Social Justice Research, Vol. 16, No. 4, December 2003 (© 2003)

When Will a Victim Be Secondarily Victimized? The Effect of Observer's Belief in a Just World, Victim's Innocence and Persistence of Suffering

Isabel Correia[1,2] **and Jorge Vala**[1]

According to the belief in a just world (BJW) theory, the most threatening victim for the observers' BJW is the innocent victim whose suffering persists. Consequently the innocent victim whose suffering persists should be more secondarily victimized by high-BJW participants than by low-BJW participants. However, research has never systematically tested this basic prediction of the theory. In these two studies we tried to determine the impact of the observer's BJW, the victim's innocence, and the persistence of the victim's suffering on secondary victimization. In study 1, an interaction between BJW and victim's innocence was found on the attractiveness of the victim. In study 2, an interaction between BJW, victim's innocence, and persistence of suffering was found on the derogation of the victim.

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

In the course of their lives, people are faced with serious losses and injustices in domains such as health, work, and affection. Those losses, which are suffered either by ourselves or by other people, lead us almost always to seek an explanation, so that we can understand their cause and guide our future behavior. Several studies have shown that innocent victims are often made responsible and blamed for situations that they objectively could not have been able to prevent. In other words, very often innocent victims are treated as if they were responsible for the situation in which they find themselves. This means that, besides having to deal with the negative consequences arising from the event that victimized them (*primary victimization*, Brickman *et al*., 1982), they are victimized once again (*secondary*

[1]ISCTE – Departamento de Psicologia Social e das Organizações, Lisboa, Portugal.
[2]All correspondence should be addressed to Isabel Correia, ISCTE, Av das Forças Armadas, 1649-026 Lisboa, Portugal; e-mail: isabel.correia@iscte.pt.

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victimization, Brickman *et al*., 1982), which also implies an absence of the social support which research has shown to be so crucial for the victims' physical and psychological well-being (see Cohen and Wills, 1985; Ross *et al*., 1999, for revisions of literature). There is evidence of secondary victimization in many different types of primary victimization situations, such as, victims of unemployment (e.g. Kieselbach, 1997), sexually abused women (e.g. Penfold, 1992) and children (e.g. Walton, 1994), female victims of domestic violence (e.g. Rosewater, 1993), cancer victims (e.g. Stahly, 1988), the elderly faced with difficulties related to their aging process (e.g. Nishimura and Takahashi, 1988), and HIV-positive people (e.g. Cadwell, 1991).

The belief in a just world (BJW) theory (Lerner, 1980) has attempted to explain secondary victimization which is a pervasive phenomenon, but nonetheless apparently perverse as it contributes to worsen the victims' situation. According to this theory, all people, in a higher or lower degree, have the need to believe that the world in which they live is a just place, where each person gets what he/she deserves (Lerner and Simmons, 1966) so that they can live with confidence in the future and carry out long-term projects. In fact, the empirical evidence seems to consistently support the fact that BJW is positively associated with victims' mental health for nonvictimized individuals facing everyday challenges, as well as for victimized individuals coping with critical life events (Dalbert, 2001).

According to the BJW theory (Lerner, 1980) individuals feel the need to preserve their BJW, even when they are confronted with unjust situations, either happening to the self or to other people. This need leads the perceivers to reorganize their cognitions whenever there is a discrepancy between someone's characteristics or actions and his/her outcomes and 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. Moreover, the degree of BJW varies interindividually and, as a consequence, the motivation to restore justice through secondary victimization will vary accordingly.

Besides the perceiver's BJW degree, two other factors contribute to increase the threat to BJW caused by the confrontation with a victim: The fact that the victim is innocent, and the fact that his/her suffering cannot be relieved (Lerner, 1980). In fact, the victim that threatens the BJW the most is the innocent victim whose suffering persists, or, in Lerner's words, the "victims of unrelievable unjust deprivation" (Lerner, 1980, p. 143). Thus, it is especially under this condition that individuals are expected to secondarily victimize the most in order that they can restore their BJW.

In this context, it seems that three factors determine the reaction to a victim: The observer's BJW, the innocence of the victim, and the persistence of the victim's suffering. Most of the studies that measure the impact of BJW on secondary victimization (Correia, 2001; and Montada, 1998, for revisions of literature) show that high believers in a JW victimize the victims more than low believers. This

result has been found in studies with different measures of BJW, among participants of different nationalities, and in various victimizing situations. However, we are not aware of any study which has tried to determine the impact of these three factors simultaneously. Most take into account only one of them (observers' BJW, e.g. Montada, 1998; victim's innocence, e.g. Comby *et al*., 1995; persistence of suffering, e.g. Lerner and Simmons, 1966) or, at most, two (observers' BJW and victim's innocence, Hafer 2000, Study 1; Correia *et al*., 2001).

As far as the innocence of the victim is concerned the victimizing situation is presented to the participants with no explanation of the reasons that have led to it: For example, a cancer victim (e.g. Maes, 1994), a rape victim (e.g. Kleinke and Meyer, 1990), or unemployed people (e.g. Montada, 1998). Therefore, the participants may judge differently whether the victimization was the outcome of an event or fact that the victim could not have controlled or could not have prevented (innocent victim) or, on the contrary, whether the victim had some control over the event that victimized him/her (noninnocent victim). In the absence of information about the victim's innocence, the participants' BJW will not be threatened if they judge the victim as noninnocent. Therefore, there is no reason to expect that observers with a high BJW will react differently from those with a low BJW: Observers with a high or a low BJW will equally victimize the victim because he/she is perceived as causing his/her plight in some way. In opposition to this pattern of reaction, if the victim is perceived as innocent, the threat to the BJW will be especially high for high believers in a JW who, compared to low believers in a JW, will show a higher motivation to secondarily victimize the victim so that they can restore justice psychologically.

The variable "persistence of suffering" has not received systematic attention from researchers, either. In fact, information about the victimizing situation is very brief in almost all studies or no information at all is given about the issue. Nevertheless, that is a relevant piece of information for participants, in that persistence of suffering should increase the threat of an innocent victim to the observer's BJW as shown by Lerner and Simmons's (1966) results. In that study the variable "persistence of suffering" was envisaged in two different but related ways: As the persistence of the victim's suffering and as the possibility of the observer himself or herself be able to relieve the victim's suffering. Nevertheless, as we will show, in subsequent studies the variable "persistence of suffering" has been mainly operationalized by giving the observers the possibility of relieving the victim's suffering. In fact, in the Lerner and Simmons's (1966) experiment participants observed a victim receiving painful electric shocks as a result of making errors in a paired-associate learning task. Participants derogated the victim more when they believed the victim would continue to suffer (whether or not because of the participants' decision) and less when they believed the suffering would not continue (whether or not because of the participants' decision). Later, Simmons and Pilliavin (1972) also found that the participants derogated more the victim when they believed her

suffering would continue than when they believed the suffering would be over. In this last experiment there were no conditions that allowed the subjects to influence the victim's fate.

Miller (1977) followed this line of research considering the persistence of suffering as the possibility of the observer to restore justice by himself/herself and measuring not secondary victimization, but instead helping behavior. He observed that participants' BJW moderated the way they responded to a victimizing situation that they could (when it was an isolated case) or could not (when the situation of the victim was presented as one of many others and thus it would be impossible for the participant to effectively reduce the victim's suffering): High-BJW participants were more willing to help a victim whose suffering they were able to put an end to (the isolated case) than when they felt that they could do nothing to stop the injustice (group case). More recently, Reichle *et al*., (1998) as well as Mohiyeddini and Montada (1998) also studied this variable operationalized in this way. Mohiyeddini and Montada (1998) showed that high believers in a JW with a high self-efficacy to promote justice in the world do not secondarily victimize unemployment victims whereas high believers in a JW with a low self-efficacy to promote justice in the world recur to this form of restoration of justice. Reichle *et al*. (1998) found a negative correlation between BJW and the responsibility they felt to help and the willingness to act prosocially in favor of the unemployed, the poor from Third World Countries and migrants (all of them victims of a persistent suffering that cannot be relieved by the participants), and thus in the same line of Lerner and Simmons's (1966), Miller's (1977), and Mohiyeddini and Montada's (1998) results.

In our opinion the crucial aspect of relievable injustice (nonpersistent suffering) versus unrelievable injustice (persistent suffering) is precisely the persistence of suffering per se, and not the fact of whether or not the observer himself or herself can relieve the victim's distress (reduce the injustice) by his or her own helping behavior. In fact, for the most part of the injustices in our society people cannot expect to personally interfere to solve the problem. Instead, they rely on specialized people or institutions to do it and for the victims' objective situation it does not matter whether the help comes from the participant or from someone else. Therefore, in our opinion the observers' perception that the victim can be effectively helped by someone is more important than the issue of who the helper is. It also seems evident to us that an innocent victim whose suffering can be reduced is in a less unjust situation than an innocent victim whose suffering cannot be reduced. Hence, in the present studies the unrelievable deprivation will be operationalized as persistent suffering that the observer cannot change.

It seems then, that empirical studies which support the BJW theory have not taken into account all the variables contained in the theory. We are even of the opinion that this may help to explain the absence of BJW effects in some studies on secondary victimization (e.g. Ambrosio and Sheehan, 1991).

This paper aims to determine the impact of the observer's BJW, the victim's innocence, and the persistence of suffering on secondary victimization. In a

previous study (Correia *et al*., 2001) using a 2 BJW (high; low) × 2 victim's innocence (innocent, noninnocent) between-subjects design, the forms of secondary victimization of a victim whose suffering was persistent were more positively correlated under the condition where the threat to BJW is highest (high-BJW participants facing an innocent victim) than under the remaining conditions. Therefore, this result suggests that when the victim's suffering is persistent it is important to take into account both the observer's BJW and the victim's innocence in order to understand secondary victimization. However, in that study, the persistence of the victim's suffering was a controlled variable, and consequently the results do not enable us to determine the impact of the persistence of suffering on secondary victimization, namely through the interaction with the victim's innocence and the observer's BJW.

In order to try to answer this question in the two studies presented in this article, we took the three variables into account simultaneously. In Study 1, the BJW is measured according to a scale; in Study 2 a threat to BJW is manipulated.

Similarly to Correia *et al*. (2001), we decided to measure the attractiveness of the victim and the derogation of the victim separately, due to the positive–negative asymmetry in the assignment of positive and negative traits and/or resources to other people (Peters and Czapinski, 1990) or groups (Mummendey *et al*., 1992). Studies of new racism (Gaertner and McLaughlin, 1983; Pettigrew and Meertens, 1995) have shown that there is a blatant pattern of discrimination characterized by the assignment of negative traits and a subtle pattern of discrimination characterized by the absence of the assignment of positive traits.

In sum, we predict two main effects (of the observer's BJW and of the victim's innocence) and a three-way interaction effect between the observer's BJW, the victim's innocence, and the persistence of the victim's suffering on secondary victimization. The main effect of BJW, expresses the fact that globally participants with high BJW victimize the victims more than participants with low BJW. The main effect of the victim's innocence should reveal the fact that the innocent victim is less subject to secondary victimization than the noninnocent victim. This is due to the social norm of victim's objective evaluation that makes an innocent victim more positively evaluated than a noninnocent victim (Weiner *et al*., 1988). Moreover, we expect a three-way interaction effect of the observer's BJW, the innocence of the victim, and the persistence of suffering: The innocent victim whose suffering persists should be more secondarily victimized by high-BJW participants than by low believers; when the victim is noninnocent we do not anticipate any differences between the conditions. Also, and in agreement with Lerner and Simmons's (1966) results, we expect the innocent victim with a persistent suffering to be more secondarily victimized by high-BJW participants than by low-BJW participants; for the noninnocent victim conditions no such difference is expected because there is no injustice at all in any of the conditions.

STUDY 1

This study aims to determine the impact of the observer's BJW, the victim's innocence, and the persistence of suffering on secondary victimization. Observer's BJW will be measured with a BJW scale.

Method

Participants

One hundred and forty-nine management and social sciences undergraduate students took part in this study, 12 of whom were excluded from the analysis as a result of the check on the manipulation of the persistence of suffering variable. Of the remaining 137, 35 were male and 102 female. Participants' ages varied between 17 and 39 years ($M = 19.58$; SD $= 2.83$).

Procedure and Experimental Design

Participants were invited to take part in a research project the object of which was to adapt a scale to the Portuguese population. After answering to the BJW scale, they were told that the researchers were also studying what people think about HIV-infected people, and were then presented the case of an HIV-infected person.

In this study, the design was between-subjects $2 \times 2 \times 2$: The first variable is BJW (low: Inferior to the median; or high: Equal or superior to the median); the second variable is the victim's innocence (innocent victim: He/she became HIV-infected because the condom used broke; noninnocent victim: he/she became HIV-infected because he/she did not use a condom); and the third variable is the persistence of the victim's suffering (more persistent suffering, when there is no hope of survival; less persistent suffering, when there is hope of survival).

Independent Variables

Belief in a Just World. Participants began by answering the six items of the General Belief in a Just World Scale by Dalbert *et al*. (1987; Cronbach alpha $=$ 0.60) on a 7-point scale from 1 (*completely disagree*) to 7 (*completely agree*). The mean of the answers to the scale is 3.40, with a standard deviation of 0.91 and a median of 3.50. Higher scores mean a higher BJW.

The Victim's Innocence. The victimization situation that was presented to participants consisted of a fictitious excerpt from an interview with an HIV-infected person who was infected through sexual intercourse with a friend. In order to preserve the anonymity of the interviewee he/she was treated as X, without any reference to name, sex, or age. Based on an experimental manipulation employed

by Comby *et al*. (1995),[3] under the "noninnocent victim" condition the individual was infected because he/she did not use a condom, although he knew the risks he ran; under the "innocent victim" condition, the individual was infected because the condom he/she used broke, so that the victim was infected even though he/she had taken measures to prevent it.

Persistence of Suffering. Before answering the questions about X, the participants read a sentence in the text about the persistence of X's suffering. The information given was in the less persistent suffering condition: "According to the doctors, with appropriate medical care there is hope that X will survive"; in the more persistent suffering condition: "According to the doctors, even with appropriate medical care there is no hope that X will survive."

Dependent Variables

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. The measure of attractiveness was the number of characteristics assigned to X. 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 midpoint 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, unconscientious, deceitful. The measure of derogation was the number of characteristics assigned to X. 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, $t(16) = -14.30$, $p < 0.001$).

Perception of Justice. The perception of the situation's justice in which the victim is 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 on the manipulation of the victim's innocence variable, participants were asked about the victim's innocence: "Could X have avoided the disease?" on

[3]Hafer (2000) also manipulates the innocence of a victim of a sexually transmitted desease in a similar way (did not use a condom or the condom used broke).

a scale of 1 (*no, not at all*) to 7 (*yes, completely*). An univariate analysis of variance (ANOVA) 2 (BJW: Low/high) × 2 (victim's innocence: Innocent/noninnocent) × 2 (persistence of suffering: More persistent/less persistent) in this variable, revealed a significant main effect of the victim's innocence ($F(1, 129) = 114.17$, $p < 0.001$). It means that the participants regarded the HIV-infected individual who did not use a condom as more capable of avoiding his/her infection ($M = 6.34$), that is less innocent, than the individual who used the condom that broke ($M = 3.67$). Therefore, the manipulation of the variable "victim's innocence" was effective. To check on the manipulation of the "persistence of suffering" variable, at the end of the questionnaire participants answered the question "According to the doctors there is some hope that X will survive the disease?", choosing one of two alternatives "There is hope" or "There is no hope." Just as was mentioned earlier, only participants who answered correctly were included in the analysis of the results.

Pilot Study

To pretest the operationalization of the persistence of suffering variable, a study with a 2 (victim's innocence: Innocent/noninnocent) × 2 (persistence of suffering: Less persistent/more persistent) between subjects design was conducted. Forty-four undergraduate students were asked whether "The situation in which X finds himself/herself has temporary or permanent negative consequences?" on a point scale of 1 (*temporary*) to 7 (*permanent*). The ANOVA showed a main effect of the persistence of suffering on the perception of persistence of suffering which means that in the condition of more persistent suffering participants perceived its negative consequences as more permanent ($M = 6.75$) than in the condition of less persistent suffering ($M = 6.34$, $F(1, 40) = 5.75$, $p < .05$).

Secondary Victimization

An univariate analysis of variance (ANOVA) 2 (BJW: Low/high) × 2 (victim's innocence: Innocent/noninnocent) × 2 (persistence of suffering: More persistent/less persistent) was conducted for each of the dependent variables (the Box's M test revealed that the covariance matrices of the dependent variables differed significantly between the conditions and, as such, one of the necessary conditions for carrying out the multivariate analysis of variance was not present). Table I presents means and standard deviations of dependent variables by condition.

Attractiveness of the Victim. Regarding the attractiveness of the victim, there was one main effect of the victim's innocence: Participants attributed more positive traits to the innocent victim ($M = 1.90$) than to the noninnocent victim ($M = 0.94$; $F(1, 129) = 23.10$, $p < 0.001$). In this way an innocent victim is more positively evaluated in comparison to a noninnocent victim. The main effect of the victim's innocence was qualified by a two-way interaction effect between the victim's

Table I. Study 1: Means and Standard Deviations on the Dependent Variables by Condition

	Innocent victim			
	High BJW		Low BJW	
	More persistent ($n = 16$)	Less persistent ($n = 13$)	More persistent ($n = 22$)	Less persistent ($n = 16$)
Attractiveness of the victim	1.88 (1.31)	1.30 (0.96)	2.04 (1.43)	2.31 (1.30)
Derogation of the victim	0.44 (0.51)	0.62 (0.77)	0.55 (1.18)	0.44 (0.63)
Justice	2.56 (1.41)	2.46 (0.97)	2.23 (1.66)	1.68 (0.79)
	Noninnocent victim			
	High BJW		Low BJW	
	More persistent ($n = 14$)	Less persistent ($n = 14$)	More persistent ($n = 18$)	Less persistent ($n = 24$)
Attractiveness of the victim	1.00 (1.11)	1.29 (1.14)	0.44 (0.70)	1.04 (0.99)
Derogation of the victim	1.00 (0.68)	1.14 (0.77)	1.17 (0.51)	1.21 (0.72)
Justice	3.29 (1.54)	2.93 (1.21)	3.00 (1.57)	3.00 (1.29)

innocence and the BJW ($F(1, 129) = 5.62$, $p < .05$) (Fig. 1). To enable a better understanding of this effect we conducted contrasts between the conditions. This analysis showed that, when the victim is noninnocent, the attractiveness of the victim does not differ between participants with a high and a low BJW ($M = 1.14$ and $M = 0.74$, $F(1, 133) = 1.62$, $p > 0.10$). However, when the victim is innocent, he/she is regarded as more attractive by participants with a low BJW ($M = 2.18$) than by participants with a high BJW ($M = 1.63$; $F(1, 133) = 3.14$, $p < 0.05$) (one-tailed test). Moreover, high believers in a JW considered the innocent victim more attractive ($M = 1.63$) than the noninnocent victim ($M = 1.14$; $F(1, 133) = 2.82$, $p < 0.05$) (one-tailed test). Low believers in a JW followed the same pattern, seeing the innocent victim more attractive ($M = 2.18$) than the noninnocent victim ($M = .74$; $F(1, 133) = 28.37$, $p < 0.001$).

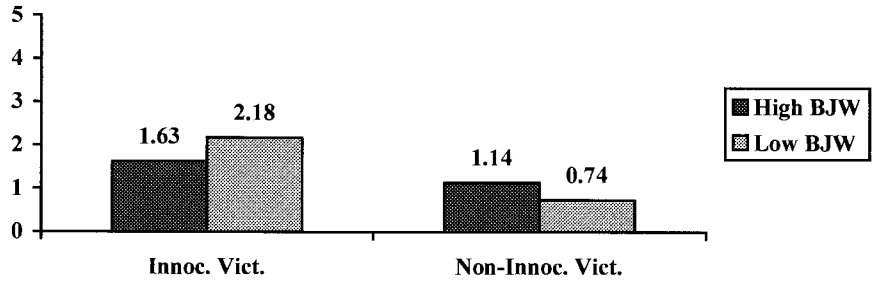

Fig. 1. Interaction between the observers' BJW and the victim's innocence on victim's attractiveness.

The remaining main effects, the 2 two-way interactions, and the three-way interaction were not significant (all F's < 1.91, all p's ns).

Derogation of the Victim. Regarding the derogation of the victim, there was only one main effect of the victim's innocence: Participants attributed more negative traits to the noninnocent victim ($M = 1.13$) than to the innocent victim ($M = 0.51$; $F(1, 129) = 21.29$, $p < 0.001$). In this way the innocent victim was less negatively evaluated in comparison to a noninnocent victim. All the remaining effects were not significant (all F's < 0.52, all p's ns).

Perception of Justice. The main effect of the variable BJW on the perception of justice ($F(1, 129) = 11.92$, $p < .001$) means that participants with higher BJW regarded X's situation as being fairer ($M = 3.05$) than did participants with low BJW ($M = 2.24$). We also obtained a main effect of the victim's innocence on the perception of justice, which means that participants think the noninnocent person is in a fairer situation ($M = 2.81$) than the innocent person ($M = 2.47$; $F(1, 129) = 2.41$; $p < .05$). All the remaining effects were not significant (all F's < 0.89, all p's ns).

In short, the main effects of the victim's innocence show that the innocent victim, in comparison with the noninnocent victim, is less derogated, considered to be in a fairer situation, and evaluated as more attractive. In other words, on the whole the innocent victim is less secondarily victimized.

DISCUSSION

The aim of this research was to determine the impact of the observer's BJW, the victim's innocence, and the persistence of suffering on secondary victimization. The predictions were only partially supported: The three-way interaction effect that had been predicted was not found for any of the forms of secondary victimization. Nevertheless, all the significant effects were either expected or, at least, do not contradict the theory.

Once again, and just as found in a previous study (Correia *et al*., 2001), the victim was evaluated according to social norms, with the noninnocent victim being judged as less attractive, more derogated, and in a fairer situation than an innocent victim. A main effect of the BJW was found on the perception of justice, showing that participants with higher BJW regarded the victim's situation as being fairer than did participants with low BJW.

Moreover, although not predicted, but in accordance with the BJW theory, one interaction effect between the observers' BJW and the victim's innocence on the attractiveness of the victim was obtained: Both observers with a high and a low BJW judged the noninnocent victim to be equally attractive, while observers with a high BJW judged the innocent victim to be less attractive than observers with a low BJW. In fact, we expected the persistence of suffering to moderate this effect. This would mean that the difference between the evaluations of an innocent victim

by low and high believers in a JW would be especially high when that innocent victim's suffering was more persistent. One reason why the predicted three-way interaction was not observed might be related with the operationalization of the persistence of suffering. In fact, although participants differentiate between the more and less persistent suffering conditions (in the expected directions), in both cases the victim's suffering is perceived as very persistent, which may have led to a nondifferential effect of this variable.

We should also mention that the effect of a different evaluation of innocent victims by high and low believers in a JW was obtained on a measure of attractiveness and not on a derogation measure, which indicates subtle rather than blatant discrimination. Therefore, this study shows that in order to predict when a victim will be secondarily victimized, it is important to consider the joint impact of the observer's BJW and the victim's innocence. However, due to the fact that BJW is considered as counter-normative and as operating automatically (Lerner, 1987, 1998; Lerner and Goldberg, 1999), there are some objections to studies in which the BJW is assessed according to a scale. We therefore replicated this study with a difference: Instead of measuring participants' BJW we manipulated a threat to this belief.

STUDY 2

This study intends to further explore the impact of BJW, the victim's innocence, and the persistence of suffering on secondary victimization when the automatic processing of information is involved. We used a *postconscious priming* (Bargh, 1994) procedure: In a first task, certain knowledge units related to BJW were activated and, in a second task, which was told not to be related to the first, we determined the impact of the activation of those structures on secondary victimization.

In this way, instead of measuring the BJW, as is the case in most studies developed in the context of BJW theory, in this study the threat to BJW was manipulated instead. As in Comby *et al*. (1995), we manipulated a threat to the individuals' BJW through the individuals' conception of the world they live in as follows: In one condition we put forward a collection of evidence which reinforced BJW inducing people to see the world as fundamentally fair, a world in which each one gets what he/she deserves (according to the definition put forward by Lerner and Simmons, 1966) or, in our words, a world in which "You reap what you sow" (and that we will designate as priming of a just world); in the other condition, we put forward a collection of evidence which threatened BJW inducing people to see the world as fundamentally unjust, a world in which each one does not have what he/she deserves or, in our words, a world in which "You do not reap what you sow" (and which we will designate as priming of an unjust world).

The collection of evidence that we presented to induce the priming of an unjust/just world (to respectively increase/decrease the motivation to re-establish the BJW) refers to a specific situation related to the individuals' own short-term future and not to people in general. The reason for this choice has to do with our intention to strengthen the motivation to re-establish the BJW. Theoretically, this choice is based on the studies that distinguish the *BJW for self* from the *BJW for other* individuals in general (Lipkus *et al*., 1996) and which have shown that the BJW for oneself is more strongly associated with the psychological correlates than the BJW for others (e.g. Dalbert, 1999).

Also theoretically, we may consider that a BJW which is under threat (under the condition of priming of an unjust world) is functionally equivalent to a high BJW, because in both cases the motivation to re-establish the BJW when the individual faces injustice is high. In the same way, a reinforced BJW (under the condition of priming of a just world) can be regarded as being functionally equivalent to a low BJW, because in both cases the motivation to re-establish the BJW is weak.

As in Study 1, we predict two main effects (of the activation of the BJW and of the victim's innocence) and a three-way interaction between the activation of the BJW, the victim's innocence, and the persistence of suffering on secondary victimization. The main effect of the activation of the BJW should express the fact that people, under the condition of priming of an unjust world, victimize the victims more than people under the condition of priming of a just world. The main effect of the victim's innocence should reveal that the innocent victim is less secondarily victimized than the noninnocent victim.

Regarding the three-way interaction between the activation of the BJW, the victim's innocence, and the persistence of suffering, in the case in which the victim is innocent, we predict that secondary victimization will be especially high under the condition of priming of an unjust world and more persistent suffering. However, when the victim is noninnocent, we do not anticipate any differences between the conditions because there is no threat to BJW, since in none of them does the victim constitute a threat to the participants' BJW. Moreover, and following Lerner and Simmons's (1966) results two more pairs of conditions are expected to differ between each other: The innocent victim with a persistent suffering will be more secondarily victimized by high believers in JW than by low believers; for the noninnocent victim conditions no such difference is expected because there is no injustice at all in any of the conditions.

Method

Participants

One hundred and fifty-nine management and social sciences undergraduate students took part in this study, 16 of whom were excluded from the analysis due

to the checking of the manipulation of the "persistence of suffering" variable. Of the remaining 143, 57 were male and 86 female. Participants' ages varied between 17 and 35 years ($M = 20.7$; SD = 4.02).

Procedure and Experimental Design

The same procedure was applied as in Study 1 with the exception that we manipulated a threat to BJW instead of measuring BJW. Participants were invited to take part in two studies. In the first one the participants were confronted with the results of a fictitious study about young people's success and satisfaction with their jobs. The information given was intended to manipulate the activation of the BJW. After this manipulation, participants were told that the researchers were also studying what people think about HIV-infected individuals. Then they were presented with the case of an HIV-infected person, and were finally asked to respond spontaneously.

In this study, the experimental design was *between-subjects* $2 \times 2 \times 2$: The first variable is the activation of the BJW (priming of an unjust world; priming of a just world); the second variable is the victim's innocence (innocent victim, he/she became HIV-infected because the condom used broke; noninnocent victim, became HIV-infected because he/she did not use a condom); and the third variable is the persistence of the victim's suffering (more persistent suffering, when there is no hope of survival; less persistent suffering, when there is hope of survival).

Independent and Dependent Variables

Activation of the BJW. The *activation of the BJW* was induced through the reading of a text with the results of a presumed study on young people's success and satisfaction with their jobs. Under the condition of priming of an unjust world, participants were presented with a collection of evidence which concluded that:

> A master's degree can no longer be regarded as a good investment, in that the dedication, the work, and the time spent will not be rewarded later. Thus, going to university is not a guarantee of a successful career. Social and economic conditions lead us to predict that this trend will continue over the next few years. To adopt the expression used by one of the jobholders with a master's degree who took part in our study: "You do not reap what you sow."

Under the condition of priming of a just world, participants were presented a collection of evidence which concluded that:

> A master's degree continues to be regarded as a good investment in which the dedication, the work, and the time spent will later be rewarded. Thus going to university is a guarantee of later career success. Social and economic conditions lead us to predict that this trend is likely to continue over the next few years. To adopt the expression used by one of the jobholders with a master's degree who took part in our study: "You reap what you sow."

The relationship between a master's degree and the expectation of future economic advantage is clear in the fact that 83% of the people in a sample of the Portuguese population in the 3rd Annual Survey of Social Attitudes of the Portuguese agree with the following statement "Nobody would study so many years to become a lawyer or a medical doctor if he/she did not think that he/she would earn more than most of the workers" (Cabral *et al*., 2000).

Victim's Innocence and Persistence of Suffering. The victim's innocence and the persistence of suffering were manipulated in the same way as in the previous study.

Measures of Secondary Victimization. The several forms of secondary victimization, namely the victim's attractiveness, derogation of the victim, and perception of justice, were measured in the same way as in the previous study.

Results

Manipulation Checks

To check on the manipulation of the victim's innocence variable, participants were questioned as to the victim's innocence in terms of the possibility of X avoiding the disease: "Could X have avoided his/her disease?" An univariate analysis of variance (ANOVA) 2 (activation of the BJW: Priming of a just world/priming of an unjust world) $\times$ 2 (victim's innocence: Innocent/noninnocent) $\times$ 2 (persistence of suffering: Less persistent/more persistent) on this variable revealed a main significant effect of the victim's innocence ($F(1, 134) = 105.42$, $p < 0.001$), meaning that participants regarded the HIV-infected individual who did not use a condom as more capable of preventing his/her infection ($M = 6.01$), in other words, less innocent than the individual who used a condom which broke ($M = 3.34$). The remaining effects were not significant. The manipulation of the victim's innocence was then successful.

To check on the manipulation of the variable "persistence of suffering," at the end of the questionnaire participants answered the question "According to the doctors is there some hope that X will survive the disease?", choosing one of two alternatives "There is hope" or "There is no hope." As already mentioned, only participants who answered correctly were included in the analysis of the results.

To check on the manipulation of the activation of the BJW variable, we measured the degree to which participants were *satisfied*, *concerned*, *upset* and in what measure it was *important* for them *to have a master's degree*, immediately after the reading of the text that manipulated the threat/reinforcement of the participants' BJW. The results, presented in Table II, showed that, under the condition of priming of an unjust world, participants were significantly less satisfied with the results of the study, more concerned and more upset than participants under

Table II. Means and Standard Deviations on Satisfaction, Concerning, Upset and Importance of Having a Master's Degree

	Priming of an unjust world	Priming of a just world	*T* test	*p*.
Satisfaction	2.41 (1.41)	5.59 (1.17)	−14.42	<0.001
Concern	5.22 (1.51)	4.06 (1.67)	4.16	<0.001
Upset	4.32 (1.62)	2.53 (1.55)	6.34	<0.001
Import. master's	6.10 (1.05)	6.55 (0.63)	−3.16	<0.005

the condition of priming of a just world. The results also showed that participants considered it less important to have a master's degree in the future under the condition of priming of an unjust world than under the condition of priming of a just world.

Secondary Victimization

An univariate analysis of variance (ANOVA) 2 (activation of the BJW: Priming of an unjust world/priming of a just world) × 2 (victim's innocence: Innocent/noninnocent) × 2 (persistence of suffering: Persistent/nonpersistent) was conducted for each of the dependent variables separately, given that, as in the previous study, the Box's *M* test revealed that the covariance matrices of the dependent variables differ significantly between the conditions. Table III presents means and standard deviations of dependent variables by condition.

Table III. Study 2: Means and Standard Deviations on the Dependent Variables by Condition

	Innocent victim			
	Priming unjust world		Priming just world	
	More persistent ($n = 19$)	Less persistent ($n = 17$)	More persistent ($n = 16$)	Less persistent ($n = 17$)
Attractiveness of the victim	1.95 (1.03)	1.25 (1.06)	1.81 (1.17)	1.88 (1.01)
Derogation of the victim	1.00 (0.58)	0.81 (0.66)	0.56 (0.81)	0.69 (0.69)
Justice	1.95 (1.03)	1.88 (1.20)	1.75 (0.93)	2.06 (1.14)
	Noninnocent victim			
	Priming unjust world		Priming just world	
	More persistent ($n = 19$)	Less persistent ($n = 18$)	More persistent ($n = 19$)	Less persistent ($n = 18$)
Attractiveness of the victim	1.00 (0.97)	1.06 (1.11)	1.37 (1.01)	1.39 (1.42)
Derogation of the victim	0.83 (0.79)	1.11 (0.76)	0.79 (0.79)	0.56 (0.62)
Justice	2.33 (1.16)	2.56 (1.38)	2.63 (1.38)	2.72 (1.41)

Attractiveness of the Victim. As far as the attractiveness of the victim is concerned the only significant effect was a main effect of the victim's innocence with participants attributing more positive traits to the victim under the innocent condition ($M = 1.72$) than under the noninnocent condition ($M = 1.20$; $F(1, 134) = 7.78$, $p < 0.01$). All the remaining effects were not significant (all F's < 2.66, all p's ns).

Derogation of the Victim. The results also showed a main effect of the activation of the BJW on derogation of the victims, which means that participants attributed more negative traits to the victim under the condition of priming of an unjust world ($M = 0.94$) than under the condition of priming of a just world ($M = 0.65$; $F(1, 134) = 5.22$; $p < 0.05$).

This main effect of the observer's BJW was qualified by a three-way interaction effect between the activation of the BJW, the victim's innocence, and the persistence of suffering ($F(1, 134) = 3.79$, $p < 0.05$), as shown in Fig. 2. Under the condition in which the victim is innocent and the suffering is more persistent, derogation was higher among participants under the condition of priming of an unjust world than among participants under the condition of priming of a just world ($M = 1.00$, $M = 0.56$, $F(1, 134) = 3.90$, $p < 0.05$) (one-tailed test). However, in the "noninnocent victim/more persistent suffering" conditions the difference in derogation between participants in the unjust ($M = 0.83$) and the just world ($M = 0.79$) priming was not statistically significant ($F(1, 134) = 0.038$, $p > 0.10$). On the other hand, when suffering was less persistent the derogation of the victim was higher under the condition of priming of an unjust world than under the condition of priming of a just world ($M = 1.11$, $M = 0.56$; $F(1, 134) = 5.45$, $p < 0.05$). The participants whose BJW had been threatened derogated the innocent victim at equivalent levels whether his/her suffering was more ($M = 1.00$)

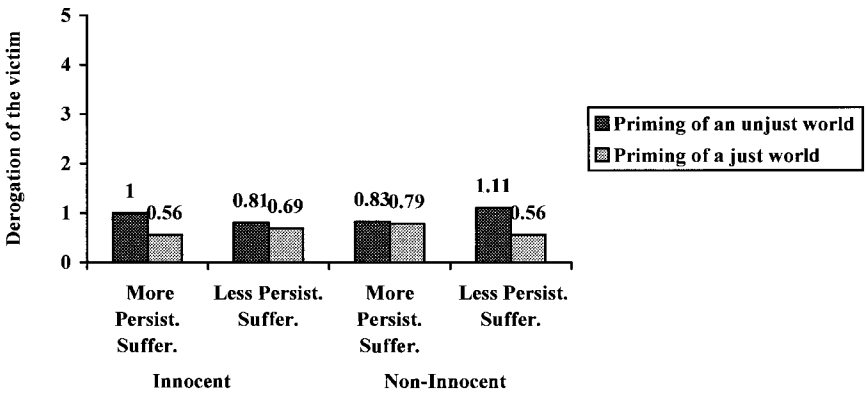

Fig. 2. Interaction between the activation of the observers' BJW, the victim's innocence, and the persistence of suffering on the derogation of the victim.

or less ($M = 0.81$) persistent ($F(1, 134) = 0.52$, $p > 0.10$). All the remaining effects were not significant (all F's < 1.17, all p's ns).

Perception of Justice. A main effect of the victim's innocence was obtained on the variable "perception of justice": Under the noninnocent condition, participants evaluated the victim's situation as fairer ($M = 2.56$) than under the innocent condition ($M = 1.90$; $F(1, 134) = 9.99$; $p < 0.01$). All the remaining effects were not significant (all F's < 0.48, all p's ns).

DISCUSSION

The aim of this research was to determine the impact of the activation of the observer's BJW, the victim's innocence, and the persistence of suffering on secondary victimization when the automatic processing of information is involved.

The activation of the BJW was manipulated through the information on the probable results of a participant's *long-term investment*, in this case relating to the future advantages of having a master's degree. Participants were told that their effort would either be rewarded or not. In the first case we intended to reduce the motivation to re-establish the BJW whereas in the second case we intended to increase the motivation to re-establish that belief. The check on this manipulation took place directly on the evaluation of that investment. We thought that this kind of manipulation check would avoid the disadvantages of other possible methods, such as direct references to a just world or confrontation with a victim. The first one would imply that the participants related this task with justice; the second one would lead to secondary victimization, which in accordance with the BJW theory or with the studies by Reichle *et al*. (1998), would lead to the re-establishment of BJW under the condition in which that motivation is higher (condition of priming of an unjust world).

Once more, and just as we had already found in our previous studies, the victim was evaluated in accordance with social norms of an objective evaluation of the victim, which means that in the noninnocent condition the victim was judged to be less attractive and in a fairer situation than an innocent victim. On the other hand, and also in line with our predictions, participants under the condition of priming of an unjust world derogated the victims more than participants under the condition of priming of a just world.

The three-way interaction between the activation of the observer's BJW, the victim's innocence, and the persistence of suffering obtained in one of the forms of secondary victimization, the derogation of the victim, confirms the importance of taking these three variables into account in studies of the reactions of observers to victims. Moreover, this interaction effect confirmed one of the fundamental predictions of the BJW theory: Under the condition in which the threat to the BJW is highest, that is, when the observer is confronted with an innocent victim whose suffering is more persistent, participants under the condition of priming of an unjust

world derogated the victims more than did participants under the condition of priming of a just world. An effect that was not expected, but which is in accordance with the theory, is the fact that the derogation is higher when participants in the condition of priming of an unjust world judged the noninnocent victims whose suffering is less persistent, than when the participants in the condition of priming of a just world judged these victims. This result suggests that noninnocent individuals who escape persistent suffering are also threatening the BJW. In fact, a just world is not only a world in which "good things happen to good people" (Lerner, 1987, p. 110) but, is also a world in which "bad things happen to bad people" (Lerner, 1998, p. 251).

GENERAL DISCUSSION

The BJW theory predicts that the most threatening victim is the innocent victim whose suffering persists. In the two studies presented in this article we analyzed the joint impact of observers' BJW, the innocence of the victim, and the persistence of his/her suffering on secondary victimization which, as far as we know, had never been done before. The results showed that participants with a higher need to re-establish the BJW, either because it is high (Study 1) or because it was threatened (Study 2), victimize the victim more than observers with a lesser need to re-establish the BJW: seeing the victim as being in a fairer situation (Study 1) or derogating him/her more (Study 2).

Moreover, in Study 1 the interaction between the observers' BJW and the victim's innocence on the attractiveness of the victim confirmed that when the observer is confronted with an innocent victim, participants with a higher BJW will derogate the victims more than do participants with a lower BJW.

In Study 2, the interaction effect between the activation of BJW, the victim's innocence, and the persistence of suffering on derogation of the victim confirmed that when the theory predicts that the threat to BJW is higher, there is more secondary victimization; that is, when the observer is confronted with an innocent victim whose suffering is more persistent, participants with a higher need to re-establish their BJW will derogate the victims more than participants with a lower need to re-establish their BJW.

These two interaction effects suggest that people with high BJW, when judging a victim, pay less attention to the underlying conditions which brought that victimization about, or even to the characteristics of the victimization, and more attention to the fact that the victimization happened, in comparison with low BJW believers, who assess the victim more objectively. This result seems to contradict Lipkus's (1992) results which suggested that high-BJW people and low-BJW people seem to pay attention to the same kind of information to decide if an event is just or not. Our results suggest precisely the opposite: People with a high BJW and people with a low BJW seem to give attention to different types of information to decide if an event is just or not. This is an open issue that may provide a promising avenue for research.

It is interesting to notice that in Study 1, where the BJW was measured and therefore the processing of information was controlled, the interaction effect between BJW and the innocence of the victim was found on a measure of subtle discrimination. This means that while there was no difference between high and low believers on the attractiveness of a noninnocent victim, high-BJW participants evaluated the innocent victim less positively than low-BJW participants. In fact high believers did not evaluate the innocent victim more negatively than low believers, they just evaluated him/her less positively.

On the contrary, in Study 2, where the BJW was induced by postconscious priming and therefore the processing of information was automatic, the interaction effect between BJW and the innocence of the victim was found on a measure of blatant discrimination. This means that when the observer is confronted with an innocent victim whose suffering is more persistent, participants under the condition of priming of an unjust world derogated the victims more than did participants under the condition of priming of a just world. In other words, observers needing to restore the BJW in face of a threatening victim evaluated the innocent victim more negatively than when that need was lower, and not merely evaluated him/her less positively as in the previous study. This double pattern of victimization found with different operationalizations of BJW supports the automaticity and the counter-normative character of that belief.

Although the pattern of results obtained are in line with the predictions, in fact we expected the joint effects between BJW, innocence of the victim, and the persistence of suffering to be more numerous. One of the reasons that might have contributed for the absence of these systematic three-way interactions may rely on the operationalizations of the innocence of the victim and of the persistence of suffering. As far as the innocence of the victim is concerned, the innocent victim was perceived as more innocent than the noninnocent victim. There were main effects of the innocence of the victim on all the measures of secondary victimization in both studies (with the exception of victim's derogation in Study 2), and both interaction effects found involved the innocence of the victim. However, as the manipulation checks showed, the innocent victim was not perceived as completely innocent, he/she was not perceived as completely absent of the possibility to avoid the infection by HIV although he/she used a condom. Another operationalization of the innocence of the victim with the innocent victim being perceived as completely absent of possibility to avoid the victimization would overcome this limitation and we would expect it to produce the interaction results predicted.

As far as the operationalization of the persistence of suffering is concerned, although conditions of less and more persistence suffering were indeed perceived as different (in the expected direction), the less persisting suffering was nevertheless perceived as persistent. This fact may have effaced some of the interaction effects predicted. Another reason for the absence of more joint effects of BJW, victim's innocence and persistence of suffering which is also related to the operationalization efficacy of this variable, are the beliefs about the persistence of

suffering of HIV-infected people that participants had prior to the study. These beliefs may have influenced the judgements of the victim, even though the participants relied on the information given when they completed the manipulation check item. Hence, future operationalizations of persistence of suffering should overcome these limitations.

Finally, the reason why the effects were found in some of the secondary victimization measures and not in others remains unclear. To date, the interrelation between forms of secondary victimization has not received much attention from the researchers (Correia *et al*, 2001, for an exception) and we think this question should be the object of an intensive program of research. Until that happens, future studies should always include several forms of secondary victimization as dependent measures so that the way in which they are affected by the situational determinants and how they relate can be understood.

In short, these two studies suggest that we will only be able to predict when a victim will be secondarily victimized if we take into account the joint impact of the BJW, the victim's innocence, and the persistence of suffering. Future studies should extend these findings with other victimizing situations, and consequently other operationalizations of victim's innocence and persistence of suffering, as well as with other measures of secondary victimization.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

This research was partially supported by two grants from the Fundação para Ciência e Tecnologia (PRAXIS/P/PSI/12091/1998 and POCTI/P/PSI/12091/1998). The authors thank Ana Guinote and two anonymous reviewers for their helpful comments on a previous version of this paper.

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