

The Effects of Belief in a Just World and Victim's Innocence on Secondary Victimization, Judgements of Justice and Deservingness

Isabel Correia,^{1,2} Jorge Vala,¹ and Patrícia Aguiar¹

Several studies have shown that victims judged to be innocent are more liked and helped by observers than victims judged to be noninnocent. Nevertheless, objectively innocent victims are very often secondarily victimized (blamed, devalued, avoided, or have their suffering minimized), and judged as deserving or as being in a just situation. An impressive amount of literature shows that high believers in a just world victimize the victims more than low believers, judge them as more deserving and think they are in a fairer situation. But the evaluation of the joint impact of the innocence of the victim and of the observers' BJW (belief in a just world) on the observers' reactions to the victim has been left undone. This study aims to throw some light on this subject. An experimental study was conducted using a 2 BJW (high; low) by 2 victim's innocence (innocent; noninnocent) between-subjects design. No interaction effects were found, but the forms of secondary victimization, as well as the judgements of justice and deservingness, were more positively correlated in the condition where the threat to BJW is higher.

KEY WORDS: belief in a just world; victimization; justice; victim's innocence.

INTRODUCTION

In the course of our life, we all learn about others who suffer and we often decide to help them. Many people even decide to join a service organization as unpaid volunteers, and due to the social and economic relevance of volunteering service organizations, researchers have been trying to understand the determinants of volunteerism (e.g., Clary *et al.*, 1988; Penner and Finkelstein, 1988).

¹Av das Fornas Armadas, Lisboa, Portugal.

²All correspondence should be addressed to Isabel Correia, Av das Fornas Armadas, 1649-026 Lisboa, Portugal; e-mail: isabel.correia@iscte.pt.

One of the factors that may account for the decision to help someone is the judgement about the victims' innocence.³ In fact, several studies have shown that victims judged to be innocent are more liked and helped by observers than victims judged to be noninnocent (Weiner *et al.*, 1998). Nevertheless, objectively innocent victims do not always elicit observers' sympathy or helping behavior. On the contrary, very often objectively innocent victims are blamed, devalued, avoided, or see their suffering minimized (e.g., Ryan, 1971). Therefore, besides having to deal with the negative consequences of the situation that victimized them (primary victimization, Brickman *et al.*, 1982) they are victimized once again (secondary victimization, Brickman *et al.*, 1982). The literature on secondary victimization covers a wide array of situations, such as unemployment (e.g., Kieselbach, 1997), sexual abuse of women (e.g., Penfold, 1992), sexual abuse of children (e.g., Walton, 1994), battered women (e.g., Rosewater, 1993), cancer (e.g., Stahly, 1988), elderly people (e.g., Nishimura and Takahashi, 1988), and HIV positive people (e.g., Cadwell, 1991).

The phenomenon of secondary victimization seems apparently perverse. Why is it that decent people, instead of relieving victims' suffering, especially in the case of innocent victims, may even contribute to increasing their suffering?

The belief in a just world (BJW) theory (Lerner, 1965, 1980) tries to explain observers' reactions to innocent victims or "victims of undeserved suffering" (Lerner and Montada, 1998, p. 1). According to this theory, sometimes decent people increase the victim's suffering because they need to believe they live in a just world, which means a world where people get what they deserve, and so there is no undeserved suffering (Lerner and Simmons, 1966). In other words, there are no innocent victims—if someone is suffering, he/she deserves it. The basis of this theory is, therefore, that there is a motivation to reorganize cognitions every time there is a discrepancy between the characteristics or the actions of someone and the outcome he/she gets when it is not apparently possible to eliminate the injustice of the situation. In other words, secondary victimization occurs as a reaction to a threat to the BJW, so that this belief may persist.

However, according to Lerner (1980) the BJW, although present in every person, is not equally strong. In Lerner's words "The question remains whether (...) everyone has the same degree or form of belief in a just world. Obviously not." (Lerner, 1980, p. 138.)

Several kinds of victimizing situations have been considered in the studies relating observers' BJW and secondary victimization, including rape (e.g., Kleinke

³According to Herbert and Dunkel-Shetter (1992) the word victim is used to refer to someone to whom some negative, painful, and somehow uncontrollable event has occurred. The suffering can be a consequence of physical and/or psychological losses. We may judge that victims vary in their degree of innocence from totally innocent victims to noninnocent victims. A victim is considered to be innocent when victimization is perceived to be the outcome of an event or fact that the victim could not control or could not have prevented (see Skinner, 1996, for a review of literature on constructs of control). A noninnocent victim is someone who is perceived as having had some control over the event that victimized him/her.

and Meyer, 1990), cancer (e.g., Maes, 1994), AIDS (e.g., Furnham and Procter, 1992), other illnesses (e.g., Clyman *et al.*, 1980), poverty (e.g., Smith, 1985), inequalities related to sex roles (e.g., Rubin and Peplau, 1973) or skin colour (e.g., Rubin and Peplau, 1973), elderly people (MacLean and Chown, 1988), fat people (e.g., Crandall and Martinez, 1996), victims of driving accidents (e.g., Montada, 1992), victims of occupational accidents (e.g., Steensma *et al.*, 1994), and unemployed people (e.g., Montada, 1998).

Most of these studies found that when confronted with a victim, observers with a high BJW showed more secondary victimization than observers with a low BJW (for reviews see Montada and Lerner, 1998). Nevertheless, other studies did not find any effects of the BJW variable (e.g., Kerr and Kurtz, 1977; Rubin and Peplau, 1973; Zucker and Weiner, 1993) or have even found opposite effects to those predicted by the BJW theory (e.g., Drout and Gaertner, 1994).

Apart from providing an impressive amount of evidence confirming these effects, what these studies have not done so far is a systematic evaluation of the impact of observers' BJW and victim's innocence on secondary victimization as well as on the judgements of justice and victim's deservingness. This is the first problem that this study addresses.

In fact, most of the studies did not control these two variables simultaneously (as far as we know the only exception is Hafer, 2000b). Some control only the innocence of the victim and do not measure or manipulate observers' BJW (e.g., Comby *et al.*, 1995; Karuza and Carey, 1984).⁴

Most other studies control only the BJW of the observers and do not control the innocence of the victim. This means that the victimizing situation is presented without an explanation of the reasons that lead to it (e.g., Kleinke and Meyer, 1990; Maes, 1994; Montada, 1998).

We think that both these variables should be taken into account in studies on the BJW and secondary victimization, because a noninnocent victim is not a threat to the BJW. The theory states that the threat to the BJW is especially high when participants with a high BJW face an innocent victim. The theory thus predicts two main effects and one interaction effect between victim's innocence and observers' BJW on secondary victimization and judgements of justice and deservingness. The main effect of BJW should imply more secondary victimization, and judgements of more justice and deservingness by high believers in a just world than by low believers. The main effect of victim's innocence should reveal that innocent victims are less subject to secondary victimization, judged to be in a less just situation and less deserving than noninnocent victims. As far as the interaction effect is concerned, innocent victims should only be less subject to secondary victimization, judged to be in a less just situation and less deserving by low believers in a just world; high believers in a just world would judge innocent victims in the same

⁴In fact, Karuza and Carey (1984) consider both observers' BJW and victims' innocence; however, they don't analyse the joint impact of these two independent variables on secondary victimization.

way they judge noninnocent victims. In fact, only innocent victims are a threat to the BJW. These effects are a basic premise of the BJW theory and one that has not been adequately tested.

The second problem this study looks at is the interrelations between forms of secondary victimization. As we have already mentioned, there are several forms of distorting the victimization event in order to find justice in it, but the BJW theory leaves partially unanswered the question of the interrelations between these strategies, and they may not all be present at the same time. Moral and behavioral responsibility have been studied the most, and Lerner and Simmons (1966) hypothesized them as alternative strategies. According to these authors, people start searching in the victim's behavior for an explanation of what happened. If they find it, they consider the victim deserving of the situation he/she is in due to his/her acts. The BJW is then preserved. Nevertheless, when it is not apparently possible to assign the responsibility to the victim's behavior, the BJW can be preserved by assigning the responsibility for what happened to the victim's character, which means derogating the victim (Lerner and Simmons, 1966). Nevertheless, for the other strategies (avoidance of the victim and minimization of suffering) the theory makes no predictions about relations between the strategies. The only research we are aware of in which some of these strategies are correlated is that by Reichle *et al.* (1998), which found a strong positive correlation between two of the strategies of secondary victimization (the minimization of the victims' injustice and blaming of the victim) of migrants, the poor in third world countries and unemployed persons.

In this study, we expected to find different interrelations between the strategies according to participants' BJW and victims' innocence, because the threat to the BJW implied in each condition is not the same. It is also probable that some research may have found no BJW effects on one of the forms of secondary victimization measured, but did find them in another, nonmeasured strategy.

Another relevant issue is the operationalisation of the evaluation of the victim. Contrary to what has been done in previous studies, we decided to measure the decrease of the attractiveness of the victim and the derogation of the victim separately, because it is well known that the assignment of positive and negative traits and/or resources to other persons or groups does not follow the same pattern (e.g., Otten and Mummendey, 1999). This has been characterised as the positive–negative asymmetry. Studies of new racism (e.g., Pettigrew and Meertens, 1995) have shown that there is a blatant pattern of discrimination characterized by the assignment of negative traits, which should not be confused with a subtle pattern of discrimination characterized by the absence of the assignment of positive traits (Correia *et al.*, 2001; Vala *et al.*, 1999). Will the decrease in the attractiveness of the victim be related to the increase in the derogation of the victim? Is the discrimination against victims subtle or blatant?

The third goal of this research is to understand the relation between the observer's judgements of justice and those of deservingness in relation to the

victim's situation. Lerner defines the BJW as "(...) the belief that people get what they deserve or, conversely, deserve what they get (...)." (Lerner and Simmons, 1966, p. 204.) According to this, the concepts of justice and deservingness should be strongly associated, especially for high believers in a just world.

The victimization situation considered in this study is that of being HIV positive. This victimizing situation is a particularly relevant one because, as Herek and Glunt (1993) remind us, people are likely to be confronted increasingly often with HIV-infected people and with the economic costs of the disease. Moreover, AIDS is associated with social discrimination, physical suffering, and death. This can make an innocent victim very threatening for an observer. This may also explain why social discrimination of HIV-infected people persists, even if it can no longer be justified by the fear of contamination (Moatti *et al.*, 1992). In fact, HIV-infected people continue to be submitted to several forms of discrimination (Comby *et al.*, 1995; Gros and De Puy, 1993), namely in health care, the work environment, and interpersonal relations. This rejection is, according to Pryor and Reeder (1993), the biggest threat to the fight against the spread of the disease, because it discourages people from having HIV tests. The significance of this victimization situation has produced some research studies on the relationship between HIV victimization and BJW theory. These studies (Connors and Heaven, 1990; Furnham and Procter, 1992; Glennon *et al.*, 1993), as already mentioned, showed that BJW is positively related to secondary victimization of AIDS' victims.

To summarise, we expect to find an interaction effect between observers' BJW and victims' innocence on secondary victimization and on the judgements of justice and deservingness. As far as the interrelations between the forms of secondary victimization and the relation between the judgements of justice and deservingness are concerned, we make no predictions, because this is only an exploratory study.

METHOD

Participants

Four hundred and thirty-six undergraduate management and social sciences students took part in this study. Ages ranged from 17 to 53 ($M = 20.9$; $SD = 3.5$). For data analysis we considered only the participants whose BJW is less than or equal to the 1st quartile (low BJW) or whose BJW is higher than or equal to the 3rd quartile (high BJW) ($N = 241$ participants: 80 male, 161 female; mean age = 21.2 years, $SD = 3.9$).

Procedure

Participants were asked to take part in a research project that aimed to apply a single scale to the Portuguese population. After responding to the BJW scale,

participants were told that the investigators were also studying what people think about HIV positive people and were presented with some questions. They were asked to answer in a spontaneous way. The time to complete the whole questionnaire was approximately 15 min.

This experiment used a 2×2 between-subjects design: the first variable is the belief in a just world (low: equal to or lower than the 1st quartile; or high: equal to or higher than the 3rd quartile); the second variable is victims' innocence (innocent victim: became HIV positive because the condom used broke; noninnocent victim: became HIV positive because he/she didn't use a condom).

Variables and Measures

Victims' Innocence

The victimization situation that was presented to participants consisted of an excerpt from an interview with an HIV-infected person. In order to preserve the anonymity of the interviewee he/she was treated as X, without any reference to name, gender, or age.

The excerpt presented was the following, and is based on an experimental manipulation employed by Comby *et al.* (1995)⁵:

Question – Do you know how you were infected?

X's Answer – Yes, I was infected by a friend. We fell in love, we started dating and after some time we had sex. He/she didn't know he/she was HIV-positive.

Question – Didn't you use condoms?

The victim's innocence was manipulated through the answer to this question. Under the "noninnocent victim" condition, the participant was infected because he/she didn't use a condom, although he/she knew the risks he/she ran, the answer was the following:

X's answer – No, we didn't use one. In the beginning we had talked about that, but I thought it wasn't necessary, that I didn't need to protect my partner, or myself. I didn't think that this could happen. . . .

Under the "innocent victim" condition, the participant was infected because the condom he/she used broke, so the victim was infected even though he/she had taken measures to prevent it, the answer was the following:

X's answer – Yes, we used condoms every time and from the beginning, but one day one of them broke. It was probably defective or of poor quality. And once is enough. . . .

⁵Hafer (2000b) also manipulates the innocence of the victim of a sexually transmitted disease in a similar way (did not use a condom or the condom used broke).

Belief in a Just World

Participants started by answering to a Just World scale that included the items of the Belief in a Just World scale (BJW scale, Rubin and Peplau, 1975) and the items of the General Belief in a Just World scale (GBJW scale, Dalbert *et al.*, 1987). The BJW scale has 20 items and the GBJW scale has 6 items, but given that items 2 and 11 of the BJW scale are the same as items 1 and 2 of GBJW scale, participants answered to a BJW scale with only 24 items. All items were answered on a 1 (*completely disagree*) to 7 (*completely agree*) response scale.

The 24 items were entered into a principal components factor analysis. Several factorial solutions were tried. The solution that was chosen consisted of 8 items (2, 9, 11, 12, and 15 from the BJW scale and 3, 4, and 6 from the GBJW scale) and one factor (eigen value = 2.63) that explains 32.9% of the total variance.

This scale is moderately reliable (Cronbach's alpha = 0.71) and all items loaded above 0.48. The mean of the scale in a 1 (*completely disagree that the world is just*) to 7 (*completely agree that the world is just*) response scale is 3.63, with a standard deviation of 0.85; the 25th percentile is 3.13 and the 75th percentile is 4.25 (see Table I).

Minimization of Suffering

The evaluation of victim's suffering was measured by agreement with the sentence "X has been suffering a lot," on a 1 (*completely agree*) to 7 (*completely disagree*) scale.

Table I. Item Analysis of the Belief in a World Just Scale ($N = 437$)

Item content	Mean	Standard deviation	Corrected item-total correlation	Alpha if item deleted
Basically, the world is a just place	2.54	1.26	0.37	0.68
It is rare for an innocent person to be wrongly sent to jail	3.72	1.53	0.36	0.68
By and large, people deserve what they get	3.45	1.54	0.44	0.67
When parents punish their children, it is almost always for good reasons	4.13	1.47	0.33	0.69
In almost any business or profession, people who do their job well rise to the top	3.79	1.58	0.41	0.68
Justice always prevails over injustice	3.46	1.54	0.51	0.65
In the long run people will be compensated for injustices	3.62	1.49	0.41	0.67
People try to be fair when making important decisions	4.82	1.46	0.32	0.69

Avoidance of the Victim

Avoidance of the victim was measured by the following questions on 7-point scales (1 = *absolutely*; 7 = *not at all*): “Would you be willing to strike up a conversation with X?” “Would you attend a party where X was present?” and “If you were a friend of X would you be willing to continue to be his/her friend after you knew he/she was infected with HIV?” These questions⁶ showed high internal consistency (Cronbach’s alpha = 0.85), and we, therefore, built an index of avoidance of the victim using the mean of the answer to these questions.

Behavioral Responsibility

Participants were asked to answer on a 7-point scale (1 = *not at all*; 7 = *totally*): “Is X responsible for the disease?” and “Is X guilty of the disease?” In this study, these questions showed a high internal consistency (Cronbach’s alpha = 0.86). We, therefore, took the mean of these two answers as a measure of victims’ behavioral responsibility.

Attractiveness of the Victim

To evaluate the attractiveness of the victim, participants were asked to identify, from the following characteristics, which of them they thought described X: polite, responsible, mature, nice, warm. In a pretest, 17 undergraduate students were asked to evaluate each of these characteristics on a 5-point scale (1 = *very negative*; 5 = *very positive*). The results showed that these characteristics were clearly positively evaluated ($M = 4.42$, significantly higher than the average point of the scale, $t(16) = 18.16$, $p < 0.001$).

Derogation of the Victim

To evaluate the derogation of the victim, participants were asked to identify, from the following characteristics, which of them they thought described X: stupid, selfish, nervous, unconscious, false. In a pretest, 17 undergraduate students were asked to evaluate each of these characteristics on a 5-point scale (1 = *very negative*; 5 = *very positive*). The results showed that these characteristics were clearly negatively evaluated ($M = 1.77$, significantly lower than the average point of the scale, $t(16) = -14.30$, $p < 0.001$).

⁶These questions are taken from the Prejudicial Evaluation and Social Interaction Scale (PESIS) (St. Lawrence, Husfeldt, Kelly, Hood, and Smith, 1990 in Johnston *et al.*, 1995).

Victim's Deservingness

The perception of victim's deservingness of what has happened to X was measured by agreement with the sentence "X deserves what has happened to him/her" on a 7-point scale (1 = *completely disagree*; 7 = *completely agree*).

Justice

The judgement of the justice of the situation in which the victim is in was measured through the answer to the following question: "How would you characterize the situation in which the victim finds herself/himself?" on a 1 (*completely unjust*) to 7 (*completely just*) point scale.

RESULTS**Manipulation Check**

To check if the manipulation of the variable victims' innocence had been interpreted in the intended way, participants were asked about X's innocence considered as X's possibility of avoiding the disease: "Could X have avoided the disease?"

A 2 (BJW: lower than the 1st quartile, higher than the 3rd quartile) \times 2 (victims' innocence: innocent, noninnocent) univariate analysis of variance (ANOVA) on this variable, revealed a significant main effect of victim's innocence ($F(1, 237) = 218.98, p < 0.001$) revealing that participants perceived the infected person who didn't use a condom more capable of preventing his/her contamination ($M = 6.25$), or less innocent than the person who used a condom ($M = 3.31$). The remaining effects were not significant. The manipulation of the "victim's innocence" variable was therefore effective. It is interesting to note that victim's innocence in the innocent victim condition ($M = 3.31$) is different from 1 (the value for completely innocent, $t(113) = 17.93, p < 0.001$). This means that the participants did not regard the victim as being completely innocent. We shall return to this aspect in the discussion.

Multivariate Analysis

A 2 (BJW: low, high) \times 2 (victims' innocence: innocent, noninnocent) multivariate analysis of variance (MANOVA) on the dependent variables (forms of secondary victimization, justice and deservingness) revealed significant multivariate main effects of BJW ($F(7, 231) = 2.09, p < 0.05$) and victims' innocence ($F(7, 231) = 31.37, p < 0.001$). The two-way interaction effect was not significant.

Univariate Analysis

Subsequent univariate between-subject analysis of variance (ANOVA) revealed significant main effects on some of the dependent variables.

There was a significant main effect of victim's innocence on the variables: victim's deservingness ($F(1, 237) = 6.62, p < 0.05$); justice ($F(1, 237) = 30.6, p < 0.001$); behavioral responsibility ($F(1, 237) = 174.43, p < 0.001$); attractiveness of the victim ($F(1, 237) = 58.15, p < 0.001$); and derogation of the victim ($F(1, 237) = 61.22, p < 0.001$).

Moreover there was a main effect of the BJW on victim's deservingness ($F(1, 237) = 11.15, p < 0.001$).

As far as deservingness is concerned, the main effect of BJW is that participants with high BJW think the victim to be more deserving of what happened to him/her ($M = 2.01$) than participants with low BJW ($M = 1.45$). The main effect of victim's innocence on this dependent variable revealed that participants considered the noninnocent victim to be more deserving of what happened to him/her ($M = 1.95$) than participants in the innocent condition ($M = 1.52$).

Regarding the main effect of victim's innocence on the justice of the victim's situation, participants in the noninnocent condition characterised the situation as more just ($M = 2.69$) than participants in the innocent condition ($M = 1.75$).

As far as the attractiveness of the victim is concerned, there was a main effect of victim's innocence, with participants assigning more positive characteristics to the victim when he/she is innocent ($M = 1.98$) than when he/she is noninnocent ($M = 0.74$). A similar effect was found on the victim's derogation variable, with participants assigning more negative characteristics to the victim when he/she is noninnocent ($M = 1.12$) than when he/she is innocent ($M = 0.43$).

The main effect of the victim's innocence variable was also found on the behavioral responsibility variable, with participants assigning more responsibility to the victim in the noninnocent condition ($M = 5.09$) than in the innocent condition ($M = 2.64$).

There were no significant effects in terms of the minimization of suffering and avoidance of the victim.

Correlations between forms of secondary victimization were analysed for each condition: participants with high BJW judging innocent victims, participants with high BJW judging noninnocent victims, participants with low BJW judging innocent victims, and participants with low BJW judging noninnocent victims. As we can see in Tables II and III, the condition of participants with a high belief in a just world and innocent victims is the one where there is a higher number of strong and significant correlations. The analysis of these correlations shows that strategies of secondary victimization seem to be more cumulative than mutually exclusive. For example, the higher the avoidance of the victim, the higher the minimization of suffering (0.45); the higher the behavioral responsibility, the lower the number

Table II. Correlations Between the Dependent Variables for Participants With High Belief in a Just World and Innocent Victims as Shown in the Upper Right Triangle ($N = 67$); and Correlations for Participants With Low Belief in a Just World and Innocent Victims as Shown in the Lower Left Triangle ($N = 48$)

	Minimization of suffering	Avoidance	Behavioral responsibility	Positive traits	Negative traits
Minimization of suffering		0.45***	0.24*	-0.31**	0.00
Avoidance	0.12		0.07	-0.09	0.18
Behavioral responsibility	0.18	0.07		-0.45***	0.19
Positive traits	-0.01	0.13	-0.28		-0.24*
Negative traits	0.21	0.02	0.06	-0.23	

* $p < 0.05$; ** $p < 0.01$; *** $p < 0.001$.

of positive traits assigned (-0.45); the higher the behavioral responsibility, the higher the minimization of suffering (0.24).

For the relation between judgements of justice and deservingness (Table IV), in all the conditions the correlation is at least positive and moderate, but in the condition where observers with high BJW judge an innocent victim, precisely when the threat to the BJW is highest, the correlation is stronger (0.40).

DISCUSSION

This research sought to examine the impact of the observer's BJW and victim's innocence on secondary victimization, and on judgements of justice and deservingness. The overall pattern of results confirms the importance of taking these two variables into account in the studies of observers' reactions to victims. As far as the first problem is concerned, the effects of observer's BJW and victim's innocence on secondary victimization, justice and deservingness, the results are partially in line with the predictions. As expected, the innocent victim

Table III. Correlations Between the Dependent Variables for Participants With High Belief in a Just World and Noninnocent Victims as Shown in the Upper Right Triangle ($N = 52$); and Correlations for Participants With Low Belief in a Just World and Noninnocent Victims as Shown in the Lower Left Triangle ($N = 74$)

	Minimization of suffering	Avoidance	Behavioral responsibility	Positive traits	Negative traits
Minimization of suffering		0.27	0.01	-0.11	0.23
Avoidance	-0.04		-0.29	-0.03	-0.04
Behavioral responsibility	-0.08	-0.25*		-0.16	-0.01
Positive traits	-0.17	0.17	-0.31*		-0.02
Negative traits	-0.18	0.24*	-0.08	0.01	

* $p < 0.05$.

Table IV. Correlations Between Justice and Deservingness by Observer's BJW and Victim's Innocence

	High BJW	Low BJW
Innocent victim	0.40* (<i>N</i> = 67)	0.20 (<i>N</i> = 48)
Noninnocent victim	0.27 (<i>N</i> = 52)	0.26* (<i>N</i> = 74)

* $p < 0.05$.

was judged more attractive, less devalued, more behaviorally responsible, was considered more deserving and in a more just situation than a noninnocent victim. In fact, according to social norms, victims should be objectively evaluated according to their degree of innocence. The main effect of the BJW was also in line with the predictions of the BJW theory, but was only found to occur in relation to judgements of the victim's deservingness. This means that people with high BJW believed the victim was more deserving of being HIV positive than people with low BJW. The fact that this effect was only found on this variable and neither on other forms of secondary victimization nor on judgements of justice may be due to the fact that the measurement of the dependent variables implied a thoughtful choice on a response scale. The fact that the BJW is a preconscious nonnormative belief (Lerner, 1998), leads people to deny it when they behave consciously. Probably the results would have been different with measures of automatic processes (Hafer, 2000a) or in situations where participants could not control their responses.

There was no interaction effect between observers' BJW and victim's innocence on any of the dependent variables. One possible explanation for the absence of interaction effect between observers' BJW and victim's innocence is that the innocent victim was not perceived to be innocent. As shown by the check on manipulation, the observers assigned significantly different degrees of innocence to the victim in the "innocent victim" and "noninnocent victim" condition, but in the condition in which the victim was supposed to be innocent he/she was not perceived to be completely innocent. This is probably related to the stigma associated with HIV-infected people and may signify that our innocent victim was not innocent enough and, consequently, not sufficiently threatening to the observer's BJW.

Another possible explanation is that the effects of the BJW and of the victim's innocence on secondary victimization, justice and deservingness are independent. This could mean that the threat to the BJW is not related to the innocence of the victim, but to the victim's suffering. In this case, it would be the suffering itself and not the conditions that lead to it that would threaten the BJW.

The analysis of the second problem addressed by this research throws some light on this discussion. In fact, the analysis of the correlations between the various

forms of secondary victimization by observer's BJW and victim's innocence show that it is important to take both these variables into account in order to understand the forms of secondary victimization, since the pattern of correlations is different in the four conditions. Forms of secondary victimization are more associated in the condition in which observers with high BJW face an innocent victim, which means it is precisely where the threat to the BJW is higher. It is important to highlight that this result was found even though under the innocent condition the victim was not perceived as completely innocent. This may mean that the two explanations for the lack of interaction effects given above are inadequate, and that this could be related to the kind of thoughtful responses that were the dependent variables.

The analysis of the pattern of interrelations between the forms of secondary victimization shows that in the condition where the threat to the BJW is higher, these strategies tend to be cumulative rather than mutually exclusive. This clearly contradicts the assumptions of Lerner and Simmons (1966), who conceived the devaluation of the victim and the blaming of the victim as alternative strategies. However, this result does not contradict the assumptions of the belief in a just world theory. In fact, this theory states that an innocent victim is highly threatening for an observer with a high belief in a just world. The consequence is that when these observers face innocent victims, they try by all means they have to redefine the undeserved suffering so that the victim is not seen to be innocent or the suffering is not perceived to be very strong. This suggests they resort to all forms of secondary victimization in order to fight that threat. This is a question that merits future research.

Another aspect that can be analysed in this study is the relation between the attractiveness of the victim and the derogation of the victim. The results show that they are negatively associated when the victim is innocent but are not associated when the victim is noninnocent, regardless of the observer's BJW. This is an open issue that may provide a promising avenue for research.

Finally, regarding the problem of the relations between justice and deservingness, the results also show the importance of taking both the observers' BJW and victim's innocence into account. Again it is in the condition where the threat to the BJW is higher that these two judgements are more closely associated. So it seems that, especially for people with a high BJW, a just world is one in which each one gets what he/she deserves.

The general conclusion of this research is that to understand secondary victimization and the judgements of justice and deservingness, it is important to take into account both the observers' BJW and the innocence of the victim. This should be borne in mind in future studies.

Finally, the results of this study lead us to propose that the BJW theory can contribute to understanding why minority groups are still secondarily victimized even though the social norm is to say that they are innocent.

ACKNOWLEDGMENT

This research was partially supported by a grant from the Fundação para Ciencia e Tecnologia (Programa PRAXIS/P/PSI/12091/1998).

REFERENCES

- Brickman, P., Rabinowitz, V. C., Karuza, J., Coates, D., Cohen, E., and Kidder, L. (1982). Models of helping and coping. *Am. Psych.* 37: 368–384.
- Cadwell, S. (1991). Twice removed: The stigma suffered by gay men with AIDS. *Smith College Stud. Soc. Work* 61: 236–246. (Special Issue: Men and men's issues in social work theory and practice.)
- Clary, E. G., Snyder, M., Ridge, R. D., Copeland, J., Stukas, A. A., Haugen, J., and Miene, P. (1998). Understanding and assessing the motivations of volunteers: A functional approach. *J. Pers. Soc. Psychol.* 74: 1516–1530.
- Clyman, R. I., Roth, R. S., Sniderman, S. H., and Charrier, J. (1980). Does a belief in a "just world" affect health care provides reactions to perinatal illness? *J. Med. Educ.* 55: 538–539.
- Comby, L., Devos, T., and Deschamps, J. C. (1995). Croyance en un monde juste: Responsabilités comportementales et morales attribuées aux personnes séropositives. *Rev. Int. Psychol. Soc.* 2: 83–106.
- Connors, J., and Heaven, P. C. L. (1990). Authoritarianism and just world beliefs. *J. Soc. Psychol.* 127: 345–346.
- Correia, I., Brito, R., and Vala, J. (2001). *Normes anti-racistes et persistance du racisme flagrant: Analyse comparative des attitudes face aux Tziganes et face aux Noirs au Portugal*, Working Paper, CIS.
- Crandall, C. S., and Martinez, R. (1996). Culture, ideology and anti-fat attitudes. *Pers. Soc. Psychol. Bull.* 22: 1165–1176.
- Dalbert, C., Montada, L., and Schmitt, M. (1987). Glaube an eine gerechte Welt als Motiv: Validierungskorrelate zweier skalen. *Psychologische Beiträge* 29: 596–615.
- Drout, C. E., and Gaertner, S. L. (1994). Gender differences in reactions to female victims. *Soc. Behav. Pers.* 22: 267–277.
- Furnham, A., and Procter, E. (1992). Sphere-specific just world beliefs and attitudes to AIDS. *Hum. Rel.* 45: 265–280.
- Glennon, F., Joseph, S., and Hunter, J. A. (1993). Just world beliefs in unjust societies: Northern Ireland. *J. Soc. Psychol.* 133: 591–592.
- Gros, D., and De Puy, J. (1993). *Pieg's par le virus: Sida et discriminations dans la vie quotidienne*, Editions Staepfli+Cie SA, Berne.
- Hafer, C. (2000a). Do innocent victims threaten the belief in a just world? Evidence from a modified stroop task. *J. Pers. Soc. Psychol.* 79: 165–173.
- Hafer, C. (2000b). Investment in long-term goals and commitment to just means drive the need to believe in a just world. *Pers. Soc. Psychol. Bull.* 26: 1059–1073.
- Herbert, T. B., and Dunkel-Schetter, C. (1992). Negative reactions to victims: An overview of responses and their determinants. In Montada, L., Phillip, S. H., and Lerner, M. J. (eds.), *Life Crises and Experiences of Loss in Adulthood*, Erlbaum, Hillsdale, NJ, pp. 497–518.
- Herek, G. M., and Glunt, E. K. (1993). Public attitudes toward AIDS-related issues in the United States. In Pryor, J. B., and Reeder, G. D. (eds.), *The Social Psychology of HIV Infection*, Erlbaum, Hillsdale, NJ, pp. 229–261.
- Johnston, M., Wright, S., and Weinman, J. (1995). *Measures in Health Psychology: A User's Portfolio*, NFER-Nelson, Berkshire.
- Karuza, J., and Carey, T. O. (1984). Relative preference and adaptiveness of behavioral blame for observers of rape victims. *J. Pers.* 52: 249–260.
- Kerr, N. L., and Kurtz, S. T. (1977). Effects of a victim's suffering and respectability on mock jury judgements: Further evidence on the just world theory. *Representative Res. Soc. Psychol.* 8: 42–56.

- Kieselbach, T. (1997). Unemployment, victimization, and perceived injustices: Future perspectives for coping with occupational transitions. *Soc. Just. Res.* 10: 127–151.
- Kleinke, C. L., and Meyer, C. (1990). Evaluation of rape victim by men and women with high and low belief in a just world. *Psychol. Women Q.* 14: 343–353.
- Lerner, M. J. (1965). Evaluation of performance as a function of performer's reward and attractiveness. *J. Pers. Soc. Psychol.* 1: 355–360.
- Lerner, M. J. (1980). *Belief in a Just World: A Fundamental Delusion*, Plenum, New York.
- Lerner, M. J. (1998). The two forms of belief in a just world: Some thoughts on why and how people care about justice. In Montada, L., and Lerner, M. J. (eds.), *Responses to Victimization and Belief in a Just World*, Plenum, New York.
- Lerner, M. J., and Montada, L. (1998). An overview: Advances in belief in a just world theory and methods. In Montada, L., and Lerner, M. J. (eds.), *Responses to Victimization and Belief in a Just World*, Plenum, New York.
- Lerner, M. J., and Simmons, C. H. (1966). The observer's reaction to the "innocent victim": Compassion or rejection? *J. Pers. Soc. Psychol.* 4: 203–210.
- MacLean, M. J., and Chown, S. M. (1988). Just world beliefs and attitudes toward helping elderly people: A comparison of British and Canadian university students. *International J. Aging Hum. Dev.* 26: 249–260.
- Maes, J. (1994). Blaming the victim: Belief in control or belief in justice? *Soc. Just. Res.* 7: 69–90.
- Moatti, J. P., Dab, W., and Pollak, M. (1992). Les Frannais et le sida . . . Les comportements 'voluent. *La Recherche* 247: 1202–1211.
- Montada, L. (1992). Attribution of responsibility for losses and perceived injustice. In Montada, L., Filipp, S. H., and Lerner, M. J. (eds.), *Life Crises and the Experience of Loss in Adulthood*, Erlbaum, Hillsdale, NJ, pp. 133–161.
- Montada, L. (1998). Belief in a just world: A hybrid of justice motive and self-interest? In Montada, L., and Lerner, M. J. (eds.), *Responses to Victimization and Belief in a Just World*, Plenum, New York.
- Montada, L., and Lerner, M. J. (1998). *Responses to Victimization and Belief in a Just World*. Plenum, New York.
- Nishimura, H., and Takahashi, Y. (1988). A study on victimization and its correlates among the aged: I. Various aspects of victimization and the vulnerability of victims to harms. *Rep. Natl. Res. Inst. Police Sci.* 29: 44–61.
- Otten, S., and Mummendey, A. (1999). To our benefit or at our expense? Justice considerations in intergroup allocations of positive and negative resources. *Soc. Just. Res.* 12: 19–38.
- Penfold, P. S. (1992). Sexual abuse by therapists: Maintaining the conspiracy of silence. *Can. J. Community Ment. Health* 11: 5–15.
- Penner, L. A., and Finkelstein, M. A. (1998). Dispositional and structural determinants of volunteerism. *J. Pers. Soc. Psychol.* 74: 525–537.
- Pettigrew, T. F., and Meertens, R. W. (1995). Subtle and blatant prejudice in Western Europe. *Eur. J. Soc. Psychol.* 25: 57–75.
- Pryor, J. B., and Reeder, G. D. (1993). Collective and individual representations of HIV/AIDS stigma. In Pryor, J. B., and Reeder, G. D. (eds.), *The Social Psychology of HIV Infection*, Erlbaum, Hillsdale, NJ, pp. 263–286.
- Reichle, B., Schneider, A., and Montada, L. (1998). How do observers of victimization preserve their belief in a just world cognitively or actionally? Findings from a longitudinal study. In Montada, L., and Lerner, M. J. (eds.), *Responses to Victimization and Belief in a Just World*, Plenum, New York.
- Rosewater, L. B. (1993). Counseling battered women. *J. Train. Pract. Profession. Psychol.* 7: 67–80. (Special Issue: Psychotherapy with women from a feminist perspective.)
- Rubin, Z., and Peplau, L. A. (1973). Belief in a just world and reactions to another's lot: A study of participants in the National Draft Lottery. *J. Soc. Issues* 29: 73–93.
- Rubin, Z., and Peplau, L. A. (1975). Who believes in a just world? *J. Soc. Issues* 31: 65–89.
- Ryan, W. (1971). *Blaming the Victim*, Pantheon, New York.
- Skinner, E. A. (1996). A guide to constructs of control. *J. Pers. Soc. Psychol.* 71: 549–570.
- Smith, K. B. (1985). Seeing justice in poverty: The belief in a just world and ideas about inequalities. *Soc. Spect.* 5: 17–29.

- Stahly, G. B. (1988). Psychosocial aspects of the stigma of cancer: An overview. *J. Psychosoc. Oncol.* 6: 3–27.
- Steensma, H., den Hartigh, E., and Lucardie, E. (1994). Social categories, just world belief, locus of control and causal attributions of occupational accidents. *Soc. Just. Res.* 7: 281–299.
- Vala, J., Brito, R., and Lopes, D. (1999). O racismo subtil e o racismo flagrante em Portugal. In Vala, J. (ed.), *Novos Racismos: Perspectivas Comparativas*, Celta, Oeiras.
- Walton, E. (1994). The confrontation clause and the child victim of sexual abuse. *Child Adolesc. Soc. Work J.* 11: 195–207.
- Weiner, B., Perry, R., and Magnusson, J. (1988). An attributional analysis of reactions to stigmas. *J. Pers. Soc. Psychol.* 55: 738–748.
- Zucker, G. S., and Weiner, B. (1993). Conservatism and perceptions of poverty: An attributional analysis. *J. Appl. Soc. Psychol.* 23: 925–943.