



Victim's innocence, social categorization, and the threat to the belief in a just world [☆]

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Abstract

This research studies people's reactions to the suffering of victims, examining the hypothesis of the belief in a just world (BJW) (Lerner, 1980) according to which the awareness of innocent victims threatens people's BJW, and extending the scope of BJW theory to intergroup contexts. An implicit measure of the threat to the BJW (Hafer, 2000a) is used in this research. After participants viewed a videotaped film containing the victimization story they performed an emotional modified Stroop task. Study 1 examined the threat to the BJW as function of the innocence of the victim at an interpersonal level of analysis. Results show that only the innocent victim threatens the observer's BJW. Study 2 examined the threat to the BJW as function of the victim's group and of the victim's innocence. Results show that an ingroup victim threatens the participant's BJW more than a victim belonging to an outgroup.

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Introduction

Research carried out in the context of the belief in a just world (BJW) theory (Lerner, 1980; Lerner & Simmons, 1966) has shown that this belief is fundamental in maintaining psychological well-being (see Dalbert, 2001 for a review). This belief, however, is also associated with secondary victimization (Brickman et al., 1982), which means that victims are held to be responsible and blameworthy for their own situation (Lerner, 1980). At an empirical level, there are a number of studies which have demonstrated that the stronger the BJW, the more likely people are to

engage in secondary victimization, presumably because of the greater threat to their BJW (for a review, see Hafer & Bègue, 2005; Lerner & Miller, 1978; Montada, 1998).

However, few empirical studies have analyzed the relation between the victim's innocence and the threat to the BJW, a critical factor of the theory. Moreover, studies on the BJW have not examined this belief at the intergroup level of analysis. How does this belief operate in an intergroup context? To contribute to the development of the BJW theory and to extend its scope to intergroup processes, this paper presents two studies that analyse the relation between the victim's innocence and the threat to the BJW, and the relation between such threat and the social categorization of an innocent victim.

Victim's innocence and the threat to the belief in a just world

As previously noted, several studies have shown that people with a stronger BJW engage in more secondary victimization than those with a weaker BJW, given that suffering is a threat to this belief. However, few studies intended

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to show that only the innocent victim is a threat to the BJW. Exceptions are the study by Comby, Devos, and Deschamps (1995), the results of which were, however, inconclusive, and the study by Hafer (2000b, Study 1) that showed that when the victim is innocent observers devalue and blame him/her more, when they are focused on long-term goals than when they are not focused on long-term goals. In the same vein, Correia, Vala, and Aguiar (2001) showed that when the BJW is strong and the victim is innocent there are greater correlations among different forms of secondary victimization, suggesting the employment of more than one form of secondary victimization. In two other studies, Correia and Vala (2003) analyzed the joint impact of the BJW, of the innocence of the victim and of the persistence of suffering on secondary victimization. The results showed that there was a more negative evaluation of the victim (secondary victimization) when BJW was stronger, the victim was innocent, and the suffering is more persistent.

However, even these studies focusing on the impact of victims' innocence on the threat to BJW, as well as research on BJW in general, infer the threat to this belief from the degree of secondary victimization or from the person's general reaction to the victims.

In the first study presented here, we proposed to more directly assess the impact of the victim's innocence on the threat to the BJW by employing the implicit measure generated in a modified Stroop task. Recently, Hafer (2000a) provided considerable construct validity for an implicit measure of the threat to the BJW that employed a modified version of a task developed by Stroop (1935) (cited by MacLeod, 1991; for a review, see Williams, Mathews, & MacLeod, 1996). In that task, developed in the clinical context, participants took longer to carry out a colour identification task when the colours were associated with presented emotionally threatening words. In Hafer's experimental paradigm, people were confronted with an unjust situation which was designed to threaten their BJW. Presumably, as a consequence of this threat mental categories related to justice were more strongly activated and thus words related to justice interfered more in the modified Stroop task than did neutral words (Hafer, 2000a). This was particularly true for people with a strong BJW as previously assessed on explicit measures (Hafer, 2002). This implicit measure is in accordance with the presence of unconscious processes through which a non-normative belief like BJW operates (see Lerner, 1998, 2003; Lerner & Goldberg, 1999).

In this context, in the first study, we analyze the impact of the victim's innocence on the threat to the BJW. In earlier studies (Correia et al., 2001, 2003), that impact was inferred from the degree of secondary victimization of the victims; in this new study the impact of the victim's innocence is analyzed by means of an implicit measure, an emotional modified Stroop task. In the second study, we raise a further question, does an innocent outgroup victim also represent a threat to the BJW?

Victim's innocence, social categorization, and the threat to the belief in a just world

Does the social category to which victims belong influence the reactions to their suffering? Do people react in a similar way to the suffering of innocent victims from an ingroup and to the suffering of equally innocent victims who are members of an outgroup? In fact, the BJW theory put forward by Lerner (1980) refers primarily to the world of individuals and to relationships between individuals. But our world is also a world of categorizations, of belonging to categories, and intergroup relations. When we move from the interindividual level to the intergroup level of analysis, do we continue to believe that the world is just?

Lerner (1980) and Lerner and Miller (1978) suggest that there is our world and the world of others, and people

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

Consequently: “It is not so frightening when something ‘bad’ happens to one of ‘them’” (Lerner & Goldberg, 1999, p. 628). These references seem to indicate that the BJW is a belief which relates to our own world and not to the world of others and, in this way, injustice threatens this belief only when it occurs amongst “our own”.

There has been no systematic empirical study of this hypothesis, but it is possible to find some evidence for it in studies about BJW in which similarity to the victim or, indirectly, the victim's degree of belonging to the world of the observer, is an independent variable. For example, Novak and Lerner (1968) showed that victims who were perceived as being more similar to the observer are subject to greater victimization. These authors carried out a study in which they showed that when the participants were unable to intervene on the victim's behalf, the victims perceived as being more similar to themselves were avoided more often than those who are different. According to these authors these responses lie in the need for individuals to protect themselves from the perception of vulnerability to a similar fate. The same pattern of results was obtained by Jones and Aronson (1973) and by Bloom, Kang, and Romano (1990).

However, when social categorization is clearly activated the results do not seem to follow this pattern. For example, Anderson (1992) showed that homosexuals with AIDS, compared to their heterosexual counterparts, were blamed more for their situation by a heterosexual sample of students. Kleinke and Meyer (1990) also showed, as in many other studies, that male participants assigned more responsibility to a female rape victim than did female participants. Moreover, Braman and Lambert (2001) found that a

responsible outgroup victim was blamed more by HBJW than by LBJW, but these variables did not influence the evaluation of an ingroup victim. We therefore have two types of results—the first indicating that the greater the proximity of the observer and victim, the greater the secondary victimization and, the second indicating that outgroup members are more secondarily victimized than ingroup members. The studies mentioned above are of situations involving “individual entities”. However, we may well ask what happens with the victimization of “collective entities” which belong to a world perceived as not being the world of the respondents. Montada (1998) gives an account of several studies involving collective victims, such as third world students, emigrants, the unemployed, exiles, etc. All these studies show a positive correlation between BJW and blaming these people for their fate. Along the same lines, Harper and Manasse (1992) established that participants with a weak BJW believe, more than those with a strong BJW, that poverty in the third world is due to structural causes and not to factors that are intrinsic to the victims. Still along the same lines, it was established that BJW correlates positively with a negative assessment of the poor (Furnham & Gunter, 1984; Wagstaff, 1983) and correlates negatively with perceptions of social injustice (Clayton, 1992). In the same vein, a study by Dalbert and Yamauchi (1994) shows that the situation of immigrant workers is considered to be more just by participants with a stronger BJW. But the same study also shows that participants who regard themselves as similar to immigrants consider the situation of those same immigrants to be more just than those who regard themselves as being different from them. Thus, in Dalbert and Yamauchi’s study the inclusion of collective victims in the participants’ world seems to facilitate their secondary victimization, as occurs with the victimization of individual entities and as the theory predicts. However, these results do not follow the pattern generally obtained with collective victims. It should be noted, however, that once again these studies do not evaluate the degree of threat to the BJW, which makes it difficult to know the psychological origins of these reactions.

It therefore remains to be clarified what is the impact of the group of the victim on the threat to BJW. In addition, no research has hitherto been conducted on the impact of the innocence of the ingroup and outgroup victims on the threat to the BJW. These issues are analyzed in Study 2.

Overview of research

Two experimental studies, involving 64 participants were conducted. Study 1 was designed to investigate the relationship between the threat to the BJW and the perception of the victim’s innocence, and, more specifically, the hypothesis that only confrontation with an innocent victim leads to a threat to the participant’s BJW. In the first part of the experimental procedure, participants saw a videotape containing a victimizing situation involving a child. The innocence vs. non-innocence of the victim was varied. In the

second part, participants performed the emotional modified Stroop task developed by Hafer (2000a), through which the threat to the BJW was measured. In Study 2, the same experimental procedure was used and the intergroup level of analysis was introduced. The threat to the BJW was analyzed, not only as a function of the innocence of the victim, but also as function of the victim’s social group (victims belonging to a “Portuguese family” vs. belonging to a “Gypsy family”).

Study 1

This first study assesses the impact of the persistent suffering of innocent victims on the threat to the observer’s BJW in an interpersonal context. The main hypothesis was that following the awareness of an innocent victim the participants would reveal greater interference in the Stroop task when presented with justice-related words than with neutral words. This difference, however, would not appear when the victim was not innocent, i.e., relatively responsible for his fate.

Method

Participants

Participants were 24 undergraduate university students (13 women and 11 men) who were randomly assigned to the experimental conditions with 12 participants in each condition.

Procedure and material

Participants were invited to collaborate in two studies on Social Psychology; they went individually to a room and watched a video that lasted ≈ 5 min. After that they were told that they should complete a questionnaire, but the experimenter said that, by mistake, she had not brought it with her. Then, supposedly while they waited for the arrival of another experimenter with the questionnaires, the participants executed a second task, the emotional modified Stroop test. At the end of this task, the experimenter stated that she did have the questionnaire after all and the participants completed the questionnaire about the content of the video that they had seen in the beginning. At the end the participants were thanked and debriefed.

Description of the story presented in the video. In the video the following truthful story was presented: six years ago a male eight-year-old child, which we here designate by Z for preservation of his anonymity, lost both arms as a consequence of a shock in an electric cable. The cable was in a house under construction. When Z was playing ball with some friends, the ball went to the house that was not sufficiently protected. When Z went to get the ball, to avoid falling down he grasped a cable and was hit by an electric shock of great intensity and as consequence he lost both arms. Therefore, Z cannot carry out everyday activities alone, such as opening doors, eating or drinking, etc. In the

interview with the father of Z, with the mother, and especially with the grandfather, reference is made to the fact that the compensation that they were awarded by the electricity company was much lower than the usual amount (3000 Euros) and it was not enough for the child's prostheses.

Description of the emotional modified Stroop task. The presentation of the stimuli and the register of the latency were made through the software TEC (Experimental Psychology Laboratory of the FPCE, 2000) in a portable PC with a colour monitor of 35 cm. The participants sat down, ≈ 70 cm away from the screen and they were invited to adjust the monitor according to their best angle of vision.

Participants were confronted with the following emotional modified Stroop task based on the Hafer experimental paradigm (2000a): the words were presented on a black screen during 33 ms (2 frames), followed by a mask constituted by eight asterisks of the same colour as the word; the colours of both the words and the mask could be one among red, blue, yellow, or green; the order of presentation of each word, as well as the colour in which it appeared were randomized in each application, with the restriction that each colour could not appear in more than two consecutive trials; the same restriction was applied to the type of words, so that in each trial no more than two consecutive words of the same category would appear.

Each trial consisted of a white cross on the centre of the screen during 800 ms (font = system; size = 36), the word was presented during 33 ms (font = arial; size = 72, small caps) and, soon afterwards, a mask of eight asterisks appeared (font = arial; size = 124), of the same colour as the word, that remained on the screen until the participant answered. The participants were asked to indicate the colour of the stimulus that appeared on the screen as fast and exactly as they were able to. The participants had a training phase constituted by six trials.

To verify the sublimarity of the stimuli, we conducted a pre-test with another sample and a post-experimental control with the experimental participants. In the pre-test nine participants were asked to accomplish the emotional modified Stroop task, just like the experimental participants, with the difference that before pressing the key corresponding to the colour of the stimulus on the screen, they had to say what they had seen on the screen. Only one person mentioned having seen words and identified four correctly.

In the post-experimental control, participants were asked to give their impression of the goals of the study. No participant suspected that the two tasks (viewing the video and the emotional modified Stroop task) were related, or mentioned having seen words on the computer screen. These data and the studies by Perdue, Dovidio, Gurtman, and Tyler (1990) and Wittenbrink, Judd, and Park (1997) strongly suggest that this duration of stimuli presentation is a subliminal one.

The emotional modified Stroop task involved two categories of words, each one with 10 words: words related to justice (example: well, right, and fair) and neutral words (example: telephone, wood, and glass). Two analyses of variance with repeated measures showed no difference of means for the length of the words, $F(1,9) = 2.50$, $p > .05$, or to their frequency of usage in the Portuguese language $F(1,9) = .15$, $p > .05$ (information from Linguistic Center of the University of Lisbon).

Design and experimental conditions

The experimental design is a 2 within-subjects factor (category of the word: justice words vs. neutral words) \times 2 between-subjects factor (victim's innocence: innocent vs. non-innocent). The dependent variable is the time to identify the stimuli that appear on the screen (latency). Under the innocent condition, the experimenter did not add more information to the one the participant received through the video; in the non-innocent condition, in the end of the video the experimenter stated that the child as well as the child's parents had already been informed of the danger that constituted the circulation in that place and a danger sign was placed in that area. The main hypothesis is that when the victim is innocent the latency will be significantly higher for justice-related words than for neutral ones but there will be no significant differences when the victim is non-innocent.

Results and discussion

Manipulation check

Closed-answer questions were included in order to check for the experimental manipulations. In order to control the manipulation of the variable victim's innocence, the participant should answer the following question: "Has Z already been warned about the danger of an electrical cable?" between two options, "Yes, Z had already been warned" (correct answer to the participants in the non-innocent condition) and "No, Z had not been warned" (correct answer to the participants in the innocent condition). All participants of this study answered the manipulation-check question correctly.

To evaluate to what degree the suffering of Z was considered as persistent, we conducted a post-test with 25 other participants that indicated, in a scale of 1 (easy to repair) to 7 (difficult to repair) to what degree the consequences of the accident were repairable. The results showed that the consequences of the accident were considered as very difficult to restore ($M = 6.24$).

Measure of the threat to the belief in a just world

In the emotional modified Stroop task, the total number of errors in colour identification was five (in 480 trials). The latencies superior to three standard deviations below or above the participants mean were excluded from the analysis, in the total of four. As a result, of the 480 trials nine answers were excluded and the latencies considered were

Table 1
Means of colour-identification latencies for justice-related words and neutral words per experimental condition: Study 1

	Innocent victim	Non-innocent victim
Justice	765.33	714.49
Neutral	718.13	712.56

Note. Colour-identification latencies are in milliseconds.

between 342 and 1393 ms. The latencies were transformed into natural logarithms before the analysis in order to eliminate the positive asymmetry of the distribution (however, to facilitate the understanding of the results, these are presented in milliseconds).

A mixed ANOVA 2 within-subjects factor (category of the word: justice words vs. neutral words) \times 2 between-subjects factor (innocence of the victim: innocent vs. non-innocent) was conducted on the transformed latencies. This analysis revealed a main effect of the category of the word, $F(1,22) = 5.32$, $p = .031$, $\eta^2 = .20$, as well as an interaction effect between the category of the word and the victim's innocence, $F(1,22) = 4.56$, $p = .044$, $\eta^2 = .17$. The main effect of the victim's innocence was not significant, $F(1,22) < 1$, *ns*.

Regarding the main effect of the word category, the latency for the justice-related words is higher than the latency for the neutral words, $M = 737.29$ vs. $M = 714.91$. Regarding the interaction effect between the category of the word and the condition innocent/ non-innocent, we conducted contrasts between pairs of conditions according to the predictions. As predicted, under the innocent condition, the latency of colour identification was higher when words of justice were presented, $M = 765.33$, in comparison with neutral words, $M = 718.13$, $F(1,22) = 9.88$, $p = .005$, in contrast, in the non-innocent condition that difference was not significant, $M = 714.49$ vs. $M = 712.56$, $F(1,22) < 1$, *ns*.

The time of colour identification, when neutral words were presented, did not differ with the victim's innocence, $M = 718.13$ and $M = 712.56$, $F(1,22) < 1$, *ns*.

In sum the goal of this study was to determine the impact of the victim's innocence in the activation of the knowledge structures related to justice, as an indicator of the threat to the BJW (Table 1). Results confirmed the predictions. After being confronted with an innocent victim, participants took more time to identify the colour of the mask when the words that preceded it were related to justice than when the words that preceded it were neutral. The same did not happen when the participants were confronted with a non-innocent victim.

The availability of this implicit measure of the activation of people's preconscious concern with justice following the awareness of an innocent victim offers the possibility of more closely examining how people assess and react to the extent to which victims deserve their fates. In this study, the information that the victim had been previously warned about the possibility of being seriously harmed was sufficient to noticeably reduce or preclude the observers' concern with justice. The BJW explanation for this finding focuses on the observer's implicit judgment

that the previously warned victim, even though a young child, by failing to take sufficient precautions was complicit in bringing about the terrible things that happened to him, and thus somehow deserved his fate.

If that is a valid explanation, then it should be possible to test hypotheses concerning the effects of other factors that affect the innocence and deservingness of victims by employing the same procedures. Namely, it should be possible to examine how people react to victims who are also members of derogated minority groups. Study 2 was designed to answer the question of whether or not observers from the majority group would reveal the same heightened concern with justice following the awareness of a behaviorally innocent minority group victim as with a victim who was a member of the majority group.

Study 2

The aim of this study was to analyse the impact of the victim's innocence and the victim's group in the threat to the BJW. Participants were confronted with the same situation as the previous study. However, in this study the social categorization of the child was manipulated. The family of the child was presented as a "Portuguese family" (ingroup) or as a "Gypsy family" (outgroup). Gypsies are the minority group object of the highest blatant prejudice in the Portuguese society (Vala, Lima, & Lopes, 2004).

As reviewed above, there is not a clear pattern of results on BJW and social categorization. However, according to Lerner's (1980) hypothesis a victim from "our world" is more threatening than a victim outside our world. Therefore, we may put forward the hypothesis that the victim of the ingroup will be more threatening to the BJW than an outgroup victim. Furthermore, if we take into account the results of Study 1 which showed that an innocent victim whose suffering persists is more threatening for the observer's BJW than a non-innocent victim, it is also expected that an innocent victim of the ingroup will be more threatening than a non-innocent victim of the ingroup, whereas the innocence of the outgroup victim does not influence the threat to the BJW. Therefore we expect: (i) a higher difference between latencies for words related to justice and neutral words in the ingroup condition than in the outgroup condition, (ii) a higher latency for words related to justice than neutral words in the ingroup innocent condition; (iii) no significant difference between latencies for words related to justice and neutral words in the remaining conditions (non-innocent ingroup victim, non-innocent outgroup victim, and innocent outgroup victim).

Method

Participants

Forty undergraduate non-Gypsy Portuguese university students participated in this study (23 women and 17 men) randomly assigned to four experimental conditions, with 10 participants in each condition.

Design, independent, and dependent variables

The experimental design is a 2 within-subjects factor (category of the word: justice words vs neutral words) \times 2 between-subjects factor (victim's innocence: innocent vs. non-innocent) \times 2 between-subjects factor (victim's group: ingroup vs. outgroup). The innocence of the victim was manipulated as in Study 1. The victim's group (in relation to the observer) was manipulated as follows: to the participants in the ingroup condition, the experimenter explicitly informed that this was a situation that had happened within a "Portuguese family"; to the participants in the outgroup condition, the experimenter explicitly informed that this was a situation that had happened within a "Gypsy family". These two conditions will be named as "White" and "Gypsy" in the results. As in Study 1, the dependent variable is the latency in the emotional modified Stroop task.

Manipulation checks

To control the manipulation of the variable victim's innocence, the same questions as in Study 1 were used. In order to check the manipulation of the variable victim's group, each participant had to complete the following sentence: "Z comes from ___" with one of these two alternatives: "Portuguese family" (correct answer for the participants in the ingroup condition), and "Gypsy family" (correct answer to the participants in the outgroup condition).

Results and discussion

Manipulation checks

All participants answered correctly to the closed-ended questions related to the control of the experimental manipulations. Furthermore, in order to control for the sublimarity of the stimuli presented in the modified Stroop task, a post-experimental control was added. At the end of the experimental situation, participants were asked to give their impression of the study's goals and to say what they had seen appear on the computer screen during the modified Stroop task. None of the participants suspected that the two tasks were actually related, nor stated to having seen words on the computer screen.

Threat to the belief in a just world

As in Study 1, the latencies were transformed into natural logarithms before the analyses. A total of 30 incorrect answers were eliminated from the 800 latencies obtained.

A mixed ANOVA 2 within-subjects factor (category of the word: justice words vs neutral words) \times 2 between-subjects factor (innocence of the victim: innocent victim vs. non-innocent victim) \times 2 between-subjects factor (victim's group: ingroup vs. outgroup) showed an interaction between category of the word and victim's group, $F(1, 36) = 5.05$, $p < .05$, $\eta^2 = 12$. No other main or interaction effects were significant, all $F_s(1, 36) < 1$, *ns*. Planned contrasts between pairs of conditions according to our predictions were performed (in order to test our hypotheses). These tests show that in the ingroup condition the

Table 2

Means of colour-identification latencies for justice-related words and neutral words per experimental condition: Study 2

	Ingroup victim		Outgroup victim	
	Innocent	Non-innocent	Innocent	Non-innocent
Justice	724.32	700.82	659.56	668.84
Neutral	694.29	681.72	667.82	689.62

Note. Colour-identification latencies are in milliseconds.

latency for justice-related words is significantly higher than for neutral words, $F(1, 36) = 3.64$, $p = .05$, and it is not significantly different in the outgroup condition, $F(1, 36) = 1.56$, *ns*. These results support our predictions. However the three-way interaction effect between category of the word, victim's innocence and victim's group was not significant, $F(1, 36) = .18$, *ns*, and there were no significant differences between latencies for justice-related words and neutral words in any of the experimental conditions.

The results suggest that when participants are confronted with an ingroup victim, here presented as belonging to a "Portuguese family", an activation of mental structures related to justice occurs (Table 2). When participants are faced with an outgroup victim, presented as belonging to a "Gypsy family", this activation does not occur.

As far as the absence of the effect of the innocence of the ingroup victim is concerned, probably the explicit salience of the victim as an ingroup child, produced a greater association between the observer and the victim and thus attenuated the psychological impact of the degree of the ingroup victim's innocence. That is the ingroup victim is always perceived as innocent whereas an outgroup victim is more frequently seen as non-innocent.

General discussion

The aim of this research was to analyse the impact of the perceived innocence of a victim and the victim's group on the threat to the BJW. In the first study the relation between the innocence of the victim and the threat to the BJW was studied in an interpersonal context. In the second study an intergroup context was created and the joint impact of the victim's group and the victim's innocence was analyzed.

According to our hypothesis, the results of the first study show that, after being confronted with an innocent victim, participants take more time, in a modified Stroop task, to identify the colour of a mask when the words that precede it are related to justice than when the words are neutral. This difference was not found in the condition where it was easier for the participants to view the victim as somewhat responsible for his suffering. These results may be interpreted as indicating that an innocent victim threatens the BJW more than a non-innocent victim. Going beyond previous research (Correia & Vala, 2003; Correia et al., 2001), which inferred the impact of victim's innocence on the threat to the BJW from the degree of victim's blaming and

devaluation, this research suggests that the injustice of the suffering of an innocent victim threatens the observer.

The second study represents an extension of the BJW to an intergroup context and shows that people are more concerned with justice after the confrontation with an ingroup victim than with an outgroup victim. However, the victim is a child victim. New studies will be now needed to generalize these results with adult victims.

Both studies can be viewed as systematic replications and extensions of Hafer (2000a) emotional Stroop analysis of JW threat reactions. These replications are important given that Hafer relied on a scenario for her studies that made explicit reference to familiar referents for justice. While the use of such a scenario in no way detracts from her findings, the results of the present studies underscore the generality of Hafer's findings by showing Stroop interference effects in a context without explicit cues for justice.

It can be asked if the latency for justice words compared with the latencies for neutral words represents a measure of the threat to the BJW, or instead, it is a measure of a general concern with justice. According to Hafer (2000a) results, the fact that this measure predicts indicators of reestablishment of the BJW (such as derogation of the victim or perception of dissimilarity) in a high threat situation is a strong argument for the former assumption. Moreover, Hafer (2002) also showed that the degree of interference for justice-related words was moderated by individual differences in the BJW. Specifically, in the Hafer's experiment the interference was higher for HBJW than for low believers. Future studies including implicit and explicit measures of victimization, as well as correlations between these measures and implicit measures of threat to BJW will strengthen the plausibility of this interpretation.

As far as results of the effect of the victim's group on the threat to the BJW are concerned, they are in line with the central hypothesis of Lerner's theory according to which the BJW is a belief that applies to events that occur in our world (Lerner & Goldberg, 1999). Moreover, this result is also in line with the "scope of justice hypothesis" (Opatow, 1990) that claims that exclusion from the scope of justice "occurs when individuals or groups are perceived as outside the boundary in which moral values, rules, and considerations of fairness apply" (p.1; for discussions see Hafer & Olson, 2003; Wenzel, 2000, 2002). It may also be that threat to BJW in the case of outgroup victims occurred but was easily resolved through system justification processes (Jost & Major, 2001). However, it is also possible that the pattern of results indicates that the BJW is being threatened when the innocent victim is a member of an ingroup, whereas it is being reinforced when the innocent victim is a member of an outgroup. It is possible that outgroup victims are, after all, not seen as outside the scope of moral values, but rather they are victims in our world who suffer because they deserve that fate. In this way, outgroup victims, at least for anti-Gypsy prejudiced people, would not threaten the BJW, but would even reinforce this belief because the negative occurrences that happen to Gypsy victims prove that the

world is just: "bad things happen to bad people" (Lerner, 1998, p. 251).

Until now, studies on BJW have not attempted, at least in a systematic and explicit way, to analyze the way people react to the victimization and suffering of people in intergroup contexts. This research represents a first step articulating the BJW and intergroup relations processes (Brewer, 2001; Tajfel & Turner, 1979) including the process of infra-humanization (Leyens et al., 2003).

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