

Failure to perceive injustice

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ABSTRACT

False consciousness can be defined as “holding of false or inaccurate beliefs that are contrary to one's own social interest and which thereby contribute to the maintenance of the disadvantaged position of the self or the group”(Jost, 1995, p. 400). Failure to perceive injustice is one of the dimensions of False consciousness. The present study aimed to observe whether there is a failure in the ability to perceive injustice among young adults, and to determine if there is a significant gender difference in the same. It was a quantitative experimental study using purposive method of sampling. The data was collected from 60 participants (18-24 years old) residing in the metropolitan city of Bangalore, India. A self-designed one item questionnaire, administered at two points in time-T1 and T2, with an interval of two weeks, was used to collect data that was compared to understand if there exists a failure in the ability to perceive injustice. Wilcoxon's signed ranks test and Mann-Whitney U test was conducted using IBM SPSS software, version 24. The results show that there is a failure in the ability to perceive injustice among young adults if details of a situation, that may cause bias, are provided. The study also concluded that there is a no significant gender difference in the ability to perceive injustice among men and women.

Keywords: *False consciousness, injustice, gender difference*

According to the ‘World Population Prospects: The 2015 revision’ population Database of United Nations Population Division, India is the country that has the world's highest number of 10 to 24-year-olds. The youth (15-24 year olds) constitute one-fifth or 19.1% of India's total population as per India's Census, 2011 (Verma et al., 2017). According to Erikson's theory of psychosocial development, individuals between the ages 18 to 30 are considered to be in the stage of young adulthood (Feist & Feist, 2008). In an ever-developing society like that of India, the perception of the young generation holds a lot of importance. How young adults perceive the society contributes to its growth. Having a false belief about injustice and failure in the ability to perceive it can affect the social system adversely. It is essential to understand these failures in perception for the society to grow.

False consciousness is defined as “holding of false or inaccurate beliefs that are contrary to one's own social interest and which thereby contribute to the maintenance of the disadvantaged position of the self or the group” (Jost, 1995, p. 400). The individual may have

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a belief which is inaccurate but is compatible with the interest of a major section of the society. The individual accepts a disadvantaged or an unjust position in the society due to this belief of the majority that he himself abides by. More than often, the major section of the society whose interest is furthered due to false consciousness is at a higher level of societal power.

False consciousness is produced by systems and societies which causes individuals to behave in contradiction to their interest. Moreover, it is the means through which unequal societies maintain themselves (Rosen, 1996). The disadvantaged group in the society, due to power, finances or other such factors of the advantaged group in the society, hold beliefs which are incompatible with their social interests; and rather are in accordance with the social interest of the advantaged group of the society.

False consciousness can be of different types (Fox, 1999):

1. Failure to perceive injustice and disadvantage: The individual fails to perceive unjust actions of others or oneself. They fail to notice the disadvantage caused due to the injustice. Even when the situations are unjust they perceive them to be just.
2. Fatalism: The individual attributes situations to fate or destiny. The individual feels powerless and accepts resignation. The belief is that all situations and events are inevitable as they are predetermined
3. Justification of social roles: Individuals justify and believe in the social roles assigned to people by the society
4. False attribution of blame: The individual not only blames others but also indulges in self-blame. This blame is more than often false
5. Identification with the oppressor: The individual identifies with the oppressor rather than the victim. The victim may be self or other
6. Resistance to change: This involves the resistance to change on the individuals part, both on a cognitive and a behavioral level

The present study focusses on one of the types of false consciousness, i.e., failure to perceive injustice. Individuals fail to perceive what can be called as social injustice, which is defined as the “denial or violation of economic, sociocultural, political, civic or human rights of specific populations or groups in the society based on the perception of inferiority by those with more power or influence” (Levy & Sidel, 2006, p. 6). These groups or populations of the society could be considered inferior on the basis of culture, race, age, gender, socioeconomic status, etc.

People fail to perceive the injustice faced by the populations that may be considered inferior to other groups in the society. People who are stereotyped and are affected by them also tend to support these stereotypes that justify the system because the ideas of the advantaged or the dominant section become their ideas. They fail to recognize the injustice even when they themselves are the victims. False consciousness can also be well understood by understanding implicit stereotyping; as between beliefs expressed consciously and unconsciously, a discrepancy can be observed (Jost & Banaji, 1994).

A study concluded that professional women hold beliefs and values which are contrary to the ideas and goals of feminism. Some of these women believed that men and women could never be equal due to natural differences in them; while some others though desired equality, expressed views and ideas that disapproved all chances to attain this goal. Some participants

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attributed all problems faced by women to individual factors, denying that women constitute a minority group (Lafontaine, 1983).

A study found that even when there was no difference in performance, people had a bias and assigned greater fame to men than to women, regardless of their conscious beliefs and opinions about gender equality. It also found that for judging fame, a low criterion is used for judging familiar men when compared to women (Banaji & Greenwald, 1993).

The present study adds to the understanding of false consciousness, mainly, failure to perceive injustice. There exists scarce literature in the fields of psychology and also sociology in relation to false consciousness and failures in the perception of injustice. Review of past literature implies that false consciousness is present and is affecting the society. The present study holds importance as it aimed to explore its existence along with understanding the differences in gender. It also adds to the present literature.

METHODOLOGY

Research Questions

1. Is there a failure in the ability to perceive injustice if details of a situation, that may cause bias, are provided?
2. Is there a gender difference in the ability to perceive injustice if details of a situation, that may cause bias, are provided?

Objectives

The aim of the study is to observe whether there is a failure in the ability to perceive injustice among young adults if details of a situation, that may cause bias, are provided. The study also aims to determine if there is a significant gender difference in the same.

Hypotheses

1. There is a decrease in the ability to perceive injustice from T1 to T2, among young adults. (T1 being the data collected at point one with neutral descriptions of a situation and T2 being the data collected two weeks from T1 when descriptions of the situation that may cause bias, are provided)
2. There is no significant gender difference in the ability to perceive injustice among young adults when descriptions of a situation that may cause bias, are provided

Research Design

The present study is a quantitative experimental study. This study adopts a within groups design to observe whether there is a decrease in the ability to perceive injustice among young adults. This is studied by observing if there is significant decrease in the scores of the participant group from T1 to T2. The study also adopts a between groups design to determine if there is a significant gender difference between men and women in their ability to perceive injustice by comparing scores at T2.

Sample

The sample consists of 60 young adults, 30 men and 30 women, between the ages of 18 to 24, with the mean age being 22.20. Purposive sampling technique was used to select the participants from the metropolitan city of Bangalore, India.

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Instruments

A self-designed one item questionnaire was administered to the participants at two points- T1 and T2 with an interval of two weeks between them. At T1 the participants were asked to provide their demographic details before the one item questionnaire was administered. A write up was provided to the participants at time T1 and T2, on the basis of which they were asked to answer the one item questionnaire. The write up for both the measurements consisted of a description of a social event. Utmost care was taken by the researcher to ensure as much neutrality as possible in the first write up and the second write-up included details to create a bias. After the write ups were given at T1 and T2, the participants were asked to rate their response from 1 to 5, with 1 being the lowest level of injustice and 5 being the highest level of injustice, for the following question: “How would you rate the level of injustice in this situation?”. Data was collected using Google forms.

Procedure

As data was collected at two points in time T1 and T2, two Google forms were created. At T1, a description of the researcher was provided and participants were made aware that their participation in the study was purely voluntary. They were assured that confidentiality would be maintained throughout the study. A write up was provided after which the self-designed one item questionnaire was administered. An interval of two weeks was maintained between T1 and T2. After two weeks, at T2 the same self-designed one item questionnaire was administered on the same participants but a different write up which included details to create the bias was provided before the questionnaire was administered.

Statistical Analysis of Data

The data was subjected to non-parametric statistics as the assumptions of normality were not fulfilled. Wilcoxon Signed Ranks Test was used to determine whether there is a decrease in the ability to perceive injustice among young adults from T1 to T2 and Mann-Whitney U Test was used to determine the gender differences at T2.

RESULTS

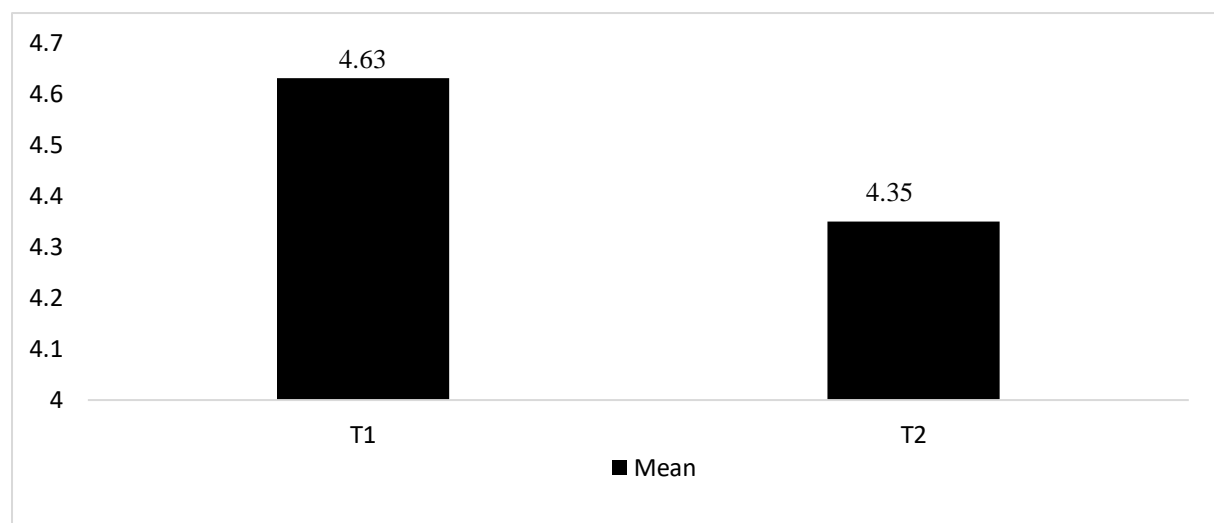


Figure 1: Shows the mean scores at T1 and T2.

The graph shows the difference in the mean scores of perceived injustice at T1 and T2. The mean score for T2 (4.35) is lesser than that of T1 (4.63). This implies that there is a decline in the rating of injustice from T1 to T2.

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Table 1: Showing the difference between T1 and T2 through Wilcoxon Signed Ranks Test.

	T2 - T1
Z	-2.68
Asymp. Sig.(2- tailed)	0.007*

Note: * $p < 0.05$

The Wilcoxon Signed Ranks Test indicated that failure to perceive injustice was significantly lower at T2 as compared to T1. It can also be indicated that there is a significant difference between T1 and T2.

Table 2: Shows the gender differences

	Ability to perceive injustice at T2
Mann- Whitney U	348.50
Asymp. Sig.(2- tailed)	0.08

Note: * $p < 0.05$

The Mann- Whitney test indicated that there is no statistically significant difference between men and women in their ability to perceive injustice.

DISCUSSION

The present study aimed to observe whether there is a failure in the ability to perceive injustice among young adults if details of a situation, that may cause bias, are provided. It also aimed to determine if there is a significant gender difference in the same.

Since the data did not fulfill the assumptions of normality, the Wilcoxon Signed Ranks Test was conducted. The results indicated that T2 scores were significantly lower than the T1 scores ($Z = -2.68$, $0.007 < 0.05$), meaning that failure to perceive injustice was significantly lower at T2 as compared to T1. This indicates that there is a change in the perception of young adults relating to injustice from T1 to T2. Therefore, the first hypothesis; there is a decrease in the ability to perceive injustice from T1 to T2, among young adults; is accepted. This can be attributed to the difference in the write-ups provided to the participants at T1 and T2 before the one item rating questionnaire.

It can be assumed that the detailed information provided to the participants at T2 has caused a decrease in their ability to perceive the injustice in the social situation. The participants that had earlier perceived a higher level of injustice at T1, perceive a lower level of injustice for the same situation at T2 when the information is presented with a bias. This shows that individuals fail to perceive injustice when details of the situation that may create a bias are provided. Participants perceived the same situation as just which they had earlier marked as unjust. This is backed by the prevalent understanding of false consciousness in current literature which indicates that individuals “perceive situations to be fair or just, even when there are good reasons to suppose that such situations are not” (Jost, 1995, p. 402).

This error in perception could be due to various factors, such as the culture and the society the individuals live in. Social conformity is a phenomenon which affects each individual of the society, directly or indirectly. Whatever the individual’s personal autonomous believes may be, conformity plays a role in altering their perception by exerting real or imagined group pressure. Due to this conformity, individuals agree to the ideas and the beliefs of the majority (Crutchfield, 1955). Internalization is a type of conformity which may add to the existence of false consciousness, thus enabling a failure in perceiving injustice. Individuals

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internalize the beliefs of the society (majority) which alter their personal belief system. The beliefs of the society now become their own beliefs. This change can be relatively permanent (Kelman, 1958). This change in their belief system due to internalization of the society's beliefs, may then enable failure in their perception.

A Mann-Whitney *U* Test was conducted which indicated that there is no significant difference between men and women in their ability to perceive injustice ($U = 348.5$, $p = 0.08$). It can be concluded that both men and women have a similar ability to perceive injustice. Therefore, the second hypothesis, there is no significant gender difference in the ability to perceive injustice among young adults; is accepted. This implies that false consciousness operates on men and women alike in our society. The results of the present study endorse the prevalent understanding that the advantaged and the disadvantaged group, both hold similar beliefs to further the interest of the advantaged group of the society regardless of gender (Jost & Banaji, 1994).

CONCLUSION

The present study concludes that there is a failure in the ability to perceive injustice among young adults if details of a situation, that may cause bias, are provided. This is an unconscious bias as the individuals themselves are not aware of it. Individuals hold this unconscious bias, irrespective of their professed views on justice and injustice. The study also concludes that there is a no significant gender difference in the ability to perceive injustice among men and women.

Implications and Future Directions

The findings of the present study can be helpful in understanding the operation of false consciousness in our society relating to injustice. There have been very few studies in India or otherwise, on false consciousness, the present study helps in understanding the bias in perception of young adults relating to injustice. The youth is the future of the society; therefore, it is important for them to perceive and differentiate between what is just and unjust. This ability to perceive injustice will help in ensuring a just order in the society, as the youth become more proactive in seeking justice. The results of the present study show a failure in perceiving injustice. This understanding can be used to increase sensitivity to injustice among young adults "by providing social support for its acknowledgement and viable options for its remedy" (Deutsch, 1985, p. 321). Since the way any content is presented to consumers has a significant impact on the way injustice is perceived, the current study amplifies the need for responsible reporting by mass media in order to ensure not to distort perception of justice and injustice.

Future research conducted can focus on the specific beliefs and perceptions relating to injustice through interviews, and a qualitative understanding of false consciousness can be obtained. This would not only help in understanding the existence of false consciousness but may also be helpful in understanding its roots in the society. The prevalence and operation of the other types of false consciousness can also be studied along with failure to perceive injustice.

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Conflict of Interest

The author declared no conflict of interests.

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