Changing Perceptions of Fairness: Group Identity, Locus of Merit and Need, and the Preference for Norms of Allocation

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The present paper analyzes the changing perceptions of social justice with reference to (disadvantaged & non-disadvantaged) group identity and the (internal & external) locus of merit and need. Reiterating the Platonic definition, a large number of discourses introduce justice as deservingness, which is predominately grounded on merit. However, collectivist democratic societies allow greater care for the need of individuals over the criteria of equality and merit. This preference may be further explained in relation to the dual locus of need and merit, i.e., internal and external. Internal locus of need refers to the recipient's own deprived condition, whereas external locus of need denotes the disadvantaged status of the group which one belongs to. Internal merit is the candidate's intrinsic worth and external merit depends on one's luck to be a member of an advantaged group. Having primarily concerned with the external needs of individuals, collectivist societies fail to give adequate attention to internal merit, external merit, and internal need of recipients. The present study unveils the problem of perceived injustice in collectivist public policies that are predominantly external need focused. Contrary to prevailing views, the study finds that 1) irrespective of the specificity of situations, merit preference is significantly higher than need preference, 2) perceived fairness is higher when resources are allocated to the meritorious, 3) perceived injustice is higher when merit is overlooked, 4) in a collectivistic social context, the presence of injustice is perceived to be higher than justice, and 5) while expressing perceived injustice, legality gains greater attention than ethical considerations. Accordingly, the paper responds to five major issues. 1) What accounts to the preference for merit over need? 2) Why loci of internal and external merit and need are being ignored? 3) Why even the disadvantaged do not recommend need, specially the external, as the norm of allocation? 4) What prompts them to perceive the dominant presence of injustice over justice? 5) Why legality is more emphasized than basic principles of justice? The study explicates inherent errors in formulating public policies which happen to be in conflict with collective perceptions mainly because of the unreliable criteria used in identifying disadvantages. It is argued that greater attention is to be paid to locate sociopolitical mechanisms that account to paradigmatic shifts in social perceptions which in turn modify the preference for norms of resource allocation. Among other things, the study exposes the dilemmatic state of affairs endemic to public policies that satisfy neither the disadvantaged nor the non-disadvantaged.

Keywords: disadvantaged, non-disadvantaged, merit, need, locus, allocation

1. Introduction

The present study examines changing perceptions of social justice with reference to disadvantaged/non-disadvantaged group (DG/NDG) identity and internal/external locus of merit and need. The primary goal of the study is to evaluate perceived fairness of resource allocation, mainly in a collectivist democratic social context. For the present purpose, merit and need are taken as allocation rules. The analysis verifies the roles of a situational variable, namely, internal/external locus of merit and need, and disadvantaged/non-disadvantaged group membership in shaping perceived fairness.

The idea of justice has always been a major concern to philosophical discourses ever since Plato's Republic. According to Platonic tradition, which is explicated in the conversations of Polemarchus (Plato, book I, 331e-336a) and Thrasymachus (Plato, book I, 336b-347e), justice is the principle of harmony which commands each one to do the duty proper to one's station and to claim one's own share. Later interpretations of Platonic position introduced the classical definition of justice, i.e., "to give each one his/her due", which is mostly grounded on what one deserves. Accordingly, justice is regarded as deservingness, which is predominantly based on one's merit. Contemporary ethicists, however, suggest a larger set of criteria for justice and allow great attention to the idea of fairness. Therefore, a number of considerations such as equality, egality, deservingness, merit, need, and reciprocity are regarded as principles of fair allocation.

While allocating resources, collectivist democratic societies, however, allow greater care for the need of individuals over the criteria of equality and merit. This preferential allocation may be further explained in relation to the dual locus of need and merit, i.e. internal and external. Internal locus of need refers to the recipient's own deprived condition, whereas external locus of need denotes the disadvantaged status of the group which one belongs to. Likewise, internal merit is the candidate's intrinsic worth and external merit depends on one's luck to be a member of an advantaged group. Collectivist societies, having primarily concerned with the external need of individuals, fail to give due attention to internal merit, external merit, and internal need of recipients. Paying attention to the above mentioned preferential allocation, the present study uncovers the problem of perceived injustice with regard to collectivist public policies that are predominantly external need focused.

The study attempts to examine the external need, i.e. disadvantaged group membership, in terms of caste groups prevailing in the collectivist social context of India. It is widely conceived that the Indian society was divided into several classes from the Vedic period, that is to say, immediately after the Arian invasion. The Puruṣa Sūkta, one of the hymns of the Ṛg Veda, has the first reference to this division (Radhakrishnan 2000). At the initial stage, all Aryans belonged to one class. However, "when the increasing complexity of life rendered necessary division of life", certain families distinguished themselves to be a class (ibid), mostly on the basis of the professions practised. Apart from the classes among Aryans, there were indigenous Dravidians and tribal groups as well. This classification, in its original sense, served as a tool for division of labour, social organization and harmonious life. At a later stage, unfortunately, the above class structure got transformed into castes that are exclusive, hierarchical and rigid. One's caste, which was determined by birth, was the only criterion for entering into specific professions and enjoying the status ascribed by the social structure. Those who considered themselves higher in the pyramid of caste often treated the lower ones with contempt. Thus, caste identity had been a major determinant of one's disadvantaged/non-disadvantaged status ever since the Vedic period.

Owing to the above mentioned historical reasons, policy formulators of the nation have found it fair to allocate greater share of public resources to the disadvantaged groups, the grounds for the disadvantaged status being one's caste identity. Accordingly, a share of resources is being reserved to the scheduled castes, scheduled tribes and other backward communities while leaving the rest to

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public pool, accessible to all. However, recent occurrences of massive protests from youth, students and professionals against the prevailing allocation policies generated great curiosity to crosscheck public perception of fairness of the policy followed. Accordingly, an attempt is made to examine the variable of DG/NDG membership as caste groups, and further, the disparity in the availability of opportunities. It is admitted that caste system has been playing a major role in Indian social mechanics, and the Indian society is intrinsically collectivist.

Corroborating the findings of some existing reward allocation studies and considering that the two variables (DG/NDG) accounts to a larger proportion of total variance than any other variable, it was felt that they should be examined in all of the investigations in the present research to establish the consistency of their significant effect (or the contrary) in the presence of varying situational and resource variables.

Internal/External locus of merit and need was included as a variable in the light of the following rationale. In addition to resource or allocation control, another form of control might make a difference in allocation rule preferences and perceived fairness. In real life allocations, fairness judgments may be affected by the source of merit or need of a meritorious or needy recipient, instead of the allocator's control over the resource; that is to say, whether the recipient was in control of his/her own merit or need, which might play a decisive role. Taking an attributional approach in the context of distributive justice (Cohen, 1982), a meritorious recipient whose merit has an internal locus of control might be seen as being more deserving than the one whose merit is based on chance factors, and has an external locus of control. Similarly, a needy recipient whose need has an internal locus of control (the recipient is personally responsible for being needy) might be considered less deserving than the one whose need has an external locus (external circumstances made the recipient needy). It appears that such a control over merit or need varies from the control over resource or allocation. The above factor has gained significant consideration in the context of retributive justice, though it receives little attention in empirical studies on distributive justice.

The need for examining attributional aspects of distributive justice has been sufficiently highlighted in the existing literature (Cohen, 1982), while a few studies (Lamm & Schwinger, 1980) identify a non-significant effect of internal/external source of recipient's need. For instance, the evidence from a cross cultural study which compares several cultures (Shirazi & Biel, 2005) affirms that the causes of need (for example, in the context of poverty) play an important role in perceiving fairness of resource allocation by the governing machinery. Likewise, a study on an Indian sample (Krishnan, Varma & Pandey, 2009) showed a significant though weak effect of internal or external locus of merit/need in perceived fairness of a given allocation. The difference between the perceived fairness of merit-based, need-based, and equality-based allocation was greatest under external locus of recipient's need, least when no locus information was provided, but non-significant under internal or external locus of merit. Since the effect of locus of merit and need did not emerge clearly in the study by Krishnan et al. (2009), this variable was examined here. Locus of merit and need could be construed as a form of personal control (internal/external) over the antecedents of reward allocation. Therefore, for further exploration of this variable, it was included here as a possible attributional factor in the context of distributive justice.

In consideration to the rationale described above, the present study examines: 1) Allocation rule preference as a dependent variable with DG/NDG membership, and internal/external merit and need as the independent variables (equal allocation as an alternative was omitted); and 2) perceived fairness of a given allocation as a dependent variable, with DG/NDG membership, internal/external merit and need, nature of allocation (merit-based or need-based allocation, avoiding equal allocation as an alternative), and allocator-recipient role as independent variables.

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2. Method

2.1 Subjects

One hundred and eighty graduate students (144 males, 36 females) were participants in the study. Age of the participants ranges from 16 to 23 years (Mean age = 18.44, SD =1.31), and all the participants are enrolled themselves in colleges in a semi-rural town in the northern Indian state of Uttar Pradesh. The subjects belong predominantly to the middle and lower-middle economic class, and all have the same mother tongue which is Hindi. Among 180 participants, 80 were from (caste based) non-disadvantaged group (NDG) and 100 were from disadvantaged group (DG).

2.2 Design

With the help of a reward allocation scenario, the present study examines effects of four independent variables, namely, DG/NDG membership, internal/external locus of merit or need, nature of allocation, and allocation rule preference. DG/NDG membership was considered at two levels such as DG membership and NDG membership. This variable was assessed in tree domains: (a) in terms of caste groups, and (b) in terms of perceived opportunity, and c) family status in society. The actual criteria adopted for both forms of DG/NDG classification are stated below.

Internal/External locus was considered at five levels such as a) internal locus of merit, b) external locus of merit, c) internal locus of need, d) external locus of need, and e) no information about locus of merit or need. Here, the last item serves as a control condition. Nature of allocation was verified at two levels, viz., merit-based allocation and need-based allocation.

Furthermore, the study follows two forms of DG/NDG classification. In the first form of classification, which is caste-based, the total sample (N = 180) was included, and the self-reported category of the respondent was used as the basis of DG/NDG classification. Since the subjects were randomly and equally assigned to each of the 10 manipulated conditions, the number of the DG/NDG subjects in each condition was unequal. In the opportunity-based DG/NDG classification, the composite opportunity ratings (given by subjects to four items related to major social domains) were used as the basis. Subjects were categorized as belonging to DG or NDG on the basis of a median split of the distribution of opportunity ratings. After excluding 34 subjects whose opportunity scores lay exactly on the median, the sample that was used in the opportunity-based DG/NDG classification was reduced from 180 to 146 subjects.

The dependent variable used in the study is allocation rule preference. Allocation rule preference is examined at two levels such as 1) the respondent's own preference (between merit and need), and 2) others' preference as perceived by the respondent, that is to say, what others would prefer in the same context. These two forms of allocation rule preference were included in consideration to the rationale that a correspondence or lack of correspondence between own and others' preferences indicated by the subjects would provide information on whether or not the preferred allocation rule reflected any norm.

Respondents' own allocation rule preference was assessed by asking to indicate to which recipient (meritorious or needy) they would allocate the resource. Likewise, others' allocation rule preference was to be indicated by subjects by mentioning to which recipient, others, in the same situation, would allocate resources. Allocation rule preference was analyzed with regard to DG/NDG membership, and internal/external locus of merit or need. (A cross examination of the frequencies of opportunity-based DG/NDG categorization indicated no remarkable feature; hence DG/NDG membership was not included in the final statistical analysis as an independent variable in the case of allocation rule preference).

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2.3 Social Justice Inventory

A questionnaire, named Social Justice Inventory, is used to collect data from the respondents. The inventory had two sections: 1) general information, and 2) a reward allocation scenario, in which the independent variables of interest were manipulated and questions to assess the dependent variable were included. In the reward allocation scenario, a hypothetical allocation setting, as mentioned below, was described. The manager of a company has to decide who is to be selected for a job. The choice is to be made in the light of a job interview, and between two candidates. One of the two candidates is more capable, whereas the other has greater financial need. Additionally, the capable candidate's merit is the result of his own hard work (internal merit), or his good luck (external merit); and the needy person's need is the result of his own laziness (internal need), or his bad luck (external need). There was a control condition in which no information was given regarding the locus of merit or need. Accordingly, there are five locus conditions: internal merit, external merit, internal need, external need, and no locus information available. Furthermore, each locus condition was combined with the nature of allocation (merit allocation or need allocation).

The description of the hypothetical scenario was followed by questions consisting the below mentioned items. These questions were common to all 10 conditions.

Item 1: Allocation rule preference (own preference): This question asks subjects to place themselves in the manager's position (i.e. allocator) and state which one, out of the two given alternatives (i.e. allocating to the meritorious recipient or to the needy recipient), they would choose. The reason for their choice was solicited.

Item 2: Allocation rule preference (others' preference): Subjects have to indicate what most others would do in the manager's place. Two alternatives were provided, i.e., allocating to the meritorious recipient or to the needy. It is expected that the reason for the choice may be disclosed.

Item 3: To collect further information regarding the perceived locus of merit and need, subjects are asked to rate (a) how much credit they would give to the meritorious recipient for his merit (7-point scale; ranging from 1 = no credit at all, through 4 = moderate credit, to 7 = full credit); and (b) how much blame they would put on the needy recipient for being needy (7-point scale; ranging from 1 = no blame at all, through 4 = moderate blame, to 7 = full blame). It was felt that the ratings on this item would serve also to check manipulation of internal/external locus.

Item 4: This item is used to assess how important the basis of allocation was, in terms of given alternatives such as the candidate's merit, need, the absence of merit or need, the internal or external locus of merit or need. Subjects were asked to choose one or more of the given alternatives.

2.4 Procedure

The Social Justice Inventory was administered to subjects in their classrooms.

2.5 Manipulations

DG/NDG membership was incorporated as a classified variable (on the basis of subjects' self-reported category) and on the basis of ratings of opportunities perceived for health facilities, education, economic growth, and family status. Internal/External Merit and Need, Nature of Allocation, and Allocator/Recipient Role were manipulated through the information given as a part of the reward allocation scenario. It was mentioned that:

1) The capable person's merit was the result of his own hard work (Internal Merit)
2) The capable person's merit was the result of his good luck (External Merit)
3) The needy person's need was the result of his own laziness (Internal Need)
4) The needy person's need was the result of his bad luck (External Need).

In the no locus information (control) condition, no information was given about the internal or external locus of merit or need.

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3. Hypotheses

It was expected that:

1) Between DG and NDG subjects, there would be a significant difference in allocation rule preference. The initial expectation was that DG might show a greater need orientation than NDG, and that the NDG would exhibit a stronger merit orientation than DG. However, in the light of non-significant findings in existing studies (Krishnan, 2001), the direction of difference was not specified in the present study. It was also expected that DG/NDG membership would interact significantly with internal/external locus of merit and need, both groups would favor internal merit and external need to a greater extent than external merit and internal need, and the difference would be greater among the DG, than among the NDG. The rationale underlying this expectation was, again, related to the presumed sense of lower personal control among the DG than among the NDG.

2) With regard to internal/external merit and need, allocation rule preference would be stronger for merit than for need, and more in internal merit and external need, than in external merit and internal need. The rationale for this expectation came from the attributional perspective (Cohen, 1982) that suggests greater credit being given to meritorious persons who are responsible for their merit, and greater blame being placed on needy persons who are responsible for their need. The few existing studies that deal with locus of merit and need do not generally demonstrate a significant effect of this variable (Lamm & Schwinger, 1980; Shirazi & Biel, 2005). The only published Indian study that examines this variable (Krishnan, Varma & Pandey, 2009) also did not find a significant effect of internal/external merit and need, but did report findings that hint the possibility that subjects do take cognizance of the locus of merit and need in allocation settings.

The expectations described above were examined with the help of appropriate statistical tests, and the major results are reported below.

4. Results and Discussion

Ensuring that subjects assigned to various experimental conditions did fulfill the manipulation checks, the responses to the scenario-based questions were analyzed. The results pertaining to items related to the meaning of justice, the extent of justice prevalent in society, and perceived unfairness under violations of allocation rules have been discussed. Allocation rule preferences (own preference and others' preference) between merit and need were analyzed separately with the help of a chi-squared test.

4.1 DG/NDG Classification (caste based and opportunity-rating-based)

To examine the role of DG/NDG membership as completely as possible, two forms of DG/NDG classification were considered:

a) Caste-based classification: On the basis of the self-reported caste category, subjects who belong to scheduled castes, scheduled tribes, and other backward classes were placed in the disadvantaged group (DG), and those who belong to the general category were placed in the non-disadvantaged group (NDG). According to this classification, the study which involves 180 participants has 100 subjects in the DG and 80 subjects in the NDG.

b) Opportunity-based classification: In place of self-reported caste category as the basis of classification, the composite opportunity ratings on four items representing major domains, such as, health, education, economic growth, and family status, were used for DG/NDG classification, using a median split on the composite scores. The median value of the composite opportunity rating was found to be 14 (within a possible range between 4 and 28). This median value was used as the basis for splitting the sample into DG subjects (below the median), and NDG subjects (above the median). As a result of the median split, 34 subjects whose opportunity rating lay exactly on the median, had to be excluded from the total sample of 180, leaving 146 subjects in the sample (DG n = 69, NDG n= 77). A t test comparing the mean opportunity ratings between the DG and NDG confirmed that those designated as NDG perceived significantly greater opportunities (NDG: mean

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opportunity rating = 17.32, SD = 2.34: n = 77) than those designated as DG (DG mean opportunity rating = 10.57, SD = 2.31: n = 69); ($t = 17.58$, $df = 144$, $p < .001$).

The responses to the Social Justice Inventory were analyzed following both forms of DG/NDG classification, as appropriate, in the case of both allocation rule preference (own and others' preference) for merit and need and perceived fairness of given allocation—the two major dependent variables.

4.2 Allocation rule preference (own and others' preference)

a) DG/ NDG classification (caste based)

Allocation rule preference was analyzed with the help of a $\chi 2$ test applied to the frequencies of merit and need preference (separately for own and others' preference), comparing between the five internal/external merit and need conditions, and between DG and NDG. The results indicated that there was no significant difference in the likelihood of merit versus need preference, between own and others' preference, between DG and NDG (caste-based), or between the five locus conditions. Overall, while analyzing the actual frequencies, in the case of own preference, merit preference was significantly more likely than need preference ($\chi 2 = 108.88$, $df = 1$, $p < .001$); merit preference (88.89%); need preference (11.11%). Similarly, in the case of others' preference, merit preference (77.78%) was significantly more likely than need preference (22.22%) ($\chi 2 = 55.56$, $df = 1$, $p < .001$). This pattern of preference (merit and need preference) was similar between DG and NDG subjects (own preference: DG: merit preference = 89%, need preference = 11%, NDG: merit preference = 88.75%, need preference = 11.25%; others' preference: DG: merit preference = 76%, need preference = 24%; NDG: merit preference = 64%, need preference= 36%), and also among different locus conditions (internal/external merit and need).

Thus, contrary to the expectations, both DG and NDG were more likely to allocate the resource to the meritorious rather than the needy recipient. Internal/External merit or need did not make a difference in allocation rule preference. Comparing own preference and others' preference, the merit-need difference tended to be smaller in others' preference than in own preference; but the overall likelihood of merit and need preference was similar. This finding can be interpreted as reflecting a norm-like finding: participants mentioned their merit and need preferences in accordance with what they thought others would prefer. It could also reflect the fact that they considered themselves to be similar to, rather than different from, others.

b) DG/NDG classification (opportunity-rating-based)

Looking at the possibility that the caste-based DG/NDG classification might not have brought out a significant difference in the experienced and actual disadvantage between the two groups, opportunity ratings on four items such as a) health facilities, b) education, c) affluence, and 4) family status are considered. The total sample is classified into DG and NDG on the basis of a median split on the composite opportunity rating.

Allocation rule preference (for merit and need) in opportunity-based DG/NDG classification is found similar to the one presented by caste-based DG/NDG classification. Between internal/external merit and need conditions, and also between own preference and others' preference, merit was clearly preferred over need by both DG and NDG. The DG/NDG frequencies in each locus condition were too small to make a condition-wise chi-squared test feasible. An overall chi-squared comparing the likelihood of merit and need preferences across conditions was carried out. Unambiguously, the results showed that merit preference was significantly higher (own preference = 86.99 %, others' preference = 76.71%) than need preference (own preference = 13.01%, others' preference = 23.29%); own preference $\chi 2 = 79.99$, $df = 1$, $p < .001$; others' preference $\chi 2 = 41.68$, $df = 1$, $p < .001$).

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However, own merit preference tended to be slightly weaker among the DG (own merit preference = 85.5%, others' merit preference = 71.01%) than among the NDG (own merit preference = 88.3%, others' merit preference = 81.8%), and need preference tended to be correspondingly stronger among the DG (own need preference = 14.5%, others' need preference = 28.99%) than among the NDG (own need preference = 11.7%, others' need preference = 18.2%). Nevertheless, it was the overall merit vs. need divergence that overshadowed all other differences. In short, even after considering experienced disadvantage in terms of lower opportunity in important domains, the expected divergence between DG and NDG in merit and need preference has not emerged in the present study.

The relevant statistical and graphical information are presented in Table 1.1 to 1.3, and Figure 1.1, to 1.3.

Table 1.1
Allocation Rule Preference (Own Preference & Others' Preference) under Internal/External Merit and Need (Following DG/NDG classification based on caste) (N = 180)

Own Preference

	Internal Merit	External Merit	Internal Need	External Need	No Locus Information	Total
Merit Preference: %	34 (94.44)	33 (91.7)	28 (77.8)	32 (88.9)	33 (91.7)	**160 (88.9)**
Need Preference: %	2 (5.56)	3 (8.3)	8 (22.2)	4 (11.1)	3 (8.3)	**20 (11.1)**
	36	36	36	36	36	**180**

Own preference - Merit vs. Need preference: Overall $\chi 2 = 108.88$, df = 1, $p < .001$

Others' preference

	Internal Merit	External Merit	Internal Need	External Need	No Locus Information	Total
Merit Preference: %	26 (72.2)	28 (77.8)	28 (77.8)	27 (75.0)	31 (86.1)	**140 (77.8)**
Need Preference: %	10 (27.8)	8 (22.2)	8 (22.2)	9 (25.0)	5 (13.9)	**40 (22.2)**
	36	36	36	36	36	**180**

Own preference - Merit vs. Need Preference: Overall $\chi 2 = 55.56$, df = 1, $p < .001$

□□

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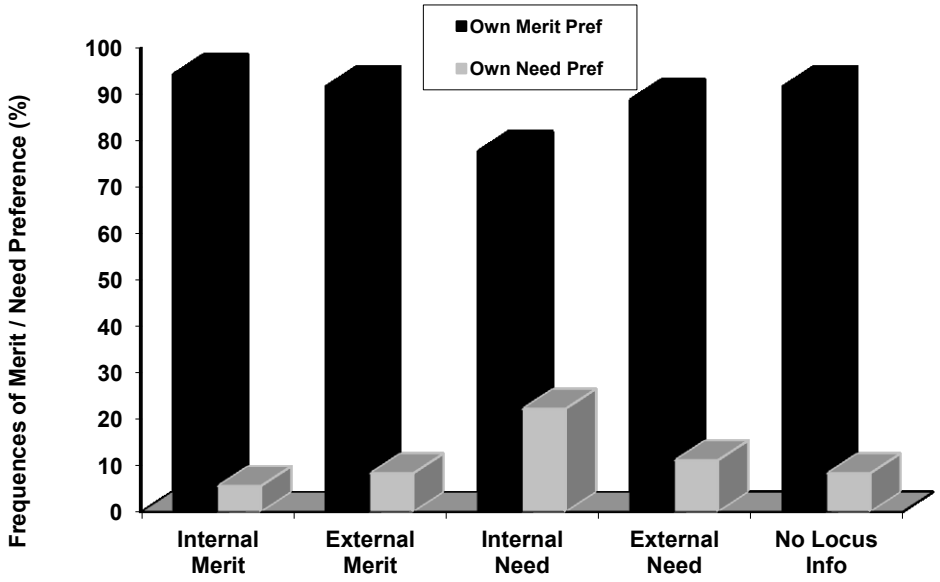
Figure 1.1

Allocation Rule Preference (Own Preference & Others' Preference) under Internal/External Merit and Need (Using DG/NDG Classification Based on Caste) (N = 180)

(A) Own Preference



(B) Others' Preference

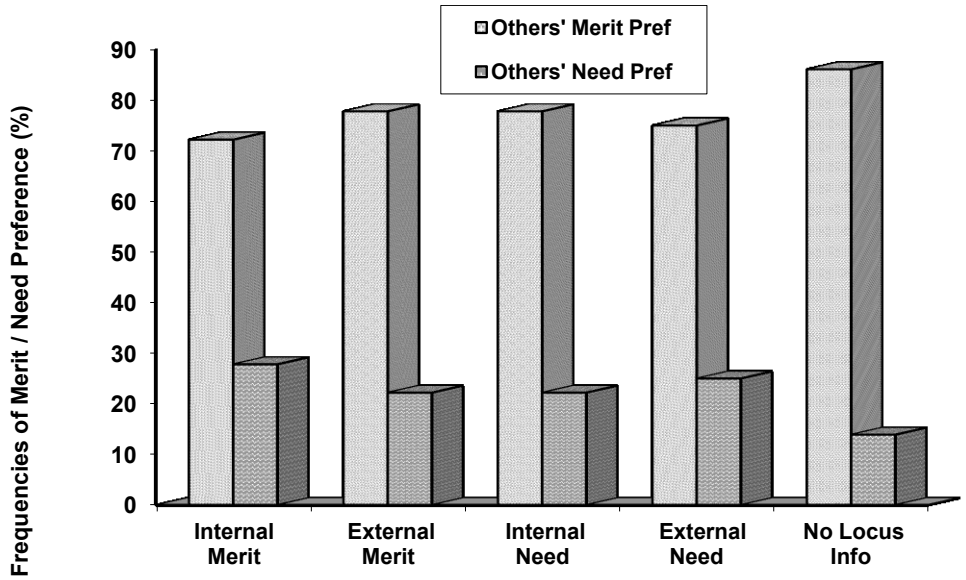


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Table 1.2

Allocation Rule Preference (Own Preference & Others' Preference) under Internal/External Merit and Need Conditions (using DG/NDG classification based on opportunity rating) (N= 146)

Own Preference

	Internal Merit	External Merit	Internal Need	External Need	No Locus Information	Total
Merit	27	24	23	24	29	**127**
%	(93.1)	(92.3)	(71.9)	(88.9)	(90.6)	(86.99)
Need	2	2	9	3	3	**19**
%	(6.9)	(7.7)	(28.1)	(11.1)	(9.4)	(13.01)
n =	29	26	32	27	32	**146**

Own preference - Merit vs. Need preference: Overall $\chi 2 = 79.99$; df = 1, p < .0001

Others' preference

	Internal Merit	External Merit	Internal Need	External Need	No locus information	Total
Merit	22	19	23	21	27	**112**
%	(75.9)	(73.1)	(71.9)	(77.8)	(84.4)	(76.7)
Need	7	7	9	6	5	**34**
%	(24.1)	(26.9)	(28.1)	(22.2)	(15.6)	(23.3)

Others' preference - Merit vs. Need preference: Overall $\chi 2 = 41.68$; df = 1, p < .001

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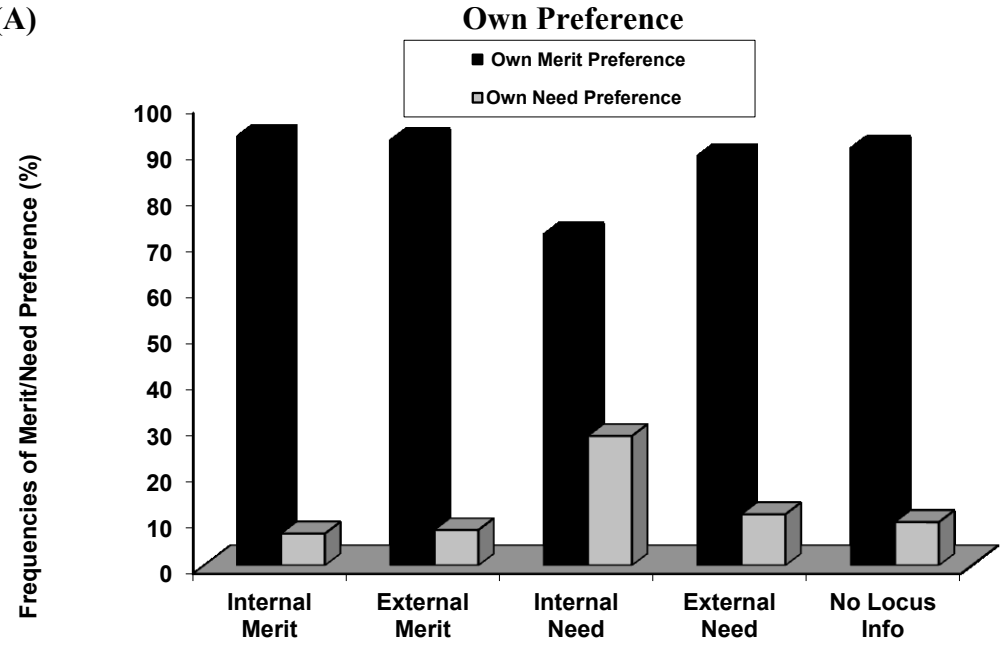
Figure 1.2
Allocation Rule Preference (Own Preference & Others' Preference) under Internal/ External Merit and Need conditions (Using DG/NDG Classification Based on Opportunity Rating) (N= 146)

(A)



(B) Others' Preference

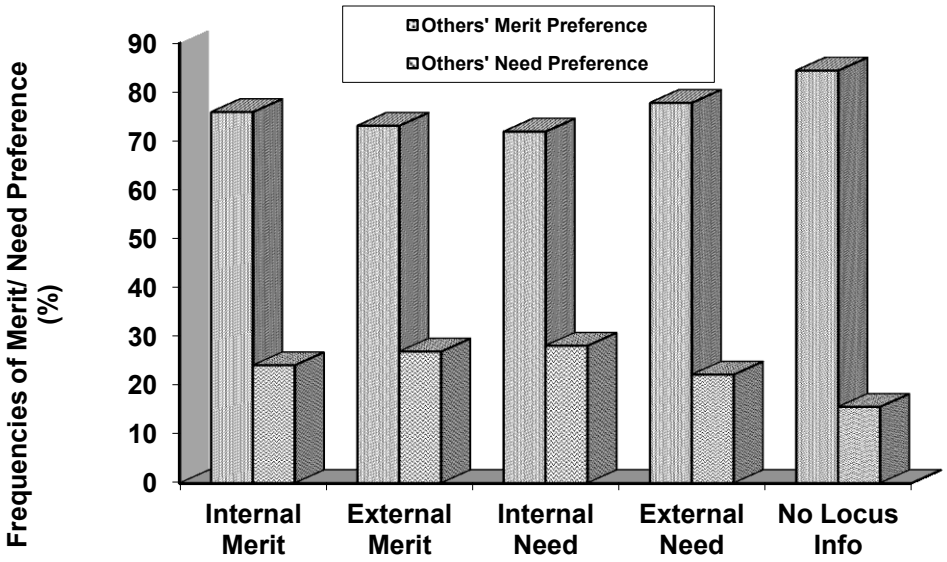


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Table 1.3

Allocation Rule Preference (Own Preference & Others' Preference) in Disadvantaged and Non-Disadvantaged Groups

	Own Preference			Others' Preference		
DG/NDG Classification Based on Caste:						
	DG	**NDG**		**DG**	**NDG**	
Merit Preference %	89 (89%)	71 (88.75%)	(160)	76 (76%)	64 (80%)	(140)
Need Preference %	11 (11%)	9 (11.25%)	(20)	24 (24%)	16 (20%)	(40)
N=	**100**	**80**		**100**	**80**	

Own Pref: Merit vs. Need preference:
DG: χ 2 = 60.84, df = 1, p < .0001
NDG: χ 2 = 48.05, df = 1, p < .0001

Others' Pref: Merit vs. Need preference:
DG: χ 2 = 27.04; df = 1, p < .0001
NDG: χ 2 = 28.80; df = 1, p < .0001

DG/NDG Classification Based on Opportunity:						
	DG	**NDG**		**DG**	**NDG**	
Merit Preference %	59 (85.5)	68 (88.3)	(127)	49 (71.01)	63 (81.8)	(112)
Need Preference %	10 (14.5)	9 (11.7)	(19)	20 (28.99)	14 (18.2)	(34)
N =	**69**	**77**	**146**	**69**	**77**	**146**

Own Pref: Merit vs. Need preference -
DG: χ 2 = 34.78; df = 1, p < .001
NDG: χ 2 = 45.20; df = 1, p < .001

Others' Pref: Merit vs. Need preference
DG: χ 2 = 12.18; df = 1, p < .01
NDG: χ 2 = 31.18; df = 1, p < .001

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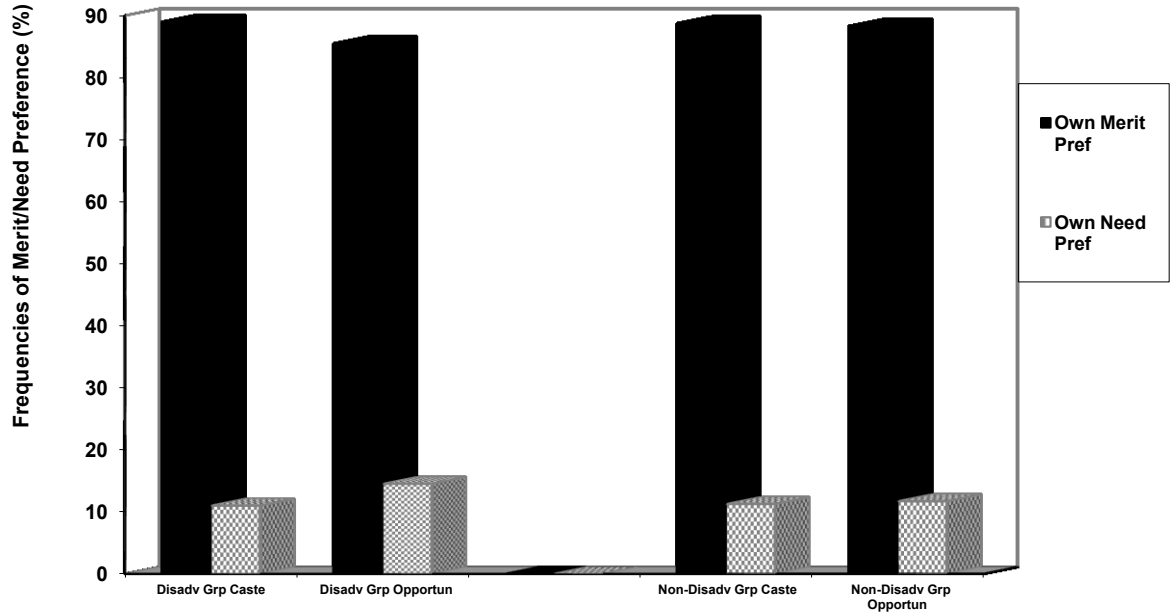
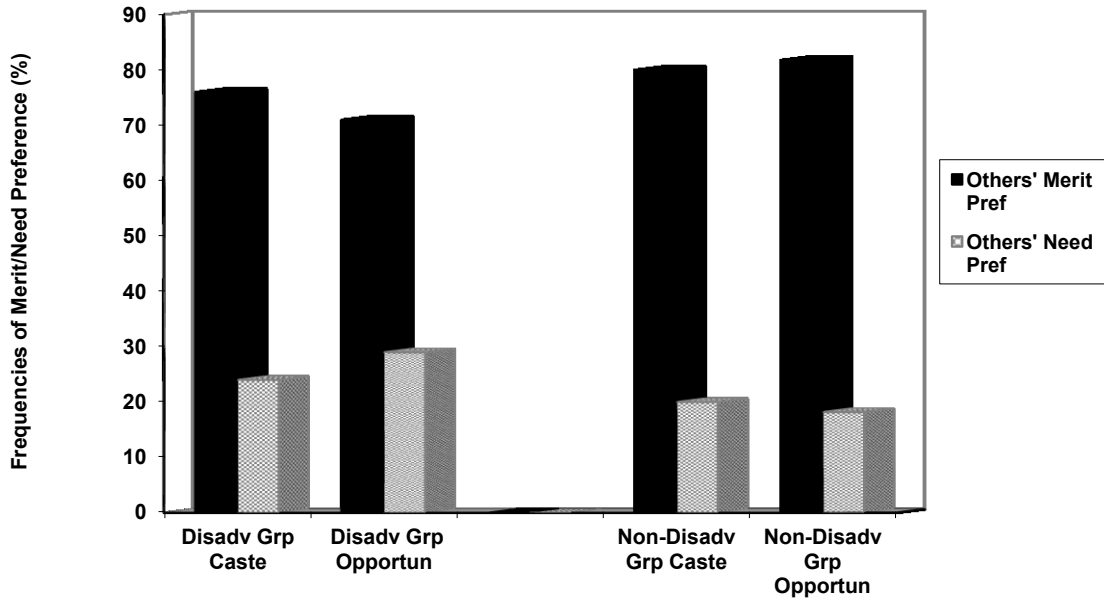
Figure 1.3

Allocation Rule Preference (Own Preference & Others' Preference) for Merit and Need in Disadvantaged and Non-Disadvantaged Groups

Own Preference: DG and NDG



Others' Preference: DG and NDG



In general, the expectations were not corroborated and most of the correlations of interest were found to be non-significant. The Hindi version of the Social Construal Scale (SCS) showed a satisfactory (but not high) reliability level (interdependent items: Cronbach alpha = 0.70; independent items: Cronbach alpha = 0.59). The interdependence mean score (Mean = 65.67, SD = 10.29) was significantly higher than the independence mean score (Mean = 58.06, SD = 11.87) (t =

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6.45, df = 177, p < .001). This feature lent some support to the assumption of relative collectivism (hence interdependence) among Indian subjects. However, interdependence and independence were also found to be positively correlated with each other (r = 0.496, df = 176, p < .001). The overall non-significant relationship between SCS score as a measure of individualism-collectivism on one hand, and perceived fairness on the other, was not taken as conclusive evidence of the actual absence of such a relationship. Rather, it suggests the need to investigate other alternatives to a direct linear relationship between individualism-collectivism and perceived fairness.

The findings may be summarized as follows. DG/NDG membership does not by itself significantly affect allocation rule preference, regardless whether it is caste-based or opportunity-rating-based. The absence of a significant main effect of opportunity-based DG/NDG classification corroborates the finding obtained with a caste-based definition of this variable. In both operationalizations of DG/NDG (caste-based and opportunity-based), perceived fairness tended to be higher among the DG than among the NDG, defying the assumed positive relationship between experienced disadvantage and perceived justice. At this stage of the present study, it appears that DG/NDG as an independent variable is probably ineffective in bringing in to light actual variations in fairness perception, at least when considered as a categorized variable, and with the scenario procedure.

With regard to locus of merit and need, the variable is not found having any clear and significant effect on allocation rule preference, though there is some indication that the subjects pays attention to this variable. Therefore, it is felt that a modified manipulation of this variable might bring out its effects in a more unambiguous way. The results of the present study are not completely in accordance with the expectations but they did corroborate some of the findings of the previous studies. However, with regard to overall allocation rule preference, the distinction between merit and need orientation comes out clearly in this study, and in favor of merit rather than need, which is an observation that is consistent with the low need preference. Yet, it is inconsistent with explanations and expectations based on cultural collectivism. Probably, it is because of the fact that equality was not an allocation alternative in the study. Additionally, the resource itself might have been one that strongly invoked a merit orientation.

5. General Discussion

The lack of a direct effect of locus of merit or need was not because subjects ignored this information or the variable itself plays no role. As it was evident from some interactions involving internal/external merit and need, subjects did take cognizance of the information regarding internal or external source of merit and need. Possibly, as mentioned above, because of situational characteristics (the setting and resource being more related to merit) became peripheral. Therefore, the present findings regarding internal/external merit and need should not be taken to negate Cohen's (1982) emphasis on the relevance of the attributional perspective in distributive justice.

Disadvantaged/Non-disadvantaged group (DG/NDG) membership proved to be of secondary importance as a variable influencing allocation preference and perceived fairness. This finding emerged regardless of whether DG/NDG was operationalized in terms of caste, or opportunities for health, education, economic growth, or family status. Surprisingly, this variable tuned out to be essentially non-significant because the setting was hypothetical (a scenario rather than a real-life situation), or because of the absence of an actual difference in experienced disadvantage, resulting in "denial of personal deprivation" (Crosby, 1982), and a "system justification tendency" (Jost et al., 2003) particularly in the light of the constitutional privileges now available to the disadvantaged caste-categories in Indian society. Contrary to expectations regarding the interactive role of personal control (as conveyed through locus of merit and need) and disadvantage, no support was found in the study for the role of personal control as highlighted in connection with relative deprivation (Crosby, 1976; Crosby & Intal-Gonzales, 1984).

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Importance of merit and need, as indicated by the respondents, were consistent with the allocation preference and perceived fairness findings, although there were no notable correlations between the two sets of measures. The perception of the extent of internal and external control over merit and need was in accordance with the expectation that, in general, more control would be perceived under internal merit and need than under external merit and need. There was also evidence that merit tended to be seen as being more controllable than need.

In general, results were not found in conformity with collectivist allocation policies that are external need focused. Contrary to the expectation of policy makers, the study affirms that 1) perceived fairness is significantly higher when resources are allocated to the meritorious. Furthermore, the study introduces four other major concerns such as: 2) collectivist policies have the tendency to ignore loci of internal and external merit and internal need, 3) even the disadvantaged do not recommend need, especially the external, as the norm of allocation, 4) collectivist societies manifest the dominant presence of injustice over justice, and 5) legal criteria gather greater attention than ethical principles. With regard to the perceived fairness of given allocation, greater justice was perceived when resources were given to the meritorious recipient than to needy ones. Here, the perceived fairness for the meritorious was highest followed by allocator role and least in needy role. The interactions were also found in the direction of merit prevalence than need prevalence. It is not in the direction of the expectation where the findings of justice preferences and perceived fairness were explained on the basis of collectivism. Locus of internal and external control variables were not found significant in any condition, either alone as a main effect or in interaction with other variables. It prompts us to go further in search of other possibilities of causal attributions that may influence reward allocation. It is also a matter of concern to find what happens to the same participants when they make their decisions for justice rule preferences and perceived fairness of given allocation. It is to be investigated why participants did not completely rule out the need-based allocation and how it became crucial when the matter is of given allocation.

One may argue that the uniqueness of the assessed resource, i.e., job, has a significant role in deriving the result which is contrary to the expectations of collectivism. Job, which is a clearly visible and concrete resource, is so scarce in a populated country like India. Quite often job becomes a matter of survival concern and most individuals do not make compromises on issues that concern jobs. Ever increasing competition in the society may also have prompted the subjects to give their preference for merit over need. Here, exclusion of other ethical norms such as equality and egality may also be a cause of low prevalence of need preference, because allocation rules are not always explicitly available. When it is not clear to whom resources are to be allocated, either to the meritorious or to the needy, one may go for a relatively safer allocation norm which is equality or egality. Though the results were not in conformity with the expectation of collectivism, the study shows consistency with a few other works that identify certain situations when merit emerges as a preferred norm over need.

The study reveals the collective perception of the presence of injustice over justice in collectivist societies that are expected to be democratic, benevolent and just. High prevalence of injustice over justice, one may argue, points to the shortcomings of the external need oriented resource allocation and policy formulation. Similarly, the collective perception may be an indicant to the failure in identifying real determinants of external need. Subjects have expressed their perception that the prevalence of justice is quite lower than injustice (Mean = 39.29%, SD = 23.46) perceivable in the society where they live in. There are no significant difference between the disadvantaged and the non-disadvantaged with regard to perceived presence of less justice than injustice (for the disadvantaged group: Mean = 40.42%, SD = 24.45; for non-disadvantaged group: Mean = 38.17%, SD = 22.57).

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6. Reflections and Policy Implications

The results of the study vindicate significant changes in perception of fairness in allocation of resources and preference for the norms to be followed while allocating resources. Collectivist public policies, which are predominantly external need focused and framed in good faith that it helps fair allocation of resources, are no more perceived good enough to attend to internal need and internal and external merits of recipients. Therefore, the policies that aim at allocating resources on the basis of external need, that is to say, the disadvantaged group membership, of recipients are perceived to be unfair. It follows from this perception that collectivist resource allocation policies need an urgent revision.

Furthermore, the study points to the possibility of inherent errors in public policies, primarily owing to the errors made during the stage of formulation, that is to say, unreliable criteria used in identifying disadvantages, and subsequently, due to failures in incorporating socio-cultural mechanics that are varying but decisive. It is possible that policies once formulated remain unrevised for a longer period of time if unchallenged by collective efforts. For this reason, the prevailing policies often appear to be in conflict with collective perceptions that are molded by a number of factors that regulate social currents. It is conceivable that causal factors such as cultural exchange, global interaction, communication, liberalization, the struggle for survival, ever increasing needs, and scarcity of resources lead to paradigmatic shifts in social perceptions which in turn modify the preference for norms of resource allocation. Therefore, it appears reasonable to turn to currently relevant set of variables that determine actual disadvantages and look for appropriate norms which ensure a fair allocation. The study unveils the dilemmatic state of affairs endemic to collectivist public policies that satisfy neither the disadvantaged nor the non-disadvantaged.

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