Nepotism
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Summary

In this thesis, I describe 11 studies that investigate: (1) What people construe as nepotism, (2) the consequences of perceived nepotism in organizational and political contexts, and (3) why nepotism remains common practice, despite the negative connotations attached to it. Chapter 1 provides a general introduction to these themes and describes various relevant theories and previous research findings. Research on nepotism is often conducted based on the 'meritocracy perspective', that describes how reward (such as job hiring or promotion) should be given to the most merited (e.g., competent or qualified) individuals. This construes nepotism solely as the hiring or promotion of incompetent family members. Such an emphasis on meritocracy gives room to the legitimization of nepotism, as long as the beneficiaries of nepotism appear to be competent. In contrast to the meritocracy perspective, central to this thesis is a 'procedural fairness perspective' on nepotism. This perspective postulates that people care about *how* their authorities (e.g., a job committee) reach the conclusion to hire individuals who are by kinship related to prominent persons in the organization. For example, people may question: (1) Were the prominent persons involved in the decision process? (2) Did kin-related individuals follow the same procedures (recruitment test, interview) as others who are not kin? (3) Did kinship influence other unrelated committee members' decisions (e.g., because they fear the prominent persons)? These are examples of procedural fairness related questions that can lead people to perceive even the hiring of fully competent kin as nepotism. Moreover, I also present several studies that can explain why nepotism remains a common occurrence, despite its bad reputation. Some people support nepotism because they adhere to the belief that positive traits of parents are transferred to their offspring. Thus, effective leaders produce effective offspring.

Chapter 2 describes five experiments about nepotism in organizations. Studies 1 and 2 involved a vignette in which participants evaluated the employment of competent (or incompetent) kin (or no kin). These two studies showed that people construe nepotism as the employment of kin, regardless of the kin's competence. Thus, whether a person is competent

or not does not matter; the employment of a person is still perceived as nepotism as long the person has kinship ties to a prominent person in the organization. In Studies 3 and 4, participants evaluated the fairness of hiring procedures of a colleague they deemed competent (or incompetent) and who had (or did not have) kinship ties to a prominent person in their organization. The results showed that, although people acknowledge the hiring of a competent kin as distributively fair relative to the hiring of a competent non-kin, they still suspect that such hiring must have involved a violation of fair hiring procedures. Moreover, in Study 4, I compared how people perceive nepotism in comparison to cronyism (hiring based on a common social network, such friendship, or group membership). This study showed that people perceive nepotism as fundamentally more unfair in terms of procedural fairness than cronyism, whereas cronyism is perceived as equally fair as the hiring of a stranger (i.e., the hiring of people without relational or group connections). In the fifth study, I asked potential job seekers for their preference to apply for a job at a prestigious but presumably nepotistic organization. Participants were more likely to apply to a less prestigious but also less nepotistic organization than to a more prestigious but also more nepotistic organization.

Chapter 3 describes four experiments about nepotism in politics. I present four studies that investigated how the prominence of family ties in politics can render people to believe that nepotism is at play. The results conform the group-value perspective of procedural fairness in showing that: (1) perceived nepotism renders people politically cynical, (2) political cynicism leads people to believe that their political authorities were treating them in procedurally unfair ways, which (3) ultimately reduced their preference to participate in politics, and increased their inclination to engage in political protest.

Chapter 4 describes two studies in which I investigated the circumstances under which people support nepotism in leadership. I describe how people use family memberships as a basis to infer the quality of their future leader and present the *belief in the merit of nepotism* as an individual difference variable that distinguishes those who support nepotism from those who do not. The results of the two studies presented in this chapter showed that strong believers in the merit of nepotism tended to expect that the offspring of a previously known effective leader to become an effective leader as well. Strong believers in the merit of

nepotism were also more inclined to expect offspring of an ineffective leader to become an ineffective leader as well. Moreover, people expected the offspring of an ineffective leader to engage in toxic or dysfunctional ways, but this expectation was absent in the case of the offspring of an effective leader. These studies suggest that those who strongly believe in the merit of nepotism use kinship ties as a heuristic to evaluate and infer the characteristics of potential leaders.

In Chapter 5, I summarize the main findings in this thesis, discuss them, and draw general conclusions. First, I conclude that, whether in organizations or politics, people view nepotism as the positive treatment of family members (e.g., through hiring or promotion) regardless of the family member's qualification. Second, nepotism can be differentiated from cronyism, and the former is viewed as more procedurally unfair than the latter. Third, perceived nepotism can be deleterious to business organizations or politics. In the context of business organizations, it may lead to a negative organizational climate. In politics it can lead to increased cynicism among voters and a reduced desire to be politically active. Fourth, people use known traits or qualifications of known leaders to infer the traits or qualifications of their offspring, and this may result in support for nepotism, particularly among people who believe in the merit of nepotism. All in all, people view nepotism as a unique positive treatment toward family members that they view negatively most of the time, but also positively under the right circumstances.