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Implications of advice rejection in repeated exchanges: Advisor responses and advisee gratitude expression as a buffer[☆]

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ABSTRACT

Using interpersonal theory as a framework and drawing upon sociometer theory and emotions as social information (EASI) model, we examine the implications of advice rejection in repeated advising exchanges. In five experiments ($n = 1788$), we identified an advisor's reduced social worth as an intermediary mechanism explaining how an advisee's rejection (vs. acceptance) of previous advice could reduce the advisor's prosocial motivation toward the advisee and lead to dishonest (vs. honest) advice giving in a subsequent advising exchange. The advisee's gratitude expression, compared to neutral/no expression and ingratitude expression, served as a buffer, which elevated an advisor's social worth in the condition of advice rejection. The findings were robust, whether the second advising exchange involved conflict of interest or not.

1. Introduction

People routinely give and receive advice in personal and professional domains, such as medical advice from doctors to patients, financial advice from brokers to investors, and career advice from mentors to protégés (e.g., Kadous, Leiby, & Peecher, 2013; Monti, Pelligra, Martignon, & Berg, 2014; Sah, Loewenstein, & Cain, 2013; White, 2005). Honest advice can have a significant impact on advisee health, career, and financial well-being. Since not every offered advice is, or should be, accepted, such as when there are doubts about advisor expertise or there is a conflict of interest involved in advice giving (Sah & Loewenstein, 2014, 2015; Sah et al., 2013a; Sniezek & Swol, 2001), it is important to understand the implications of advice rejection for an advisee. Positioning our inquiry within the framework of interpersonal theory (Kiesler, 1982, 1986), we focus on the following questions in this research: (1) Does advice rejection affect the integrity of the advice given in a subsequent exchange and if it does, then, through which mechanisms? (2) How can the advisee mitigate potential negative implications of advice rejection? Specifically, we explore the interpersonal implications of advice rejection (vs. acceptance) in repeated advising exchanges by positing that an advisee's overt action is likely to evoke an advisor's covert experiences (self-system) including self-esteem and social motivation and subsequent overt reaction toward the advisee.

To address our first research question, we draw upon sociometer

theory (Leary & Baumeister, 2000) and depict advice rejection as a form of overt social rejection that can symbolize an advisee's devaluation of an advisor (Goldsmith & Fitch, 1997; Snapp & Leary, 2001) and thus hurt the advisor's social worth (communal self-esteem; Grant & Gino, 2010; Tafarodi & Swann, 1995). We expect reduced social worth to diminish the advisor's prosocial motivation toward the advisee and subsequently increase the likelihood of dishonest (vs. honest) advice giving in a future advising exchange. In addressing our second research question, we draw upon emotions as social information (EASI) model (Van Kleef, 2009; Van Kleef, De Dreu, & Manstead, 2010) and explore how advisee expression of gratitude (an other-praising moral emotion; Haidt, 2003), compared to expression of ingratitude, neutral expression, and no expression, elevates advisor social worth in response to advice rejection. Following EASI model, we propose that, in a negative situation such as advice rejection, the advisee's gratitude expression is particularly likely to serve as a positive interpersonal signal conveying the advisee's positive beliefs about an advisor's social value, thereby elevating advisor social worth.

The present research contributes to the literature on advice giving in several ways. First, we apply sociometer theory to the context of advising exchanges and highlight social worth as an important mechanism that determines advisor prosocial motivation toward the advisee and subsequent advice giving, while accounting for alternative explanatory mechanisms. Second, by switching the ongoing conversation from

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advice seeking or taking as a singular event from the perspective of an advisee (e.g., Brooks, Gino, & Schweitzer, 2015; de Hooge, Verlegh, & Tzioti, 2014; Tost, Gino, & Larrick, 2012), to advice giving as a continuous interaction from the perspective of an advisor, we encourage more research to delineate the psychological underpinnings of advisors' decisions. Finally, we extend EASI model into the context of advice giving by demonstrating the interpersonal value of gratitude expression (versus ingratitude expression and neutral/no expression) in repeated advising exchanges, particularly in the presence of a negative advising exchange in the past.

2. Theory and hypotheses

2.1. Repeated advising exchanges: A sociometer perspective

2.1.1. Sociometer approach to psychological implications of advice rejection

In interpersonal exchanges, one's overt action toward the other influences individuals' covert intrapsychic experiences, specifically the self-system entailing self-esteem and social motivation (Kiesler, 1982, 1986). Self-esteem is “an affectively laden self-evaluation” that individuals strive to protect and enhance (Leary & Baumeister, 2000, p. 2). Sociometer theory states that due to fundamental need to belong (Baumeister & Leary, 1995), individuals are actively gauging their relational value or communal self-esteem (Tafarodi & Swann, 1995, 2001) and maintain it to increase the likelihood of acceptance from others (Leary, 2012; Leary & Baumeister, 2000; Leary, Tambor, Terdal, & Downs, 1995). Individuals' feelings about themselves are inherently tied to their social worth – “a marker of one's relational value to other people... a degree to which a person regards his or her relationship with another individual as valuable or important” (Leary, 2012, p. 146). Social worth reflects eligibility for inclusion beyond the immediate situation to general or future relational value of an individual (Leary & Baumeister, 2000).

Going beyond what has been proposed by other self-esteem theories, sociometer theory posits that self-esteem is not only shaped by others' evaluations, but also designed as a sociometer – the “gauge” that constantly monitors and responds to others' feedback or treatment, such as acceptance or rejection (Leary & Baumeister, 2000). Notably, a sociometer is especially attuned to negative feedback, as humans are more sensitive to negative than positive feedback (Leary, Springer, Negel, Ansell, & Evans, 1998) and negative treatment implicates loss in social worth (Leary, 1999; Leary & Baumeister, 2000). Research suggests that negative feedback can be detrimental to self-evaluations even in anonymous interactions (Downs, 1993) or when the feedback is meaningless (Leary et al., 1995), beyond the influences of trait self-evaluations or other individual differences (Williams, 2007). Sociometer theory has received considerable empirical support from both social psychology research that measured individuals' psychological reactions to various forms of social rejection and exclusion (e.g., Anthony, Wood, & Holmes, 2007; Denissen, Penke, Schmitt, & Van Aken, 2008; Leary, Haupt, Strausser, & Chokel, 1998; Leary, Springer, et al., 1998), and neuroscience research that revealed the neural underpinnings of individuals' reactions to various forms of social rejection (e.g., Eisenberger, Inagaki, Muscatell, Byrne Haltom, & Leary, 2011; Eisenberger, Lieberman, & Williams, 2003; Kross, Berman, Mischel, Smith, & Wager, 2011).

2.1.2. Implication for advice giving

We propose that in the context of repeated advising exchanges, an advisor's social worth (i.e., the advisor's communal form of self-esteem), is an important mechanism that explains how the advisor reacts psychologically and behaviorally to an advisee's overt rejection (vs. acceptance) of prior advice. That is, from an advisor's perspective, an advisee's advice rejection (vs. acceptance) can be construed as a relational devaluation (Leary, 2012; Leary & Baumeister, 2000; Tafarodi & Milne, 2002), thereby reducing an advisor's social worth. Importantly,

even in personally insignificant relationships, social worth perceptions shape individuals' social motivations and action tendencies (Grant & Berg, 2011; Kiesler, 1986; Leary, 2005; Leary & Baumeister, 2000), such as prosocial motivation, or motivation to help others (Grant, 2008; Grant & Berg, 2011).

As one of the strongest drivers of human behaviors, prosocial motivation is evolutionarily significant (Baumeister & Leary, 1995; Nowak, 2012) and is often reinforced by social norms (Cialdini, Reno, & Kallgren, 1990). Since individuals generally prefer to uphold a positive self-concept of themselves (Monin & Jordan, 2009), they are motivated to maintain positive self-views by engaging in prosocial behaviors, such as helping or cooperating with others unless there are enabling conditions for unethical conduct. In other words, unless there is a significant temptation to defect, a large cost for cooperation (vs. defection), or an ulterior motive to be not prosocial, individuals tend to automatically (intuitively) help others or cooperate with others even in one-shot interactions with strangers (Rand et al., 2014; Rand & Nowak, 2013).

However, one of the factors that may reduce prosocial motivation is a reduction of social worth triggered by various forms of social rejection (e.g., ostracism, social exclusion, negative feedback). Supporting this argument, prior research demonstrates that social rejection could lead to reduced prosocial behaviors (Tice, Twenge, & Schmeichel, 2002; Twenge, Baumeister, DeWall, Ciarocco, & Bartels, 2007). Accordingly, consistent with Carver and Scheier's (1981) claim that self-esteem is a motivating force underlying much of what individuals do, we argue that social worth should have a significant implication for advice giving. Specifically, in the context of repeated advising exchanges, we contend that an advisor is motivated to provide honest advice unless they experience reduced social worth, which instead provokes their disregard for helping an advisee, particularly at the expense of their own interest. Combining our arguments, we propose the following hypotheses:

Hypothesis 1. An advisee's advice rejection (vs. acceptance) reduces an advisor's social worth.

Hypothesis 2. An advisor's social worth mediates the negative effect of an advisee's advice rejection (vs. acceptance) on the advisor's prosocial motivation.

Hypothesis 3. An advisor's social worth and subsequent prosocial motivation, together, mediate the effect of an advisee's advice rejection (vs. acceptance) on the advisor's honest (vs. dishonest) advice giving in a subsequent advising exchange.

2.2. Gratitude expression as a buffer

As noted earlier, social worth is affect-laden. Therefore, an advisee's emotion expression in response to rendered advice, in addition to overt behavior, can further shape an advisor's social worth. According to EASI model, different emotion expressions convey unique strategic information regarding expressers' beliefs and relational intentions, thereby influencing observers' cognitions, motivations, and social behaviors (Van Kleef et al., 2010). While expressed emotions can be contagious, they are more likely to serve a signaling (informational) function in negative situations (Van Kleef et al., 2010) or in neutral situations such as zero acquaintance (Belkin & Rothman, 2017; Dunning, Anderson, Schlösser, Ehlebracht, & Fetchenhauer, 2014). Advice rejection, as a form of social rejection that hurts an advisor's social worth (Leary, Springer, et al., 1998), constitutes a negative situation to the advisor. Thus, we expect that, in the instance when an advisee rejects the advice given by an advisor, the advisee's emotion expression that accompanies rejection is more likely to serve a signaling function rather than a contagious function, and thus, may alter the advisor's social worth.

The emotion of gratitude comprises a warm sense of appreciation for someone or something, goodwill toward the person or thing, and an

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