

Effects of Lay Beliefs on the Justice Motive

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Injustice anywhere is a threat to justice everywhere
Martin Luther King, Jr., (1963)

That justice is important to people seems to be an incontestable notion. Rules of justice lie at the heart of modern societies with a society's constitutional law usually defining important basic human rights and responsibilities and elaborate systems of laws and regulations guiding people's lives in the social world. In addition, individuals are greatly concerned with justice (Folger, 1984) and feel threatened by injustice, as the 1963 quote by Martin Luther King Jr. illustrates. Not only do people want fair outcomes for everyone (see, e.g., Adams, 1965; Walster, Walster, & Berscheid, 1978), but people also greatly value being treated fairly and treating each other with respect (Lind & Tyler, 1988; Tyler & Lind, 1992). So, while not many people will argue with the fact that justice is an important social value, the question of how people define justice is much more difficult to address. This issue has intrigued philosophers, legal scholars, and social scientists alike.

In general, philosophical questions related to defining justice mostly revolve around issues of what constitutes a just society and how a just world can be achieved (e.g., Rawls, 1971) or around how people can live a moral and virtuous life (e.g., Beauchamp, 2001). For instance, Rawls (1971) used the notion of a veil of ignorance, a thought experiment in which no one knows their position in society, to come to pure moral reasoning regarding the rules of justice in societal and political decision-making. With some notable exceptions, legal scholars are mostly concerned with "black-letter law," which refers to the law as it is written in legal codes and enacted by legislators (Finkel, 2000). As such, many legal scholars study how

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laws and legislation should work and how these may be improved legislation. “Black-letter lawyers” do not focus not on lay people’s perceptions of justice directly. In other words, both philosophical and legal perspectives on justice focus mostly on normative aspects of justice or on the so-called “ought”-questions.

In the current chapter we do not focus on philosophical, legal, or other normative conceptions of justice, but instead we will elaborate on theories of justice that lay people have. For that purpose, we take a social scientific approach to studying justice (Cohen, 1986). Building on this perspective we will elaborate on commonsense notions of justice (Finkel, 2000; Tyler, 2006) and the effects that these commonsense notions can have on people’s reactions when they have been confronted with injustice.

Commonsense justice reflects what ordinary people think is just and fair. These perceptions of justice will to a large degree overlap with philosophical and legal notions of justice. However, this may not always be the case, for instance when people protest against certain laws and regulations. A classic example in this respect is the experience of Rosa Parks who in 1955 refused to give up her bus seat to a white person and was arrested for it. This became an important event in the civil rights movement in the U.S. in the 1950s and 1960s. We believe that while lay people’s conception of justice will not always follow normative ideas of justice, perceptions of justice and injustice are of crucial importance when we want to understand how people will respond and behave in our world. After all, if men or women define situations as real, they are real in their consequences (Thomas & Thomas, 1928). We will now first review some of the classical distinctions made in social justice research.

Within social scientific theorizing on justice, a distinction is often made between distributive justice and procedural justice. The former focuses on the fairness of distributions of goods and resources. Put differently, distributive justice concerns the fairness of outcome distributions (e.g., Adams, 1965; Blau, 1964). In early theorizing researchers focused mostly on issues of distributive justice and proposed equity as an important determinant of outcome fairness judgments (Adams, 1965; Walster et al., 1978). Equity theory proposes that people prefer equal outcomes for equal inputs. More precisely, people are assumed to judge an outcome as just or fair when their own outcome-to-input ratio equals some comparative or referent outcome-to-input ratio. Several studies have shown that people dislike inequitable underpayment as well as inequitable overpayment (e.g., Adams, 1965; Peters, 2006), lending support to important predictions from equity theory.

In later studies, procedural justice was introduced as an important other determinant of people’s justice judgments. Procedural justice entails the fairness of how people arrive at certain outcomes and not on the outcomes itself (e.g., Lind & Tyler, 1988; Van den Bos, 2005, 2015). Hence, procedural justice is focused on the fairness of decision processes or (more generally) the fairness of how people are treated (Van den Bos, 2015). Procedural justice even has been proposed to be more important for understanding people’s reactions than distributive justice (Lind & Tyler, 1988, p. 1); a proposition that has gained support in several studies (see, e.g., Tyler, 1987, 1989).

We want to emphasize that the discussion above on the different types of justice is far from complete. We further note that, in addition to distinguishing distributive and procedural justice, a further distinction has been made between retributive justice (e.g., Wenzel & Mummendey, 1996; Wenzel & Okimoto, 2016) and restorative justice (e.g., Cohen, 2016). Retributive justice focuses mainly on punishment for perpetrators while restorative justice tends to concentrate on the victim's perspective. Specifically, restorative justice is concerned with re-establishing the relations between the victim, offender, and society (Cohen, 2016).

Notwithstanding the importance and relevance of the different types of justice discussed thus far, in the current chapter we want to focus on why people care about justice and how this shapes reactions following injustice. Most of the research and theorizing described above focused on *what* "types of justice" people care about and less on *why* people care about justice. Hence, the question of what motivates lay people to place importance on justice in their lives still remains. This question is addressed by Lerner in just-world theory (e.g., Lerner, 1977, 1980). In his seminal theory, he focused on lay people's conception of justice to explain reactions following confrontations with injustice. In the current chapter we will focus on this approach in explaining the effects of lay theories of justice on responses to social injustice.

Justice motive theory or just-world theory (Lerner, 1980) assumes the need for justice to be a fundamental human need and focuses on people's reactions following a confrontation with innocent suffering. According to the theory, lay people define justice as everyone getting what they deserve such that good things will happen to good people and bad things will only happen to bad people.

In this chapter we will first elaborate on the origins and functions of this just-world belief (Lerner, 1977, 1980). Subsequently, following the general tenet of just-world theory, we will focus on people's reactions toward victims of injustice. We will discuss the role of the belief in a just world in people's reactions following unjust events they observe and explain how the belief in a just world can paradoxically lead to victim blaming. Subsequently, processes that play a role in shaping these derogatory reactions will be discussed. Here we broadly distinguish two lines of research, one focusing on processes that occur before the unjust event has taken place and that influence the construal of an unjust event, and one discussing basic psychological processes that take place after a confrontation with an innocent victim and that influence the processing of an unjust event. These processes are illustrated in Fig. 1. Both types of processes can influence reactions toward innocent victims. In the final part of this chapter, we will also describe studies on alternative lay people's reactions to deal with unjust situations and alternative lay people's operationalizations of justice that may help explain the broad range of possible reactions following unjust events.

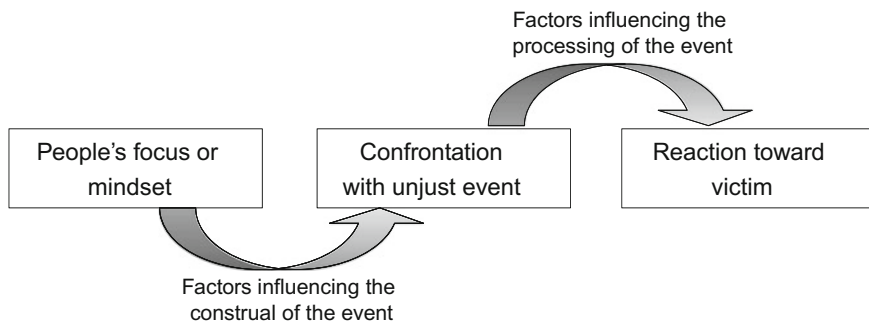


Fig. 1 Schematic overview of the factors influencing people's reactions toward unjust events

The Belief in a just World

Lerner (1977, 1980) argued that the fundamental need for a just world, that is, a world in which people get what they deserve, stems from a personal contract that is adopted in childhood when children learn to give up immediate satisfaction for more delayed—and often greater—rewards. Believing in a just world provides structure to our social world and gives people the confidence that efforts will pay off. When people do not adopt this belief, striving for delayed rewards would seem futile, as they cannot be certain that their efforts will pay off. As such, the belief in a just world enables people to focus on the future, strive for long-term goals and trust that their efforts will pay off in the end. Studies have shown that, indeed, people defend their belief in a just world more vigorously when they are focused on the future as opposed to the present (e.g., Bal & Van den Bos, 2012; Hafer, 2000a; Hafer & Rubel, 2015; Laurin, Fitzsimons, & Kay, 2011). Moreover, research shows that this effect is due to feelings of uncertainty being reduced by endorsing the belief in a just world (Bal & Van den Bos, 2012).

While the main function of the belief in a just world is making the world predictable and enabling people to focus on the future (Bal & Van den Bos, 2012; Hafer, 2000a), believing in a just world has also been related to several psychological health indices. For this purpose, several researchers have constructed scales to measure the degree to which people believe in a just world (e.g., Lipkus, Dalbert, & Siegler, 1996) and related these to various outcome measures. In general, studies found that the more people believe that the world is just, the higher their well-being, positive affect, optimism, and the more effectively they can cope with stress (for overviews, see Furnham, 2003; Hafer & Sutton, 2016). These studies show that it generally seems adaptive to believe that the world is a just place.

Moreover, these studies also showed that people can differ in the strength with which they endorse the belief in a just world. That is, there may be individual and cultural differences in the strength with which people express their belief in a just world (see, e.g., Sabbagh & Schmitt, 2016; Schmitt, Baumert, Gollwitzer, & Maes, 2010). However, we argue that it is important to distinguish between people's

tendency to endorse this belief, which can be related to several health and other indices, and people's general need for a just world and the related threat experienced by injustice, which seems to be universal (Hafer & Sutton, 2016). Hence, while people can differ in how strongly they express the belief in a just world, all people will likely still experience a sense of threat when confronted with injustice. In this chapter, we will primarily focus on this more or less universal need for a just world and subsequent reactions to deal with unjust events.

On a daily basis we are confronted with many instances of unjust events. When we watch the news, read a newspaper, or talk to friends or acquaintances, we often see or hear stories of injustice and unjust events that happen to people in our world. These stories can encompass minor instances of injustice, such as catching a bad break, but also more grave unjust situations, such as discrimination, terrorist acts, serious crimes or other types of violence in which innocent people are victimized. How do people maintain their belief in a just world in the face of such great evidence to the contrary?

These unjust situations should make it impossible or at least very difficult to uphold the belief in a just world. Yet, because this belief serves so many important functions for individuals, it is also impossible to give up on it when an unjust event is encountered. People are not ignorant about these unjust events and they do not deny that injustice exists in the world in general. However, people do maintain that the world is just for them personally as it serves such important social functions. Hence, people make a distinction between the world in general and their personal world (Lerner, 1980; Lipkus et al., 1996; Sutton & Douglas, 2005). This personal world does not only encompass them as individuals, but consists of that part of the world in which they live and function. The scope of this world, that is, who is or is not included in this personal world, may differ as a function of the situation (Lerner, 1980; Opatow, 1990). Differentiating between a personal world and the world in general enables people to uphold the belief in a personally just world while at the same time acknowledging that injustice does exist in the world in general.

When an unjust situation concerns people's personal world directly, they can react to unjust suffering in various ways to restore their belief in a just world. First, experienced or perceived injustice can evoke strong emotional reactions. Moral outrage has been coined as a specific negative emotion following acts of injustice (Montada & Schneider, 1989). Moreover, while reactions to grave unjust situations are to be expected, even minor events can instill a sense of injustice (Gaucher, Hafer, Kay, & Davidenko, 2010).

Importantly, reactions to deal with a confrontation with unjust suffering can diverge greatly. Sometimes people will stand up against injustice and go to great lengths to "right a wrong," for instance by punishing the perpetrators or by compensating the victims. Sometimes people even March the streets to protest against grave unjust situations. At other times, however, people tend to blame victims for their ill plight, stating that these victims must have done something to deserve what happened to them. Paradoxically, both types of reactions can be explained by lay people's "concern for justice" (Lerner, 1980). That is, standing up against unjust situations, helping victims, and punishing perpetrators are all ways in which people

can actively pursue a more just world. On the other hand, blaming the victims also helps to restore one's sense of justice, as the victims become deserving of their ill fates and, hence, the unjust situation is cognitively resolved.

In just-world theory, Lerner (1980) included both active strategies, such as helping or compensating the victim, as well as more passive or cognitive strategies, such as victim blaming, as ways to resolve a threat to people's just-world beliefs. Over the past decades, research on reactions following unjust events has accumulated. Most of these studies, however, focused on victim blaming. In the following section we will discuss some important studies that have been conducted in this area and that provide insight into the processes that are involved in victim blaming predominantly, but also other strategies, to uphold the belief in a just world.

Psychological Processes Underlying Victim Blaming

Most of the research on victim blaming focused on situational factors that either increased or decreased the just-world threat experienced, resulting in more victim blaming and derogation, or decreased the just-world threat, yielding less blaming and derogation of innocent victims. Whereas blaming is focused on condemning a victim's actions, derogation is focused on condemning a victim's character. These studies showed, for instance, that people blamed a victim more when the victim's suffering was enduring as opposed to ending (e.g., Hafer, 2000a, Study 2) and when the victim actually did something to contribute to the injustice occurring (i.e., a non-innocent victim; e.g., Hafer, 2000a, Study 1). Moreover, people also blamed a victim more when the perpetrator was not caught as opposed to caught, presumably because chances of justice being served increase when the perpetrator has been apprehended (e.g., Hafer, 2000b; Van Prooijen & Van den Bos, 2009; Van den Bos & Maas, 2009). Intuitively, these findings make sense as they can easily be explained by the fact that a greater just-world threat would lead to more victim blaming.

In a seminal paper, Hafer (2000b) showed that these effects were indeed due to an increased activation of justice-related constructs. That is, in two studies she confronted participants with a scenario in which a boy was severely assaulted and robbed. In these studies, Hafer used a manipulation of perpetrator apprehension. That is, half of the participants were told that the perpetrator had been caught and was sent to jail, creating a low threat, while the other half of the participants read that the perpetrator was still at large and would not likely be caught, creating a high threat. Subsequently, participants' concern with justice was measured in an implicit manner, using a modified Stroop task. In a Stroop task words in different colors are presented to participants. Participants have to identify the color of words presented to them and ignore the content of these words. In Hafer's version of the Stroop task, justice-related, harm-related, story-related, and neutral words were included. Results revealed that people who read that the perpetrator had not been apprehended experienced took longer to identify the color of justice-related words (as

opposed to other neutral, story-related or harm-related words) than the people who read that the perpetrator had been apprehended. This can be explained by the fact that it is more difficult to ignore the content of words that are activated in your mind (in this case “justice”).

These findings indicate that people’s concern with justice is heightened following a confrontation with injustice, especially when this instance constitutes a stronger threat to the belief in a just world. In a follow-up study, Hafer also revealed that victim blaming and derogation reduced this concern, as this interference attenuated for participants who were given a chance to blame and derogate the victim as opposed to those who did not get this opportunity. Hence, this indicates that victim blaming and derogation serve as viable ways to resolve the threat to people’s just world, posed by a confrontation with innocent suffering.

In addition to victim innocence, perpetrator apprehension, and enduring versus ended victim suffering, victim similarity has been put forward as another possible variable influencing threat to the belief in a just world (e.g., Bal & Van den Bos, 2010; Correia, Vala, & Aguiar, 2001, 2007). Specifically, when a victim is more similar (versus less similar) to an observer, two hypotheses can be put forward. On the one hand, one could expect that similarity increases identification and with that empathy for the victim, which would reduce victim blaming. On the other hand, one could expect that similarity would increase the fear of a similar fate bestowing on the observer and therefore victim blaming will be enhanced.

Studies focusing on victim similarity showed support for the latter hypothesis. When a victim belonged to the same social group as the observer, victim blaming was increased (Correia et al., 2001, 2007). Later studies added to these findings by showing a similar effect for perpetrator similarity. That is, belonging to the same social group as the victim or to the same social group as the perpetrator both increased victim blaming (Bal & Van den Bos, 2010). Moreover, social similarity to a victim or perpetrator (i.e., belonging to the same social group) as well as physical proximity of an unjust event both increase negative reactions toward a victim (e.g., Bal & Van den Bos, 2012, Study 2, 2015).

More recently, studying the processes that are involved in processing injustice has become more prominent in just-world research. These studies focused on how certain psychological variables influenced lay people’s reactions following a confrontation with injustice. We will discuss this process-oriented research in more detail in the following paragraphs. In doing so, we first focus on factors that influence how people construe an unjust event and subsequently move on to a discussion of the processes that take place after people have been confronted with innocent suffering, and that influence how people process an unjust event (see Fig. 1 for a schematic overview).

A Focus on the Self Versus Others

In the 1970s, several researchers studied the assignment of blame or responsibility to victims of accidents or other types of injustice (e.g., Chaiken & Darley, 1973; Lerner & Simmons, 1966; Novak & Lerner, 1968; Shaver, 1970; Walster, 1966). These seminal studies inspired many others to further investigate these issues and led to the distinction between person identification and position identification (Lerner, Miller & Holmes, 1976). In the former, people are more concerned with the ill fate of the victim (“I feel his suffering”), while in the second, they will be more focused on their own personal consequences (“That could also happen to me”).

More recently, research on the relation between self-construal and victim blaming (Van Prooijen & Van den Bos, 2009) extended these earlier findings by researching the more indirect processes influencing the construal of unjust events. Self-construal refers to whether people describe *themselves* in terms of group membership or in terms of individual qualities (Singelis, 1994). That is, people can either define themselves in terms of differences with others, stressing their uniqueness (i.e., an independent self-construal), or in terms of similarities with others, stressing their belonging to certain social groups (i.e., an interdependent self-construal). People dispositionally and situationally differ in whether they adopt a more independent or interdependent self-construal. In their research, Van Prooijen and Van den Bos (2009) applied this insight to the study of victim blaming. In this study participants read a scenario in which a girl was assaulted after a night out, after which blaming of the victim was measured. The researchers found that both manipulated and measured high levels of *interdependent* self-construal led participants to blame the victim more than when they were primed with or scored high on *independent* self-construal. According to the Van Prooijen and Van den Bos, these findings can be explained by the fact that an interdependent self-construal may facilitate assimilation with others (i.e., position identification). When people assimilate with a victim specifically, this may enhance the threat experienced and thus increase derogatory reactions toward this victim.

In line with these findings, our research showed that victim blaming is enhanced when people are self-focused as opposed to other-focused (Bal & Van den Bos, 2015), presumably because people who are self-focused will be more concerned with the threat that a situation of injustice poses, while other-focused individuals will be more concerned with the victim’s fate. Hence, a self-focus may lead to position identification while an other-focus may lead to person identification. In our studies, half of the participants were asked to think back to and describe a situation in which they were focused on themselves (e.g., studying for an exam) and the other half to think back to and describe a situation in which they were focused on others (e.g., listening to a lecturer giving a lecture). Subsequently, we confronted the participants with a scenario in which a man was severely injured after being hit by a car. Our findings on victim blaming showed that reactions were enhanced when they were self-focused as opposed to other-focused.

Additional studies, focusing on related processes, also speak to the fact that a self-focus enhances and an other-focus reduces derogatory reactions toward victims. For instance, studies have shown that mimicking a person, whether it be the victim or a person unrelated to the situation, reduced victim blaming (Stel, Van den Bos, & Bal, 2012). According to the authors, mimicking might induce a general other-oriented mindset. Put differently, mimicking might make an other-focus or person identification more likely. Moreover, studies have shown that ego depletion (i.e., being low on self-control) enhances victim blaming and, perhaps even more important for the current discussion, that self-affirmation reduces victim blaming (Loseman & Van den Bos, 2012). Loseman and Van den Bos (2012) argue that these findings may be explained by the fact that the victim poses a self-threat to the observer. Hence, these authors again relate a self-focus to the experienced threat and subsequently to more victim blaming.

All and all, a picture emerges that fits with the idea that people may construe a just-world threat differently depending on whether they are mainly focused on personal consequences as opposed to how the victim must feel. These findings are in line with earlier theorizing (Lerner, Miller, & Holmes, 1976). Identification with the position of the victim enhances experienced threat and therefore derogatory reactions to deal with this threat, while identification with the victim as a person enhances sympathy and, as such, will decrease derogatory reactions. Some papers studying distributive and procedural justice also alluded to the fact that these focuses could influence justice judgments and related reactions following personally experienced injustice (e.g., Lerner & Clayton, 2011; Skitka, Aramovich, Lytle, & Sargis, 2009; Van Prooijen, 2013). We will now move on to a discussion of the processes that take place following such confrontation with an innocent victim.

Approach Versus Avoidance Orientation

The research described above focused on factors influencing the construal of the event, *before* people are confronted with injustice. We will now turn to a discussion of studies focusing on what happens *after* people have been confronted with an unjust situation and look for factors that may influence subsequent processing of unjust information. Hence, we will discuss the processes that take place in between the confrontation with injustice and people's overt reactions toward the victims. A seminal motivational dichotomy that influences a broad range of psychological phenomena is that of approach and avoidance (Chen & Bargh, 1999). Approach and avoidance motivation have been found to play a role in most, if not all, human behavior. That is, people will be motivated to avoid negative stimuli (punishment) as much as possible and to approach positive stimuli (rewards) when they can. Similar to a self versus other focus, this orientation to approach or avoid can differ dispositionally and situationally. Approach and avoidance motivation will likely also influence how people process a confrontation with unjust suffering. Specifically, we expect that when people are approach motivated toward victims, a

concern with their ill fate will be likely, while avoidance motivation might make more derogatory and rejecting reaction more likely. We have studied how these motivations influence reactions toward victims of injustice by experimentally inducing them before a confrontation with an innocent victim and by measuring them after such a confrontation.

With regard to the former, our research has shown that people tend to blame an innocent victim more when they are avoidance as opposed to approach motivated (Bal, 2014; Bal & Van den Bos, 2016). We further showed that a confrontation with an innocent victim who poses a high just-world threat inhibits people's natural approach tendencies and leads people to become more avoidance than approach motivated toward the victim. These findings indicate that people will oftentimes react in an avoidance-motivated manner toward a confrontation with an innocent victim. Such an avoidance-motivated reaction may heighten chances of victim blaming as a way of resolving the threat to one's belief in a just world.

Experiential Versus Rationalistic Processing

Another way to study what happens after people have been confronted with a victim is by looking at the influence of rationalistic versus experiential processing of the unjust event. According to dual-process theories (e.g., Strack & Deutsch, 2004), people can process information in one of two ways. They either use rationalistic and effortful routes, in which information is processed in detail and in which costs and benefits are carefully weighed against alternative options. Alternatively they can use experiential and intuitive routes, which process information more quickly and superficially and work by using heuristics. Following the increased attention to dual-process theories within the psychological literature (e.g., Strack & Deutsch, 2004), the influence of rationalistic and experiential processing in reactions following injustice has also gained attention in social justice research (e.g., Harvey & Callan, 2014; Van den Bos & Maas, 2009; Van den Bos et al., 2008). Within the justice motive literature there is an ongoing debate about whether rationalistic or experiential processing of the situation is dominant in people's reactions to the unjust event (e.g., Van den Bos, 2007; Lerner & Clayton, 2011). A number of researchers argue that reactions toward unjust situations result from intuitive experiential processing of information (e.g., Lerner & Clayton, 2011; Lerner & Goldberg, 1999; Harvey & Callan, 2014). In contrast, other studies show that these reactions are stronger when people have adopted rationalistic assessments of the situation (e.g., Van den Bos & Maas, 2009). The type of justice information that is processed is important in this respect (Maas & Van den Bos, 2009; Van den Bos & Maas, 2009).

In their theorizing, Lerner and Goldberg (1999) argue that justice judgments and subsequent reactions are usually arrived at through intuitive processing of the unjust situation. That is, they propose that the management of people's just-world beliefs usually takes place outside of people's consciousness. Hence, negative reactions

following unjust events are due to the associative link of the victim to the negative event and positive reactions can occur spontaneously when helping is an available option that is effortless and relatively costless (i.e., experiential processing).

Harvey, Callan, and Matthews (2014) found partial evidence for this line of reasoning. In a series of studies these authors manipulated and measured information processing style, being either intuitive and experiential or rationalistic and effortful, and measured a variety of reactions following a confrontation with a victimization scenario, which constituted either a high or low just-world threat. Findings revealed that most reactions differed based on victim innocence and victim suffering (i.e., the just-world threat manipulations), regardless of information processing mode. Therefore, the authors concluded that people's reactions to victimization, including victim blaming, occur intuitively as well as through rationalistic processing. Hence, rationalistic processing of unjust information is not a necessary prerequisite for reacting toward innocent victims.

In contrast with the above line of reasoning, and in line with the uncertainty management model (Van den Bos, 2009), Van den Bos and Maas (2009) propose that it is rationalistic as opposed to experiential processing that occurs after a confrontation with threats to the belief in a just world. These authors conducted an experiment in which they asked participants to either react to information in an intuitive and experiential or rational and deliberative manner. After this, participants read a scenario in which a woman was either robbed or sexually assaulted and the degree to which the participants blamed the victim was measured. They induced a high or low just-world threat by telling participants that the perpetrator was either caught (low threat) or not (high threat). Their results revealed that only people in a rationalistic mindset blamed a victim more when the perpetrator was still at large as opposed to when he was caught. This difference was not there for people in an intuitive mindset. Interestingly, in an intuitive mindset, blaming was generally higher than in a rationalistic mindset. The authors concluded that rationalistic processing enhances victim blaming following a high as opposed to a low just-world threat, and hence, threat-related victim blaming is the result of rationalistic as opposed to experiential processing of the unjust situation.

Future research may want to reconcile the findings by Harvey et al. (2014) with those obtained by Van den Bos and Maas (2009). For example, it might be the case that differences in reactions found by Harvey and colleagues were related to heuristics, such as the need to reduce negative affect or (lack of) care for the victim, and not to the just-world threat the victims posed. Hence, the manipulations of victim innocence and victim suffering, adopted by Harvey et al. (2014), may have enabled differing reactions for several reasons other than the just-world threat the victim posed. In contrast, participants in the studies by Van den Bos and Maas (2009) may have focusing on the just-world threat that the victim posed specifically, for which rationalistic processing seems necessary.

Interestingly, with regard to procedural justice judgments, differences were found mainly in an experiential mindset as opposed to a rationalistic mindset (Maas & Van den Bos, 2009). That is, in a set of studies in which participants reacted to a fair or unfair procedure, results showed that especially in an experiential mindset

did people react more negatively to an unfair as opposed to a fair procedure. In a rationalistic mindset no differences of procedural fairness were found. It may be the case that in these instances experiential processing fits the context better, because affect and procedural justice are linked (i.e., feeling bad because of procedural injustice). Hence, while reacting to personally experienced procedural unfairness seems to be a more experiential and intuitive process, interpreting a confrontation with an innocent victim in terms of the just-world threat that the situation poses seems to be a more rationalistic process.

Taking these results together, the studies converge and diverge on certain points with regard to the processing of information on unjust suffering. That is, while researchers on each side of the debate stress the importance of either intuitive or rationalistic processing in reactions to innocent suffering and victim blaming specifically, both sides do agree on the fact that intuitive as well as rationalistic paths to reacting to unjust situations are possible. It seems to be the case that only reactions following rationalistic, effortful and deliberative processing of innocent suffering are sensitive to threat-related information, as shown by Van den Bos and Maas (2009). Spontaneous, intuitive, and experiential reactions to unjust situations, on the other hand, are not influenced by the degree of threat that the situation poses, as suggested by Harvey et al. (2014) and Maas and Van den Bos (2009).

Evidence for Positive Reactions Following Unjust Events

Most of the research inspired by the introduction of justice motive theory (Lerner, 1980) focused on factors influencing derogatory reactions of victim blaming and derogation (for an overview, see Hafer & Bègue, 2005). However, reactions following unjust events can be much more varied, as already explained in the introduction of this chapter. That is, oftentimes people do not react in derogatory terms toward victims, but unjust situations spark strong negative emotions and a willingness to take action against the unjust event. Outside the realm of justice motive theory, it has been found that people experience moral outrage following a confrontation with injustice and go to great lengths to alleviate the victim's ill plight or punish the wrongdoer, sometimes even by sacrificing their own positive outcomes (Batson, 1998).

In just-world theory, Lerner (1980) already alluded to the possibility that people react in this more constructive way toward confrontations with injustice, actively pursuing a (more) just world. Specifically, Lerner distinguished helping and compensating the victim together with punishing the perpetrator from blaming and derogating the victim together with other more "irrational" strategies to preserve the belief in a just world. In a seminal study, Lerner and Simmons (1966) found that people will help a victim when helping is an available option, and only resort to victim blaming when helping is deemed futile.

In more recent work, attention is also given to these more positive reactions and the question of how people choose to adopt a certain strategy for resolving a

just-world threat (see, e.g., Bègue, Charmoillaux, Cochet, Cury, & De Suremain, 2008; DePalma, Madey, Tillman, & Wheeler, 1999; Hafer & Gosse, 2011; Hafer & Rubel, 2015; Kogut, 2011). By and large, these studies focused on dispositional traits influencing willingness to help and did not study the underlying processes involved in deciding how to react to an unjust event.

In our own studies, we did include helping or supporting the victim as a possible reaction in several studies and investigated the role of approach and avoidance motivation as well as a self- versus and other-focus also in relation to positive reactions. Our findings showed that while a self-focus enhanced victim blaming, an other-focus decreased victim blaming and enhanced support for the victim. That is, after presenting the participants with a car crash scenario, we measured whether people were willing to invest time and effort into raising money for the victim of the car crash. Our results showed that when people were other-focused, they helped the victim more than when they were self-focused (Bal & Van den Bos, 2015). Moreover, in a different set of studies we also found that people react more supportively and less derogatory toward the victim when they were approach motivated as opposed to avoidance motivated (Bal, 2014; Bal & Van den Bos, 2016).

In our studies, it did not seem to be the case that people necessarily help when helping was possible. Instead, oftentimes people's spontaneous reactions were to cognitively resolve a just-world threat by resorting to victim blaming and derogation. When people were explicitly made to focus on the victim's well-being (by inducing an approach motivation or an other-focus), they did opt to help more as a way of resolving a just-world threat. These findings may be reconciled with (Lerner's 1980; Lerner & Simmons, 1966) propositions by taking into account the costs of helping. When helping is relatively costless and effortless, people will help a victim. When helping involves effortful and costly behavior, for instance by having to spend time or money, people will be less willing to help and may adopt a cognitive strategy of victim blaming or derogation as a relatively more likely option.

In addition to derogatory and supportive reactions toward the victims of misfortune, more differentiated reactions are possible and have received some attention in research. We want to address two related types of reactions, namely immanent and ultimate justice reasoning (Callan, Sutton, Harvey & Dawtry, 2014; Callan, Ellard & Nicol, 2006; Harvey & Callan, 2014) and compensatory rationalizations (Kay et al., 2007; Kay & Jost, 2003; Jost & Kay, 2005; Gaucher et al., 2010). Both types of reactions try to make sense of an unjust situation by placing it in a broader perspective, assuming that justice and injustice balance out. In the former, people perceive misfortunes as caused by previous bad deeds (immanent justice reasoning) or resulting in ultimate compensation (ultimate justice reasoning). In the latter, people are expected to keep up a kind of moral balance or create an illusion of equality such that negative traits or undeserving events are "compensated" with positive traits or events with opposite valence. So in addition to people getting what they deserve, a balance between good and bad outcomes may be a lay theory that people adopt in the realm of justice.

Immanent justice reasoning can be viewed as the belief that actions bring about deserved outcomes. In this type of reasoning, people make a causal link between prior moral behavior and subsequent random outcomes. Importantly, Callan and colleagues stress that the lack of a physically plausible means by which the outcome and prior behavior can be connected is a defining feature of immanent justice reasoning (for an overview, see Callan et al., 2014). In two studies, Callan et al. (2006) showed that people resort to immanent justice reasoning for both positive and negative outcomes. Specifically, in their first study, they presented participants with a scenario in which a man named David was seriously injured in a car accident. Half of the participants learned that David was having an extramarital affair with a travel agent. The other half of the participants was told that David was on his way to a travel agent to plan a holiday with his family instead. They subsequently measured perceptions of a causal link between David's behavior and the car accident and found that people resort more to immanent justice reasoning when David had an extramarital affair than when he did not. They conceptually replicated these findings in a second study, in which they measured immanent justice for an undeserved positive outcome. Hence, immanent justice reasoning seems to be an additional coping strategy to deal with a threat to one's just-world belief.

In a more recent study, Harvey and Callan (2014) extended these findings by also including ultimate justice reasoning as a possible defensive strategy in the face of just-world threats. Ultimate justice reasoning is different from immanent justice reasoning in the fact that the former is focused forward, stressing that current undeserved outcomes will ultimately lead to a more meaningful life, while the latter is backward-looking, focusing on prior behaviors to explain current undeserved outcomes. Ultimate and immanent justice reasoning were found to be negatively correlated. Moreover, using a similar setup as Callan et al. (2006), they showed that people were more likely to resort to immanent justice reasoning when the victim was a "bad" person (such as a person who cheated) and to ultimate justice reasoning when the victim was a "good" person (such as a person who planned a holiday for his family). These effects were mediated by perceptions of deservingness.

Related to these two balancing strategies to preserve the just-world belief, Kay and colleagues put forward a related idea, which they termed compensatory rationalizations (for an overview, see Kay et al., 2007). Compensatory rationalizations are used to find a balance between positive and negative outcomes or traits. Specifically, Kay and Jost (2003) showed that people judge the system as more fair when they have been exposed to complementary stereotypes as opposed to non-complementary stereotypes. That is, with a short scenario they introduced a person to the participant. In this scenario they varied wealth and happiness of the person, such that he was either rich and unhappy, poor and happy, rich and happy, or poor and unhappy. The first two conditions constituted complementary stereotypes as they confer that no person can have it all. The latter two conditions constituted noncomplementary stereotypes. Reading the complementary scenarios led to higher ratings of the system as fair than reading the noncomplementary scenarios. Moreover, in a subsequent study Kay and Jost (2003) showed that noncomplementary scenarios led to an implicit concern with justice.

These two strategies of immanent and ultimate justice reasoning, on the one hand, and compensatory rationalizations, on the other, seem to contradict each other, leading to directly opposite predictions regarding people's reactions following victimizations (encompassing both individual cases and discrimination of groups in society). However, the two can be reconciled by specifying the conditions under which either will be adopted. Several studies (e.g., Gaucher et al., 2010; Kay, Jost, & Young, 2005) have looked into these factors and revealed, for instance, that while people resort to immanent justice reasoning or victim blaming mostly when the traits are causally relevant for the outcome (e.g., "poor and lazy"), while they resort more to compensatory rationalizations for traits that are irrelevant for the outcome (e.g., "poor, but happy", see for instance, Kay et al., 2005).

These studies show that following confrontations with injustice, people can adopt a broad range of strategies to uphold their faith in a just world. While the first studies on the justice motive focused mostly on victim blaming and derogation, more recent work began to uncover many other possible reactions to resolve a just-world threat, such as helping, immanent and ultimate justice reasoning, and compensatory rationalizations. Importantly, these reactions not only cover reactions to individual cases of injustice, but also include reactions to groups of people who are less well-off and reactions to inequality as we also saw in the studies on compensatory rationalizations. Hence, the role of justice beliefs in discrimination became the focus of research as well (see for instance work on system justification theory; Jost & Banaji, 1994; Jost, Banaji, & Nosek, 2004).

Going Beyond Deservingness

Within the justice motive literature, injustice is defined as deservingness. That is, the central tenet of just-world theory is that people have a fundamental need to believe that the world is a just place, which is defined as a world in which people get what they deserve. As such, it most closely aligns with a notion of equity, which can be defined as proportionality between an individual's outcome and his or her input, as discussed in the beginning of this chapter. However, several different justice principles can be distinguished (Deutsch, 1975). Specifically, Deutsch distinguished three principles of justice; equity, equality, and need. People can dispositionally as well as situationally differ in the principle that they apply.

Looking at the way in which people define justice, we also see such a differentiation. Studying over 5000 instances of injustice, provided by ordinary people, Finkel (2000) found that most people, when probed for instances of unfairness, refer to situations where innocence was punished, hard work was not rewarded, or an unfair advantage was given. However, people also referred to situations of unequal treatment as an instance of injustice. Hence, while many referred to instances related to equity and deservingness, other principles could and did play a role.

Importantly, when probed for instances of unfairness, people come up with instances of personally experienced unfairness but also with instances of observed unfairness, where the situation did not directly involve them. These impersonal situations encompassed more than half of the situations provided in Finkel's (2000) study and also seemed to increase with age, with children mentioning unfairness for others about half of the time, but young adults and elderly adults mentioning unfairness for others about two third of the time. These findings are especially interesting as they point to the idea that justice is not self-interested (a substantial amount of the time).

In line with people's commonsense notion of justice, Deutsch (1975) notes that equity is an economically oriented view of justice in which the rules of justice are met when an individual's outcome or reward is proportional to his or her input or contribution. Many (Western) societies do have such an economic orientation. Hence, in many societies the deservingness principle applies and people will live by the rules of equity (Martin, 1999).

However, in certain situations the principles of equality or need may be applied. Specifically, equality may be applied in solidarity-oriented groups or contexts and need in caring-oriented groups or contexts. One could easily imagine that while a person might adhere to an equity principle of justice in general, contexts do exist in which (s)he takes more of a caring or solidarity orientation, for instance in schools, in a home for the elderly, or when people have been struck by a natural disaster. In these instances, we are able to let go of our general justice principle of equity and focus more on the other person's needs. We want to teach our children, enhance the quality of life for the elderly and come to the aid of the persons who lost their homes due to a typhoon. These additional principles of justice deserve attention in future studies and should be incorporated in the justice motive. Focusing on when people adopt these principles of justice may also result in additional strategies in which people try to preserve their belief in a just world.

Concluding Remarks

In this chapter we have discussed how lay beliefs about social justice shape reactions following unjust events and more specifically reactions toward innocent victims of injustice. We have explained why people sometimes react in derogatory manners toward innocent victims, blaming them for their ill fates. We have discussed some important processes that shape these reactions and influence the construal and processing of these events. Moreover, we have discussed alternative reactions of helping and balancing strategies (such as immanent justice reasoning and compensatory rationalizations) that seem to be less detrimental for the victims involved. We finished this chapter with a discussion of varied perspectives of justice that lay people can adopt and that may be incorporated into the justice motive literature.

We chose to focus on work pertaining to people's justice motive and reactions toward victims specifically, as we believe this to be an important area of research in which justice judgments play an important social role and can have far-reaching consequences. It is important to note, however, that in choosing to do so, we did not provide a complete overview of the possible ways in which justice plays a role in the lives of people. For instance, we have not discussed reactions to personal encounters with unjust situations. While these reactions may to some degree overlap with the reactions discussed in this chapter, we only briefly touched upon related fields of study, for instance on distributive and procedural justice. A discussion of all research conducted on social justice was beyond the scope of this chapter, but we hope to have provided an overview of the array of ways in which lay people can react to innocent suffering and innocent victims specifically.

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