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CITIZEN PERCEPTIONS OF PROCEDURAL FAIRNESS AND THE MODERATING ROLES OF ‘BELIEF IN A JUST WORLD’ AND ‘PUBLIC SERVICE MOTIVATION’ IN PUBLIC HIRING

ABSTRACT

This article expands our knowledge of how variation in public administrative processes affects citizen perceptions of procedural fairness (CPPF). Focusing on a specific administrative process—the selection and hiring process—we use a survey experimental design among 823 U.S. citizens and examine the effect of a public hiring process involving the appearance of advocacy from an applicant’s social contacts on CPPF. Moreover, we theoretically and empirically examine the moderating effects of two psychological constructs: ‘belief in a just world’ and ‘public service motivation’. We find that citizens rate the procedural fairness of a hiring situation much lower when the situation appears to be influenced by an applicant’s social contacts. However, citizens who report stronger ‘belief in a just world’ have less concern with a hiring process marked by advocacy, whereas citizens with higher levels of ‘public service motivation’ have more concern.

INTRODUCTION

Citizen trust in government and the public sector is a cornerstone for the effective functioning of public institutions (Kim 2005; Thomas 1998; Rothstein 2012). As an enabler of effective interactions between public organizations and citizens, citizen trust in government and the public sector is especially important for the successful provision of public goods and services that depend on cooperation from citizens (Rothstein 2012; Van Ryzin 2011). At the same time, citizen trust in government appears to be deteriorating in many OECD countries (OECD 2015; Pew Research Center 2015). Scholars have identified a range of societal trends that may explain the declining trust, such as a general decrease in interpersonal trust (Fukuyama 1999), a greater orientation towards post-materialist values (Inglehart 1997), and negative media coverage focused more on conflict than substance (Orren 1997).

Van Ryzin (2011) notes how the government performance movement in the United States and Europe has tended to assume that governments can restore public trust by producing outcomes that matter to citizens. Challenging this assumption, some research suggests that perceptions of fairness of public administrative processes are at least as important as actual outcomes to the formation of trust among citizens (Tyler 1990, 2001; Van de Walle 2013; Van Ryzin 2011). More research on the factors affecting how citizens perceive the procedural fairness of the function and work of public organizations is therefore needed.

This article expands our understanding of the factors shaping citizens' perceptions of procedural fairness (CPPF), defined as the extent to which citizens perceive the processes and procedures governing the function and work of government and public administration as fair. While we do not directly investigate citizen trust in government and public administration, the perceived fairness of administrative processes and procedures is a significant component in citizen trust formation (Tyler 1990, 2001; Van de Walle 2013; Van Ryzin 2011). Using a

survey experiment administered to 823 U.S. citizens, our examination focuses on a particular administrative process ubiquitous in governments: the process guiding selection and hiring in the public sector. As we discuss later, in theory, formal regulations and guidelines define these processes in order to achieve merit-based systems of personnel recruitment and selection. In reality, however, public sector selection and hiring can be influenced by other factors, such as informal advocacy from an applicant's social contacts (former coworkers, friends, and relatives). Based on evidence suggesting that hiring situations involving advocacy from an applicant's social connections are fairly common and that many people are well-aware of this (shown later), we ask: *How does a hiring situation potentially influenced by advocacy from an applicant's social contacts affect CPPF?*

Moreover, this article begins to examine how psychological constructs moderate the effect of administrative processes on CPPF. Understanding the cognitive factors shaping citizens' perceptions of fairness in response to different public administrative processes is essential for the successful design of future procedural initiatives that will also positively affect citizens' trust (Moynihan *et al.* 2015). Indeed, our approach draws from the psychological and behavioral sciences and is consistent with calls to more strongly link these research traditions to public administration scholarship (Grimmelikhuijsen *et al.* 2016).

Motivation can affect human reasoning through the reliance on a biased set of cognitive processes that are used to construct and evaluate beliefs (Kunda 1990). As motivated reasoning has been a framework used to understand everything from political decision-making (Redlawsk 2002) to unethical behavior (Bersoff 1999), it may also help explain how individual's beliefs and attitudes influence how administrative processes affect CPPF. We examine the effects of two psycho-social constructs— 'belief in a just world' (BJW) and 'public service motivation' (PSM)—on the relationship between the appearance of social advocacy in a public sector hiring process and CPPF. Specifically, we ask: *How do BJW and*

PSM moderate the extent to which a hiring situation based on advocacy from an applicant's social contacts affects CPPF?

We focus on the BJW and PSM constructs for two reasons. First, while research has examined both the correlates and outcomes of BJW (Dalbert 2009; Furnham 2003) and PSM (Perry *et al.* 2010; Ritz *et al.* 2013), research has yet to examine their roles in shaping how citizens interpret different public administrative processes. Second, juxtaposing BJW and PSM is relevant in light of the theoretically interesting commonalities and differences among the constructs. Both constructs relate to normative beliefs about the distribution of public goods, including the processes guiding the distribution of public sector jobs. As we elaborate later, theory supports that both BJW and PSM may moderate the effect of the appearance of social advocacy in a hiring process on CPPF. However, the two constructs differ fundamentally with respect to what constitutes the appropriate allocation of public goods. While PSM is associated with a normative notion of fair and equitable processes, BJW represents a world view where individuals rationalize any outcome as being deserved. While PSM suggests that the allocation of public goods *should be* procedurally fair, BJW suggests that the allocation of public goods *is* inherently fair. This difference leads to hypotheses of moderation effects in opposite directions that calls for empirical testing and will offer insights into how the two constructs influence citizen interpretations of the public administrative routines and practices.

This article makes two important contributions to the literature. First, our examination of how variation in the administrative process characterizing public sector selection and hiring may affect CPPF offers new insights into the importance of administrative processes to citizens' perceptions of fairness. While public administration research is concerned with citizen trust in government and the public sector (Bouckaert 2012; Christensen and Laegreid 2002; Kim 2010; Vigoda-Gadot 2007; Yang and Holzer 2006), scholars have given relatively

little consideration to the ways that internal processes and procedures of government agencies are experienced and interpreted by citizens as fair (for exception, see Moynihan *et al* 2015).

Investigating how administrative processes support or undermine citizen trust is important for gaining a better understanding of how citizens interpret the actions and operations of government agencies. While we consider this issue in the context of a HR process, the broader issue of how a public organization's procedures and routines shape CPPF is crucial to better understand the relationships between citizen and state. In addition, research on trust suggests that aspects of administrative processes such as perceived fairness and honesty are important determinants of citizen trust of government agencies and public sector representatives (Kim 2005; Thomas 1998). These findings raise questions about the particular processes affecting CPPF.

Second, by expanding our understanding of the moderating effects of BJW and PSM, the article contributes new insights to BJW and PSM research. In particular, we heed the calls for research attention to the settings in which BJW (Pfeffer 2016) and PSM (Wright and Grant 2010) may be especially salient, and add to our understanding of how BJW and PSM moderate citizen-state relations. Our study begins to unlock how internal cognitive processes drive different responses among citizens to public organizations' processes and procedures.

PUBLIC SECTOR HIRING AND PROCEDURAL FAIRNESS

As a vehicle for examining CCPE, our study focuses on selection and hiring in the public sector. This particular process provides a solid foundation for starting to identify the administrative processes that influence CPPF for several reasons. First, selection and hiring are important aspects of personnel management in all public organizations. Public organizations have job vacancies on a regular basis that necessitate a selection and hiring process.

Second, although public employment is not a public good that all citizens are entitled to receive, it is a public benefit distributed within a community. While citizens may not think about the procedural fairness of selection and hiring in the public sector on a daily basis, moral intuitions and fairness norms in the allocation of all public goods are deep seeded and have a strong evolutionary basis (Schokkaert and Overlaet 1989). By examining selection and hiring, we can begin to unravel how even routine operations guiding low-salience administrative issues influence CPPF. Third, as we discuss in the following sections, selection and hiring processes are occasionally marked by deviance from the formal rules and regulations—and procedural fairness theory suggests that deviations from formal processes may have negative consequences for CPPF.

Public Sector Employment

Weber's (1968, original work published in 1922) outline of the ideal bureaucracy included the break from a system in which administrative officials are chosen for employment through personal relationships and social connections. In Weberian bureaucracies, personnel recruitment and selection are governed by merit and technical qualifications. While the historical development of the formal aspects of employee selection and hiring in the U.S. public sector occurred prior to Weber's work, they are largely consistent with Weber's bureaucratic principles. For example, the Pendleton Act of 1883 created the United States Civil Service Commission. The Civil Service Commission was responsible for administering the federal personnel system, including making personnel rules and regulations, administering merit examinations, and enforcing merit rules for nearly 100 years (Kellough and Nigro 2006, 19). Other legislation, such as the Administrative Procedures Act of 1946 and the Civil Rights Act of 1964, further aligned public sector selection and hiring with a system of merit.

Most selection and hiring for public sector jobs in the U.S. reflect the aspirations of a Weberian system of merit in its formal aspects (Battaglio and Condrey 2006; Kellough and Nigro 2006). Still, present selection and hiring systems do not eliminate all the factors other than merit that might influence hiring and advancement decisions. Personal relationships and social connections are (informal) factors that influence selection and hiring decisions in the public sector. A survey of U.S. federal employees (MSPB 2010) shows that 30 percent believed their agency did not have fair and open competitions for job vacancies. Granovetter (1995) shows that 40-50 percent of all jobs are obtained through help from social contacts (usually friends or relatives). Additional evidence emphasizes that the importance of social contacts for job obtainment cuts across all sectors. For example, research finds that 41 percent of agency heads in U.S. local governments report that their organization uses a social networking site (Feeney and Welch 2016). Moreover, we analyzed data from the latest round of the National Administrative Studies Project (NASP-Citizen) (Taggart, Stritch, and Bozeman 2015)—a U.S. survey conducted in 2015 among 2,027 working adults. We find that 33 percent report that the most significant means of them obtaining their current job was a social contact (social connection, coworker, or alumni connection). Roughly one-quarter (23 percent) of those working in public agencies report a social connection being the most significant means of job obtainment.

In sum, while selection and hiring for public sector jobs follow a system of merit in terms of formal regulations and guidelines, in practice hiring decisions are subject to considerations other than merit and technical qualifications. Research suggests that hiring situations involving advocacy from an applicant's social connections are fairly common, that many people are aware of this, and that many individuals have themselves relied on social connections for job obtainment.

It is important to note that social connections and the accrual of social capital can have positive effects on the lives of individuals. Indeed, research finds that social connections and networks may positively affect a number of employment-related outcomes, such as the likelihood of obtaining a job and total salary (Fernandez, Castillo, and Moore 2000). While we do not dispute the importance of social contacts and the positive effects they can have on job advancement, the perception that a hiring process was influenced by social connections may have negative consequences for CPPF. We present our theoretical expectations and hypotheses in the following sections.

Procedural Fairness

Research on procedural fairness suggests that people often react more strongly to how they feel they are treated in a particular process than to the fairness of a particular outcome (Lind and Tyler 1988). Perceptions of procedural justice involve judgements about the fairness of the process by which decisions are made (Lind and Tyler 1988). Leventhal's (1980) six 'justice rules' form a conceptual framework for understanding procedural fairness and justice, portions of which is widely utilized in research (Colquitt 2001). In public administration, aspects of Levanthal's (1980) justice rules have been widely used, e.g., for explaining employee job performance and satisfaction (Choi 2011), organizational commitment (Hassan and Rohrbaugh 2011), and whether rules are evaluated as effective (Dehart-Davis 2009).

Leventhal's (1980) six-justice rules are: (1) Procedures should be consistent across persons and time (*consistency rule*); (2) Personal self-interest and blind allegiance to narrow preconceptions should be prevented (*bias-suppression rule*); (3) Allocative processes should rely on as much good information as possible (*accuracy rule*); (4) Opportunities to modify or reverse decisions must exist (*correctability rule*); (5) The allocative process must reflect the concerns and values of all stakeholders as much as possible (*representativeness rule*); and (6)

Allocative procedures must be compatible with the moral and ethical values of the individual making the judgement (*ethicality rule*). Individuals apply these rules selectively and choose different rules depending on the specific circumstances (Leventhal 1980). Each rule may be given different weight when a person judges the procedural fairness of a situation.

In this article, we examine hiring at a government agency that appears influenced by advocacy from an applicant's social contacts. Several of Leventhal's (1980) rules may apply to such a hiring situation. For example, the bias-suppression rule implies that a hiring process should be unbiased by personal self-interest and narrow preconceptions. Hiring based on advocacy from a social contact may be perceived to break the bias-suppression rule. Individuals may perceive a hire resulting from advocacy as serving the self-interest of the advocating employee who might also have a biased perception of the applicant's actual job qualifications.

Similarly, hiring based on advocacy from a social contact may be perceived to break the representativeness rule, because an applicant having a social contact within the organization would have a better chance of getting the job than equally qualified applicants without such an inside contact. Finally, the opportunity to provide extra information (i.e., a recommendation from an insider) may be perceived to break the consistency rule unless all applicants have that same opportunity.

As a public sector hiring process marked by advocacy from an applicant's social contacts may be perceived to break one or more of Leventhal's (1980) rules, we expect that citizens will report a lower procedural fairness rating when a hiring situation is potentially influenced by advocacy from an applicant's social contacts, and will test the following hypothesis:

H1: *"Citizens will rate the procedural fairness of a hiring situation lower when the situation appears to be influenced by advocacy from an applicant's social contact."*

However, the extent to which any public sector selection and hiring process is perceived to be more or less fair is likely contingent on an individual's beliefs and motivations. The theory of motivated reasoning explains that individuals interpret situations and outcomes in a way to maintain consistency with their own world view (Kunda 1990). In the following sections, we discuss why BJW and PSM may moderate how citizens perceive the fairness of a public sector hiring situation that appears to be influenced by advocacy from social contacts.

Belief in a Just World

“What goes around comes around” and “You reap what you sow.” These figures of speech are the essence of the BJW construct. Introduced by Lerner (1965), the BJW theory states that people need to believe in a just world in which everyone gets what they deserve and deserves what they get (Dalbert 2009). BJW concerns the cognitive bias that good things tend to happen to good people and bad things tend to happen to bad people (Furnham 2003), despite the fact this is patently not the case (Lerner 1998). BJW serves as an important adaptive function for the individual; as a psychological buffer against the harsh reality that society is full of inequalities and injustices (Furnham 2003). Research shows that BJW represents a coping mechanism (Dalbert 2001) and that BJW beliefs are predictive of life satisfaction and well-being (Lipkus *et al.* 1996) and reduced stress (Tomaka and Balscovich 1994).

However, a substantial amount of BJW research focuses on victim blaming as a means of restoring just world beliefs (De Judicibus and McCabe 2001). For example, BJW is found to be positively associated with victim blaming in relation to different categories of “victims:” people in the third world, AIDS patients, rape victims, and cancer patients (Braman and Lambert 2001; Campbell *et al.* 2001; Furnham and Proctor 1992; Kleinke and

Meyer 1990). Recently, scholars have considered the role of BJW in making judgments about public policies (Wenger and Wilkins 2014) and the importance of hard work in getting ahead in society (Bullock *et al.* 2014).

However, research has yet to study how BJW affects CCPF. In line with Leventhal's (1980) justice rules, a hiring process that appears influenced by advocacy from an applicant's social contacts is likely to be perceived as less fair. Based on BJW theory (Dalbert 2009; Lerner and Miller 1978), we expect that a citizen's BJW will moderate the extent to which a hiring process that appears to be influenced by advocacy from a social contact negatively affects CPPF. BJW represents a cognitive bias among individuals that serves to justify existing social, economic, and political arrangements and procedures (Dalbert 2009; Jost *et al.* 2004)—including a hiring process characterized by advocacy from an applicant's social contact. Because of this justification bias, we expect that citizens with a high BJW will perceive hiring that appears to be influenced by advocacy from social contact as less procedurally unfair (more fair) than citizens with a low BJW. We will test the following:

H2: *“BJW attenuates the negative effect of advocacy from an applicant's social contact in a hiring process on citizens' perception of procedural fairness.”*

Public Service Motivation

The PSM construct is defined as “an individual's orientation to delivering services to people with the purpose of doing good for others and society” (Hondeghem and Perry 2009, 6). PSM focuses on a motivational attribute transcending an individual's immediate self-interest; an altruistic-type motive capturing normative beliefs directed towards the interests of others and the public good. While early PSM research was exclusively situated in the field of public administration, PSM is now a multidisciplinary and multi-sectoral issue (Perry *et al.* 2010). PSM is therefore not a concept specific to public employees. While PSM may prevail in

public sector organizations (Brewer and Selden 1998), PSM can be found among all citizens, irrespective of their sector of employment (Steen 2008).

Numerous studies have probed the determinants and consequences of PSM. Several studies find a positive association between PSM and performance (Andersen *et al.* 2014; Bellé 2013; Brewer and Selden 2000;). Similarly, studies find a positive association between PSM and preferences for public employment (Christensen and Wright 2011; Kjeldsen and Jacobsen 2013; Pedersen 2013; Vandenabeele 2008). However, research has yet to examine the consequences of PSM for an individual's perception of procedural fairness.

Recent PSM research develops from the notion that PSM originates from the public content of institutions—social structures infused with public values that individuals internalize into a public service identity (Perry and Vandenabeele 2008; Pedersen 2015a). Capturing an altruistic origin, PSM may correlate positively with commonly held public values, such as administrative equity and accountability (Kim *et al.* 2013). Extending this logic, PSM may correlate with the normative belief that selection and hiring in the public sector should be governed by a system in which advocacy from applicants' social contacts should not necessarily increase a person's chance of receiving a job offer (decrease other applicants' chance of job offer). This theoretical linkage is not least demonstrated by the constitutive items in a recently developed PSM measurement scale (Kim *et al.* 2013). Items such as “I think equal opportunities for citizens are very important” and “I get very upset when I see other people being treated unfairly” relate to the recognized importance of equity and fairness in public administrative decision making and practice. In addition, research shows that PSM is negatively correlated with unethical behavior and dishonesty (Barfort *et al.* 2015).

Based on PSM theory (Perry and Vandenabeele 2008; Pedersen 2015a), we expect that an individual's PSM will moderate the extent to which public sector hiring that appears to be

influenced by advocacy from social contact results in a negative perception of procedural fairness. Advocacy from applicants' social contacts is not a formal (official) qualification criterion for job offers in public employment. Selection and hiring processes in public organizations that appear influenced by such advocacy may, therefore, result in an intra-personal conflict with public values and norms that is more pronounced among high-PSM individuals. Hiring processes that appear influenced by advocacy from a social contact may thus be perceived as less procedurally fair (more unfair) among citizens with higher PSM. We will test the following:

H3: *“PSM increases the negative effect of advocacy from an applicant’s social contact in a hiring process on citizens’ perception of procedural fairness.”*

DATA

Our data comprise a sample of 910 U.S. citizens. We collected the data using Amazon’s Mechanical Turk (MTurk) in March 2015.¹ We recruited participants through a post on the MTurk marketplace with a link to an e-survey (set up in Qualtrics). The survey was accessible to people with a U.S. IP address. Similar to other public administration studies that examine citizen attitudes and perceptions using data collected on MTurk or similar crowdsourcing platforms (Kaufman and Tummers 2016; Jilke, Van Ryzin, and Van de Walle 2016; Pedersen 2015b; Pedersen and Stritch 2016; Marvel 2016; Smith 2016), our procedure warrants some caution in extrapolating from the sample. For a more detailed discussion of MTurk and its research potential in public administration scholarship, see Stritch, Pedersen, and Taggart (2017).

The survey experiment was approved by the Social and Behavioral IRB at Arizona State University. In line with Brewer and Brewer (2011), we excluded 87 observations from the analyses for not remembering the content of our survey experiment at a later stage of the

survey (i.e., the gender of the applicant or the type of organization).² Our final sample contains 823 respondents.

RESEARCH DESIGN

We test our hypotheses using data from a survey experiment involving a vignette describing a hiring process at a government agency. The sample participants were randomly assigned to one of two groups (the randomization was embedded in the survey). Figure 1 shows the vignettes received by the control group and the treatment group:

[Figure 1 about here]

Treatment respondents received the same information as the control respondents. The words “government agency” were bolded, emphasizing that the scenario relates to a hiring process at a public organization.³ In addition, treatment respondents were also provided the following text: “After the interview, Jacob’s longtime friend from college who works at the agency put in a good word for Jacob to the hiring manager.” This additional text presents a hiring process that is possibly influenced by an applicant’s personal relationship with a staff member who therefore recommends the applicant to the hiring manager. In the U.S., ‘a good word’ is a colloquial expression suggesting that the social connection is able to channel beneficial information or a recommendation on an individual’s behalf to those in charge of the process. The text suggests that information was presented on the applicant’s behalf to the hiring committee outside of the formal application process. The treatment is subtle and does not explicitly state that the information is used or that Jacob does, in fact, receive a benefit from the ‘good word.’ Through this approach we examine how the appearance of advocacy and an extra-procedural benefit affects CPPF.

The vignette in Figure 1 describes a male applicant (Jacob). We describe the applicant’s name to increase the contextual realism of the vignette. However, the respondents’ perception

of the situation is potentially affected by the applicant's gender. Social gender role and stereotype beliefs may entail that applicants of different genders are associated with different fairness perceptions (Eagly *et al.* 2000). Therefore, we manipulated the name (gender) of the applicant within both the control and treatment groups and we substituted the name "Jacob" with the name "Emily" at random (see Levitt and Dubner 2005). Because we randomized the applicant's name within both experimental groups, the applicant's gender should not confound our results.⁴

Measurement

We measured CPPF in the survey with a standardized (mean = 0, standard deviation = 1) three item scale: "Generally, the process used by the organization in making the hiring decision was fair," "It was not fair how the individual obtained the position [reversed]," and "The organization was concerned about being fair when it hired the individual." While we tailored the items to our hiring situation, they are based on Gilliland's (1994) hiring decision fairness scale—a scale adapted and used by other researchers (Thorsteinson and Ryan 1997). We captured item responses on a seven-point Likert scale. Principal component analysis (PCA) identifies a one-factor solution (Eigenvalue > 1) with factor loadings of .83 or higher. The Cronbach's alpha is .82. We construct the scale using the predicted factor scores.

We measured BJW using the six-item General Belief in a Just World Scale by Dalbert *et al.* (1987). The scale has been validated and widely used in research (Dalbert 2000). Examples of items include "I think the world is basically a just place" and "I believe that, by and large, people get what they deserve" (see the appendix). The scale is standardized and captures responses on a six-point Likert scale. PCA identifies a one-factor solution with factor loadings of .65 or higher. The Cronbach's alpha is .84. We construct the scale using the predicted factor scores.

We measured PSM using the 16-item PSM instrument developed by Kim *et al.* (2013). Examples of items include “I think equal opportunities for citizens are very important” and “I get very upset when I see other people being treated unfairly” (see the appendix). We captured responses on a five-point Likert scale. As expected, a rotated PCA identifies a four-factor solution with factor loadings ($> .45$) matching the four anticipated PSM sub-dimensions (attraction to public participation, commitment to public values, compassion, and self-sacrifice). We generate a single standardized PSM scale using the predicted factor scores from an unrotated PCA (a one-factor solution with factor loadings of .51 or higher). The Cronbach’s alpha is .90.

The pairwise correlations between all study variables appear in the appendix (Table A-1). To test the discriminant validity of the primary constructs of interest, we performed a PCA on the three CPPF items, six BJW items, and 16 PSM items. The analysis identifies a three-factor solution with factor loadings above .6 and matching the anticipated CPPF, BJW, and PSM latent constructs. The factor correlation matrix reveals correlations between the three factors in a range between -.29 and .30—correlations below the .7 threshold indicating a majority of shared variance ($.7 \times .7 = 49\%$ shared variance), i.e., discriminant validity problems (Hair *et al.* 2010).

ANALYSES

Are characteristics potentially affecting CPPF equally distributed across the control and treatment groups? Table 1 shows the distribution in observable respondent characteristics (means and standard deviations)—for the full sample (column 1) and by experiment group (columns 2 and 3). Column “ $p > F$ ” shows the results of ANOVA tests for differences in means between the control and treatment groups.

[Table 1 about here]

As column “ $p > F$ ” shows, the control and treatment groups are balanced in terms of gender, race, age, education, employment status, and annual household income. Similarly, we see that the assignment of the applicant names (“Jacob” or “Emily”) is also balanced—confirming that our name manipulation does not confound the results.

Moreover, Table 1 shows the distribution in BJW, PSM, and CPPF. As expected, we see that mean values of both BJW and PSM are the same in both the control and treatment groups. For CPPF, we see a significant difference in the means, indicating that the difference in the description of the hiring situation in control and treatment groups has an effect on CPPF.

Results

To examine the effect of the treatment, we regress a treatment dummy variable on the CPPF measure. Table 2 shows the result of regression analyses testing the effect of treatment relative to the control group. Models 1 and 2 show the results, respectively, for models without and with inclusion of the variables in Table 1 as controls (excluding BJW and PSM).⁵

[Table 2 about here]

The treatment estimate is similar in magnitude across the two models ($\beta = -.66$). Consistent with our balance check, this finding supports that individual differences potentially affecting CPPF are equally distributed across the control and treatment group.

In line with Hypothesis 1, we see that the treatment has a negative effect on CPPF. Citizens for whom the hiring process appears to be influenced by advocacy from an applicant’s social contacts report a lower CPPF in the size of .66 standard deviations.⁶

Moderation Effects

Table 3 shows the results of regression analyses testing for the moderating effects of BJW and PSM. Models 1 and 2 include an interaction term for the treatment dummy and BJW (without and with controls). Models 3 and 4 include an interaction term for the treatment dummy and PSM (without and with controls).

[Table 3 about here]

The interaction term coefficients in models 1 and 2 are positive, suggesting that the negative treatment effect approaches zero for respondents with higher BJW. Conversely, the interaction term coefficients in models 3 and 4 are negative, suggesting that the negative treatment effect is greater for respondents with higher PSM.

To illustrate these findings, we use the estimates in models 2 and 4 to compute the marginal effects of the treatment at different levels of BJW and PSM, respectively. Figure 2 shows the graphical plots of the results.⁷ The Y-axis denotes the treatment estimates. The X-axis denotes levels of BJW and PSM. The vertical lines represent the 95 percent confidence interval.

[Figure 2 about here]

The treatment has an overall negative effect on CPPF—irrespective of the respondents’ BJW and PSM. However, in line with Hypothesis 2, respondents reporting a *greater* level of BJW perceive the treatment as *more* fair than respondents with *lower* BJW.⁸ We see the reverse moderation effect for PSM. In line with Hypothesis 3, respondents reporting a *greater* level of PSM perceive the treatment as *less* fair than respondents with *lower* PSM.⁹

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

While our survey experimental design provides a basis for causal inference, the article has limitations that need to be discussed. First, although our sample is socio-economically diverse, it is not fully representative of the U.S. adult population. While U.S. MTurk samples

are generally more representative of the U.S. population than more traditional convenience samples (Berinsky *et al.* 2012), this limitation engenders some caution. In line with other studies using data collected through MTurk or similar online platforms (e.g., Kaufman and Tummers 2016; Jilke *et al.* 2016; Pedersen and Stritch 2016; Marvel 2016; Smith 2016), our results should be interpreted in light of this caveat.

Second, we cannot reject that the effects we observe in our experiment may differ from how hiring based on advocacy from social contacts shapes CPPF in real-life situations. As with the majority of survey experimental research, we cannot dismiss that real-world effects may be somewhat larger or smaller. We recognize that the formation of real-life CPPF is affected by a variety of contextual factors that cannot be captured in a vignette—and that some of these factors may counteract the negative effects of hiring based on advocacy from social contacts that we observe in our study.

However, our findings offer evidence that public sector hiring processes involving a general advocacy from social contacts have a negative impact on CPPF—and our research design diminishes the likelihood that history, maturation, or other time or space factors are threats to the study’s internal validity. Moreover, ethical issues may delimit the practical potential for examining our hypotheses using field experiments. While we encourage future research to replicate our findings using other experimental methods offering greater ecological validity, we think that our study provides important insights and may be the most feasible approach for understanding how public sector hiring based on advocacy from social contacts shapes CPPF. As suggested by an anonymous reviewer, future research could consider experimental survey treatments involving the appearance of negative input from a social contact (“put in a bad word”).

We also recognize that the specific content of a “good word” might affect how individuals perceive the fairness of its use in a hiring decision. A positive recommendation

from a social connection based on the quality of a job candidate's prior work may be less detrimental to CPPF than a recommendation based on informal, social interactions. Moreover, while the vignette leaves the nature of the friendship vague, research should explore more specific types of social connections. Indeed, a "good word" from a former co-worker might be seen as more legitimate, and less detrimental to CPPF, than someone known through other social situations.

Third, our study does not allow us to unravel the extent to which the negative treatment effect is, in fact, directly attributable to the respondents' perceptions of the hiring situation as influenced by advocacy from a social contact. While only the treatment text differs across the control and treatment recipients, future studies should include a manipulation check and test the degree to which both the control and treatment respondents perceive the hiring situation as influenced by advocacy from a social contact.

Despite these limitations, this article offers two substantive insights to public administration research. First, in line with procedural fairness theory, we find that citizens perceive the procedural fairness of a hiring process at a government agency much lower when the decision appears to be influenced by advocacy from an applicant's social contacts (treatment) compared to when the situation is not influenced by such advocacy (control). This finding is important, as it sheds light on an aspect of citizen-state relationships that has been largely unconsidered in the literature. While the effects of organizational procedures on citizen perceptions of fairness and trust have been documented in certain contexts, such as policing (e.g. Tyler 1990), they have not been widely considered in the context of basic organizational functions—in this case, public hiring.

Second, we find that the negative treatment effect is moderated by both BJW and PSM. Citizens who report a higher level of BJW perceive job offers potentially influenced by advocacy from social contact as *less unfair* than citizens who report a lower level of BJW. In

contrast, citizens with higher levels of PSM perceive job offers potentially influenced by advocacy from social contacts as *less fair* than citizens with lower levels of PSM.

These findings hold important implications for public administration research and practice. By elucidating how BJW and PSM are moderators of the relationship between the hiring process and CPPF, we begin to understand the mechanisms underlying the effect of process on CPPF. Contributing also new insights to the BJW and PSM literatures, our findings found a call for more research and suggest that BJW and PSM play an important role in shaping citizens' fairness and justice perceptions in relation to government and public administration processes. This issue is particularly salient in the context of current citizen-state relations and the increasing distrust of public institutions. Understanding the ways that psycho-social processes moderate how citizens' interpret the fairness of day-to-day operations offers insights that may help us predict and explain how citizens will evaluate, perceive, and react to larger institutional changes and organizational reforms in the public sector. Future research should support this notion with further evidence—as well as seek to unravel other moderators of the link between public organization processes and CPPF.

Moreover, by demonstrating that variation in the administrative process characterizing selection and hiring in the public sector may affect CPPF, the article offers important insights to public administration and procedural fairness literature by considering the importance of administrative processes. In line with research showing that citizen trust in government and the public sector is as much influenced by procedural fairness and justice perceptions as it is by outputs (Van de Walle 2013; Van Ryzin 2011), our study supports that the administrative processes of the public organizations can enhance or undermine CPPF.

As mentioned, the average citizen may be unlikely to give much conscious thought about the procedural fairness of selection and hiring in the public sector—and the average citizen is not cognizant of whether a particular real-life hiring process was influenced by

advocacy from an applicant's social contact. Yet many citizens are likely aware that social connections frequently play a role in selection and hiring in both the private and public domain (Barbulescu 2015; Granovetter 1995). At the same time, the notions that public sector hiring and selection processes are guided by applicant qualifications and competencies, as well as procedural fairness and equal opportunity, are not only cornerstones of public employment systems, but enhance the legitimacy of public organizations in democratic societies. We show that deviations from hiring processes designed to ensure technical competence and performance are viewed by citizens as suspect. By showing that variation in even a routine, but important, administrative process may influence CPPF, we reinforce the claim that not only output but also administrative processes are important determinants of CPPF. Furthermore, while we show that administrative processes can affect citizen's perceptions of fairness, we find that individual-level orientations towards justice and fairness, such as PSM and BJW, are crucial in understanding how citizens experience and interpret the processes of government.

Other administrative processes that are more visible to the public at large and more salient for citizens in terms of fairness perceptions may entail larger effects on CPPF than what we observe in our study. One example is the processes guiding decisions about wages and salary increases of top managers and politicians (e.g. a process characterized by more public justification and transparency). Similarly, variation in the administrative process guiding public decision-making in relation to citizens' applications for public services (e.g., accessibility, processing time, red tape) may have an effect on CPPF and should be considered in future research. Additionally, administrative practices appearing to shape the distribution of public goods and services among specific groups may be considered. For instance, administrative policies that have disparate impacts on the poor or to

underrepresented minority groups may affect CPPF, but their effects may also be moderated by psychosocial constructs, such as PSM or BJW.

The notion that agency processes and procedures affect CPPF is especially relevant in the context of recent reforms and changes to the very nature of public employment. Advocates of the reforms argue that changes in public employment are necessary to make public agencies more adaptive and responsive. As such, the reforms respond to calls from citizens and their elected representatives to help promote accountability and government performance—not necessarily weaken merit—by removing excessive employee protections that make firing low-performing workers difficult (Kettl 2000).¹⁰ In some places, large sections of the workforce are now employed at-will (Kellough and Nigro 2006), pay-for-performance systems have been implemented (Kellough and Nigro 2002), and agency managers have more discretion in the employee selection and hiring process (Battaglio and Condrey 2006).

While previous research has examined the effects of such public personnel reforms on public employees' attitudes and perceptions (Rubin and Kellough 2012), no research has considered how increased opportunities for discretion and deviations from formal routines, including advocacy from social contacts in hiring, might undermine CPPF. Our results suggest that advocacy from social contacts has an effect on CPPF. However, recognizing that these effects are moderated by the beliefs and motives held by the citizen is equally important. We believe that our finding is an important step in understanding how administrative processes can affect CPPF, but also informs future Behavioral Public Administration research on citizen-state relations.

NOTES

¹ MTurk is a frequently used crowdsourcing platform for survey experimental research in the social sciences (Arceneaux 2012; Berinsky *et al* 2012; Horton *et al.* 2011).

² The respondents were asked to recall the gender of the applicant (male/female/do not remember) and the type of organization (public/private/do not remember). The 87 excluded respondents gave one or more wrong or “do

not remember” responses. ANOVA test shows balance in the proportion of excluded observations across the control and treatment groups.

³ We cannot rule out that our findings are exclusive to public service organizations. However, by highlighting the words “government agency,” we cue the respondents to think of a hiring process in a public organization context. Moreover, given the sample’s inclusion criteria, our sample includes only those respondents who were able to recall that the hiring situation occurred in a public organization.

⁴ As later shown (Table 1), the gender of the applicant is balanced across the control and treatment group. Moreover, the analyses include a dummy variable for “applicant name.”

⁵ As anticipated, given the random treatment assignment, model inclusion of BJW and PSM does not qualitatively change the estimated treatment effect ($\beta = -.66^{***}$; S.E. = .064).

⁶ As the CPPF measure is normally distributed, this treatment estimate (.66) translates into a percentile loss of 25 for a citizen at the 50th percentile rank. That is, for a citizen with an average CPPF, the treatment is expected to lower his or her CPPF by 25 percentile points.

⁷ An alternative way to illustrate the moderation effects is to use the model estimates to compute and plot the predicted values of CPPF for control and treatment recipients with low and high levels of BJW and PSM (one S.D. below and above the mean). The plots appear in the appendix, Figure A-1. The slopes of the trend lines show how the negative treatment effect is smaller for individuals with high BJW (relative to low BJW) and larger for those with high PSM (relative to low PSM).

⁸ A difference in BJW of one (i.e., one standard deviation) relates to a difference in the effect of treatment of roughly .17 standard deviations in CPPF—a percentile gain of 7 for a citizen at the 50th percentile rank.

⁹ A difference in PSM of one (i.e., one standard deviation) relates to a difference in the effect of treatment of roughly -.13 standard deviations in CPPF—a percentile loss of 5 for a citizen at the 50th percentile rank.

¹⁰ As an anonymous reviewer pointed out, the 2015 Federal Employee Viewpoint Survey Results suggests that even public employees see these as concerns. Only 33 percent of federal employees stated that they agree promotions were based on merit and only 28 percent said their work-unit takes steps to remove a poor performer or an employee unwilling to improve.

APPENDIX

BJW

- I think the world is basically a just place
- I believe that, by and large, people get what they deserve
- I am confident that justice always prevails over injustice
- I am convinced that in the long run people will be compensated for injustices.
- I firmly believe that injustices in all areas of life (e.g. professional, family, political, etc.) are the exception rather than the rule.
- I think people try to be fair when making important decisions.

PSM

- I admire people who initiate or are involved in activities to aid my community.
- It is important to contribute to activities that tackle social problems.
- Meaningful public service is very important to me.
- It is important for me to contribute to the common good.
- I think equal opportunities for citizens are very important.
- It is important that citizens can rely on the continuous provision of public services.
- It is fundamental that the interests of future generations are taken into account when developing public policies.
- To act ethically is essential for public servants.
- I feel sympathetic to the plight of the underprivileged.

- I empathize with other people who face difficulties.
- I get very upset when I see other people being treated unfairly.
- Considering the welfare of others is very important.
- I am prepared to make sacrifices for the good of society.
- I believe in putting civic duty before self.
- I am willing to risk personal loss to help society.
- I would agree to a plan to make a better life for the poor even if it costs me money.

[Table A-1 about here]

[Figure A-1 about here]

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Figure 1. Sample Case Vignettes (Control and Treatment)

Control:

In this section, you will read a short scenario about a recent hiring process. Please read the following scenario:

Last month Jacob applied for a job at a **large government agency**. After all the applications were screened by a hiring committee, Jacob was one of four candidates called in for an interview. Last week Jacob was offered and accepted the position at the **government agency**.

Treatment:

In this section, you will read a short scenario about a recent hiring process. Please read the following scenario:

Last month Jacob applied for a job at a **large government agency**. After all the applications were screened by a hiring committee, Jacob was one of four candidates called in for an interview. After the interview, Jacob's longtime friend from college who works at the agency put in a good word for Jacob to the hiring manager. Last week Jacob was offered and accepted the position at the **government agency**.

Table 1. Sample Characteristics, Full Sample and by Experiment Groups. Means and Standard Deviations (in Parenthesis)

	Full Sample (1)	Control Group (2)	Treatment Group (3)	<i>p</i> > F
Female	.57 (.49)	.57 (.50)	.58 (.49)	.72
Race:				
White	.78 (.41)	.77 (.42)	.79 (.41)	.55
Black	.08 (.27)	.08 (.27)	.08 (.28)	.83
Hispanic	.04 (.20)	.05 (.22)	.04 (.19)	.34
Asian	.05 (.22)	.05 (.22)	.05 (.21)	.68
Other	.04 (.20)	.04 (.20)	.04 (.20)	.92
Age	45.73 (16.28)	46.21 (16.08)	45.23 (16.48)	.39
Education:				
Some high school	.01 (.10)	.01 (.11)	.01 (.09)	.50
High school	.09 (.29)	.10 (.30)	.08 (.27)	.17
Some college	.27 (.45)	.26 (.44)	.29 (.45)	.41
Undergraduate	.41 (.49)	.40 (.49)	.41 (.49)	.85
Some graduate	.05 (.22)	.06 (.25)	.04 (.19)	.08
Postgraduate	.17 (.38)	.16 (.36)	.18 (.39)	.29
Employment status:				
Student	.05 (.23)	.06 (.24)	.05 (.22)	.49
Unemployed	.13 (.33)	.13 (.34)	.12 (.33)	.69
Employed	.79 (.40)	.78 (.41)	.90 (.40)	.43
Other	.03 (.16)	.03 (.16)	.02 (.16)	.87
Sector of employment:				
Private	.69 (.46)	.68 (.47)	.70 (.46)	.40
Public	.19 (.39)	.20 (.40)	.18 (.38)	.41
Non profit	.08 (.28)	.09 (.29)	.08 (.27)	.59
Never had a job	.04 (.19)	.03 (.18)	.04 (.19)	.67
Annual household income:				
< \$30,000	.26 (.44)	.26 (.44)	.25 (.44)	.71
\$30,000-59,999	.36 (.48)	.37 (.48)	.36 (.49)	.73
\$60,000-89,000	.21 (.41)	.22 (.41)	.21 (.41)	.73
\$90,000+	.16 (.37)	.15 (.35)	.18 (.38)	.20
Applicant name (female)	.49 (.50)	.49 (.50)	.50 (.50)	.76
Belief in a just world (BJW)	0 (1)	-.01 (.98)	.01 (1.02)	.82
Public service motivation (PSM)	0 (1)	.01 (.98)	-.01 (1.02)	.73
Citizen's perception of procedural fairness (CPPF)	0 (1)	.33 (.82)	-.34 (1.05)	.00
<i>N</i>	823	416	407	

Table 2. Effect of Treatment on CPPF. OLS Regression

	CPPF			
	(1)		(2)	
	β	S.E.	β	S.E.
Treatment	-.66***	.066	-.66***	.066
Control variables	No		Yes	
R-square (adj.)	.11		.11	
N	823		823	

Notes: * $p < .1$; ** $p < .05$; *** $p < .01$. For brevity, the control variable estimates are not reported. The full models are available from the authors.

Table 3. Moderation Effects of BJW and PSM. OLS Regression

	Perception of Procedural Fairness							
	(1)		(2)		(3)		(4)	
	β	S.E.	β	S.E.	β	S.E.	β	S.E.
Treatment	-.67***	.064	-.66***	.064	-.67***	.064	-.66***	.064
BJW	.14***	.046	.14***	.048	.22***	.032	.23***	.033
PSM	.03	.032	.02	.034	.09*	.046	.08	.047
Treatment x BJW	.16**	.064	.17***	.065				
Treatment x PSM					-.12*	.064	-.13**	.065
Control variables	No		Yes		No		Yes	
R-square (adj.)	.16		.16		.16		.16	
N	823		823		823		823	

Notes: * $p < .1$; ** $p < .05$; *** $p < .01$. For brevity, the control variable estimates are not reported. The full models are available from the authors.

Figure 2. Plot of the Marginal Effect of Treatment at Different Levels of BJW and PSM

Table A-1. Correlation Information

Variable	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16
1 Citizen's perception of procedural fairness (CPPF)	-															
2 Belief in a just world (BJW)	.22*	-														
3 Public service motivation (PSM)	.00	-.12*	-													
4 Treatment	-.33*	.01	-.01	-												
5 Female	.01	-.16*	.23*	.01	-											
Race:																
6 White	.01	.02	-.01	.02	-.05	-										
7 Black	-.01	-.01	.09*	.01	.10*	-.56*	-									
8 Hispanic	.07	.02	-.07	-.03	-.08*	-.41*	-.06	-								
9 Asian	-.04	.04	-.05	-.01	-.02	-.43*	-.07	-.05	-							
10 Other	-.03	-.08*	.01	-.00	.06	-.40*	-.06	-.05	-.05	-						
11 Age	.04	-.05	-.02	-.03	.07	.05	-.01	-.01	-.00	-.06	-					
Education:																
12 Some high school	.01	-.02	.06	-.02	-.04	.05	-.03	-.02	-.02	-.02	.02	-				
13 High school	.03	-.08*	.01	-.05	-.10*	.00	.03	.04	-.03	-.05	-.00	-.03	-			
14 Some college	-.06	-.05	.03	.03	.03	.03	.02	-.02	-.06	.01	-.12*	-.06	-.19*	-		
15 Undergraduate	.07*	.04	-.02	.01	-.02	-.05	.01	.03	.03	.03	-.02	-.08*	-.26*	-.21*	-	
16 Some graduate	.01	-.05	-.01	-.06	.08*	-.01	.01	.03	-.03	.01	.05	-.02	-.07*	-.14*	-.19*	-
17 Postgraduate	-.05	-.03	-.02	.04	.02	.02	-.05	-.05	.09*	-.02	.14*	-.04	-.14*	-.28*	-.38*	-.11*
Employment status:																
18 Student	-.08*	-.03	-.02	-.02	-.06	-.05	.05	.00	.04	.00	-.23*	-.02	-.02	-.15*	-.10*	.07
19 Unemployed	-.02	-.12*	.06	-.01	.10*	-.04	.07*	.01	-.00	-.03	.04	-.04	.03	.04*	-.02	-.04
20 Employed	.10*	.14*	-.09*	-.03	-.07*	.09*	-.08*	-.01	-.00	-.05	.07*	-.06	-.02	-.13*	.09*	.00
21 Other	-.03	.00	.02	-.01	.06	.03	-.05	.00	-.00	.00	.12*	-.06	-.02	.02	-.04	-.00
Sector of employment:																
22 Private	-.01	-.07*	-.03	.03	-.11*	.06	-.06	-.04	.03	-.04	.02	.04	.04	.09*	-.01	-.04
23 Public	.02	.07*	-.04	-.03	.10*	-.02	.03	.02	-.03	.02	.04	-.05	-.04	-.12*	.04	.04
24 Non profit	.04	-.00	.09*	-.02	.07*	-.02	.02	.02	-.01	.00	.02	-.03	-.10*	-.06	.02	.03
25 Never had a job	-.07	.01	.02	.02	-.04	-.07*	.06	.02	-.01	.06	-.16*	.05	.14*	.10*	-.10*	-.05
Annual household income:																
26 < \$30,000	.00	-.09*	.09*	-.01	.08*	-.04	.12*	.01	-.02	-.06	-.15*	.08*	.11*	.09*	-.09*	.01
27 \$30,000-59,999	.03	.03	.00	-.01	-.05	-.00	-.02	.05	-.05	.04	.10*	-.02	.04	.06	-.01	-.00
28 \$60,000-89,000	.00	.06	-.04	-.01	-.02	-.01	-.05	.00	.04	.02	.05	-.05	-.06	-.05	.05	.03
29 \$90,000+	-.04	-.00	-.07*	.04	-.01	.07	-.06	-.08*	.04	-.01	-.01	-.01	-.10*	-.12*	.06	-.04

Notes: Pairwise correlations, * $p < .05$.

Table A-1. Correlation Information (cont.)

	Variable	17	18	19	20	21	22	23	24	25	26	27	28	29
17	Postgraduate	-												
	Employment status:													
18	Student	-.07	-											
19	Unemployed	-.01	-.09*	-										
20	Employed	.07	-.34*	-.54*	-									
21	Other	.03	-.04	-.06	-.23*	-								
	Sector of employment:													
22	Private	-.11*	-.05	.01	.02	-.09*	-							
23	Public	.10*	.01	-.03	.07*	.10*	-.72*	-						
24	Non profit	.11*	-.05	.00	.02	-.02	-.45*	-.15*	-					
25	Never had a job	-.09*	.18*	.04	-.22*	-.05	-.29*	-.09*	-.06	-				
	Annual household income:													
26	< \$30,000	-.09*	.08*	.16*	-.20*	.01	.04	-.11*	.08*	.02	-			
27	\$30,000-59,999	-.08*	-.07*	-.05	.04	-.03	.05	-.04	-.03	.00	-.45*	-		
28	\$60,000-89,000	.04	-.02	-.07	.13*	-.01	-.08*	.13*	-.03	-.04	-.31*	-.40*	-	
29	\$90,000+	.17*	.02	-.06	.05	.03	-.02	.04	-.03	.02	-.26*	-.33*	-.23*	-

Notes: Pairwise correlations, * $p < .05$.

Figure A-1. Plots of the Predicted Values of CPPF for Control and Treatment at Low and High Levels of BJW and PSM