# More Affected = More Neglected: Amplification of Bias in Advice to the Unidentified and Many

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#### Abstract

Professionals often give advice to many anonymous people. From a utilitarian perspective, it could be argued that extra attention and care should be devoted to the preparation of advice given to larger numbers of recipients, since the advice will affect the welfare of more

## Study 1 (continued)

#### Results

*Figure 1:* Advice on number of filled dots (horizontal line represents correct number of filled dots: 455)



## Study 2

#### Method

- 205 advisors in 2 (identified vs. unidentified) x 2 (single vs. multiple recipients) between-subjects design
- Multiple recipients presented as five different recipients rewarded for accuracy independently of each other (one recipient drawn at random to determine advisor's payment)

people. Yet, contrary to this logic, this work reports results from two studies that find the opposite of the normatively dictated result – i.e., that advice-givers facing conflicts of interest tend to give more rather than less biased advice when there are multiple recipients, and decrease the bias in their advice if a single recipient is identified.

#### Introduction

Prior research has examined impact of identifiability and multiple recipients on charitable giving and punishment (Schelling 1968, Kogut & Ritov, 2005a, 2005b, Nordgren and Morris McDonnell 2010). This work examines the consequences on advice-giving in the presence of a conflict of interest. Conflicts of interest (COI) are ubiquitous in today's society and can lead experts to give biased or corrupt advice, often unintentionally (Dana & Loewenstein, 2003).

Figure 2: Advisor's best estimate on the number of filled dots



Proportion of reference group affected by advice is constant (100% of group affected) for both single and multiple recipients

### Results

- More biased advice given to multiple than single recipients, F(1,201) =5.73, *p* =.018
- Single identified recipients received the least biased advice, t(201) =2.39, p =.022, and the most correct best estimate, t(201) =2.84, p =.005

*Figure 4:* Advisor's best estimate on the number of filled dots



Due to increased intensity of feelings towards a single identified other, we propose, and test, that advisors will give more biased advice to unidentified than to identified recipients (Study 1), and to multiple than to single recipients (Study 2). We also examine the extent to which this bias is unconscious or conscious. Only to the degree that it is conscious, presumably, can it be controlled, or compensated for, by advisors.

Study 1

#### Method

Interaction between conflict and identifiability, F(1,167) = 5.74, p = .018 Advisors in the unidentified conflict condition gave the most inflated (and inaccurate) best estimate, t(167) = 2.88, p = .003 This suggests the underlying psychological processes in giving biased advice are in part unconscious

Figure 3: Advisor's self-perceived rating of their good advice (composite measure from advisor's self-ratings on how honest, accurate they were and how much they wanted to help the recipient)



Advisor's self-perceived ratings of good advice revealed greater values for single than for multiple recipients, F(1,201) = 6.60, p = .01

Advisor's personal estimates suggest a part unconscious process in giving biased advice, yet the self-perceived good advice measure reveals some awareness of poor quality advice to multiple recipients

#### Conclusions

Advisors give more biased advice to multiple recipients than single recipients and decrease the bias in their advice if a single recipient is identified. Increased intensity of feelings towards single identified recipients appears to drive this process; advisors are both more aware of, and motivated to reduce, bias in their advice only when the

- 171 advisors gave advice on the number of filled dots in a large grid of 900 dots (some filled, some clear) to recipients who then made an estimate on the number of filled dots without seeing the full grid. Recipients were rewarded for accuracy.
- Some advisors were subject to a COI, i.e. they were rewarded if their recipient over-estimated the number of filled dots
- 2 (COI vs. no COI) x 2 (identified vs. unidentified recipient) between-subjects design
- Identifiability manipulation: name, age, past tense (to indicate recipient is determined)
- Advisors also asked for their best estimate at the end of the study (and rewarded for accuracy for this estimate)
- Advisors in the identified conflict condition thought they gave **the worse advice,** *t*(167) =2.94, *p* =.004

In combination with the impact of identifiability on advisors' own personal estimates, this suggests that the bias to give inflated advice to the unidentified is at least partly unconscious, and that advisors are more aware of, and possibly feel guilty about, their biased advice in the identified conflict condition.

#### recipient is single and identified.

Decreased psychological distance and increased intensity of emotion are important to increase, not only awareness of succumbing to a COI, but also motivation to suppress giving biased advice.

#### References

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