perceptions of interactional justice are largely predicted by the extent to which decision makers provide information about their decisions and treat people with respect and dignity (Bies & Moag, 1986). Despite their varied causes, different forms of justice tend to have similar effects on attitudes and behaviors (Cohen-Charash & Spector, 2001; Colquitt et al., 2001; Colquitt et al., 2013). Among other things, perceived injustice leads to lower job satisfaction, lower organizational commitment, fewer organizational citizenship behaviors, and higher turnover.

To explain differential reactions to distributive injustice, Huseman, Hatfield, and Miles (1987) proposed that some people are especially sensitive to underpayment inequity (i.e., entitleds), whereas others are especially tolerant of underpayment inequity (i.e., benevolents). Less attention has been given to differential reactions to procedural and interactional injustice, but some recent studies suggest that personality traits such as trust propensity, risk aversion, and trait morality moderate the relationship between these forms of injustice and behavioral outcomes like task performance and counterproductive behavior (Colquitt, Scott, Judge, & Shaw, 2006). Skarlicki, Folger, and Tesluk (1999) found that people react more negatively to interactional injustice when they are high in negative affectivity and low in agreeableness. Likewise, van Hiel, de Cremer, and Stouten (2008) found that the relationship between procedural fairness and cooperation was stronger among those high in neuroticism.

Another stream of research has used cultural differences to explain differential reactions to injustice. In a recent review of the literature, Leung (2005) describes a number of studies with surprisingly consistent findings. Specifically, people in countries that embrace low power distance values exhibit stronger negative reactions in the face of injustice. Power distance is typically conceptualized as "the extent to which a community accepts and endorses authority, power differences, and status privileges" (Carl, Gupta, Javidan, 2004, p. 513). In a collection of four studies, for example, Brockner and his colleagues (Brockner et al., 2001) found that people from low power distance cultures (e.g., the United States, Germany) exhibited stronger negative reactions to lower levels of procedural justice (i.e., voice) than people from high power distance cultures (e.g., China, Mexico, Hong Kong). It appears as though people in low power distance cultures are more likely to expect fair treatment from people in positions of power.

Likewise, Li and Cropanzano (2009) produced meta-analytic evidence that North American studies find stronger correlations between justice and outcomes than do studies conducted with East Asian samples. Specifically, North Americans exhibited stronger correlations between distributive justice, organizational commitment, and turnover intentions. With respect to procedural justice, North Americans experiencing injustice exhibited lower job satisfaction and greater turnover intentions than East Asians. Taken together, these studies fit a relational theory of justice in which perceived injustice is experienced as a threat to one's social identity (Blader & Tyler, 2015). In cultures where an individual's social identity is particularly valued, threats to social identity are more likely to produce stronger reactions.

One of the weaknesses of the existing research on cross-cultural psychology is the likelihood that cultural differences may exist within nations (Cohen, 2009). Thus far, researchers studying cultural differences in justice perceptions have assumed that differences between nations were more meaningful than differences within nations. A growing body of research, however, suggests that regional differences in the United States may predict stronger reactions to injustice among people in the Southern United States. Nisbett and Cohen (1996) describe an assortment of evidence suggesting that people in the South are more likely to respond aggressively when confronted by an insult or anything else that might pose a threat to one's social identity. This "culture of honor" has been used to describe a wide variety of regional differences including homicide patterns and tolerance for violence when defending self or property (Cohen & Nisbett, 1994; Cohen, Nisbett, Bowdle, & Schwarz, 1996).

According to Nisbett and Cohen (1996), the culture of honor is rooted in the economic histories of the earliest settlers of the South. When Scotch-Irish herders settled in the South, they brought with them a willingness to defend their property and establish a reputation to match. Thus any threat to one's social identity would trigger an especially defensive (and often violent) reaction. Regardless of the source, a

variety of studies show that people in the South respond more aggressively to insults. More recently, the relational nature of the culture of honor was supported among professional baseball pitchers (Timmerman, 2007). Pitchers from the South were more likely hit opposing batters, but only in situations where their social identities may have been threatened (e.g., after a teammate was hit by a pitch, following a homerun).

Thus far, the culture of honor has not been used to explore regional differences in work outcomes or work attitudes. But given the findings in other fields, the following hypotheses are proposed:

> *H1: Consistent with previous research, distributive justice, procedural justice, and interactional justice will be positively related to job satisfaction and organizational commitment and negatively related to intent to leave the organization.*
> *H2: The relationship between justice and work outcomes will be moderated by region such that people in the South will react more negatively to perceived injustice than people in other regions of the United States.*

METHOD

Data Source

Participants in this study included 4,584 respondents to the General Social Survey (GSS; Smith, Marsden, & Hout, 2015). The GSS is a project of the National Opinion Research Center and is typically administered biannually. The face-to-face cross-sectional survey contains core items that are asked in every administration. It also includes items that are unique to each year. The sampling is representative of the adult population in the 48 contiguous United States. The questions necessary to test the proposed hypotheses were asked in 2002, 2006, 2010, and 2014. During these years, the response rates for the survey were 70.1%, 71.2%, 70.3%, and 69.2% respectively. The sample was 76.1% White, 49.0% female, and 37.0% were interviewed in the South. The respondents averaged 42.4 years of age, had achieved an average of 14.0 years of education, and earned an average income of $37,440 (in constant 2000 dollars).

Measures
Southern

To preserve confidentiality, respondents' locations were not identified beyond their US Census regional location. Respondents were classified as Southern if the survey interview was conducted in one of the states identified as Southern by the US Census (i.e., Arkansas, Louisiana, Oklahoma, Texas, Florida, Mississippi, Alabama, Georgia, South Carolina, North Carolina, Tennessee, Kentucky, Virginia, West Virginia, Maryland, Delaware, and Washington, D.C.). This is the same definition used in other culture of honor research (e.g., Cohen & Nisbett, 1996)

Justice

Distributive justice was measured with a single item (FAIREARN) asking respondents "How fair is what you earn on your job in comparison to others doing the same type of work you do?" Answer options ranged from 1 ("Much less than you deserve") to 5 ("Much more than you deserve"). Procedural justice was measured with a single item (PROMTEFR): "Tell me if the statement is very true, somewhat true, not too true, or not at all true with respect to the work you do. Promotions are handled fairly." This item was recoded so that high scores would indicate more perceived justice. Interactional justice was measured with a single item (RESPECT) "Please tell me whether you strongly agree, agree, disagree, or strongly disagree with each of these statements. At the place where I work, I am treated with respect." This item was also recoded so that high scores would indicate more perceived justice.

Outcomes

Job satisfaction was measured with a single item (SATJOB1) asking "All in all, how satisfied would you say you are with your job?" The responses were coded from 1 = "Not at all satisfied" to 4 = "Very

satisfied." Organizational commitment was measured with a single item (PROUDEMP): "Please tell me whether you strongly agree, agree, disagree, or strongly disagree with each of these statements. I am proud to be working for my employer." Intent to leave was measured with a single item (TRYNEWJB) asking "Taking everything into consideration, how likely is it you will make a genuine effort to find a new job with another employer within the next year?" Responses were coded from 1 = "Not at all likely" to 3 = "Very likely".

RESULTS

Descriptive statistics and intercorrelations between study variables are shown in Table 1. The strong correlations between all forms of justice and all outcomes are consistent with previous research and support Hypothesis 1. Also noteworthy is the fact that none of the justice measures or outcomes vary by region. In other words, Southerners were not more likely to perceive more (or less) justice in the workplace and they were not more likely to experience more (or less) satisfaction, commitment, or intent to leave the organization.

Hypothesis 2 was tested with hierarchical multiple regression (see Table 2). If the relationship between justice and outcomes depend on geographical region, there should be a significant interaction term after controlling for other predictors of the outcome and the main effects of justice and the particular outcome of interest. With respect to distributive justice, none of the expected interactions were statistically significant. With respect to procedural justice, the interaction with geographical region significantly predicted satisfaction and commitment, but not intent to leave the organization. Interactional justice demonstrated a similar pattern. The interaction between interactional justice and region significantly predicted satisfaction and commitment, but not intent to leave.

TABLE 1
DESCRIPTIVE STATISTICS AND INTERCORRELATIONS BETWEEN STUDY VARIABLES

	Mean	SD	1	2	3	4	5
1. Age	42.35	12.83					
2. Sex	1.51	0.50	.004				
3. Education	14.03	2.80	.043**	.047**			
4. Race	0.76	0.43	.108**	-.054**	.098**		
5. Income	37,440	36,562	.175**	-.222**	.325**	.112**	
6. Region	0.37	0.48	.011	.013	-.079**	-.119**	-.041**
7. Distributive Fairness	2.54	0.87	.057**	-.066**	.045**	.072**	.133**
8. Procedural Fairness	2.88	0.98	.006	-.071**	.077**	.069**	.099**
9. Interactional Fairness	3.29	0.66	.072**	-.009	.094**	.022	.115**
10. Job Satisfaction	3.33	0.74	.174**	.005	.080**	.110**	.136**
11. Pride in Employer	3.26	0.67	.123**	.007	.082**	.086**	.105**
12. Intent to Leave	1.55	0.77	-.262**	.015	-.056**	-.174**	-.182**

* p < .05, ** p < .01

TABLE 1 CONTINUED
DESCRIPTIVE STATISTICS AND INTERCORRELATIONS BETWEEN STUDY VARIABLES

	6	7	8	9	10	11
1. Age						
2. Sex						
3. Education						
4. Race						
5. Income						
6. Region						
7. Distributive Fairness	-.016					
8. Procedural Fairness	.017	.246**				
9. Interactional Fairness	-.017	.173**	.342**			
10. Job Satisfaction	-.026	.254**	.404**	.445**		
11. Pride in Employer	-.009	.197**	.410**	.566**	.562**	
12. Intent to Leave	.018	-.175**	-.212**	-.195**	-.399**	-.287**

* p < .05, ** p < .01

TABLE 2
REGRESSION RESULTS PREDICTING OUTCOMES

|	Outcome Variable		
	Job Satisfaction β	Pride in Employer β	Intent to Leave β
Age	.132**	.079**	-.218**
Sex	.045**	.035**	-.033*
Education	-.001	.007	.028
Income	.038**	.007	-.109**
Race	.056**	.046**	-.124**
Region	-.321**	-.297**	-.061
ΔR^2	.051**	.029**	.107**
Distributive Fairness	.137**	.050**	-.093**
Procedural Fairness	.156**	.207**	-.153**
Interactional Fairness	.359**	.438**	-.104**
ΔR^2	.260**	.358**	.055**
Distributive Fairness X Region	-.019	.006	.009
Procedural Fairness X Region	.098*	.114**	.062
Interactional Fairness X Region	.238**	.194**	-.001
ΔR^2	.004**	.004**	.000

* p < .05, ** p < .01

The specific nature of these significant interactions is shown in Figures 1-4. Figures 1 and 2 show that, as expected, Southerners react more negatively to unfair procedures than do people not in the South. Interestingly, and also as expected, the difference between Southerners and non-Southerners is apparent at the lowest levels of perceived injustice, but not at the highest levels. The culture of honor predicts that Southerners respond more negatively to social identity threats, but it does not predict that Southerners respond more positively to high levels of perceived justice. Figures 3 and 4 show a similar pattern for interactional justice. People in the South react more negatively to disrespect in the workplace with respect to satisfaction and commitment. As with job satisfaction, the differences are most apparent at the lowest levels of perceived disrespect.
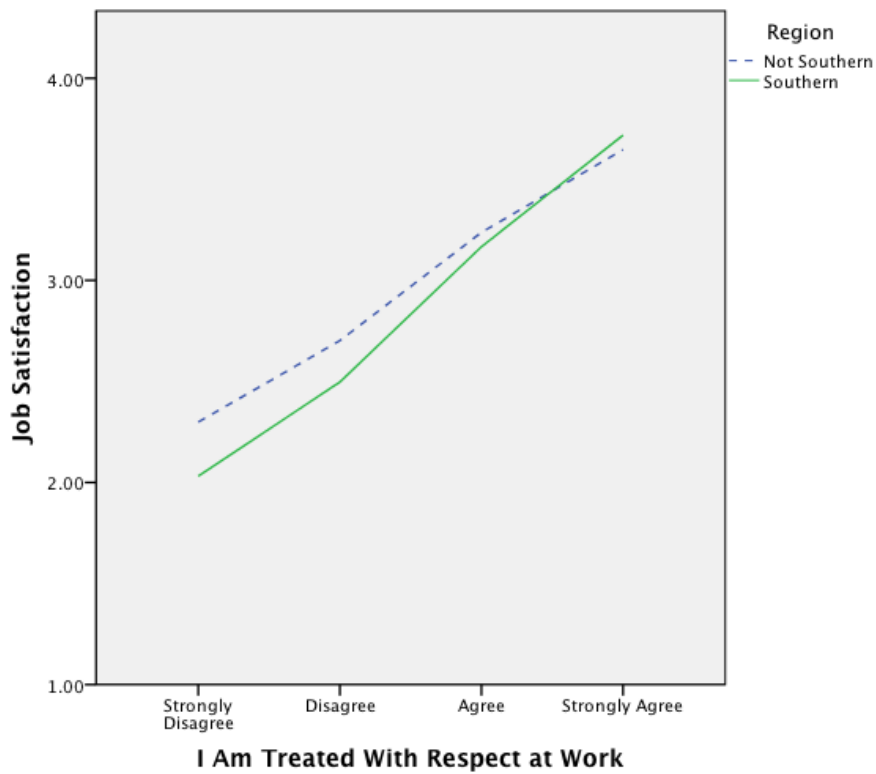
FIGURE 1
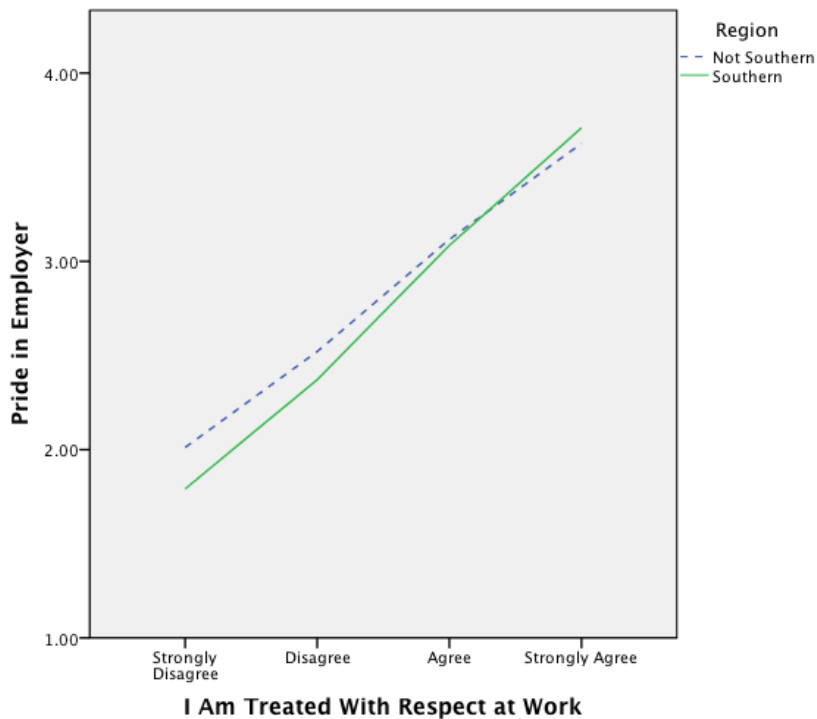**PROCEDURAL FAIRNESS AND JOB SATISFACTION MODERATED BY REGION**
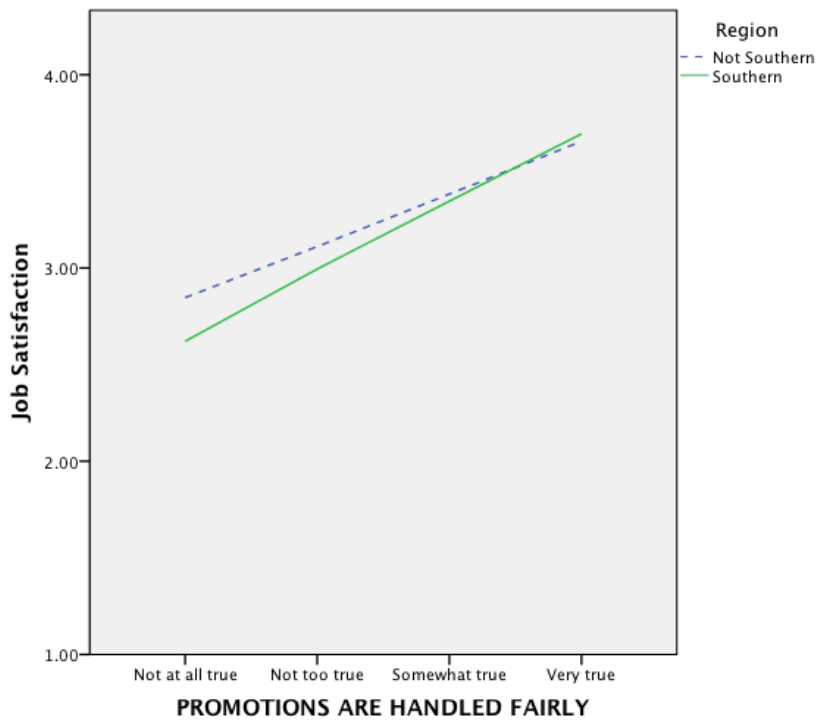
FIGURE 2
PROCEDURAL FAIRNESS AND PRIDE MODERATED BY REGION
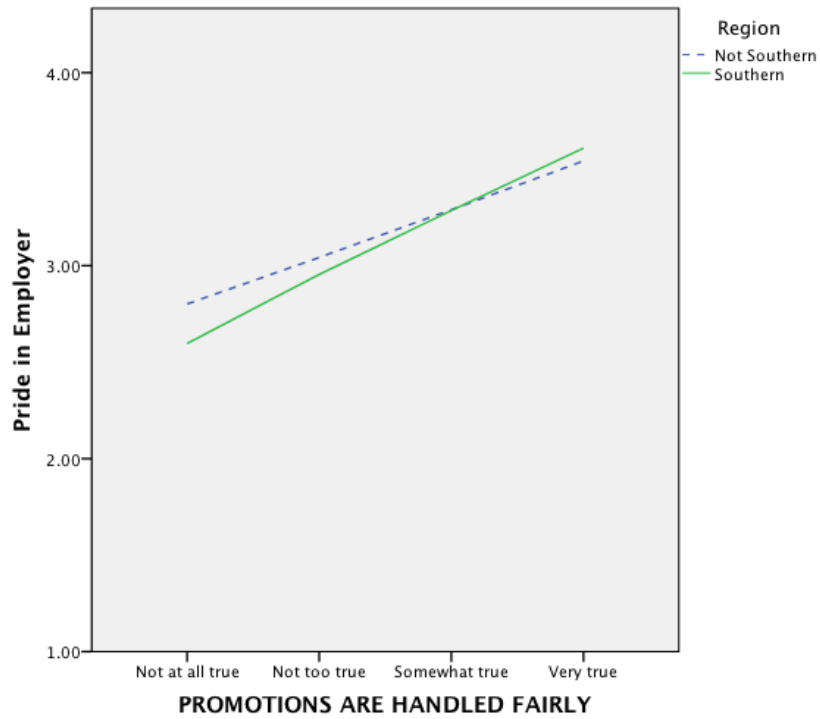
FIGURE 3
INTERACTIONAL FAIRNESS AND JOB SATISFACTION MODERATED BY REGION

FIGURE 4
INTERACTIONAL FAIRNESS AND PRIDE MODERATED BY REGION

DISCUSSION

Overall, the results of this study suggest that the culture of honor persists in modern workplaces. Furthermore, the culture of honor may help explain geographic differences in reactions to perceived injustice at work. This neglected aspect of workplace diversity may have important consequences.

From a practical standpoint, the fact remains that all forms of perceived injustice are strongly related to job satisfaction, organizational commitment, and intent to leave the organization. Management training related to the causes and consequences of perceived injustice has been shown to be effective (Skarlicki & Latham, 1996,1997). Such training should be designed to maximize learning and transfer (Skarlicki & Latham, 2005). Trainees, for example, should actively participate and receive meaningful feedback about their use of distributive, procedural, and interactive justice principles. The regional differences support the idea that this type of training might be especially important in the Southern region of the United States. These differences may also be important to incorporate in diversity training.

There are some limitations to this study. Perhaps the most significant is the fact that the major variables of interest were measured with single items of unknown reliability. Whereas multiple-item scales are certainly preferable, Wanous, Reichers, and Hudy (1997) made a strong case for single-item measures of job satisfaction when multiple-item measures are unavailable. Subsequently, researchers in marketing (Bergkvist & Rossiter, 2007) and management (Fuchs & Diamantopoulos, 2009) have argued that single-item measures may be acceptable and should not be the "kiss of death" during the review process. In this study, the validity of the measures is strengthened by the intercorrelations between the justice measures and the outcomes. They are consistent with other studies that have used multiple-item measures.

It should also be noted that several of the hypothesized moderated relationships were not observed. Specifically, distributive justice was significantly related to all three outcomes in the expected direction, but the relationships were not moderated by region. This might suggest that violations of distributive

justice do not have the same type of relational implications that violations of procedural and interactional justice carry. Specifically, procedural and interactional injustice might be more likely to be perceived as a threat to one's social identity than distributive injustice (Blader & Tyler, 2015). Also, intentions to leave the organization were significantly related to all three forms of justice, but none of these relationships varied by region. Thus in this study, region interacted with justice to predict attitudes, but not behavioral intentions. This finding warrants additional research to establish its generalizability.

In summary this study used a large, nationally representative sample to test relationships between three types of justice and three important outcomes. Consistent with previous research, distributive, procedural, and interactional justice were strong predictors of job satisfaction, organizational commitment, and intent to leave the organization. Furthermore, this study found evidence of a "culture of honor" in which employees in the Southern United States reacted more negatively to procedural injustice and interactional injustice. This new finding opens the door for future researchers to study this neglected aspect of workplace diversity.

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