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Non-Contingent Success Reduces People's Desire for Processes that Adhere to Principles of Fairness

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Abstract A central tenet of justice theory and research is that people prefer decisions to be made with processes that adhere to principles of fairness. The present research identified a boundary condition for this general tendency. Across three studies, we found that people who experienced non-contingent success had less of a desire for fair processes relative to their counterparts who experienced contingent success. Furthermore, results attributable to other independent variables, namely regulatory focus in Study 2 and self-affirmation in Study 3, shed light on the underlying mechanism: people experience non-contingent success as self-threatening and lower their desire for processes that adhere to fairness in the service of protecting themselves against the threat. Theoretical implications are discussed as are limitations of the studies and suggestions for future research.

Keywords Justice · Regulatory focus · Self-affirmation · Self-handicapping

Joe is a financial analyst at a prominent investment bank. Compared to his fellow analysts he is extremely busy. However, a closer look indicates that this is because he has taken on a large number of projects and is therefore challenged to complete any of them on time. Luckily, his manager cuts him

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slack, noting that he is clearly bogged down by the sheer number of tasks he has on his ever-expanding plate.

Andrea has been assigned an important project by her boss. Instead of tackling it immediately, she procrastinates and only begins working on it two days before the deadline. The report is not her best work, but Andrea consoles herself, noting that it likely would have been much better had she given herself more time to complete it.

Although conventional wisdom dictates that Joe should not overextend himself and that Andrea should refrain from procrastinating, these and other forms of self-defeating behaviors are common both inside and outside the workplace. One reason people behave in these ways is to give themselves a self-protective excuse if things were to not go their way. For example, Joe could attribute any late deliverables to his multiple commitments rather than to his inability to get the job done on time. Similarly, if Andrea submits a report of poor quality, it can be attributed to time constraints rather than to her inability to produce a quality analysis.

Another way in which individuals may protect themselves in the face of unfavorable outcomes is if they saw the outcomes as resulting from procedures that were not entirely fair. This possibility implies that there may be circumstances under which people's typical desire to be treated with high procedural fairness may be reduced. Consider the following example:

Chris is a manager who has been recognized for a number of successful projects at work but remains uncertain as to whether he is really deserving of the positive trajectory, or has just simply been in the right place at the right time. When his boss decides to experiment with a 360 feedback plan and instructs Chris to ask his colleagues for input that will be used as a basis for his performance review, Chris fails to ask others to provide feedback about his performance.

In the organizational justice literature, process fairness refers to the justice of the methods used to make and implement decisions. Conceptually distinct from outcome fairness, process fairness is an amalgam of procedural fairness (e.g., voice, accuracy), informational fairness, (i.e., the adequacy and sincerity of the explanations people receive for why certain decisions were made), and interpersonal fairness, that is, the dignity and respect with which people are treated when decisions are carried out (Colquitt, 2001). In the example of Chris, getting feedback from others may be viewed as a way to enhance process fairness by imbuing the evaluation with greater accuracy. By avoiding such feedback, Chris is manifesting a reduced preference for accuracy of information used to make decisions, one of the known determinants of procedural fairness (Leventhal, Karuza, & Fry, 1980).

Chris' avoidant behavior runs counter to one of the most basic and well-established findings in the justice literature: people generally prefer processes that adhere to the principles of fairness (e.g., Lind & Tyler, 1988; Thibaut & Walker, 1975). In many different settings and reflected in various dependent variables,

people react more positively to being treated with higher process fairness (e.g., Folger, 2001).[1]

Prior theory and research also have identified a host of reasons why people prefer to be treated with higher process fairness. For example, such processes address instrumental concerns; they lead people to believe that they are likely to receive their share of desired outcomes in the short or long term (Thibaut & Walker, 1975). Processes that reflect interpersonal or informational fairness address people's status concerns by signaling that they are held in high regard (Lind & Tyler, 1988). Fair processes also help people reduce or manage the uncertainties they may experience (Van den Bos, Wilke, & Lind, 1998). Furthermore, process fairness has deontic value; it reassures people that basic principles of morality have been upheld (Folger, 2001).

Given that the justice literature has demonstrated the pervasive tendency for people to prefer *greater* levels of process fairness, it is theoretically and practically important to delineate when this preference may be *less* pronounced. Although relatively few studies have addressed the questions of when and why individuals might show a reduced desire for process fairness, inferences may be drawn from studies that have assessed individuals' *reactions to* being treated with varying degrees of process fairness. For example, Brockner et al. (1998) found that, compared to their high self-esteem counterparts, the job satisfaction and organizational commitment of low self-esteem individuals were less influenced by the opportunity to provide input in a decision-making process. One interpretation of such findings is that low self-esteem people have a reduced desire to have voice, a key element of process fairness. Similarly, Brockner et al. (2001) found that the tendency for people to respond more favorably to higher levels of voice was not as strong in people from high power distance cultures than from low power distance cultures. These results are consistent with the notion that people with high power distance beliefs have less of a desire for voice, relative to their counterparts with lower power distance beliefs.

Furthermore, the results of studies examining people's self-evaluations in response to *already-received* outcomes provide insight into when people may have a reduced desire for high process fairness (Brockner, 2010). Whereas there is a strong positive relationship between process fairness and people's self-evaluations when their outcomes are favorable, this relationship has been shown to be significantly lower in the face of unfavorable outcomes. By way of accounting for these findings, prior theory and research suggest that fair processes influence the self-relevance of the outcomes associated with these processes. The greater the process fairness, the more likely the people are to see themselves as personally responsible for their outcomes (Holmvall & Bobocel, 2008; Van den Bos, Bruins, Wilke, & Dronkert, 1999). The fact that fair processes make outcomes self-relevant has implications for when people may have a reduced desire for such processes. More specifically, when their outcomes are unfavorable rather than favorable, people may have less of a

[1] For ease of reading throughout the manuscript, we will use the words, "people's desire for process fairness," as opposed to "people's desire for processes that adhere to principles of fairness." Strictly speaking, however, the more accurate depiction is the latter rather than the former.

desire for process fairness. Fair processes accompanying unfavorable outcomes confront people with the self-threatening experience of seeing themselves as personally responsible. Therefore, the desire to avoid seeing themselves as personally responsible for negative outcomes suggests that people will have less desire for process fairness when outcomes are relatively unfavorable.[2]

Prior research has tested this reasoning indirectly in studies examining the interactive effect of process fairness and outcome favorability on people's self-evaluations (Brockner, 2010). The fact that there is less of a positive relationship between process fairness and self-evaluations when outcomes are relatively unfavorable implies that people will have less of a desire for fair processes when outcomes are relatively unfavorable. However, this implication is merely speculative because people's *desire* for high process fairness was never directly assessed in these prior studies.

Furthermore, the notion that people have less of a desire for high process fairness when outcomes are unfavorable rather than favorable may be overly restrictive. In fact, there may be certain conditions under which people may have a reduced desire for fair processes even when they have experienced favorable outcomes. The present studies examine one such type of favorable outcome: the experience of success that is non-contingent. Non-contingent success entails people receiving positive feedback or favorable outcomes ("success") accompanied by the perception that the favorable outcomes were not due to anything about themselves ("non-contingent"). For example, in an academic setting, students may believe that they did well on an examination because they made lucky guesses. Or, in an organizational context, salespeople may believe that they had a particularly good year not because of anything that they did, but rather because they just happened to be "in the right place at the right time." Contingent success, in contrast, refers to people receiving favorable outcomes that they believe to be due to something about themselves.

The focal hypothesis of the present research is that people have less of a desire for process fairness in response to non-contingent success rather than contingent success. Non-contingent success threatens the self by calling into question people's sense of competence. More specifically, non-contingent success makes people uncertain about whether they can continue to be successful. One way to deal with such self-threats is by preferring (and putting oneself in) situations in which

[2] The finding that the positive relationship between process fairness and self-evaluations is significantly reduced when outcomes are unfavorable (rather than favorable) has taken three different forms across studies: (1) *attenuation*, in which people's self-evaluations are more positive in response to higher than lower process fairness, albeit to a significantly lesser degree than when outcomes are favorable, (2) *elimination*, in which people's self-evaluations do not differ as a function of process fairness when outcomes are unfavorable, and (3) *reversal*, in which people's self-evaluations are actually lower when process fairness is high rather than low. While intriguing, the reversal effect may be the least likely to emerge. Whereas people's use of process fairness information to make inferences about how much they are personally responsible for their outcomes may give rise to a reversal effect, their preference for high process fairness for other reasons such as status concerns (e.g., Lind & Tyler, 1988) may counteract this tendency, thereby giving rise to attenuation or elimination. The present research examines the conditions under which people's typical desire for high process fairness may be reduced, while treating the more precise form that this reduced preference may take (attenuation, elimination, or reversal) as an exploratory empirical question.

outcomes are less self-relevant. Therein lies a potential allure of processes that are less fair. Such processes reduce the self-relevance of outcomes; therefore, when outcomes are unfavorable or when people have doubts about their sense of competence, people may prefer procedures that reduce the self-relevance of their outcomes.

In the above example of Chris, let's assume that he is experiencing uncertainty because his prior success was non-contingent. If so, the prospect of receiving a negative performance review based on a more comprehensive or accurate, and therefore, fair process may lead him to feel more personally responsible than if the same review was less comprehensive or accurate. Thus, his wanting the performance review to not include feedback from his co-workers may allow Chris to feel less personally responsible and therefore protect his self-esteem if he were to ultimately receive a negative performance review from his boss.

Furthermore, by reducing their desire for high process fairness, people may have multiple ways to protect themselves, depending on whether they are looking to future unfavorable outcomes that may be received or looking back at outcomes that they already received. Looking to the future, people may prefer processes that enable them to see themselves as less personally responsible for potentially unfavorable resource allocation decisions. For example, relative to those who experienced contingent success, those who experienced non-contingent success may have less of a desire for a subsequent resource allocation decision to be based on a process entailing high accuracy (a hypothesis tested in Study 1) or in which they had a high level of voice (a hypothesis tested in Study 2). Anticipating the possibility of relatively unfavorable outcomes, those who experienced non-contingent success may hedge their bets by having less of a desire for process fairness, thereby reducing the self-relevance of such outcomes.

Looking back, people may prefer processes that are less self-revealing in order to deflect attention or hide from their shaky sense of competence. For example, relative to those who experienced contingent success, people who experienced non-contingent success may have less of a desire for informational fairness, in which they receive an explanation of how certain resource allocation decisions were made. This hypothesis was tested in Study 3.

Whereas numerous factors may reduce people's desire for process fairness, we examined non-contingent success for two reasons. First, the experience of non-contingency is ubiquitous. For example, in the workplace, employees may perceive non-contingency when: (1) there is a long time interval between how well they perform and the outcomes of their performance, (2) when they work as part of a team rather than on an individual basis, and (3) when misalignments in an organization's reward system cause employees not to be compensated in proportion to their contributions. In all of these instances, people perceive the relationship between themselves and their outcomes to be unclear. Thus, when employees perform well, there may be numerous reasons for them to experience their success as non-contingent.

Second, examining non-contingent success allows us to forge connections between justice theory and a literature in which non-contingent success has been shown to play a central role: research on self-handicapping. Self-handicapping

theory focuses on how people handle the self-threat associated with anticipating the possible receipt of unfavorable outcomes (e.g., Jones & Berglas, 1978; Higgins, Snyder, & Berglas, 1990). When people experience non-contingent success, they subsequently may put obstacles in their own way that reduce their chances of future success. Examples of self-handicapping include getting inebriated on the night before an important test or failing to put forth the level of preparatory effort necessary for success. In the organizational arena, self-handicapping may also take the form of taking on too many tasks and procrastination (recall our opening examples of Joe and Andrea). At first blush, imposing obstacles is paradoxical in that the obstacles increase the likelihood that people will receive unfavorable outcomes. However, by putting obstacles in their way, people may be able to influence the attributions made for their performance. Of particular concern to the present analysis, the self-handicap may provide people with a handy excuse if they were not to perform well, which, *ex ante*, they perceive as a real possibility. If they were to perform poorly, they (and others) can attribute their poor performance to the handicap rather than to more personal and therefore self-threatening causes, such as a lack of ability. Prior research has shown that success contingency influences self-handicapping (Jones & Berglas, 1978). Relative to those pretreated with contingent success, those who experience non-contingent success are more likely to self-handicap to minimize the self-threatening implications of the possibly unfavorable future outcomes they anticipate.

A fundamental premise of the present research is that when people are looking ahead to potential unfavorable outcomes to be received, having less of a desire for process fairness may serve a similar psychological function to engaging in self-handicapping behavior. In both instances, people are seeking to protect against threats to their sense of self. Just as people who experienced non-contingent success may self-handicap to ward off the possible self-threat that they anticipate, so too might the experience of non-contingent success reduce their desire for fair processes to ward off seeing themselves as personally responsible for unfavorable outcomes which may be received.

The Present Studies

Three studies evaluated whether reductions in people's desire for process fairness are influenced by the experience of non-contingent versus contingent success. Unlike extant studies that indirectly speak to when and why people may have a reduced desire for high process fairness, the present research directly examines when and why individuals might not prefer fairness as much. To evaluate the generality of the primary prediction that people want process fairness less when they have experienced non-contingent rather than contingent success, we examined different principles of fairness (Colquitt, 2001): accuracy, voice, and informational fairness, in Studies 1, 2, and 3, respectively.

Moreover, in Studies 2 and 3, we included additional independent variables in the research design to shed light on the underlying mechanism. Our reasoning is that the experience of self-threat accounts for the tendency of non-contingent success to

reduce people's desire for process fairness. If this reasoning is correct, then other factors affecting people's experience of self-threat should: (1) moderate the relationship between success contingency and their desire for process fairness (a hypothesis tested in Study 2) and (2) affect their desire for process fairness (a hypothesis tested in Study 3).

Additionally, we used two different research methods to test the focal hypothesis that people want process fairness less in response to non-contingent than contingent success. Studies 1 and 2 used a vignette in which participants were asked to imagine that they were in a workplace situation in which they experienced success that was either non-contingent or contingent. In Study 3, we conducted an experiment in which participants actually experienced all aspects of the situation, including the manipulation of success contingency.

Study 1

All participants read a vignette in which they were asked to imagine that they were employees applying for a desirable position within their organization. Participants also were told that the organization was considering the use of two methods to make the selection decision that varied with respect to accuracy, which is one of the components of procedural fairness (Leventhal, Karuza, & Fry, 1980).

All participants were informed that they had a record of being successful in the organization. Half of the participants were led to believe that their prior success was contingent on their ability and effort (contingent success condition), while the other half was told that their prior success was not contingent on their ability and effort (non-contingent success condition). The dependent variable consisted of the extent to which participants wanted decision-making authorities in the organization to use each of the two methods (one more accurate than the other) when making the decision about whether to offer them the job.

Hypothesis 1 Relative to their counterparts in the contingent success condition, participants in the non-contingent success condition will show less of a tendency to rate the more accurate method as preferable to the less accurate method.

Method

Participants and Design

Forty-eight undergraduate students at a university in the northeastern USA completed the study for course credit. Participants received a booklet in which the manipulation and all measures were embedded. To heighten their involvement, participants were instructed to "put yourself in the shoes of the person who is going through this situation, and consider what you would be thinking and feeling if you went through the exact same situation." Participants then read that they had been working at a company for about one year after graduating from college. To ensure perceived success, they were told: "You have already received a promotion while

none of the other college graduates in your cohort have been promoted at all. Your pay, bonuses, and job title suggest that you have been successful. All in all, your record of promotion and compensation at the company is positive."

Success contingency was manipulated by randomly assigning participants to a condition in which they were led to believe that their success was either contingent or non-contingent on their ability and effort. In the contingent success condition, participants were told:

> It is quite clear why you have received this positive feedback. For instance, every indication suggests that you have superior capabilities to your work colleagues. Further reassuring you is the fact that there seems to be a strong relationship between how hard you try and how well you perform. For example, on the various projects that you've worked on, the harder you try the better you do. In short, you generally feel secure about your ability to continue to perform well at work.

In the non-contingent success condition, participants were told:

> You are very unsure about why you have received this positive feedback. For instance, there is no indication that you have superior capabilities to your work colleagues, and in fact when you compare yourself to them you often believe that you are weaker than them in certain fundamental ways. Further puzzling you is the fact that there doesn't seem to be much of a relationship between how hard you try and how well you perform. For example, on some projects you have not tried hard and have done well while on other projects you have tried hard and have not done well. In short, you generally feel insecure about your ability to continue to perform well at work.

All participants were then told that they applied for a position involving a promotion that they would value highly, and (to heighten their involvement further) that important others knew that they had applied for the position. The scenario also provided information regarding the criteria necessary to be successful in the position. Specifically, all participants were told:

> The search committee told you that they have identified three attributes that are necessary to be successful in this position. The following is a list of those attributes: (1) attentiveness to detail, (2) strong quantitative ability, and (3) ability to cope with tight time deadlines.

They were then told that two different methods (labeled "Method 1" and "Method 2") could be used to determine who would be awarded the new position. Method 1 was described as being highly accurate, as follows:

> In this case, the search committee would collect information about the three attributes mentioned previously, that is: attentiveness to detail, quantitative ability, and ability to cope with tight time deadlines. This information is not currently available in the job candidates' personnel files and therefore the effort would require a great deal of time to gather all of the necessary

information. On the other hand, having all of this information would allow the company to be very accurate in selecting the right person for the job.

Method 2 was described as being less accurate.

In this case, the search committee would collect information about the job candidates' quantitative ability only. This information is not available in the job candidates' personnel files but could be obtained through a brief test. This would not require as much time as Method 1 requires. On the other hand, having information about candidates' quantitative ability but not the other attributes relevant to job performance would make it more difficult for the company to be accurate in selecting the right person for the job.

After reading the scenario, participants completed a questionnaire that included measures pertaining to success contingency and perceived fairness as well as the main dependent variable: participants' preference for the two methods.

One of the main consequences of success contingency is that it affects people's certainty about their competence, such that they tend to be less certain in response to non-contingent success rather than contingent success (Jones & Berglas, 1978). Hence, we assessed the consequence of success contingency with the item, "How certain or uncertain would you feel about your overall competence at work?" [Scale endpoints were, "highly uncertain" (1), and "highly certain" (7)]. In addition, to evaluate whether participants perceived the more accurate method as more fair, they rated the fairness of each of the two methods that the organization was contemplating using to make the selection decision, i.e., "How fair is it to use Method 1 [Method 2] to determine which job applicant should be awarded the position?" [Scale endpoints: "not at all fair" (1), "very fair" (7)].

Dependent Variable

To assess the strength of their relative preference for the two methods, participants were asked two questions: "How strongly would you prefer that Method 1 [Method 2] be used as the basis for selecting the job applicant?" [Scale endpoints: "not at all" (1), "very strongly" (7)].

Results

Perceptions of Competence and Perceived Fairness

As expected, participants felt less certain about their overall competence in the non-contingent success condition ($M = 5.00$, 95 % CI [4.50, 5.50]) than in the contingent success condition ($M = 5.71$, 95 % CI [5.21, 6.21]), $F(1, 46) = 4.02$, $p = .05$, $\eta_p^2 = .08$.

Given that all participants rated the fairness of Method 1 and Method 2, we conducted a two-factor analysis of variance (Success Contingency × Method, with repeated measures on the last factor). Of greatest importance, only the main effect of method was significant such that participants perceived the more accurate method

($M = 5.67$, 95 % CI [5.26, 6.07]) as more fair than the less accurate method ($M = 3.31$, 95 % CI [2.87, 3.76]), $F(1, 46) = 43.12$, $p < .001$, $\eta_p^2 = .48$.

Test of Hypothesis 1

We conducted a Success Contingency × Method analysis of variance of participants' preferences, with repeated measures on the last factor. There was a main effect of method, $F(1, 46) = 16.46$, $p < .001$, $\eta_p^2 = .26$, such that participants generally expressed greater desire for the more accurate method ($M = 5.06$, 95 % CI [4.58, 5.55]) over the less accurate method ($M = 3.52$, 95 % CI [3.03, 4.01]). Of greater importance, the interaction was significant, $F(1, 46) = 3.89$, $p = .05$, $\eta_p^2 = .08$. In support of Hypothesis 1 and as can be seen in Fig. 1, participants' tendency to prefer the more accurate method over the less accurate method was significantly less pronounced in the non-contingent success condition (more accurate method: $M = 4.67$, 95 % CI [3.98, 5.35]; less accurate method: $M = 3.88$, 95 % CI [3.18, 4.57], $F(1, 46) = 2.17$, $p = .148$, $\eta_p^2 = .05$) than in the contingent success condition (more accurate method: $M = 5.46$, 95 % CI [4.78, 6.14]; less accurate method: $M = 3.17$, 95 % CI [2.47, 3.86], $F(1, 46) = 18.18$, $p < .001$, $\eta_p^2 = .28$).

Subsidiary Analysis Testing an Alternative Interpretation

Given that the allocation decision had not already occurred, it is possible that participants' preferences for the more and less accurate methods reflected more instrumental concerns. That is, those in the non-contingent success condition may have believed that the use of the more accurate method would *lower* their chances of being selected for the position. To evaluate this possibility, we asked participants at

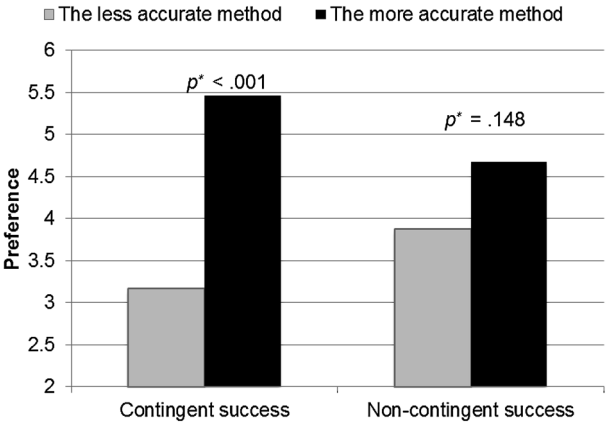

Fig. 1 Preference for the more accurate method over the less accurate method as a function of success contingency (Study 1). *Note* Scores could range from 1 to 7, with higher scores reflecting more of a preference. *p values are in reference to the simple effect of method

the end of the questionnaire, "Assume you had to choose between Method 1 and Method 2 to serve as the basis for selecting the job applicant. Which one of these methods would you choose?" Immediately after they had made their choice, participants were then asked, "Assume that the company used the method that you just chose. In light of this, rate the likelihood that you will be selected for the job." [Scale endpoints: "not at all likely" (1), "very likely" (7)].

To evaluate this alternative hypothesis, we conducted a Success Contingency × Method Selected (2 × 2) analysis of variance on participants' perceived likelihood that they would be chosen for the job. Most participants (70 %) selected the more accurate method, with this percentage higher but not significantly so in the contingent success condition than in the non-contingent success condition. If participants' preferences for the methods were largely based on the instrumental concern of being selected for the job, then in the contingent success condition those who chose the more accurate selection method should be more confident than those who chose the less accurate selection method. The accurate method makes it more likely that the job will go to the most deserving person, which those in the contingent success condition are likely to believe is themselves. In contrast, in the non-contingent success condition, if participants' method preference was based largely on maximizing the likelihood of being selected for the job, then there should be a significant reduction in the tendency for those who chose the more accurate method to be more confident about being selected for the job. In sum, the reasoning underlying this alternative interpretation should manifest itself in the form of an interaction effect between Success Contingency and Method Selected.

However, an analysis of variance showed that the interaction effect was trivial (as were the two main effects; all Fs < 1). Thus, it does not appear that the reduction in participants' preference for the more accurate method over the less accurate method in the non-contingent success condition was based primarily on their trying to make it more likely for them to be selected for the job.

Study 2

Study 2 was designed to extend Study 1 in two important respects. First, process fairness was examined in a different way than in Study 1. Whereas the process dimension consisted of accuracy in Study 1, it was based on voice in Study 2. As in Study 1, all participants in Study 2 were asked to imagine that they had applied for a desirable promotion in their organization. After the success contingency manipulation, they were told that the organization was considering the use of two methods to make the selection decision. The two methods varied on the basis of whether or not they allowed participants to have voice. Conceptually analogous to Hypothesis 1 from Study 1, we expect people's tendencies to prefer the voice-giving method over the voice-denying method to be lower in the non-contingent success condition than in the contingent success condition. This may be because the voice-denying method better enables participants to ward off having to accept personal responsibility if their future outcomes turn out to be unfavorable. Support for this prediction would

lend generality to the results of Study 1 by showing that the effect of success contingency on people's preference for accuracy also applies to other process dimensions that adhere to principles of fairness.

Hypothesis 2 Relative to their counterparts in the contingent success condition, participants in the non-contingent success condition will show less of a tendency to rate the voice-giving method as preferable to the voice-denying method.

Additional Independent Variable

A second way in which Study 2 was designed to extend Study 1 was by shedding light on the mechanism accounting for the relationship between success contingency and people's desire for processes varying in voice. We did so by including another independent (or moderator) variable in the research design (Spencer, Zanna, & Fong, 2005). Our reasoning is that the tendency for non-contingent success to reduce people's desire for process fairness is due to the self-threat; they would anticipate experiencing if they were to fail to maintain their success. If so, then the predicted relationship between success contingency and people's desire for process fairness should be stronger when non-contingent success elicits more of a self-threat.

One factor likely to reflect people's experience of self-threat in the face of non-contingent success is their regulatory focus. According to Higgins (1998), people engage in self-regulation in either promotion-focused or prevention-focused ways. Relative to their promotion-focused counterparts, those with a prevention focus are more motivated by safety and security, which makes them more vigilant to protect against meaningful losses, such as guarding against threats to the self. Regulatory focus may therefore influence people's desire for methods varying in voice when they are *anticipating* the possible failure to maintain favorable outcomes, such as after being treated with non-contingent success. In particular, those with more of a prevention focus may be particularly likely to engage in self-protection in anticipation of the possibility of receiving unfavorable outcomes. As Higgins (2012) recently suggested, whereas promotion-focused individuals assign importance to winning (advancing from 0 to +1), prevention-focused individuals are motivated to not lose (preventing movement from 0 to -1). Success that is non-contingent may be experienced as less likely to be *maintained*, which is a potential threat that is more relevant to the (self-protective) strivings of prevention rather than promotion-focused persons. Accordingly, we expected regulatory focus to moderate the relationship between success contingency and people's desire for methods varying in voice:

Hypothesis 3 The tendency for non-contingent success to reduce people's preference for the voice-giving over the voice-denying method set forth in Hypothesis 2 will be stronger among those with a prevention rather than a promotion focus.

Method

Participants and Design

Sixty-five undergraduate students at a business school in the northeastern USA participated in the study in exchange for course credit. Stimulus materials were similar to those used in Study 1. Before participants read the booklet containing the job promotion scenario and the questionnaire in which our experimental manipulations and dependent variables were embedded, we manipulated their regulatory focus (e.g., Higgins, 1998). Specifically, participants were asked to list and write about how they plan to accomplish either three hopes and aspirations (promotion condition) or three obligations and duties (prevention condition).

As in Study 1, all participants were then asked to imagine that they applied for a position involving a promotion that they would value highly. They were then told that two different methods (again described only as "Method 1" and "Method 2") could be used to determine who would be awarded the new position. One method was described as denying voice to participants: "In this case, the search committee would look for indications of how well applicants were doing in the company, such as their record of promotion and compensation, to make their decision. This method would not allow you to have any direct personal input into the search process." They were also told that with this method the search committee would not interview them for the position prior to making their decision.

The other method was described as giving voice to participants: "In this case, the search committee would look for the same indications of how well applicants were doing in the company as in the other method to make their decision. Furthermore, the search committee would also allow you to have direct personal input into their deliberations about whether to select you for the position." As a further indicator of the greater voice associated with this method, they also were told that the search committee would interview them for the position as part of the process of choosing the successful candidate.

Whereas the voice-denying method was expected to be seen as less fair than the voice-giving method, the voice-denying method also allows participants to feel less personally implicated if future outcomes prove to be unfavorable, and therefore reduce the experience of self-threat. After reading the entire scenario, participants completed a questionnaire that included the same items used in Study 1 to assess participants' perceptions of competence and method fairness. (As is common in regulatory focus research, we did not include a check on the regulatory focus manipulation. The procedure used was identical to the one used in many previous studies (Higgins, 1998), the results of which attest to its validity.) The questionnaire also included the same dependent variable used in Study 1 of participants' preference for the two methods.

Results

Perceptions of Competence and Method Fairness

Participants were significantly less certain regarding their competence in the non-contingent success condition ($M = 3.63$, 95 % CI [3.24, 4.01]) than in the contingent success condition ($M = 6.21$, 95 % CI [5.83, 6.59]), $F(1,63) = 91.32$, $p < .001$, $\eta_p^2 = .59$.

As in Study 1, we analyzed participants' fairness perceptions with a two-factor analysis of variance (Success Contingency × Method, with repeated measures on the last factor). Once again, the only significant finding was a highly significant main effect of method, such that participants perceived the voice-giving method as more fair ($M = 6.17$, 95 % CI [5.97, 6.37]) than the voice-denying method ($M = 3.24$, 95 % CI [2.86, 3.62]), $F(1, 63) = 191.60$, $p < .001$, $\eta_p^2 = .75$.

Tests of Hypotheses

We conducted a three-factor analysis of covariance (Success Contingency × Regulatory Focus × Method) of participants' method preferences, with repeated measures on the last factor. In support of Hypothesis 2, there was a significant two-way interaction between success contingency and method, $F(1, 60) = 6.74$, $p < .025$, $\eta_p^2 = .10$. Conceptually analogous to Hypothesis 1 in Study 1, participants' preference for the voice-giving method over the voice-denying method was less pronounced in the non-contingent success condition (voice-giving method: $M = 5.14$, 95 % CI [4.67, 5.60]; voice-denying method: $M = 4.88$, 95 % CI [4.22, 5.53], $F(1, 60) = .31$, $p = .580$, $\eta_p^2 = .01$) than in the contingent success condition (voice-giving method: $M = 6.09$, 95 % CI [5.63, 6.54]; voice-denying method:

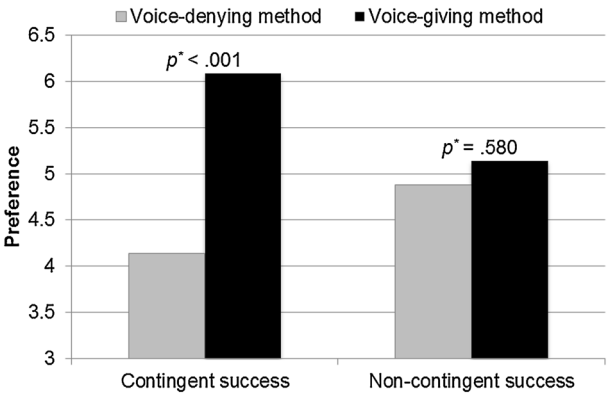

Fig. 2 Preference for the voice-giving method over the voice-denying method as a function of success contingency (Study 2). *Note* Scores could range from 1 to 7, with higher scores reflecting more of a preference. *p values are in reference to the simple effect of method

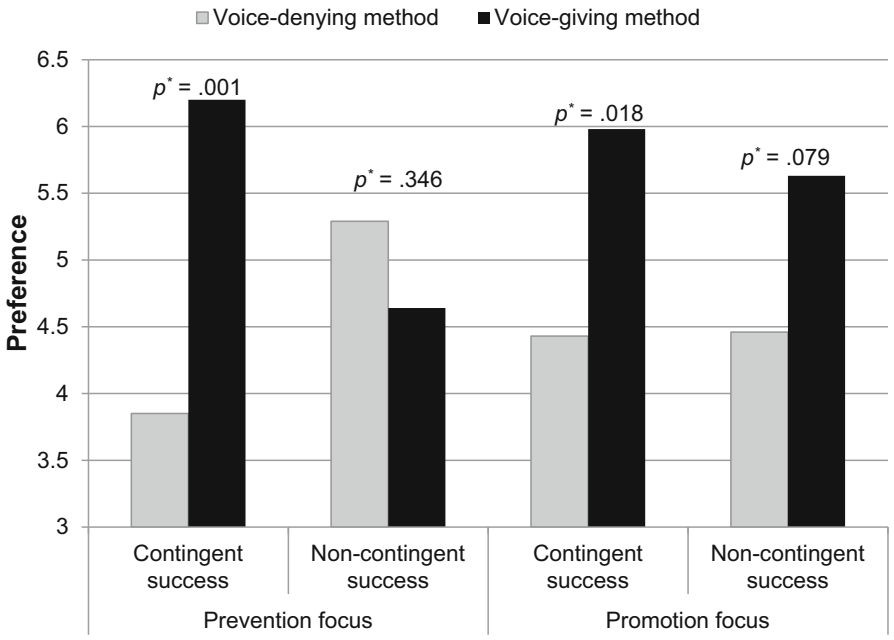

Fig. 3 Preference for the voice-giving method over the voice-denying method as a function of success contingency and regulatory focus (Study 2). *Note* Scores could range from 1 to 7, with higher scores reflecting more of a preference. *p values are in reference to the simple effect of method

$M = 4.14$, 95 % CI [3.49, 4.78], $F(1, 60) = 18.23$, $p < .001$, $\eta_p^2 = .23$), as shown in Fig. 2.[3]

Hypothesis 3 posited that the aforementioned two-way interaction between success contingency and method would be stronger among those in the prevention focus condition than in the promotion focus condition. In fact, the three-way interaction was significant, $F(1, 60) = 3.92$, $p = .05$, $\eta_p^2 = .06$, and is shown in Fig. 3 to take the predicted form: participants induced to be prevention focused preferred the voice-giving method over the voice-denying method to a considerably lesser extent in the non-contingent success condition (voice-giving method: $M = 4.64$, 95 % CI [3.53, 5.32]; voice-denying method: $M = 5.29$, 95 % CI [4.33, 6.26], $F(1, 60) = .90$, $p = .346$, $\eta_p^2 = .02$) than in the contingent success condition (voice-giving method: $M = 6.20$, 95 % CI [5.54, 6.85]; voice-denying method: $M = 3.85$, 95 % CI [2.92, 4.77], $F(1, 60) = 12.86$, $p = .001$, $\eta_p^2 = .18$). In contrast, those induced to be promotion focused preferred the voice-giving method over the voice-denying method, regardless of success contingency (voice-giving method: $M = 5.63$, 95 % CI [4.98, 6.28]; voice-denying method: $M = 4.46$, 95 % CI [3.55, 5.38], $F(1, 60) = 3.20$, $p = .079$, $\eta_p^2 = .05$, in the non-contingent success

[3] We included gender as a covariate in the analyses in Study 2 because unlike in Study 1 gender was significantly related to participants' tendencies to prefer the more fair method over the less fair method; specifically, women showed more of a tendency to prefer the voice-giving method over the voice-denying method than did men, $F(1, 60) = 5.69$, $p < .02$.

condition; voice-giving method: $M = 5.98$, 95 % CI [3.54, 6.61]; voice-denying method: $M = 4.43$, 95 % CI [3.53, 5.32], $F(1, 60) = 5.95$, $p = .018$, $\eta_p^2 = .01$, in the contingent success condition). To state the three-way interaction differently, the simple two-way interaction effect between success contingency and method was significant in the prevention focus condition, $F(1, 60) = 10.65$, $p < .01$, $\eta_p^2 = .23$, but not in the promotion condition, $F(1, 60) = 1.23$, $p > .10$.

In sum, the results of Study 2 show that not only was success contingency a determinant of people's preference for a different principle of process fairness (voice, rather than accuracy), but also the tendency for those in the non-contingent condition to show a diminished preference for process fairness was stronger among those who were more motivated to self-protect (i.e., participants in the prevention focus condition).

Study 3

Study 3 was designed to extend Studies 1 and 2 in several important ways. First, given that the sample sizes in Studies 1 and 2 were relatively small, we examined a considerably larger sample in Study 3 to further enhance the generality of the findings. Second, we conducted an experiment (as opposed to utilizing a vignette) such that participants directly experienced all aspects of the situation, including the manipulation of success contingency. Third, we operationalized success contingency and process fairness in different ways, with the latter being examined in terms of informational fairness rather than in terms of accuracy (Study 1) or voice (Study 2). Finally, as in Study 2, we sought to shed light on the mechanism accounting for the relationship between success contingency and people's desire for process fairness.

All participants worked on a task and received positive feedback about their performance, in which they were led to believe that their success was either contingent or non-contingent. Participants were then told that they would be working on an activity later in the study in which they would be assigned to one of two roles. One of the roles was described as highly desirable, whereas the other was described as highly undesirable. Moreover, they were told that the role to which they would be assigned was going to be based upon their performance on a task very similar to the one that they just completed.

Participants also were informed that after being assigned to either the highly desirable or highly undesirable role, they would have the opportunity to receive an informative explanation of why they were assigned to one role rather than the other (informational fairness). Such causal accounts have been shown to be an important element of interactional fairness (e.g., Bies, 1987). The dependent variable was how much participants wanted to receive the informative explanation of their role assignment after the decision was made. We predicted that those who experienced non-contingent success would have less of a desire for informational fairness than their counterparts in the contingent success condition.

Hypothesis 4 Relative to those in the contingent success condition, participants in the non-contingent success condition will have less of a desire for informational fairness.

Additional Independent Variables

As in Study 2, we included other independent variables in the research design to further evaluate whether people's reduced desire for process fairness emanated from their experience of self-threat. Participants were told that their task performance would directly affect the favorability of their outcomes, in that how well they performed would influence whether they were assigned to a desirable rather than an undesirable role in a subsequent activity. Relative to those in the contingent success condition, those who experienced non-contingent success are likely to question whether they will be assigned to the undesirable role. Furthermore, the more that those in the non-contingent success condition answer that question affirmatively, that is, by believing that they *will* be assigned to the undesirable role, the more likely they are to experience self-threat, and therefore have less desire for informational fairness.

If self-threat and the resulting motive to self-protect accounts for the reduced desire for informational fairness, then engaging in self-affirmation should lead to a greater desire for informational fairness precisely when participants are feeling most self-threatened, when they experienced non-contingent success and also expected to be assigned to the undesirable role. Self-affirmation has been shown to reduce people's tendency to defensively self-protect when exposed to self-threat (Sherman & Cohen, 2006; Steele, 1988). Our reasoning is that self-protection in response to self-threat underlies participants' reduced preference for informational fairness. If this reasoning is correct, then those who self-affirm should have more of a desire for informational fairness than those who do not self-affirm, particularly when they are most likely to be experiencing self-threat, when they have experienced non-contingent success and also are expecting to be assigned to the undesirable role.

After participants experienced either non-contingent or contingent success, we assessed the extent to which they expected to receive the unfavorable outcome of being assigned to the undesirable role. Moreover, half of the participants were randomly assigned to either engage in self-affirmation or not. We expected self-affirmation to have the strongest positive effect on the desire for informational fairness among participants who were likely to feel most self-threatened, namely those who experienced non-contingent success and who more expected to be assigned to the undesirable role.

Hypothesis 5 There will be a three-way interaction between success contingency, role assignment expectation, and self-affirmation, such that the positive effect of self-affirmation on desire for informational fairness will be strongest among those who experience non-contingent success and who also think it more likely that they will be assigned to the undesirable role.

Method

Participants

A total of 358 participants were recruited via Amazon Mechanical Turk to complete an online study. Participants had to be 18 years old or older, a resident of the USA and have completed some college courses. Slightly less than half of the participants were male (45.6 %).

Procedure

Participants were told at the outset that they would be completing two parts of a Business Aptitude Test (BAT) and that how well they did on the BAT would determine whether they would be selected for the desirable role or undesirable role. To further heighten participants' engagement, we told them that performance on the BAT had been shown to be an accurate measure of intelligence and an effective predictor of success in the workplace.

Manipulations and Measures

Success Contingency

The manipulation of success contingency was based on the same one used in many previous studies which has been shown to reliably produce results consistent with self-handicapping theory (e.g., Berglas & Jones, 1978; Kolditz & Arkin, 1982; Shepperd & Arkin, 1989; Siegel, Scillitoe, & Parks-Yancy, 2005; Tucker, Vuchinich, & Sobell, 1981). Participants worked on problems typical of those found in the Graduate Management Admission Test (GMAT), as well as multiple choice questions relating to everyday managerial decisions. In the non-contingent success condition, the problems used were similar to those ranked as "Moderately Difficult" in the standard GMAT admissions examination review manuals, whereas in the contingent success condition the problems used were similar to those ranked as "Easy." All participants were told that they would have 10 min to complete the first section of the BAT, and that they should answer all of the questions, even if it required guessing on questions for which they did not know the answer. (Pilot testing suggested that 10 min was ample time for participants to identify correct responses in the contingent success condition, but was not enough time for those in the non-contingent success condition, who often were making guesses.) After completing the examination, participants were told that their responses would be scored and that they would receive feedback. Shortly thereafter, all participants were given identical positive feedback, whereby they were told that they had performed "better than the vast majority of people who have taken this exam," and their "potential to be successful in a wide range of careers and situations" was "very high."

At this point, they completed several questions about their task performance, which included a way to evaluate the level of success contingency that they

experienced. First, participants were asked, "In light of the evaluation you received about your performance on the first section of the BAT, how well do you expect to do on the remaining portion of the BAT?" (Scale endpoints: "very poorly" (1), "very well" (5). The evaluation of the manipulation followed immediately thereafter. Given that non-contingent success is hypothesized to elicit self-threat by making people uncertain about their sense of competence, we asked participants, "How certain are you of your answer to the previous question?" [Scale endpoints: "not at all certain" (1), "very certain" (5)]. Whereas participants received identical feedback regarding their performance on the BAT, we expected their subjective experience of certainty about their subsequent performance to be higher in the contingent success than in the non-contingent success condition.

Self-Affirmation

The manipulation of self-affirmation took place next, drawing on the procedure used in many previous studies (e.g., Sherman & Cohen, 2006; Steele, 1988). Participants in the affirmation condition first rank-ordered the personal significance of ten values (e.g., sense of humor, relations with friends/family, and spontaneity/living life in the moment). They were then asked to write a brief explanation of why their most highly ranked value was important to them and also to describe a situation in which this value played an important role in their life. Those in the no affirmation condition were asked to write a brief description of the foods they ate the previous day, under the guise of "helping us to get to know a little bit more about your preferences and opinions."

After the self-affirmation manipulation, participants were told once again that their performance in the next part of the BAT would determine whether they would be selected to the more desirable ("Managerial") role or to the more undesirable ("Clerical") role. To further differentiate the roles, we indicated that prior participants in the study found the Managerial role to be much more desirable than the Clerical role. The Managerial role was depicted as "drawing on a variety of skills and abilities in a very engaging way; therefore, we expect that you would also likely find it to be very interesting." In contrast, the Clerical role was described as "quite boring as it doesn't require you to use many of your skills and abilities; therefore, we expect that you would also not find it to be very interesting."

Informational Fairness

All participants were told that after their assignment to either the Managerial or Clerical role was made, they could "opt to receive a full and detailed explanation about how and why they were selected for one role rather than the other." The measure of how much they wanted informational fairness consisted of a four-item index (Cronbach alpha = .91), e.g., "After the role assignment has been made, how much would you want a full and detailed explanation of the selection decision?" [Scale endpoints: "not at all" (1), "very much" (7)]. Given that participants had been told repeatedly that their assignment to one role versus the other was going to

be based on their performance on the BAT, the substance of the explanation was likely to be perceived as self-relevant.

Expectation of Being Selected for the Undesirable Role

Finally, participants completed the measure of how likely it was that they would be selected for the undesirable role: "At this moment, what is your expectation of being selected for the Clerical role?" [Scale endpoints: "not at all likely" (1), "very likely" (7)]. After completing this measure, participants were told that the study was over. They were thanked, debriefed, and paid for their participation.

Results and Discussion

Evaluating the Manipulation of Success Contingency

The effect of success contingency was assessed after participants experienced the manipulation but prior to the self-affirmation manipulation. Participants in the non-contingent success condition were significantly less certain about their performance on the upcoming BAT than were those in the contingent success condition, *M*s = 3.49 (95 % CI [3.32, 3.67]) vs. 4.17 (95 % CI [4.01, 4.33], respectively, $F(1, 336) = 31.47$, $p < .001$, $\eta_p^2 = .09$.[4]

As is common in self-affirmation research, we did not include an independent measure of self-affirmation because of concerns about reactivity, i.e., the very act of completing a measure of self-affirmation could be self-affirming in its own right. However, in manipulating self-affirmation, we closely followed the procedure used in many prior studies (Sherman & Cohen, 2006; Steele, 1988), the results of which attest to the validity of the manipulation.

Tests of Hypotheses

We conducted a hierarchical multiple regression on desire for informational fairness, entering the main effects of success contingency, self-affirmation, and expectations on the first step, all two-way interactions on the second step, and the three-way interaction on the third step. Two significant effects emerged. First, there was a main effect for success contingency. In support of Hypothesis 4, participants wanted informational fairness less in the non-contingent success condition ($M = 5.55$, 95 % CI [5.35, 5.75]) than in the contingent success condition ($M = 5.89$, 95 % CI [5.70, 6.07]), $F(1, 334) = 5.89$, $p < .025$, $\eta_p^2 = .02$.

Second, in support of Hypothesis 5, the three-way interaction effect was significant, $F(1, 330) = 5.06, p < .025, \eta_p^2 = .02$. As specified in Hypothesis 5, the positive effect

[4] The question preceding the certainty measure (i.e., how well participants expected to perform on the next section of the BAT) also yielded a significant effect of success contingency ($p < .001$), such that participants expected to do better on the next part of the BAT in the contingent success condition than in the non-contingent success condition. Controlling for participants' responses to this question in an analysis of covariance on the subsequent measure of certainty, we found the success contingency effect remained highly significant ($p < .001$).

of engaging in self-affirmation on people's desire for informational fairness was strongest among participants most likely to be experiencing self-threat (i.e., those pretreated with non-contingent success and who more strongly believed that they were going to be selected for the undesirable role). As illustrated in Fig. 4, the simple slope of self-affirmation (i.e., the difference between the gray bar and black bar) was significant ($p = .023$) only among this group but not significant among any of the other three groups ($ps = .142$, .513, and .174). Thus, it was people who were most likely to be in need of self-protection whose desire for informational fairness was greater when they self-affirmed than when they did not, suggesting that self-threat affected how much people wanted to be treated with high process fairness.

In sum, the results of Study 3 provide further evidence that success contingency was a determinant of people's preference for process fairness and that this relationship was driven by the experience of self-threat.

General Discussion

Taken together, the results of three studies show that people had less of a desire for process fairness when they experienced non-contingent rather than contingent success. Conceptually analogous findings emerged across studies differing in

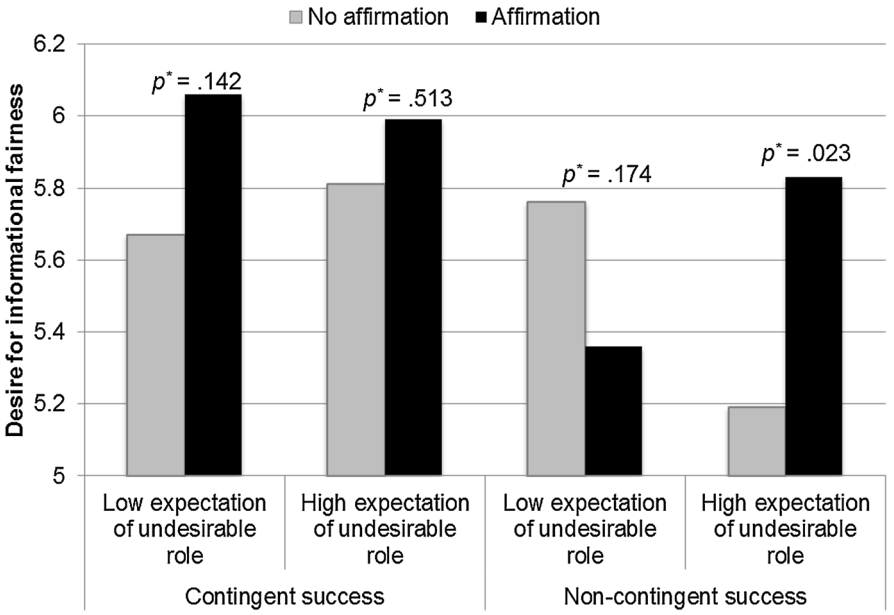

Fig. 4 Desire for informational fairness as a function of success contingency, likelihood of being selected for the undesirable role, and self-affirmation (Study 3). *Note* Desire for informational fairness as a function of success contingency, level of expectation being selected for the undesirable role (one SD above and one SD below the mean level of expectation), and self-affirmation. Predicted values are shown because the likelihood variable is continuous rather than categorical. Higher scores reflect more of a desire for informational fairness. *p values are in reference to the simple effect of self-affirmation

numerous ways, such as: (1) the type of research method used (i.e., role playing in Studies 1 and 2 versus an actual situation in Study 3); (2) the way in which success contingency was operationalized (we used different methods in Studies 1 and 2 relative to Study 3); and (3) the principle of process fairness that was examined (accuracy, voice, and informational fairness). The fact that the relationship between success contingency and people's desire for process fairness was consistent across methodologically different studies bodes well for the reliability and generalizability of the findings.

Furthermore, the results produced by the other independent variables in Studies 2 and 3 shed light on the mechanism accounting for participants' lower preference for process fairness when they experienced non-contingent rather than contingent success. We posited that the tendency for non-contingent success to lower people's desire for process fairness reflected their motivation to self-protect. In different ways, the results of Studies 2 and 3 showed that people's reduced desire for process fairness varied as a function of how motivated they were to engage in self-protection. When prevention focused, people are more likely to experience the self-threat elicited by non-contingent success, thereby explaining why (in Study 2) prevention-focused individuals showed a stronger tendency for non-contingent success to reduce their desire for voice. Moreover, self-affirmation counteracts people's experience of self-threat, thereby explaining why (in Study 3) self-affirmation had a positive effect on desire for informational fairness when people were likely to be feeling most self-threatened, i.e., when they experienced non-contingent success and they thought it more likely that they would be assigned to the undesirable role.

Theoretical Implications

Justice

A cardinal principle in justice theory and research is that people prefer process fairness. The fact that process fairness information influences the self-relevance of outcomes suggests that there may be conditions under which people may show less of the typical tendency to prefer to be treated with high process fairness. In particular, people will have a reduced desire for process fairness in response to unfavorable rather than favorable outcomes. The present studies meaningfully extend the results of prior research demonstrating that when people's outcomes are unfavorable, the positive relationship between process fairness and self-evaluations is significantly reduced (Brockner, 2010). First, whereas the previous findings implied that people have a reduced desire for fair process if they have received unfavorable outcomes, the present studies demonstrate that people can have a reduced preference for process fairness even when they experienced *favorable* outcomes, in particular, when the favorable outcomes reflect non-contingent success. Second, the present findings provide more direct evidence that people have less of a desire for process fairness in response to non-contingent success. In all three studies, the dependent variable specifically assessed how much participants *wanted* such processes.

Hedging and Hiding

When people experience non-contingent success, they are caught in a bind. On the one hand, they may appreciate the success, but, on the other hand, the non-contingency of the success may elicit self-threat by calling into question their sense of competence. The present studies suggest that people may have a variety of ways to manage self-threat by making their experiences less self-relevant, as manifested in their desire for process fairness. On the one hand, looking *ahead* to allocation decisions when their sense of competence is shaky, they may have less of a desire for processes which elicit self-attributions for outcomes, as shown in Studies 1 and 2 in which those experiencing non-contingent success wanted accuracy and voice, respectively, to a lesser extent (hedging). On the other hand, looking *back* at resource allocation decisions when their sense of competence is shaky, they may have less of a desire for explanations of how such decisions were made, as shown in Study 3 in which those treated with non-contingent success wanted informational fairness to a lesser extent (hiding). Previous research has shown that the predicament introduced by the experience of non-contingent success may cause people to engage in self-handicapping (Jones & Berglas, 1978; Higgins et al., 1990). The present findings suggest that for similarly self-protective reasons, people who experience non-contingent success have less of a desire to be treated with process fairness, relative to their counterparts who experience contingent success.

Self-Handicapping

One of the most intriguing features of self-handicapping is that it reveals the types of sacrifices that people are willing to make in the face of non-contingent success. For example, when people experience non-contingent success, they may put obstacles in their way. In essence, they are willing to lower their chances of successful self-regulation, in the service of having a self-protective explanation if their self-regulatory activity proves to be unsuccessful. The present studies provide evidence of yet another sacrifice people make in response to non-contingent success, reducing their desire for fair process. Being treated with process, fairness offers many benefits. It satisfies instrumental concerns (Thibaut & Walker, 1975) and relational concerns (Tyler & Lind, 1992). It helps people manage uncertainty (Van den Bos & Lind, 2002), and it reassures them that basic principles of morality have been upheld (Folger, 2001). The present studies show that people are more willing to eschew these various benefits of fair processes when they experience non-contingent rather than contingent success. Thus, in addition to self-handicapping, reducing their desire for process fairness may be yet another sacrifice that people are willing to make in the service of self-protection.

Limitations and Suggestions for Future Research

In considering some limitations of the present studies, we also are suggesting additional avenues for further research. For example, the somewhat small sample sizes in Studies 1 and 2 raise a potential concern about the generalizability of the

results. To address this issue, Study 3 examined a much larger sample. Further reassuring about generalizability is that converging results emerged across three methodologically different studies.

In addition, we acknowledge that alternative interpretations of our findings are possible, which could be addressed in future research. For example, one alternative explanation is that non-contingent success reduced people's desire for fair process for more materially instrumental rather than self-protective reasons. More specifically, in Studies 1 and 2, participants who experienced non-contingent success may have believed that they had a better chance to receive the promotion if the method was somewhat less adherent to principles of fairness, i.e., the less accurate method in Study 1 and the voice-denying method in Study 2. Whereas this alternative explanation cannot be eliminated entirely, several of the present findings make it less compelling. First, unlike accuracy and voice (the elements of process fairness examined in Studies 1 and 2, respectively), informational fairness refers to an aspect of the process that has no effect on decisions and their associated outcomes. Informational fairness provides recipients with a description of how decisions and their associated outcomes were reached, but it does not influence the decision-making process itself. Put differently, whereas accuracy and voice have the potential to *causally affect* decisions, informational fairness merely *accompanies* the receipt of decisions and their associated outcomes. Since Study 3 showed that non-contingent success led to less of a preference for an aspect of process fairness that did not affect the decision, it seems less likely that this finding was accounted for by the instrumental concern of trying to bring about a desirable outcome. Second, the subsidiary analysis evaluating the instrumental alternative interpretation in Study 1 also failed to lend support to this possibility. Nevertheless, additional research on this matter is needed.

Another alternative interpretation of the mechanism accounting for the present findings stems from the possibility that participants experienced non-contingent success as less fair than contingent success. That is, non-contingent success may have created a sense of injustice, which may have caused people to disengage, which, in turn, led to a reduced preference for process fairness. While this account is intriguing, we believe that it is not born out by the results of Studies 1 and 2. Recall that both studies assessed the strength of individuals' *relative* preference for two methods varying in fairness (accuracy in Study 1 and voice in Study 2). Consistent with this alternative explanation, participants' tendency was to prefer the more fair method (Method 1) less in the non-contingent success condition than in the contingent success condition [Study 1: $M = 4.67$ (NCS) vs. $M = 5.46$ (CS); Study 2: $M = 5.14$ (NCS) vs. $M = 6.09$ (CS)]. However, if individuals view their experience of non-contingent success as unfair, then it would stand to reason that as an expression of disengagement, they would also prefer the unfair method (Method 2) less in the non-contingent success condition than in the contingent success condition. However, the results do not support this reasoning; to the contrary, individuals in the non-contingent success condition preferred the unfair method more than in the contingent success condition [Study 1: $M = 3.88$ (NCS) vs. $M = 3.17$ (CS); Study 2: $M = 4.88$ (NCS) vs. $M = 4.14$ (CS)].

An additional issue to examine in future research is whether it was the experience of non-contingent success versus the experience of contingent success that was primarily responsible for the present findings. We theorized that non-contingent success leads people to question their competence which elicits self-threat and results in a diminished preference for process fairness. Instead (or in addition), there may have been something about the experience of contingent success that accounted for the present findings. A definitive answer to this question would require a control condition (in addition to the non-contingent success and contingent success conditions) to determine where the "action" is truly coming from, which all three studies lacked.

However, one way to explore this question further within the current research is to examine whether the effects of the other independent variables were significant within the contingent success versus non-contingent success conditions. Indeed, subsidiary analyses in Study 2 showed that the two-way interaction between regulatory focus and method was marginally significant in the non-contingent success condition, $F(1, 60) = 3.57$, $p = .064$), such that the tendency to prefer the voice-giving method over the voice-denying method was less pronounced among those with a prevention focus than with a promotion focus (see Fig. 3). In contrast, the simple two-way interaction between regulatory focus and method was trivial in the contingent success condition, $F(1, 60) = .77$, $p = .383$. Moreover, in Study 3, as can be seen in Fig. 4, the only instance in which the simple effect of self-affirmation was significant was in the non-contingent success condition (when participants also believed it was more likely that they would receive the unfavorable outcome). Pending additional research, therefore, we tentatively conclude that the present findings were more attributable to the experience of non-contingent success than contingent success.

Finally, although the present research explored the effect of success (non-contingent versus contingent) on individuals' desire for process fairness, another potentially fruitful question for further research is whether people would respond similarly to the experience of failure. That is, it may be the non-contingency of the outcome, and not the valence per se, that reduces individuals' desire for process fairness. Alternatively, it may be that, like non-contingent success, the experience of contingent failure reduces individuals' desire for process fairness because the likelihood of a negative outcome (and the self-threat it entails) is greater upon experiencing contingent as opposed to non-contingent failure. Disentangling the effects of outcome contingency and outcome valence on people's desire for process fairness is worth exploring.

Conclusion

The present research contributes to an emerging body of theory and research that offers qualifications to the conventional wisdom that people want processes that adhere to principles of fairness. Across three methodologically different studies, we found that people's typical desire for process fairness is lower when they experience non-contingent rather than contingent success. Our findings have implications for

each of justice and self-handicapping theory, while simultaneously demonstrating how these two previously distinct literatures may be brought together.

Compliance with Ethical Standards

Conflict of interest All authours declare that they have no conflict of interest.

Ethical Standards All procedures performed in studies involving human participants were in accordance with the ethical standards of the institutional and/or national research committee and with the 1964 Helsinki Declaration and its later amendments or comparable ethical standards. This article does not contain any studies with animals performed by any of the authors.

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