Two Spheres of Belief in Justice: Extensive Support for the Bidimensional Model of Belief in a Just World

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ABSTRACT The purpose of this research comprising five studies (N = 666) was to further corroborate the bidimensional conceptualisation of the belief in a just world proposed by Lipkus et al. (1996). It was demonstrated that belief in a just world for the Self (and not for Others) was correlated to evaluations of the meaning of life. Belief in a just world for Others was significantly correlated to discrimination against the elderly, stigmatisation of poverty, and higher penal punitiveness, while belief in a just world for Self was weakly or not related to these variables. Together, these observations confirm the importance of the conceptual and psychometric distinction between these two spheres of the belief in a just world.

The belief in a just world (BJW), according to which people generally get what they deserve (Lerner, 1965; Lerner & Miller, 1978; Lerner, 1980), constitutes a fundamental attitudinal orientation widely implicated in the perception and comprehension of individuals’ physical and social environment. As Lerner and
Montada have recently restated, “People, for the sake of their security and ability to plan for the future, need to believe they live in an essentially ‘just’ world, where they can get what they deserve, at least in the long run” (1998, p. 1).

While particularly operant in victim perception, as was extensively illustrated by Lerner (1980; see also Hafer, in press), the BJW construct has been employed in the investigation of a variety of social phenomena, including altruistic behaviour, the perception and justification of inequalities, and social discrimination (for a review, see Furnham & Procter, 1989). According to Lerner (1980, p. 125), the sphere of relevance of BJW is not limited to the judgment of others, even if this theory is mostly known from this aspect. In an earlier literature review, Lerner and Miller (1978) noted that “virtually no research has examined the question of whether people who are the victims of misfortune tend to blame themselves for their fate” (p. 1043), suggesting the prospect of applying this theoretical concept to the interpretation of how individuals perceive themselves when faced with situations of injustice or victimization. More than twenty years later, as the perspective of the target is invested with increasing importance in social psychology (see Swim & Stangor, 1998), the just world hypothesis is examined more and more frequently from the point of view of the individual (see Hafer & Correy, 1999; Hafer & Olson, 1989, 1993; Olson & Hafer, 2001).

Most of the experimental or correlational investigations of the BJW are based on general measures of the construct, following the earlier psychometric propositions of Rubin and Peplau (1973; 1975). However, given the wide acknowledgment of the limited reliability of the original scale, new unidimensional (i.e., Dalbert, Montada, & Schmitt, 1987; Lipkus, 1991) or multidimensional (Furnham & Procter, 1992; Lipkus, Dalbert, and Siegler, 1996) instruments were legitimately developed.

This emphasis on the multidimensional character of the BJW introduced an attractive conceptual approach. A multidimensional instrument operationalizing the distinction Self / Others was notably validated by Lipkus et al. (1996). This scale is composed of two reliable sets of items, one concerning BJW for the Self (BJW-S) and the other BJW for Others (BJW-O). The authors suggested that correlational and experimental research using the BJW concept would have much to gain in terms of precision and relevance from the exploration of these two dimensions. The findings they reported
confirmed the heuristic value of the differentiation between Self and Others: BJW for Self was found to be more strongly associated to indexes of psychosocial adjustment than BJW for Others (Lipkus et al., 1996). The main purpose of the present studies is to further validate this assumption. It was thus expected that the belief in a just world for the Self would be significantly linked to psychosocial adjustment but not, or weakly, to social discrimination, while belief in a just world for Others would be related to social discrimination indexes but not, or weakly, to psychosocial adjustment. While BJW-S represents a personal resource involved in self-perception, event interpretation, and coping strategies (see Lipkus, et al., 1996; Dalbert, 1999, 2001), BJW-O, sometimes described as general BJW (see Dalbert, Montada, & Schmitt, 1987), refers more to the application of the justice motive in the interpretation of the social environment. BJW-O would be activated mainly in the judgment of social events and is therefore more directly involved in social discrimination than BJW-S. This assumption is not a new one. Furnham and Procter (1992) have already argued that only “social” aspects of the just world belief are supposed to be associated with social phenomena. These authors developed a tridimensional just world scale, tapping the personal, interpersonal, and sociopolitical spheres of just world beliefs. They hypothesized that personal just world beliefs would be less linked with attitudes toward AIDS than interpersonal or social just world beliefs. Their findings verified that the personal sphere of BJW was generally not significantly linked to attitudes toward AIDS, whereas the interpersonal and the social spheres were associated with negative attitudes to AIDS victims. While the instrument developed by Furnham and Procter was a promising contribution, it has, however, not been used in subsequent studies, mainly in view of its limited reliability.

Another purpose of this study is to confirm, and to extend, the observations concerning the bidimensional character of the BJW made by Lipkus et al. (1996) with a French population, in order to contribute to its validation in a different sociocultural context. Maes (1998a) has underlined that research on BJW has today certainly reached the final phase of theory development that Furnham (1990) called "text-bookization." This is indeed the case for French psychology texts, which generally include discussions of BJW (e.g., Moscovici, 1984; Deschamps & Beauvois, 1996; Vallerand, 1994). It seems therefore important to produce findings relative to the BJW
and its measurement in the French context. On another note, Hunt (2000) has pointed out that the majority of the available research on BJW is conducted with White American or British students. The present research attempts to validate the bidimensional model of BJW in the French context with a sample of over 650 subjects, almost half of whom do not belong to the student population.

In sum, the aims of this project are to (a) test the validity and reliability of a bidimensional measure of belief in a just world in the French context and (b), following Lipkus et al. (1996) and Dalbert (1999), to contribute to the validation of the distinction between the belief in a just world for the Self and for Others by establishing their respective convergent and discriminant validities.

OVERVIEW

Five studies are reported in three parts. The first part presents preliminary psychometric assessment and test-retest reliability of the scale over a six-month interval (Study 1). A second part presents the investigation of convergent validity of BJW-S and discriminant validity of BJW-O; study 2 analyses the relationships between BJW-S and meaning of life. In a third section, three victim observation studies examine convergent validity of BJW-O and discriminant validity of BJW-S. The two BJW dimensions are analysed in their relation to the perception of the elderly (Study 3), the poor (Study 4), and to punitive attitudes toward delinquents (Study 5).

Preliminary Analyses of Scale Reliability

The aim of study 1 was to determine the basic psychometric properties of the BJW-S and BJW-O scales and to establish test-retest reliability for their French version.

METHOD

Participants

Three hundred and eleven first-year psychology students from the University of Grenoble participated in the study. The sample was composed of 44 males, 262 females, and 5 subjects who did not mention their gender, their age ranging from 17 to 42 years ($M = 19$, $SD = 2.73$).
Procedure

Participants filled in a questionnaire that included the BJW-S and BJW-O scales (Lipkus et al., 1996) during an introductory course in psychology. The scale is a 6-point Likert-type instrument composed of 2 sets of 8 items rated from 1 (strongly disagree) to 6 (strongly agree). Practical reasons, mainly related to student mobility within the academic year, made it possible for a reduced sample of 56 subjects from the initial group to complete the BJW-S and BJW-O scales six months later.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Descriptive Statistics and Reliability

Data analysis yields the following characteristics regarding the BJW-S scale: $M = 3.09$, range 1.75 to 4.50, $SD = 0.5$, $\alpha = .66$. Average BJW-O scale score was $M = 2.51$, ranging from 1 to 4.5, $SD = 0.6$, $\alpha = .80$. In accordance with previous observations (i.e., Dalbert, 1999; Lipkus et al., 1996), the two scales are positively correlated ($r = .48$, $p < .000$). Furthermore, subjects showed a tendency to score significantly higher on the BJW-S than the BJW-O scale, $t(31) = 18.18$, $p < .000$, a result that is coherent with prior findings (e.g., Dalbert, 1999). Men and women did not differ significantly in terms of BJW-S ($M = 3.10$, $SD = 0.53$ vs. $M = 3.09$, $SD = 0.49$, $t(304) = .05$, $ns$). Moreover, BJW-O male scores were significantly higher than female scores ($M = 2.66$, $SD = 0.49$, vs. $M = 2.48$, $SD = 0.61$, $t(67.82) = 2.24$, $p < .02$). A slight significant correlation appeared between age and BJW-S ($r = -.12$, $p < .02$), but not with BJW-O ($r = -.08$, $ns$).

Test-retest reliability

The following average scores were obtained from a part of the participants six months later: BJW-S scale, $M = 3.19$, $SD = 0.46$; BJW-O scale, $M = 2.57$, $SD = 0.64$. Correlations between scores obtained in the two times of testing were $r = .50$ for the BJW-S and .57 for the BJW-O scale, ($p < .000$ for both tests), which, according to the criteria proposed by Robinson, Shaver, & Wrightsman (1991), constitutes satisfactory test-retest reliability.
Belief in a Just World and Psychosocial Adjustment

Although the majority of reports on the BJW are based on unidimensional measures that do not distinguish between spheres of the belief and are mainly concerned with victim perception, it has been demonstrated that BJW is, without a doubt, related to psychological benefits. Lipkus et al. (1996) stated that “the BJW may be conceptualized as a positive illusion in that it encourages people to see their world as orderly, meaningful, and predictable” (p. 666). Many studies have pointed out that just world believers react more favourably to various threatening situations. Such individuals generally express a stronger feeling of personal control (Clayton, 1992; Furnham & Karani, 1985; Hafer & Olson, 1989; Lerner & Miller, 1978; Rubin & Peplau, 1973; Zuckerman, Gerbasi, & Marion, 1977), rarely experience feelings of depression (Ritter, Benson, & Snyder, 1990), feel less lonely (Jones, Freemon, & Goswick, 1981), have higher life satisfaction (Dalbert, 1993; 1998; Dalbert & Katona-Sallay, 1996; Dalbert, Lipkus, Sallay, & Goch, 2001; Dzuka & Dalbert, in press), consider the world as more friendly (Fleming & Spooner, 1985), are more optimistic (Littell & Beck, 1999), judge their marital relations as more satisfying (Lipkus & Bissonnette, 1996, 1998) and have less trouble sleeping (Jensen, Dehlin, Hagberg, Samuelsson, & Svensson, 1998). Schill, Beyler, and Morales (1992) showed that just world believers obtain lower scores in the Self-defeating Personality Scale (Schill, 1990). Similarly, Ma and Smith (1986) showed that high BJW is correlated to weak scores on normlessness, isolation, powerlessness, and meaninglessness measures. Rim (1983) and Heaven & Connors (1988) demonstrated a negative correlation between BJW and neuroticism. Finally, research has shown that strong just world believers are less threatened by suffered injustice (Olson & Hafer, 2001) and in certain cases are better prepared to cope with stress or psychological hardship (Brown & Grover, 1998; Tomaka & Blascovich, 1994).

It may be assumed that the more relevant dimension in matters referring to psychosocial adjustment would be the belief in a just world for the Self rather than for Others, the former being implicitly taken into account by participants in earlier studies who completed general BJW scales. In the study by Lipkus et al. (1996), only BJW for Self coherently predicted less depression, less stress, and higher life satisfaction. Furthermore, it has been shown that BJW for Self is
more coherently correlated than BJW for Others with the five main
personality dimensions (Costa & McCrae, 1989): just world believers
see themselves as less neurotic, more emotionally stable, extroverted,
and open. The aim of the following study was to test the convergent
validity of the BJW for Self and the discriminant validity of the BJW
for Others scales. This study investigated the relationships between
BJW-S, BJW-O, and the meaning and value that people attribute to
their present life.

**STUDY 2: BELIEF IN A JUST WORLD AND PURPOSE IN LIFE**

The literature discussed above lends support to the assumption that
BJW is related to psychosocial adjustment operating through a
positive vision of the world. It was hypothesized that BJW-S is
positively linked to the way people perceive their purpose in life and,
further, that BJW-S is more strongly related with purpose in life
than is BJW-O.

**METHOD**

**Participants**

Sixty-three respondents (23 men and 40 women) were interviewed by
researchers in their homes in the city of Grenoble. The sample was
composed of full-time or part-time workers (42.8%), college
students (23.8%), and retired individuals (19%), age ranging from
18 to 79 years ($M = 39.10$, $SD = 17.15$). Their occupational statuses
were the following: employees and operatives: $n = 13$ (20.6 %),
intermediary professions: $n = 12$ (19 %), managerial and intellectual
staff: $n = 7$ (11.1%), others and non-responses: $n = 31$ (49.2%).

**Measures**

Evaluation of the meaning of life was indexed with the Purpose In
Life (PIL) test developed by Crumbaugh (1968). The scale comprises
20 items, rated from 1 (low purpose) to 7 (high purpose) and is
negatively correlated with the Depression Scale of the MMPI
($r = - .65$) and Srole’s Anomia Scale ($r = - .40$) (Crumbaugh, 1968).
Addad and Benezech (1986) reported a correlation of $- .53$ between
this scale and neuroticism and showed that delinquents obtained
lower scores than nondelinquents. In another field, Paloutzian
(1981) observed that religious converts scored higher on PIL than nonconverts, whereas Crandall and Rasmussen (1975) and Soderstrom and Wright (1977) noted that PIL scores were higher among intrinsically motivated religious subjects than less committed individuals or unbelievers. Scale items refer to the tendency to attribute meaning and depth to existence (example item: “My personal existence is: 1 = utterly meaningless, without purpose; 7 = very purposeful and meaningful”). Cronbach alpha was .86 ($M = 5.14$, $SD = 0.74$). The questionnaire also included the BJW-S and BJW-O scales (Lipkus et al., 1996). Means, standard deviations, and Cronbach alphas for these scales as well as score correlations are reported in Table 1.

**RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

No significant differences were observed between genders on any of the scales. Further, preliminary correlation analysis showed that BJW-S and BJW-O were not correlated with subject’s age ($r = .07$ ns and $r = .13$ ns respectively). Zero-order correlations between just world beliefs and PIL were calculated. BJW-S and PIL scores were significantly correlated in the predicted direction ($r = .43$, $p < .001$). On the contrary, BJW-O and PIL were not significantly correlated ($r = .19$, ns). When controlling for BJW-S, this correlation reached $r = .02$, ns. Moreover, t tests comparing these two correlations (using the formula proposed by Steiger, 1980) showed that they were significantly different from each other $t(60) = 2.07$, $p < .05$). These results show that BJW for Self (but not for Others) is distinctively related to a meaningful vision of life and corroborate recent reports (see Dalbert, 2001) that suggest that BJW for Self is involved in psychosocial adjustment and, more precisely, in the way people make sense of their own existence.

**Belief in a Just World and Social Judgment: Three Victim Observation Studies**

The aim of the following studies was to replicate previous findings regarding BJW for Others and social judgment of specific targets. The studies tested the assumption that belief in a just world for Others influences the perception of such targets, in the sense that discrimination against victims (Studies 3 and 4), or punitive attitudes
Table 1
Means, Standard Deviations, Alpha Coefficients, Paired Comparisons and Intercorrelations Between BJW-S and BJW-O Scales for Studies 1-5

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sample group</th>
<th>BJW-S</th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th>BJW-O</th>
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<th></th>
<th>t value (paired)</th>
<th>Correlations</th>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>M</td>
<td>SD</td>
<td>α</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>SD</td>
<td>α</td>
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<tr>
<td>Sample 1 (n = 311)</td>
<td>3.09</td>
<td>0.50</td>
<td>.66</td>
<td>2.51</td>
<td>0.60</td>
<td>.80</td>
<td>18.18***</td>
<td>.48***</td>
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<td>Female (n = 262)</td>
<td>3.09</td>
<td>0.49</td>
<td>2.48</td>
<td>0.61</td>
<td>2.66</td>
<td>0.49</td>
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<tr>
<td>Male (n = 44)</td>
<td>3.10</td>
<td>0.53</td>
<td>2.66</td>
<td>0.49</td>
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<tr>
<td>Sample 2 (n = 63)</td>
<td>3.73</td>
<td>0.82</td>
<td>.79</td>
<td>2.87</td>
<td>0.75</td>
<td>.84</td>
<td>8.71***</td>
<td>.51***</td>
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<tr>
<td>Female (n = 40) 3.76</td>
<td>0.86</td>
<td>2.81</td>
<td></td>
<td>0.75</td>
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<tr>
<td>Male (n = 23)</td>
<td>3.82</td>
<td>0.76</td>
<td>2.98</td>
<td>0.73</td>
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<tr>
<td>Sample 3 (n = 66)</td>
<td>3.55</td>
<td>0.95</td>
<td>.90</td>
<td>2.87</td>
<td>0.98</td>
<td>.90</td>
<td>6.86***</td>
<td>.66***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female (n = 21) 3.20</td>
<td>0.64</td>
<td>2.63</td>
<td></td>
<td>0.74</td>
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<tr>
<td>Male (n = 45)</td>
<td>3.71</td>
<td>1.02</td>
<td>2.97</td>
<td>1.07</td>
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<tr>
<td>Sample 4 (n = 83)</td>
<td>3.33</td>
<td>0.73</td>
<td>.88</td>
<td>2.52</td>
<td>0.79</td>
<td>.91</td>
<td>1.70***</td>
<td>.60***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female (n = 38) 3.13</td>
<td>0.81</td>
<td>2.36</td>
<td></td>
<td>0.78</td>
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<tr>
<td>Male (n = 45)</td>
<td>3.50</td>
<td>0.61</td>
<td>2.60</td>
<td>0.78</td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Sample 5 (n = 143)</td>
<td>3.71</td>
<td>0.71</td>
<td>.81</td>
<td>2.90</td>
<td>0.74</td>
<td>.85</td>
<td>9.71***</td>
<td>.50***</td>
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<tr>
<td>Female (n = 72) 3.65</td>
<td>0.67</td>
<td>2.76</td>
<td></td>
<td>0.66</td>
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<tr>
<td>Male (n = 71)</td>
<td>3.76</td>
<td>0.75</td>
<td>3.03</td>
<td>0.80</td>
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toward delinquents (Study 5) may contribute to the preservation of a just world belief. The three studies also aimed at establishing convergent validity for the BJW-O scale by comparing the data obtained in a French context to prior findings. In addition, the studies attempted to verify discriminant validity for the BJW-S scale, in order to evaluate the relevance of the bidimensional conceptualisation of BJW proposed by Lipkus et al. (1996).

Study 3: Just World Beliefs and Attitudes Toward Elderly People

As Pasupathi, Carstensen, and Tsai (1995) note, although stereotypes of the elderly are both positive and negative, people appear to hold more negative than positive beliefs about aging (see also Heckhausen, Dixon, & Baltes, 1989). BJW may in fact intervene in the perception of the elderly. Old age is frequently associated with diverse psychological and social deficiencies. It is therefore possible that derogation of the elderly constitutes a coping strategy that, while preserving the feelings of justice, allows individuals to believe that they maintain some form of control over a condition that will probably one day become their own.

To this date, distinct empirical evidence linking BJW for others and the perception of the elderly has been reported in three studies. Weigel and Howes (1985) observed a positive correlation between BJW and endorsement of negative stereotypes toward the elderly. Lipkus and Siegler (1993) showed that subjects with high BJW scores were less likely to confirm support to the elderly. Finally, McLean, and Chown (1988) interviewed Canadian and English participants and showed a significant correlation between BJW and blame attribution to the elderly in both samples. For the Canadian sample only, high BJW was also related to the tendency to dismiss the needs of elderly people for the convenience of society. A third dimension, the tendency to approve of public welfare destined to home care for elderly people, was also negatively correlated to BJW, but the results did not reach statistical significance.

In order to verify convergent validity of the BJW scales proposed by Lipkus et al., the study of McLean and Chown (1988) was replicated with a French sample. It was hypothesized that BJW-O would be positively correlated to attribution of responsibility for poor health and low income to the elderly themselves as well as to
the tendency, generally, to dismiss their needs. A negative correlation was expected between BJW-O and support for home care welfare for the elderly. It was further expected that BJW-S would not be significantly linked to these three variables. Finally, correlations between BJW-O and the Attitude Toward Elderly People Scale (ATEPS) scores were expected to be significantly stronger than the correlations between BJW-S and ATEPS scores.

**METHOD**

**Participants**

A convenience sample composed of 66 individuals (45 men and 21 women), primarily full-time workers (54.5%) and college students (27.3%), ages ranging from 18 to 45, \((M = 30.63, SD = 7.84)\) responded to a questionnaire. Participants were recruited in the streets of the city and the area of Grenoble.

**Measures**

The Attitude Toward Elderly People Scale (ATEPS) developed by McLean and Chown (1988) consists of 9 Likert-type items rated on a 6-point scale with scores ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 6 (strongly agree). Scale items were grouped into three dimensions, as suggested by the authors, with the exception of item 1, which was excluded from the analysis in order to increase the reliability of the first dimension. This dimension corresponds to attribution of responsibility for poor health and low income to the elderly themselves and is composed of two items (example item: “If elderly people are in financial need, it is their own fault”). Cronbach alpha was .58, \((M = 2.70, SD = 1.00)\). The second dimension, representing the tendency to dismiss the needs of elderly people for the convenience of society, is composed of 3 items (example item: "While jobs are in short supply, people should retire from work early"). Cronbach alpha was .51 \((M = 2.78, SD = 0.93)\). The third dimension, measuring the tendency to approve of public welfare devoted to home care for the elderly, is composed of 3 items (example item: “More home help for the elderly should be provided by the government”). Cronbach alpha was .72 \((M = 4.43, SD = 0.90)\). The questionnaire also included the French versions of BJW-S and BJW-O scales (Lipkus et al., 1996). Table 1 presents
the means, standard deviations, Cronbach alphas, and score correlations for both BJW scales.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Preliminary analyses indicated that the only significant difference between genders concerned BJW-S, where men tended to obtain a higher score than women ($M = 3.71$, $SD = 1.01$ vs. $M = 3.20$, $SD = .64$, $t(64) = 2.11$, $p < .03$). Correlations between participants’ age and BJW-S or BJW-O were not significant ($r = -.14$, ns and $r = -.01$, ns respectively). Zero-order correlations between just world beliefs and the three dimensions of the ATEPS were calculated. In accordance with the hypothesis, BJW-O was significantly correlated positively to blame attribution to the elderly ($r = .39$, $p < .001$) and rejection of the elderly ($r = .30$, $p < .01$) and negatively linked to the tendency to approve of public welfare allocated to home care for the elderly ($r = -.27$, $p < .03$). Discriminant validity for BJW-S scale was verified through the absence of significant relationships between BJW-S and any of the ATEPS subscale scores ($r = .07$, $r = .14$ and $r = .00$ respectively, ns). Moreover, three $t$ tests for dependent samples comparing the strength of the correlations between both BJW scales and the three dimensions of the ATEPS showed that the correlations between the BJW-O scores and blame attribution as well as rejection of home care for the elderly were significantly higher than correlations between BJW-S scores and these two indexes, $t(63) = 3.42$, $p < .01$ and 2.45, $p < .05$ respectively. The comparison of correlations between BJW-S or BJW-O with rejection of the elderly did not yield significant differences ($t(63) = 1.36$, ns). Additional analyses showed that BJW-O remained significantly correlated to blame attribution to the elderly, rejection of the elderly, and rejection of home care for the elderly when BJW-S was controlled ($r = .47$, $p < .001$, $r = .27$, $p < .03$ and $r = -.37$, $p > .003$). Interestingly, when BJW-O was held constant, the correlations between BJW-S and blame attribution to the elderly and BJW-S became negative ($r = -.28$, $p < .04$), while the correlation between BJW-S and support of home care turned positive ($r = .25$, $p < .05$). The correlation between BJW-S and rejection of elderly remained
nonsignificant ($r = -0.07, \textit{ns}$). These effects are interpreted in the general discussion.

**Study 4: Belief in a Just World, Perceptions of the Poor and of Wealth Distribution**

Furnham and Procter (1989) argued that “the just world hypothesis supposes that just world believers will be unsympathetic towards the poor. Unless compensating the underprivileged is possible, which it is not in any substantial way without considerable social change, a BJW is maintained by derogating the victims of poverty and rationalizing that they deserve their fate” (p. 374). Smith (1985) has described several possible strategies to maintain the BJW in the face of poverty. These include direct denial or minimization of its existence, the belief in “another” kind of justice that will compensate the experienced suffering (see Maes, 1998b), and victim derogation, which, in this specific case, “locates the causes of and responsibilities for inequalities in human attributes and capacities” (Smith, 1985, p. 20).

Many studies have verified that BJW is positively related to derogation of the poor and of people in socially precarious situations (Campbell, Carr, & McLachlan, 2001; Furnham & Gunter, 1984; Guziewicz & Takooshian, 1992; Harper, Wagstaff, Newton, & Harrison, 1990; Montada, 1998; Wagstaff, 1983). In one of the rare studies on BJW conducted with a probability sample, Smith (1985) showed that BJW is linked to minimization of social inequalities, to beliefs that contribute to the preservation of existing inequalities, to derogation of the poor and valorisation of the rich, as well as to individuating versus structural explanations of inequalities. Reichle, Schneider, and Montada (1998) have demonstrated that when people are faced with individuals in need (e.g., immigrants, poor, unemployed), they tend cognitively to restore the injustice as a function of their BJW by either blaming the victims, minimizing their needs, or justifying their own advantages. The longitudinal nature of this study made it possible to illustrate further that the operation of such strategies of cognitive restoration of justice induces a subsequent reinforcement of BJW.

The present study aimed at investigating several dimensions linked to perceptions of poverty and wealth distribution. Such dimensions were directly derived from the study of Jonsson and
Flanagan (2000), who examined eight distinct relevant dimensions: (a) perception of pro-social action toward the poor, (b) valorisation of personal achievement, (c) perception of the existence of social support for those in need, (d) accentuation of the existence of social disparities, (e) belief in equality of chances to succeed, (f) support of public aid to individuals, (g) belief that public welfare inhibits the development of individuals’ autonomy, and (h) valorisation of egalitarianism. It was hypothesized that support for pro-social action toward the poor would be negatively correlated to BJW-O. We thought that the negative perception of poverty associated with BJW would lead such individuals to unfavourable judgments of pro-social action aimed at reducing poverty. Mohiyeddini and Montada (1998) have shown that a general BJW is related to derogation of the unemployed and a weak desire to support them politically. In addition, consistent with the results reported by Feather (1991), it was expected that BJW-O would be positively correlated to valorisation of personal achievement. In this light, support for public welfare for the poor and valorisation of an egalitarian distribution of wealth was expected to correlate negatively with BJW-O, while the perception of negative effects of public welfare on the development of individual’s autonomy would be positively correlated to BJW-O. As these attitudes are included in a globally negative perception of the poor (see Bullock, 1995), it was expected that they would be coherently correlated to BJW-O.

One cognitive strategy employed to sustain BJW consists in minimizing social inequalities. Smith (1985) observed a correlation between general BJW (Rubin & Peplau’s scale, 1975) and inequality minimization. The present study tested the hypothesis that BJW for Others would be negatively correlated to the accentuation of existing social disparities and positively linked to belief in equality of chances to succeed. Finally, believers in a just world, who have a tendency to minimize the difficulties of the poor and to generally trust people (Bègue, 2002; Lipkus, 1991; Zuckerman, Gerbasi & Marion, 1977), should also endorse the belief that in their city, citizens in need receive public support. Thus, a positive correlation between this measure and the BJW-O scale was expected. Finally, it was expected that correlations between BJW-O and the perceptions of poverty and wealth distribution scales would be significantly higher than the correlations between the latter scales and BJW-S scores.
METHOD

Participants

The study was conducted with 83 subjects (45 men and 38 women), ages ranging from 21 to 64 years ($M = 36.54$, $SD = 10.37$). The majority were full-time or part-time workers (74% and 13.2%). Their occupational statuses were the following: employees and operatives: $n = 30$ (33%), intermediary professions: $n = 34$ (37.4%), managerial and intellectual staff: $n = 18$ (19.8%), others and non-responses: $n = 11$ (12.1%). The participants were conveniently selected, mainly in the streets of the city and area of Grenoble.

Measures

The instrument devised by Jonsson and Flanagan (2000), composed of eight subscales, was presented to subjects. The social commitment subscale (6 items; e.g., “I am prepared to work less hours if this would liberate jobs for the unemployed”) measured the importance that a subject accorded to fighting social inequalities, as well as the sacrifices that one was willing to make in order to contribute to this cause ($\alpha = .77$, $M = 4.43$, $SD = 0.78$). The accentuation of social disparities subscale (3 items; e.g., “A handful of people get richer but many become poorer”) measured the importance attributed to inequalities ($\alpha = .66$, $M = 4.43$, $SD = 0.86$). The support for public welfare scale (6 items; e.g., “The state should provide everyone with free basic services such as health care and judiciary aid”) measured the priority attributed to government intervention in favour of the most needy ($\alpha = .65$, $M = 3.25$, $SD = 0.97$). The egalitarianism subscale (2 items; e.g., “It is not right that there are rich and poor in society. There should be more equality”) measured adhesion to a vision of a more egalitarian society ($\alpha = .66$, $M = 4.12$, $SD = 1.08$). The personal achievement subscale (5 items; e.g., “Competition for getting a job makes people who hold jobs work better”) measured adhesion to an individualistic and pragmatist vision of social achievement ($\alpha = .45$, $M = 3.82$, $SD = 0.71$). The perception of social relations scale (3 items; e.g., “If someone in our city has difficulties, he or she can generally count on others to help them through”) evaluated endorsement of a vision of the community watching over the well-being of each individual ($\alpha = .72$, $M = 2.88$, $SD = 0.78$). The equality of chances subscale (3 items; e.g., “In
general, everyone has equal chances of making his or her place in the
sun’’) evaluated the belief in the possibility for everyone to succeed
socially (α = .66, M = 3.25, SD = 0.97). Finally, the inhibition of
autonomy development accentuated by public welfare subscale (2
items; e.g., “When the state offers its services for free, people have a
tendency to get lazy’’) measured belief in negative effects of public
welfare on individual social conduct (α = .90, M = 4.04, SD = 1.13).
The questionnaire also included the BJW-0 and BJW-S scales
(Lipkus et al., 1996). All items are rated on a 6-point scale, with
answers ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 6 (strongly agree).

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Male scores for the BJW-S scale were significantly higher than
female scores (M = 3.50, SD = .61 vs. M = 3.13, SD = .81,
t(81) = 2.55, p < .05). Similarly, male BJW-O scores tended to be
higher than female scores (M = 2.66, SD = .78 vs. M = 2.36,
SD = .78, t(81) = 1.74, p < .08). Participant’s age was not signifi-
cantly correlated to BJW-S or BJW-O scores (respectively r = −.08
ns and r = −.04, ns). Women showed a weaker belief in equality of
chances than men (M = 3.01, SD = .92 vs. M = 3.44, SD = .97,
t(81) = 2.03, p < .04) and higher awareness of the extent of social
inequalities (M = 4.64; SD = .79 vs. M = 4.25, SD = .87,
t(81) = 2.03, p < .04). No other significant differences were observed
between genders.

Zero-order correlations between just world beliefs and the eight
dimensions of the Attitude Toward The Poor scale were computed.
Consistent with the hypothesis, BJW-O was significantly and
negatively correlated to social commitment (r = −.42, p < .001),
accentuation of economic disparities (r = −.40, p < .001), support of
public welfare (r = −.34, p < .01), and egalitarianism (r = −.37,
p < .001), and positively related to the perception of social relations
(r = .44, p < .01), the perception of equality of chances (r = .44,
p < .001), and the belief that public welfare discourages the
development of individual autonomy (r = .27, p < .05). No signifi-
cant correlation was observed between BJW-O and the personal
achievement score (r = .16, ns). Correlations between BJW-S scores
and the other measurements were systematically weaker than the
correlations of those scores and BJW-O scores (r = −.27, −.34,
The comparison of the pairs of correlations showed that two among the eight pairs were significantly different: perception of social relations, $t(80) = 2.24, p < .05$, and equality of chances, $t(80) = 3.35, p < .01$. This was not the case for accentuation of social disparity $t(80) = 0.65, ns$; belief that public welfare discourages the development of individual autonomy ($t(80) = 1.59, ns$; social commitment ($t(80) = 1.65, ns$; support of public welfare ($t(80) = 1.26, ns$), egalitarianism ($t(80) = 0.42, ns$), and personal achievement ($t(80) = 0.39, ns$).

Additional analysis indicated that when BJW-S was controlled, the links between BJW-O and the various scales remained generally similar and always significant ($r = -.33, -.26, -.23, -.23, .39, .43, .25$). The only exception was the correlation between BJW-O and personal achievement, which increased and reached statistical significance ($r = .26, p < .02$). An additional analysis was also performed to investigate the relations between BJW-S and the scales when BJW-O was controlled. None of the scale scores were correlated with BJW-S (respectively $r = -.03, -.13, -.02, -.14, -.03, .12$ and $-.05, ns$) with the exception of personal achievement scores, which were negatively correlated with BJW-S ($r = -.21, p < .05$). These results suggest that BJW-O is the only pertinent dimension in the definition of poverty perceptions. Belief in a just world for the Self is not related to the perceptions of poverty, while it appears to be negatively related to a competitive vision of personal achievement when BJW-O is controlled. These effects will be further analysed in the discussion section.

**Study 5: BJW and Penal Punitivity**

Initially, the belief in a just world was studied in order to account for the social judgment of victims. However, as Gerbasi, Zuckerman, and Reis (1977) have noted, victim derogation is not the only way of maintaining belief in a just world. Attribution of stricter sentences to agents guilty of unjust actions is another strategy toward restoring justice. Thus, the just world hypothesis is readily applied to the examination of jury trials (Davis, Bray, & Holt, 1977, p. 339). Gerbasi et al. (1977) refer to two studies that demonstrate that subjects who obtain a high score in a just world scale also attribute longer sentences than others (Gerbasi & Zuckerman, 1975; Izzett, 1974). More recent research has verified that BJW is linked to
attributions of responsibility, blame, and / or punishment to perpetrators (Ford, Liwag-Mc Lamb, & Foley, 1998; Moran & Comfort, 1982 ; Schuller, Smith, & Olson, 1994; Taylor & Kleinke, 1992). Generally speaking, the BJW is positively linked to more punitive attitudes in matters of criminal justice (Carroll, Perkowitz, Lurigio, & Weaver, 1987; Mohr & Luscri, 1995; Finamore & Carlson, 1987, but see also McGraw & Foley, 2000; Taylor & Kleinke, 1992, for inconsistent results). Kassin & Wrightsman (1983) observed that BJW is correlated to Juror Bias Scale scores, which measure pre-trial expectancies that the defendants generally committed the crimes with which they are charged, and also measure attitudes toward conviction and punishment. The aim of this study was to test the relationship between BJW for Others and penal punitivity and to further evaluate the discriminant validity of BJW for Self. It was hypothesized that BJW-O would be positively correlated to penal punitivity scores and that this correlation would be stronger than the correlation between the latter scale and BJW-S scores.

It has been demonstrated that political ideology, which is generally linked to penal punitivity (Gerbasi et al., 1977; Hamilton, 1976), is frequently related to BJW (Cheung & Kwok, 1996; Dalbert, 1992; Dittmar & Dickinson, 1993; Furnham & Gunter, 1984; Smith & Green, 1984; Wagstaff, 1983; Wagstaff & Quirk, 1983). This variable was therefore included in the questionnaire design in order to test that correlations between BJW-O and penal punitivity are not influenced by political ideology. It was expected that BJW-O would remain significantly linked to penal punitivity when political ideology scores were controlled.

**METHOD**

**Participants**

A convenience sample of 143 respondents was surveyed in the city and surrounding area of Grenoble (71 men and 72 women). Subjects were primarily full-time workers (61%) and college students (11%), age ranging from 16 to 74 years, ($M = 33.12$, $SD = 13.28$). Their occupational statuses were the following: employees and operatives: $n = 25$ (17.5%), intermediary professions: $n = 56$
(39.2%), managerial and intellectual staff: n = 25 (17.5%), others and non-responses: n = 43 (30.2%).

Measures

The Index of Punitive-Internal Attitudes to Offenders developed by Mohr and Luscri (1995) consists of 8 Likert-type items rated on a 6-point scale that ranges from 1 (strongly disagree) to 6 (strongly agree), reflecting the general tendency to favour punitive sanctions and to attribute offenses to dispositional rather than situational factors (e.g. “Courts are too soft on juvenile offenders”). Cronbach alpha was .75 (M = 1.84, SD = 1.40). Political position was measured on a 7-point scale ranging from 1 = extreme left to 7 = extreme right. The questionnaire included the BJW-O and BJW-S scales (Lipkus et al., 1996). Means, standard deviations, and Cronbach alphas of the scales, as well as scale score correlations, are presented in Table 1.

Results

No significant differences were observed between genders in regard to BJW-S and punitive attitude scores. On the contrary, male BJW-O scores were significantly higher than female ones (M = 3.03 vs. M = 2.76, t(139) = 2.14, p < .03). Age was significantly correlated to BJW-S (r = −.19, p < .02) but not to BJW-O (r = .11, ns).

Zero-order correlations between just world beliefs and Punitive-Internal Attitudes to Offenders Index scores were calculated. As expected, BJW-O was significantly correlated to punitive attitude toward delinquents: r = .17, p < .05. This weak correlation is comparable to the one reported by Mohr and Luscri (1995), which was .19. Correlations between Punitive-Internal Attitudes To Offenders Index and BJW-S scores were not significant (r = .06, ns). However, the correlations between the two BJW scores and the Punitive-Internal Attitudes to Offenders Index were not significantly different, t(140) = 1.31, ns. Participant’s political ideology was not correlated to BJW-S and BJW-O scales (r = −.06 and −.07, ns) but was moderately associated with Punitive-Internal Attitudes to Offenders (r = .33, p < .001).

A multiple regression analysis was performed in order to examine the relative contribution of BJW-S, BJW-O, and political ideology in the prediction of the Punitive-Internal Attitudes to Offenders scores.
Results showed that two among the three scales were independent predictors of the target variable ($R^2 = .14$, $F(126) = 7.15$, $p < .0002$); that is, BJW-O ($\beta = .19$, $p < .05$) and political ideology ($\beta = .35$, $p < .0000$). BJW-S was not a significant predictor ($\beta = -.03$, ns).

**DISCUSSION**

These three studies demonstrated that BJW-O is related to a stigmatizing perception of the elderly and the poor, as well as to a specific understanding of the socioeconomic environment that translates to a weaker inclination toward social action, minimization of social inequalities, and unfavourable perceptions of public welfare to people in financially needy situations. BJW-O also appeared as an independent (albeit weak) predictor of punitive penal attitudes, distinguished from political ideology. Together, these findings support convergent validity for the BJW-O scale. Moreover, the fact that correlations between BJW-S and target variables are generally not significant (Studies 3 and 5) for the BJW-S scale and are systematically weaker, and even eventually disappear, when BJW-O is controlled (Study 4) supports the discriminant validity of the BJW-S scale and verifies the relevance of the bidimensionality of the belief in a just world construct. However, it should be noted that certain pairs of correlations between the BJW-S and BJW-O scores and the variables under study were not significantly different, which suggests that, despite their differences, these two scales occasionally overlap.

Interestingly, when BJW-O scores were held constant, the correlation between BJW-S scores and the target variable scores was found to be significant while it was not before, and in some cases, the direction of the correlation changed. For instance, while none of the three Attitude Toward Elderly People subscales was significantly linked to BJW-S, when BJW-O scores were controlled, blame attribution to the elderly and acceptation of home care scores correlated significantly with BJW-S (respectively, negatively and positively). Contrary to BJW-O, BJW-S appeared to be associated with a stronger acceptance of elderly people. Similarly, among the scales assessing perception of poverty and wealth distribution, the personal achievement scale (which was positively correlated with
BJW-O when BJW-S was controlled) was negatively correlated with BJW-S when BJW-O was controlled. This observation would suggest that higher BJW-S corresponds to weaker adhesion to an individualistic and pragmatist vision of social achievement. Overall, these results affirm the heuristic pertinence of a distinction between BJW for Self and for Others.

**GENERAL DISCUSSION**

The purpose of this project was to examine reliability and validity for a measure of belief in a just world in the French context and to contribute to the validation of the distinction between the belief in a just world for the Self and for the Others, following Lipkus et al. (1996) and Dalbert (1999). The five studies presented here seem to lend sufficient support to the relevance of the construct in the French context. At the same time, they verify the importance and necessity of the distinction between the spheres of a just world belief in reference to what happens to the Self and what happens to Others. Although correlated, (observed correlations in the five studies between the two scales vary from .48 to .66), the scales clearly tap two discernible spheres of BJW. The data reported here established that scale reliability through test-retest or Cronbach’s alpha (see Table 1) is sufficient. The evidence supporting convergent validity for the two scales appears satisfactory. The analysis of discriminant validity of the two scales showed that, in most cases, the scales did not correlate significantly with nonpertinent criteria, although in a few cases, the difference between pairs of correlations did not reach statistical significance.

Furthermore, the findings replicate observations made by Lipkus et al. (1996), Dalbert (1999), and Dzuka and Dalbert (in press): people always believe that the world is more just for themselves than for others. One possible interpretation of this tendency might be that the potentially stigmatizing tone of certain items in the BJW-O scale (e.g., “I feel that when people meet with misfortune, they have brought it upon themselves”) may lead subjects to moderate their judgments in order not to appear too harsh with others. However, additional analyses revealed that differences between BJW-S and BJW-O scores are evidenced for items that do not have such an accusing intonation (e.g., “I feel that a person’s efforts are noticed
and rewarded”). Another interpretation may be that BJW is a more urgent belief for the Self than for Others, and individuals naturally endorse it more. Olson & Hafer (in press) suggest that “it is possible that being deprived oneself is even more threatening to the belief in a just world than is seeing other people who are potentially innocent victims.” Recent reports indicate that individuals are motivated to minimize the injustice they have been victims of and that minimization serves self-presentation strategies (see Olson, Hafer, Couzens & Kramins, in press): people believe that they will be less likable and perceived as less competent if they say that they are victims of injustice. A third explanation may be linked to sampling procedures used in current psychological research. Most survey respondents—for the majority of published reports, students and convenience samples selected in a Western urban context—generally benefit from material or psychological resources or life styles that do not expose them openly to injustice. It is possible that when such respondents compare their own experience to most of the examples of injustice that concerns others, such as stories they hear on the news, for instance, they naturally feel the world is more just to themselves. In any case, as Lipkus et al. (1996) have underlined, there are asymmetries in the way people perceive justice and injustice for themselves and for others.

Another issue that may be discussed here is the relevance of differences in the endorsement of BJW that may be predicted by gender. Four among 10 tests presented here yielded significant gender differences. These findings seem to indicate that gender is not in itself a crucial determinant of the belief in a just world and thus appear in line with the conclusions of the meta-analysis conducted by O’Connor, Morrison, McLeod, and Anderson (1996). Moreover, the links between BJW and age were slight or nonsignificant, which is consistent with the BJW studies based on representative samples (Benson, 1992; Forest, 1995; Umberson, 1990).

One of the goals of this research was to demonstrate that BJW-S contributes to individual well being. Believing in a just world indeed induces people to believe that life has meaning—that it makes sense—as was demonstrated by Study 2. Belief in a just world for Others intervenes significantly in the perception of a diversity of social targets. The present findings confirm that believing that the world is just for Others occurs together with derogation of the elderly and the poor. In addition, it is linked with a perception of the
socioeconomic environment that endorses a weak inclination to be actively engaged in social causes, as well as to minimization of social inequalities and unfavourable perception of public welfare destined to those in financial need. Finally, belief in a just world for Others is related to more severe penal attitudes toward delinquents.

Together, these observations imply that the effects of BJW would differ according to whether it refers to the individual sphere (auto-perception) or to social judgment of others. It is possible that BJW for Self contributes to some extent to individuals’ psychosocial adjustment, providing one with useful resources in times of stress, while at the same time, BJW for Others induces derogation and discriminatory judgments of a diversity of targets. However, the present results do not warrant the conclusion that only BJW-S generates psychosocially desirable effects. Indeed, with regard to social judgment and behaviour, BJW for Others may in certain circumstances incite altruistic conduct (see Bierhoff, Klein, & Kramp, 1991; Zuckerman, 1975). Consequently, the correlates of BJW in the individual or social spheres remain to be determined more fully. In conclusion, the differentiation of the belief in a just world for the Self and for the Others proposed by Lipkus et al. (1996) appears particularly qualified, both conceptually and psychometrically, to heuristically equip future studies in this particularly fruitful domain that investigates the belief in the existence of justice in the world along with its personal and social corollaries.

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