

# Justice Sensitivity Is Positively and Negatively Related to Prejudice and Discrimination

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# Justice Sensitivity Is Positively and Negatively Related to Prejudice and Discrimination

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The trait justice sensitivity captures individual differences in the tendency to perceive injustice and to negatively respond to these perceptions. The tendency to negatively respond to injustice to one's disadvantage (victim justice sensitivity) was reliably linked to different measures of antisocial behavior and conservative values. Thus, we assumed that victim justice sensitivity should also be positively related to prejudice and discrimination. In contrast, the tendency to negatively respond to injustice to the disadvantage of others (altruistic justice sensitivity), was reliably linked to prosocial behavior. Hence, we assumed that altruistic justice sensitivity should also show negative relations with prejudice and discrimination. In order to test these assumptions, we surveyed justice sensitivity, prejudices against three different groups, and discrimination experiences among  $N=343$  participants ( $M=26.61$  years, 79 percent women) in Germany. We found that victim justice sensitivity predicted more self-perpetrated discrimination. Altruistic justice sensitivity predicted less total prejudice and self-perpetrated discrimination and mediated the link between self-experienced discrimination and prejudice/self-perpetrated discrimination unless age, gender, and education were controlled for. Discrimination can promote discrimination. Future research on correlates and potential risk and protective factors of prejudice and discrimination should also consider justice sensitivity as a moral-related trait.

Keywords: justice sensitivity, prejudice, discrimination, authoritarianism, social dominance orientation

Being the target of prejudice and discrimination often has negative consequences including economic disadvantages (McKenzie 2006), impaired performance when group membership is salient (stereotype threat; Stone et al. 1999), stress, and physical and psychological problems (Pascoe and Smart Richman 2009; Schmitt et al. 2014). To make matters worse, prejudice and discrimination seem on the increase in recent years (Major, Blodorn, and Major Blascovich 2016). It is, therefore, crucial to identify factors that may cause and prevent stereotypes and discrimination against others, for example in order to develop effective prevention and intervention measures.

Trait-like measures that reflect stable systems of attitudes or ideological beliefs, such as authoritarianism and social dominance orientation (SDO), predict negative cognitions (prejudice) and adverse behavior (discrimination) towards members of perceived outgroups (Duckitt 2006; Pratto et al. 1994). At the same time, prejudices and discrimination include aspects of injustice: Prejudices imply that individuals are attributed—often negative—traits and behavior based on demographic or group-related characteristics alone. These attributions are not verified in the individual case and, therefore, are often unjustified. Similarly, discrimination describes unequal, unfair, or negative treatment due to (ascribed) group membership

(Spears Brown 2017). Hence, justice-related traits may also be linked to prejudice and discrimination.

In order to test this assumption, the present study examined the relations between a trait measure reflecting the individual importance of justice—justice sensitivity—and prejudices against three diverse groups as well as self-experienced and self-perpetrated discrimination. Thus, it aimed to add to the knowledge about the personality trait justice sensitivity and its links with attitudes and discrimination, which have not previously been investigated. In doing so, we also aimed to add to the explanation of prejudice and discrimination by additional trait variables and to highlight potential ways to prevent them.

### 1 Prejudice and Discrimination

Prejudice is defined as negative feelings and attitudes (stereotypes) towards members of perceived outgroups (for example men, homosexuals, Muslims; for example, Allport 1954); discrimination is defined as negative, sometimes unfair behavior towards these individuals (Spears Brown 2017). Research has described an array of factors and theories adding to and explaining prejudice and discrimination. Some research emphasized the relevance of personality traits reflecting rigid adherence to social conventions and submission to authorities (authoritarianism; Altemeyer 1981) or to hierarchical group differences (social dominance orientation, SDO; Kteily et al. 2019; Pratto et al. 1994; Whitley 1999). Other theories focused cognitive and social factors, such as prejudices as a reduction of cognitive workload (Devine 1989), rivalry for resources (Sherif 1967), need for a positive social identity (Tajfel and Turner 1979). Recent theoretical models emphasize the relevance of both personality factors (such as justice sensitivity) and cognitive factors (such as a mindset of inequality), with a special focus on inequality and justice as risk factors for radicalization processes (Beelmann 2020). In addition, there is some indication that individuals' own negative experiences, such as being the subject of discrimination, may promote negative feelings and behavior towards others (Benner et al. 2018). Hence, negative social experiences and a specific vulnerability towards them (as in justice sensitivity), may help explaining prejudice and discrimination.

### 2 Justice Sensitivity

Justice sensitivity captures stable individual differences in the frequency of injustice perceptions and the intensity of negative emotional, cognitive, and behavioral responses towards them (Schmitt et al. 2010; Schmitt et al. 2005; Schmitt 1996). It explains individual differences in responses towards objectively identical justice-related cues based on the fact that they may be differently perceived and interpreted by different persons. Individuals high in justice sensitivity tend to ruminate about unjust experiences (Schmitt 1996; Schmitt et al. 2010). Depending on the perspective from which an individual is sensitive towards injustice (as a victim, observer, beneficiary, or perpetrator), the emotional and behavioral reactions differ (Mikula, Petri, and Tanzer 1990).

Highly victim-justice sensitive individuals tend to frequently and intensely perceive situations as unfair to their own disadvantage (Schmitt et al. 2005, 2010). Their primary affective response is anger (for example "It makes me angry when others receive recognition that I deserve."), the primary behavioral response is an urge to retaliate. Victim justice sensitivity reflects primarily egoistic concerns for justice (Schmitt et al. 2010); it has positive links with jealousy, paranoia, and Machiavellism (Schmitt et al. 2005). Highly victim-justice sensitive individuals tend to behave uncooperatively (Baumert, Schlösser, and Schmitt 2014; Fetchenhauer and Huang 2004; Gollwitzer et al. 2009) and aggressively (Bondü 2018; Bondü and Krahe 2015; Bondü and Richter 2016). They also tend to transgress norms and to justify their own misconduct (Gollwitzer et al. 2005; Kuntz and Butler 2014). Individuals high in victim justice sensitivity reported higher authoritarianism and resistance to political reforms, stronger justifications of the existing system despite criticizing it, and more nationalistic concerns than individuals low in justice sensitivity (Agroskin et al. 2015; Rothmund, Stavrova, and Schlösser 2017; Traut-Mattausch et al. 2011). Finally, victim justice sensitivity was positively related to concerns about Germany's well-being (Rothmund et al. 2017), less willingness to showing solidarity (Schmitt 1998), and higher anger and angst about the in-group's future (Süssenbach and Gollwitzer 2015). Hence, highly victim-justice sensitive individuals show an expressed tendency towards ad-

verse social behavior and conservative values. Therefore, they can also be assumed to show a higher tendency toward prejudice and discrimination. So far, however, no study has linked justice sensitivity to measures of prejudice and discrimination.

Highly observer-justice sensitive individuals often perceive situations to the disadvantage of others. They tend to respond with moral outrage (“I am outraged if someone does not receive recognition they deserve.”) and strive for victim compensation or perpetrator punishment. Highly beneficiary-justice sensitive individuals tend to respond with guilt (“I have a bad conscience when I receive recognition that someone else deserves.”) and a desire to compensate the victim or punish the perpetrator in situations in which they (perceive themselves to) benefit from other’s unfair treatment. Finally, highly perpetrator-justice sensitive individuals fear treating others unfairly and tend to respond with guilt (“I have a bad conscience when I deny someone recognition that they deserve.”) and a desire to compensate the victim or to punish themselves. These three perspectives on justice sensitivity reflect a concern for justice for the sake of others and were combined into a composite altruistic justice sensitivity score in previous research (Fetchenhauer and Huang 2004). They show positive links with agreeableness, co-operative and prosocial behavior, responsibility assumption, and empathy (Baumert et al. 2014; Bondü and Elsner 2015; Fetchenhauer and Huang 2004; Schmitt et al. 2005, 2010). Observer and perpetrator justice sensitivity showed negative correlations with SDO and authoritarianism (Reese, Proch, and Cohrs 2014). Beneficiary justice sensitivity was positively related to compassion, feelings of guilt towards a disadvantaged group (Süssenbach and Gollwitzer 2015), and moral courage (Baumert, Halmburger, and Schmitt 2013). Findings regarding observer justice sensitivity were inconsistent: It was correlated with compassion and guilt, but also with anger towards the out-group and fear of losing in-group advantages (Süssenbach and Gollwitzer 2015). Therefore, we expected beneficiary and/or perpetrator justice sensitivity in particular to show negative links with prejudice and discrimination.

Justice sensitivity may not only influence behavior, it is also itself influenced by social experiences: Self-

perpetrated bullying predicted higher victim justice sensitivity in boys and lower observer justice sensitivity in girls; victimization experiences predicted higher victim justice sensitivity in girls and lower victim justice sensitivity in boys one to two years later (Bondü, Rothmund, and Gollwitzer 2016). Unemployed participants reported higher victim justice sensitivity than employed participants (Schmitt et al. 2010). Hence, negative social experiences may promote victim justice sensitivity and decrease altruistic justice sensitivity. We therefore expected to find this pattern in the present study, too: Negative social experiences in terms of self-experienced or observed discrimination should be linked to lower victim justice sensitivity.

### 3 The Present Study

We examined the links between the four justice sensitivity perspectives, different measures of prejudice (homophobia, Islamophobia, ambivalent sexism against men), and self-perpetrated discrimination, while controlling for potentially influencing variables (authoritarianism, SDO, experienced and observed discrimination) in order to determine the specific influence of justice sensitivity on measures of prejudice and self-perpetrated discrimination. Based on previous findings and our theoretical assumptions, we derived the following hypotheses:

(1) Victim justice sensitivity predicts a) prejudice and b) discrimination: Participants who tend to respond with anger and rumination to perceived unfair treatment towards oneself report a higher tendency to perceive and treat out-group members negatively in general.

(2) This is also the case when SDO and authoritarianism are controlled: Victim justice sensitivity predicts a) prejudice and b) discrimination beyond other risk factors.

(3) The altruistic justice sensitivity perspectives negatively predict a) prejudice and b) discrimination: The higher the concern for justice for others, the lower the tendency to perceive and treat out-group members negatively.

(4) This should also be the case when SDO and authoritarianism are controlled: Altruistic justice sensitivity predicts a) prejudice and b) discrimination beyond other risk factors.

(5) a) Beneficiary and/or b) perpetrator justice sensitivity have stronger effects than observer justice sensitivity.

(6) Self-experienced and observed discrimination positively predict self-perpetrated discrimination.

(7) Victim justice sensitivity mediates the positive relation between self-experienced and/or observed discrimination and self-perpetrated discrimination beyond other risk factors.

In addition to Hypotheses 4 and 5, we also explored the potential effects of self-experienced and observed discrimination on prejudice and whether altruistic justice sensitivity might also be a mediator thereof.

## 4 Method

### 4.1 Sample

The sample consisted of N=423 16- to 68-year-olds. The online survey was programmed to exclude participants who did not complete at least three quarters of the questionnaire. The remaining N=343 participants had a mean age of 26.61 years (SD=10.95), 79.3 percent were female. 92.4 percent of the participants had a university entrance qualification, 50.1 percent were still in vocational training or students. 37.0 percent reported a net income under €500 Euro, 24.9 percent between €500 and €999, 14.0 percent between €1000 and €1999, and 12.6 percent €2000 and above (11.4 percent did not report their income). 68.0 percent of participants said they were Christian, 3.3 percent belonged to other religious groups (Muslim, Jewish, others), 26.7 percent reported not to belong to any religious group (2.1 percent did not answer the question). 91.5 percent were born in Germany. About 18 percent had at least one parent with migration background. Finally, 91.8 percent reported heterosexual sexual orientation, 2.9 percent bisexual, and 1.8 percent homosexual (3.6 percent reported other or no orientation).

### 4.2 Measures

**Justice Sensitivity.** We assessed justice sensitivity with a five-item short version of the Justice Sensitivity Inventory that was originally designed to measure justice sensitivity in child and adolescent samples (JSICA5; Bondü and Elsner 2015; Schmitt et al. 2005, 2010). The scale measures victim, observer, beneficiary, and perpetrator justice sensitivity (see above for

example items). Response options ranged from 1 *does not apply* to 6 *exactly applies*. Analyses of the psychometric properties of the original and the short version of the Justice Sensitivity Inventory yielded evidence for good reliability and validity (Bondü and Elsner 2015; Schmitt et al. 2005; Schmitt et al. 2010), also in adult samples (Bondü and Inerle 2020; Bondü and Richter 2016). We computed mean scores separately for all justice sensitivity perspectives and a combined mean score from the three altruistic perspectives.

**Prejudice.** We assessed prejudice via three questionnaires that covered common topics of prejudice: gender, sexual orientation, and religious affiliation. We sought to investigate whether justice sensitivity predisposes to prejudice in general by including a broad range of prejudices. We measured homophobia using six items from a German translation of Altemeyer and Hunsberger's homophobia scale (for example, "Homosexual acts are wrong"). Response options ranged from 1 *strongly agree* to 9 *strongly disagree*. We measured sexism against men with the twenty items of the German Ambivalent Sexist Attitudes towards Men Scale (ASEM; Collani and Werner 2004; for example, "men will always fight to have greater control in society than women"). Response options ranged from 1 *completely disagree* to 6 *completely agree*. We measured Islamophobia using a German translation of the Islamophobia scale (Lee et al. 2009; twelve items, for example, "If possible, I would avoid going to places where Muslims might be"). Response options ranged from 1 *completely disagree* to 5 *completely agree*. We first computed mean scores separately for all three prejudice measures and then z-transformed and averaged these mean scores into a total-prejudice score.

**Discrimination.** We assessed the frequency of self-experienced, observed, and self-perpetrated discrimination with a translated and adapted version of the Everyday Discrimination Scale (EDS; Williams et al. 1997). Participants reported self-experienced ("You are treated with less courtesy than others"), observed ("You observe how a person is treated with less courtesy than others"), and self-perpetrated ("You treat a person with less courtesy than others") discrimination via nine congruently worded items per scale. Response options ranged from 1 *never* to 6 *almost every day*. We excluded two items from the self-perpetrated

discrimination scale due to factor loadings  $<.40$  in an initial confirmatory factor analysis. We computed mean scores separately for all three scales. Participants were given the opportunity to indicate why they had been discriminated against, which groups they had observed experiencing discrimination, and which groups they themselves had discriminated against (for example on the basis of gender, age, religious affiliation), but we did not consider this information in the present analysis. Our analysis thus comprised three total discrimination scores (from the victim's, the observer's, and the perpetrator's perspective) irrespective of the reasons for the behavior or the affected groups. Good reliability and validity of the original EDS was demonstrated (Krieger et al. 2005; Taylor, Kamarck, and Shiffman 2004).

*Authoritarianism and Social Dominance Orientation.* We assessed authoritarianism using the nine-item Kurzskala Autoritarismus (KSA-3, Beierlein et al. 2014; "Proven behaviors should not be called into question"). We measured SDO using the German translation of the sixteen-item SDO7 scale (Carvacho et al. in preparation; "We should not press for group equality"). Response options ranged from 1 *strongly disagree* to 7 *strongly agree*. We computed mean scores for both variables.

#### 4.3 Procedure

All scales were included in an online questionnaire conducted using [www.socisurvey.com](http://www.socisurvey.com). We recruited participants via advertisements in a university intranet that advertises course credits, via private contacts and potentially interested groups (such as psychology students) in social media networks, and via private social networks. Participants needed sufficient German language skills to answer the questionnaire. Participants had to be sixteen years or older. Participants who indicated they were younger were directed straight to the last page of the questionnaire. There were no further inclusion or exclusion criteria. The questionnaire followed a standardized sequence (sociodemographic data, discrimination, justice sensitivity, Islamophobia, homophobia, sexism against men, SDO, authoritarianism). Participants were able to enter a lottery for thirty €10 vouchers for an online retail company. Students at the university could also receive

course credits. Participants were informed about the purpose of the study and participated voluntarily. The study adhered to ethical guidelines and participants were guaranteed privacy. The survey was programmed to force answers. There was a low rate of missing data (0–5.5 percent per variable). Missing data due to early termination of the questionnaire were tended to by the Full Information Maximum Likelihood procedure using *Mplus* 8.0. Due to correlations of the dependent and independent variables in our study with age, gender, and education (Table 1), we reran all models including these three variables as control variables. Unless stated otherwise, the results of these models hardly differed from those not including the control variables, indicating stable findings that may also apply to other samples. The data will be made accessible upon publication of the present study.

## 5 Results

### 5.1 Descriptives and Correlations

Table 1 shows the ranges, internal consistencies, mean values, and standard deviations of all variables, as well as their zero-order correlations. Concerning mean scores, participants showed high levels of self-reported justice sensitivity, particularly altruistic justice sensitivity, in line with previous research. In contrast, low levels particularly of self-reported homophobia, Islamophobia, and self-perpetrated discrimination as well as limited variance in these variables indicated floor effects. Concerning correlation patterns, victim justice sensitivity was positively related to Islamophobia and self-perpetrated discrimination. All altruistic justice sensitivity perspectives were negatively related to all prejudice measures. Observer and perpetrator justice sensitivity were negatively related to self-experienced discrimination, beneficiary and perpetrator justice sensitivity were negatively related to self-perpetrated discrimination. SDO and authoritarianism were negatively related to the altruistic justice sensitivity perspectives, and positively related to victim justice sensitivity, the prejudice scales, and self-experienced discrimination. There were several small correlations between age and education and the dependent and independent variables.

**Table 1: Ranges, internal consistencies, means, standard deviations, and zero-order correlations of all variables**

	range	$\alpha$	M	SD	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15
1 Victim justice sensitivity (JS)	1-6	.79	4.24	0.96	.16**	-.03	-.03	-.03	.03	-.05	.14**	.08	.09	.09	.25***	.12*	.14*	-.14*	-.05
2 Observer JS	1-6	.84	4.69	0.85	.62***	.57***	.62***	.57***	.83***	-.26***	-.24***	-.16**	-.11*	.05	-.07	-.15**	-.22***	-.23***	.05
3 Beneficiary JS	1-6	.87	4.38	1.04	.66***	.90***	.66***	.90***	.90***	-.22***	-.24***	-.23***	-.09	.01	-.19***	-.12*	-.26***	-.25***	.07
4 Perpetrator JS	1-6	.85	5.00	0.88	.86***	.86***	.86***	.86***	.86***	-.25***	-.27***	-.26***	-.22***	-.10	-.29***	-.16**	-.21***	-.25***	.04
5 Altruistic JS	1-6	.92	4.69	0.80	-.28***	-.29***	-.29***	-.29***	-.28***	-.28***	-.29***	-.25***	-.16**	-.01	-.21***	-.27***	-.17**	-.28***	.07
6 Homophobia	1-9	.83	1.86	1.33	.39***	.47***	.39***	.47***	.47***	.23***	.23***	.47***	.23***	.04	.08	.32***	.34***	-.18***	.05
7 Islamophobia	1-5	.91	1.48	0.62	.34***	.34***	.34***	.34***	.34***	.17**	.17**	.34***	.17**	-.05	.06	.32***	.36***	.04	.15**
8 Sexism against men	1-6	.92	2.65	0.76	.27***	.27***	.27***	.27***	.27***	.12*	.12*	.27***	.12*	.12*	.16**	.55***	.44***	.08	.03
9 Experienced discrimination	1-6	.84	2.20	0.63	.51***	.51***	.51***	.51***	.51***	.51***	.51***	.51***	.51***	.51***	.51***	.12*	.11*	.21***	-.03
10 Observed discrimination	1-6	.91	3.13	0.79	.53***	.53***	.53***	.53***	.53***	.53***	.53***	.53***	.53***	.53***	.53***	.08	-.03	.11*	-.15**
11 Perpetrated discrimination	1-6	.84	2.00	0.62	.05	.05	.05	.05	.05	.05	.05	.05	.05	.05	.05	.05	.04	.21***	-.08
12 Authoritarianism	1-7	.90	2.42	0.67	.56***	.56***	.56***	.56***	.56***	.56***	.56***	.56***	.56***	.56***	.56***	.56***	.56***	.08	-.10
13 SDO	1-7	.80	2.66	0.94	.10	.10	.10	.10	.10	.10	.10	.10	.10	.10	.10	.10	.10	.10	.00
14 Gender	0/1		0.21																.07
15 Age	17-68		26.61	10.95															
16 Education	1-4		3.92	0.30															

Note: \*  $p < .05$ ; \*\*  $p < .01$ ; \*\*\*  $p < .001$ . Justice sensitivity measures: 1 does not apply to 6 exactly applies; homophobia/authoritarianism/Social Dominance Orientation (SDO): 1 strongly agree to 9/7 strongly disagree; Islamophobia and sexism against men: 1 completely disagree to 5/6 completely agree; discrimination measures: 1 never to 6 almost every day; gender: 0 female, 1 male; education 1 no school-leaving qualification to 4 university entrance qualification. Spearman Rho for correlations involving educational status.

## 5.2 Links between Justice Sensitivity and Prejudice/Discrimination

To examine the potential effects of justice sensitivity on prejudice and discrimination, we first specified a structural equation model with victim justice sensitivity and altruistic justice sensitivity as independent variables (not yet including self-experienced and observed discrimination as independent variables) and the combined prejudice score and self-perpetrated discrimination as dependent variables. SDO and authoritarianism were considered as control variables. In line with previous methodological research (Little, Cunningham, Shahar, and Widaman 2002) and with research on justice sensitivity (Schmitt et al. 2005; Schmitt et al. 2010) victim justice sensitivity, self-perpetrated discrimination, SDO, and authoritarianism were indicated by test-halves (the mean of the odd-numbered items forming the first, the mean of the even-numbered items forming the second test-half, respectively). Altruistic justice sensitivity was indicated by the mean scores of observer, beneficiary, and perpetrator justice sensitivity, total prejudice was indicated by the standardized mean scores of homophobia, Islamophobia, and sexism against men. All indicators loaded significantly on their latent factors. Correlations between predictors and between error terms of the outcome measures were allowed and estimated. We used a robust maximum likelihood estimator. We considered path coefficients significant with  $p < .05$ .

The model explained 64.4 percent of variance in total prejudice and 17.1 percent of variance in self-perpetrated discrimination ( $\chi^2 = 121.551$ ,  $df = 62$ ,  $p < .001$ ,  $RMSEA = .053$  [95% CI: .039; .067],  $CFI = .967$ ,  $SRMR = .044$ ,  $N = 343$ ). Contrasting Hypotheses 1a and 2a, SDO ( $\beta = .21^{**}$ ) and authoritarianism ( $\beta = .55^{***}$ ), but not victim justice sensitivity positively predicted total prejudice. In line with Hypotheses 1b and 2b, victim justice sensitivity predicted higher self-perpetrated discrimination ( $\beta = .30^{***}$ ). Neither SDO nor authoritarianism contributed to this prediction. In line with Hypothesis 3a and 3b, higher altruistic justice sensitivity predicted less total prejudice ( $\beta = -.25^{***}$ ) and discrimination ( $\beta = -.32^{***}$ ). In line with Hypothesis 4 this was the case above and beyond the effects of authoritarianism and SDO, indicating that individuals

concerned about fair treatment of others are less prone to have negative attitudes towards others because of their belonging to a certain group and avoid treating them negatively because of their group membership.

In order to further disentangle these effects, we computed two models that separately considered a) the three prejudice and b) the three altruistic justice sensitivity measures. In the model that considered the three prejudice types separately, the results were similar for all prejudice scales and similar to the results of the model including the total prejudice score: Lower altruistic justice sensitivity and higher authoritarianism predicted higher values on all prejudice measures. Victim justice sensitivity did not add to these predictions, SDO only added to the prediction of sexism against men ( $\chi^2 = 133.336$ ,  $df = 91$ ,  $p = .003$ ,  $RMSEA = .037$  [.022; .050],  $CFI = .986$ ,  $SRMR = .031$ ,  $N = 343$ ). Thus, the pattern of findings for victim justice sensitivity and altruistic justice sensitivity was the same irrespective of the type of prejudice or the group the prejudice related to: the tendency to care about justice to the benefit of others was linked to a stronger tendency to have less negative attitudes towards members of groups that are often the aim of prejudice. Regarding the model that examined the links between the total prejudice score and self-perpetrated discrimination separately for the three altruistic justice sensitivity perspectives, the results showed that these effects were due to perpetrator justice sensitivity, thus confirming Hypothesis 5b and rejecting Hypothesis 5a (total prejudice:  $\beta = -.21$ , discrimination:  $\beta = -.39$ ;  $\chi^2 = 133.744$ ,  $df = 87$ ,  $p = .001$ ,  $RMSEA = .040$  [.026; .052],  $CFI = .983$ ,  $SRMR = .035$ ,  $N = 343$ ). The more participants reported fearing treating others unfairly, the less they reported negative attitudes (prejudices) and adverse behavior (discrimination) towards others just because they belong to a certain group. Observer and beneficiary justice sensitivity did not add to the prediction of total prejudice or discrimination.

Finally, we examined the potential mediating role of victim justice sensitivity and altruistic justice sensitivity between self-experienced as well as observed discrimination on the one hand and the total prejudice score as well as self-perpetrated discrimination on the

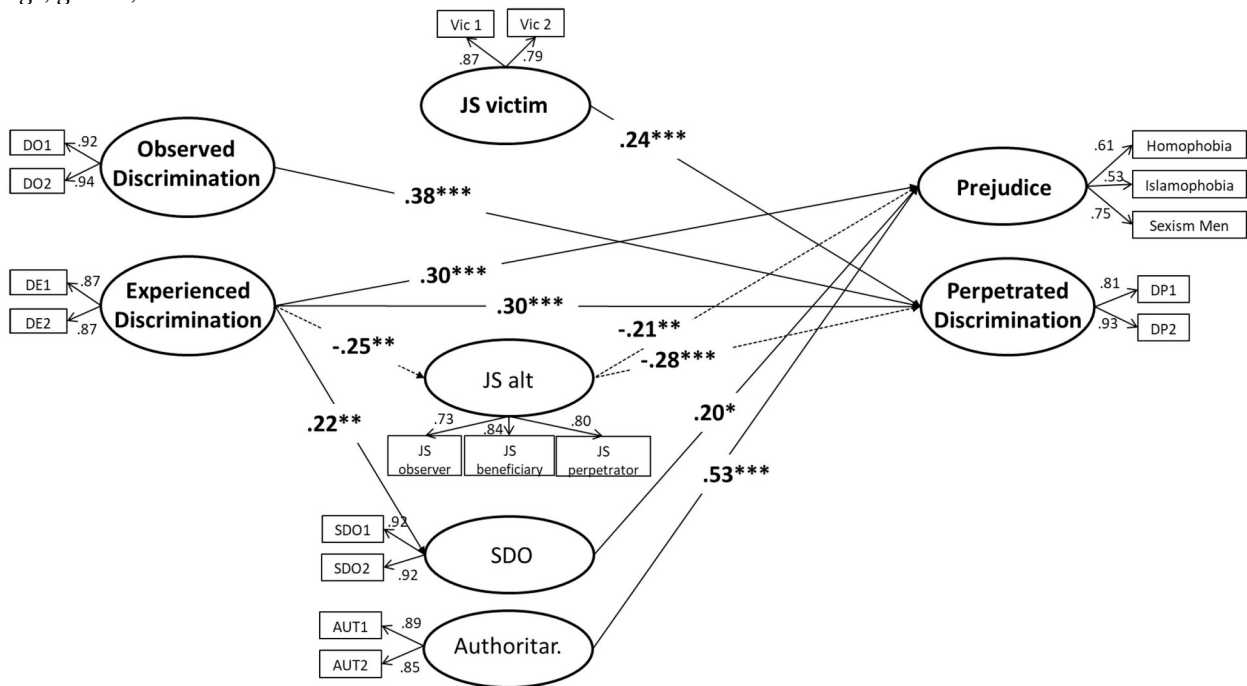


other hand (Figure 1). Indicators of the discrimination subscales, latent variables of self-experienced and observed discrimination, as well as error terms of all mediating variables and outcome measures were allowed to correlate in the model. The model explained 53.0 percent of variance in discrimination and 70.9 percent of variance in total prejudice ( $\chi^2=171.229$ ,  $df=101$ ,  $p<.001$ ,  $RMSEA=.045$  [.033; .056],  $CFI=.974$ ,  $SRMR=.041$ ,  $N=343$ ). Only partly in line with Hypothesis 6, more self-experienced, but not observed discrimination directly predicted more total prejudice (as did altruistic justice sensitivity, SDO, and authoritarianism). In line with Hypothesis 6, both self-experienced and observed discrimination directly predicted self-perpetrated discrimination (as did victim justice sensitivity and altruistic justice sensitivity). In line with Hypothesis 7, victim and altruistic justice sensitivity showed positive relations with prejudice and/or

discrimination beyond self-experienced and observed discrimination. Contrasting Hypothesis 7, victim justice sensitivity did not mediate this link, but altruistic justice sensitivity did when age, gender, and education were not considered as control variables. In this case, there were significant indirect effects from self-experienced discrimination on prejudice ( $\beta=.051$  [.026; .076],  $p=.040$ ) and on self-perpetrated discrimination ( $\beta=.068$  [.035; .101],  $p=.038$ ) via altruistic justice sensitivity. The more participants reported having been treated negatively due to belonging to a certain group, the less they reported being concerned about justice for others. The indirect effects were no longer significant when age, gender, and education were considered as control variables ( $ps=.095$  and  $.078$ , respectively).

**Figure 1:**

Prediction of total prejudice and self-perpetrated discrimination by observed discrimination, self-experienced discrimination, victim JS, altruistic JS, authoritarianism, and SDO. Significant and standardized path coefficients displayed. Correlations of predictors, mediator variables, and error terms of outcome measures allowed and estimated, but not displayed in the figure. Dotted lines indicate additional significant indirect effects of experienced discrimination on prejudice ( $\beta=.05^*$ ) and discrimination ( $\beta=.07^*$ ) via altruistic JS in the model not controlling for age, gender, and education.



$\chi^2=171.229$ ,  $df=101$ ,  $p<.001$ ,  $N=343$ ,  $RMSEA=.045$  [.033 .056],  $CFI=.974$ ,  $SRMR=.041$ ;  $R^2$  prejudice=.709,  $R^2$  perpetrated discrimination=.530

## 6 Discussion

The present study aimed to highlight the links between the trait justice sensitivity – reflecting the individual importance of justice to the benefit of self (victim justice sensitivity) and of others (altruistic justice sensitivity) – and negative attitudes (prejudice) as well as behavior (discrimination). Only partly in line with our assumptions, victim justice sensitivity, the tendency to feel unfairly treated, predicted negative behavior towards others due to their belonging to a certain group (discrimination), but not in connection with negative attitudes (prejudice) towards members of specific groups (here: men, homosexuals, Muslims). More concern for justice for others (altruistic justice sensitivity) was linked to less prejudice and self-perpetrated discrimination and mediated the links between these variables and self-experienced discrimination.

### 6.1 Victim Justice Sensitivity

Positive links between victim justice sensitivity and self-perpetrated discrimination are in line with previous research that showed positive relations of victim justice sensitivity with uncooperative and aggressive behavior (Bondü 2018; Bondü and Krahe 2015; Fetchenhauer and Huang 2004; Gollwitzer et al. 2005) on the one hand and a conservative political orientation aiming to maintain the existing social order on the other hand (Agroskin et al. 2015; Rothmund et al. 2017; Traut-Mattausch et al. 2011). The present research extends these previous findings by directly linking victim justice sensitivity to measures of prejudice and discrimination. This seems an important step, because in recent years, negative attitudes and behavior towards members of perceived out-groups seem to be on the increase. Our findings indicate that individuals who frequently feel unfairly treated themselves are also less hesitant to treat others negatively and unfairly themselves. This is in line with reasoning in previous research, indicating that highly victim-justice sensitive individuals tend to have generalized negative expectations about being unfairly treated (Bondü 2018; Fetchenhauer and Huang 2004), to justify their own misconduct (Gollwitzer et al. 2005), or to show adverse behavior as a means of self-protect-

tion in order to avoid own victimization (Bondü 2018; Gollwitzer, Süßenbach and Hannuschke 2015). The present findings support this latter view by showing that although victim justice sensitivity was related to adverse behavior towards members of perceived out-groups, it was unrelated to negative attitudes towards specific groups. Thus, the adverse behavior is apparently not based in or justified by general negative attitudes towards other groups. Nonetheless, the present findings add to the notion that victim justice sensitivity can be considered an egoistic trait that may predispose to a broad range of adverse social behavior in terms of a risk factor. Future research should examine this assumption also with regard to discrimination using longitudinal data.

### 6.2 Altruistic Justice Sensitivity

In line with previous assumptions, altruistic justice sensitivity (particularly perpetrator justice sensitivity) may apparently protect from perceiving and treating others negatively merely due to their association with a certain group. This is most likely the case, because individuals high in altruistic justice sensitivity would perceive such behavior as unjust and acting that way would most likely result in negative moral emotions (particularly guilt; Schmitt et al. 2005) or even self-sanctions. The present findings expand and back previous research showing that altruistic justice sensitivity is related to a concern for others' well-being, cooperative or prosocial behavior, and positive attitudes towards out-group members (Baumert et al. 2015; Bondü and Elsner 2015; Fetchenhauer and Huang 2004; Süßenbach and Gollwitzer 2015). Hence, the present study adds to the growing body of research suggesting that altruistic justice sensitivity may be a protective factor for adverse social or interpersonal behavior. Contrasting victim justice sensitivity, the potential protective effects of altruistic justice sensitivity apparently do not only relate to actual behavior (i.e., discrimination) but also to the underlying attitudes (i.e., prejudices). This suggests that individuals high in altruistic justice sensitivity tend to view others more favourably regardless of their belonging to certain groups and that they try to judge others based on their actual behavior rather than stereotypic views.

### 6.3 Discrimination Experiences

One further important finding of our study relates to the strong links between self-experienced and/or observed discrimination and prejudice and self-perpetrated discrimination. This indicates that perceptions or experiences of discrimination may breed further discrimination, likely resulting in a vicious circle (Benner et al. 2018). Discrimination experiences may serve as a behavioral example (social learning theory; Bandura 1977; Spears Brown 2017) or desensitize the victim and, therefore, promote subsequent discriminatory behavior by the victim. Experiencing discrimination could also impair self-esteem (Benner et al. 2018), which may subsequently be strengthened through devaluing others.

We had expected self-experienced or observed discrimination to increase fear and expectation of future victimization, thereby increasing egoistic and self-protective tendencies associated with victim justice sensitivity. Victim justice sensitivity, however, was unrelated to both self-experienced and observed discrimination in structural equation modeling and did not mediate their links with self-perpetrated discrimination. In other words, the positive links between victim justice sensitivity and discriminating behavior were irrespective of the individual's own similar experiences. Instead, self-experienced and observed discrimination was negatively related to altruistic justice sensitivity and altruistic justice sensitivity mediated the links between self-experienced discrimination and prejudice as well as self-perpetrated discrimination when age, gender, and education were not considered as control variables. This finding would suggest that perceptions of others' negative behavior may foster the individual's own negative behavior not through increased self-concern but through decreases in concern for others. Hence, the question regarding the origins of high victim justice sensitivity remains to be answered, but experiencing discrimination could lead to a decrease in normative standards and less empathy for others.

### 6.4 Limitations and Outlook

Advantages of the present study include the use of highly reliable measures, including three different stereotypes, as well as measures of discrimination and justice sensitivity from different perspectives. In addi-

tion, significant findings despite limited variance in some of the variables (i.e., high levels of justice sensitivity as well as low levels of prejudice and discrimination) speak for the stability of the present findings. Limitations include a discrimination measure that does not reflect actual behavior. Most participants in the present study were female students without migration background. Hence, the average level of self-experienced discrimination is presumably low. Findings may differ for other age and ethnic groups, due to different levels of self-experienced prejudice and discrimination and attitudes towards certain groups. Future research with larger and more diverse samples may, therefore, investigate moderating effects of group status and reasons for discrimination on the links between justice sensitivity, prejudice, and discrimination. Most importantly, our data are cross-sectional and do not allow for causal inferences. For example, it is also likely that perpetrated discrimination may lead to more experiences of discrimination and higher altruistic justice sensitivity may be associated with experiencing less discrimination oneself. Hence, future research should employ discrimination measures that reflect real-life behavior towards members of different out-groups and that do not merely rely on self-reporting. It should replicate the present findings with longitudinal or experimental data and strive to identify processes that may explain the influences of observed and experienced discrimination on altruistic justice sensitivity. This may also contribute to answering the question how and why the different justice sensitivity perspectives develop and individuals express them differently.

The present findings imply that discrimination may foster discrimination. Therefore, it seems important to prevent discrimination at an early stage in order to avoid the formation of a self-perpetuating vicious circle. They also imply that justice-related concerns and traits may be influential in reaching this aim. Hence, research may strive to find ways to increase empathy and concern for justice for others without increasing the risk of internalizing problems at the same time. Sensitization to unjust behavior and structures, moral dilemmas, or role-play may help to highlight the relevance of justice in everyday life. Justice sensitivity apparently influences behavior in numerous ways and,

therefore, seems to deserve more attention by research and prevention development.

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