

Making Sense of Injustice:
Benign and Derogatory Reactions
to Innocent Victims

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Making Sense of Injustice:
Benign and Derogatory Reactions
to Innocent Victims

Betekenis geven aan onrecht:

Behulpzame en beschuldigende reacties naar onschuldige slachtoffers

(met een samenvatting in het Nederlands)

PROEFSCHRIFT

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ingevolge het besluit van het college voor promoties
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Voorwoord (Preface in Dutch)

De afgelopen vier jaar van mijn leven stonden in het teken van sociale rechtvaardigheidsonderzoek en, specifiek, het bestuderen van reacties richting onschuldige slachtoffers van onrecht, waar dit proefschrift het resultaat van is. In eerste instantie kwam mijn interesse in sociale rechtvaardigheid voort uit een fascinatie voor crimineel gedrag en de vraag wat criminelen drijft tot hun vaak vreselijke misdaden. Met mijn achtergrond in klinische psychologie wilde ik criminele psychopathologie bestuderen. Echter, mijn uiteindelijke keuze voor de onderzoeksmaster Psychological Health Research leidde me in een andere richting.

Ik heb mijn masterthesisonderzoek gedaan bij Kees, die me tijdens één van onze eerste meetings aanraadde me eens in te lezen in *just-world* theorie, gezien mijn interesse in criminaliteit en (straf-)recht. Van meet af aan vond ik dit een interessante theorie, waardoor ik mijn masterthesis heb geschreven over negatieve reacties richting onschuldige slachtoffers. Na een kort uitstapje en verlenging van mijn zomer aan de andere kant van de wereld, zetten Kees en ik onze samenwerking voort in een AiO-project over hetzelfde onderwerp.

Kees heeft zijn best gedaan om mij aan “de duistere kant van rechtvaardigheid” te houden en in het eerste deel van mijn AiO-project ben ik me dan ook blijven richten op negatieve veroordelende reacties richting slachtoffers. Maar na drie jaar deze reacties te hebben bestudeerd en talloze scenario’s over afschuwelijke misdrijven en verschrikkelijke ongelukken te hebben verzonnen, wilde ik me op een meer positieve uitdrukking van het geloof in een rechtvaardige wereld richten.

Daarom heb ik me in de tweede helft van mijn proefschrift gefocust op het transformeren van negatieve reacties richting onschuldige slachtoffers in positieve reacties, zoals steun en hulp voor de slachtoffers. Je zou kunnen stellen dat op dat moment de “Miss World-deelnemster in mij wakker werd” en ik sociaal-psychologische inzichten wilde gaan gebruiken om de wereld te verbeteren. Ik denk dan ook dat de bevindingen uit dit proefschrift waardevol kunnen zijn bij het oplossen van verschillende maatschappelijke problemen (zoals discriminatie en milieuproblematiek). Met dit proefschrift hoop ik je ervan te kunnen overtuigen dat meer positieve reacties om om te gaan met onrecht wel degelijk mogelijk zijn en dat deze meer aandacht verdienen in het sociale rechtvaardigheidsonderzoek.

Chapter 1

General Introduction and Overview

This chapter is partially based on:

Bal, M., & Van den Bos, K. (in press, pending final acceptance). Coping with an unjust world. In A. C. Michalos (Ed.), *Encyclopedia of quality of life research*. New York: Springer.

Justice is a core human value (Folger, 1984). Yet, in the world we live in, we are confronted with injustice on a regular basis. Opening the newspaper, we immediately read about many grave unjust situations all around the world. But also closer to home, we often encounter unjust situations, ranging from relatively minor incidents that may feel unjust, such as your computer crashing minutes before a deadline, to more clear instances of injustice, such as serious crimes as violence or rape. In this dissertation, I will focus largely on how people deal with a confrontation with individual cases of severe injustice. That is, I investigate reactions of others toward victims of a serious crime or accident. This noted, I do believe that the findings presented in the dissertation could be applied to other types of unjust situations, such as disadvantaged groups and unfair situations in daily life.

When confronted with injustice, reactions can range from going to great lengths to help or support the victims in order to alleviate their ill fate to harsh negative reactions often resulting in blaming and derogating the victims for what happened to them. How people make sense of unjust events will be investigated in the current dissertation. Specifically, the main scope of this dissertation will be twofold. That is, I will study factors influencing the paradoxical negative reactions toward innocent victims and I will focus on ways to transform these negative reactions into more benign ones. As such, I want to identify factors that make it more likely for people to either blame or help innocent victims of injustice.

Injustice and people's reactions to it have been pivotal subjects of research across numerous scientific disciplines, such as law, philosophy, and psychology (e.g., Cohen, 1986). In the current dissertation, I will use insights from social psychology to study key factors influencing how people make sense of a confrontation with

injustice. Specifically, I want to look at core human values and motivations that could help to explain why people are (sometimes) more prone to derogatory reactions toward innocent victims of injustice, while at other times they may go to great lengths to support these same victims.

Contemporary society

Humans have evolved to live in increasingly larger and progressively more interdependent groups (e.g., Aronson, 1999; Martin, 1999). And while these developments brought great advantages and enabled us to progress in many ways, the growing interdependence of human societies also put strains on our capabilities. Contemporary human society is characterized by a strong emphasis on long-term goal striving, assessment of one's worth by others in varying domains, and a variety of binding exchange relationships (Martin, 1999). For instance, when working towards attaining a PhD people have to invest years of hard work in which they enter into long-term binding commitments, most notably with their supervisor, and in which they are often evaluated (e.g., when submitting an article, when presenting their research, and when defending their dissertation).

During this time, people cannot always be certain that they will receive the output they are working towards. We cannot always know whether our effort and input will eventually pay off. Yet, people are known to function optimally when they receive frequent feedback that they are progressing toward their goals and that their efforts will pay off (Martin, 1999). This temporal gap between immediate input and delayed outcomes gave rise to feelings of personal uncertainty or self-doubt (McGregor, Zanna, Holmes, & Spencer, 2001; Van den Bos, 2009).

Personal uncertainty has to do with instability in self-views (Van den Bos, 2009). That is, because delayed outcomes are often uncertain, people might wonder whether they are still on the right track in achieving their outcomes. They might doubt their own abilities in attaining it and question whether will indeed get what they are working hard towards. Too much personal uncertainty might eventually lead people to give up their long-term goal striving in favor of more immediate rewards.

Delayed rewards are nevertheless inevitable in contemporary society. Therefore, people have developed strategies to deal with their feelings of personal uncertainty in different ways. Notably, people have developed a set of norms and rules which originated in the development of cultures and cultural worldviews. These cultural worldviews encompass ideas about the world that are shared by a group and that provide a sense of order and security. They help us make sense of the world we live in. Several theories have focused on different worldviews and their self-esteem building and uncertainty buffering functions (e.g., Greenberg, Pyszczynski, & Solomon, 1986; Proulx & Heine, 2006).

One worldview that specifically buffers against the personal uncertainties brought on by long-term goal striving is the idea that the world is just (Bal & Van den Bos, 2012). We do not only value justice on a societal level, but we also find it important to be treated fairly as an individual. People generally strive to do the right thing and greatly value being treated fairly. Moreover, rules of justice are pivotal to the functioning of most, if not all, societies. This is clear in our societal rules of law, but also in day-to-day interactions with others. Within social psychology, ample research has been devoted to the importance of this justice motive in people's personal experiences (e.g., Lind & Tyler, 1988;

Thibaut & Walker, 1975) and in confrontations with injustice more broadly (e.g., Lerner, 1980; Hafer & Bègue, 2005; Jost & Banaji, 1994).

Theoretical background

One seminal theory, focusing on how people deal with a confrontation with injustice and innocent victims specifically, is just-world theory (Lerner, 1977; 1980). This theory was introduced to explain the paradoxical negative reactions that sometimes follow a confrontation with innocent victims. Just-world theory posits that people have a fundamental need to believe that the world is a just place – that is, a place in which people get what they deserve. In general, people believe that good things happen to good people and that bad deeds will not go unpunished.

This belief is similar to other worldviews people have in that it buffers against uncertainties brought about by contemporary society and helps make sense of the world. Specifically, Lerner (1980) proposed that this belief is “inextricably bound with [a] person’s motives and goals. People want to and have to believe they live in a just world so that they can go about their daily lives with a sense of trust, hope and confidence in their future.” (p. 14)

When people are confronted with injustice (e.g., an innocent victim), their belief in a just world (BJW) is threatened and people will want to restore it. According to Lerner, there are several ways in which people can restore their belief in a just world. These reactions can range from benevolent to derogatory reactions. Benevolent reactions encompass helping or compensating the victim or punishing the perpetrator. The just-world hypothesis postulates that these reactions will be used to restore the BJW when possible (e.g., Lerner & Goldberg, 1999). More specifically, when people have the resources (e.g., time,

money) available to alleviate the victims suffering, they will do so and when these resources are not available or when it costs too much, people engage in more negative reactions to make sense of the injustice.

These reactions comprise of denial of the injustice or a re-appraisal of the victim's behavior or character or the outcome. All of these strategies will down-regulate the injustice of an event by changing the deservingness of what happened to the victim. People can reduce the injustice of the event by denying the existence of the injustice all together (e.g., no one has to die of hunger in this world). They can also mentally change the outcome of the event such that what happened becomes a good thing. People can do this, for example, by insisting that the victim must have grown from the experience or that they became a better person because of it. Finally, people can re-appraise the victim's behavior or character, thereby blaming or derogating the victim. These reaction reappraise the victims behavior ("They had it coming"; blaming) or character ("S/he must be stupid, for being so careless"; derogation).

The introduction of just-world theory sparked a broad range of studies to substantiate the propositions put forward by the just-world hypothesis. Broadly speaking, within this research domain two lines of studies can be distinguished (Hafer & Bègue, 2005; Furnham, 2003). The first focuses on the BJW as an individual difference variable and studies how the BJW relates to several other personality characteristics (e.g., Dalbert, 2001). The second focuses on the BJW as a fundamental motive and usually involves a confrontation with injustice as a BJW threat (e.g., Hafer, 2000a).

The findings of these two lines of research might be summarized as follows: "The BJW is like eating garlic; good for the inside, but bad for

others” (Sutton, 2010). Good for the inside, because a high BJW is positively correlated with positive personality characteristics, such as greater well-being and high self-esteem (Dalbert, 2001). Furthermore, the BJW enables people to focus on the future and strive for long-term goals (Bal & Van den Bos, 2012; Hafer, 2000b; Laurin et al., 2011). If people can have faith that they will get what they deserve, they can trust that their hard work and efforts will pay off in the end.

Bad for others, because numerous studies have shown that victim blaming and derogating a victim are viable ways to relieve a BJW threat (for an overview see Hafer & Bègue, 2005). Notably, in two seminal studies, using a modified Stroop task, Hafer (2000a) has shown that, (a) people's concern for justice indeed increases after a confrontation with an unjust event, and (b) the degree of victim blaming and derogation is related to people's concern for justice.

Subsequent studies revealed that several factors influence to which degree victims are blamed for their ill fate. These factors are usually said to differ in the degree of BJW threat. For instance, victim blaming and derogation have been found to increase when the perpetrator has not been caught. This makes sense, because when the perpetrator has been apprehended the chances that justice will be served increase and the BJW threat decreases. Moreover, studies also indicate that blaming and derogating are enhanced when the victim is innocent or when the victim is similar to you (see, e.g., Correia & Vala, 2003; Correia, Vala, & Aguiar, 2001, 2007). Just-world theory can account for these seemingly paradoxical findings, because these innocent and similar victims pose a greater threat to the BJW and thus provoke stronger reactions to deal with this threat.

More recently, research started to identify factors that influence this pattern of more derogatory reactions in response to a high as

opposed to a low BJW threat. These studies help gain insight into the functions and processes underlying the belief in a just world and reactions to injustice. For instance, in line with just-world theorizing, studies have shown that the belief in a just world serves an important future-orienting function, enabling people to delay gratification (Callan et al., 2009; Hafer, 2000b; Laurin et al., 2011). Hence, the pattern of more victim blaming and derogation following a high BJW threat as opposed to a low BJW threat is present especially when people are future-oriented (Bal & Van den Bos, 2012; Hafer, 2000b).

Moreover, some studies have looked into processes that help explain derogatory reactions toward victims of injustice. Victim blaming has been found to stem from a self-regulatory failure (Loseman & Van den Bos, 2012). That is, victim blaming is enhanced when people are depleted and these reactions can be reduced by self-affirmation. Related to this, derogatory reactions toward innocent victims can be caused by a need to resolve inconsistencies between people's belief in a just world and the reality of unjust suffering or by associative links between the victim and the negative event (Van den Bos & Maas, 2009). Therefore, negative reactions are based on the strength of people's belief in a just world when adopting a rationalistic mindset, but not when adopting an experiential mindset. Finally, victim blaming is enhanced by an assimilation of the observer with the victim. Such an assimilation enhances the threat of a similar fate bestowing on the observer. As such, people blame innocent victims more when adopting an interdependent as opposed to an independent self-construal (Van Prooijen & Van den Bos, 2009). These studies help explain why people blame and derogate innocent victims of injustice.

Interestingly, although helping was a substantial part of the original theory (Lerner, 1980), most of the studies that have been

conducted on BJW threat focused on victim blaming and derogation and only a handful of studies focused on benevolent reactions toward victims (e.g., Bègue, Charmoillaux, Cochet, Cury, & De Suremain, 2008; Kogut, 2010; DePalma, Madey, Tillman, & Wheeler, 1999). These studies have generally looked at the strength of people's belief in a just world to explain individual differences in helping intentions, but they did not study the social psychological processes underlying these reactions.

Negative reactions toward victims of injustice are of course more counterintuitive than help and support. However, the important proposition that people will help when helping is possible (Lerner, 1980; Lerner & Goldberg, 1999), which was postulated at the introduction of just-world theory, has not been tested up until now. Moreover, while some studies focused on factors influencing the degree to which victim are blamed for their ill plight, systematic research on the social psychological processes underlying people's choice to blame or help innocent victims of injustice is lacking.

The current dissertation

I want to address these two issues in the current dissertation. Specifically, my aims are (a) to gain further insight into the functions of the BJW resulting in the paradoxical negative reactions toward innocent victims of injustice; and (b) to study key factors that could make either derogatory reactions or benevolent reaction more probable strategies to resolve the injustice. For this purpose, I have divided this dissertation in two sections in which I try to answer why people blame innocent victims of injustice (Part I) and how to transform victim blaming into helping (Part II).

Part I: Why we blame innocent victims

In the first part of this dissertation, I focus on the functions of the belief in a just world and the consequential negative reactions toward innocent victims. That is, in Chapter 2 I investigate the threat-relieving function of victim blaming and derogation. Specifically, I introduce a perpetrator-similarity hypothesis that could help explain the negative reactions toward innocent victims. Subsequently, I shift focus from the functions of victim blaming and derogation to the functions of the belief in a just world more generally. In Chapter 3, I investigate why people have a need to believe that the world is a just place, which can result in victim blaming and derogation as a way of dealing with a threat to this belief.

Chapter 2: Crime Proximity

The studies described in Chapter 2 start off with the notion that “as events come closer to [people’s] world, the concern over injustices increases greatly, as does the need to explain or make sense of the events” (Lerner & Miller, 1978, p. 1031). Earlier studies have shown that, indeed, people paradoxically blame innocent victims more when they belong to the same social group as the observer (e.g., Correia & Vala, 2003; Correia et al., 2001, 2007). However, in Chapter 2, I focus on a different variable related to crime proximity, namely perpetrator similarity. In three studies, I show that a socially similar perpetrator poses a greater threat to people’s belief in a just world than a socially dissimilar perpetrator and enhances victim blaming and derogation in order to deal with this threat.

I have used the insights obtained in this chapter in subsequent studies described in this dissertation. That is, I have manipulated crime proximity to induce either a high or a low BJW threat. Moreover, while

Chapter 2 focuses on social distance between the observer and the victim or perpetrator, I have also adopted a manipulation of physical distance to manipulate BJW threat. That is, when a crime took place close to your home BJW threat is greater than when a crime took place further away.

Chapter 3: Personal Uncertainty

In Chapter 3, I move from the threat-relieving function of victim blaming and derogation to the uncertainty-relieving function of the belief in a just world. In contemporary society, people are often expected to focus on the future and strive for long-term goals. According to just-world theory, the belief in a just world plays an important role in enabling people to do so as it reduces the uncertainty that is associated with striving for delayed outcomes. In Chapter 3, I therefore investigate the influence of these contemporary societal factors on the belief in a just world and its consequences for reactions toward innocent victims of injustice.

Earlier research has shown that when people are more future-oriented, they tend to blame innocent victims of injustice more, indicating that they have a higher need to believe in a just world (Hafer, 2000b). In Chapter 3, I add to these findings by investigating whether, in a conceptual replication of Hafer's (2000b) work in a differentiated sample, a future orientation leads to more negative evaluations of an innocent victim (Study 3.1). Importantly, in two other studies I show that adopting a future orientation enhances intolerance of personal uncertainty (Study 3.2), and that experiencing personal uncertainty leads to more negative evaluations of a victim (Study 3.3). Hence, personal uncertainty can (at least partially) explain the relation between a future orientation and negative reactions toward innocent victims.

Taken together, the findings of Chapters 2 and 3 help gain insight into the reasons why people blame innocent victims of injustice. That is, the negative reactions toward innocent victims help relieve the BJW threat. Moreover, personal uncertainty, associated with a future orientation, enhances the need to believe in a just world, resulting in more victim blaming and derogation.

Part II: How to transform victim blaming into helping

While the first part of this dissertation focuses on further explaining the negative reactions toward innocent victims of injustice, in Part II I will focus on the tension that often exists between benevolent and derogatory reactions when confronted with innocent suffering. As already alluded to in the first paragraphs of this dissertation, when confronted with innocent suffering, reactions can range from great effort to help the victims involved to harsh blameful and derogatory reactions toward victims. In the second part of this dissertation, I want to investigate how the negative reactions can be transformed in more benign expressions of the belief in a just world.

Chapter 4: Approach vs. Avoidance Motivation

In Chapter 4, I focus on the processes that take place after a confrontation with an innocent victim. That is, I investigate the motivations underlying defensive and benevolent reactions toward innocent victims. I concentrated on one of the most fundamental motivational distinctions in social psychology, namely that of approach and avoidance motivation. As injustice usually is an aversive event, leading to negative affect, I predict that a confrontation with an innocent victim will spontaneously trigger an avoidance motivation. Moreover, I propose that an avoidance motivation will subsequently

enhance victim blaming and derogation and decrease helping after a high BJW threat. In contrast, an approach motivation will decrease victim blaming and derogation and increase helping after a high BJW threat. In three studies I found support for these hypotheses by confronting people with a high or low BJW threat in all studies and measuring (Study 4.1) or manipulating (Studies 4.2 & 4.3) approach and avoidance motivations. Results revealed that people become more avoidance motivated following a high as opposed to a low BJW threat (Study 4.1). I subsequently measured negative and supportive reactions in Studies 4.2 and 4.3 respectively and show that while an avoidance motivation enhanced derogatory reactions and suppressed support, in an approach motivation derogatory reactions decreased and support increased. Thus, motivational orientations related to basic approach and avoidance tendencies seem to shape reactions to BJW threats.

Chapter 5: Self vs. Other Focus

In Chapter 5, I wanted to extend on these insights by focusing on fundamental differences between people that could influence how they construe and react to unjust events. That is, I focus on different social values that people can adhere to (e.g., Van Lange, 1999). Specifically, I propose that when confronted with an innocent victim, people can react from a self-focused perspective (“This could happen to me!”) or from an other-focused perspective (“This victim must feel terrible.”). In Chapter 5, I will use this dichotomy of self-focused and other-focused strategies to help explain how people react to a confrontation with an innocent victim.

I propose that when self-focused, people will appraise an unjust event as a threat to their BJW and when other-focused, people will perceive the unjust event as a person-in-need, yielding a care appraisal.

In three studies, I show that as expected a self-focus enhanced derogatory reactions toward innocent victims and suppressed supportive reactions, while an other-focus enhanced helping and decreased negative reactions. Moreover, people generally seem to adopt a self-focus when confronted with innocent suffering.

Taken together, the findings of Chapters 4 and 5 provide important initial insight into the association between a confrontation with innocent victims and the different strategies people can adopt to deal with this unjust situation. Taken together, in these two empirical chapters I investigate the processes that take place before (Chapter 5) and after (Chapter 4) a confrontation with an innocent victim and that can evoke either a greater tendency to blame or derogate the victims involved or to try to alleviate their ill fate by helping or supporting them in order to make sense of the unjust situation. Importantly, the studies presented in Chapters 4 and 5 explicitly incorporate both helping and blaming as strategies to deal with a BJW threat. These chapters, of course, only reveal some factors that influence how people deal with a confrontation with innocent suffering and more factors play a role but, this noted, I also think it is fair to say that Chapters 4 and 5 revealed some basic factors that help explain the tension between victim blaming and helping after a confrontation with unjust situations.

In sum

In four empirical chapters, in which twelve studies are presented, I aim to gain insight into how people make sense of a confrontation with innocent victims. That is, I investigated key factors influencing the paradoxical negative reactions toward innocent victims of injustice and I studied how these negative reactions can be transformed into more benign reactions, such as help and support to

alleviate the victim's suffering. After a description of these studies in the four empirical chapters, in Chapter 6 the findings will be summarized and their implications discussed. Chapters 2 to 5 were written as independent research articles and can therefore be read independently. As a consequence, there may be some overlap between the chapters.

PART I

WHY WE BLAME INNOCENT VICTIMS

Chapter 2

Crime Proximity

This chapter is based on:

Bal, M., & Van den Bos, K. (2010). The role of perpetrator similarity in reactions toward innocent victims. *European Journal of Social Psychology, 40*, 957-969. doi: 10.1002/ejsp.668

(Studies 2.1 and 2.2 were part of the master thesis of Michèle Bal. Study 2.3 was run, and the paper was revised considerably, after the completion of the master thesis.)

Abstract

Building and extending on just world theory, this paper studies people's negative reactions to innocent victims of rape or sexual assault. Specifically, we focus on an as yet unexplored variable that may help to explain these reactions, namely whether the perpetrator of the crime was similar or dissimilar to people who observed what happened to the victim. Perpetrator similarity refers to whether the perpetrator belongs to the personal world of the observer or not, and, in accordance with predictions derived from just world theory, findings of three studies reveal that especially men take more physical distance from an innocent victim (Study 2.1) and blame (Study 2.2) and derogate (Study 2.3) an innocent victim more when the perpetrator is similar to them as opposed to when the perpetrator is different from them. Implications are discussed.

Keywords: just world belief, victimization, perpetrator similarity, blaming, physical distancing

“People will be concerned primarily with their own world, the environment they must live in and function. To witness and admit to injustices in other environments does not threaten people very much because these events have little relevance for their own fates. As events become closer to their world, however, the concern over injustices increases greatly, as does the need to explain or make sense of the events” (Lerner & Miller, 1978, p. 1031).

In our society, we cannot escape occasionally being confronted with criminal offenders and innocent victims of criminal acts. Not only is it possible that we directly witness a crime, but more often we hear about it on the news or read about it in the newspapers. As the above-stated quote by Lerner and Miller (1978) illustrates, how we deal with the injustice done to innocent victims seems to be dependent on the proximity of the crime to our personal world. Previous research on this intriguing issue has tended to focus on one aspect of proximity, namely victim similarity (e.g., Aguiar, Vala, Correia, & Perreira, 2008; Correia, Vala, & Aguiar, 2007; Lodewijkx, De Kwaadsteniet, & Nijstad, 2005; Novak & Lerner, 1968). Victim similarity refers to whether a victim belongs to your personal world or not. Research findings have revealed that people are more threatened by reading about a victim that is similar to them as opposed to different from them (Correia et al., 2007).

According to our knowledge, another aspect of crime proximity, perpetrator similarity (i.e., whether a perpetrator is similar to you or different from you), has been largely neglected in just world research up until now. In the present paper we propose that perpetrators who are similar to you pose a more severe threat to your belief in a just world

than perpetrators who are different from you and we will investigate how perpetrator similarity influences people's reactions toward innocent victims.

Just world theory

Rationally, when someone becomes victim of a cruel event such as rape or sexual assault, one would expect the social environment to sympathize with this victim. In reality negative reactions are found repeatedly (e.g., Correia & Vala, 2003; Correia, Vala, & Aguiar, 2001). Just world theory (Lerner, 1980) provides a plausible explanation for this paradoxical finding. This theory proposes that people have a basic need to believe the world is a just place, where good things happen to good people and bad things happen to bad people. Adopting the belief that the world is just serves the psychological function of keeping the world manageable and predictable. When bad things do happen to good people, the implication is that it could also happen to the observer. In order to differentiate themselves from a victim, people blame or derogate innocent victims of a crime (Correia & Vala, 2003; Correia, Vala, & Aguiar, 2001, 2007; for more extensive introductions to just world theory, see, e.g., Hafer, 2000a; Hafer & Bègue, 2005; Lerner, 1977, 1981).

Personal world versus world of others

An important proposition of just world theory is that people make a distinction between their personal world and the world of others (Lerner, 1980; Lerner & Miller, 1978; Sutton & Douglas, 2005; Sutton, Douglas, Wilkin, Elder, & Cole, 2008). People with whom they interact or who are otherwise part of their social world belong to their personal world, while other people belong to the world of others.

Following this line of reasoning, just world theory proposes that people's just world belief is threatened more when someone similar to them is victimized than when someone not similar to them is victimized. A victim similarity effect has indeed been found in some earlier studies (e.g., Aguiar et al., 2008; Correia et al., 2007; Lerner & Novak, 1987). For example, Novak and Lerner (1968) found that people react more negatively toward a similar victim than toward a different victim. Whether it is the threat to people's belief in a just world that causes these negative reactions remains to be investigated, although some indication for this assumption can be found in the research by Hafer (2000a). She reported that people's reactions towards victims depend upon perceived threat to ones' belief in a just world and that people react more negatively when their belief in a just world is threatened more. Moreover, Correia et al. (2007) recently reported that people's belief in a just world is threatened more when the victim belonged to people's personal world than when the victim did not belong to people's personal world. Furthermore, Aguiar et al. (2008) found that a similar victim was derogated more than a different victim, but only when a non-obtrusive measure of derogation was used. In the current paper we will focus on another aspect of crime proximity to study negative reactions toward innocent victims, namely perpetrator similarity, and we will also focus on victim similarity in our first two studies.

The Current Research

The aims of the current paper are three-fold. First, we will use descriptions of a rape or sexual assault, presented either in film or on paper, and we will measure how people react to victims of these crimes. We chose to focus on these crimes because these crimes can have

detrimental health effects (Ullman & Filipas, 2001; Ullman, Townsend, Filipas, & Starzynski, 2007) and it is known that people may react negatively toward victims of rape or sexual assault, possibly leading to secondary victimization (Brown & Testa, 2008). Moreover, fear of reactions from one's social environment is also one of the reasons that rape is still a seriously underreported crime (Rennison, 2002). Second, in the three studies we report here we will measure blaming, derogation, and physical distancing, which are three important ways in which people can express negative reactions toward innocent victims (Hafer, 2000b; Lerner, 1980). Third, and most importantly, we want to introduce a new factor in belief in a just world research, namely perpetrator similarity. Building on Lerner and Miller (1978, p. 1031), we will argue that perpetrator similarity is an important factor that will influence the way people react toward victims of rape or sexual assault. In the following paragraphs, we will address the latter two issues in depth, starting with how people can react toward innocent victims.

Reactions toward victims

People can deal with a threat to their belief in a just world in several ways (Lerner, 1980). The most obvious and rational way to do this is to punish the perpetrator. However, when a perpetrator has not been caught, people tend to react negatively toward the victim. Lerner (1980) proposes four nonrational strategies, which all result in negative reactions toward the victim. There are three ways of reinterpreting an unjust event, which are considered nonrational strategies: reinterpretation of the cause, which includes blaming innocent victims' behavior; reinterpretation of character, such as derogation of the victim; and reinterpretation of the outcome. People can also deny the injustice and mentally and physically withdraw from it to avoid dealing

with the threat to their just world belief (for more extensive introductions to belief in a just world theory, see, e.g., Hafer & Bègue, 2005; Lerner, 1980; Ross & Miller, 2002). In the current paper, we investigate people's reactions towards victims by applying three strategies mentioned here. Specifically, we will study the effects of perpetrator similarity on observers' physical distancing from the victims (Study 2.1), blaming the victim (Study 2.2), and derogation of the victim (Study 2.3). Reinterpretation of the outcome will not be included in our studies because we think this strategy is not likely to be used for a terrible crime, such as rape.

Perpetrator similarity hypothesis

We will now move on to a more elaborate grounding of our perpetrator similarity hypothesis. Lerner and Miller (1978, p. 1031) state that "as events become closer to [people's] world (...), the concern over injustices increases greatly." These events do not consist solely of information about the victim. When we are confronted with an innocent victim, we often also have some information about the perpetrator (even when he or she is not caught), for example in the form of a police sketch or a short description by eye witnesses. It makes sense that people take into account this information too, when forming an opinion about the situation and in reacting to the victim. In the studies to be presented here, we will investigate the relation between perpetrator similarity and reactions toward victims of a crime. Following just world theory (e.g., Lerner & Miller, 1978), we argue that it will be more threatening when a perpetrator belongs to the personal world of an observer than when this perpetrator belongs to the world of others. When a perpetrator is not caught (as will be the case in our studies), people can only use strategies aimed at reacting to the victim to reduce

this threat to their belief in a just world. Thus, building on just world theory (e.g., Lerner & Miller, 1978), we hypothesize that more negative reactions to victims will be found when the perpetrator is from the same personal world than when the perpetrator belongs to the world of others. To put it differently, we put forward a perpetrator similarity hypothesis here such that we predict more negative reactions to victims when the perpetrator is a member of the same group as the observer of the crime (similar perpetrator) than when the perpetrator is a member from a different group (different perpetrator).

While our perpetrator similarity hypothesis is a new concept in just world theory and adds to the existing knowledge on it, some researchers have studied perpetrator similarity in different contexts before. Shaver (1970) conducted several studies in which he manipulated perpetrator similarity to study its influence on reactions toward perpetrators, but not victims. He found that personal similarity to the perpetrator led to lessened attributions of responsibility and increased ascription of carefulness. In another study by Chaiken and Darley (1973) reactions toward victims were studied by manipulating similarity to either the perpetrator or the victim. Findings showed that when the perpetrator was similar, but not when the victim was similar, people derogated the victim. These results only partially fit with our perpetrator similarity hypothesis and just world theory. However, this could be explained by the fact that situational similarity was manipulated instead of personal similarity. It makes sense that people are less motivated to derogate a victim, when they cannot avoid being in the same situation in the future. In contrast, when people might get in the same situation in the future, because there is personal similarity with the victim (or the perpetrator), a plausible way to reduce the threat of getting in such a situation could be blaming or derogating the

victim to distance themselves from that victim (and with that the likelihood of getting in a similar situation). Therefore, in the current research personal similarity to the victim and/or perpetrator is manipulated.

We examined the effect of perpetrator similarity in negative reactions toward innocent victims by manipulating the description of the perpetrator in our studies. We used different manipulations of similarity: perpetrators were portrayed as either a student (similar perpetrator) or a professor or older adult (different perpetrator). Because we wanted to extend the just-world research done up until now, we also included a comparable manipulation of victim similarity in our Studies 2.2 and 2.3. In our first study, we studied negative reactions by focusing on behavior, which we investigate further in our second and third studies, in which we used blaming and derogation as our dependent variables. Taken together, the three studies to be presented here test our perpetrator similarity hypothesis and examine the possible effects of perpetrator similarity on negative reactions toward innocent victims of rape and sexual assault.

Study 2.1

In our first study, we use a high-impact situation to study people's negative reactions toward a victim (Lerner & Goldberg, 1999). Our aim was to reveal whether people's reactions toward victims transfer to their behavior. We tested whether people physically withdraw from the event or anything that has to do with it, in this case the victim, which is a nonrational strategy Lerner (1980) proposes people use to cope with a just world threat. In real-life interactions with a victim, people might not always voice their opinion directly toward

the victim, but if their negative reactions still are apparent in the behavior of people, victims will still feel secondarily victimized.

To create a high-impact situation, we used vivid and emotionally involving stimulus materials in this study. Building on Hafer (2000a), Correia et al. (2007), and Aguiar et al. (2008), participants saw a video of a woman, who told about the night she was raped. Pilot testing revealed that students at Utrecht University judged this video to be absorbing and emotionally involving. After the video, participants were made to believe they would now meet this victim for a short interaction. Moreover, the reaction toward the victim was measured in an unobtrusive manner, namely by inconspicuously measuring the physical distance participants took from the victim.

In this study we wanted to look at perpetrator similarity specifically, being the main variable of interest in the current research project. Therefore, we only manipulated the information people received about the perpetrator: He was either a fellow student (similar) or a professor (different). The victim in this study was always a student.

We expected that participants' just world belief would be threatened more, when the perpetrator was a fellow student, than when the perpetrator was a professor, because the first will be part of their personal world, while the latter will belong to the world of others. This should result in more physical distancing from the victim when the perpetrator was similar to the participant (i.e., a student) than when the perpetrator was different from the participant (i.e., a professor). Moreover, gender of the participants was included in all our three experiments as an additional independent variable to examine whether this would influence participants' reactions as well.

Method

Participants and design. In this study 47 students, all studying at the Uithof campus of Utrecht University, participated. Their ages ranged between 18 and 26 years ($M = 20.64$, $SD = 1.99$). Participants were randomly assigned to one of the perpetrator similarity conditions (student vs. professor). Twenty-four participants were assigned to the student condition and 23 participants were assigned to the professor condition. Men ($N = 19$) and women ($N = 28$) were equally distributed across conditions.

Experimental procedure. Participants were invited to take part in this study with flyers posted at different locations on the Uithof campus. They could earn money (€ 3) or course credit for their participation in the study.

Students who wanted to participate reported to an office, in which the researcher was present throughout the day. Participants were then escorted by the female researcher to a different room, in which they would see a short film. After the participant was informed about the procedure, the researcher left the room. Before starting the film, participants were instructed to read an information sheet, which included a short introduction about sexual violence and the film they were going to see. Moreover, a description of the perpetrator was given. In this description perpetrator similarity was manipulated; the perpetrator was described as either a student (similar perpetrator) or a professor (different perpetrator). When participants were finished reading the information sheet, they could start the film.

The film of approximately 3 minutes contained an interview with Linda, a supposed rape victim, who told about what happened the night she was raped. In reality, Linda was a hired actress and the story was fictional, but participants did not know this (and only found out

during debriefing). During the interview the following story was told by the actress: Linda went to a student party together with some friends. At about 1.30 A.M. she wanted to go home, because she had an exam the next morning. Her friends still wanted to stay at the party, so Linda decided to go home alone. She parked her bike in an alley and when she is opening her lock, she was grabbed from behind by a man. She wanted to scream, but the man put a hand over her mouth. Then he raped her and left her alone in the alley. Linda did not know what to do and went home, where she took a long shower. She did not report this story to the police, so the perpetrator had not been caught.

After watching the film, participants came to the hallway, where the researcher was already waiting for them to take them to the next part of the experiment. The researcher explained to the participants they would now go to a room in which they would meet the victim. As a cover story, participants were instructed they would have a short talk with the victim about what happened, with the purpose of investigating how people deal with traumatic experiences. Building on Macrae, Bodenhausen, Milne, and Jetten (1994, Study 2; see also Van den Bos, Euwema, Poortvliet, & Maas, 2007, Study 3) we measured physical distancing in this study: When entering the room, participants saw a row of eight empty chairs. On the right-hand chair (the one furthest away from the door) a coat and bag were placed. The researcher explained that these items belonged to the victim, but that she had just left to go down to the supermarket. Participants were instructed to take place on one of the chairs and wait for Linda. The participants seated themselves and the researcher left the room. The chair in which the participant sat down constituted the dependent measure of physical distance of Study 2.1, measured on a 7-point scale (1 = *closest to the victim*, 7 = *furthest from the victim*). It was expected that participants' seating preference

would be affected by our perpetrator similarity manipulation. After a short while, the researcher would return and debrief the participant. Then they would return to the waiting room, where they were paid or given course credit and thanked for their participation. The experiment took approximately 20 minutes to complete.

Results

A 2 x 2 ANOVA was conducted with perpetrator similarity and gender as the independent variables and the physical distance measure as the dependent variable. Results revealed a significant gender x perpetrator similarity interaction only, $F(1, 43) = 5.56, p < .03, \eta_p^2 = .12$. Means and standard deviations are provided in Table 2.1. Men sat

Table 2.1. *Perpetrator similarity x gender interaction on physical distancing from the victim (Study 2.1)*

Gender of participants	Similar perpetrator		Different perpetrator	
	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
Men	3.30	1.06	2.44	0.53
Women	2.71	0.83	3.23	0.73

Note. Means are on 7-point scales with higher values indicating more physical distancing from the victims.

significantly further away from the victim when the perpetrator was similar (i.e., a student) than when the perpetrator was different (i.e., a professor), $F(1, 43) = 4.64, p < .04, \eta_p^2 = .10$. Women did not show a perpetrator similarity effect, $F(1, 43) = 1.20, p > .27, \eta_p^2 = .03$. We did not find significant gender differences in the similar perpetrator condition (i.e., student), $F(1, 43) = 2.45, p > .12, \eta_p^2 = .05$, and the different perpetrator condition (i.e., professor), $F(1, 43) = 2.54, p > .11, \eta_p^2 = .06$. No other significant effects were found. Our 2 x 2 ANOVA

explained 16.2 % of the variance of physically distancing from the victim.

Discussion

This study demonstrates the importance of perpetrator similarity in explaining reactions toward innocent victims of a crime. In Study 2.1 we used emotionally involving stimulus materials and an unobtrusive behavioral measure of reacting toward the victim. We found that especially men took more physical distance from a victim of a similar perpetrator (i.e., a fellow student) than from a different perpetrator (i.e., a professor). Women did not show this perpetrator similarity effect. So, it may be that men take into account the information they receive about the perpetrator, while women seem to focus more on victim characteristics. In this case a match between gender of the participant and gender of the perpetrator or victim influences blaming reactions too, in combination with our manipulation of similarity.

These results seem to support our perpetrator similarity hypothesis in that men take more distance from the victim when the perpetrator was similar to them than when the perpetrator was different. We interpreted the distance we measured in Study 2.1 as a negative reaction toward the victim. However, an alternative explanation could be that men want to show respect to the victim and therefore keep their distance, especially when they are similar to the perpetrator. Therefore, we conducted two additional experiments in which we measured these negative reactions more directly by measuring blaming (Study 2.2) and derogation (Study 2.3) of the victim. Furthermore, in Studies 2.2 and 2.3 we also include a manipulation of victim similarity to study the effects obtained in Study 2.1 in more depth.

Study 2.2

In Study 2.2 we examined whether perpetrator similarity and victim similarity are related to people's blaming reactions toward the victim. Blaming is one of the three ways in which people can reinterpret an unjust event (Lerner, 1980); in this case they reinterpret the cause of the event (i.e., the victim must have done something to deserve the victimization). For this purpose we presented students with a rape description in which a similar or different victim was raped or sexually assaulted by a similar or different perpetrator. In these scenario descriptions the perpetrator was not caught. Similarity was manipulated by portraying both the victim and the perpetrator as either similar to the participants (i.e., a student) or as different from the participants (i.e., a professor or working adult). We also added a manipulation check to make sure participants indeed rated a professor (or working adult) less similar to them than a fellow student.

Based on the perpetrator similarity hypothesis and the results obtained in Study 2.1, we hypothesized that male participants would blame the victim more, when the perpetrator was similar (i.e., a student) than when the perpetrator was different (e.g., a professor). Further following Study 2.1, we also expected that our female participants would not (or not strongly) show this effect. We also predicted that, when the victim was similar, participants' just world belief would be threatened more and hence participants would engage in more victim blaming than when the victim was different (see, e.g., Correia et al., 2007).

Method

Participants and design. One hundred and twenty-four students, all studying at the Uithof Campus of Utrecht University, participated. Their ages ranged from 18 to 30 years ($M = 21.50$, $SD = 2.39$).

Participants were randomly assigned to one of the conditions of the 2 (perpetrator: similar vs. different) x 2 (victim: similar vs. different) factorial design. Between 29 and 33 participants took part in each of the four conditions. Men (N = 42) and women (N = 81; one participant did not answer the question regarding gender) were equally distributed across the different conditions.

Procedure. We randomly approached participants in a student restaurant and asked if they wanted to fill in a questionnaire about judging social situations (the cover story). When they agreed to fill in the questionnaire one was handed to them and we left, but stayed in the same room. After about 15 minutes we collected the questionnaires or participants handed them in sooner.

Questionnaire. The questionnaire started with an introduction in which victim similarity and perpetrator similarity were manipulated by introducing four characters, two men, Maarten and Joost, and two women, Simone and Linda (typical Dutch names). Maarten was portrayed as either a student or a middle-aged man, and Joost as a student or a professor. Simone was portrayed as a student or a middle-aged housewife, and Linda as a student or a professor. By doing this, four versions of the questionnaires were created: similar victim – similar perpetrator, similar victim – different perpetrator, different victim – similar perpetrator, and different victim – different perpetrator. The introductions were followed by three questions to measure perceived similarity to the characters; measuring the degree to which the participants could identify with the character, recognize themselves in the character, and whether the character could be part of the circle of friends of the participants on 7-point Likert scales (1 = *certainly do not agree*, 7 = *certainly do agree*; α 's > .86).

Next, participants read two short stories about one of the women being raped or assaulted by one of the men. In the first story, Simone went to the pub with some friends. Simone decided to go home early that night, as a result of which she cycled home alone. She was followed by Maarten, who pulled her off her bike as he passed her. He dragged her into an alley, where he raped her. The next day Simone could not remember what her rapist looked like, so he had not been caught. In the introduction to this story, similarity of Simone and Maarten was manipulated. Necessary adjustments to the story were made to fit with the characters. In the second story, Linda and Joost both attended a party in a club in Utrecht. At that party they met and had a short conversation. After a while, Linda had to go to the toilet. When she opened the door of her restroom, Joost was standing in front of her. He pushed her to one of the walls of the restroom and grabbed her under her skirt. Linda found a way to get out of the restroom, but felt awful and dirty and decided to go home immediately. She took a long shower and then went to bed, crying. She did not dare to tell anyone what happened that night, so she did not report the incident to the police. In the introduction to this scenario, similarity of Linda and Joost was manipulated. Necessary adjustments to the story were made to fit with the characters. (Order of the scenarios was always the same and experimental condition of both scenarios was not varied within participants.)

After each story, participants filled in nine items to rate to which degree the victim could be blamed for the crime on a 7-point Likert scale (1 = *certainly do not agree*, 7 = *certainly do agree*; $\alpha = .93$). An example of such an item was: "I think Linda / Simone acted irresponsibly, considering the situation she was in."

Results

Manipulation check. A 2 x 2 x 2 analysis of variance (ANOVA)¹ was conducted with self-reported similarity to the perpetrator as the dependent variable and the perpetrator similarity and victim similarity manipulations and gender as the independent variables. Only a main effect of the perpetrator similarity manipulation on self-reported similarity was found, $F(1, 119) = 8.01, p < .01$. Results indicated that participants rated themselves as more similar to a similar perpetrator (i.e., a fellow student; $M = 4.74, SD = 1.31$) than to a different perpetrator (e.g., a professor; $M = 3.88, SD = 1.41$). These results did not significantly differ between genders, $F(1, 115) = 2.21, p > .14$. We can conclude that the manipulation of perpetrator similarity was successful.

Furthermore, a 2 x 2 x 2 ANOVA on the self-reported similarity to the victim yielded only a main effect of the victim similarity manipulation, $F(1, 115) = 129.19, p < .01$. Results indicated that participants rated themselves as more similar to a similar victim (i.e., a fellow student; $M = 5.55, SD = 1.11$) than to a different victim (e.g., a professor; $M = 3.16, SD = 1.15$). No significant gender differences were found, $F(1, 115) = 0.54, p > .46$. These results show that the manipulation of victim similarity was successful.

Blaming. Because both scenarios yielded similar results, participants' responses to the two scenarios were taken together in subsequent analyses. A 2 x 2 x 2 ANOVA was conducted with perpetrator similarity, victim similarity, and gender as the independent variables and blaming as the dependent variable. Results revealed a significant main effect of perpetrator similarity, $F(1, 115) = 15.70, p < .01, \eta_p^2 = .12$. Victims were blamed more when the perpetrator was similar (i.e., a student, $M = 1.93, SD = 0.87$) than when the perpetrator was different (e.g., a professor, $M = 1.46, SD = 0.53$). This effect was

qualified by a significant interaction of gender x perpetrator similarity, $F(1, 115) = 8.09, p < .01, \eta_p^2 = .07$. Means and standard deviations pertaining to this interaction effect are presented in Table 2.2. Male

Table 2.2. *Perpetrator similarity x gender interaction on blaming of the victim (Study 2.2)*

Gender of participants	Similar perpetrator		Different perpetrator	
	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
Men	2.25	0.94	1.30	0.71
Women	1.65	0.41	1.50	0.51

Note. Means are on 7-point Likert scales with higher values indicating higher levels of blaming the victim.

participants blamed a victim significantly more when the perpetrator was similar than when the perpetrator was different, $F(1, 119) = 23.84, p < .01, \eta_p^2 = .17$. Women did not show a significant difference of the perpetrator similarity manipulation, $F(1, 115) = 1.51, p > .22, \eta_p^2 = .01$. Moreover, when the perpetrator was similar, men blamed the victim significantly more than women, $F(1, 119) = 10.47, p < .01, \eta_p^2 = .08$. No significant differences in blaming the victim were found when the perpetrator was different, $F(1, 115) = 0.85, p > .35, \eta_p^2 = .01$.

Finally, for the gender x victim similarity interaction, a trend towards significance was revealed, $F(1, 115) = 3.11, p = .08, \eta_p^2 = .03$. Means and standard deviations are presented in Table 2.3. Women blamed a victim significantly more when the victim was similar (i.e., a student), than when the victim was different (e.g., a professor), $F(1, 119) = 4.35, p < .04, \eta_p^2 = .04$. Men did not show a significant difference, $F(1, 115) = 0.35, p > .55, \eta_p^2 = .00$. Moreover, when the victim was different (e.g., a professor), men blamed the victim significantly more

than women did, $F(1, 119) = 12.49, p < .01, \eta_p^2 = .10$. No such gender difference was found when the victim was similar (i.e., a student), $F(1, 115) = 0.29, p > .58, \eta_p^2 = .00$. No other significant effects were found. Our 2 x 2 x 2 ANOVA explained 22.2 % of the variance in blaming reactions toward the victims.

Table 2.3. *Victim similarity x gender interaction on blaming of the victim (Study 2.2)*

Gender of participants	Similar victim		Different victim	
	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
Men	1.91	0.90	2.04	0.97
Women	1.74	0.66	1.39	0.48

Note. Means are on 7-point Likert scales with higher values indicating higher levels of blaming the victim.

Discussion

From Study 2.2 it can again be concluded that perpetrator similarity is important in studying reactions towards innocent victims, again predominantly among male observers. In addition to previous research, in which only victim similarity was taken into account (Correia et al., 2001, 2007), we found that when men who were confronted with a perpetrator to which they were similar (i.e., a student) would blame an innocent victim more for a crime than when the perpetrator was not similar to them (e.g., a professor). So, our perpetrator similarity hypothesis was also supported by the results of Study 2.2. Moreover, the perpetrator similarity effects found on blaming were caused by the reactions of men. In contrast, for women a trend toward significance for the relation between victim similarity and blaming was found. They

tended to blame a similar victim more than a victim they are different from.

Study 2.3

In both Studies 2.1 and 2.2, the effects of our perpetrator similarity manipulation interacted with participants' gender such that especially men were influenced by the perpetrator similarity manipulation. It should be noted that in most rape cases the victim is female. In correspondence with this observation, we used in Studies 2.1 and 2.2 the gender roles most frequently present in sexual violence cases; that is, our perpetrator was a man (e.g., Maarten) and our victim a woman (e.g., Simone). One might argue that this may have led our male participants of Studies 2.1 and 2.2 to believe that they could not be a victim of rape or sexual assault, which could make it easier for them to react negatively toward the victim. In Study 2.3 we therefore we wanted to find out whether our gender x perpetrator similarity effect was caused by the match between gender of the victim or perpetrator and the participant. Thus, to rule out that the results found in Studies 2.1 and 2.2 were caused by the gender roles present in our rape cases instead of our manipulation of perpetrator similarity, we reran the Simone-Maarten rape case of Study 2.2, but this time there was a male victim (Simon) who was raped by a male perpetrator (Maarten).

Furthermore, derogation was added as an additional dependent variable. Victim derogation is a different way in which people can reinterpret an unjust event; in this case they reinterpret the victims character (i.e., the victim must be a very irresponsible persons, otherwise this event would not have happened; Lerner, 1980). Similar to Study 2.2, we presented people with a rape scenario in which a

similar or different victim was sexually assaulted by a similar or different perpetrator. Similarity was manipulated by portraying both the victim and the perpetrator as either a male working adult (different) or a male student (similar).

Following our perpetrator similarity hypothesis, we predicted that a victim would be blamed more when the perpetrator was a fellow student than when the perpetrator was a working older adult. Similarly, we hypothesized that a victim would be derogated more when the perpetrator was a fellow student, than when the perpetrator was a working older adult. Finally, building on the findings of Studies 2.1 and 2.2, we expected our male participants to show these effects stronger than the female participants.

Method

Participants and design. Participants were 115 students between the ages of 17 and 46 ($M = 22.19$, $SD = 4.24$). Students were all studying at the Uithof campus in Utrecht. Forty-four men and 68 women participated (3 participants did not indicate their gender). Participants were randomly assigned to one of the conditions of the 2 (perpetrator: similar vs. different) x 2 (victim: similar vs. different) factorial design. Between 28 and 30 participants took part in each of the four conditions. Men and women were equally distributed across the different conditions.

Experimental procedure. We used exactly the same experimental procedure as in Study 2.2, but this time "Simone" was called "Simon."

Questionnaire. The questionnaire started with an introduction in which victim similarity and perpetrator similarity were manipulated by introducing two characters, two men, Maarten and Simon. Both were portrayed as either a student or a middle-aged man. By doing this, four versions of the questionnaires were created: similar victim – similar

perpetrator, similar victim – different perpetrator, different victim – similar perpetrator, and different victim – different perpetrator. The introduction was followed by three questions to measure perceived similarity to the characters; measuring the degree to which the participants could identify with the character, recognize themselves in the character, and whether the character could be part of the circle of friends of the participants on 7-point Likert scales (1 = *certainly do not agree*, 7 = *certainly do agree*; α 's > .92).

Next, participants read a short story about Simon being raped by Maarten. The story read the same as the first scenario used in Study 2.2 (about Simone and Maarten). Only "Simone" was replaced by "Simon" and gender-appropriate changes were made to the story.

Our dependent variables were the same nine blaming items as in Study 2 ($\alpha = .84$). Furthermore, nine additional items measured victim derogation on a 7-point Likert scale (1 = *certainly do not agree*, 7 = *certainly do agree*; $\alpha = .81$). An example of such an item was: "I think Simon deserved what happened to him."

Results

Blaming. A 2 x 2 x 2 ANOVA with perpetrator similarity, victim similarity and gender as the independent variables and blaming as the dependent variable yielded the predicted gender x perpetrator similarity interaction effect on the blaming scale, $F(1, 104) = 6.27, p < .02, \eta_p^2 = .06$. Male participants blamed a victim significantly more when the perpetrator was a student than when the perpetrator was a middle-aged man, $F(1, 104) = 4.00, p < .05, \eta_p^2 = .03$, whereas such an effect of the perpetrator similarity manipulation was not found among female participants, $F(1, 104) = 1.73, p > .19, \eta_p^2 = .02$. Moreover, when the perpetrator was different, men blamed the victim significantly more than women, $F(1, 104) = 4.09, p < .05, \eta_p^2 = .04$. No significant

differences in blaming the victim were found when the perpetrator was similar, $F(1, 104) = 1.51, p > .22, \eta_p^2 = .01$. No other significant effects were found. Means and standard deviations are presented in Table 2.4. Our 2 x 2 x 2 ANOVA explained 9.6 % of the variance in blaming reactions toward the victims.

Table 2.4. *Perpetrator similarity x gender interaction on blaming of the victim (Study 2.3)*

Gender of participants	Similar perpetrator		Different perpetrator	
	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
Men	2.50	0.77	1.97	0.58
Women	2.18	0.90	2.46	1.08

Note. Means are on 7-point Likert scales with higher values indicating higher levels of blaming the victim.

Derogation. A 2 x 2 x 2 ANOVA with perpetrator similarity, victim similarity, and gender as the independent variables and derogation as the dependent variable revealed a perpetrator similarity main effect, $F(1, 104) = 4.10, p < .05, \eta_p^2 = .04$. A victim of a similar perpetrator (i.e., a student) was derogated more than a victim of a different perpetrator (i.e., a middle-aged man). This effect was qualified by a gender x perpetrator similarity interaction effect, $F(1, 104) = 4.58, p < .04, \eta_p^2 = .04$, such that male participants derogated a victim significantly more when the perpetrator was a student) than when the perpetrator was a middle-aged man, $F(1, 104) = 7.37, p < .01, \eta_p^2 = .07$, whereas such an effect of the perpetrator similarity manipulation was not found among female participants, $F(1, 104) = 0.01, p > .93, \eta_p^2 = .00$. No significant gender difference was found in the similar perpetrator, $F(1, 104) = 2.06, p > .15, \eta_p^2 = .02$, or different perpetrator condition, $F(1, 104) = 0.83, p >$

.36, $\eta_p^2 = .01$. No other significant effects were found. Our 2 x 2 x 2 ANOVA explained 12.4 % of the variance in derogation of the victim. Means and standard deviations are presented in Table 2.5.

Table 2.5. *Perpetrator similarity x gender interaction on derogation of the victim (Study 2.3)*

Gender of participants	Similar perpetrator		Different perpetrator	
	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
Men	2.50	0.90	1.86	0.66
Women	2.11	0.72	2.10	0.83

Note. Means are on 7-point Likert scales with higher values indicating higher levels of blaming the victim.

Discussion

The results of Study 2.3 suggest that although in rape cases there often may be a gender difference between victims and perpetrators, with perpetrators being predominantly men and victims predominantly women, this gender difference in roles does not explain the gender x perpetrator effect found in Studies 2.1 and 2.2, as this effect was also obtained on both blaming and derogating reactions when both victim and perpetrator of the rape were of the same gender. This suggests that men do not react more negatively toward victims than women because they cannot be the victim themselves. Furthermore, Study 2.3 reveals that evidence for our perpetrator similarity hypothesis can also be found among male observers of homosexual rape.

General Discussion

Taken together, we found in three studies that perpetrator similarity influences people's, and especially men's, reactions toward

victims. They distance themselves more from a victim of a similar perpetrator than from a victim of a dissimilar perpetrator (Study 2.1). They also blame a victim of a perpetrator that is similar to themselves more than a victim of a perpetrator that is different from themselves (Study 2.2) and they derogate a victim of a similar perpetrator more than a victim of a dissimilar perpetrator (Study 2.3). These results support our perpetrator similarity hypothesis and were on reactions to low-impact (Studies 2.2 and 2.3) and high-impact contexts (Study 2.1; Lerner & Goldberg, 1999). The perpetrator similarity effects we found in all three studies were especially evident among men. Thus, here we have strong evidence that if a rapist belongs to the same social group as a male observer, he will tend to derogate or react in other negative ways to the victim. In our opinion, this is a disturbing and important finding that social psychologists need to know about and which should ultimately be known to people working at the coalface of criminology and the law.

Thus, we showed in three studies, measuring different reactions, that including perpetrator similarity in research on belief in a just world is important. The results fit with the assumption of just world theory, as put forward by Lerner and Miller (1978, p. 1031), that “as events become closer to [peoples’] worlds (...), the concern over injustices increases greatly, as does the need to explain or make sense of the events”. Especially men did indeed react more negatively toward victims of similar perpetrators than to victims of perpetrators belonging to the world of others. To our knowledge, this was the first research in which this information was included in systematic studies on reactions toward innocent victims. In future research, it is important to take into account perpetrator information as well, in addition to information about victim similarity because in real life some information about a

perpetrator is often available (e.g., a police sketch), also when the perpetrator is still not caught, and we have shown here that information about the extent to which perpetrator shares similarities with people influences how people react toward victims of a crime. An interesting next step would be to study whether perpetrator information also influences how victims judge themselves and whether it influences the reporting of rape or other types of crimes by those victims.

As mentioned above, we found that our perpetrator similarity effect interacted with gender in all three studies. That is, especially men were influenced by the perpetrator similarity manipulation in these studies. It seems that, in addition to our manipulation of similarity, gender is an important social category (see also Sutton et al., 2008). In fact, one can wonder whether male perpetrators can ever be in “the personal world” of female participants who are reading a rape scenario, regardless of what other demographic groups they belong to. In this light, it is understandable that effects hold only for male participants, who by dint of their gender and their membership of the group “student” find themselves living in the same demographic world as a rapist who has got away scot-free and is thus a threat to justice in that world. It is interesting that in some sense male observers are almost aligning themselves with the offender if he also belongs to another important ingroup like “student”. A plausible mechanism for defending the idyll of justice within the ingroup is to minimize the wrongness of the rapist’s actions. Although this is not directly measured in these studies, of course it is consistent with the blame and derogation of victims.

We hasten to note here that we only used student samples in our studies. In an ideal world a professor sample would have been

included to obtain a complete design. We also explicitly mention here that we did not find reliable effects of our victim similarity manipulation in our Studies 2.2 and 2.3. Perhaps this has something to do with perpetrator similarity overwhelming the effects of victim similarity manipulations. In other words, finding victim similarity effects in the presence of perpetrator similarity information may have been difficult in the present studies and/or the samples studied here. Moreover, there is no solid evidence in the literature that victim similarity always affects responses to victims of rape (but see Aguir et al., 2008; Correia et al., 2007). When there are strong normative restrictions on reacting negatively toward victims, people will monitor their responses clearly and will not be easily led. Perpetrator similarity may have a better chance of “working”, because participants are less likely to appreciate its relevance to how they are supposed to evaluate the victim, and therefore to monitor themselves. Future research with different types of crimes, different manipulations of similarity and different dependent variables (e.g., using implicit measures; Hafer, 2000a) is needed to examine the full implications of these and other findings reported in the present paper, hence, studying in more detail the fascinating psychological processes pertaining to just world theory. We would applaud future research studies examining these and other possible implications of the current studies and hope the pioneering studies presented here may spur such future research endeavors.

Conclusions

In conclusion, we extended just world research by introducing a new variable to the social psychology literature, namely perpetrator similarity. All studies presented here support our perpetrator similarity hypothesis; people react more negatively toward innocent victims when the perpetrator is someone similar to them than when the perpetrator

is different from them. This reaction is especially likely to be found among men. Our findings support the notion of Lerner and Miller (1978) that when events become closer to people's personal worlds, people will react more negatively toward a victim and imply that it is important to include this factor in future research on belief in a just world and reactions toward victims.

Footnotes

- 1) As one participant did not indicate his/her gender, 123 participants were included in these analyses.
- 2) As three participants did not indicate their gender, 112 participants were included in these analyses.

Chapter 3

Personal Uncertainty

This chapter is based on:

Bal, M., & Van den Bos, K. (2012). Blaming for a better future: Future orientation and associated intolerance of personal uncertainty lead to harsher reactions toward innocent victims. *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin*, 38, 835-844. doi: 10.1177/0146167212442970

Abstract

People are often encouraged to focus on the future and strive for long-term goals. This noted, we argue that this future orientation is associated with intolerance of personal uncertainty, as people usually cannot be certain that their efforts will pay off. To be able to tolerate personal uncertainty, people adhere strongly to the belief in a just world, paradoxically resulting in harsher reactions toward innocent victims. In three experiments, we show that a future orientation indeed leads to more negative evaluations of an innocent victim (Study 3.1); enhances intolerance of personal uncertainty (Study 3.2); and, that experiencing personal uncertainty leads to more negative evaluations of a victim (Study 3.3). So, while a future orientation enables people to strive for long-term goals, it also leads them to be harsher toward innocent victims. One underlying mechanism causing these reactions is intolerance of personal uncertainty, associated with a future orientation.

Keywords: belief in a just world, victim blaming, victim derogation, future orientation, personal uncertainty

People are often expected to focus on the future, strive for long-term goals, and delay gratification (Martin, 1999). However, in the present paper we argue that such a future orientation will make people more intolerant of personal uncertainty (Van den Bos, 2001, 2009). In particular, we propose that people will try to make this personal uncertainty tolerable by adopting the belief that the world is a just and deserving place and, hence, trust that their efforts will pay off in the end (Lerner, 1980). We further note that, paradoxically, adopting and adhering to the belief in a just world can have negative effects, such as being harsher to people who innocently fell victim to a crime. In the current line of research, we investigate whether focusing on the future indeed leads to heightened intolerance of personal uncertainty and whether this intolerance underlies harsher reactions toward innocent victims.

Future orientation and intolerance of personal uncertainty

People often have to invest time, money, and energy now in order to obtain a reward later. And while several influential social psychological theories focus on the importance and benefits of delaying gratification and striving for long-term goals (e.g., Metcalfe & Mischel, 1999; Muraven, Tice, & Baumeister, 1998), delayed rewards are often uncertain, which could lead to feelings of personal uncertainty or self-doubt (Martin, 1999). Therefore, we expect that a strong future orientation can make people more intolerant of these feelings of personal uncertainty.

According to the uncertainty management model (Van den Bos, 2001, 2009; Van den Bos & Lind, 2002, 2009), personal uncertainty is defined as a subjective sense of doubt or instability in self-views, worldviews, or the interrelation between the two (Van den Bos, 2009).

The model proposes that people develop and adhere to cultural worldviews to be able to tolerate this uncertainty. Building and extending on these insights, we argue in the present paper that in order to tolerate the personal uncertainty associated with adopting a future orientation people may adhere to the belief in a just world more strongly.

The Belief in a Just World

Just world theory (Lerner, 1980) argues that people need to believe that the world is a just place, because it keeps the world manageable and predictable. According to Lerner (1980), “people want to and have to believe they live in a just world so that they can go about their daily lives with a sense of trust, hope and confidence in their future” (p. 14). Thus, the belief in a just world allows people to engage in long-term and goal-directed behavior. This belief develops early in childhood, when children give up the pleasure principle and adopt a reality principle (Lerner, 1980). The reality principle enables people to forego immediate gratification in exchange for delayed bigger rewards.

So, if people work hard and invest time, money, and energy into what they are doing now they can be confident that they will get what they deserve in the end, but only if they live in a just world in which good things happen to good people and bad things happen to bad people (for more extensive introductions to just world theory, see, e.g., Callan, Ellard, & Nicol, 2006; Hafer, 2000a, 2000b; Hafer & Bègue, 2005; Lerner, 1977, 1981; Sutton & Douglas, 2005). On the basis of this line of reasoning, we propose that adopting the belief in a just world is a way to tolerate the personal uncertainty people experience when they have to delay gratification and focus on the future.

Research has shown that adopting the belief in a just world will

result in harsh reactions toward innocent victims. After all, being confronted with an innocent victim threatens people's belief that the world is a just place. Blaming or derogating the victim relieves the belief in a just world (BJW) threat, because what happened to the victim is no longer unjust as the victim becomes more deserving of his or her ill fate. Stronger blaming or derogating reactions thus indicate that the BJW has been threatened more strongly (Hafer, 2000b). This can be the case, for example, when people are confronted with an innocent as opposed to a non-innocent victim or when the crime occurs closer to home (see, e.g., Bal & Van den Bos, 2010; Correia & Vala, 2003; Correia, Vala, & Aguiar, 2001, 2007).

The Current Research

In the current research we argue that a focus on the future enhances intolerance of personal uncertainty. Moreover, we suggest that one way of dealing with this intolerance of personal uncertainty associated with focusing on the future is adhering to the belief in a just world more strongly and thus react more negatively toward innocent victims. Some empirical evidence indeed indicates that a strong future orientation enhances victim blaming and derogation (Hafer, 2000a; Hafer, Bègue, Choma, & Dempsey, 2005). In the present paper we build and extend on these findings and propose that intolerance of personal uncertainty associated with a future orientation underlies these negative reactions toward innocent victims. Figure 3.1 gives an overview of our studies.

We note that in studying these issues it is difficult for people to report their true level of intolerance of personal uncertainty, as they are usually unable to report these introspective measures in unbiased and

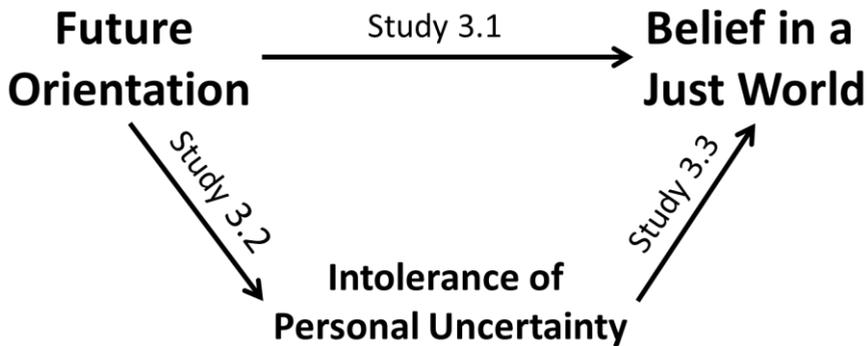


Figure 3.1. *Overview of Studies 3.1 to 3.3.*

objective ways (Van den Bos, 2009). Therefore, the predictive validity of self-reported intolerance of personal uncertainty can be limited (Van den Bos & Lind, 2009). Furthermore, we expect that when people explicitly labeled their feelings associated with a future orientation as intolerance of personal uncertainty or when they relieved the BJW threat by blaming or derogating the victim, they would not show the effect of future orientation on a subsequent measure anymore. So, if intolerance of personal uncertainty is measured before victim blaming and derogation are assessed, the effect of future orientation on blaming and derogation may not be reliable. Hence, mediation analyses may not work, leading to the erroneous conclusion that the effects are not there.

According to the logic put forward by Spencer, Zanna, and Fong (2005), testing our hypotheses with an "experimental-causal-chain design" is a solution to this problem. We therefore followed the line of reasoning delineated by Spencer and colleagues to test our hypotheses. That is, in three studies we investigated whether intolerance of personal uncertainty associated with a future orientation influences people's negative reactions toward innocent victims. In the first study we

assessed to what degree people are oriented toward the future and then presented them a scenario about a victim, after which we measured blaming and derogation of the victim. In our second study, we manipulated future orientation and measured intolerance of personal uncertainty. Finally, in our third study, we manipulated personal uncertainty and measured victim blaming and derogation.

In both Studies 3.1 and 3.3 we included a manipulation of BJW threat. In Study 3.1 BJW threat was manipulated by confronting participants with either an innocent victim (high threat) or a non-innocent victim (low threat; e.g., Hafer, 2000a). In Study 3.3, BJW threat was varied by presenting participants with either a proximal crime (high threat) or a distal crime (low threat; e.g., Bal & Van den Bos, 2010). As people resort to blaming and derogation mainly under high BJW threat, we expected to find the effects of future orientation in Study 3.1 and uncertainty salience in Study 3.3 particularly in the high BJW threat conditions.

Study 3.1

In our first study, we examined whether enhanced future orientation leads to more victim blaming and victim derogation. In doing so, we sought to replicate and extend earlier findings by Hafer (2000a) by using a more differentiated sample. The Hafer findings were obtained among students. It may well be argued that students constitute a specific group of people who are more future oriented than the general public. Our study was conducted among the general public in two different cities, Utrecht in the Netherlands and New York City in the United States. We also added a manipulation of victim gender and included a more elaborate measure of victim blaming and derogation (Bal & Van den Bos, 2010).

In Study 3.1, participants filled out a questionnaire that measured the degree to which they were oriented towards the future. In addition, we presented them with a scenario in which victim innocence was manipulated to induce a BJW threat (Correia & Vala, 2003; Hafer, 2000a). The scenario was about a person, who had recently contracted HIV. It was explained that the virus was contracted either because the condom broke during intercourse in the innocent victim condition or through practicing unsafe sex (i.e., not using a condom) in the non-innocent victim condition (cf. Hafer, 2000a). After the scenario, participants' negative reactions toward the victim were measured using a short questionnaire.

We expected that when participants scored higher on future orientation, they would react more negatively toward a victim. This effect was expected to occur especially when participants were confronted with an innocent victim (as opposed to a non-innocent victim), because an innocent victim poses a greater threat to people's BJW than a non-innocent victim (Correia & Vala, 2003; Correia et al., 2001, 2007). Additionally, as the non-innocent victims contributed to their ill fate themselves, we expected that people would blame and derogate a non-innocent victim more than an innocent victim.

Method

Participants and design. Two hundred and forty-two non-student participants took part in Study 3.1. Their ages ranged from 16 to 86 years ($M = 26.30$, $SD = 9.70$). One hundred forty-seven women and 85 men participated (10 participants did not indicate their gender). Participants were randomly assigned to one of the conditions of the 2 (victim innocence: innocent vs. not innocent) \times 2 (victim gender: male vs. female) factorial design. Between 57 and 62 participants took part in each of the four conditions. Participants were recruited in two different

cities; Utrecht in the Netherlands (N = 127) and New York City in the USA (N = 115). Men and women as well as participants from Utrecht and New York were equally distributed across the different conditions.

Procedure and materials. People sitting in a busy park in the city center (Wilhelminapark in Utrecht and Bryant Park in New York City) were randomly approached by the experimenters. We asked them to fill out a questionnaire on coping with HIV. If they agreed to participate, the questionnaire was handed to them and the experimenters continued to approach potential participants. After about 15 minutes we collected the questionnaires and participants were thanked for their participation.

Participants read a short scenario about a man (Simon) or woman (Simone) who recently discovered s/he was HIV positive. Because s/he was having emotional difficulties dealing with this HIV positive status, s/he had to temporarily quit her job. How s/he contracted the virus was manipulated to create an innocent and a non-innocent victim condition. In the non-innocent victim condition, the virus was contracted through not using a condom during intercourse. In the innocent victim condition, s/he did use a condom, but it broke (cf. Hafer, 2000a).

After this story, participants rated to which degree the victim could be blamed for contracting HIV with the 9-item scale of victim blaming developed by Bal and Van den Bos (2010). Answers were measured on a 7-point Likert-type scale (1 = *totally disagree*, 7 = *totally agree*; $\alpha = .87$). An example of such an item was: "I think Simon / Simone acted irresponsibly, considering the situation s/he was in." Furthermore, the 10-item scale of victim derogation developed by Bal and Van den Bos (2010) measured to what degree the victim was derogated for contracting HIV on a 7-point Likert-type scale (1 = *totally*

disagree, 7 = *totally agree*; $\alpha = .81$). An example of such an item was: "I think Simon / Simone deserved what happened to him / her." As blaming and derogation were significantly correlated, $r = .66$, $p < .01$, scores were collapsed to form an overall negative evaluation measure ($\alpha = .91$).¹

The questionnaire continued with a scale measuring Future Orientation ($\alpha = .72$). This scale consisted of the ten items, two of which were reverse-keyed, from the Future Scale from Zimbardo's (1990) Stanford Time Perspective Inventory. The scale measured to what degree people invested in the future and how they usually worked towards attaining future goals. Items were measured on a 7-point Likert-type scale (1 = *totally disagree*, 7 = *totally agree*). The questionnaire ended with measuring demographic variables.

Results

To test our hypothesis we conducted a moderated multiple regression analysis. In this analysis, negative evaluation of the victim was regressed on victim innocence, future orientation, and the victim innocence x future orientation interaction. Following Cohen, Cohen, West, and Aiken (2003), we centered future orientation and effect-coded victim innocence (-1 = *not innocent*, 1 = *innocent*).² This analysis yielded a significant main effect of victim innocence, $\beta = -.42$, $t(238) = -7.35$, $p < .01$, and a marginally significant main effect of future orientation, $\beta = .10$, $t(238) = 1.71$, $p < .09$. Perhaps more interestingly, these effects were qualified by a significant interaction of victim innocence and future orientation, $\beta = .12$, $t(238) = 2.07$, $p < .04$. Interpretation of the appropriate simple slopes revealed a significant effect of future orientation in the condom broke condition (i.e., the innocent victim), $\beta = .25$, $t(117) = 2.78$, $p < .01$. As can be seen in Figure 3.2, people evaluated the victim more negatively when future

orientation was estimated to be high (+1 SD) as opposed to when future orientation was estimated to be low (-1 SD). The effect of future orientation was not significant in the no-condom condition (i.e., the non-innocent victim), $\beta = -.02$, $t(121) = -0.25$, $p > .81$. Additional analyses showed an effect of victim innocence when future orientation was estimated to be high (+1 SD), $\beta = -.30$, $t(238) = -3.72$, $p < .01$, and when future orientation was estimated to be low (-1 SD), $\beta = -.54$, $t(238) = -6.66$, $p < .01$. In both cases the non-innocent victim was evaluated more negatively than the innocent victim.

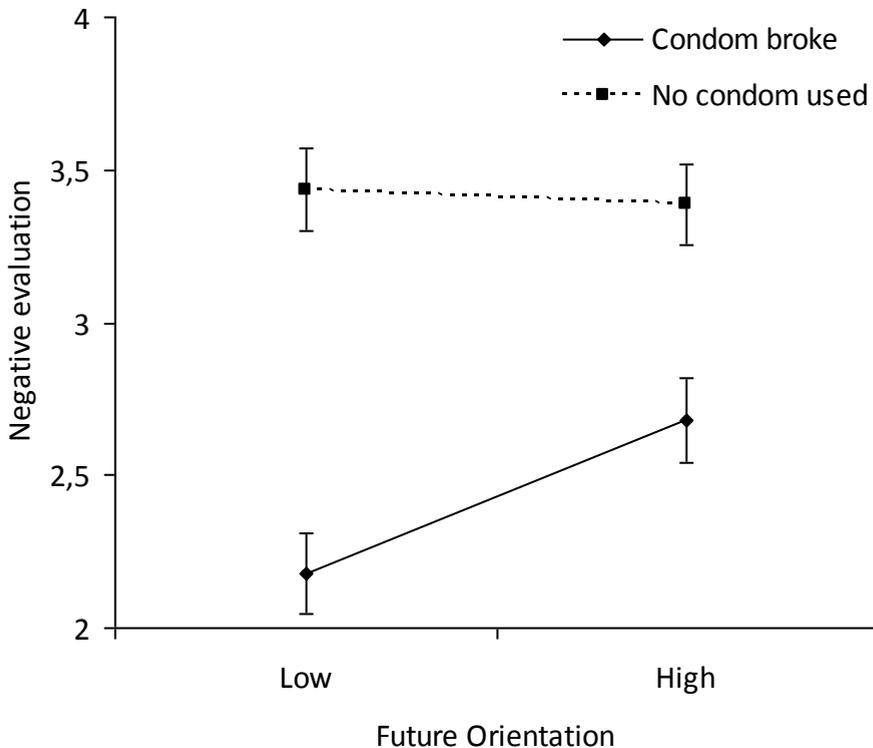


Figure 3.2. Mean negative evaluation as a function of future orientation and victim innocence (Study 3.1).

Note. Means are on 7-point scales with higher values indicating a more negative evaluation.

Discussion

Our first study revealed in a differentiated sample that people who were more oriented towards the future evaluated an innocent victim more negatively than people who were less oriented towards the future. As expected, this effect was not present after confrontation with anon-innocent victim. This is an important finding, as it rules out the possibility that people who are focused on the future simply are more negative to others in general. Rather future oriented people only evaluate others more negatively when this helps them to restore the belief in a just world.

In our second study, we wanted to test whether focusing on the future leads to a heightened intolerance of personal uncertainty compared to focusing on the present. We therefore manipulated time orientation and measure intolerance of personal uncertainty.

Pretest 3.1

When adopting an experimental causal chain design, it is important that the proposed psychological processes as they are measured and manipulated refer to the same concept. We therefore conducted a pretest in which we checked whether our measure of future orientation of Study 3.1 is psychologically equivalent to the manipulation of future orientation in Study 3.2. As in Study 3.2, time orientation was manipulated by asking participants ($N = 38$) to read a short introduction on the difference between focusing on the present and focusing on the future, after which they were asked to focus either on the present and write down a short term goal or to focus on the future and write down a long term goal. Subsequently, participants answered two open-ended questions on how they wanted to achieve this goal and how striving for the goal made them feel. After this

manipulation we measured future orientation. For this purpose we created a state version of the Future Orientation scale from Zimbardo's (1990) Stanford Time Perspective Inventory used in Study 3.1 ($\alpha = .76$). A General Linear Model (GLM) analysis revealed a main effect of the time orientation manipulation on the future orientation scale, such that when participants focused on the future they scored higher on the future orientation scale ($M = 4.84, SD = 0.76$) than when they focused on the present ($M = 4.19, SD = 0.87$), $F(1, 31) = 5.22, p < .03, \eta_p^2 = .14$. This validates our claim that our manipulation and measure of future orientation hang together in a reliable way.

Study 3.2

Building on the results of Study 3.1 and Pretest 3.1, Study 3.2 tests whether a future orientation indeed heightens intolerance of personal uncertainty. We expected that when people were oriented toward the future they would be less tolerant of personal uncertainty than when they were oriented toward the present.

Method

Participants and design. Sixty-eight students at Utrecht University (51 women and 17 men) participated in this study. Their ages ranged from 17 to 26 years ($M = 19.75, SD = 2.11$). Participants were randomly assigned to one of the two time orientation conditions: future orientation ($N = 37$) versus present orientation ($N = 31$). Men and women were equally distributed across the conditions.

Procedure and materials. The researcher asked students to fill out a questionnaire. Students participated voluntarily. The questionnaire took approximately 10 minutes to complete. When participants were finished, they placed the questionnaire in a box and were thanked for their participation.

Study 3.2 started with the manipulation of time orientation in which participants were asked to focus either on the future and write down a long term goal or to focus on the present and write down a short term goal followed by some questions regarding the goal also used in Pretest 3.1.³ After this manipulation we measured intolerance of personal uncertainty. We created a state version of the Emotional Uncertainty Scale (Greco & Roger, 2001), consisting of 15 items that were measured on 7-point Likert-type scales (1 = *not at all*, 7 = *totally*; $\alpha = .91$). An example of such an item was: “At this moment, to what degree would uncertainty frighten you?”

Results

A GLM analysis revealed a significant effect of time orientation on intolerance of personal uncertainty, $F(1, 66) = 8.79, p < .01, \eta_p^2 = .12$. Participants were more intolerant of personal uncertainty when they were oriented toward the future ($M = 4.24, SD = 0.79$) than when they were oriented to the present ($M = 3.58, SD = 1.04$).

Discussion

The results of our second study support our hypothesis that people become more intolerant of personal uncertainty when they were focused on the future as opposed to focused on the present. Thus, the results of Studies 3.1 and 3.2 imply that a future orientation indeed heightens intolerance of personal uncertainty and also leads to harsher reactions toward innocent victims.

In Study 3.3, we wanted to test the link between personal uncertainty and negative reactions toward innocent victims. Instead of measuring intolerance of personal uncertainty, we manipulated uncertainty salience by having participants focus on aspects that made them feel uncertain or certain about themselves.

Pretest 3.2

Before conducting Study 3.3, we wanted to verify that our measure of intolerance of personal uncertainty of Study 3.2 is psychologically similar to our manipulation of uncertainty salience in Study 3.3. Therefore, participants ($N = 33$) completed our uncertainty salience manipulation. Following the manipulation developed and tested by Greifeneder, Müller, Stahlberg, Van den Bos, and Bless (2011), participants in the condition in which personal uncertainty was made salient were asked to think about aspects of themselves and their lives that they felt uncertain about, to describe the aspects that made them feel uncertain about themselves (Hogg, Sherman, Dierselhuis, Maitner, & Moffitt, 2007), and to complete two open-ended questions concerning their personal uncertainties (Van den Bos, 2001): “Please describe the emotions that the thought of you being uncertain arouses in you” and “Please write down, as specifically as you can, what you think physically will happen to you as you feel uncertain about yourselves.” In the condition in which personal certainty was made salient, participants completed similar materials, but this time participants were asked to indicate their personal certainties. Participants then filled out the state version of the Greco and Roger (2001) Emotional Uncertainty Scale we used in Study 3.2 to measure intolerance of personal uncertainty ($\alpha = .94$). A GLM analysis revealed a main effect of uncertainty salience on intolerance of personal uncertainty, such that when uncertainty was salient participants scored higher on intolerance of personal uncertainty ($M = 4.84, SD = 0.76$) than when certainty was salient ($M = 4.19, SD = 0.87$), $F(1, 31) = 5.22, p < .03, \eta_p^2 = .14$. From this we can conclude that our manipulation and measure of intolerance of personal uncertainty indeed hang together in a reliable way.

Study 3.3

Now that we know from Pretest 3.2 that our manipulation of uncertainty salience is equivalent to the measure of intolerance of personal uncertainty we used in Study 3.2, we can test whether uncertainty salience indeed leads to harsher reactions toward innocent victims. For this purpose we asked participants to first fill out our uncertainty salience manipulation. Then, in an ostensibly unrelated study, we presented participants with a (fictional) police report of a serial rapist and measured their negative reactions toward the rape victim. To induce a BJW threat we manipulated crime proximity. In the proximal crime condition the rapist was active in Utrecht, the city where the participants studied. In the distal crime condition the rapist was active in Groningen, another Dutch university city about 200 kilometers away from Utrecht. Lerner and Miller (1978) stated that "as events become closer to [people's] world ... the concern over injustices increases greatly, as does the need to explain or make sense of the events". Therefore, we assume that a proximal crime will constitute a greater BJW threat than a distal crime (see also Bal & Van den Bos, 2010).

We expected that participants would blame and derogate a victim more when they would feel uncertain as opposed to certain about themselves. This effect was expected to occur especially under a high BJW threat, so when participants were confronted with a proximal crime as opposed to a distal crime.

Method

Participants and design. Twenty-four men and 36 women participated in Study 3.3. Their age ranged from 17 to 35 ($M = 21.23$, $SD = 2.92$). Participants were randomly assigned to one of the four conditions of the 2 (uncertainty salience: uncertain vs. certain) x 2

(crime proximity: proximal vs. distal) design. Between 13 and 17 participants took part in each of the four conditions. Men and women were equally distributed across the different conditions.

Procedure and materials. Participants were invited to take part in this study with flyers posted at different locations on the campus. Upon arrival in the laboratory, participants were seated behind a computer in separate cubicles. The experiment was programmed on the computer from start to finish. Participants started with an uncertainty salience manipulation, after which they read a police report in which crime proximity was manipulated. Subsequently, they filled out a questionnaire about the police report. After finishing the experiment, the participants returned to the waiting room. They were paid € 3 or given course credit and thanked for their participation. The experiment lasted for approximately 20 minutes.

In the uncertainty salience manipulation participants were asked to think about aspects of themselves and their lives that they felt *uncertain / certain* about, followed by the same questions as in Pretest 3.2. Subsequently we administered the Positive and Negative Affect Schedule (PANAS; Watson, Clark, & Tellegen, 1988), consisting of two subscales, one measuring positive affect (PA; $\alpha = .83$) and one measuring negative affect (NA; $\alpha = .89$). This questionnaire was included as a filler task and to check whether people's affective states were influenced by our uncertainty salience manipulation.

In an ostensibly unrelated study, participants were told to read through a police report about a serial rapist. They could take as much time as they needed. The police report started with a picture and short introduction of the victim. On the next screen, participants read a summary of the rape, followed by the characteristics of the rapist. The report ended with a request for information by the police.

In the report, crime proximity was manipulated to induce a BJW threat. The high-threat condition was created by portraying the perpetrator as living in the same city as the participants (i.e., Utrecht). Moreover, the victim was an Utrecht University student. In the low-threat condition the perpetrator lived in a different Dutch city, not close to Utrecht (i.e., Groningen). Also, the victim was a Groningen University student. In both conditions the perpetrator was not caught.

After this police report, participants filled out the blaming ($\alpha = .82$) and derogation ($\alpha = .81$) scales used in Study 3.1. Similar to Study 3.1, blaming and derogation were significantly correlated, $r = .71$, $p < .01$. Scores were therefore collapsed to form an overall negative evaluation measure ($\alpha = .87$).⁴

Results

PANAS. A GLM analysis on positive and negative affect with uncertainty salience as independent variable showed that the uncertainty salience manipulation had a significant effect on both scales of the PANAS. That is, participants felt more negative affect after the uncertainty manipulation ($M = 2.10$, $SD = 0.74$) than after the certainty manipulation ($M = 1.48$, $SD = 0.39$), $F(1, 58) = 16.47$, $p < .01$, $\eta_p^2 = .22$. Participant also reported less positive affect after the uncertainty manipulation ($M = 3.06$, $SD = 0.52$) than after the certainty manipulation ($M = 3.41$, $SD = 0.61$), $F(1, 58) = 5.86$, $p < .02$, $\eta_p^2 = .09$.

We therefore took into account both positive and negative affect in subsequent analyses by including these two scales as covariates. No significant effects of affective states were revealed on negative evaluation of the victim ($ps > .79$). Moreover, after controlling for the covariates, the uncertainty salience manipulation still significantly influenced negative evaluation of the victim. So, while our uncertainty manipulation did have some effect on positive and negative affect of

the participants, these effects of affective state cannot explain why uncertainty influenced participants' subsequent reactions toward innocent victims.

Negative victim evaluation. Following the logic delineated by Yzerbyt, Muller and Judd (2004), we included our manipulations of uncertainty salience and crime proximity and their interaction as independent variables, and both scales of the PANAS and their interaction with crime proximity as covariates in a GLM analysis on negative evaluation. This analysis revealed a main effect of uncertainty salience, $F(1, 52) = 5.44, p < .03, \eta^2 = .10$. When uncertainty was salient participants evaluated a victim more negatively ($M = 2.05, SE = 0.12$) than when certainty was salient ($M = 1.64, SE = 0.12$). This effect was qualified by an uncertainty salience x crime proximity effect, $F(1, 52) = 8.05, p < .01, \eta^2 = .13$. As can be seen in Figure 3.3, participants

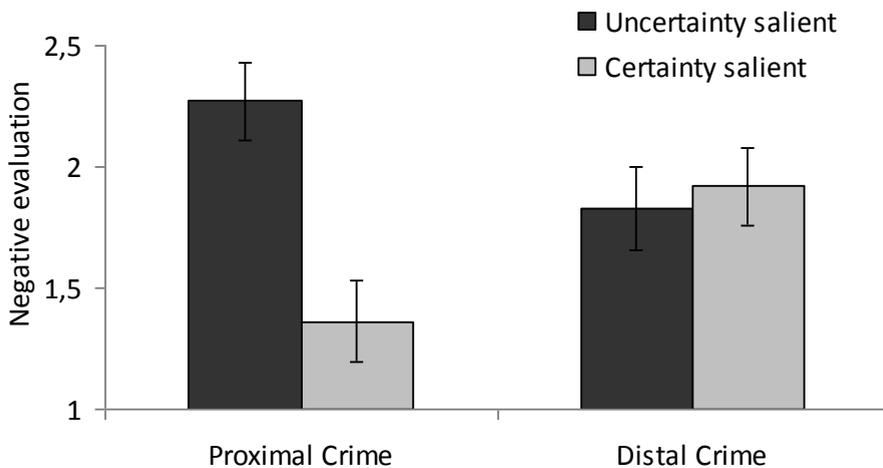


Figure 3.3. Mean negative evaluation as a function of uncertainty salience and crime proximity (Study 3.3).

Note. Means are on 7-point scales with higher values indicating more negative reactions toward the victim.

evaluated a proximal victim more negatively when uncertainty was salient ($M = 2.27$, $SE = 0.16$) than when certainty was salient ($M = 1.36$, $SE = 0.17$), $F(1, 52) = 12.87$, $p < .01$, $\eta_p^2 = .20$. The effect of uncertainty salience was not significant in the distal victim condition, $F(1, 52) = 0.13$, $p > .71$, $\eta_p^2 < .01$.

In addition, we found that when certainty was salient a significant effect of crime proximity was found, $F(1, 52) = 5.64$, $p < .03$, $\eta_p^2 = .10$, such that a distal victim ($M = 1.92$, $SE = 0.16$) was evaluated more negatively than a proximal victim. When uncertainty was salient this effect approached significance, $F(1, 52) = 3.58$, $p < .07$, $\eta_p^2 < .06$, suggesting that a distal victim ($M = 1.83$, $SE = 0.17$) was evaluated somewhat less negatively than a proximal victim.

Discussion

Our third study revealed that feelings of personal uncertainty indeed lead to more victim blaming and derogation. When people feel personally uncertain they evaluate a victim more negatively, than when people feel personally certain. As expected, this effect was found when BJW threat was high, so when the crime was proximal as opposed to distal.

People did experience more negative and less positive affect in the uncertainty condition as opposed to in the certainty condition. This finding is not unexpected, as personal uncertainty often constitutes an aversive state (Van den Bos, 2009). Furthermore, when controlling for positive and negative affective states, we still found that our uncertainty manipulation influenced the negative evaluation of the victim significantly. Hence, changes in neither positive nor negative affect can account for the effects of personal uncertainty on blaming and derogation of the victim.

General Discussion

In three studies we showed that being more future oriented is associated with a more negative evaluation of an innocent victim (Study 3.1), that having a future orientation as opposed to a present orientation leads to higher intolerance of personal uncertainty (Study 3.2), and that being reminded about personal uncertainties leads to a more negative evaluation of an innocent and proximal victim than being reminded about personal certainties (Study 3.3). Taken together, the three studies lend support for our line of reasoning. Focusing on the future leads to harsher reactions toward innocent victims. Moreover, intolerance of personal uncertainty associated with this future orientation seems to underlie this relationship.

This is an important finding, as people are expected to focus on the future, strive for long-term goals, and delay gratification (Martin, 1999). And although several researchers have emphasized the importance of being able to delay gratification and the benefits of a future orientation (e.g., Metcalfe & Mischel, 1999; Muraven, Tice, & Baumeister, 1998), the possible drawbacks of such an orientation have not received much attention. The current studies show that such drawbacks do exist. People become more intolerant of personal uncertainty and this intolerance leads to, among other things, harsher reactions toward innocent victims.

In related studies it has been found that after a threat to their BJW people will give up delayed bigger rewards for smaller immediate rewards, indicating that the trust that their efforts will pay off in the long run has been damaged (Callan, Shead, & Olson, 2009). Furthermore, recent studies show that people's motivation to pursue long-term goals is dependent on their BJW and that this effect is more pronounced for the socially disadvantaged, as these people can benefit

most from getting what they deserve if they work hard (Laurin, Fitzsimons, & Kay, 2011). Finally, adherence to the BJW and a future orientation are positively related. The more people endorse a just world the more confidence they have that future goals will be achieved (Sutton & Winnard, 2007). Taken together, these findings support the notion that one important function of the BJW is to enable people to focus on the future (Lerner, 1980). We extend this idea by proposing that intolerance of personal uncertainty associated with a focus on the future may underlie this relationship.

We believe that people adopt the BJW in order to better tolerate their personal uncertainties brought about by a future orientation. A critic might argue that the BJW allows people to deny their personal uncertainties altogether. However, uncertain outcomes are inherent to most, if not all, long-term goals (e.g., Laurin et al., 2011; Martin, 1999). For instance, when applying for a new job you cannot be certain that you will indeed succeed in (a) getting the job, and (b) that this will contribute to your life happiness over time. Feelings of personal uncertainty, such as feelings of doubt whether you made the right choice and whether you have the qualities needed to fulfill the job, are common. We do not expect that people would negate that they (at least) sometimes experience these feelings of personal uncertainty. Rather, we expect that the BJW is a way of making these uncertainties tolerable. Nevertheless, whether the BJW functions as a way of making personal uncertainty tolerable or as a denial of personal uncertainty altogether should be examined in future studies.

We note explicitly that while we tested the negative consequences of stricter adherence to the BJW, enhanced victim blaming and derogation is only one negative consequence of today's future oriented society. Other worldviews might also be defended more

rigorously when people are future oriented. Threats to one's worldview, whether it is the BJW or another worldview, create cognitive dissonance. The action-based model of dissonance (Harmon-Jones, Amodio, & Harmon-Jones, 2009) proposes that cognitive dissonance impedes on goal-directed behavior. Furthermore, facilitating effective action is the primary reason that people want to reduce dissonance as reducing threats allows us to engage in effective action. Hence, especially when future oriented, people might defend their worldviews in order to reduce cognitive dissonance and engage in effective goal-directed action, as future oriented individuals generally work hard toward attaining important goals (e.g., Laurin et al., 2011; Martin, 1999). Therefore, our findings may well have implications for worldview defense research more broadly.

Related to this, we tested negative consequences of stricter adherence to the belief in a just world. Blaming and derogation are well-known and often used outcome variables in BJW research, but other reactions, such as compensatory rationalizations, are of course possible and should be studied in future research. Our research could be a starting point for future studies further exploring the relationship between adopting a future orientation and worldview defensive reactions including the BJW.

In our studies we adopted the experimental-causal-chain approach advocated by Spencer et al. (2005). Rather than by attempting to include all variables in one design which may disturb the effects studied, we chose to conduct three separate studies and two additional pilot studies. In our two pilot studies we validate our claim that future orientation as measured in Study 3.1 is psychologically similar to manipulated future orientation in Study 3.2 and that our uncertainty salience manipulation in Study 3.3 induces intolerance of personal

uncertainty as measured in Study 3.2. Taken together, we hope that our five studies (Studies 3.1 – 3.3, Pretests 3.1 and 3.2) have convincingly demonstrated that intolerance of personal uncertainty can help explain the relationship between future orientation and victim blaming and derogation. We want note explicitly here that future research is needed to examine the magnitude of the effect as well as other possible underlying mechanisms.

In our paper we manipulated BJW threat in two ways both used previously in BJW research. That is, we manipulated victim innocence in Study 3.1 (cf. Correia & Vala, 2003; Correia et al., 2001, 2007; Hafer, 2000a) and crime proximity in Study 3.3 (cf. Bal & Van den Bos, 2010; Correia et al., 2007). In both studies we expected to find an effect primarily in the high BJW threat condition (i.e., an innocent victim in Study 3.1 and a proximal crime in Study 3.3). However, with regard to the low threat conditions we expected that participant would blame and derogate a non-innocent victim more in Study 3.1, because there was an objective reason to blame or derogate him or her (i.e., practicing unsafe sex). In Study 3.3 there was no objective reason to blame or derogate the distal victim more than the proximal victim and blaming and derogation was probably determined largely by BJW threat. In Study 3.1 results revealed that participants blamed and derogated the victim more in the low threat condition (as opposed to the high threat condition). In contrast, in Study 3.3 participants did not blame and derogate the distal victim more than the proximal victim. Overall, these results fit with our line of reasoning.

In our uncertainty salience manipulation of Study 3.3 we contrasted uncertainty salient with certainty salient conditions. One could wonder whether the certainty salient condition constituted a control condition (e.g., Greifeneder et al., 2011; Greifeneder, Müller,

Stahlberg, Van den Bos, & Bless, in press; Müller, Greifeneder, Stahlberg, Van den Bos, & Bless, 2010) or whether it constituted a self-affirmation condition (e.g., McGregor, Haji, & Kang, 2008; McGregor, Zanna, Holmes, & Spencer, 2001). While we adopted the first interpretation, the latter does fit our data as well. According to the Reactive Approach Motivation model (McGregor, Prentice, & Nash, 2009), one way of reducing intolerance of personal uncertainty is by affirming the self. Moreover, some research indicates that self-affirmation reduces worldview defense reactions (e.g., Adams, Tormala, & O'Brien, 2006; Loseman & Van den Bos, 2012; Schmeichel & Martens, 2005). In future research other self-affirmation manipulations could be adopted to further investigate whether affirming the self is a viable way of reducing negative evaluations of innocent victims.

Here we would like to speculate a bit that our results may be interpreted in terms of ID-compensation theory (Martin, 1999). ID-compensation theory proposes that individuals function optimally when they receive frequent feedback that they are progressing toward their goals and that their efforts will pay off. The theory proposes that when people do not satisfy their need for frequent feedback, they will become less tolerant of personal uncertainty and more susceptible to various worldview defense strategies. Contrary to the predictions of ID-compensation theory, we found that when a future orientation is not obstructed (i.e., when people do satisfy their need for frequent feedback that they are progressing towards their goal), people experience higher levels of personal uncertainty. Especially under these conditions, people will become more vulnerable for the negative consequences of a delayed-return society, such as harsher reactions toward innocent victims. So, we think that by testing when a future focus gives rise to intolerance of personal uncertainty our paper

contributes to ID-compensation theory. With this research we hope to stimulate further research on ID-compensation theory.

Coda

In closing, we do not want to suggest that people should not focus of the future anymore and give in to immediate gratification from now on. By and large, people are expected to focus on the future and this future orientation has important benefits as it enables us to strive for long-term goals and delay gratification. We show a negative consequence of a strong focus on the future, namely that people become harsher toward innocent victims. Furthermore, we reveal that one important reason why future orientation has this effect on victim blaming and victim derogation has to do with intolerance of personal uncertainty. Thus, our findings suggest a basic tendency for people to engage in blaming of innocent others in order to cope with the personal uncertainties associated with a future orientation.

Footnotes

- 3) Separate analyses for blaming and derogation yielded comparable results.
- 4) Including victim gender (-1 = *man*, 1 = *woman*), participant gender (-1 = *men*, 1 = *women*) and all interactions in the model did not change the direction or significance of the reported effects. In addition to the reported effects, this model showed a significant main effect of victim gender only, $\beta = -0.14$, $t(217) = -2.27$, $p < .03$, indicating that the male victim was evaluated more negatively than the female victim.
- 5) The answers to the second open-ended question (how striving for the goal made them feel) were recoded into two dichotomous variables, one measuring positive feelings and one measuring negative feelings with 0 indicating that no such feelings were reported and 1 that such feelings were reported. Using logistic regression, we tested whether people experienced more positive feelings when oriented towards the future than when oriented towards the present. For both positive, $B = -1.03$, $SE = 0.68$, $p > .12$, and negative feelings, $B = 0.36$, $SE = 0.60$, $p > .55$, results indicated that time orientation did not influence the feelings associated with the reported goals. Participants did not experience more positive feelings when oriented towards the future as opposed to the present.
- 6) Separate analyses for blaming and derogation yielded comparable results.

PART II

**HOW TO TRANSFORM VICTIM BLAMING INTO
HELPING**

Approach vs. Avoidance Motivation

This chapter is based on:

Bal, M., & Van den Bos, K. (2013). *On human motivation and coping with threats to one's worldview: Transforming victim blaming into helping of innocent victims*. Manuscript submitted for publication.

Abstract

When people are confronted with innocent victims they usually show one of two types of reactions: help and support of the victims involved or blaming of the victims. Unfortunately, innocent victims are often blamed for what happened to them because they pose a threat to people's belief that the world is a just place where bad things happen only to bad people. In the present paper we ask whether it is possible to transform people's reactions such that they show helping of the victims involved. Building on the human motivation literature and worldview maintenance research, we develop a process-oriented model of spontaneous avoidance and motivated approach underlying blaming and helping of innocent victims. In three studies, we reveal that a strong threat to just-world beliefs triggers an avoidance motivation and that this avoidance motivation leads to blaming and derogation of the victims involved. In contrast, an approach motivation leads to support of these innocent victims. These results suggest that when people are trying to cope with threats to their worldviews, adopting an approach mindset may help to transform spontaneous negative reactions into motivated positive reactions toward innocent victims of unjust events.

Keywords: belief in a just world, victim blaming, helping behavior, worldview maintenance, approach and avoidance motivation

To be able to live in the present-day complex social world, people's lives are governed by certain assumptions and ideas about the world. For instance, people generally believe that life has meaning (Proulx & Heine, 2006) and that the world is just (Jost & Banaji, 1994; Lerner, 1980). These worldviews buffer against the uncertainties brought about by our social environment (McGregor, Zanna, Holmes, & Spencer, 2001; Van den Bos, 2009). Put differently, among the important functions of these worldviews are that they give structure to the complex social world and make the world a predictable place. Hence, worldviews enable people to go through live with confidence in themselves and the world in general. Such confidence is needed to be able to strive for long-term goals as it decreases the uncertainty of attaining delayed outcomes (e.g., Bal & Van den Bos, 2012). A number of worldview theories have already alluded directly or indirectly to the confidence or self-esteem building function and future orienting capacity of worldviews (see, e.g., Lerner, 1980; Martin, 1999; Solomon, Greenberg, & Pyszczynski, 1991).

As worldviews are general ideas about the world, people can be confronted with incongruent events or information, such as experiences that make life seem meaningless or events that indicate that the world is an unjust place. This discordant information can threaten people's worldviews and therefore can trigger defensive reactions to restore the worldviews. Most of the restorative strategies that have been studied thus far have negative social consequences. For instance, several studies have shown that in the process of worldview restoration people stereotype more (e.g., Greenberg et al., 1990), derogate others (e.g., Jost, Banaji, & Nosek, 2004), and blame victims for their ill fate (e.g., Hafer & Bègue, 2005). In the present paper we set out to examine whether more positive reactions are possible in processes of worldview defense. Specifically, we focus on threats to people's belief that the

world is a just place and examine how negative reactions (blaming the victims for what happened to them) can be transformed into more benevolent reactions (helping of those victims).

The Belief in a Just World

The belief in a just world where good things happen to good people and bad things happen to bad people serves as an important worldview for many (Van den Bos & Maas, 2012). Yet, in the world we live in this belief is often threatened. On a regular basis people are confronted with unjust events and innocent suffering. For instance, when watching the news on television or the Internet we often learn about wars or famines that are going on in this world. We also are informed about unjust events through interpersonal encounters and personal stories, for instance, when a friend or neighbor tells us about that they were robbed last week or that someone broke into their home.

Just-world theory (Lerner, 1977, 1980) was introduced to explain how people deal with these experiences of injustice. The theory proposes that people have a basic and fundamental need to believe that the world is just (e.g., Hafer, 2000a; Lerner, 1980; Sutton & Douglas, 2005). This belief directly enables people to focus on the future and strive for long-term goals (Bal & Van den Bos, 2012; Hafer, 2000b). That is, only if people can trust that the world is just and hence that they will get what they deserve, will they invest time and energy in delayed and uncertain outcomes (e.g., Bal & Van den Bos, 2012; Callan, Shead, & Olson, 2009; Hafer, 2000b; Laurin, Fitzsimons, & Kay, 2011).

When people witness innocent suffering, the belief in a just world (BJW) is threatened, as the victims are not getting what they deserve, and people will need to restore this belief. Victim blaming and

derogation relieve a BJW threat, as the victim becomes more deserving of his or her ill fate. Research has shown that blaming and derogating a victim are indeed viable ways to relieve a BJW threat (for an overview, see, e.g., Hafer & Bègue, 2005). Moreover, studies have found that these negative reactions are even stronger when the victim is innocent or when the victim is similar to you (see, e.g., Bal & Van den Bos, 2010, 2012; Correia & Vala, 2003; Correia, Vala, & Aguiar, 2001, 2007). Just-world theory can account for these seemingly paradoxical findings, because victims who are innocent or who are similar to you pose a greater threat to your BJW and thus provoke stronger reactions to deal with this threat.

Just-world theory sparked a broad range of studies, focusing on the importance of the BJW and reactions toward victims of injustice (for overviews, see, e.g., Furnham, 2003; Hafer & Bègue, 2005; Lerner, 1980). While many studies have investigated antecedents of people's reactions toward innocent victims, the processes leading up to these reactions have been relatively underinvestigated. Moreover, with some notable exceptions (see, e.g., DePalma, Madey, Tillman, & Wheeler, 1999; Kogut, 2011), research up until now focused heavily on the paradoxical negative reactions following a confrontation with an innocent victim. Yet, reactions toward real-world injustice can vary from blaming the victims for their ill plight to great effort in helping these victims.

Just-world theory (Lerner, 1980) explained the negative reactions people often show to innocent victims by proposing that these reactions diminish the threat by making the victims deserving of their fate. This noted, people can also be motivated to help these victims and alleviate their ill fate as a way of actively reconstructing the world to be a just place. Hence, blaming and helping victims are two

very different ways of dealing with injustice that might stem from the very same motivation for justice (Lerner, 1980). But when do people choose to blame victims and when do they help victims? In other words, what determines more derogatory versus more benevolent reactions to people who are innocent of their unjust fates? In the current research, we focus on the negative defensive reactions of blaming and derogation of innocent victims as well as the more benevolent reactions of help and support of those victims. In doing so, we propose a process-oriented model of spontaneous avoidance and motivated approach to explain both types of reactions.

Human Motivation

To study the processes leading up to the reactions people can have toward innocent victims we turn to one of the most basic motivational tendencies people have, namely their inclination to approach positive things and avoid negative ones (e.g., Carver, 2006; Chen & Bargh, 1999; Elliot, 2006; Higgins, 1997). In doing so, we argue that the behavioral dichotomy of defensive and benevolent reactions toward innocent victims of injustice maps onto the distinction between avoidance and approach motivations. By studying the processes leading up to these behavioral reactions, we hope to gain more precise insights into how victim blaming may be transformed into victim helping.

From an evolutionary perspective, escaping from danger, such as predators or enemies, and acting on positive events, such as gathering food and responding to opportunities for reproduction, have been important tools for survival (Darwin, 1859). Moreover, it is easy to imagine how also in contemporary everyday life most behaviors can be categorized as either approaching positive things or avoiding threats and danger. For example, we meet with our friends for a dinner party

and we enjoy a good meal, but we also take care not to run into a car when crossing the road after the party. Thus, it seems generally adaptive to act on both our approach and avoidance motivations as these motivational systems guide us through life and save us from immediate danger.

It is important to realize that in our contemporary society we encounter many symbolic threats (e.g., Martin, 1999). These threats entail events or information that are incongruent with general beliefs about the social world. We therefore put forward that an *avoidance* motivation might underlie the defensive reactions people show after having experienced a worldview threat, such as a threat to their just-world beliefs. We further propose that an *approach* motivation might lead to more benevolent reactions toward these threatening events. Thus, our aim is to investigate whether we can use the insights from human motivation and worldview maintenance to transform blaming and other derogatory reactions into helping and other benevolent reactions toward innocent victims.

The Current Research

According to just-world theory, avoidance of victims of injustice can be seen as an important behavioral strategy to deal with the threat to the BJW (Lerner, 1980). Some earlier studies focused on this avoidance of the victim and showed that people keep more distance (Bal & Van den Bos, 2010; Pancer, 1988) and are less willing to interact with victims of injustice (Lerner & Agar, 1972; Novak & Lerner, 1968). However, whether these behavioral avoidance reactions stem from an avoidance motivation following a BJW threat has not directly been tested until now. We suggest that an avoidance motivation following a confrontation with injustice underlies negative reactions such as

blaming and derogating of innocent victims. After all, blaming and derogating create psychological distance between the observer and the victim by placing him or her outside the observers' world and in the "world of victims" (Lerner, 1980, pp. 23-26).

Building on the line of reasoning proposed here, we investigated approach and avoidance motivation after a confrontation with an innocent victim and studied the role of motivational orientations in reactions toward innocent victim of injustice. We expected that a confrontation with an innocent victim which poses a high BJW threat would spontaneously trigger an avoidance motivation (Hypothesis 4.1). In addition, we predicted that an avoidance motivation would enhance victim blaming and derogation and decrease helping after a high BJW threat (Hypothesis 4.2). In contrast, an approach motivation was hypothesized to decrease victim blaming and derogation and increase helping after a high BJW threat (Hypothesis 4.3).

An overview of our hypotheses is presented in Figure 4.1. In all three studies we tested these hypotheses by confronting people with a high or low BJW threat. In Study 4.1, we examined Hypothesis 4.1 by confronting participants with a victim and subsequently measuring approach and avoidance motivation. In Studies 4.2 and 4.3, we tested Hypotheses 4.2 and 4.3 by inducing an approach or avoidance motivation before confronting participants with a victim and subsequently measuring negative reactions to the victim (Study 4.2) as well as positive reactions to the victim (Study 4.3).

Study 4.1

In Study 4.1, we examined whether a BJW threat influences people's approach and avoidance motivation toward the victim. For this purpose,

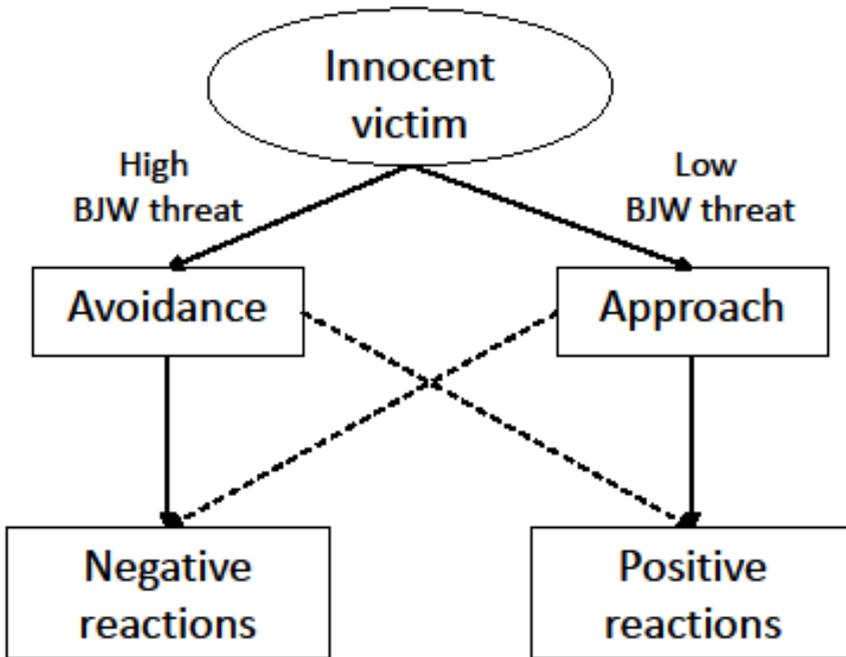


Figure 4.1. *A process-oriented motivational model of reactions toward innocent victims*

Note. The model proposes that a strong just-world threat leads to spontaneous avoidance reactions and associated negative reactions toward innocent victims, whereas weaker just-world threats and motivated approach mindsets lead to more positive reactions toward the victims.

we confronted participants with a rape victim. To induce a high or low BJBW threat we manipulated whether crime proximity was distal or proximal. Lerner and Miller (1978) stated that "as events become closer to [people's] world ... the concern over injustices increases greatly, as does the need to explain or make sense of the events" (p. 1031). Hence, a proximal victim will constitute a greater BJBW threat than a distal victim (e.g., Bal & Van den Bos, 2010, 2012; Correia & Vala, 2003; Correia, Vala, & Aguiar, 2001, 2007). Following our BJBW threat

manipulation, we measured approach and avoidance motivation toward the victim with a reaction time task. Specifically, we asked participants to approach or avoid pictures of the victim (vs. a comparable control person), depending on a content-irrelevant feature, namely frame color. Faster reaction times constitute a greater motivation to approach or avoid the person in the picture (Papies, Barsalou, & Custers, 2012).

We expected that participants would be more avoidance motivated and less approach motivated toward the victim as opposed to the control person. Moreover, this effect would occur especially under a high BJW threat, so when participants were confronted with a proximal as opposed to a distal victim. As people are social beings (Aronson, 1972; De Waal, 1996), one could argue that they will generally be inclined to approach as opposed to avoid others. Hence, we expected that people would generally be approach motivated toward the control person.

Method

Participants and Design. Eighty-three Utrecht University students (26 men and 57 women) participated for course credit or €2. Their ages ranged from 17 to 37 years ($M = 21.49$, $SD = 3.96$). The study had a 2 (BJW threat: high vs. low; between-participants) x 2 (Target: victim vs. control person; within-participants) x 2 (Response: approach vs. avoidance; within-participants) design. Men and women were equally distributed across conditions.

Procedure and Materials. Participants were invited to take part in this study with flyers posted at different locations on the campus. Upon arrival in the laboratory, participants were seated behind a computer in individual cubicles. All stimulus materials were presented on the computer screen. The study began with a short film clip in which a rape victim was interviewed. Subsequently participants performed a

reaction time task in which they had to approach or avoid pictures. The experiment ended with some demographical questions.

BJW threat. Following the procedure by Bal and Van den Bos (2010), participants saw a short film clip of an interview with a rape victim, Linda. Before the film clip, participants read some background information about Linda. BJW threat was manipulated among our participants (all Utrecht University students) such that half of the participants read that Linda was an Utrecht University student (high threat), whereas the other half of the participants read that Linda was a Groningen University student (low threat; cf. Bal & Van den Bos, 2010, Study 1). In the film clip of approximately 3 minutes, Linda (actually a hired actress) talked about what happened the night she was raped.

Approach-Avoidance paradigm. The experiment continued with a reaction time task. Building on Papies et al. (2012), participants were told that they were going to react to pictures of objects, people (including the victim), and animals. In the task, pictures were presented inside a blue or purple frame. Half of the participants were instructed to press the upper key of a response box to “move toward the picture” when it appeared in a blue frame, and to press the lower key of the response box to “move away from the picture” when it appeared in a purple frame. The other half of the participants were instructed to “move toward” pictures that appeared in a purple frame and to “move away” from pictures that appeared in a blue frame. After each response, the picture grew or shrank, thereby simulating approach or avoidance respectively. Following the Papies et al. (2012) paradigm, participants were instructed to respond as quickly and accurately as possible.

After a practice task of 20 unrelated trials, the actual task began. In this task 10 target pictures (5 victim and 5 control person pictures) as

well as 10 filler pictures (5 positive and 5 negative pictures) were presented. Each picture was presented 4 times: twice in an approach trial and twice in an avoidance trial, all in random order.

The critical pictures consisted of pictures of the victim, which were 5 stills from the film clip. The control person pictures were 5 photos from another girl of the same age.¹ The filler pictures were all taken from the International Affective Picture System (IAPS; Lang, Bradley, & Cuthbert, 2008). These positive (IAPS 1710, 1750, 2071, 7330, and 5829) and negative (IAPS 1120, 1202, 1930, 6230, and 9301) pictures were included to make the task more varied and challenging, but also to check whether the task worked as expected. Research has shown that people generally want to move toward positive pictures and away from negative ones (Chen & Bargh, 1999). Hence, people should be quicker to approach positive pictures and to avoid negative pictures.

Results

Following conventions (e.g., Papies et al., 2012), response latencies for incorrect responses, as well as latencies more than 3 standard deviations from the mean were excluded from analyses. This involved 4.98 % of the responses. A 2 (BJW threat) x 2 (Picture type) x 2 (Response) mixed ANOVA on response latencies of the critical trials only revealed a significant 3-way interaction, $F(1, 81) = 4.37, p < .04, \eta_p^2 = .05$.² As we expected to find effects especially under high BJW threat, we analyzed the picture type x response interaction for a high threat (proximal victim) and low threat (distal victim) separately. For a high threat the picture type x response interaction was significant, $F(1, 41) = 6.68, p < .02, \eta_p^2 = .14$. As can be seen in Table 4.1, participants in the high threat condition were significantly slower to approach the victim as opposed to the control person, $F(1, 41) = 5.45, p < .03, \eta_p^2 = .12$. Moreover, participants in the high threat condition were significantly

faster to avoid as opposed to approach the victim, $F(1, 41) = 4.99$, $p < .04$, $\eta_p^2 = .11$. The other simple main effects did not reach significance within the high threat condition, $ps > .25$. In further accordance with our predictions, the picture type x response interaction effect was not significant within the low BJW threat condition, $F < 1$.

Table 4.1. *Response latencies in milliseconds on approach and avoidance trials as a function of BJW threat and picture type for critical pictures (Study 4.1)*

		Avoidance trials		Approach trials	
		<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
High threat	Victim picture	498.45	82.91	520.87	110.47
	Control picture	509.58	92.02	497.14	91.01
Low threat	Victim picture	514.81	98.38	515.10	117.47
	Control picture	509.63	95.40	517.77	120.73

A 2 (BJW threat) x 2 (Picture valence) x 2 (Response) mixed ANOVA on response latencies of the filler trials revealed a significant two-way interaction of picture valence and response only, $F(1, 81) = 12.22$, $p < .01$, $\eta_p^2 = .13$. Participants were significantly slower to approach ($M = 532.60$, $SD = 113.09$) as opposed to avoid negative pictures ($M = 515.88$, $SD = 103.24$), $F(1, 81) = 4.44$, $p < .04$, $\eta_p^2 = .05$. They also tended to be faster to approach ($M = 509.18$, $SD = 98.78$) as opposed to avoid positive pictures ($M = 524.95$, $SD = 524.95$), although this effect was marginally significant only, $F(1, 81) = 8.38$, $p < .07$, $\eta_p^2 = .04$. Moreover, participants were significantly faster to approach positive as opposed to negative pictures, $F(1, 81) = 12.87$, $p < .01$, $\eta_p^2 = .14$. For avoidance motivation this effect of faster avoidance of negative as opposed to positive pictures was not significant, $p > .27$.

Discussion

In line with our predictions, Study 4.1 revealed that a confrontation with a proximal victim (i.e., a high BJW threat) spontaneously triggered an avoidance motivation. More specifically, people were more motivated to avoid than to approach the proximal victim. Moreover, they were less motivated to approach a proximal victim as opposed to a comparable control person. These effects were not present when participants were confronted with a distal victim (i.e., low BJW threat).

It is important to note that BJW threat did not interact with approaching and avoiding positive and negative pictures. On the positive and negative IAPS pictures that we used as our control materials we only found a two-way interaction of picture valence and response, showing that people were more motivated to avoid negative pictures and approach positive pictures. The lack of a three-way interaction of picture valence and response with BJW threat is important, as it yields additional support for the idea that the avoidance motivation after a high BJW threat was specifically directed at avoiding the victim and it rules out the possibility that people who are confronted with a victim simply become more avoidance motivated in general. Put differently, after a confrontation with a proximal victim, people want to specifically avoid this victim and are not more motivated to avoid negative stimuli in general.

Study 4.2

Study 4.1 showed that a high BJW threat influenced approach and avoidance motivation, but we did not investigate how this shapes subsequent reactions toward the victims involved. In Studies 4.2 and 4.3, we addressed this issue by manipulating approach and avoidance

motivation among our participants followed by measuring negative (Study 4.2) and positive (Study 4.3) reactions to an innocent victim.

Research has shown that arm flexion and extension produce bodily feedback that unconsciously activate approach and avoidance motivation respectively (e.g., Cacioppo, Priester, & Bernston, 1993; Förster, 2003). This manipulation has previously been used in research successfully to induce an approach or avoidance motivation (e.g., Van Prooijen, Karremans, & Van Beest, 2006) and in Study 4.2 we used this as our approach versus avoidance manipulation. In Study 4.2, we used the same BJW threat manipulation as in Study 4.1 and subsequently measured victim blaming and victim derogation with a short questionnaire. Furthermore, as an additional measure we unobtrusively assessed physical distancing from the victim.

We expected that an avoidance motivation would lead to more negative reactions toward the victim (i.e., more victim blaming, derogation, and distancing) than an approach motivation. As in Study 4.1, this effect was expected to occur especially under a high BJW threat, so when participants were confronted with a proximal as opposed to a distal victim. Moreover, in an avoidance motivation we expected to replicate earlier findings such that people would react more negatively toward a proximal (high threat) as opposed to a distal victim (low threat; e.g., Bal & Van den Bos, 2010, 2012; Correia, Vala, & Aguiar, 2001, 2007). In an approach motivational condition, this effect was expected to attenuate, leading people to react less negatively toward the proximal victim.

Method

Participants and Design. Sixty-two students (24 men and 38 women) participated for course credit or €2.³ Their ages ranged from 17 to 40 years ($M = 20.89$, $SD = 4.05$). The study had a 2 (Motivation:

approach vs. avoidance) x 2 (BJW threat: high vs. low) between-participants design. Men and women were equally distributed across the conditions.

Procedure and Materials. Participants were invited to take part in this study with flyers posted at different locations on the campus. Upon arrival in the laboratory, participants were seated behind a computer in individual cubicles. The entire experiment was programmed on the computer. The study started with the manipulation of approach and avoidance motivation. While holding this position, participants saw the same short film as in Study 1. Then negative reactions toward the victim were measured. The experiment ended with some demographical questions.

Approach-Avoidance manipulation. Participants were informed that research had recently shown that the processing of information was improved by physical strain. We told participants we wanted to test how timing influenced this effect and manipulated approach and avoidance by asking participants to either exert pressure by putting their non-dominant hand under the table and press upwards (i.e., arm flexion) or by putting their non-dominant hand on top of the table and press downwards (i.e., arm extension; e.g., Cacioppo et al., 1993; Förster, 2003). They were told to hold this position until instructed to let go (which was after watching the film clip).

BJW threat. A high or low BJW threat was induced by using the same manipulation and film clip of Study 4.1.

Negative reactions. Following the film clip, participants rated to which degree the victim could be blamed for what happened to her with the 9-item scale of victim blaming ($\alpha = .87$) developed by Bal and Van den Bos (2010). An example of such an item was: "I think Linda acted irresponsibly, considering the situation she was in." Furthermore,

the 10-item scale of victim derogation developed by Bal and Van den Bos (2010) measured to what degree the victim was derogated for what had happened to her ($\alpha = .81$). An example of such an item was: "I think Linda deserved what happened to her." Answers were measured on a 7-point Likert-type scale (1 = *totally disagree*, 7 = *totally agree*). As blaming and derogation were significantly positively correlated, $r = .76$, $p < .01$, scores were collapsed to form an overall negative evaluation measure ($\alpha = .92$; see also Bal & Van den Bos, 2012).⁴

Results

A 2 (Motivation) \times 2 (BJW threat) ANOVA on negative reactions revealed a significant two-way interaction only, $F(1, 58) = 5.60$, $p < .03$, $\eta_p^2 = .09$. Subsequent analyses of the simple main effects showed that people reacted more negative toward a proximal victim when they were avoidance motivated as opposed to approach motivated, $F(1, 58) = 4.72$, $p < .04$, $\eta_p^2 = .08$. Moreover, participants with an avoidance motivation reacted more negatively toward a proximal victim as opposed to a distal victim, $F(1, 58) = 5.12$, $p < .03$, $\eta_p^2 = .08$. The other simple main effects were not significant, $ps > .24$. A least significant difference test for multiple comparisons between means ($p < .05$) with the four cells of our design serving as the independent variable (Kirk, 1982) corroborated these findings.⁵ Table 4.2 shows the result of this test as well as the means and standard deviations of the negative victim evaluation.⁶

Discussion

The results of Study 4.2 show that motivational orientation indeed influenced how people reacted toward a victim. That is, people blamed and derogated an innocent proximal victim more when they were avoidance motivated than when they were approach motivated. Moreover, we replicated earlier findings in the avoidance motivation

Table 4.2. *Negative evaluation of the victim as a function of motivational orientation and BJW threat (Study 4.2)*

	Avoidance		Approach	
	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
High threat	2.24 _a	0.70	1.75 _b	0.59
Low threat	1.72 _b	0.47	1.99 _{a,b}	0.70

Note. Means are on 7-point scales with higher values indicating more negative evaluations. Means with no subscripts in common differ significantly ($p < .05$), as indicated by a least significant difference test for multiple comparisons between means (Kirk, 1982).

condition (e.g., Bal & Van den Bos, 2010, 2012; Correia, Vala, & Aguiar, 2001, 2007). That is, avoidance motivated people reacted more negatively toward a proximal as opposed to a distal victim. This effect attenuated in the approach motivation condition, leading participants in this condition to blame and derogate a proximal victim less strongly. These findings fit with the results of Study 4.1, in which we showed that a high BJW threat leads to an avoidance motivation. In Study 4.2, we showed that an avoidance motivation could subsequently lead to more negative reactions in order to deal with this threat. Hindering the spontaneous tendency to avoid the victim by inducing an approach motivation diminishes these negative reactions. In our third study, we wanted to focus on positive ways of dealing with a BJW threat by measuring how much people support a victim after inducing an approach or avoidance motivation.

Study 4.3

In Study 4.3, we again induced an approach or an avoidance motivation among our participants. Following this manipulation, we

measured positive reactions toward the victim. In particular, we measured this variable in natural communication with the victim. To this end, we gave participants the opportunity to support the victim by leaving her a message. We assessed how much effort people put in their messages, and we also inspected the content of the messages participants sent to the victim in terms of supportiveness and possibly related variables. Thus, in Study 4.3 we measured real communicative behavior as our main dependent variable instead of assessing merely intentions to help.

In Study 4.3, we confronted participants with the same film clip as in Study 4.1. However, instead of inducing a high or low BJW threat by manipulating crime proximity, we now manipulated whether the perpetrator was caught or not caught (e.g., Hafer, 2000a). We did this to show that our motivation x BJW effects were robust across at least some different manipulations of BJW threat. Furthermore, one might argue that the manipulation of crime proximity used in Studies 4.1 and 4.2 has some overlap with participants' group membership. Even though this would not interfere with our line of reasoning, by manipulating apprehension of the perpetrator in Study 4.3, we can rule out the possibility that our effects are caused by group membership.

After learning about the victim's ill fate, participants got the opportunity to help the victim cope with what happened to her by leaving her a message. We expected that an avoidance motivation would lead to less supportive messages for the victim as opposed to an approach motivation. As in Studies 4.1 and 4.2, this effect was expected to occur especially under a high BJW threat, so when the perpetrator was not caught as opposed when he was caught. As positive reactions following a BJW threat have not been studied often, we included a control condition in which we did not manipulate motivational

orientation. We wanted to investigate whether the pattern of results with regard to support of the victim in this control condition would be more similar to the approach motivation condition or the avoidance motivation condition. These findings on how people normally react following a BJW threat contribute to our understanding of the processes underlying the positive reactions toward innocent victims of injustice and could help in transforming negative reactions in positive ones.

Method

Participants and Design. One-hundred and four students (35 men and 69 women) participated in this study for €2 or course credit.⁷ Their ages ranged from 17 to 57 years ($M = 20.98$, $SD = 4.61$). The study had a 3 (Motivation: approach vs. avoidance vs. control) x 2 (BJW threat: high vs. low) between-participants design. Men and women were equally distributed across conditions.

Procedure and Materials. Participants were invited to take part in this study with flyers posted at different locations on the campus. Upon arrival at the laboratory, participants were seated behind a computer in individual cubicles. The experiment was again programmed on the computer. The study began with the manipulation of approach and avoidance motivation that we used in Study 4.2. While holding the corresponding positions in either the approach or avoidance conditions, participants saw the same film clip as in Studies 4.1 and 4.2. Using this clip, Study 4.3 included a different manipulation of BJW threat, namely by informing the participants that the perpetrator either was caught or was not caught. Following this manipulation and the watching of the film clip, participants were given the opportunity to support the stimulus person (Linda) by leaving her a message, followed by some demographic questions.

Approach-Avoidance manipulation. The motivational orientation manipulation of Study 4.2 was used. In Study 4.3, we also included a control condition in which no instructions were given before the BJW threat manipulation. This condition was added as a neutral baseline condition to find out how people would normally react following a BJW threat.

BJW threat. We showed participants the same film clip as in Studies 4.1 and 4.2. However, instead of inducing a high or low BJW threat by manipulation crime proximity, we now manipulated whether the perpetrator caught or not. This manipulation of BJW threat has successfully been used in previous studies (e.g., Hafer, 2000a; Van Prooijen & Van den Bos, 2009). After seeing the film clip, half of our participants learned that our perpetrator was apprehended and awaiting trial (low BJW threat) and half of our participants learned that our perpetrator was not apprehended and that chances were small that he would be (high BJW threat).

Leaving a message. We told all participants that Linda still had great difficulty dealing with what happened to her. Therefore, participants were given the opportunity to leave a message for Linda. These messages were coded in two ways. Specifically, we analyzed the *number of words* used to write the message as an indication of responsiveness to her ill fate. When participants chose not to leave a message, they scored zero on the number of words.

Additionally, the *content of the messages* was analyzed to find out to which degree the messages were indeed helpful. As not all participants chose to leave a message, the analyses of message content are of an exploratory nature. After the data were collected, two raters who were blind to the experimental conditions rated the messages left by the participants on a 7-point Likert-type scale (1 = *not at all*, 7 =

completely) on three dimensions, namely how *supportive*, *personal*, and *positive* the messages were. Raters were explicitly instructed not to take into account the length of the messages in their ratings. To examine whether it was appropriate to aggregate the ratings of both raters, intraclass correlation coefficients for each item were computed using a two-way random model with consistency definition (McGraw & Wong, 1996; Shrout & Fleiss, 1979). These were .72 for the supportive rating, .71 for the personal rating, and .58 for the positivity rating. Using conventions set forth by Cicchetti (1994), these values are “good” for the first two dimensions and “fair” for the last one.

Results

Number of words. A 3 (Motivation) x 2 (BJW threat) ANOVA on the number of words spent on the message revealed a significant two-way interaction only, $F(2, 98) = 4.22, p < .02, \eta_p^2 = .08$.⁹ Inspecting the means and standard deviations presented in Table 4.3, our results showed that participants with an avoidance motivation spent less words on the message than participants in all other conditions. Statistical analyses verified this observation. Only in the avoidance condition did participants spent less words on the message under high as opposed to low BJW threat, $F(1, 98) = 9.00, p < .01, \eta_p^2 = .08$. The simple main effects of BJW threat in the approach and control conditions were not significant, $ps > .31$. Thus, the avoidance condition mirrored the control condition with regard to words spent on the message. Moreover, analyses revealed that, as expected, no differences were obtained in the low BJW threat condition, $p > .24$. There was a marginally significant effect of motivational orientation in the high BJW threat condition, $F(2, 98) = 2.98, p < .06, \eta_p^2 = .06$. Participants in the avoidance condition spent fewer words on the message than participants in the control condition and tended to spent less world on the message than

participants in the approach condition, $p < .10$. The approach condition did not differ from the control condition, $p > .47$. A least significant difference test for multiple comparisons between means ($p < .05$) with the six cells of our design serving as the independent variable (Kirk, 1982) confirmed these findings. The result of this test can be found in Table 4.3.⁹

Table 4.3. *Number of words used in the supportive message for the victim as a function of motivational orientation and BJW threat (Study 4.3)*

	Avoidance		Control		Approach	
	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD
High threat	7.74 _a	19.98	29.18 _b	31.74	22.68 _{a,b}	22.15
Low threat	35.44 _b	38.51	19.56 _{a,b}	19.85	24.29 _{a,b}	27.71

Note. Means with no subscripts in common differ significantly ($p < .05$), as indicated by a least significant difference test for multiple comparisons between means (Kirk, 1982).

Message content. A 3 (Motivation) x 2 (BJW threat) ANOVA on how personal the messages were revealed a significant two-way interaction only, $F(2, 50) = 3.29$, $p < .05$, $\eta_p^2 = .12$. Similar to the findings on the number of words spent on the message, subsequent analyses of the simple main effects revealed no differences in the low BJW threat condition, $p > .95$. However, there was a significant effect of motivational orientation in the high BJW threat condition, $F(2, 50) = 6.53$, $p < .01$, $\eta_p^2 = .21$. Participants in the approach condition were more personal toward the victim than participants in the avoidance condition, $p < .01$, and the control condition, $p < .01$. The avoidance condition did not differ from the control condition, $p > .79$. Moreover, in the control condition participants tended to be less personal toward the victim in the high as opposed to low BJW threat, $F(1, 50) = 2.86$, $p < .10$,

$\eta_p^2 = .05$. The simple main effects of BJW threat in the approach and avoidance conditions were not significant, $ps > .12$. A least significant difference test for multiple comparisons between means ($p < .05$) with the six cells of our design serving as the independent variable (Kirk, 1982) as well as the means and standard deviations of the ratings on how personal the messages were can be found in Table 4.4.

For the *supportive ratings*, the effects were comparable, although they were less strong. A 3 (Motivation) x 2 (BJW threat) ANOVA on the supportive ratings of the messages left for the victim revealed a marginally significant two-way interaction only, $F(2, 50) = 2.39, p = .10, \eta_p^2 = .09$. As expected, subsequent analyses of the simple main effects revealed no differences in the low BJW threat condition, $p > .63$. This noted, there was a marginally significant effect of motivational orientation in the high BJW threat condition, $F(2, 50) = 2.87, p < .07, \eta_p^2 = .10$, indicating that participants in the approach condition were somewhat more supportive toward the victim than participants in the control condition, $p < .03$. The avoidance condition did not differ from the control condition, $p > .46$, and the approach condition, $p = .11$. No simple main effects of BJW threat were found, $ps > .12$. A least significant difference test for multiple comparisons between means ($p < .05$) with the six cells of our design serving as the independent variable (Kirk, 1982) as well as the means and standard deviations of the ratings on how supportive the messages were can be found in Table 4.4.

For the *positive ratings*, the 3 (Motivation) x 2 (BJW threat) interaction was not significant, $F(2, 50) = 1.82, p = .17, \eta_p^2 = .07$. The two main effects were also not statistically significant. However, to be complete, we did report the result of the least significant difference test (Kirk, 1982) as well as the means and standard deviations of the ratings

Table 4.4. Ratings of the supportive messages for the victim as a function of motivational orientation and BIW threat (*Study 4.3*)

	Avoidance		Control		Approach		
	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	
Personal	High threat	4.23 _a	1.01	4.11 _a	1.02	5.46 _b	1.01
	Low threat	4.86 _{a,b}	0.85	4.89 _{a,b}	0.99	4.75 _{a,b}	0.89
Supportive	High threat	4.73 _{a,b}	1.19	4.39 _a	1.24	5.42 _b	0.76
	Low threat	4.71 _{a,b}	0.99	5.11 _{a,b}	0.93	4.69 _{a,b}	0.88
Positive	High threat	4.64 _a	0.95	4.56 _a	0.68	5.33 _b	0.81
	Low threat	4.93 _{a,b}	0.61	5.17 _{a,b}	0.56	5.00 _{a,b}	0.85

Note. Means are in 7-point scales, with higher values indicating higher ratings. Means on a dependent variable with no subscripts in common differ significantly ($p < .05$), as indicated by a least significant difference test for multiple comparison between means (Kirk, 1982)

on how positive the messages were in Table 4.4. Looking at the overall pattern of results on message content presented in Table 4.4, the control condition seemed to be more similar to the avoidance condition as opposed to the approach condition. These findings will be discussed in more detail in the General Discussion.

General Discussion

We all have to deal with misfortune at times. And while it would be comforting to be supported by our social environment in these stressful times, we often also have to deal with harsh social reactions. The results presented here suggest that when people are trying to cope with threats to their worldviews, adopting an approach mindset may help to transform spontaneous negative reactions into motivated positive reactions toward innocent victims of an unjust fate. Going back to the model presented in Figure 4.1, we found support for our proposed line of reasoning. Taken together, the three studies showed that people become more avoidance motivated when confronted with a high BJW threat and that an avoidance motivation subsequently enhances negative reactions toward an innocent victim and decreases support, whereas an approach motivation decreases negative reactions and makes more positive and supportive reactions possible.

While these positive reactions were part of just-world theory at its introduction (Lerner, 1980), much of the previous research focused on the negative reactions of victim blaming and derogation. In the current line of research, we set out to examine possible benevolent reactions following a just world threat. We aimed to do so by studying the underlying processes that take place after a confrontation with an innocent victim. More specifically, our results showed that people generally become avoidance motivated after seeing or hearing about

injustice, but that people will help victims, when they are approach motivated. In line with just-world theory (Lerner, 1980), our research indicates that people can help victims as a way of dealing with injustice. However, while just-world theory proposed that people would help when helping is possible (Lerner, 1980), our findings revealed that an approach motivation may be needed to show this effect.

In three studies, our aim was to gain insight into the psychological underpinnings of blaming and helping innocent victims. Rather than by attempting to include all variables in one design, which may disturb the effects studied (Bal & Van den Bos, 2012), we decided to conduct three separate studies in which we tested the different hypotheses proposed by our model. In Study 4.1, we found support for our proposition that a BJW threat enhances an avoidance motivation aimed specifically at avoiding the victim. Study 4.2 substantiated this claim, as we observed significantly more blaming under high as opposed to low threat only in the avoidance motivated condition and not in the approach condition. Study 4.3 subsequently showed that benevolent reactions were enhanced in approach motivated persons compared to avoidance motivated persons.

We used a manipulation of physical proximity to induce a high or low BJW threat in Studies 4.1 and 4.2. We chose this manipulation because with manipulating crime proximity the differences in reactions could only be caused by subjective differences in threat and could not be caused by objective differences in the situation (e.g., Bal & Van den Bos, 2010, 2012; Correia & Vala, 2003; Correia, Vala, & Aguiar, 2001, 2007). While this indeed created a high or low BJW threat, one might argue that this manipulation is confounded with group membership. In order to make sure that our effects were not caused by this variable, we adopted another well-known manipulation of BJW threat in Study 4.3,

namely by manipulating whether the perpetrator was caught or not (Hafer, 2000a; Van Prooijen & Van den Bos, 2009). All three studies corroborated our proposed line of reasoning.

With respect to the results of Study 4.3, we note that they show that motivational orientation also influenced positive supportive reactions toward a victim. That is, only avoidance motivated people spent less words on a message of support for the victim when the perpetrator was still at large (i.e., high BJW threat) as opposed to when he was caught (i.e., low BJW threat). This effect attenuated for people in the approach motivation and control condition, such that they seemed more willing to support the victim regardless of BJW threat. The findings in the control condition seem to fit with just-world theory (Lerner, 1980; Lerner & Goldberg, 1999), as the theory proposed that people will resort to victim blaming and derogation, when help or support are not possible. So, when supporting the victim is a viable way of dealing with the BJW threat, as was the case in Study 4.3, people will choose to help the victim instead of blaming him or her.

We would like to note that our analyses of the content of the messages suggest nuances to this conclusion. That is, looking at the content of the messages, the results of Study 4.3 show that, under high BJW threat, approach motivated people leave more personal and supportive messages for the victim than avoidance motivated people and people in the control condition. Moreover, while the control condition resembled the approach condition with regard to responsiveness to the victim, it more closely resembled the avoidance condition with regard to the content of the messages. This seems to indicate that while people in the control condition were willing to leave a message of support for the victim, these messages were less personal and supportive following a high BJW threat as opposed to a low BJW

threat. So, we would like to speculate a bit and propose that people generally might be willing to help, but only at a small cost to themselves and that an approach motivation might be necessary to really put effort into helping the victim. More research obviously is needed to examine these suggestions in more detail. It also would be interesting for future studies to look into the boundary conditions of benevolent reactions. This noted, our results do indicate that approach and avoidance motivation influence positive, supportive reactions following a confrontation with innocent victims, such that an approach motivation led to more benevolent reactions than an avoidance motivation.

Conclusions

With the findings reported here we think we add to the literature on approach and avoidance motivation as well as worldview maintenance research in general. It seems that people try to avoid symbolic threats in much the same way as they avoid physical threats. Moreover, while it might be adaptive and functional to avoid physical threats in our environment, avoiding these symbolic threats might not always be necessary and (socially) functional. That is, an avoidance motivation enhances defensive reactions following a worldview threat and suppresses more benevolent reactions to deal with such a threat. These negative effects seem to attenuate in an approach motivation. In our studies we investigated reactions following a worldview threat in the realm of justice beliefs (Lerner, 1980), but reactions following threats to other worldviews, for instance in the field of terror management (Greenberg & Pyszczynski, & Solomon, 1986), system justification (Jost & Banaji, 1994), or meaning making (Proulx & Heine, 2006), might also be influenced in much the same way by an approach vs. avoidance motivation.

For example, research on system justification revealed that people seem to close their eyes to information on complex social issues, such as global warming, as a way of dealing with (or in fact ignoring) these problems (Shepherd & Kay, 2012). Paradoxically, this avoidance behavior becomes stronger the more pressing the issue is. Our research indicates that this behavior could originate from an avoidance motivation and that inducing an approach motivation might lead people to be more open to information on these issues and engage in them as a way of dealing with them.

We also extend findings on the role of motivational orientations in the realm of procedural justice (e.g., Brebels, De Cremer, & Sedikides, 2008; Johnson, Chang, & Rosen, 2010; Van Prooijen, Karremans, & Van Beest, 2006). Here, studies showed that being treated (un)justly influences motivational orientations and that procedural justice judgments are influenced by these orientations. That is, persons with an approach motivation stand up against personal unjust treatment more than avoidance-oriented persons. We extended these findings to reactions toward the observer perspective. Specifically, our findings revealed that when confronted with injustice befalling on another person, people will become avoidance motivated, which enhances negative reactions and suppresses support and help. People with an approach motivation seem to stand up against unjust treatment of others and support them more.

At first glance, our results might seem to contradict reactive approach motivation (RAM; McGregor, Nash, Mann, & Phillips, 2010; McGregor, Prentice, & Nash, 2009). This model proposes that when people are confronted with a worldview threat an approach motivation is activated. In contrast, our results of Study 4.1 showed that people become more avoidance motivated following a confrontation with an innocent victim. These seemingly contradictory findings can be

reconciled by looking at the focus of the motivational orientation. That is, in our study the avoidance motivation was specifically directed at the victim. Moreover, RAM proposes that people will become motivated to vigorously approach viable alternatives. Thus, while people may avoid the threat, they will approach other belief systems to feel better. Hence, our findings actually fit well with the predictions put forward by RAM and extend their findings by focusing on the worldview that is threatened as opposed to different belief systems.

In closing, our results revealed that people generally become avoidance motivated when confronted with innocent victims and that when avoidance motivated, people react more negatively toward victims of injustice as a way of dealing with the threat to their belief in a just world. Moreover, an approach motivation makes more benevolent reactions possible, leading to increased support and decreased blaming of these victims. It thus seems that people deal with a symbolic worldview threat in much the same way as a physical threat. In contemporary society, where people are frequently confronted with symbolic threats, it is important to study the ways in which people can deal with these threats. Our research revealed that inducing an approach motivation might be a viable way of transforming victim blaming in helping of innocent victims following a confrontation with injustice.

Footnotes

- 1) In a pilot test, pictures of both stimulus persons were found to be equally attractive, nice, likable, and positive, $F(1, 19) = 2.62, p > .12, \eta_p^2 = .12$. This suggests that the victim and the control person were comparable on these dimensions of person perception.
- 2) In all studies, including gender in our analyses had no significant effects on any of the variables analyzed. We therefore dropped gender from the analyses reported.
- 3) A total of 81 participants (34 men and 47 women) took part in Study 4.2. Two participants were excluded from analyses because of missing values; 10 due to prior knowledge of the film clip of Linda; 4 because they indicated that they had not complied with the instructions of the motivational orientation manipulation; and 3 because they had Cook's distance (1977) scores more than 3 *SDs* above the mean in the main analyses (Cohen et al., 2003). This resulted in an effective sample of 62 participants.
- 4) Separate analyses for blaming and derogation yielded comparable results.
- 5) As the design of Study 4.1 included two within-subjects factors, we could not conduct a least significant difference test for multiple comparisons between means in that study.
- 6) In this study we also assessed physical distancing. Specifically, after the film clip, participants was told that the experiment would continue in a different room. The researcher escorted the participants to this room and explained that they would now meet the victim. When entering the room, participants saw a row of eight empty chairs. On the right-hand chair a coat and bag were placed. The researcher explained that these items belonged to the victim, but that she had just left to go to the toilet. Participants were instructed to take place on one of the chairs and wait for Linda. In the meantime they could fill out the blaming and derogation questionnaire. The participants sat down and the researcher left the room. The chair in which the participant sat down constituted our measure of physical distance, measured on a 7-point scale (1 = *closest to the victim*, 7

= *furthest from the victim*). A 2 (Motivation) x 2 (BJW threat) ANOVA on seating distance revealed one statistically significant effect only. That is, a significant main effect of BJW threat showed that participants sat closer to the proximal victim ($M = 2.09, SD = 0.73$) as opposed to the distal victim ($M = 2.70, SD = 0.75$), $F(1, 58) = 7.05, p < .01, \eta_p^2 = .11$. That these findings are less strong than the findings on negative victim evaluations could be explained by the fact that keeping your distance might be a way of showing respect to the victims as well as not wanting to come close to them. Conversely, sitting close to the victim could be interpreted as a way of comforting the victim. So, when approach motivated, people might be looking for a way to help the victim and therefore choose to sit closer to him or her. More research to sort out the specific the relationship between seating distance and avoidance and approach motivation seems warranted.

- 7) A total of 128 participants (39 men and 89 women) took part in Study 4.3. Fourteen participants were excluded due to prior knowledge of the film clip of Linda; 6 because they indicated that they had not complied with the instructions of the motivational orientation manipulation; and 4 because they had Cook's distance (1977) scores more than 3 *SDs* above the mean in the main analyses (Cohen et al., 2003). This resulted in an effective sample of 104 participants.
- 8) We also conducted logistic regression with participants' choice to leave or not to leave a message as dependent variable. A test of the model with BJW threat, motivation (with the control condition as reference category) and the interaction was significantly better than the constant only model, $\chi^2 (df = 5) = 11.73, p < .04$, Nagelkerke $R^2 = .14$. This analysis yielded a marginally significant BJW x Motivation effect, $p < .07$. Importantly, in correspondence with the number of words used, the effect of the BJW manipulation was significant in the avoidance condition, $\beta = -2.22, p < .04$, but not in the approach condition, $\beta = -0.17, p > .86$.
- 9) We tested for heterogeneity of variance in all studies. Results of these tests were not significant, indicating homogeneity of variance.

Self-focus vs. Other-focus

This chapter is based on:

Bal, M., & Van den Bos, K. (2013). *Putting the “I” and “us” in justice: Divergent reactions toward innocent victims in self-focused and other-focused individuals*. Manuscript submitted for publication.

Abstract

Reactions toward innocent victims can range from harsh derogatory reactions to great effort to alleviate the victims' ill fates. The negative reactions tend to originate from people's desire to protect their belief in a just world (BJW). But what could explain the often observed benevolent reactions? Using insights from research on human social values, the current paper investigates the divergent reactions toward innocent victims. Specifically, we propose that self-focused versus other-focused motives can evoke derogatory versus more benevolent reactions respectively toward innocent victims. By manipulating social value orientation in Study 5.1 and self-focus versus other-focus in Studies 5.2 and 5.3, we indeed show that a self-focus enhanced victim blaming and derogation and decreased helping of innocent victims. Furthermore, when focused on another person these effects attenuated. Taken together, these findings show that both blaming and helping can be viable strategies to deal with unjust situations.

Keywords: social values, self-focus vs. other-focus, belief in just world threats, victim blaming and derogation, helping

Imagine that, while having your breakfast on a Saturday morning, you read in the newspaper that a fellow student or colleague of yours got into a severe accident. That is, while cycling home after an evening on the town, he got hit by a car on an unsafe crossing. In the accident, he suffered severe head trauma. Furthermore, because he has to go through intensive rehabilitation to re-obtain all his cognitive skills and his insurance will not pay for this he probably has to give up his dream of becoming a successful researcher. The university set up a fundraiser for his revalidation and you can help. What would you do? Would you spend time raising money for the victim? Or would you think “why was he so careless; everybody knows how dangerous that crossing is”? Or maybe even “he probably had one too many beers with his friends and did not pay attention at the crossing”?

When people are confronted with victims, whether it be individual cases or mass suffering, they often have to decide how to react. In the current research, we look at key variables that can influence the construal of the event, making either blaming or helping a more likely option to deal with the confrontation with an innocent victim. That is, building on and extending earlier theorizing, we propose that an innocent victim can arouse empathic feelings, because they have been treated unjustly, but that victims may also evoke fear in people of a similar ill fate bestowing on them and, as such, elicit feelings of threat (Gilligan, 1986; Lerner, 1980; Lerner, Miller, & Holmes, 1976). We put forward that these different reactions to the unjust event could be induced by different social values that people can adhere to (e.g., Van Lange, 1999).

Social Values

The idea that humans are self-focused is pervasive in many fields of science, such as economics and law (Walster, Berscheid & Walster, 1973). According to this perspective, people are self-interested rational beings who weigh costs and benefits in hopefully rational manners to arrive at a decision. And indeed, in many situations people are self-interested. This *homo economicus* view of mankind, however, cannot explain all human behavior and every decision that people make. That is, people sometimes make decisions that are clearly not self-interested, but that are more focused on others and on gaining a positive outcome for others as well, at times even at personal costs (Batson, 1998). Feeling valued and respected by other people and important groups fulfill core human needs (e.g., Baumeister & Leary, 1995). This other-oriented perspective is substantiated by the facts that people are social animals (Aronson, 1999; De Waal, 1996) and that humans live in groups where they need social contact and depend on others for certain goods and services (Baumeister & Leary, 1996; Martin, 1999). This *homo socialis* view of mankind complements the well-known *homo economicus* view and underscores the other-oriented focus of human nature.

In line with the proposed differences between self- and other-orientations, many influential social psychological theories make a distinction between self-focused and more other-focused needs or values (e.g., Baumeister & Leary, 1995; Deci & Ryan, 2000; Fiske, Cuddy, & Glick, 2007; Van Lange, Otten, De Bruin, & Joireman, 1997). Most of the mentioned theories assume that people have a predisposition to either be more self- or other-focused, but that situational influences can shift people's focus toward stronger self-orientations or toward other-orientations (e.g., Brucks & Van Lange, 2007; Van Lange, 1999). Notably,

research shows that people are either cooperative in interactions with others (i.e., prosocial) or that they are more focused on maximizing their own outcomes (i.e., proself; Van Lange, 1999). Specifically, three social value orientations can be distinguished; a prosocial orientation which is focused on cooperation; an individualistic orientation in which people strive to maximize outcomes with little or no regard for others; and a competitive orientation in which people strive to maximize relative advantage compared to others (Van Lange, 1999; Van Lange et al., 1997). We argue that an important field in which these different focuses could influence decisions people make is just-world theory.

Just-World Theory

Just-world theory (Lerner, 1977, 1980) is a seminal theory that aims to explain the paradoxical negative reactions people sometimes have toward innocent victims of injustice. In this theory it is argued that people have a fundamental need to believe that the world is a just place; a place in which good things happen to good people and bad things happen to bad people. This belief in a just world (BJW) enables people to strive for long-term goals with often uncertain outcomes (Bal & Van den Bos, 2012; Hafer, 2000a). That is, if people can have faith that everyone gets what they deserve and, hence, that their efforts will pay off in the end, they are able to deal with the uncertainty that is associated with investing in long-term goals (Bal & Van den Bos, 2012).

When people observe an innocent victim, they are confronted with the fact that the world in reality is not just. Thus, an innocent victim poses a threat to people's just-world belief. Victim blaming and derogation have been shown to relieve a BJW threat as the victims become deserving of their ill fate (e.g., Hafer, 2000b; Hafer & Bègue, 2005). This explains why victim blaming and derogation is enhanced

when the victims are innocent or when they are similar to the observer (Bal & Van den Bos, 2010; Correia, Vala, & Aguiar, 2001, 2007; Hafer, 2000b). Just-world theory can explain these counterintuitive findings, because an innocent or similar victim (as opposed to a non-innocent or dissimilar victim) will pose a greater BJW threat and heighten the fear that a similar ill fate might bestow on the observer. Hence, innocent or similar victims will evoke stronger reactions to cope with the BJW threat (Lerner, 1980; Hafer, 2000a).

In the real world we do not only see derogatory reactions when people are confronted with innocent suffering. In contrast, people sometimes go to great lengths to help or support those in need, for instance by donating money and time to alleviate the victims' suffering or taking a stand against injustice. These benevolent reactions were part of just-world theory at its introduction (Lerner, 1980; Lerner & Simmons, 1966). That is, Lerner (1980) proposed restitution as a possible strategy to resolve BJW threats. Yet, since the introduction of just-world theory, most research has focused on the paradoxical negative reactions toward innocent victims (for an overview, see Hafer & Bègue, 2005). Benevolent reactions have only received minor attention in research on just-world theory, with a few notable exceptions (see, e.g., Bègue, Charmoillaux, Cochet, Cury, & De Suremain, 2008; DePalma, Madey, Tillman, & Wheeler, 1999; Kogut, 2011). These studies have focused largely on individual differences in just-world beliefs to explain differences in helping and did not manipulate BJW threats nor focused on underlying processes that drive reactions to these threats.

In the current line of research, we aim to complement the existing body of literature by focusing on key social psychological moderators that can be hypothesized to influence the negative as well

as positive reactions toward victims of injustice. That is, we investigate whether differences in the construal of the unjust event in either a more self-focused or other-focused way can make blaming of innocent victims or an effort to help these victims a more likely strategy to resolve the injustice. In the following section we will further explain why we think these different focuses could influence reactions toward innocent victims.

Self-Focus vs. Other-Focus

Research on perspective taking lends support for the idea that a self-focus versus an other-focus can evoke diverging interpretations of a specific event. That is, studies have shown that in perspective taking it is important to distinguish between placing yourself in the other person's shoes (imagine-self) and a more detached imagining how the other feels (imagine-other; e.g., Batson, Early, & Salvarini, 1997; Lamm, Batson, & Decety, 2007). In the study conducted by Batson and colleagues (1997), participants in the imagine-self condition were asked to imagine how a similar situation would be for them (self-focus), whereas they imagined how the other must feel in the imagine-other condition (other-focus). While the former enhanced feelings of distress primarily, the latter also enhanced feelings of empathic concern. How the distinction between self-focused and other-focused construals of events relates to people's benevolent and derogatory reactions toward innocent victims of injustice will be investigated in the current research.

Some studies on derogatory reactions toward innocent victims assumed, but did not test directly, that a self-focus or an other-focus could underlie victim blaming. Specifically, the role of the self in negative reactions toward innocent victims has received some attention in research on self-regulation and the BJW. For example, Loseman and

Van den Bos (2012) argued that a victim enhances aversive thoughts and emotions, because it poses a self-threat. Hence, they suggested that people will be primarily focused on the consequences of a BJW threat for the self when blaming an innocent victim. Other studies showed that mimicking reduced victim blaming, regardless of whether people mimicked the person who they later learned was victimized or a different person. For instance, Stel, Van den Bos, and Bal (2012) suggested that mimicking might put people in a general other-oriented mindset. In the current line of research, we will directly manipulate a self-focus and an other-focus and examine the effects of these manipulations on both victim blaming and victim helping.

In studying the role of a self- vs. an other-focus in reactions to unjust suffering, it is important to distinguish between the construal of the *situation* and *self*-construal. Self-construal refers to whether people describe *themselves* in terms of group membership or in terms of individual qualities. A self-focused versus and other-focused construal of the situation refers to whether people construe a certain *situation* by focusing on personal consequences (i.e., a self-focus) or by taking into account other people's feelings, consequences and outcomes (i.e., an other-focus). Put differently, whereas the former explains differences in how people see themselves, the latter focuses on differences in how people construe the world around them.

In their research on self-construal, Van Prooijen and Van den Bos (2009) showed that people with an interdependent self-construal tend to blame innocent victims more than people with an independent self-construal. According to the researchers, these differences can be explained by the fact that an interdependent self-construal leads to assimilation with others, and, hence, with the victim. They argue that seeing the victim as part of yourself enhances the experienced BJW

threat as it heightens the fear of a similar ill fate bestowing on the observer. In support of the authors' predictions, interdependent self-construal led to increased victim blaming. Importantly, these findings fit with our proposed line of reasoning that a self-focus might enhance the tendency to blame a victim because of a construal of the situation in terms of personal consequences (i.e., a self-focus).

Taken together, the studies reviewed are in line with our proposed line of reasoning and lend some indirect support for the proposition that a self-focus might enhance (Loseman & Van den Bos, 2012; Van Prooijen & Van den Bos, 2009) and an other-focus might reduce derogatory reactions toward innocent victims of injustice (Stel, Van den Bos, & Bal, 2012). However, this assumption has not been tested directly. Moreover, these studies did not examine whether a self-focus and an other-focus are related toward helping of innocent victims, as our line of reasoning predicts. Hence, we contribute to the existing body of research in at least two important ways. First, we focus on reactions toward victims of injustice instead of experienced feelings of distress and concern (Studies 5.1 to 5.3). Second, we investigate not only derogatory reactions toward innocent victims, but also include a measure of helping behavior (Study 5.3).

The Current Research

In three studies, we set out to investigate the influence of adopting a self- vs. an other-focus on the diverging behavioral reactions toward innocent victims of injustice. We propose that a self-focus will enhance derogatory reactions toward innocent victims and suppress helping of the victims involved. We further propose that an other-focus will decrease derogatory reactions toward innocent victims and enhance helping of the victims involved. Consistent with earlier studies

(e.g., Bal & Van den Bos, 2012, Hafer, 2000b, Loseman & Van den Bos, 2012; Van den Bos & Maas, 2009; Van Prooijen & Van den Bos, 2009), we expect to find these effects following a high BJW threat.

In Study 5.1 we tested these predictions by manipulating social value orientation (Van Lange, 1999). Whereas it might be argued that social value orientation serves as a proxy for a self- vs. other-focus only, in Studies 5.2 and 5.3 we directly induced a self- or an other-focus and investigated both negative (Study 5.2) and positive reactions (Study 5.3) toward innocent victims of injustice. In Studies 5.2 and 5.3, we also included a neutral control condition to establish whether people normally adopt a self- or an other-focus when confronted with an unjust situation. In this condition we did not manipulate focus. By comparing the results from this control condition to the self-focus and other-focus conditions, we gain insight into how people generally react toward innocent victims and thus how we should interpret the effects obtained in the self- and other-focused conditions.

Study 5.1

In Study 5.1 we examined whether social value orientation (SVO) influences people's reactions toward innocent victims of injustice. For this purpose we manipulated social value orientation using a scrambled sentences task. In an ostensibly unrelated study, participants were confronted with a rape victim. To induce a high or low BJW threat we manipulated whether crime proximity was distal or proximal. Lerner and Miller (1978) stated that "as events become closer to [people's] world ... the concern over injustices increases greatly, as does the need to explain or make sense of the events" (p. 1031). Hence, a proximal victim will constitute a greater BJW threat than a distal victim (e.g., Bal & Van den Bos, 2010, 2012; Correia, Vala, & Aguiar, 2001, 2007).

Subsequently, victim blaming and victim derogation were measured with a questionnaire successfully used in earlier research (Bal & Van den Bos, 2010, 2012).

While a distinction can be made between three social value orientations, oftentimes a prosocial orientation is contrasted with a proself orientation, which encompasses both an individualistic and a competitive orientation (e.g., Van den Bos et al., 2011; Van Dijk, DeCremer, & Handgraaf, 2004; Van Lange & Liebrand, 1991). Proselfs are said to be concerned mainly with self-interest and gaining a maximum outcome for themselves. Prosocials, on the other hand, are said to be concerned with attaining an equal division of outcomes between themselves and others (Van Lange, 1999). Therefore, one might expect that a proself orientation, being more egocentric, would more likely lead to negative reactions toward innocent victims of injustice. In contrast, a prosocial orientation would lead to less victim blaming, because of the other-focus that characterizes this social value orientation. We refer to this hypothesis as the *prosocial/proself hypothesis*.

Alternatively, one could argue that the individualistic orientation is the only social value orientation that is truly self-focused. That is, in a prosocial orientation, people aim to make an equal division between themselves and *others*. In a competitive orientation, people aim to acquire the greatest relative advantage over *others*. In contrast, in an individualistic orientation, people want to gain as much as possible, without taking into account what others are getting (Van Lange, 1999). Hence, according to this view, only in an individualistic orientation others are disregarded completely. Therefore, one might expect that an individualistic orientation, where others are not taken into account in the construal of events, would lead to more derogatory reactions

toward an innocent victim than a prosocial or a competitive orientation. We refer to this hypothesis as the *individualistic/other-focused hypothesis*.

So, according to the *prosocial/proself hypothesis* people would blame and derogate a victim *less* in the prosocial condition as opposed to the competitive and individualistic conditions. According to the *individualistic/other-focused hypothesis* people would blame and derogate a victim *more* in the individualistic condition as opposed to the prosocial and individualistic conditions. In both hypotheses, effects were expected to occur especially under a high BJW threat, so when participants were confronted with a proximal victim.

Method

Participants and Design. 115 students (28 men and 87 women) participated in Study 5.1.¹ Their ages ranged from 18 to 37 years ($M = 22.07$, $SD = 3.82$). The study had a 3 (SVO: prosocial vs. individualistic vs. competitive) x 2 (BJW threat: high vs. low) design. Between 18 and 20 participants took part in each of the six conditions.

Procedure and Materials. The researchers approached students at different campus restaurants and asked whether they wanted to fill out a short questionnaire. When students were willing to participate, a questionnaire was handed to them and the researchers continued to approach other potential participants. After about 15 minutes the researchers came back to collect the questionnaire and participants were thanked and debriefed. The study started with a scrambled sentences task, in which SVO was manipulated. Subsequently, participants read a short story about a rape and negative reactions toward the victim were measured. The experiment ended with some demographical questions.

SVO manipulation. Participants completed a scrambled sentences task (Srull & Wyer, 1979) consisting of 8 to-be-completed sentences. A similar task has been used in earlier research (Van den Bos et al., 2011) to induce a "proself" mindset (i.e., the individualistic and competitive orientation combined). We adapted this task to create three social value orientation conditions. In the prosocial mindset condition, the sentences to be constructed described other-related behavior pertaining to cooperation (e.g., "I like doing something for others"). In the individualistic mindset condition, the sentences described self-related behavior pertaining to assertiveness and personal responsibility (e.g., "I am responsible for my future"). In the competitive mindset condition, the sentences described behavior pertaining to competition and winning (e.g., "Taking out the competition is fun").

BJW threat. In an ostensibly unrelated experiment, participants read a scenario about a woman (Simone), who was raped after a night on the town. In the scenario, it was explained that Simone went to a pub with some friends. As she needed to study for an exam, she decided to go home early by herself. On her way home, she noticed that someone was following her. When she arrived at a dark and quiet part of the road, her follower overtook her and dragged her off her bike. He raped her and left. As Simone was unable to describe her perpetrator to the police, he has not been caught. To induce a high or low BJW threat, crime proximity was manipulated (see Bal & Van den Bos, 2010, Study 2; 2012, Study 3). In the high threat condition, Simone was a fellow Utrecht University student. In the low threat condition, Simone was a Groningen University student.

Negative reactions. Following the scenario, participants rated to which degree the victim could be blamed for what happened to her with the 9-item scale of victim blaming ($\alpha = .86$) developed by Bal and

Van den Bos (2010). An example of such an item was: "I think Simone acted irresponsibly, considering the situation she was in." Furthermore, the 10-item scale of victim derogation developed by Bal and Van den Bos (2010) measured to what degree the victim was derogated for what had happened to her ($\alpha = .82$). An example of such an item was: "I think Simone deserved what happened to her." Answers were measured on a 7-point Likert-type scale (1 = *totally disagree*, 7 = *totally agree*). In accordance with earlier studies (Bal & Van den Bos, 2012), blaming and derogation were significantly correlated, $r = .76$, $p < .01$, and therefore scores were collapsed to form an overall negative evaluation measure ($\alpha = .91$).²

Results

A 3 (SVO) \times 2 (BJW threat) ANOVA on negative evaluation revealed a main effect of SVO, $F(2, 109) = 3.51$, $p < .04$, $\eta_p^2 = .06$.³ Participants in the individualistic condition ($M = 2.31$, $SD = 0.93$) evaluated the victim more negatively than participants in the competitive condition ($M = 1.62$, $SD = 0.65$), $p < .01$. The prosocial condition ($M = 1.64$, $SD = 0.50$) did not differ from the other two conditions, $ps > .18$. This effect was qualified by a significant interaction between SVO and BJW threat, $F(2, 109) = 3.60$, $p < .04$, $\eta_p^2 = .06$. As can be seen in Table 5.1, statistically significant effects of the SVO manipulation were found in the high BJW threat condition, $F(2, 109) = 5.59$, $p < .01$, $\eta_p^2 = .09$, and not in the low BJW threat condition, $F(2, 109) = 1.60$, $p > .20$, $\eta_p^2 = .03$. To interpret these effects, we performed a least significant difference test for multiple comparisons between means ($p < .05$), with the six cells of our design serving as the independent variable (Kirk, 1982). Table 5.1 shows the results of this test as well as the means and standard deviations of the negative victim evaluations. In line with the *individualistic/other-focused* hypothesis,

Table 5.1. *Negative evaluation of the victim as a function of SVO and BJW threat (Study 5.1)*

	Individualistic		Competitive		Prosocial	
	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
High threat	2.31 _a	0.93	1.62 _c	0.65	1.64 _c	0.51
Low threat	1.89 _{a,c}	0.71	1.69 _{b,c}	0.69	2.11 _{a,b}	0.82

Note. Means with no subscripts in common differ significantly ($p < .05$), as indicated by a least significant difference test for multiple comparisons between means (Kirk, 1982).

under a high BJW threat participants with an individualistic orientation evaluated the victim more negatively than participants with a prosocial orientation or a competitive orientation. The competitive condition did not differ from the prosocial condition.

Additionally, the least significant difference test for multiple comparisons between means revealed that in the prosocial condition participants evaluated the proximal victim significantly less negatively than the distal victim. In the individualistic condition, an opposite effect was found, albeit marginally, such that participants tended to evaluate the proximal victim somewhat more negatively than the distal victim, $p < .08$. No difference was found in the competitive condition.

Discussion

The results of Study 5.1 show that social value orientation indeed influenced how people react toward innocent victims of injustice. In the high BJW threat condition, participants in the individualistic condition blamed and derogated an innocent victim more than participants in either the prosocial or competitive conditions. Furthermore, people in the individualistic condition tended to react more negatively toward a proximal as opposed to a distal victim, replicating earlier findings on victim blaming and derogation (e.g., Bal &

Van den Bos, 2010, 2012; Correia et al., 2001; Hafer, 2000a, 2000b; Van Prooijen & Van den Bos, 2009). An opposite effect was found for people in the prosocial condition, such that they blamed and derogated a proximal victim less than a distal victim. For people in the competitive condition, there was no significant effect of the BJW threat manipulation.

Our results suggest that especially the individualistic value orientation deviates from the prosocial and competitive value orientation, as people with an individualistic orientation blamed and derogated the proximal victim more than people with either a prosocial or a competitive orientation. These effects are in line with the *individualistic/other-focused hypothesis*. If this hypothesis would be true, then while both the individualistic and competitive orientations are termed proself orientations, only the individualistic orientation seems to be truly self-focused and others are completely disregarded. Of course, these findings should be replicated in future studies to substantiate this observation. For now, we conclude that the distinction between a self-focus and an other-focus might be an important notion that differentiates in meaningful ways effects of social value orientations on reactions to innocent victims. The aim of Studies 5.2 and 5.3 was to directly test the hypothesis that a self-focus enhances victim blaming and derogation and attenuates positive reactions, while an other-focus decreases victim blaming and derogation and enhances helping of the victim.

Study 5.2

In Study 5.2 we focused on negative reactions toward innocent victims and examined whether a self-focus as opposed to an other-focus would enhance victim blaming and derogation. We manipulated focus

by asking participants to think back to and describe a situation in which they were either self-focused or other-focused. Following this manipulation, participants read a newspaper article about an accident, after which we measured victim blaming and derogation in a subtle manner that may be reflective of how people ascribe responsibility to the victim in the real world. That is, we asked participants to estimate how much alcohol they thought the victim had drunk before the accident. To induce a high or low BJW threat we again manipulated whether the crime was distal or proximal.

We predicted that a self-focus would lead to more negative reactions toward the victim (i.e., more alcohol consumed by the victim) than an other-focus. This effect was expected to occur especially under a high BJW threat, so when participants were confronted with a proximal as opposed to a distal victim. To establish whether people normally react from a self- or an other-focus perspective when confronted with an unjust situation, we also included a neutral control condition in Study 5.2 in which we did not manipulate focus.

Method

Participants and Design. 170 students (71 men and 99 women) participated in this study.⁴ Their ages ranged from 18 to 34 years ($M = 21.33$, $SD = 2.02$). The study had a 3 (Focus: self vs. other vs. control) x 2 (BJW threat: high vs. low) design. Between 25 and 31 participants took part in each of the six conditions.

Procedure and Materials. The researchers approached students at different campus restaurants and asked whether they wanted to fill out a short questionnaire. When students were willing to participate, a questionnaire was handed to them and the researchers continued to approach other potential participants. After about 15 minutes the researchers came back to collect the questionnaire and participants

were thanked and debriefed. The study started with our focus manipulation. Subsequently, participants read a newspaper article about an accident and negative reactions toward the victim were measured. The experiment ended with some demographical questions.

Focus manipulation. In the other-focused condition, participants were asked to think of a situation in which they were focused on another person and to describe that situation in detail. This was followed by three open-ended questions. (1) "Please describe, as specifically as possible, how that person acted in the situation." (2) "Please describe what feelings you think this other person had in that situation." (3) "Please describe what you think the other person thought in that situation." In the self-focused condition, participants were asked to think of a situation in which they were focused on themselves and to describe that situation in detail. This was followed by three open-ended questions. (1) "Please describe, as specifically as possible, how you acted in the situation." (2) "Please describe what feelings you had in that situation." (3) "Please describe what you thought in that situation." In the control condition, no such questions were asked. Similar salience manipulations have been used to induce other mindsets (see, e.g., Greenberg, Solomon, & Pyszczynski, 1997; Van den Bos, 2001; Van Prooijen, Van den Bos, & Wilke, 2002).

BJW threat. In an ostensibly unrelated experiment, participants read a newspaper article about Thomas Weijers (a typical Dutch name). Thomas had spent his evening with friends, but decided to go home early at 2 a.m. and left by himself. When he was cycling home, he got hit by a car on a dangerous crossing. Thomas loses consciousness and wakes up in the hospital. He suffered a severe head injury and became paralyzed from the waist down because of this accident. The driver of the car did not stop after hitting Thomas and was therefore not caught.

To induce a high or low BJW threat, proximity was manipulated (cf. Bal & Van den Bos, 2010, 2012). In the high threat condition, Thomas was a Utrecht University student and the accident happened in Utrecht. In the low threat condition, Thomas was a Groningen University student and the accident took place in Groningen.

Indirect negative reactions. After a filler questionnaire (Bal & Van den Bos, 2010) and along with some filler questions about the article, participants were asked how much alcohol they thought the victim had drunk before he got in the accident. This was not explicitly mentioned in the newspaper article. Alcohol intoxication indicates that the victim was (partially) to blame for the accident according to the participants, so we took the amount of glasses of alcohol participants' guessed Thomas had consumed as an indirect measure of participants' negative evaluation of the victim.

Results

A 3 (Focus) x 2 (BJW threat) ANOVA on glasses of alcohol revealed a significant main effect of BJW threat, $F(1, 164) = 5.09, p < .03, \eta_p^2 = .03$. This effect was qualified by a two-way interaction between focus and BJW threat, $F(2, 164) = 3.57, p < .03, \eta_p^2 = .04$. As can be seen in Table 5.2, statistically significant effects of the focus manipulation were found in the high BJW threat condition, $F(2, 164) = 3.70, p < .03, \eta_p^2 = .04$, and not in the low BJW threat condition, $F(2, 164) = 0.90, p > .41, \eta_p^2 = .01$. To interpret these effects we performed a least significant difference test for multiple comparisons between means ($p < .05$), with the six cells of our design serving as the independent variable. Table 5.2 shows the results of this test as well as the means and standard deviations of the negative victim evaluations. As hypothesized, under a high BJW threat self-focused participants

Table 5.2. *Participants' estimates of glasses of alcohol drank by the victim as a function of focus and BJW threat (Study 5.2)*

	Control		Self		Other	
	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
High threat	4.17 _a	2.37	4.59 _a	2.89	2.84 _b	2.35
Low threat	2.50 _b	2.33	2.92 _b	3.38	3.44 _{a,b}	2.36

Note. Means with no subscripts in common differ significantly ($p < .05$), as indicated by a least significant difference test for multiple comparisons between means (Kirk, 1982).

evaluated the victim more negatively than participants with an other-focus. Furthermore, participants in the control condition also evaluated the victim more negatively than other-focused participants. The control condition did not differ from the self-focus condition.

Additionally, the least significant difference test revealed that, when focused on themselves, participants thought that the proximal victim had drunk more than the distal victim. In the control condition, participants also indicated that the proximal victim drank more glasses of alcohol than the distal victim. When focused on another person, this effect attenuated and was not statistically significant.⁵

Discussion

The results of Study 5.2 revealed that self-focused people blamed the proximal victim more for what happened to him than other-focused people, indicated by the amount of alcohol they estimated the victim to have consumed before the accident. Moreover, this effect was particularly pronounced following a high BJW threat as opposed to a low BJW threat, replicating earlier findings on victim blaming and derogation (e.g., Bal & Van den Bos, 2010; 2012; Correia et al., 2001; Hafer, 2000a; 2000b; Van Prooijen & Van den Bos, 2009). In the control condition, people also indicated that the victim drank more alcohol

following a high BJW threat as opposed to a low BJW threat. This effect attenuated in the other-focused condition. As such, the control condition seemed to mirror the self-focused condition, indicating that a self-focus might be the default when confronted with an innocent victim.

We would like to emphasize that the newspaper article was presented as an unrelated study. As such, participants could not take the victim's perspective in the focus manipulation. Moreover, many situations participants described in the other-focus condition had nothing to do with taking an other's perspective (e.g., listening to a lecturer). In our view, an other-focused construal of the world around you could encompass, but does not exclusively entail, taking an other's perspective. This other-focus will open up more benign ways of dealing with a confrontation with an innocent victim. In Study 5.2 we found that derogatory reactions toward victims were reduced in the other-focus condition as opposed to the self-focus condition. In Study 5.3 we focus on victim helping as a reaction toward innocent suffering.

Study 5.3

In Study 5.3 we focused on positive reactions toward innocent victims and examined whether an other-focus as opposed to a self-focus would enhance helping of innocent victims. The experimental set-up was largely similar to Study 5.2 in that we used the same focus manipulation and victim scenario. However, in Study 5.3 we measured positive reactions following the confrontation with an innocent victim. That is, participants could help the victim by raising money for his rehabilitation.

We expected that an other-focus would lead to more help for the victim (i.e., spending more time raising money) than a self-focus.

This effect was expected to occur especially under a high BJW threat, so when participants were confronted with a proximal as opposed to a distal victim. As in Study 5.2, we also included a neutral control condition, in which we did not manipulate focus, to obtain additional evidence about how people normally react to innocent victims from a self-focused or an other-focused perspective.

Method

Participants and Design. 137 students (70 men and 67 women) participated.⁶ Their ages ranged from 17 to 43 years ($M = 21.33$, $SD = 3.00$). The study had a 3 (Focus: self vs. other vs. control) x 2 (BJW threat: high vs. low) design. Between 20 and 27 participants took part in each of the six conditions.

Procedure and Materials. Participants were invited to take part in this study with flyers posted at different locations on the campus. Upon arrival in the laboratory, participants were seated behind a computer in individual cubicles. The study started with our focus manipulation. Subsequently, participants read the newspaper article used in Study 5.2. Following this, participants were asked to volunteer some time to help the victim by making sums to raise money. The experiment was programmed on the computer from start to finish.

Focus manipulation. The focus manipulation was the same as in Study 5.2.

BJW threat. BJW threat was manipulated through using the same newspaper article as in Study 5.2.

Helping the victim. After reading the newspaper article, participants learned that the victim suffered severe neurological damage, because of the accident. Without help from a personal study coach he would therefore not be able to finish his study. Participants could voluntarily help the victim and raise money for a personal study

coach by making sums. This procedure was based on Freerice.com, a website hosted by the United Nations World Food Programme that provides rice to hungry people. On the website you can answer trivia questions in several categories and earn rice grains for each correct answer. The rice that you earned is donated to the World Food Programme. We programmed a similar paradigm for our experiment, which was focused on helping Thomas by raising money for a personal study coach. Participants were asked to answer sums of increasing difficulty ranging from simple additions and subtractions (e.g., $5 + 8$) to multiple divisions and multiplications (e.g., $9 \times 7 \times 3$). For each set of two correct answers, participants raised € 0.05 for Thomas. Participants could spend as much time as they wanted on answering the sums with a maximum number of 200 sums. They could opt to stop throughout the task by clicking a button that remained on the screen during the task. Money raised in euros and time spent on the sums in milliseconds constituted our main dependent variables.

Results

Time spent on the sums. As scores on this variable were skewed to the right, we performed a log-transformation on the scores before analyzing the data. For ease of interpretation, untransformed means and standard deviations are presented. A 3 (Focus) \times 2 (BJW threat) ANOVA on time spent on the sums revealed a marginally significant main effect of BJW threat, $F(1, 131) = 3.20, p < .08, \eta_p^2 = .02$. This effect was qualified by a significant two-way interaction between focus and BJW threat, $F(2, 131) = 5.30, p < .01, \eta_p^2 = .08$. As can be seen in Table 5.3, statistically significant effects of the focus were found in the high BJW threat condition, $F(2, 131) = 6.63, p < .01, \eta_p^2 = .09$, and not in the low BJW threat condition, $F(2, 131) = 0.76, p > .47, \eta_p^2 = .01$. To interpret these effects we performed a least significant difference test

Table 5.3. *Time spent on the sums as a function of focus and BJW threat (Study 5.3)*

	Control		Self		Other	
	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
High threat	199.20 _a	176.31	174.39 _b	204.83	265.50 _a	173.84
Low threat	253.45 _a	161.52	241.33 _a	178.64	214.79 _a	189.20

Note. Means with no subscripts in common differ significantly ($p < .05$), as indicated by a least significant difference test for multiple comparisons between means (Kirk, 1982).

for multiple comparisons between means ($p < .05$), with the six cells of our design serving as the independent variable. Table 5.3 shows the results of this test as well as the means and standard deviations of the time spent on the sums. As hypothesized, under a high BJW threat self-focused participants spent less time on making sums than participants with an other-focus.

Additionally, the least significant difference test revealed that, when focused on themselves, participants spent less time making sums for the proximal victim as opposed to the distal victim. The effects of BJW threat in the other two focus conditions were not significant, $ps > .18$.

Money raised. For the amount of money raised for the victim, the effects were comparable to time spent on helping the innocent victim, although they were less strong. A 3 (Focus) \times 2 (BJW threat) ANOVA on money raised revealed a marginally significant main effect on BJW threat, $F(1, 131) = 3.73$, $p < .06$, $\eta_p^2 = .03$. This effect was qualified by a marginally significant two-way interaction of focus and BJW threat, $F(2, 131) = 2.62$, $p < .08$, $\eta_p^2 = .04$. As can be seen in Table 5.4, statistically significant effects of the focus were found in the high BJW threat

condition, $F(2, 131) = 3.46, p < .04, \eta_p^2 = .05$, and not in the low BJW threat condition, $F(2, 131) = 0.64, p > .52, \eta_p^2 = .01$. To interpret these effects we performed a least significant difference test for multiple comparisons between means ($p < .05$), with the six cells of our design serving as the independent variable. Table 5.4 shows the results of this test as well as the means and standard deviations of the negative victim evaluations. As hypothesized, under a high BJW threat self-focused participants raised less money for the victim than participants with an other-focus. Furthermore, participants in the control condition also raised less money for the victim than other-focused participants. There was no significant difference between the control condition and the self-focus condition.

Table 5.4. *Money raised for the victim as a function of focus and BJW threat (Study 5.3)*

	Control		Self		Other	
	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
High threat	1.10 _{a,b}	0.77	0.80 _b	0.81	1.38 _a	0.67
Low threat	1.48 _a	0.74	1.35 _a	0.71	1.22 _{a,b}	0.89

Note. Means with no subscripts in common differ significantly ($p < .05$), as indicated by a least significant difference test for multiple comparisons between means (Kirk, 1982).

Additionally, the least significant difference test revealed that, when focused on themselves, participants raised less money for the proximal victim as opposed to the distal victim. The effects of BJW threat in the other two focus conditions were not significant, $ps > .11$.

Discussion

The results of Study 5.3 indicate that other-focused people help a proximal victim more than self-focused people. Furthermore, self-

focused people help a high threat victim less than a low threat victim. These findings fit with the findings from Study 5.2 and earlier findings on negative reactions following a BJW threat. Self-focused people seem to blame an innocent victim more and help them less, when they pose a high BJW threat as opposed to a low BJW threat. This effect attenuated in the other-focused condition. In the other-focused condition people helped a victim more and blamed them less, regardless of BJW threat.

In the control condition of Study 5.3, participants seemed to help an innocent victim less under a high BJW threat as opposed to a low BJW threat, although these effects were not significant. As such, the control condition again seemed to more similar to the self-focused condition than to the other-focused condition. Together with the results of Study 5.2, this could indicate that people generally adopt a self-focus after being confronted with innocent victims of injustice. Under a high BJW threat though, the control condition of Study 5.3 seemed to fall in between the self-focused and the other-focused condition. Further studies into supportive reactions following a confrontation with an innocent victim are necessary to further disentangle these effects. Nevertheless, from both studies it is clear that self-focused people helped an innocent victim less than other-focused people, especially under a high BJW threat.

General Discussion

Coming back to the example with which we began our introduction: what would you do if you would read about the car accident victim? Would you spend time raising money for his rehabilitation? Or would you think, why was he so careless; everybody knows how dangerous that crossing is? Our results suggest that your focus – whether you view the situation from a self-focused or an other-

focused perspective – could influence whether you would be more inclined to help or blame the victim. That is, in three studies we found that a self-focus enhanced derogatory reactions (on measures of victim blaming and derogation and alcohol intake) and suppressed helping of the victim (on measures based on the Freerice game), whereas an other-focus enhanced helping and decreased derogatory reactions toward the victim, especially when the victim involved posed a high BJW threat.

Taken together, our studies complement the existing body of literature of just-world theory by studying both derogatory and benevolent reactions toward innocent victims of injustice (Lerner, 1977, 1980). When just-world theory was introduced, both victim blaming and derogation and helping were proposed as strategies to restore the belief in a just world after a confrontation with innocent victims (Lerner, 1980). Yet, benevolent reactions have only received minor attention in research on just-world theory up until now. Moreover, the scarce amount of studies that have been conducted focused largely on individual differences in just-world beliefs to explain differences in helping (e.g., Bègue et al., 2008; DePalma et al., 1999).

In Study 5.3, we manipulated BJW threat and examined the effects of this manipulation on helping behavior. According to just-world theory, people will first try to help or compensate the victim and only resort to the more negative derogatory strategies, when benevolent strategies are deemed futile, too costly or simply impossible (Lerner & Goldberg, 1999; Lerner et al., 1976). However, our studies suggest that people's spontaneous reaction could be self-focused, resulting in victim blaming and derogation. When people are other-focused, they will more likely try to help the victims involved.

Our results revealed that in both Studies 5.2 and 5.3 the control condition was more comparable to the self-focused condition than to the other-focused condition. Specifically, self-focused people indirectly blamed the victim more when he posed a high BJW threat as opposed to a low BJW threat in Study 5.2 and helped the high BJW threat victim less as opposed to the low BJW threat victim in Study 5.3. As such, these results replicated earlier findings on victim blaming and derogation (e.g., Bal & Van den Bos, 2010, 2012; Correia et al., 2001; Hafer, 2000a, 2000b; Van Prooijen & Van den Bos, 2009). These effects of more blaming and less helping of a victim who poses a high BJW threat as opposed to a low BJW threat were also present in the control condition, although they were less strong in that condition. These findings suggest that people might spontaneously adhere to a self-focus when confronted with innocent victims of injustice. Importantly, in the other-focused condition the effect attenuated. That is, under a high BJW threat, victims were blamed less and helped more when other-focused as opposed to self-focused.

The findings of our last two studies might also help explain the findings on social value orientation of Study 5.1. In the individualistic condition people blamed and derogated an innocent victim, who posed a high BJW threat, more than in both the competitive and prosocial condition. Hence, a high BJW threat might cause people to adhere to a more individualistic orientation. This proposition fits with the findings of Studies 5.2 and 5.3 which suggest that people spontaneously adopt a self-focus after being confronted with an innocent victim.

As an aside, in the prosocial condition of Study 5.1, people blamed and derogated an innocent proximal victim less than an innocent distal victim. This effect was not present in the competitive condition. A prosocial mindset might lead to an intergroup bias, in

which in-group members are favored over out-group members (Tajfel & Turner, 1979). This in-group/out-group distinction might not be salient in a competitive mindset. In Studies 5.2 and 5.3 similar patterns of less blaming of the proximal as opposed to the distal victim were present in the other-focused conditions, albeit insignificantly. So, an in-group/out-group distinction could be part of an other-focus and when this distinction is made salient, which is probably the case in the prosocial condition, an intergroup bias may follow. Future studies could use different BJW threat manipulations to further investigate the role of social identities in reactions toward innocent victims of injustice.

With regard to possible future studies, it is worthwhile to note that in Study 5.1, we adopted a mindset manipulation of social value orientation instead of the often used decomposed game technique in which individual differences are measured to assign individuals to one of the three categories (e.g., Van Lange et al., 1997). We believe that the advantage of using this mindset manipulation in our study are twofold. First, most people will usually be classified as prosocial individuals, using the decomposed game measure (e.g., Van Lange, 1999; Van Lange & Liebrand, 1991). By manipulating social value orientation, we ensured that all orientations were represented in our sample. Second, as we were no longer measuring outcome-related constructs as our dependent variable, but focused on reactions toward innocent victims of injustice, a departure from the decomposed game measure seemed appropriate. Other studies have successfully used a similar mindset manipulation of social value orientation using a scrambled sentences task (e.g., Van den Bos et al., 2011), but they only made a distinction between a prosocial and a proself orientation. To our knowledge, the manipulation we developed is the first to experimentally distinguish between all three value orientations.

We proposed that a self-focus would elicit feelings of threat following a confrontation with an innocent victim, whereas an other-focus would elicit feelings of concern for the victim (cf. Lamm et al., 2007; Lerner et al., 1976). These different interpretations of the event would make either victim blaming or helping a more likely reaction, respectively. In the current research we focused on the subsequent reactions that follow these appraisals. It would be worthwhile for future research to further look into and measure these different appraisals of threat and empathy that are possible after a confrontation with an innocent victim. We also would applaud it when future research would try to measure helping and blaming in one study with one measure that simultaneously reflects either low levels of blaming and high levels of helping (or v.v.). For now, we conclude that our results fit with our line of reasoning, as we found in three empirical studies that a self-focus (or related mindsets) made negative reactions more likely, while an other-focused (or associated mindsets) evoked more helping of the victims involved.

We would like to note explicitly that our findings fit with and extend earlier findings on self-construal and negative reactions following a BJW threat (Van Prooijen & Van den Bos, 2009). An interdependent self-construal as opposed to an independent self-construal enhanced blaming after a confrontation with an innocent victim. Van Prooijen and Van den Bos (2009) proposed that these findings could be explained by an assimilation of the victim with the self for an interdependent self-construal and no assimilation for an independent self-construal. In line with this idea, we showed that such assimilation is likely caused by a focus on the self. Moreover, we show that when people are other-focused more benign reactions to deal with injustice are possible.

Furthermore, our findings add to the seminal theories that make a distinction between people as rational economic decision makers and social-oriented individuals (e.g., Baumeister & Leary, 1995; Deci & Ryan, 2000; Fiske et al., 2007; Van Lange et al., 1997). In the current research, we show differentiated reactions toward victim of injustice following a self-focus versus an other-focus. Whereas the *homo economicus* more likely resolves unjust situations by blaming or derogating the victim, the *homo socialis* more likely tries to alleviate the victims' suffering by helping or supporting them.

Coda. More benign reactions following a confrontation with injustice are often visible in the real world. People can go to great lengths to help innocent victims of natural disasters, charity raisers can be a great success and people take to the streets to protest against grave injustices all over the world. We would like to suggest that it now is the time to also move research on social justice and the reactions people have toward innocent victims of injustice beyond the derogatory reactions and integrate help and support in the scope of reactions that can occur after a confrontation with injustice. In our research, we hope to have taken a step in this direction by showing that a self-focus makes victim blaming a viable way of dealing with injustice, while an other-focus increases the likelihood that people will help the victims involved. As such, we have tried to put both the "I" and "us" in "justice".

Footnotes

- 1) A total number of 118 participants took part in Study 5.1. Three participants were excluded from analyses because of their knowledge about the goals of the experiment, resulting in an effective sample of 115 participants.
- 2) Separate analyses for blaming and derogation yielded comparable results.
- 3) In Studies 5.1 to 5.3, including gender in our analyses had no significant effects on the variables analyzed. We therefore dropped gender from the analyses reported.
- 4) A total number of 180 participants took part in Study 5.2. Nine participants were excluded from analyses because of missing values and 1 because he had a Cook's distance (1977) score more than 3 *SDs* above the mean in the main analyses (Cohen et al., 2003). This resulted in an effective sample of 170 participants.
- 5) In Study 5.2, we also included the negative victim evaluation questionnaire of Study 1 ($\alpha = .92$). A 3 (Focus) x 2 (BJW threat) x 2 (Gender) ANOVA on negative evaluation revealed a main effect of BJW threat, $F(1, 158) = 6.41$, $p < .02$, $\eta_p^2 = .04$, a main effect of gender, $F(1, 158) = 9.34$, $p < .01$, $\eta_p^2 = .06$, and a significant three-way interaction between focus, BJW threat and gender, $F(2, 158) = 2.16$, $p < .04$, $\eta_p^2 = .04$. Conducting separate analyses for men and women (Bal & Van den Bos, 2010), analyses revealed that men only show a significant main effect of BJW threat, such that they evaluated the proximal victim ($M = 2.64$, $SD = 0.88$) more negatively than the distal victim ($M = 2.29$, $SD = 0.67$), $F(1, 65) = 4.20$, $p < .04$, $\eta_p^2 = .07$. For women, a significant two-way interaction of BJW threat and focus was found, $F(2, 93) = 3.57$, $p < .04$, $\eta_p^2 = .07$. Only in the self-focus condition did women evaluate a proximal victim ($M = 2.52$, $SE = 0.19$) more negatively than a distal victim ($M = 1.76$, $SE = 0.20$), $F(1, 93) = 7.79$, $p < .01$, $\eta_p^2 = .08$. These gender differences were absent, in our supposedly more subtle measure of victim blaming that asked about alcohol intake.
- 6) A total number of 164 participants took part in Study 5.3. Eighteen participants were excluded from analyses because they had participated in

Study 5.1; 5 because they indicated that they had not complied with the instructions; and 4 because they had a Cook's distance (1977) score more than 3 *SDs* above the mean in the main analyses (Cohen et al., 2003). This resulted in an effective sample of 137 participants.

Chapter 6

General Discussion

One aim of the current dissertation was to gain progressive insights into the psychological underpinnings of the paradoxical negative reactions toward innocent victims of injustice that sometimes occur. These negative reactions have been subject of scientific scrutiny since the introduction of just-world theory, although the processes that play a role in these reactions only received sparse attention in research (Lerner, 1977, 1980; for an overview, see Hafer & Bègue, 2005).

This dissertation was aimed at also explicitly incorporating more benign reactions in research. Benevolent reactions of compensating the victim and punishing the perpetrator were an equal part of this theory at its introduction, but were largely neglected in research (see Hafer & Bègue, 2005). Moreover, in real life reactions do range from harsh negative reactions toward innocent victims to exerting great effort to alleviate the victim's plight. I investigated the processes that occur when people are confronted with innocent victims of injustice and that influence whether people are more prone to make sense of this injustice by either blaming or derogating the victims for their ill plight or helping and supporting the victims involved to alleviate their poor fate.

I will now move on to a discussion of the main findings of the four empirical chapters. Subsequently, strengths and some caveats of the research will be discussed. Finally, the remaining part of this chapter will be devoted to a discussion of some implications and future directions.

Part I: Why we blame innocent victims

In the first part of this dissertation, I focused on the threat-relieving and uncertainty-reducing functions of victim blaming and derogation. In Chapter 2, I introduced a new variable that could help explain the negative reactions people have toward innocent victims

through a perpetrator similarity hypothesis. That is, I proposed that a similar perpetrator would pose a greater BJW threat than a dissimilar perpetrator based on the idea that the more proximal a crime is, the more threatening it will be for people as they can easily imagine a similar ill fate befalling them (Lerner, 1980).

Earlier studies have shown that victim similarity enhances experienced BJW threat, resulting in more victim blaming and derogation of a similar as opposed to a different victim (e.g., Correia et al., 2001, 2007). These findings were based on the idea that “as events come closer to [people’s] world, the concern over injustices increases greatly, as does the need to explain or make sense of the events” (Lerner & Miller, 1978, p. 1031).

In Chapter 2, I added to these findings and found support for my perpetrator similarity hypothesis by showing that a similar as opposed to a different perpetrator also posed a greater BJW threat, which resulted in enhanced victim blaming and derogation. Specifically, in Study 2.1 I found that people distanced themselves more from the victim when the perpetrator belonged to the same social group as the observer than when he belonged to a different social group. In Studies 2.2 and 2.3, I found that this distancing was likely due to derogatory reactions toward the victim.

In subsequent studies, I have used the insights obtained in this first line of studies to manipulate BJW threat. That is, I have manipulated crime proximity to induce a high vs. low BJW threat in studies throughout my dissertation. In research on the justice motive several different manipulations of a high vs. a low BJW threat have been used. Often used manipulations include victim innocence, duration of suffering and perpetrator punishment. I believe that manipulations of crime proximity are especially well-suited to induce a high vs. a low BJW

threat, because in contrast to these other manipulations they do not change the event itself. Specifically, confronting participants with a blameworthy (vs. innocent) victim logically enhances victim blaming resulting in more victim blaming of a low BJW threat victim. Hence, blaming will not be based solely on BJW threat, but also on “objective blameworthiness”. Longer suffering increases BJW threat, but it also increases the severity of the event. Finally, when the perpetrator has been punished the BJW threat is resolved, so this actually is a manipulation of a vs. no BJW threat. Hence, manipulating crime proximity is a more conservative manipulation of BJW threat than perpetrator punishment.

In other studies presented in this dissertation I have therefore mostly used crime proximity as a manipulation of BJW threat. In doing so, I have used social as well as physical proximity – whether the crime took place close to where the observer lived or in a city further away – to induce a high BJW threat. I have, however, also complemented this manipulation with other BJW threat manipulations throughout this dissertation to substantiate my findings.

In Chapter 3, I departed from studying the functions of victim blaming and derogation specifically and focused on the uncertainty-reducing function of the belief in a just world more broadly which subsequently is proposed to enhance derogatory reactions toward innocent victims. At the introduction of just-world theory (Lerner, 1980), the importance of this belief in reducing uncertainty was already suggested. Specifically, it was proposed that the belief in a just world was necessary because it imbues the world with structure and predictability. This predictability was needed in order to be able to strive for long-term goals and delayed outcomes, which often are uncertain.

While the future-orienting function of the belief in a just world has been demonstrated in research (e.g., Hafer, 2000b; Hafer et al., 2005; see also, Callan et al., 2009), the role of associated personal uncertainty has not. In Chapter 3, I showed that personal uncertainty, which is associated with a future orientation, indeed enhanced the need to believe in a just world and, hence, enhanced victim blaming and derogation. In Study 3.1, a conceptual replication of earlier studies with a differentiated sample revealed that more future-oriented individuals indeed blamed and derogated an innocent victim more than less future-oriented individuals. In Studies 3.2 and 3.3, I found that feelings of personal uncertainty, associated with such a future orientation, (at least partially) underlie these negative reactions.

These two lines of research add to the existing literature on social justice and reactions toward victims of injustice (e.g., Hafer & Bègue, 2005). In Chapters 2 and 3, I demonstrated the threat-relieving and uncertainty-reducing functions of victim blaming and derogation. The second part of this dissertation was devoted to incorporating the more benign reactions toward innocent victims of injustice that do occur in real life, but that have received only minor attention in social justice research.

Part II: How to transform victim blaming into helping

In the second part of this dissertation, I investigated the processes that occur when people are confronted with innocent suffering. For this purpose, I looked into key social values and motivations that could make people more prone to either derogatory reactions toward innocent victims or benevolent reactions aimed at alleviating the victims' ill fate as a way of resolving the injustice. In Chapters 4 and 5, I studied both types of reactions and I tried to gain

insight into the processes that are spontaneously evoked by a confrontation with an innocent victim and that influence subsequent benign and derogatory reactions.

Specifically, in Chapter 4 I focused on the processes that occur after people are confronted with an innocent victim. I investigated the role of approach and avoidance motivation in derogatory and benevolent reactions toward innocent victims on injustice. This distinction between approach and avoidance is one of the most basic motivational tendencies people have. Numerous studies have shown that people are inclined to approach positive things and avoid negative ones (e.g., Carver, 2006; Chen & Bargh, 1999; Elliot, 2006; Higgins, 1997).

In Chapter 4, I investigated whether people also apply this motivational distinction to more symbolic threats, in this case a BJW threat. In Study 4.1, I revealed that, indeed, people avoid innocent victims more when they pose a high as opposed to a low BJW threat. Subsequently, by manipulating approach and avoidance motivation in Studies 4.2 and 4.3, I showed that an avoidance motivation enhanced victim blaming and derogation and suppressed supportive reactions. Inducing an approach motivation in these studies, decreased derogatory reactions and enhanced support for the victim.

In Chapter 5, instead of studying the processes that occur after people have been confronted with an innocent victim, I focused on the difference between two different social values that people adopt. That is, I distinguished between a self-focused and an other-focused orientation in how people construe events. People are often thought of as rational beings that weigh costs and benefits to come to a decision and as a result are mainly concerned by their own outcomes. However, such a self-interested motive cannot explain all human behavior.

Therefore, in theorizing this self-focused orientation style is often complemented with an other-focused orientation (e.g., Baumeister & Leary, 1995; Deci & Ryan, 2000; Van Lange et al., 1997). People sometimes strive to feel valued, respected and included in a social group and therefore make decisions that are not directly self-interested, but more other-oriented instead.

The idea that justice judgments and reactions to injustice can be influenced by a self-focus and an other-focus has been recognized before (e.g., Lerner, 2012; Van Prooijen, in press). For instance, Lind and Tyler (1988) introduced the group-value model to complement Thibaut and Walker's (1975) seminal theory on procedural justice. While the original theory focused on people's concern about control over decisions, the group-value model recognized that people value membership in social groups and that this is an important predictive factor of people's procedural justice judgments as well. Viewed from this perspective, one could argue that Lind and Tyler (1988) addressed more other-focused values, whereas Thibaut and Walker (1975) mostly focused on self-focused values.

Procedural justice judgments usually concern reactions to one's own unjust treatment. In the Chapter 5, we focus on a different type of reactions to injustice that people make. That is, we will investigate how people deal with an unjust situation happening to someone else; i.e., a confrontation with an innocent victim.

In three experiments, I showed that this distinction between self-focused and other-focused motives also exists in reactions toward innocent victims of injustice. That is, in Study 5.1 I used a manipulation of social value orientation to study the negative reactions toward innocent victims of injustice (Van Lange, 1999). In this study, I found that individualistic people showed more derogatory reactions toward an

innocent victim than both prosocial and competitive people. Study 5.1 suggests that a distinction between social value orientations can be made based on focus. As such, this study complements earlier research that distinguished between a prosocial and a proself orientation which encompassed both the individualistic and competitive orientation. That is, in Study 5.1, the individualistic orientation seemed to be the only truly self-focused orientation, as in the other two orientations others are taken into account (i.e., by striving for an equal division between yourself and the other or by striving for the greatest relative advantage over the other). This difference influenced how people reacted toward an innocent victim and could play a role in many more reactions. Hence, this differentiation based on focus opens up interesting possibilities for future research.

In Studies 5.2 and 5.3, I directly manipulated a self-focus vs. an other-focus and revealed that people blamed and derogated innocent victims more and showed less support for these victims when self-focused as opposed to other-focused. Moreover, in both studies a control condition was added. Results obtained in the control condition of both Studies 5.2 and 5.3 showed that this control condition was more similar to the self-focused condition than to the other-focused condition. This is indicative evidence that people spontaneously seemed to adopt a self-focus, when confronted with innocent suffering.

Taken together, the results of Chapters 4 and 5 suggest that people become spontaneously avoidance motivated and self-focused, when confronted with innocent victims of injustice. These factors make derogatory reactions toward these victims a likely strategy to make sense of the injustice. However, these reactions can be counteracted and may even be transformed in more benign ways of dealing with

injustice, such as support and help for the victims involved, by instilling an other-focus or an approach motivation.

Threat appraisal

My findings support the notion that people perceive innocent suffering as a threat. That is, people tend to avoid innocent victims of injustice and interpret the event in a self-focused manner, resulting in enhanced victim blaming and derogation. An approach motivation and an other-focus, on the other hand, enhanced benign reactions toward innocent victims, possibly because attention is turned away from the threatening aspects of the event and toward the victims' needs. Whether these different reactions toward the victims involved indeed stem from different interpretations of the event was not directly tested in this dissertation and could be an interesting avenue for future research.

It should be noted that many studies indirectly showed that feelings of threat are indeed underlying derogatory reactions toward innocent victims. Early studies on the belief in a just world have shown that being confronted with an innocent victim is arousing as measured by galvanic skin response. Victim blaming was related to these feelings of arousal and threats to just-world beliefs (Lerner, 1980, pp. 76-77). Moreover, in a different set of studies, victim blaming was reduced when arousal could be attributed to something other than the unjust event (Thornton, 1984).

More recently, Hafer (2000a) showed that (a) people's concern for justice increases after a confrontation with an unjust event, and (b) the degree of victim blaming and derogation is related to people's concern for justice. In general, several studies have identified factors that induced a BJW threat and a proposed high as opposed to a low BJW threat elicited more derogatory reactions toward innocent victims.

These findings however, only cover the threat interpretation that an unjust event might evoke, neglecting the concern or care interpretation that a confrontation with an innocent victim might also elicit.

Some initial support for the notion that innocent suffering can elicit different interpretations comes from research on perspective taking. In these studies, people are usually asked to take the perspective of another person when interpreting a certain situation. Using fMRI methodology, studies have shown that a confrontation with another person in pain evokes personal distress, but in some instances also empathic concern (Lamm et al., 2007). Whether these feelings of empathic concern or "justice as care" (Gilligan, 1977) also play a role when confronted with an innocent victim of injustice remains to be seen.

I would like to note explicitly that measuring feelings of threat or concern directly might prove challenging. Feelings of threat and concern are difficult states for people to grasp and probably even more difficult to notice and report. Moreover, people might be inclined to report feelings of concern when probed for these appraisals as this would be socially desirable (Crowne & Marlow, 1960). As such, people are probably unable to report these introspective measures in unbiased and objective ways (Nisbett & Ross, 1980). Hence, self-report measures of threat and concern appraisals of unjust events probably lack predictive validity. In addition to using more indirect measures of derogatory reactions toward innocent victims as the ones used in previous research, a solution to this problem could be to use a more implicit measure to obtain people's threat and concern appraisal.

One model that could be useful in this regard is the biopsychosocial model of arousal regulation (BPS model; Blascovich & Tomaka, 1996). According to this model arousal can be appraised as a

threat or a challenge, depending on personal resources and situational demands. When resources outweigh demands, a situation will be appraised as a challenge. When demands outweigh resources, a situation will be appraised as a threat. Threat and challenge can be measured through certain physiological indices and could therefore lend itself well as a more implicit measure of threat and care appraisals following a confrontation with an innocent victim. A challenge appraisal of an unjust event would likely instigate a search for ways to help the victim. A threat appraisal probably enhances the likelihood of victim blaming and derogation as a way to deal with the situation.

Research on the BPS model has already shown that physiological indices of a threat vs. a challenge appraisal influence how people deal with other types of symbolic threats. For instance, the model has been applied to status or social identity threat (Scheepers, 2009; Scheepers & Ellemers, 2005); stereotype threat (Derks, Scheepers, Van Laar & Ellemers, 2011; Vick, Seery, Blascovich, & Weisbuch, 2008); expectancy violations (Mendes, Blascovich, Hunet, Lickel, & Jost, 2007); and power and powerlessness (Scheepers, De Wit, Ellemers, & Sassenberg, 2011). Whether the BPS model is a viable way of measuring threat vs. care appraisals following a BJW threat and subsequent benign and derogatory reactions toward innocent victims remains to be seen. For now, I would like to conclude that I have obtained findings that fit with this idea.

Methodological issues

In my dissertation, I have used various sorts of stimulus materials encompassing different individual unjust situations (i.e., rape, car accident, serious illness). These unjust situations were presented in different forms throughout the studies. I have used short scenarios, newspaper articles, police reports, and a film clip of an interview with a

supposed rape victim. Lerner (1980, 2003) has critiqued some of these paradigms for being too low impact to elicit any concerns about justice and that they would stimulate normative responses. However, in all empirical chapters I have found the expected and counter-normative pattern of more derogatory reactions under a high as opposed to a low BJW threat.

Furthermore, in real life people are often confronted with injustice in ways similar to the scenarios I used. Only rarely do we witness crimes directly. Much more often do we read about it in the newspaper or hear about it through first- or second-hand stories. These are exactly the ways in which I confronted participants with these innocent victims. Moreover, some anecdotal evidence, obtained from participants during debriefing interviews, revealed that these scenarios can indeed be very emotionally involving. As such, I believe that the paradigms I used to induce a BJW threat constitute realistic and natural confrontations with innocent victims.

In addition to realistic stimulus materials, I have tried to use natural and behavioral outcome measures of both blaming and helping. That is, I have measured blaming using questionnaires, but also by measuring physical distancing (Study 2.1) and in a more indirect and natural way by asking participants about the victim's alcohol intake (Study 5.2). In real life, people might not always explicitly state that they think victims are to blame for what happened to them. This is also exemplified by the fact that mean victim blaming and derogation scores on the questionnaire never exceed the midpoint of the scale, indicating that people do not explicitly blame or derogate victims to a high degree. This could be referred to as a "hidden ceiling effect" (Van Prooijen & Van den Bos, 2009). People might, however, blame victims more

covertly by keeping some distance or by saying things like “he might have had one too many” or “why was she wearing such a short skirt”.

In Chapters 4 and 5, I have focused on benign reactions toward innocent victims of injustice in addition to the derogatory reactions that occur. Specifically, I have asked participants to leave a message to support the victim in Study 4.3 and I have given participants the opportunity to raise money for the victim in Study 5.3. Both measures are ways in which people would also try to help a victim in real life and, hence, constitute natural helping strategies. Moreover, I measured real helping instead of helping intentions to eliminate concerns about social desirability and normative reactions.

Finally, all empirical chapters consist of three studies in which a BJW threat manipulation was adopted (with the exception of Study 3.2). I aimed to replicate the general earlier finding of more negative reactions toward innocent victims after a high as opposed to a low BJW threat in all chapters and worked toward extending these insights in complementing studies. That is, I focused on the social psychological processes that take place when confronted with an innocent victim, adopting different designs, but always replicating and extending our earlier findings. Specifically, I used the insights obtained in three separate studies in Chapter 2 throughout this dissertation. Subsequently, in Chapter 3 I adopted the experimental-causal-chain-design (Spencer et al., 2000). In Chapter 4, I determined in a first study which processes spontaneously occur after a BJW threat before manipulating these processes and studying the subsequent reactions. Finally, in Chapter 5 I included a control condition in Studies 5.2 and 5.3 in which no additional instructions were included to gain insight into how people generally react toward innocent victims. This large pool of (conceptual) replications combined with extensions speaks to the

validity and reliability of the findings, while simultaneously progressing our knowledge on the processes that underlie people's positive and negative reactions toward innocent victims of injustice.

Implications and future directions

The introduction started off with the notion that humans live in increasingly larger and progressively more interdependent societies and that this puts strain on people's capabilities. Notably, in contemporary society, people are often expected to invest in delayed and uncertain outcomes. Because of this uncertainty, people developed cultural worldviews that provided a sense of order and predictability. As such, these worldviews help make sense of the world people live in. In the current dissertation, I studied the consequences of focusing on delayed rewards and associated personal uncertainty with regard to the belief in a just world (Chapter 3).

I do believe that the findings of Chapter 3, but also of the other empirical chapters, contribute to the knowledge on human sense-making processes and the workings worldview defense strategies more generally. That is, personal uncertainty probably also gave way to people's quest for meaning and uncertainty probably is part of people's existential anxiety (Van den Bos, 2009). Similar processes of approach vs. avoidance motivation and a self-focus vs. an other-focus could help explain the more defensive (and benign) strategies to deal with other worldview threats as well. The role of these processes might be studied in other sense-making processes in future research. Importantly, benign worldview maintenance strategies has been understudied in most (if not all) cultural worldview research. In this dissertation, I decided to focus on the belief in a just world and reactions toward innocent victims

of injustice, as this worldview has clear and specific consequences that directly impact on society.

In Chapters 4 and 5, I focused on helping as a viable strategy to cope with a confrontation with innocent suffering in addition to victim blaming and derogation and, hence, tried to incorporate the understudied strategy of victim helping to resolve the unjust situation. Within just-world research, most empirical attention has been devoted to studying the negative derogatory strategies to relieve the BJW threat (for an overview, see Hafer & Bègue, 2005). Nevertheless, victim helping was part of the original theory. According to just-world theory (Lerner, 1980; Lerner & Goldberg, 1999), people would initially try to help the victim as a way of resolving the unjust situation and only when this strategy was deemed futile or too costly, would they resolve the situation in a different, more defensive way.

This noted, the findings of Chapters 4 and 5 point in a somewhat different direction. That is, people seemed to be avoidance-motivated and self-focused when confronted with an innocent victim, resulting in victim blaming and derogation as viable strategies to deal with the unjust situation. Especially when these spontaneous processes are blocked (i.e., by an approach motivation and an other-focus) did people adopt helping as a strategy to resolve the injustice more. These findings do not fit with the proposition put forward in just-world theory of the primacy of helping as a palpable strategy to resolve a confrontation with injustice, but instead seem to indicate that people will often choose to reduce their sense of injustice in a more cognitive manner (i.e., victim blaming and derogation). These derogatory strategies regularly require little effort and are relatively less time-consuming in comparison to the more benign strategies. For people to stand up for the victim and lend support or a helping hand, they seem to need a push in the right

direction (i.e., they need to be other-focused or approach-motivated). Put differently, benign just world maintenance becomes possible, only after people's spontaneously reactions are withheld or are controlled.

At this point, I would also like to address what I believe might be boundary conditions of the viability of victim blaming and derogation. That is, there are innocent victims that one would not blame and derogate, even though they pose a high BJW threat (e.g., a close relative or your partner). The findings of this dissertation can accommodate these reactions as these victims would more likely be approached with an other-focus and approach motivation and, as such, elicit help and support as behavioral reactions to resolve the injustice. Hence, I propose that an other-focused and approach motivated interpretation of a confrontation with an innocent victim can outweigh other factors that usually lead to a high BJW threat, resulting in more benign as opposed to derogatory reactions toward the victims involved.

As a whole, my studies illustrate how a confrontation with innocent suffering can, on the one hand, constitute a BJW threat, resulting in victim blaming and derogation as a way to cope with these feelings of threat. This threat that is elicited by being faced with innocent victims, according to just-world theory, stems from the need to believe that horrible things will not happen to good people or, put differently, that people will get what they deserve (Lerner, 1980). As shown in Chapter 3, this belief enables people to deal with the personal uncertainty that is associated with long-term goal striving. Hence, only if people get what they deserve does it make sense to strive for delayed and often uncertain outcomes.

However, in subsequent studies, I demonstrated that more benign reactions toward innocent victims, on the other hand, are also possible as a way of dealing with unjust situations. These reactions

seem to surface when people are less focused on the threatening aspects of the event. That is, I propose that when people are other-focused (Chapter 5), they are more inclined to pay attention to the victim's needs instead of focusing on the BJW threat it poses. Such an interpretation of the event could subsequently evoke an approach motivation toward the victim (Chapter 4) and lead to more benign reactions to resolve the injustice.

A deserving vs. a fair world

I would like to speculate a bit and propose that underlying this different interpretation of the unjust event could be a different conceptualization of justice. Specifically, I believe that a distinction should be made between a just world and a fair world. The terms justice and fairness have often been used interchangeably in the social justice literature (e.g., Jost, Banaji, & Nosek, 2004; Kay & Jost, 2003; Van den Bos, 2003). And indeed, according to the Oxford dictionary both terms have an overlapping meaning. However, there are also meaningful differences between the two concepts. Notably, *just* can be defined as “deserved” whereas *fair* can be defined as “treating people equally”.

In line with the *just* definition, according to just-world theory people need to believe that everyone will get what they deserve (Lerner, 1980). Just-world beliefs are therefore sometimes also referred to as the deservingness principle (Hafer & Bègue, 2005; Lerner, 1980). These just-world beliefs have been shown to be related to derogatory reactions toward innocent victims of injustice numerous times (for an overview, see, Hafer & Bègue, 2005). I propose that, in addition to the deservingness principle, people can also believe in and strive for a *fair* world, where everyone is treated equally. Furthermore, such a focus on fairness might be more closely related to benevolent reactions toward innocent victims.

Consistent with this line of reasoning, several scholars have alluded to the notion that people can adhere to an equity principle and an equality principle (e.g., Deutsch, 1975; Skitka, Aramovich, Lytle, & Sargis, 2009; Van Prooijen, in press). The equity definition entails that people should receive outcomes proportional to their inputs and, hence, closely resembles the deservingness principle that is used in just-world theory to define justice. The equality definition entails that all people should get similar outcomes, regardless of their input, and, as such, is more in line with a fairness principle of justice.

According to Deutsch (1975), justice will be operationalized as equity in economically-oriented groups. In solidarity-oriented groups the equality definition will apply. I concur with this idea and propose that while the deservingness principle is largely concerned with individualistic values of competence, such as long-term goal striving, the fairness principle of justice will be related to more social values (e.g., the need to belong to a group). In Chapter 3, some initial support for this idea was found. Specifically, in Chapter 3 one feature of an individualistic competence-related focus, namely future-orientation, has been found to enhance the need to believe in a just world, resulting in more victim blaming and derogation.

Building on this idea, the deservingness principle seems to be more self-focused as opposed to the equality principle, in which others are also taken into account. As such, the proposed distinction between deservingness and equality fits with the findings of Chapter 5. In Chapter 5, derogatory reactions were enhanced by a self-focus, whereas benevolent reactions were increased by an other-focus. In a similar vein, justice as deservingness might be operationalized in more self-focused terms and, hence, relate to derogatory reactions toward innocent victims. Importantly, justice as fairness might be

operationalized in more other-focused terms and, hence, relate to benevolent reactions toward innocent victims.

Based on the findings presented in this dissertation and the reasoning above, in Figure 6.1 I propose the following tentative sense-making model of reactions toward innocent victims of injustice. This model includes both derogatory as well as benevolent reactions toward innocent victims. As can be seen in the model, when people are confronted with an innocent victim they can become approach or avoidance motivated, which subsequently will evoke either more benevolent or defensive derogatory reactions toward the victim respectively as a way of dealing with the unjust situation (Chapter 4). An important factor that could influence whether people adopt an approach or an avoidance motivation is whether people are self-focused or other-focused before encountering the victim (Chapter 5). When people are self-focused, they will most likely interpret a confrontation with a victim in terms of personal consequences (“This could happen to me”), whereas when they are other-focused, the situation might turn attention toward the needs of the victim (Lerner, Miller, & Holmes, 1976). Finally, focusing on the self and on individualistic values may lead people to adopt a deservingness definition of justice (e.g., future-orientation; Chapter 3), which may more likely result in victim derogation to resolve the injustice. Focusing on others and on social values may lead people to adopt a fairness definition of justice, which might more likely result in more benign strategies to resolve the injustice.

It is especially these benign reactions to injustice that should receive more attention in future research. In this regard, it might be interesting to look at the different principles of justice that I proposed in the model. Social justice research has largely focused on the deserving-

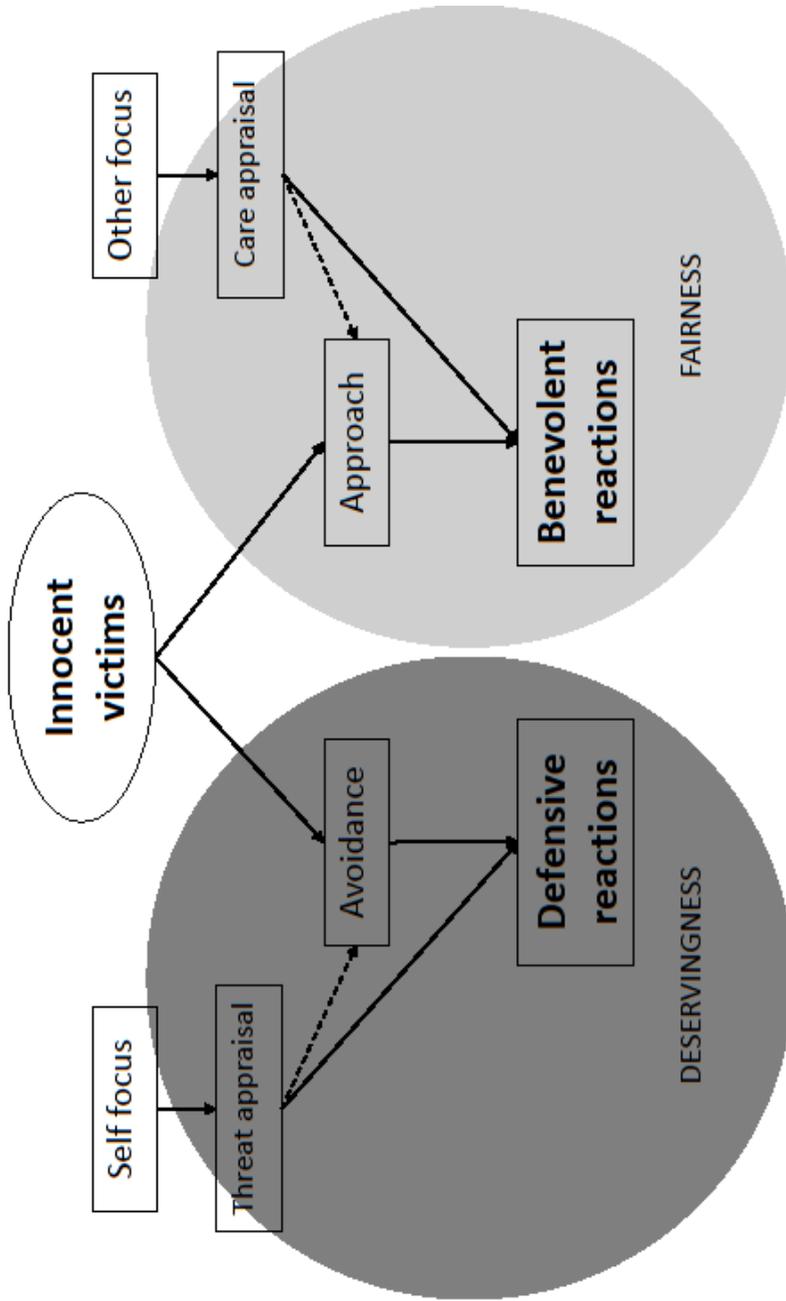


Figure 6.1. A hypothesized process-oriented sense-making model of positive and negative reactions toward innocent victims of injustice.

ness principle in explaining (mostly derogatory) reactions toward innocent victims. The fairness principle, while acknowledged as a possible lay definition of justice (e.g., Deutsch, 1975; Jost & Banaji, 1994; Skitka, Aramovich, Lytle, & Sargis, 2009; Van Prooijen, in press), has received much less attention in studying (benign) reactions toward innocent victims.

Reactions to those less well-off

One theory that seems to assume that people can define justice in terms of fairness and equality is system justification theory (Jost & Banaji, 1994). According to this theory, people will generally value the fairness principle and strive for equality. Only when people are confronted with incongruent information (i.e., inequality), will they be motivated to justify the system, thereby shifting from a general fairness principle to the deservingness principle.

System justification theory builds on and extends earlier work on just-world theory. System justification theory was introduced as a framework that could explain stereotyping and discrimination, and, more specifically, the paradoxical negative self-stereotyping by disadvantaged groups that could not be explained the earlier ego-justification and group-justification accounts of stereotyping. Its' basic premise is that, in addition to upholding a positive self-image and group-image, derogating certain groups can also serve the function of upholding or defending the system (i.e., the status quo). That is, people are motivated to view the status quo as legitimate, good, and fair (Jost & Banaji, 1994). In order to uphold the system, people justify the status quo by stating that disadvantage is deserved.

I would like to propose that system justification theory may lend itself well to a more comprehensive test of the model proposed in this dissertation. That is, system justification already implicitly assumes that

people can adhere to both a fairness principle and a deservingness principle of justice. Nevertheless, the deservingness principle and subsequent negative consequences (i.e., derogation of those less-well off) have been the primary focus of attention in research on system justification theory.

Research on system justification revealed that, system justifying beliefs enhance negative stereotypes of minority groups by both the majority group and the in-group and a resistance to system change (e.g., Jost, Banaji, & Nosek, 2004; Kay, Gaucher, Peach, Friesen, Laurin, Zanna, & Spencer, 2009). These defensive reactions are found to be even stronger under system inescapability, system threat, system dependence, and low personal control (Kay & Friesen, 2011).

More fairness-related reactions, such as system rejection and motivation for change have received much less empirical attention. The different definitions of justice, that are now implicitly incorporated in this theory may help explain whether people will react to a confrontation with inequality by justifying the system and derogating those less well-off or by rejecting the system and trying to change it. In the current dissertation, I focused on reactions toward victims of injustice, using individual cases of mostly criminal injustice. Studying system justification might be a viable way to extend the findings of the current dissertation and further test the predictions put forward in the model.

Research on system justification theory (Jost & Banaji, 1994) as well as just-world theory (Lerner, 1980) has been skewed toward the negative reactions people have toward disadvantaged groups or innocent victims. Nevertheless, taking action against inequality or helping innocent victims are also strategies that could be adopted to cope with an unjust world. In the real world, we often see both types of

reactions. Of course, we all may sometimes be inclined to blame and derogate innocent others as a defense strategy. This may often be the easiest and least-effortful way to deal with a confrontation with injustice. Yet, there are numerous instances in which people put in great effort to help and support victims of injustice, sometimes even at their own expense. This is exemplified by the many fundraisers that are organized in response to instances of injustice (e.g., natural disasters) and charitable appeals for various causes as well as the protests that some unjust situations elicit.

Beyond social psychology

The studies presented in this dissertation have been conducted and interpreted within the field of social psychology. The findings could have implications for a broader range of fields, though. Here, I would like to discuss two ways in which my findings could be of value in fields besides social psychology.

First, the findings presented in this dissertation could have applications in the field of law. Within the legal system, victims and victim's rights play a progressively more important role. The effects of apologies from perpetrators or legal institutions and recognition for the position of the victim receive more and more attention in research. Moreover, mediation is becoming an increasingly more common practice as an alternative to going to court. In mediation, the perpetrator and victim try to come to a mutual agreement on a suiting compensation for the victim and/or punishment for the perpetrator without the involvement of a judge. Hence, these developments point to a greater participation for the victim in the legal decision-making process.

In addition, in the Netherlands the right to speak for victims has recently been incorporated in the law and legal regulations. Moreover,

the position of victims has been further strengthened by the establishment of victim office windows, which are central places victims can go to with all their questions regarding the legal procedure. Also worth noting in this regard is *Slachtofferhulp*, a Dutch foundation that aims to support victims in coping with and processing what happened to them and, if possible, to recuperate or alleviate (im)material harm.

With this more active involvement of the victim in the system of law, people are also increasingly more confronted with these innocent victims. Our findings suggest that an avoidance motivation and self-focus, which often are salient when confronted with innocent victims, may lead people to blame and derogate these victims. And even though these reactions might not explicitly be expressed, they could still influence (legal) decision-making processes. I believe it is important to make people working in the legal system aware of these possible negative influences of the greater victim involvement in the legal process. Legal decision-makers acknowledge (and simultaneously tend to be skeptical of) the influence emotional victims statements might have on their decision-making, but seem to neglect these more indirect influences of a confrontation with innocent victims. Therefore, I propose more attention should be paid to lay justice beliefs that play a role for all people, including legal decision-makers. Moreover, knowing where the negative reactions come from might also help victims cope with instances with secondary victimization. As such, my findings could prove important for victim-focused foundations, such as *Slachtofferhulp*, and they might be used in the information provided to the victims to help make sense of what happened.

Second, my findings might prove useful for charities and fund raising. Many campaigns for different charitable causes confront people with innocent victims of injustice (e.g., a starving African child or a

battered and bruised housewife). The aim of such confrontations probably is to raise awareness and to increase empathic feelings (and maybe even anger), but my findings show that such confrontations might evoke an avoidance motivation and result in negative and rejecting reactions toward the victims. In developing a campaign to increase support for a charitable cause it is important to be aware of these possible counterintuitive reactions and to look at ways to raise awareness along with a willingness to help. The current dissertation offers two options to accomplish more positive reactions following a confrontation with innocent suffering, namely by instilling an approach motivation or an other-focus in people, they become more likely to help innocent victims of injustice.

These applications could be valuable extensions of the work presented in this dissertation. I believe that findings obtained through experimental (lab) studies could (and should) be substantiated by more applied research. Moreover, extending these insights toward more applied frameworks may warrant a departure from the experimental methodology and the use of several different methodological designs (e.g., questionnaires). In this dissertation, – in line with the social psychological tradition – I have nevertheless chosen to conduct experiments to answer the questions posed in the introduction. Experiments are important, if not essential, in determining whether a specific effect exists. As such, it enables one to gain a precise insight in the processes that play a role. My interest in teasing apart the processes that play a role in the benevolent and derogatory reactions people have toward innocent victims of injustice led me to studying these questions from a social psychological perspective. I believe that experiments should precede applied studies to first get a robust insight into the

processes that play a role before applying these insights in the real world.

Coda

In the current dissertation, I addressed two questions regarding social justice and reactions toward victims of injustice. Why do people blame innocent victims? And how can we transform derogatory reactions into more benevolent ones? It seems that especially in today's future oriented and self-focused society, people need to believe that the world is a just place. As unjust suffering poses a threat to this belief, people may spontaneously be inclined to turn away from innocent suffering, causing them to blame the victims involved to make sense of the injustice. Benign reactions are possible, when people adopt an other-oriented focus, leading to an approach motivation. With the research presented in this dissertation, I took some steps toward empirically incorporating benign reactions into just-world theory and the sense-making processes that take place when confronted with innocent victims. This dissertation shows that making sense of injustice can be accomplished both by benign and derogatory reactions to innocent victims.

Samenvatting (Summary in Dutch)

Rechtvaardigheid is een belangrijke waarde voor de meeste, zo niet alle, mensen. Toch worden we dagelijks geconfronteerd met onrecht en onschuldige slachtoffers. In dit proefschrift heb ik onderzocht hoe mensen omgaan met deze onschuldige slachtoffers van onrecht. Reacties lopen uiteen van grote inspanning om hen te helpen en steunen tot harde negatieve beschuldigende en veroordelende reacties (“Had je maar niet...”). In het huidige proefschrift stonden twee vragen centraal: Waar komen de negatieve reacties richting slachtoffers vandaan? En hoe kun je deze negatieve reacties veranderen in meer positieve reacties?

Een belangrijke theorie, die zich richt op reacties richting slachtoffers, is de geloof-in-een-rechtvaardige-wereld theorie (Lerner, 1977, 1980). Deze theorie stelt dat mensen een fundamentele behoefte hebben om te geloven dat de wereld rechtvaardig is (Belief in a Just World; BJW). Anders gezegd, mensen willen geloven dat iedereen krijgt wat zij verdienen. Wanneer mensen geconfronteerd worden met onschuldige slachtoffers wordt dit geloof bedreigd, omdat hen iets is overkomen wat zij niet hebben verdiend. Om het geloof in een rechtvaardige wereld te kunnen behouden, kunnen mensen zich dan negatief uitlaten over het slachtoffer. Krijgen wat je verdient, wordt dan als het ware verdienen wat je krijgt.

Mensen nemen zulke extreme maatregelen om hun geloof in een rechtvaardige wereld te kunnen behouden, omdat het belangrijke functies vervult. Het zorgt er namelijk voor dat mensen kunnen streven naar lange-termijndoelen (Hafer, 2000b; Lerner, 1980). Alleen wanneer mensen erop kunnen vertrouwen dat iedereen inderdaad krijgt wat ze

verdienen, heeft het zin om te investeren in lange-termijndoelen, waarvan we vaak niet zeker weten of we ze gaan behalen.

Na de introductie van de *just-world* theorie, heeft veel onderzoek zich gericht op het bestuderen van de paradoxale negatieve reacties richting slachtoffers. Onderzoek heeft aangetoond dat mensen zich druk maken om rechtvaardigheid na een confrontatie met een onschuldig slachtoffer en dat deze bezorgdheid gerelateerd is aan negatieve reacties richting het slachtoffer (Hafer, 2000a). Daarnaast hebben vele studies gekeken naar de ernst van de dreiging en variabelen die dit beïnvloeden, zoals of de dader gepakt is en of het slachtoffer op je lijkt (Hafer & Bègue, 2005). Meer recent begon onderzoek zich te richten op de processen die een rol spelen bij de negatieve reacties richting slachtoffers (bijv. Loseman & Van den Bos, 2012; Van den Bos & Maas, 2009; Van Prooijen & Van den Bos, 2009).

Gek genoeg heeft het overgrote deel van het onderzoek naar de *just-world* theorie (Lerner, 1980) zich gericht op de negatieve reacties richting slachtoffers en zijn de positieve reacties, die ook deel uitmaakten van de theorie, grotendeels genegeerd in onderzoek. Daarom is één van de doelen van deze dissertatie te onderzoeken hoe negatieve reacties getransformeerd kunnen worden in meer positieve. Maar voordat ik deze vraag probeer te beantwoorden, wilde ik eerst meer inzicht krijgen in waarom mensen negatief reageren op slachtoffers van onrecht.

Waarom mensen slachtoffers beschuldigen en veroordelen

De eerste twee empirische hoofdstukken richten zich op de vraag waar de negatieve reacties richting slachtoffers vandaan komen. In Hoofdstuk 2 bouw ik voort op eerder onderzoek naar slachtoffergelijkenis (bijv. Correia et al., 2001, 2007). Onderzoek heeft

aangetoond dat mensen een slachtoffer dat op ons lijkt negatiever beoordelen en meer beschuldigen dan een slachtoffer dat niet op ons lijkt. Volgens de *just-world* theorie (Lerner, 1980; Lerner & Miller, 1978) kan dit verklaard worden doordat de eerste een grotere bedreiging voor onze rechtvaardige wereld vormt en deze de angst dat een soortgelijk onrecht ons kan overkomen vergroot.

In aanvulling hierop, introduceer ik een nieuwe variabele, die op een soortgelijke manier van invloed zou kunnen zijn, namelijk dadergelijkenis. In drie studies heb ik aangetoond dat wanneer je lijkt op de dader (i.e., tot dezelfde sociale groep behoort) het negatieve reacties richting slachtoffers verhoogt in vergelijking met wanneer je niet op de dader lijkt. Het lijkt er dus op dat de nabijheid van het onrecht in bredere zin van invloed is op de ervaren BJW dreiging en de resulterende negatieve reacties richting slachtoffers. In de hieropvolgende hoofdstukken van dit proefschrift heb ik deze notie gebruikt om BJW dreiging te manipuleren.

In Hoofdstuk 3 richt ik me niet op het verlichten van een BJW dreiging als reden voor negatieve reacties richting slachtoffers, maar kijk ik naar de onzekerheidsverminderende functie van het geloof in een rechtvaardige wereld in het algemeen. Ik sluit hierbij aan bij eerder onderzoek, dat al aantoonde dat mensen het geloof in een rechtvaardige wereld belangrijker vinden, wanneer zij op de toekomst gericht zijn en investeren in lange-termijn doelen (Hafer, 2000b; Laurin, Fitzsimons, & Kay, 2012). In Hoofdstuk 3 toon ik aan dat gevoelens van onzekerheid, die worden geassocieerd met toekomstgerichtheid, (gedeeltelijk) ten grondslag liggen aan de negatieve reacties richting slachtoffers. Specifiek, laat Studie 3.1 zien dat toekomstgerichte mensen een slachtoffer negatiever evalueren dan mensen die minder toekomstgericht zijn. Studies 3.2 en 3.3 tonen vervolgens aan dat

persoonlijke onzekerheid, wat wordt geassocieerd met toekomstgerichtheid, deze negatieve reacties (gedeeltelijk) kan verklaren.

Samen dragen deze twee lijnen bij aan de bestaande literatuur over sociale rechtvaardigheid en de paradoxale negatieve reacties richting onschuldige slachtoffers en bieden ze voortschrijdend inzicht in waarom mensen negatieve reacties richting onschuldige slachtoffers hebben. In het tweede deel van de dissertatie verschuift de focus van het bestuderen van de processen die ten grondslag liggen aan de negatieve reacties richting onschuldige slachtoffers naar het integreren van ook de positieve reacties, die vaak zichtbaar zijn in de echte wereld, in onderzoek naar sociale rechtvaardigheid en reacties richting slachtoffer van onrecht.

Hoe negatieve reacties omgezet kunnen worden in positieve

In het tweede deel van mijn dissertatie, kijk ik naar verschillen in menselijke motivaties en sociale waarden, die van invloed zijn op hoe mensen reageren op een confrontatie met onschuldige slachtoffers. Ik heb hierbij zowel processen onderzocht die vooraf gaan aan als processen die plaatsvinden nadat mensen geconfronteerd worden met onschuldige slachtoffers en die positieve reacties of negatieve in de hand werken.

In Hoofdstuk 4 heb ik me gericht op de motivationele processen die plaatsvinden nadat mensen zijn geconfronteerd met een slachtoffer. Specifiek heb ik gekeken naar de rol van een toenaderings- versus een vermijdingsmotivatie. Studie 4.1 laat zien dat mensen gemotiveerd zijn een onschuldig slachtoffer te vermijden in plaats van te benaderen, vooral bij een hoge BJW dreiging. Voorts laten Studies 4.2 en 4.3 zien dat een vermijdingsmotivatie negatieve reacties laat toenemen en

positieve reacties onderdrukt. Door een toenaderingsmotivatie te induceren, werden negatieve reacties verminderd en namen positieve, steunende reacties juist toe.

In aansluiting hierop, wordt in Hoofdstuk 5 gekeken naar processen die plaatsvinden voordat mensen geconfronteerd worden met een onschuldige slachtoffer. In dit hoofdstuk wordt gebruik gemaakt van basale verschillen in sociale waarden, die mensen kunnen hebben. Specifiek wordt in Hoofdstuk 5 gekeken naar verschillen tussen het hebben van een zelffocus versus een anderfocus in reacties richting onschuldige slachtoffers. In drie studies werd gevonden dat, wanneer mensen meer op zichzelf gefocust waren, negatieve reacties toenamen en positieve reacties werden onderdrukt. Wanneer mensen op een ander gefocust waren, werden negatieve reacties verminderd en namen positieve reacties juist toe.

Samenvattend geven deze twee lijnen van onderzoek inzicht in de processen, die plaatsvinden wanneer mensen geconfronteerd worden met onschuldige slachtoffers, en die van invloed zijn op de verschillende reacties, die mogelijk zijn om om te gaan met een confrontatie met onrecht. In Hoofdstukken 4 en 5 hebben we gekeken naar een tweetal fundamentele verschillen tussen mensen, namelijk toenaderings- vs. vermijdingsmotivatie en zelfgefocuste vs. andergefocuste sociale waarde. Deze twee fundamentele variabelen beïnvloeden hoe mensen reageren op onschuldige slachtoffers en dus of negatieve reacties of positieve reacties meer voor de hand liggen. Het lijkt erop dat mensen spontaan een zelffocus en een vermijdingsmotivatie hebben, wanneer ze met onschuldige slachtoffers te maken krijgen, wat leidt tot negatieve reacties richting deze slachtoffers. Een anderfocus en een toenaderingsmotivatie werkt daarentegen juist meer positieve reacties in de hand.

Conclusie

In ons dagelijks leven worden we maar al te vaak geconfronteerd met slachtoffers van onrecht. En juist omdat we rechtvaardigheid zo belangrijk vinden, leiden zulke confrontaties soms tot negatieve reacties richting deze onschuldige slachtoffers. Het is belangrijk om meer inzicht te krijgen in de negatieve reacties met als uiteindelijk doel ze te verminderen of zelfs om te zetten in meer positieve, omdat ze in een breed scala aan situaties toepasbaar zijn. Het gaat dan niet altijd om expliciete negatieve uitingen, maar vaker om indirecte negatieve effecten van een vermijdende houding ten opzichte van deze slachtoffers. Bijvoorbeeld binnen het rechtssysteem (cf. secundaire victimisatie), maar ook voor slachtofferhulporganisaties en goede doelen in een bredere zin kunnen deze inzichten waardevol zijn.

Daarnaast gaat het natuurlijk niet altijd om individuele gevallen van slachtofferschap, zoals ik heb onderzocht in deze dissertatie. Ik denk dat mijn bevindingen ook kunnen gelden voor groepen, die achtergesteld of gediscrimineerd worden. Ik denk dan ook dat het uitbreiden van mijn bevindingen naar het framework van *system justification* theorie (Jost & Banaji, 1994; Kay & Jost, 2003) een logische vervolgstap in het onderzoek kan zijn.

In het huidige proefschrift heb ik me gericht op twee vragen over sociale rechtvaardigheid en, specifiek, reacties richting slachtoffers. Waarom reageren mensen soms negatief op slachtoffers? En hoe kunnen we deze negatieve beschuldigende en veroordelende reacties transformeren in meer positieve steunende en hulpvaardige reacties? Het lijkt erop dat vooral in de huidige toekomstgerichte en op zichzelf gerichte samenleving mensen sterk vasthouden aan het geloof in een rechtvaardige wereld. Omdat onschuldige slachtoffers een bedreiging vormen voor dit geloof, worden zij spontaan gemeden, wat resulteert in

negatieve reacties richting slachtoffers. Positieve reacties zijn mogelijk, wanneer mensen op anderen gefocust zijn, wat leidt tot een toenaderingsmotivatie. De bevindingen uit deze dissertatie bieden inzicht in de processen die ten grondslag liggen aan de negatieve reacties richting slachtoffers en includeren ook positieve reacties expliciet in het onderzoek naar sociale rechtvaardigheid en theoretische inzichten in het geloof in een rechtvaardige wereld. Mensen kunnen betekenis geven aan onrecht door zowel positieve als negatieve reacties richting slachtoffers.

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Curriculum Vitae

Michèlle Bal was born in Apeldoorn on August 16th, 1985. She enjoyed a pleasant upbringing in a quaint village on the Veluwe. But after graduating from the Rijksscholengemeenschap Noord-Oost Veluwe in Epe, she decided to take the big leap to the city of Utrecht. That is where she started her psychology studies at Utrecht University in 2003. She obtained her bachelor's degree in Clinical Psychology in 2006. During her bachelor thesis project, she developed a clear interest in doing research. That is why she continued her studies in the Psychological Health Research Master, from which she successfully graduated in 2008. In this master, she worked together with prof. dr. Kees van den Bos on a master thesis on social justice and reactions toward innocent victims. After graduating, Utrecht was no longer big enough for her and she decided to test her luck in Sydney, where she worked at UNSW on a short research project. In 2009, she returned to the Netherlands to start a PhD project on social justice at Utrecht University with Kees van den Bos. The fruits of this labor are described in this dissertation as well as several national and international publications. As of September 2013, Michèlle Bal is working as an assistant professor in Criminology at the Law Department of Leiden University.

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