

Worldview Defense, Prejudice, and Derogating Others



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Subject: Social Psychology Online Publication Date: Jun 2019

DOI: 10.1093/acrefore/9780190236557.013.266

Summary and Keywords

In the literature on prejudice and derogatory reactions, two prominent lines of research can be distinguished, one focusing on the expression and endorsement of (mostly) negative stereotypes and prejudice, and one zooming in on how defense of cultural worldviews can lead to derogatory reactions toward those who are different from ourselves. Research on both stereotypes/prejudice and cultural worldviews reveals how personal uncertainty can lead to the occurrence of derogatory reactions. In research on prejudice, the automaticity of stereotyping and prejudice has been the subject of debate. Some scholars argue for the inevitability of stereotyping, as these processes are assumed to be automatic and inevitable. By contrast, other scholars distinguish automatic stereotype activation from more controlled stereotype endorsement. Importantly, stereotype activation may be altered by stereotype-negation training reducing the expression of prejudice. In worldview defense research, it is shown how uncertainty-related motives and other worldview threats are related to the expression of derogatory reactions toward those who fall outside our scope of justice. In contemporary society, people frequently have to deal with feelings of personal uncertainty, especially regarding future-oriented delayed outcomes. To cope with these feelings, people adhere to their cultural worldviews. These belief systems enable people to strive for long-term goals, but also make them more vulnerable to expressing prejudice and other derogatory reactions. A wealth of research shows that when people's worldviews are threatened, they tend to react more rigidly and negatively toward others, especially toward those who belong to an outgroup. Related to this, studies on the belief in a just world and reactions toward innocent victims provide additional insight into the harsh and rigid reactions that people sometimes show toward innocent others. That is, watching innocent victims of crimes can threaten the idea that the world is just, and people sometimes respond in derogatory and prejudiced ways toward those victims in order to uphold the idea that the world is a just place where bad things happen to bad people only. Importantly, alleviating feelings of personal uncertainty (either by affirming personal certainty or by refocusing attention toward other aspects of an unjust situation) can reduce derogatory reactions and instigate benevolent reactions focused on helping those who are less well off.

Uncertainty, Prejudice, and Derogatory Reactions

A prominent question in the field of social psychology is why people sometimes react toward others in negative and derogatory ways. These derogatory reactions encompass negative responses toward people and groups who are different from us (i.e., prejudice). These reactions also include harsh responses in terms of judging people's actions or characters negatively (i.e., blaming and derogation) and the negative ways in which we react toward others who do not share our opinions or views. A broad range of theories tries to explain these derogatory reactions, focusing on the expression of prejudice specifically (e.g., Allport, 1954; Bargh, Chen, & Burrows, 1996; Devine, 1989) or on personality traits that may make people more prone toward showing derogatory reactions, such as right-wing authoritarianism (Adorno, Frenkel-Brunswik, Levinson, & Sanford, 1950), social dominance orientation (Sidanius & Pratto, 1999), and the need for cognitive closure (Webster & Kruglanski, 1994).

Seminal theories stress the role of feelings of uncertainty in prejudice and other derogatory reactions (Allport, 1954; Fromm, 1942; for a recent overview, see Jonas et al., 2014). These theories include uncertainty-identity theory (Hogg, 2007), the reactive approach model (McGregor, Prentice, & Nash, 2009), meaning maintenance theory (Proulx & Heine, 2006), the uncertainty management model (Van den Bos, 2009), and also terror management theory (Greenberg, Pyszczynski, & Solomon, 1986), just-world theory (Lerner, 1980), and system justification theory (Jost & Banaji, 1994).

This article does not review all the theories that have been developed in the broad field of research on uncertainty, prejudice, and other derogatory reactions. Instead, we start off with a short elaboration on the classic and more recent approaches in studying prejudice and related derogatory reactions, followed by a more detailed discussion of the role that personal uncertainty plays in worldview-defensive reactions, prejudice, and other derogatory reactions, specifically in the field of justice (Bal & Van den Bos, 2017).

Research on stereotypes and prejudice demonstrates that people are often biased against others outside their own social group, showing stereotypes (cognitive bias), prejudice (affective bias), and discrimination or other derogatory reactions (behavioral bias; Fiske, 1998). In classic social psychological theories, the process of stereotype activation and the usage of stereotypes are frequently viewed as an inevitable consequence of the human tendency to categorize the social environment (Allport, 1954). After all, because of the enormous amount of information people constantly receive when moving through their social environment, they have developed a spontaneous tendency to simplify information into social categories and stereotypes. This way, the flow of information about the social environment becomes manageable. A negative consequence of this process, howev-

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er, is that it can also lead to negative biases toward others, such as when stereotypes consist of predominantly negative attributes and result in prejudice and discrimination. In fact, Bargh and others have concluded that stereotype activation and usage of those stereotypes is inevitable, as stereotyping tends to be an automatic process (Bargh, 1999, 2007; Bargh, Chen, & Burrows, 1996; Bargh & Pietromonaco, 1982).

However, in a less pessimistic paper, Devine (1989) made a critical distinction between stereotype activation and stereotype endorsement. She countered previous theorizing on automatic processes by proposing that although stereotype activation may be largely automatic and spontaneous, stereotype endorsement is more controlled and influenced by personal beliefs. Thus, people may have knowledge of the content of certain social categories or stereotypes, but personally believe that these stereotypes do not accurately describe individuals belonging to this group. Therefore, they may choose not to endorse this stereotype and will not show prejudiced and discriminatory behavior. Hence, according to the model proposed by Devine, although stereotypes may be activated automatically, the endorsement of these stereotypes can be controlled by personal beliefs.

In these more classic approaches described in earlier sections, stereotypes and the expression of stereotypical attitudes and prejudicial behavior are examined directly. Another way to study these issues also gained popularity over the last decades. This approach focuses on explaining prejudice and other derogatory reactions by studying people's general worldviews or belief systems. These views or belief systems are not necessarily related in direct ways to people's stereotypes. Nevertheless, studying how people respond to people or events that bolster versus threaten their worldviews and belief systems provides systematic insight into the psychological underpinnings and fundamental motives for prejudice and other derogatory reactions (Kay & Brandt, 2016; see also Greenberg, Koole, & Pyszczynski, 2004; Van den Bos, 2009).

In the following, we elaborate on the cultural worldview approach and examine how people's prejudices (and related concepts such as stereotyping and derogation) are associated with uncertainty-related motives. Studies have shown that the adherence to cultural worldviews is inevitable in contemporary society. Pressures from contemporary societies push people to strive for long-term goals and focus on the future, increasing feelings of personal uncertainty (Martin, 1999). To relieve these aversive feelings, people developed cultural worldviews that provided a sense of order and structure, enabling a sense of trust and security (Van den Bos, McGregor, & Martin, 2015). A negative byproduct of the development of these worldviews, however, is that people will try to uphold them in the face of threatening information (Bal & Van den Bos, 2012). Hence, in the face of personal uncertainty or other worldview threats, people will react in defensive and rigid manners, sometimes resulting in the endorsement of stereotypes, prejudice, and other derogatory reactions. In the following, these propositions are further explained and elaborated on.

Contemporary Society

Humans have evolved to live in increasingly larger and progressively more interdependent groups (e.g., Aronson, 1972; Durkheim, 1893; Martin, 1999). In earlier times bonds were based mostly on kinship, and families were largely self-sufficient, but in contemporary society roles are much more differentiated and people depend on others for several goods and services (Durkheim, 1893). And although these developments brought about great advantages and enabled us to progress in many ways, the growing interdependence in human societies also put a strain on individuals. Interdependence requires of people that they trust each other and enter into a variety of binding exchange relationships in which people are also assessed of their worth by others in varying domains (Martin, 1999; see also Durkheim, 1893).

Moreover, many contemporary societies are characterized by an emphasis on long-term goal striving, a strong orientation toward the future and a focus on delayed gratification instead of immediate rewards (Martin, 1999). This is apparent, for instance, in the increased amount of years that people spend in school getting an education. On the one hand, this enables them to fulfill differentiated roles in society, but on the other, it also increases times of uncertainty. During these times people may wonder, “Will I obtain my diploma?” and “Will I be able to get a job?” These types of questions are inherent to delayed gratification in contemporary society. In striving for long-term goals—whether it be getting an education, maintaining a relationship, pursuing a career, or something completely different—people cannot always be certain that they will receive the outcome they are working toward. After all, they cannot always know whether their efforts and inputs will pay off eventually. For instance, people have to invest in an education for a certain amount of years without the guarantee of a good job afterward. One could even argue that uncertainties are increasing in contemporary society; our world is becoming increasingly more volatile, uncertain, complex, and ambiguous (VOCA; e.g., Bodenhausen & Peery, 2009). Yet people are known to function optimally when they do 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 gives rise to feelings of self-doubt or personal uncertainty (McGregor, Zanna, Holmes, & Spencer, 2001; Van den Bos, 2009).

To cope with these feelings, societies are governed by a large set of formal and informal rules and regulations, enabling people to trust that their efforts will indeed pay off in the end. These encompass formal institutions, such as a system of law encouraging and prohibiting certain types of behavior and, importantly, also more informal institutions, such as cultural norms, values, and practices that people abide by (Bar-Tal, 2000; Zerubavel, 2009). These cultural worldviews encompass ideas about what the world should look like and how people in it should behave. In this way people’s worldviews constitute shared cognitions within a group that provide a sense of order and security. Some general worldviews are shared almost universally, such as a belief that life has meaning (Proulx & Heine, 2006), people’s fear of death (Greenberg, Pyszczynski, & Solomon, 1986), and the conviction that the world in general is a just and fair place (Bal & Van den Bos, 2010; Jost

& Banaji, 1994; Lerner, 1980). Cultural worldviews can also be narrower, consisting of specific religious beliefs and cultural conceptions of how to behave or what is appropriate conduct. Taken together, cultural worldviews evolved to provide a sense of order and predictability in contemporary uncertain and future-oriented societies. In other words, these worldviews protect individuals against feelings of uncertainty. In “FEELINGS OF PERSONAL UNCERTAINTY” and “CULTURAL WORLDVIEW DEFENSE,” we provide a more detailed overview of what these feelings of uncertainty entail and of how dealing with these feelings can possibly lead to prejudice and other derogatory reactions.

Feelings of Personal Uncertainty

When talking about uncertainty, scholars and laymen alike typically refer to having less information than one would like to come to a decision in a given situation. We know from the seminal work of Tversky and Kahneman (1974; for a review, see Kahneman, 2011) that most (if not all) decisions in daily life are made under incomplete information. That is, people oftentimes rely on heuristics to come to a decision and usually do not process all available information about a situation when making decisions. We refer to this type of uncertainty as informational uncertainty (Van den Bos, 2009; Van den Bos & Lind, 2009). Informational uncertainty can be aversive, such as when people are waiting for the outcome of an important test, but can also be sought out explicitly, such as when we look forward to a vacation and have made no specific plans on what to do (Hogg, 2007).

Another type of uncertainty, namely, personal uncertainty, is generally thought to be more aversive. As such, people generally have a harder time tolerating this type of uncertainty. Personal uncertainty can be defined as a subjective sense of doubt or instability in self-views, worldviews, or the interrelation between the two (Van den Bos, 2009). This type of uncertainty is especially likely to occur in contemporary societies with their emphasis on striving for long-term goals. 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 their goals and question whether they will indeed get what they are working hard toward.

Whereas informational uncertainty has to do with knowing you are uncertain about something, personal uncertainty is more related to feelings of uncertainty. Hence, the former is an epistemic form of uncertainty, whereas the latter is an affective form of uncertainty. For example, it is about not knowing the outcome of a certain test, which is informational uncertainty, versus the negative feelings associated with being in the dark about the outcome making you doubt whether you were skilled enough to pass the test, which is personal uncertainty. According to theorizing in the field of social self-regulation (Van den Bos, 2009), these feelings of personal uncertainty are deemed especially aversive and, as such, elicit attempts to diminish them.

A rational way of diminishing personal uncertainty would be to try to receive feedback that you are progressing toward your goal (Martin, 1999). In today’s volatile, uncertain, complex, and ambiguous societies, however, such feedback is oftentimes not available. In

these uncertain instances, people have to find another way to trust that their efforts will pay off. This is where cultural worldviews come in. What these worldviews do, among other things, is to buffer against feelings of personal uncertainty by providing a sense of order and structure to the social world. As such, worldviews provide a sort of guideline to the way the world should work, and by adhering to these worldviews people can create a sense of trust that their efforts will indeed pay off and, hence, there is no need to feel uncertain anymore. For instance, believing that the world is a just place where good things happen to good people (Lerner, 1980) makes the future predictable and enables a striving for long-term and uncertain goals, because if the world is just, working hard will lead to the desired outcomes. Because cultural worldviews fulfill such an important role in contemporary societies, they will be defended in the face of threat (e.g., Jonas et al., 2014; McGregor, Zanna, Holmes, & Spencer, 2001; Van den Bos et al., 2005). How such a worldview defense can result in prejudice and other derogatory reaction is discussed in “CULTURAL WORLDVIEW DEFENSE.”

Cultural Worldview Defense

A number of theories have focused on different cultural worldviews and alluded to their self-esteem building and uncertainty buffering functions (e.g., Greenberg et al., 1986; Proulx & Heine, 2006; Van den Bos & Lind, 2002, 2009). The development of these theories sparked a wealth of research, showing that people will rigorously try to uphold their worldviews when one of these belief systems is threatened. At least two broad types of theories can be distinguished when focusing on the role of personal uncertainty in prejudice and other derogatory reactions. First, there are several theories focused on general worldview defensive reactions. In these theories there is no direct relation between the worldview people are trying to uphold and the subsequent prejudicial and derogatory reactions they show. Second, there are more specific theories in which subsequent derogatory reactions do aid in restoring the threatened worldview directly. Here we discuss both and elaborate on their relation to personal uncertainty as well as prejudice and other rigid social reactions.

A prototypical example of the first type of theories is uncertainty management theory (Van den Bos & Lind, 2002, 2009). Research on uncertainty management theory shows that the experience of personal uncertainty underlies an array of negative social reactions, including stereotyping and derogation of others. For instance, Van den Bos et al. (2005), induced feelings of personal uncertainty by asking people two open-ended questions concerning their thoughts and feelings regarding being uncertain: (a) “Please briefly describe the emotions that the thought of you being uncertain arouses in you” and (b) “Please write down, as specifically as you can, what you think physically will happen to you as you feel uncertain.” Compared to a control condition in which people did not think about feeling uncertain, participants judged more negatively a student who wrote negatively about the participants’ university in this uncertainty salience condition. Hence,

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studies on uncertainty management theory show that people tend to react in a more rigid fashion when they feel uncertain.

What is interesting is that important findings pertaining to terror management theory, a related cultural worldview theory, also seem to be (at least partially) explained by feelings of personal uncertainty. That is, research on terror management shows similar effects on stereotyping and derogation of others when people are made to think of their own death. In many studies, mortality salience has been induced by asking people two open-ended questions concerning their thoughts and feelings about their death that are similar to those asked in the uncertainty salience manipulation: (a) "Please briefly describe the emotions that the thought of your death arouses in you" and (b) "Please write down, as specifically as you can, what you think physically will happen to you as you die." (In fact, the uncertainty salience manipulation discussed previously is based on this mortality salience manipulation.) These studies have shown that after mortality has been made salient, people react more negatively to someone criticizing their country and nationality (e.g., Greenberg et al., 2004), similar to the uncertainty salience effects.

Importantly, later studies have shown that these mortality salience effects are at least partially caused by feelings of personal uncertainty. Specifically, Van den Bos et al. (2005) compared a mortality salience induction to an uncertainty salience induction by comparing both conditions to a neutral control condition. They showed that both manipulations of mortality salience and uncertainty salience had similar effects on the judgment of people criticizing the participants' university. That is, in both conditions participants judged a student who wrote negatively about the participants' university more negatively than in the control condition, in which no questions were posed.

In addition, the authors showed that mortality salience induced thoughts of uncertainty, at least in some of their participants, whereas uncertainty salience did not induce thoughts of death. Moreover, participants who thought of uncertainty as a result of the mortality salience manipulation also showed stronger rejection of the student criticizing their university than participants who did not think of uncertainty after the mortality salience manipulation (Van den Bos et al., 2005). These findings indicate that feelings of personal uncertainty (see also McGregor, Prentice, & Nash, 2009) play an important role in worldview defensive reactions.

In the theories discussed up until now, there is no direct relation between the worldview that is threatened and the subsequent reaction. That is, both uncertainty management theory and terror management theory focus on how general threats can lead to diverse negative social reactions; for example, the fear of death is not directly reduced by derogating others. In the second type of cultural worldview theories, there is a direct relation between the worldview that is threatened and subsequent prejudice and other derogatory reactions. These theories concern people's belief that the world in which they live and function is just (e.g., Jost & Banaji, 1994; Lerner, 1980). The belief in a just world can be considered a specific worldview; because people value justice on a societal level, they generally strive to do the right thing and greatly value being treated fairly. Within social

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psychology, ample research and theorizing 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., Hafer & Bègue, 2005; Jost & Banaji, 1994; Lerner, 1980).

Within theories on the justice motive, a distinction can be made between just-world theory (e.g., Bal & Van den Bos, 2017; Hafer & Bègue, 2005; Lerner, 1980), which focuses on derogatory reactions toward individual victims of injustice, and system justification theory (Jost & Banaji, 1994; Kay et al., 2009), which focuses prejudicial reactions and derogation of groups who are less well off in society. Studies show how being confronted with people who are less well off (either because they are victims of injustice or because they are as a group lagging behind in society) threatens people's belief that the world is a just place. Importantly, derogating these people and showing prejudiced reactions toward them is a way of rationalizing their disadvantaged status and, as such, restores people's worldview (e.g., Hafer, 2000A).

Just-world theory was introduced, in part, to explain the paradoxical negative reactions that sometimes follow a confrontation with innocent victims (Lerner, 1977, 1980). The 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. Because innocent victims clearly did not get what they deserved, as something bad happened to presumably good persons, the belief in a just world is threatened. According to just-world theory, one way of dealing with this threat is to blame the victims for what happened to them. That way the situation will no longer be unjust as the victims became deserving of their misfortune.

This belief is similar to other worldviews people have in that it buffers against uncertainties brought about by a contemporary future-oriented society, and it 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 believe that the world is just, they can trust that their efforts will be paid off in the end, and they will therefore be able to forego immediate rewards and strive for more long-term goals, thus delaying gratification (Callan, Shead, & Olson, 2011).

Studies indeed showed that when people are future oriented, they adhere to the belief in a just world more rigorously (Bal & Van den Bos, 2012; Hafer, 2000B). That is, people who are dispositionally (as a result of individual predisposition) or situationally (by means of experimental manipulation) more future oriented defend their belief in a just world more vehemently in the face of a just-world threat (i.e., a confrontation with an innocent victim), resulting in more victim blaming, than people who are less future oriented. Moreover, feelings of personal uncertainty underlie these negative, derogatory reactions (Bal

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& Van den Bos, 2012). Hence, personal uncertainty plays an important role in defending specific worldviews pertaining to just-world beliefs.

Most research on just-world theory focuses on derogatory reactions toward individual victims of injustice. A theory that is in important ways based on just-world theory, namely, system justification theory, focuses on blaming groups in society who lag behind. This cultural worldview theory is similar to just-world theory in that it argues that disadvantaged groups in society threaten the idea that society is just. Subsequently, disadvantage can be rationalized by proposing that it is deserved, through the endorsement of stereotypical traits in this group, especially when people are motivated to see the current status quo as fair (Kay et al., 2009). For instance, studies on system justification showed that people tend to see an unequal gender division in politics as fair because women are seen as less ambitious than men, especially when people believe that this system is important for themselves.

As an aside, studies on system justification have also revealed that these system-justifying tendencies are not only adhered to by majority members. That is, minority members also justify inequalities by self-stereotyping (Laurin, Fitzsimons, & Kay, 2011; Laurin, Kay, & Shepherd, 2011). These processes are probably related to people's social dominance orientation, the belief that group hierarchies are inevitable in all societies and are even a good idea to maintain order and stability (Sidanius & Pratto, 1999).

Studies have also shown that system-justifying tendencies are motivated (at least partially) by a need to reduce feelings of personal uncertainty. However, scholars studying system justification theory stress a need for control or structure as opposed to reducing personal uncertainty specifically. That is, compensatory control theory (Kay et al., 2009) proposes that people defend their system, derogating people who are less well off for their lagging behind, by endorsing negative stereotypes, because the system provides a source of control. Put differently, in order to compensate for reduced feelings of personal certainty or control, people will resort to justifying the existing social system as fair, legitimate, and just, thereby being inclined to blame those who are struggling in society for their relatively lower status. Several empirical studies have found support for this idea, showing that when people are temporarily deprived of control (i.e., when they experience personal uncertainty) system-justifying tendencies are enhanced (e.g., Kay & Eibach, 2013; Kay, Gaucher, McGregor, & Nash, 2010; Kay et al., 2008).

Taken together, general cultural worldview theories, such as uncertainty management theory (Van den Bos & Lind, 2002, 2009), as well as studies on the belief in a just world (Bal & Van den Bos, 2012; Hafer, 2000B) and system justification (Jost & Banaji, 1994; Kay et al., 2009) specifically, all support the notions that (a) people find it hard to tolerate feelings of personal uncertainty; (b) they will therefore adhere more rigorously to worldviews that provide certainty, order, and structure, such as the belief in a just world and the idea that the current status quo is fair and legitimate when experiencing personal uncertainty; and (c) this can result in harsh, derogatory reactions and prejudice toward those who lag behind.

Benevolent Reactions

Most of the studies up until now have focused on defensive reactions following a worldview threat, showing prejudiced and derogatory reactions toward those who are less well off, especially when those harboring the defensive reactions are experiencing personal uncertainty. However, other studies focus on mitigating stereotype endorsement and derogation of those who are less well off, and show that more benevolent reactions may also be possible in dealing with worldview threats. In the following paragraph, we discuss two lines of research that have focused on ways to reduce these negative reactions and increase more benevolent reactions following a worldview threat. Specifically, we focus on the processes that occur in prejudicial and derogatory reactions, and show how intervening in these processes may reduce these negative reactions tendencies, allowing for more constructive behaviors.

Following uncertainty management theory, worldview defensive reactions can be viewed as self-regulatory behavior. That is, people try to regulate their feelings of personal uncertainty by adhering to cultural worldviews. When these worldviews are threatened, people are motivated to defend these belief systems because they serve important functions for the self (i.e., they provide a sense of certainty, order, and structure). In their research, Loseman and Van den Bos (2012) specifically focused on the belief in a just world to find direct support for this view of cultural worldview defense as self-regulation and at the same time show how countering feelings of personal uncertainty by self-affirmation will reduce derogatory reactions. In two studies, they confronted participants with an unjust event, a girl who fell victim to rape. In both studies they measured victim blaming through a short questionnaire. In the first study, self-regulatory resources of half of the participants were depleted through a letter-crossing task (Muraven, Tice, & Baumeister, 1998). The results of this study showed that victim blaming was enhanced for these participants as opposed to a control group.

Furthermore, Loseman and Van den Bos (2012) also suggested a way in which derogatory reactions can be reduced. That is, in their second study, half of the participants were given a self-affirmation task after reading the victimization scenario. Specifically, participants were asked to write down three positive characteristics of themselves. In the control condition, participants had to write down three brand names of detergents. Results of this experiment showed that victim blaming was reduced in the self-affirmation condition as opposed to the control condition. Hence, temporarily heightening people's personal sense of certainty by a self-affirmation task presumably reduced their need to defend the belief in a just world after a confrontation with unjust events. Self-affirmation may thus buffer against feelings of personal uncertainty and the negative effects of worldview adherence and, as such, reduce prejudice and other derogatory reactions that follow from a worldview threat.

This line of research provided an initial way through which derogatory reactions may be reduced. However, in a more recent set of studies, we (Bal & Van den Bos, 2015) proposed an additional way through which derogatory reactions may be countered, but si-

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multaneously studied how positive and benevolent reactions may be increased. That is, in this line of research we also explicitly studied support for those who are less well off in addition to measuring derogatory reactions. We proposed that in a confrontation with an innocent victim, people often tend to focus on the threatening aspects of the situation, that is, the fact that this event is incongruent with their worldview. However, when people can be made to focus more on the fact that the victim is someone who is deserving of empathy and help instead of the worldview threat that he or she poses, benevolent reactions may become more primary. In other words, when people are not concerned with their feelings of personal uncertainty associated with a worldview threat, they may be able to focus on other features of the situation (such as how the other person may be feeling).

We tested these ideas in two studies in which we confronted participants with a newspaper article of a young man who was seriously injured by being hit by a car while cycling home. Before reading this short newspaper article, in both studies we manipulated participants' focus (self-focus vs. other-focus vs. control condition) in an ostensibly unrelated experiment by asking them to think back to a situation in which they were focused either on themselves or on another person and to describe that situation in detail. This was followed by three open-ended questions: (a) "Please describe, as specifically as possible, how you/that person acted in the situation"; (b) "Please describe what feelings you/you think this other person had in that situation," and, (3) "Please describe what you/you think the other person thought in that situation."

In the first study, we measured derogatory reactions by asking participants in a supposed recall task on the newspaper article to indicate, among some filler questions, the amount of alcohol the victim had drunk before getting into the accident (nothing about drinking alcohol was actually mentioned in the article). Results showed that when participants were self-focused as opposed to other-focused, they estimated the victim to have drunk significantly more alcohol. Moreover, estimates in the control condition were similar to those in the self-focused condition. This may indicate that people tend to focus on the personal consequences of a worldview threat more so than on the victim's fate. In the second study, we measured actual helping behavior by allowing participants the opportunity to raise money for the victims' rehabilitation. Specifically, participants could solve math problems and raise €0.05 for each two correct answers. Results of this study showed that participants raised significantly less money to aid in the victim's recovery when they were self focused as opposed to other focused. The control condition fell in between these two conditions.

Taken together, these studies provide an additional avenue through which derogatory reactions may be reduced and more benevolent reactions may also be increased. That is, when people are confronted with a worldview threat, they may be spontaneously inclined to defend their belief systems and show derogatory reactions toward those who are less well off. Encouraging people to focus more on the fact that these people are deserving or in need of help may turn attention away from the (worldview-) threatening aspects of the situation and may reduce tendencies to engage in worldview maintenance, instead insti-

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gating a search for ways to benefit these people who are less well off (see also Kay, Jost, & Young, 2005). It is important to note that in the studies described here, we did not focus directly on prejudice and stereotyping. However, there is important overlap between victim blaming and derogation and prejudicial reactions in the sense that prejudice may be viewed as a specific type of derogation of those who are less well off. As such, these studies do offer possible avenues of prejudice reduction that are related to the cultural worldview defense explanation of prejudice and the role of personal uncertainty in the endorsement of it (i.e., affirming the self and focusing on others).

These studies all focused on intervening in the endorsement of stereotypes as a way of reducing prejudice and derogatory reactions toward those who are less well off. They fit within the cultural worldview approach to prejudice in which personal uncertainty plays an important role. However, within the more traditional approach studying stereotyping and prejudice (as described in the beginning of this contribution), a more recent line of research also focuses on a way of mitigating prejudice. Although these studies are not directly related to the role of personal uncertainty in prejudice, we do want to allude to these studies shortly. This line of research has focused on changing stereotype activation as a way of intervening in the process of stereotyping and prejudice. Specifically, by targeting the content of these stereotypes and altering the negative content of them through training, Kawakami and colleagues (Kawakami et al., 2000; Kawakami, Dovidio, & Van Kamp, 2005) tried to reduce the endorsement of stereotypes. Hence, they built on the model proposed by Devine (1989) directly and showed that not only can personal beliefs influence the expression of prejudice and discrimination, but stereotype activation may also be targeted by extensive training in negating category-trait associations.

In the studies by Kawakami et al. (2000), participants were trained to respond to photographs of two social categories (e.g., black and white persons) paired with stereotypic positive and negative traits. For instance, “athletic” and “poor” were two stereotypical traits associated with black people, and “ambitious” and “uptight” with white people (Kawakami et al., 2000, Study 3). During the training phase, participants had to respond with “No” to trials where the photograph and trait were congruent (e.g., black person paired with “athletic”) and “Yes” to trials where the photograph and trait were incongruent (e.g., white person paired with “poor”). Their results showed that after this training, participants showed a significant reduction in stereotype activation, measured as reaction times to congruent and incongruent trials, in comparison with a pretest and with a control group that did not receive this training.

In subsequent research, however, it was questioned whether the training in negating stereotype activation was actually beneficial in reducing prejudice and discrimination (Kawakami et al., 2005). That is, because the training was quite explicit, people may show contrast effects in subsequent behavioral reactions. The reasoning was that participants want to correct for the perceived effects of the training to show their true opinions in subsequent behaviors, but in doing so actually enhance prejudicial and discriminatory reactions. To test this idea, Kawakami and colleagues (2005) again trained participants in negating stereotypes with the same procedure but now focused on gender stereotypes.

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Subsequently, participants were asked to take part in a job application task. They had to read through a job advertisement and four résumés and cover letters (two male and two female) and decide on whom they deemed most appropriate for the job. In addition to a no-training condition and a training condition, two more experimental conditions were added, in which participants completed the stereotype-negation training. In these conditions either a filler task was added in between the training and the job application task (filler condition), or participants had to perform a secondary task during the job application task, to make it more difficult to make a decision based on careful deliberation (cognitive load condition).

The results showed that, as expected, the hiring decision was not influenced by the training alone. That is, in both the control condition and the training condition, participants preferred the male applicants to the female applicants. In the filler condition and the cognitive load condition, however, this preference disappeared, and participants chose to hire male and female applicants equally, indicating that applicants' gender was no longer taken into account in the hiring decision. Hence, this line of research shows that in the expression (and reduction) of prejudice, motivational factors play an important role. The cultural worldview approach focuses specifically on these motivational factors.

Conclusion

Uncertainty-related motives are associated with prejudice and other derogatory reactions. Though some classic theories argue for the inevitability of stereotyping and prejudice (Allport, 1954; Bargh, 1999) other theories assume that although stereotype activation may be automatic, stereotype endorsement is more controlled (Devine, 1989). Hence, when personal beliefs are incongruent with stereotype activation, those stereotypes may not be endorsed, and no prejudice will be expressed. More recent research and theorizing has focused on prejudice and other derogatory reactions being the result of worldview threats and associated feelings of personal uncertainty. That is, because people live in an increasingly future-oriented world, they often have to delay gratification and strive for long-term goals. This future orientation brings about feelings of personal uncertainty and self-doubt. To deal with these aversive feelings, people developed worldviews, such as the idea that the world is just. When these beliefs are threatened, defensive reactions—such as derogation of those who are less well off—are restorative. Hence, by derogating and showing prejudicial reactions, disadvantaged people become deserving of their less fortunate fate.

Building and extending on these insights, several efforts (both in the traditional direct approach toward examining prejudice and in the cultural worldview approach of explaining prejudice) have focused on reducing prejudicial and derogatory reactions and opening up possibilities for more benevolent responses toward individuals who are less well off.

Research on stereotype activation (e.g., Kawakami et al., 2000, 2005) shows that stereotype content may be altered such that prejudicial reactions may be reduced. Studies on worldview maintenance, and specifically the belief in a just world (e.g., Bal & Van den

Bos, 2015; Loseman & Van den Bos, 2012), show that alleviating feelings of personal uncertainty, either by affirming personal certainty or by refocusing attention toward other aspects of an unjust situation, can reduce derogatory reactions.

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