Belief in a just world lowers bribery intention

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Corruption is rampant around the world and can be detrimental to social justice. We aim to understand whether and how belief in a just world to self (BJW-self) influences individuals’ intentions to become involved in bribery. We measured bribery intention using hypothetical scenarios. In Study 1 and Study 2, we consistently found that BJW-self negatively predicted bribery intention, and this pattern was mediated by perceived punishment of getting involved in bribery. We further demonstrated the causal effect of BJW-self on bribery intention in an experiment (Study 3). These results indicate that BJW as one lay belief can be important in suppressing people’s bribery intention, and perceived punishment mediates the effect of BJW on rule-breaking behaviours. Implications for anti-corruption policies and future research are also discussed.

Key words: belief in a just world, bribe giving, bribe taking, bribery intention, perceived punishment.

Bribery occurs widely throughout the world (Davis & Ruhe, 2003). Considering the negative consequences of bribery, such as hindering economic development and undermining social justice (Gupta, Davoodi & Alonso-Terme, 2002; Lambsdorff, 1998; O’Connor & Fischer, 2011), researchers across different disciplines including politics, economics, management, and psychology, have made a tremendous effort to understand the occurrence of bribery. Determinants of the occurrence of bribery have been widely examined at the macro level, such as at country level in social-political, cultural, institutional, and economic domains (Jain, 2001; Martin, Cullen, Johnson & Parboteeah, 2007; O’Connor & Fischer, 2011; Pellegrini & Gerlagh, 2008; Rose-Ackerman, 2006; Sanyal, 2005; Serra, 2006; Treisman, 2000; Triandis et al., 2001). In contrast, antecedents of bribery at the individual level have been examined less (De Graaf, 2007).

In recent years, researchers have paid more attention to the role of individuals’ characteristics on decision-making of bribery (Campos-Ortiz, 2011). Evidence has shown that individuals’ bribery intention is associated with their experiences regarding bribery (Campos-Ortiz, 2011; Lee & Guven, 2013), major (Frank & Schulze, 2000), gender roles, and risk preferences (Alatas, Cameron, Chaudhuri, Erkal & Gangadharan, 2009; Frank & Schulze, 2000; Lee & Guven, 2013). As bribery often leads to unfair decisions regarding others (Jong-Sung & Khagram, 2005; Rose-Ackerman, 2006), we propose that belief in a just world (BJW) is particularly relevant to individual’s bribery intention. We aim to understand how and why BJW influences individuals’ intention of giving and taking bribes.

Belief in a just world and rule-breaking behaviour

According to the Just-World Theory (Lerner, 1980; Lerner & Miller, 1978), people are motivated to perceive the surrounding social world as a just place where they get what they deserve and deserve what they get (Hara, 2002). Thus, BJW is indicative of a personal contract (Lerner, 1980), which obliges individuals to behave fairly (cf. Echebarria-Echabe, 2009). Previous research has found that individuals holding a strong BJW tend to endorse stronger social responsibility (Bierhoff, 1994) and obligation for reciprocity (Edlund, Sagarin & Johnson, 2007), are more likely to help people in need (Bierhoff, Klein & Kramp, 1991), and achieve their goals by just means than those holding weak BJW (e.g. Hafer, 2000; Hafer & Bégue, 2005; Lerner, 1980).

In addition to the boosting effect of positive behaviours, BJW also helps regulate individuals’ negative behaviours. For example, evidence has shown that people holding a strong BJW have fewer illegal intentions and behaviours (Dalbert, 1999; Sutton & Winnard, 2007), are less likely to have disciplinary problems in prison (Otto & Dalbert, 2005), or engage in bullying behaviour (Correia & Dalbert, 2008). Bribery, typically defined as ‘an illegal act where a person offers money or receives money from another person to influence the actions of a public officer or official’ (Black’s Law Dictionary), constitutes a breach of regulation and personal contract, and often leads to unfair outcomes.
Belief in a just world and bribery intention

Thus, we propose that people with strong belief in a just world are less likely to become involved in bribery.

Furthermore, previous research has found a causal effect of BJW on happiness (Correia, Batista & Lima, 2009), possibility of blaming the victim (Kogut, 2011), and legitimate pursuit of long-term goals (Laurin, Fitzsimons & Kay, 2011). In contrast, the impact of BJW on intention to break the rules is largely correlational. Whether BJW has a causal effect on rule-breaking behaviours such as bribery remains to be seen. We aim to test this causal relationship and the underlying mechanism.

Perceived punishment as the mechanism

First, we propose that a stronger BJW leads to a higher perceived punishment of bribery. BJW refers to a belief that people get what they deserve (Lerner, 1980). People who endorse BJW hold the belief that the world is just and if they violate the law, they deserve to be punished (Bègue & Bastounis, 2003; Schuller, Smith & Olson, 1994). Thus, they would not choose to violate the law. Indeed, past research has shown that stronger BJW is correlated with punishment and blame to perpetrators (Bègue & Bastounis, 2003; Schuller et al., 1994), and leads to punitive attitudes in criminal justice (e.g. Bègue & Bastounis, 2003; Carroll, Perkowitz, Lurigio & Weaver, 1987). For example, believers in a just world suggest longer sentences for wrongdoers than people who do not endorse BJW (Gerbasi & Zuckerman, 1975). Therefore, individuals with stronger BJW would perceive more punishment for bribery.

Second, we propose that higher perceived punishment leads to lower bribery intention. Previous research shows that punishment can significantly reduce corruption as found in real life (Ogus, 2004) and in lab experiments (e.g. Abbink, Irlenbusch & Renner, 2002). Moreover, according to the rational choice theory of crime, officials who commit corruption often weigh the expected benefits against the expected costs in the decision-making process, and corruption would occur when expected benefits outweigh expected costs (Song & Cheng, 2012). In most cases, the officials know the expected benefits (such as the size of the bribes they will receive) beforehand. Thus, the expected costs finally determine the outcome of their benefit and cost calculation, which further reinforces their decisions (Song & Cheng, 2012). In short, we propose that perceived punishment would reduce bribery intention, and thus mediate the effect of BJW on bribery intention.

Research on BJW has differentiated two dimensions of this construct: belief in a personal just world (BJW-self) and belief in a general just world (BJW-others) (Dalbert, 1999). BJW-self focuses on fairness for the self, whereas BJW-others focuses on fairness for others. Previous research shows that compared to BJW-others, BJW-self is more predictive of one’s life satisfaction (e.g. Correia & Dalbert, 2007; Lipkus, Dalbert & Siegler, 1996; Sutton & Douglas, 2005), and the reactions to one’s own injustice (e.g. Strelan, 2007), including delinquent intentions (Sutton & Winnard, 2007). In contrast, BJW-others demonstrates stronger explanatory power regarding harsh perceptions and attitudes toward disadvantaged people and groups than BJW-self (e.g. Bègue & Bastounis, 2003; Diebels & Czopp, 2011; Itaru, 2003; Sutton & Douglas, 2005). As we aim to examine the role of BJW on an individual’s intention to become involved in bribery, we focus on BJW-self in the current research.

Overview of the studies

To summarize, we hypothesize that BJW-self negatively predicts bribery intention (Hypothesis 1). This effect can be mediated by perceived punishment for bribery (Hypothesis 2). We conducted three studies to test these hypotheses using surveys (Study 1 and Study 2) and one experiment (Study 3). We used bribe giving in Study 1 and bribe-taking in Studies 2 and 3 to test our hypotheses from both the giver’s and the receiver’s perspective. In Study 3, we manipulated BJW-self using the priming paradigm to examine the causal effect.

Study 1

Method

Participants. We recruited 136 part-time students (21.30% male, 78.70% female; M = 28.38 years, SD = 4.57 years) attending a lecture in psychology at a university in north China. All participants voluntarily joined the study and were given a gel pen as a gift for their participation in the survey.

Procedure and measures. Upon arrival, participants were told that they were participating in a study on ‘people’s attitudes towards social phenomena and responses to different social situations’. Participants were firstly asked to complete the seven-item BJW scale for self on a six-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (totally disagree) to 6 (totally agree) (Dalbert, 1999). The sample items included ‘I am usually treated fairly’, ‘Overall, events in my life are just’. The internal consistency of these items was high (α = 0.82).

Subsequently, participants read a scenario in which they played the role of a sales agent who had to compete against two other firms to win a contract from an international buyer to earn a rich commission (for details, please refer to
Appendix I). This scenario was borrowed from a previous study measuring intention of bribe giving (Mazar & Aggarwal, 2011). Participants were asked to estimate their intention to offer an under-the-table payment to win this contract on a nine-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (definitely will not bribe) to 9 (definitely will bribe). If they did offer a bribe, participants were asked, using four items on a nine-point scale, what the likelihood and intensity of legal punishment, and the likelihood and intensity of moral punishment would be (Čábelková & Hanousek, 2004; Sutton & Winnard, 2007). One sample item was ‘please estimate the probability of legal punishment if you offer the payment’. Higher scores indicated higher likelihood or stronger intensity of punishment. In the current research, we define moral punishment as the possible resentment of others toward corrupt behaviour, which comprises probability and intensity of punishment (Čábelková & Hanousek, 2004). As responses to the four items were highly consistent ($\alpha = 0.85$), we averaged the four items as a composite score for perceived punishment.

We also measured social desirability as a control variable as it may influence decision-making regarding morality-laden issues (Davis & Ruhe, 2003). Participants filled out the 16-item social desirability scale (RD16; Schuessler, Hittle & Cardascia, 1978), a true-false inventory that measures the degree to which people describe themselves in socially desirable terms (e.g. ‘One can always find friends if one tries’). We transformed the true-false answer to a seven-point Likert scale with a higher score indicating a more desirable response style ($\alpha = 0.77$). Finally, demographic information including gender, age, education, and income was collected.

### Results and discussion

Table 1 shows the descriptive statistics and correlations of the variables in study 1. Correlations between BJW-self, perceived punishment, and bribery intention were significant in the expected directions. Hypothesis 1 was supported. Social desirability was significantly correlated with the above three variables ($ps < 0.05$), while income and gender were unrelated to these variables ($ps > 0.10$). Age was associated with perceived punishment ($p < 0.05$), but was unrelated to BJW-self and bribery intention. Nonetheless, we still controlled gender, age, and social desirability, responding in the following analysis, as previous research suggests that gender and age can be related to bribery intention (e.g. Alatas et al., 2009; Barr & Serra, 2009).

We examined the mediating effect of perceived punishment between BJW-self and bribery intention using the bootstrapping analysis (Preacher & Hayes, 2004), controlling for age, gender, and social desirability. As shown in Table 2, BJW-self was negatively associated with bribery intention ($\beta = -0.21$, $p < 0.05$), and predicted higher perceived punishment ($\beta = 0.22$, $p < 0.05$). When perceived punishment was included in the regression model of BJW-self and bribery intention, it emerged as a significant and negative predictor of bribery intention ($\beta = -0.38$, $p < 0.001$), but the effect of BJW-self became nonsignificant ($\beta = -0.12$, $p = 0.15$; indirect effect $= -0.27$, $SE = 0.12$, 95% confidence interval: $-0.54$ to $-0.05$; 5000 bootstrap samples). When not including control variables, perceived punishment still fully mediated the effect of BJW-self on bribery intention (Sobel test: $z = -2.70$, $p < 0.01$). Hypothesis 2 was thus supported.

We found supporting evidence that people who endorsed lower BJW-self were more inclined to bribe, and this effect was fully mediated by the perceived punishment of becoming involved in bribery. We aim to replicate this finding from the bribe taker’s perspective in Study 2.

### Study 2

#### Methods

**Participants.** We recruited another 132 non-overlapping sample of part-time students (25% male; 75% female; mean

### Table 1 Descriptive statistics and correlations among the key variables in Study 1

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>$M$</th>
<th>$SD$</th>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>5</th>
<th>6</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Gender</td>
<td>0.21</td>
<td>0.41</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>–</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Age (years)</td>
<td>28.38</td>
<td>4.57</td>
<td>0.26*</td>
<td>0.01</td>
<td>0.07</td>
<td>0.27**</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>–</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Income (Yuan, RMB)</td>
<td>4500.00</td>
<td>1966.48</td>
<td>0.26**</td>
<td>0.43***</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>–</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Socially desirable responding</td>
<td>4.62</td>
<td>0.74</td>
<td>-0.13</td>
<td>-0.04</td>
<td>-0.21*</td>
<td>-0.09</td>
<td>0.21*</td>
<td>0.27**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. BJW-self</td>
<td>4.06</td>
<td>0.71</td>
<td>-0.13</td>
<td>-0.00</td>
<td>0.11</td>
<td>0.27**</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>–</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Perceived punishment</td>
<td>4.31</td>
<td>1.85</td>
<td>-0.08</td>
<td>-0.10</td>
<td>0.07</td>
<td>-0.20*</td>
<td>-0.23**</td>
<td>-0.43***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. Bribery intention</td>
<td>5.50</td>
<td>2.23</td>
<td>-0.10</td>
<td>0.11</td>
<td>0.07</td>
<td>-0.20*</td>
<td>-0.23**</td>
<td>-0.43***</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note: Gender was dummy-coded as 0 for male and 1 for female. $^*p < 0.05$; $^{**}p < 0.01$; $^{***}p < 0.001$. © 2015 Wiley Publishing Asia Pty Ltd, Asian Association of Social Psychology and Beijing Normal University
Table 2 Results of hierarchical regression analysis on the role of BJW-self on bribery intention and the mediation model in Study 1

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>Step 1: Control variable</th>
<th>Step 2: Independent variable</th>
<th>Step 3: Mediation variable</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>β</td>
<td>t</td>
<td>β</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gender</td>
<td>-0.10</td>
<td>-1.20</td>
<td>-0.07</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age</td>
<td>-0.12</td>
<td>1.46</td>
<td>-0.23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Socially desirable responding</td>
<td>-0.22</td>
<td>-2.59*</td>
<td>0.22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BJW-self</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>-0.21</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: Gender was dummy-coded as 0 for male and 1 for female. *p < 0.05; **p < 0.01; ***p < 0.001.

Results and discussion

Table 3 shows the descriptive statistics and correlations of the variables in Study 2. We conducted mediational analysis as in Study 1 (Preacher & Hayes, 2004), controlling for age, gender, and social desirability. As shown in Table 4, BJW-self was negatively associated with bribery intention (β = -0.24, p < 0.01), and predicted a higher level of perceived punishment (β = 0.27, p < 0.01). When perceived punishment was included as a mediator, it emerged as a significant and negative predictor of bribery intention (β = -0.44, p < 0.001), and the effect of BJW-self became nonsignificant (β = -0.12, p = 0.15; indirect effect = -0.31, SE = 0.11, 95% confidence interval: -0.53 to -0.09; 5000 bootstrap samples). When not including control variables, perceived punishment fully mediated the effect of BJW-self on bribery intention (Sobel test: z = -3.33, p < 0.001).

The findings again supported our hypotheses that perceived punishment mediates the suppressing effect of BJW-self on bribery intention. Study 2 replicated and extended the results in Study 1 in a bribe-taking scenario. So far, the findings we have are only correlational. The mediational
results can be caused by the high correlations among variables (Spencer, Zanna & Fong, 2005). To further examine whether BJW-self has a causal effect on perceived punishment and bribery intention, we manipulated BJW-self in an experiment in Study 3.

**Study 3**

Study 3 aims to examine the causal link between BJW-self and bribery intention. Although most previous research has focused on BJW as a stable individual difference, we propose that it can also be activated by experimental manipulation as it is one kind of declarative knowledge (Higgins, 1996). Social psychological research has demonstrated that constructs traditionally conceptualized as structural and heavily determined by long-term factors (e.g. sense of power) can be reconceptualized as mindsets (e.g. Galinsky, Gruenfeld & Magee, 2003; Zitek, Jordan, Monin & Leach, 2010). One commonly used manipulation of mindsets is to ask participants to recall incidents (Kogut, 2011). Indeed, previous research has successfully manipulated BJW-others by asking individuals to recall and write about an incident that happened to others in which they felt that the world was just (or unjust) (Kogut, 2011). Therefore, we manipulated BJW-self by asking the participants to recall and write down their personal experiences of being fairly/unfairly treated.

We firstly conducted a pilot study to examine the validity of this manipulation. We recruited 122 undergraduate students (17.2% female, 82.8% male; M = 20.86 years, SD = 1.23 years) from a university in north China. Participants were randomly assigned to either the just world priming or unjust world priming condition. They were
asked to ‘recall one personal experience that you were fairly (or unfairly) treated, and write it down as clearly as possible in ten minutes’. After the recall task, BJW-self (α = 0.80) and BJW-others (α = 0.83) were measured as a manipulation check. Using one-way ANOVA, we found that the level of BJW-self was significantly higher after just world priming (M = 4.34, SD = 0.68) than after unjust world priming (M = 3.75, SD = 0.74), F(1, 120) = 20.86, p < 0.001, η² = 0.15, but the level of BJW-others was non-significant between just world priming condition (M = 3.73, SD = 0.85) and unjust world priming condition (M = 3.47, SD = 0.75), F(1, 120) = 3.23, p > 0.05, η² = 0.03. Therefore, recalling and writing down fair or unfair personal experiences effectively affected BJW-self, but not BJW-others.

In the main study, we manipulated people’s BJW-self, and then measured their bribery intention and perceived punishment as in Study 2.

**Method**

**Participants and design.** We recruited another 134 non-overlapping sample of undergraduate students (17.9% female, 79.1% male, four missing data; Mean age = 21.93 years, SD = 1.49) as in the pilot study. Participants were randomly assigned to three conditions using a between-subject design, namely high BJW group (just world priming, N = 42), low BJW group (unjust world priming, N = 44), and control group (N = 48). Participants voluntarily joined the study and were given a gel pen as a gift after the experiment.

**Procedure and measure.** Participants were invited to join in a study in a classroom and were told that they would complete two separate tasks. The first task aimed to collect scenarios for future research. Participants from two experimental groups were asked to recall and write down personal experiences of being either fairly or unfairly treated as in the pilot study, and participants from the control group were asked to recall and write about a typical day at school. The second task was described as a survey on people’s opinions about society. After the recall task, participants answered the short form of Positive and Negative Affect Schedule (PANAS; Thompson, 2007), a widely used standard measure of affective state. We used the self-reported feelings as control variables, as recalling fair or unfair personal experiences could induce affective reactions (Mikula, Scherer & Athenstaedt, 1998; Shaver, Schwartz, Kirson & O’Connor, 1987), which may influence punishment and intention to bribe (Zitek et al., 2010). Participants were asked to report on a five-point scale to what extent they felt the five positive (α = 0.70) and five negative emotions (α = 0.84) at that moment. Then they were presented with the same three hypothetical scenarios as in Study 2, followed by measures of bribery intention (α = 0.79), perceived punishment (α = 0.87), and social desirability (α = 0.67). Finally, demographic information including gender and age was collected.

**Results**

We ran a one-way ANCOVA to test Hypothesis 1, controlling for the effect of gender, age, and social desirability. As expected, the just world priming caused significantly lower perceived bribery intention (M = 3.09, SD = 1.64) than the control condition (M = 3.90, SD = 1.76), F (1, 124) = 4.01, p < 0.05, and the unjust world priming condition (M = 5.09, SD = 2.19), F(1, 124) = 24.10, p < 0.001, η² = 0.16. We also found a significant main effect of priming on perceived punishment. Participants in the just world priming condition (M = 6.13, SD = 1.42) perceived significantly higher punishment than those in the control condition (M = 5.39, SD = 1.89), F(1, 124) = 4.08, p < 0.05, and unjust world priming condition (M = 4.68, SD = 1.76), F(1, 124) = 13.44, p < 0.001, η² = 0.10. Moreover, as shown in Figure 1, this difference in perceived punishment partially mediated the effect of BJW-self priming on bribery intention. When perceived punishment was included in the regression model of priming and bribery intention, controlling for the effect of gender, age, positive affect, negative affect, and socially desirable responding, it emerged as a significant and negative predictor of bribery intention (β = −0.34, p < 0.001), and the effect of priming on bribery intention was still significant (β = −0.29, p < 0.01). However, the size of the effect dropped significantly according to the Sobel Test, Z = −2.61, p < 0.01. This partial mediation effect was further supported by the bootstrapping method (Indirect effect = −0.27, SE = 0.11, 95% confidence interval (CI) = [−0.51, −0.07]; 5000 bootstrap samples). When not including control variables, perceived punishment still partially mediated the effect of BJW-self on bribery intention (Sobel test: z = −2.99, p < 0.01). As a whole, Hypotheses 1 and 2 were supported.

![Figure 1](mediational-model-of-perceived-punishment.png)

**Figure 1 Meditational model of perceived punishment on BJW-self and bribery intention in Study 3. Note:** Parameter estimates are standardized regression coefficients (β). **p < 0.01. ***p < 0.001.
General discussion

Previous studies on bribery mainly focus on various country-level factors as predictors. Factors influencing personal intentions of giving and taking bribes have been examined less. As bribery transactions undermine justice for the public, we aim to understand how and why BJW-self suppresses bribery intention. Across three studies using working adults and student samples in China, we consistently found that BJW-self leads to lower bribery intention, and this effect can be at least partially mediated by a higher perceived punishment for bribery.

We contribute to the literature on bribery and BJW in the following ways. First, we extend previous research on antecedents of corruption and find that people’s lay beliefs of a just world are an important predictor of bribery intention. It suggests that beyond trait variables, such as cultural values (Li, Triandis & Yu, 2006; Mazar & Aggarwal, 2011), moral principles (Tian, 2008), and demographic background (Alatas et al., 2009), construction of the world indeed affects individuals’ intentions of being involved in unethical behaviour. Previous research shows that beliefs about the world influence the effect of norm violations on feelings of guilt and shame (Ersay, Born, Derous, & van der Molen, 2011). In fact, belief in a just world not only lowers the perception of others’ corruption intentions (Bai, Liu & Kou, 2014), but also decreases one’s own intention to give or take bribes. As lay beliefs can be learnt and transmitted via institutions and discourses (Morris, Menon & Ames, 2001), we expect that discourse about social justice would enhance perceived punishment of bribery and curb bribery intention. Specifically, nurturing a culture of social justice in organizations and the society in general could be a worthy investment to maintain transparency and reduce bribery intentions.

Second, we found that the priming effect of BJW-self on bribery intention provides both theoretical and practical implications. In Study 3, we demonstrated that by priming prior experiences of fair treatment, participants showed less bribery intention than priming unfairly treated experiences. This temporal effect suggests a promising role of BJW on suppressing bribery intention. Practically, the embedding of justice into codes of conduct at the workplace would strengthen the salience of the belief of a just world, thus helping the anti-bribery movement.

Third, we extend previous research on the impact of BJW-self on rule-breaking behaviours. Previous studies find consistent correlational evidence that BJW-self suppresses rule-breaking behaviours, such as bullying (Correia & Dalbert, 2008), illegal behaviour (Dalbert, 1999), and disciplinary problems in prison (Otto & Dalbert, 2005). In the present study, we found that strong BJW-self induces higher perceived punishment, which suppresses rule-breaking intention (i.e. bribery intention). Emphasizing the importance of justice, highlighting punishment could also help in the prevention of rule-breaking behaviours.

Moreover, previous research suggests that information framing, such as outcome framing (e.g. Brockner, Wiesenfeld & Martin, 1995) and numerical framing (Kwong & Wong, 2014), influences justice perception. We used bribe giving in Study 1 and bribe taking in Studies 2 and 3, which involved two different perspectives of bribe-giver and bribe-receiver. We consistently found that BJW-self decreased bribery intention for both the giving and taking of bribes. These findings indicate that perspective as a bribe-giver or bribe-receiver does not influence justice perception of the world regarding bribery intention.

The current research has several limitations to be addressed in future studies. First, we used self-report measures of bribery intention and BJW-self across three studies, except that we manipulated BJW-self in Study 3. The findings could be subject to an overestimation of common variance due to common-method bias (Podsakoff, MacKenzie, Lee & Podsakoff, 2003). Future research may examine actual bribe-giving and bribe-taking behaviours. Also, to measure perceived punishment, future studies might ask the participants to alter the punishment levels in experimental settings.

Another limitation of the current research is that perceived punishment partially mediated the effect of BJW-self on bribery intention in Study 3. As perceived punishment is based on exogenous sanctions, future research could examine the role of endogenous constructs such as psychological entitlement. Previous research has demonstrated that individuals instructed to recall unfair experiences can result in psychological entitlement, a sense that one deserves more and is entitled to more than others (Campbell, Bonacci, Shelton, Exline & Bushman, 2004), and further increased intentions to engage in self-interested behaviours (Zitek et al., 2010). Since bribery is mainly for self-interest (Ko & Weng, 2011), recalling personal experiences of being unfairly treated may lead to a sense of psychological entitlement and increases individuals’ bribery intention. We call for future investigations regarding other potential mechanisms.

There are also other interesting directions for future research. For example, it is worth considering whether similar results would be observed when BJW-others (instead of BJW-self) is manipulated. The previous method of manipulating BJW-others, asking individuals to recall and write about a just (or unjust) event that happened to someone else (Kogut, 2011), may influence the activation of people’s ethical scripts (Keizer, Lindenberg & Steg, 2008), and ultimately influence their bribery intention (Ashkanasy, Windsor & Trevino, 2006).
Acknowledgments

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References


End notes

2. We conducted an exploratory factor analysis on the four items and used an Eigenvalue larger than 1 as the criterion. Only one factor emerged (Eigenvalue = 2.80), accounting for 70.06% of the variance.
3. We conducted an exploratory factor analysis on the four composite indicators and used an Eigenvalue larger than 1 as the criterion. Only one factor emerged (Eigenvalue = 3.16), accounting for 79.08% of the variance.


**Appendix I**

Scenario on bribe giving used in Study 1 (modified from Mazar & Aggarwal, 2011).

Imagine that you are working as a sales agent for a company. You earn part of your remuneration as salary, and part through commission for sales. The commission is 1% of the sales.

Now imagine that you have been in touch with a potential buyer. The sales order is of a large value (i.e. 5 000 000). If you succeed in winning the order, you would not only personally earn from this deal (i.e. 5000), but you would gain from promotion in the future. There are two other firms competing for the same order. You are fairly confident of your firm’s quality in comparison to the two competing firms, but you know that you will not be able to compete on price.

There are still two days before the potential buyer makes a final decision. You hear that the buyer still has not made a decision. You think the buyer might be willing to give your company the order if you offer some money for making it happen. The amount of money you are thinking of is 2000 (40% of the commission that you would personally earn from this deal). You know that giving bribes is an illegal act. What do you decide to do?

**Appendix II**

Two scenarios on bribe taking used in Study 2 and Study 3.

**Scenarios pertaining to a violation of traffic regulation**

Imagine you are the chief officer in charge of traffic control in a county. A driver has violated traffic regulations. To reduce the punishment, the driver asks you for help and promises to give you some money under the table if he succeeds. You know that helping him reduce the punishment by offering a bribe is an illegal act.

**Scenarios pertaining to allocating funding in an academic setting**

Imagine you are the chair of a selection committee for evaluating a scientific research project. One proposal cannot pass the evaluation successfully. To pass the evaluation and get a research grant, the applicant asks you for help and promises to give you some money under the table if the proposal can be funded. You know that helping him to get a research grant through bribery is an illegal act.
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