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The Level of Equity and Justification of the Sanctions Distributed within the Family and Professional Fields

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Abstract: *This study explores the manner in which individuals explain their decisions when assigning sanctions (positive or negative consequences) during social interactions. Traditionally, individuals are thought to take responsibility for their actions (internal attribution). However, a certain number of results obtained in the field of education or in the work environment highlight the fact that in the case of sanction distributing behaviours, that is to say if we question the distributor (and no longer the receiver) of a sanction, attributions are more external than self-attributing. This research aims primarily to verify that such results can also be obtained in order to explain the sanctions distributed by a parent to their children or by a spouse to their wife. Moreover, considering that certain sanctions may not correspond to just compensation for the conduct of the individual being sanctioned, we also wanted, on an exploratory basis, to examine the attributions carried out by the distributors of unjust sanctions, again within the familial environment as well as in the professional field. A questionnaire was administered to 64 employees (with an equal distribution of men and women) who were also parents of young children. The questionnaire presented scenarios where individuals in power positions (a father to a child, a husband to a wife and a manager to a subordinate) distributed sanctions (fair or unfair) and the participants were asked to explain the cause using internal or external attributions. The results show that, for just sanctions, the attributions are preferentially external, while for unjust sanctions, differences are observed according to the gender of the participant. From an educational perspective, this research sheds light on the manner in which power dynamics in classrooms can influence how educators assign responsibility for learning. By recognizing the tendency to place blame externally when providing feedback or consequences, educators can create a learning environment that emphasizes internal responsibility and shared ownership of academic achievement. This shift in behaviour empowers students and fosters a stronger sense of agency in their own learning journey.*

Keywords: *sanctions; justice; internality; locus of distribution; family; work.*

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Introduction

Preferential explanation of the type of causality

Our daily lives are filled with ups and downs – successes and failures. These events can, from a causal point of view, be classified into two categories: internal factors (influenced by our personality or actions) or external factors (due to luck, arbitrary people's decisions, etc.).

This dichotomization refers to a theory about individuals' beliefs in what concerns the degree of control they have over events in their lives, a theory called Locus of Control by Lefcourt (1966) and Rotter (1966). People who believe in themselves and their ability to succeed through their actions, feeling like they control their own destiny, have an internal locus of control. Conversely, people who believe that their future results can be due to external causes are people who have an external locus of control (Spector, 1982). Studies exploring the manner in which we attribute causality (reasons for events) consistently show a preference for internal explanations, even when the situation clearly involves external factors (Langer, 1975; Lerner, 1965; Lerner & Simmons, 1966; Beauvois et al., 1991; Cambon et al., 2006).

Just like with successes and failures (locus of control), we explain our own actions (or those of others) through internal reasons (personality, choices) or external ones (luck, other people's actions). This concept, introduced by Heider (1944), is called the attribution theory. It's important to note that attribution focuses on explaining behaviours, while locus of control deals with explaining outcomes (successes or failures). Galvin et al. (2018) consider that in order to easily understand the difference between locus of control and the attribution theory, we must focus on causality. Attributional explanations focus on something that was and is subsequently explained, while LOC explanations involve a prediction about a person's ability to control their future.

Attribution has given rise to a stream of specific research, but research which once again showed a significantly higher frequency of internal explanations as compared to external ones: to explain our behaviours (attribution), we also appeal mainly to internal elements, again even if the objective determinants are external (Jones, 1979; Ross, 1977; Beauvois et al., 1998; Shaver, 1970).

This accentuation of the weight of the actor was first interpreted as an error, a cognitive bias called "an attribution error" (Nietzsche, 1968, 163) and then "a fundamental attribution error" (Ross, 1977). But a few years later, another interpretation emerged, no longer in terms of bias but of social

normalization. Initiated by Jellison & Green (1981), a new series of research then developed, research tending to highlight a social valuation of internal explanations. Put another way, our tendency to favour internal explanations, even when they contradict objective evidence, might stem from the social value placed on such explanations. These internal justifications could be seen as upholding a specific social norm: the norm of internality. This norm would consist of the social valuation of internal explanations, both in terms of reinforcements received, as well as in terms of behaviours adopted (Dubois, 1994; Bressoux & Pansu, 1998; Dompnier & Pansu, 2007; Jouffre et al., 2008; Desrumaux, 2011; Mazilescu & Gangloff, 2017; Dompnier & Pansu, 2010).

This norm of internality has been the subject of a lot of criticism, criticism mainly relating to its validity (Dagot, 2002; Delmas, 2009; Dompnier & Pansu, 2010; Gangloff, 2000; Jugel et al., 2010; Lecigne, 2008; Scheidegger et al., 2012). However, we are hereby interested in a different aspect, one that relates to the contradictory nature of this two-sided norm in a situation of asymmetric interaction between two people.

Changing the focus of locus (causality interpretation)

We are proposing to change the place of analysis of the causality from the receiver of reinforcement/behaviours to the distributor of reinforcement/behaviours. From the same event we are no longer interested in the explanations of the receiver, in terms of locus of control, but we are interested in the explanations offered by the distributor of behaviours.

Gangloff called this positioning in the analysis of the causality on the distributor of reinforcement/behaviours, locus of distribution or LOD, concept which therefore refers to the explanation of the sanctions that an actor X broadcasts to a receiver Y (Gangloff, 2004).

Taking as an illustration a teacher who sanctions a student, Gangloff (2004) has thus argued that if the student considers themselves (or is considered to be) responsible for the sanction they receive (if therefore they say they are or are said to be internal in terms of LOC), logic dictates that the teacher does not declare themselves internal but, on the contrary, external, that is to say not responsible for their sanction distributing behaviour. According to Gangloff's concept of LOD (Locus of Distribution), the actors involved switch roles. They are no longer the receivers of the sanction obligated to explain its reception through LOC, but rather become distributors of the sanction, with the responsibility of justifying a specific behaviour, namely the way they distribute the sanction further.

More generally, if we consider the receiver of a sanction to be the source of such sanction, this implies, as a corollary, that we ought to declare the agent distributing the sanction not responsible for their distributive behaviour. Several studies point to a confirmation of this corollary.

Thus Gangloff (2004) carried out a research in two parts with successive application of the two main paradigms classically used in the work intended to verify the existence of a standard (Jellison & Green, 1981): the paradigm of self-presentation (the first part), and the paradigm of judges (the second part). In the first part, teachers involved in continuing education answered a questionnaire relating to the explanation of their distributive behaviour of sanctions vis-à-vis students. Participants, divided into three equal groups, answered a questionnaire about explaining their use of sanctions towards students. The first group received neutral instructions, encouraging honesty. The second group received "over-normative" instructions, pushing them to answer in a way that would make them appear good to their students. Finally, the third group received "counter-normative" instructions, encouraging them to portray themselves in a negative light. All participants answered questions about both positive and negative sanctions, with each question offering three response options: attributing responsibility to the student, the teacher or to external factors beyond their control (like administrative rules or the economic context). In the second part, students were confronted with three questionnaires identical to the one used in the first part, but these questionnaires were already completed (one in a self-attributive manner, the second systematically putting the students first, and the third referring to external causes). The students then had the task of ranking these teachers in order of preference. It was observed that, confronted with the neutral or over-normative instruction, in terms of priority, the teachers attributed the reinforcements they distributed first to the students, then to context and finally to themselves (in the case of both positive and negative sanctions). On the other hand, with the counter-normative instruction, they attributed the cause of the sanctions first to themselves, and only then to the students and to context. As for the students, it was again observed, regardless of the valence of the items, that they indicated a clear preference for the teachers who consider the students responsible for their sanctions, the teachers referring to context coming in second position and the self-attributing teachers being last. This study, reproduced in Argentina using the same tools and the same procedure, produced similar results (Mayoral et al., 2009). These two studies thus highlight, in the case of neutral or over-normative instruction for the first part, that when they sanction their students, the teachers declare themselves

to be external in terms of the behaviours they adopt of congratulating or making an accusation against students. It is also observed, on the one hand that such attributions are valued by the students (second part of the studies), and on the other hand (because of the difference in the answers provided by the teachers for the over-normative instruction and the counter-normative instruction) that this valuation is known to teachers.

Two other studies, carried out in a professional environment with an identical procedure, aimed to examine the attributions of the sanctions adopted by the hierarchical executives vis-à-vis their subordinates (Gangloff et al., 2011; Mayoral et al., 2011): line managers have thus responded to a questionnaire regarding the explanation of their sanction distributing behaviours in relation to their subordinates by following the paradigm of self-presentation, and the subordinates were confronted with the same questionnaire by applying the paradigm of judges. It was then observed that in order to make a good impression (over-normative instructions), line managers attributed the sanctions they applied first to the behaviours of their subordinates and only afterwards to themselves, and also that an inverted hierarchy was obtained when it came to making a bad impression, regardless of the valence, positive or negative, of the sanction. As for the employees' preferences, it was again ascertained, regardless of the valence of the sanctions, that the executives attributing the sanctions they distributed to the behaviours of their subordinates were significantly preferred to self-attributing executives. That is to say the results were identical to those obtained in terms of sanctions distributed by teachers to their students.

However, in each of these studies the paradigm of self-presentation was applied to teachers and line managers, while students and subordinates alike were confronted with the paradigm of judges. In classical studies on the norm of internality, however, it is generally those evaluated who are confronted with the paradigm of self-presentation and the evaluators who respond to the paradigm of judges. Another study, also carried out in a work environment, has been conducted (Gangloff et al., 2016), but in which it was the subordinates (in this case team leaders distributing sanctions to their subordinates) who had to explain their distributions so as to make a good (versus a bad) impression on their supervisor, the latter (senior executives) having to classify their team leaders in order of preference according to their portrayal (self-attributing, attributing to the receiver, attributing to some other external cause). It was then observed that team leaders who attributed their behaviour to their subordinates were systematically valued more than those who performed internal attributions, for both positive and negative items. As for the team leaders wishing to make a good impression on their

supervisor (over-normative instructions), their internal attributions were systematically less frequent than their attributing the responsibility to subordinates, regardless of the valence of the items. Such consistency of data leads us to extend their application outside the educational and professional fields.

More precisely, we hereby hypothesize that in the familial field, when a parent sanctions one of their children, or when a spouse 'sanctions' their spouse, this will be explained by prioritizing the conduct of the receiver of the sanction. That being said, in the studies cited above, the sanctions distributed correspond to a fair compensation of the receivers' behaviour: the latter "receive what they deserve and deserve what they receive" (Lerner & Simmons, 1966, 204).

On the contrary, if in spite of their mistakes, children are not held accountable or if, in spite of their good work, employees are not rewarded, one might consider oneself to be in the presence of injustice. Our second objective is to also examine, but on an exploratory basis, the attributions carried out in this type of situations.

Methodology

Participants

The study involved 64 parents of children aged 7 to 15 (32 men and 32 women). Participation was voluntary and anonymity was guaranteed for all participants, who were approached in public spaces. The questionnaire itself was divided into two parts. The first part addressed just sanctions, while the second part focused on unjust sanctions.

The study adhered to ethical research principles by ensuring all participants went through the informed consent process.

Work instrument

In the first part, each participant was confronted with two series of four items in which a parent sanctioned their children (the first series) and in which a spouse sanctioned their spouse (the second series). In each series, two negative sanctions and two positive sanctions were presented together with three possible explanations for the sanction (related either to the personality or the mood of the distributor of the sanction, or to the personality or the mood of the recipient of the sanction, or to another external cause).

Example of a positive sanction from the first series:

When I am being conciliatory with my children, it is because...

a) They have behaved well (attribution to the receiver),

b) I am kind (self-attributing explanation - attribution to the distributor),

c) It is recommended by pedagogues (other external explanation).

Example of a negative sanction from the first series:

When I am being strict with my children, it is because...

a) They are difficult children (attribution to the receiver),

b) I am someone who does not let anything get by them (self-attributing explanation),

c) It is meant to prepare them for adulthood (other external explanation).

Participants were asked to rate each explanation from 1 to 3, 1 if it seemed totally acceptable to them and 3 if it seemed totally unacceptable. The range of results can thus vary from 4 to 12: 4 if for each of the 3 possibilities proposed in each of the 4 items the respondent indicates 1; 12 if for each of the 3 possibilities proposed in each of the 4 items the respondent indicates 3.

In the second part, which consisted only of unjust sanctions, three sets of items were proposed, making reference to a parent sanctioning their children, a spouse sanctioning their spouse and a team leader sanctioning their subordinates. Each series consisted of two items (a positive sanction and a negative sanction), each followed by six possible explanations for the sanction (related to the personality or the mood of the distributor of the sanction, to the personality or the mood of the receiver of the sanction, and finally to two other external causes).

Example of negative sanction from the second series: When I get unjustly angry with my wife, it is because...a) I had a difficult day (self-attributing explanation), b) I get carried away easily (self-attributing explanation), c) She annoyed me (attribution to the receiver), d) She has a difficult character (attribution to the receiver), e) My mother asked me to be harsh with my wife (attribution to an external cause), f) It is a way of dominating the partner through stress (attribution to an external cause).

Example of a negative sanction from the third series (at the workplace): When I get unjustly angry with my subordinates, it is because ... a) I had a difficult day at work (unstable self-attributing explanation), b) I get carried away easily (stable self-attribution explanation), c) They annoyed me (unstable attribution to the receiver), d) They have difficult characters (stable attribution to the receiver), e) The management asked me to be hard

(attribution to another unstable external cause), f) It is a technique of management by stress (attribution to another stable external cause).

Participants were asked to rate each explanation from 1 to 6, with 1 if it seemed totally acceptable to them and 6 if it seemed totally unacceptable. The range of results can thus vary from 6 to 36: 6 if for each of the 6 possibilities proposed in each of the 2 items the respondent indicated 1; 36 if for each of the 6 possibilities proposed in each of the 2 items the respondent indicated 6.

Results

Distribution of just sanctions in a familial context

To verify the hypothesis that in a familial context, when a parent sanctions one of their children (just sanctions), they will explain themselves in relation to the behaviour of the children, a repeated-measures ANOVA was employed to analyse the data. This analysis aimed to identify any statistically significant differences between the three types of causal attributions that were investigated in the study.

In the familial context (parent-children relation) the results obtained indicate significant differences between the attributions to the receiver (children), the attributions to the distributor (parent), and the attributions to an external cause: $F(2, 126) = 27.61$, $p < .001$. A post-hoc Tukey comparison was used to test the differences in the estimated marginal means for each combination of within-subject effects. The attributions directed to the receiver were significantly less than the attributions directed to the distributor, $t(63) = -6.27$, $p < .001$ and the attributions directed to the receiver were significantly less than the attributions directed to an external cause, $t(63) = -6.29$, $p < .001$. Taking into consideration that the range of means is between 4 (most acceptable) and 12 (most unacceptable) we can say that the attributions oriented towards the distributor of the sanction are judged as less acceptable than those oriented towards the receiver.

In other words, in the sanctions adopted by a parent with regard to their children, we see, in agreement with our hypothesis, that the attributions directed to the receiver, that is to say to the children, are systematically judged as more acceptable than those directed to the distributor and to an external cause.

Table 1. Means (and standard deviations) obtained in the case of just distributions.

	A1 children just			A2 couple just		
	A target	B self	C ext	A target	B self	C ext
M+W	6.64 (1.40)	8.47 (1.41)	8.92 (1.87)	8.14 (1.55)	9.14 (1.54)	6.80 (1.68)
M	6.94 (1.46)	8.22 (1.50)	8.59 (1.66)	8.25 (1.76)	9.16 (1.72)	6.50 (1.88)
W	6.34 (1.29)	8.71 (1.30)	9.25 (2.03)	8.03 (1.33)	9.12 (1.36)	7.09 (1.42)

Range of means: 4 (the most acceptable) to 12 (the most unacceptable). M-men; W-women

We continued to calculate the differences between the 3 types of causal attributions in the familial context between husband and wife.

The results indicate significant differences between the attributions oriented to the receiver, to the distributor or to the other external source $F(2, 126) = 23.78$, $p < .001$.

A post-hoc Tukey comparison indicates that, in what regards couple sanctions, the attributions directed to the distributor were significantly more numerous than the attributions directed to an external cause, $t(63) = -6.63$, $p < .001$, and significantly more numerous than the attributions directed to the receiver $t(63) = -3.08$, $p = .009$. Another result indicates that the attributions directed to the receiver are significantly greater than the attributions directed to an external cause $t(63) = 3.91$, $p < .001$.

This means that the best accepted attributions are first the other external attributions, then the receiver attributions and finally attributions oriented towards the distributor (self-attributions).

Thus, once again, our hypothesis of a valuation of external attributions in terms of LOD is confirmed.

Distribution of unjust sanctions in the family and in the work environment

In the first series of items, which deal with the sanctions distributed by the father to his children, significant differences are observed between the attributions of the parents: $F(2, 126) = 5.03$, $p = .011$.

A post-hoc Tukey comparison indicates that the attribution to the distributor was significantly greater than the attribution to an external cause $t(63) = 2.75$, $p = .002$. Taking into consideration that the range of means is between 6 (most acceptable) and 36 (most unacceptable) we can say that there is a valuation of external attribution by comparison with the attribution to the distributor (self-attribution).

So, in the case of unjust sanctions, in the relationship between a father and his child, attributions to an external cause are preferred to attributions directed at the distributor of sanctions. These results also go in the direction of valuing external attributions in terms of LOD.

The differences observed among women indicate that the attributions to the target or to external elements are better valued than self-attributions.

Table 2: Means (and standard deviations) obtained in unjust distributions.

	B1 children unjust			**B2 couple unjust**			**B3 work unjust**		
	A target	B self	C ext	A target	B self	C ext	A target	B self	C ext
M+W	13.86	14.91	12.92	15.09	14.25	12.58	13.69	13.12	15.42
	(2.32)	(2.97)	(3.50)	(3.69)	(4.21)	(3.92)	(3.13)	(4.03)	(4.45)
M	14.25	14.44	13.06	15.16	14.78	11.97	13.97	12.00	16.03
	(2.05)	(3.34)	(3.65)	(3.77)	(4.63)	(4.04)	(3.20)	(4.22)	(4.57)
W	13.47	15.37	12.78	15.03	13.72	13.19	13.41	14.25	14.81
	(2.54)	(2.52)	(3.41)	(3.68)	(3.74)	3.76)	(3.09)	(3.55)	(4.31)

Range of means: 6 (the most acceptable) to 36 (the most unacceptable); M-men; W-women

The second series (when a man sanctions his wife) also indicates a significant difference between the three types of attributions $F(2, 126) = 4.50$, $p = .013$. A post-hoc Tukey comparison indicates that the attribution to the receiver was significantly greater than the attribution to an external cause $t(63) = 3.17$, $p = .007$, which means that there is a valuation of external attribution as compared to the attribution oriented towards the receiver of the sanction.

Finally, in the work environment (the third series), the differentiations once again come only from men, with the following hierarchy of preferences: self-attributions, attributions to the receiver and, finally, attributions to other external causes.

Limits and discussions

When it comes to explaining behaviour (our own or that of others not related to us), the data present in the literature systematically shows a preference for internal attributions. But literature fails to examine sanction distributing behaviours, thus only researching a small sample of behaviours, and in spite of this it still considers the results it reports to be applicable to all behaviours. This is indeed the conclusion of the first study carried out by Beauvois and Le Poultier in 1986, study in which these authors extended the valuation of internality established by Jellison & Green (1981) in terms of LOC to the attribution of behaviour. Beauvois and Le Poultier write as follows (Beauvois & Le Poultier, 1986, 101): "The overestimation of the role of the actor in terms of the causal explanation of behaviour (attribution), as well as in terms of explanation of reinforcements (control body), are but two

sides of the same norm that we will call the internality norm". And the latest work published by the proponents of this norm still does not limit this postulate. Thus, Dubois & Aubert (2010, 61) recently wrote: "It is accepted that a person be judged more positively by an evaluator when they explain what they have done or what happened to them by evoking internal causes than when they explain their behaviours and the reinforcements received by evoking external causes". However, the work that we mentioned in the introduction already underlines the abusive nature of such a generalization. In fact, it appears that in the case of neutral instructions, the agents distributing the sanctions (teachers or line executives) attribute their behaviour first to external causes (that is to say to students or to subordinates, or to context), and reject internal factors, ranking them last. And at a normative level, the results of these studies also highlight a valuation of teachers and executives who consider the recipients of their sanctions (students or subordinates) responsible for such sanctions, and therefore, as a corollary, a valuation of the distributors of the sanctions (teachers or line managers) who declare themselves not responsible for their distributive behaviours. Similar results are also obtained by confronting subordinates with the paradigm of self-presentation and by asking their superiors to prioritize said subordinates according to the attributions they carry out.

This study underlines the fact that such results are not limited to the educational or professional field. In fact, it is hereby noted that when a father sanctions his children or when a husband sanctions his spouse, the attributions to the receiver of the sanction or to an external cause are considered more acceptable than self-attributions (or distributor attributions).

These various studies thus show that considering the recipient of a sanction to be the source of said sanction (the usual result obtained in studies regarding the norm of internality) can only logically lead to not attributing the cause of their distributive behaviour to the distributor of the sanctions. These studies therefore encourage us to consider, when we find ourselves dealing with a situation of complementary statuses, and therefore roles, characterized by asymmetric interactions related to the distribution of sanctions, and looking at matters from the point of view of the distributor of the sanction having to explain their distributive behaviour (i.e. in terms of Locus of Distribution), that there would be a valuation of externality, i.e. an externality norm re-sulting in the removal of responsibility from the agent distributing the sanction. Let us also hereby underline, in terms of consequences, that at a societal level, this removal of responsibility from the

agents distributing sanctions can only lead to a perpetuation of the hierarchical positions in question and of the behaviours associated with them: it protects the distributors of sanctions against any inclination to challenge them (which would not only be useless, but also completely absurd) and ensures their permanence as agents of power, in the broadest sense of the term: defining 'good' conduct (legislative power), evaluating (judicial power) and applying sanctions to deviants (executive power). Such a mark of allegiance (Gangloff, 2011; Dagot & Castra, 2002; Legrain & Dagot, 2005), the transmission of which by socio-educational bodies can be observed (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1970) from an early age (Lecigne, 2008), thus makes it possible to obtain the best sustainability of social systems notably evoked in the just world theory: 'People get what they deserve and deserve what they get' (Lerner & Simmons, 1966, 204).

Having said this, the second part of this study deals with situations in which the compensation distributed to the receivers is not correlated with their contributions: the situations proposed are all inequitable. In what regards the sanctions distributed by a father to his children, the results are identical to those obtained by the just sanctions in the first part, but with a noticeable difference: only women place the attributions to the receiver before self-attributions (men report no significant difference). On the contrary, in the other two series, it is only the men who draft a hierarchy. Thus, in what regards the sanctions a man applies to his wife, the other external attributions precede the attributions to the target or to the distributor of the sanction (with no differentiation occurring between these last two cases): in fact, answers like 'such is the life of a couple' are ranked first. Finally, in the third series (work environment), self-attributions precede the attributions to the receiver: it is therefore preferable, for example when one does not sanction the errors of their subordinates, to evoke one's tolerance or the fact of having a good day, rather than to highlight personality ('they're good guys') or circumstantial ('they were tired') traits of the receptors. The results of this second part are therefore somewhat heterogeneous. It seems to us that several combined reasons might be able to explain it: the situations represented (the sanctioning of a child, of a wife, and of subordinates), the fact that the distributor of the sanctions is always a man (father), and the gender division of our respondents. In the first series (sanctions applied to a child), only women establish a hierarchy. Since they are generally responsible for the education of children and the mothers exhibited more sensitivity than the fathers in their relationship with their children (Rodríguez et al., 2013), we may consider that they feel a certain need to justify the sanctions they administer to them. On the other hand, in

terms of sanctions that might target them, applied by their spouse (the second series), they do not establish any hierarchy, unlike men who, for their part, relinquish their responsibility, just as they remove the responsibility from the wife who receives the sanction. One could wonder if the answers would have been the same had we suggested a wife sanctioning her companion.

One of the limitations of this study is that it neglected such operationalization. Finally, for sanctions directed at subordinates, we see that men (who are again the only ones to express a preference) prefer self-attributions. At the moment we are not in a position to establish a hypothesis that would allow us to understand this matter, except to mention another operational limitation: our participants were all employees, but we were not aware of their possible hierarchical responsibilities. It is therefore not excluded that our sample was essentially made up of subordinate employees, hence their rather natural propensity, when faced with unfair treatment, to blame their boss first. Therefore, further research that extends beyond the exploratory phase would now be necessary in order to examine this matter.

Conclusions

This study focuses on distributive sanctioning behaviour, a segment of behaviours for which attributions are more external than self-attributive.

The findings supported the initial objective, revealing that in a situation of asymmetric interaction (father - child, husband – wife, superior - subordinate), the person who distributes the sanctions does not declare themselves internal, but on the contrary external, that is to say not responsible for their behaviour. Such devolution of responsibility is moreover quite consistent with certain observations in the field when one considers the occurrence, increasingly frequent, of certain speeches delivered by business leaders in which layoffs, reductions in wages or other sacrifices demanded of a social group are justified by globalization, that is to say by an argument testifying to an externalization of responsibilities.

This disempowerment of agents distributing sanctions leads, on a societal level, to a perpetuation of their hierarchical positions and ensures their sustainability as agents of power.

We also examined how people explain unjust sanctions (undeserved punishments) within a family and a work setting. The findings highlight the complex interplay between power dynamics, gender, and attribution patterns.

Further research is needed in order to explore the nuances of Locus of Distribution across different power dynamics, including same-sex couples and female managers. Additionally, investigating the reasons behind the observed gender differences in the work environment would be insightful.

This research demonstrates that in situations of unequal power, those distributing sanctions may deflect responsibility, potentially undermining the effectiveness of traditional responsibility-based interventions. Educational efforts might be more effective if they address not only individual responsibility but also the power dynamics and the attribution processes that influence the manner in which sanctions are delivered and perceived.

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