Testing an attribution-of-blame model of judgments of injustice

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Abstract

The attribution-of-blame model of judgments of injustice, which is the focus of this article, depicts judgments of injustice as blaming of an actor who is seen as responsible for the violation of the entitlement of somebody else without sufficient justification. Responsibility and blame are conceptualized in the model in accordance with Heider (1958) and Shaver (1985). The article briefly describes the background and the propositions of the model and its scope. Then it reports a series of four correlational and one experimental studies which tested the validity of the model. The findings lend support to the propositions that attributions of causality and intention and perceived lack of sufficient justification contribute to the perception of injustice beyond the mere perception that somebody's entitlement or deserving has been violated. However, no support was found for the assumption that perceived control of the respective agent contributes to the perception of injustice. The concluding section discusses the main findings of the studies and points to questions which should be pursued in future research in order to establish the range of validity of the proposed model of judgments of injustice. Copyright © 2003 John Wiley & Sons, Ltd.

What are the conditions which lead people to regard something as unjust? The research presented in this article tested a model which conceptualizes judgments of injustice as a particular instance of blaming. According to this view, calling something unjust frequently implies the attribution of blame to an actor for violating the entitlement or deserving of another person.

According to one of the standard definitions, justice means that people get what they are entitled to or deserve on the basis of who they are and what they have done (e.g. Buchanan & Mathieu, 1986; Cohen, 1986; Lerner, 1977, 1987; Mikula, 2001).¹ The notions of entitlement and deservingness are indeed central to many social psychological theories of justice (e.g. Adams, 1965; Crosby, 1976, 1982; Feather, 1999; Heuer, Blumenthal, Douglas, & Weinblatt, 1999; Lerner, 1977, 1987; Major, 1994; Skitka & Tetlock, 1992; Walster, Walster, & Berscheid, 1978). According to Lerner (1987), the cognitive component of the experience of entitlement is 'the judgment, often tacit, that someone, or

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¹The present discussion does not distinguish between the concepts of entitlement and deserving. Obviously, there are differences between the two concepts. But they are not relevant to the present purposes. For discussions of the differences between the concepts see Furby (1986), Feather (1999), and Steil (1994).

some category of people, is entitled to a particular set of outcomes by virtue of who they are and what they have done. The "entitled to" is experienced affectively and motivationally as an imperative, a sense of requiredness between the actor's perceived outcomes and the person's attributes or acts' (pp. 107–108).

Moving from justice to injustice, the above definition suggests that perceptions of violation of people's entitlement or deserving build the basis of the experience of injustice. Some theorists actually equate the violation of entitlement with injustice (e.g. Major, 1994). Other authors proposed that the perception of violated entitlements is not the only decisive element and the experience of injustice presupposes further conditions (e.g. Crosby, 1976, 1982; Folger, 1987; Folger & Cropanzano, 2001; Mikula, 1984; Montada, 1991). For instance, Crosby (1982) proposed that attributions of responsibility contribute to feelings of deprivation and injustice beyond the violation of entitlement: victims will feel more deprived the less they regard themselves as responsible for the fact that they do not get what they want and feel entitled to. Montada (1991, p. 14) argued that 'the very concept of justice implies that some agent or agency is *responsible* [italics added] for experienced losses and hardships. The experience of injustice is associated with resentment towards an agent whose freely chosen actions or omissions lead to "unjust" consequences ... Resentment is directed toward those persons (or institutions) who are perceived as being *responsible* [italics added] for disadvantages that are *not* convincingly justified [italics added]'. Similarly, Folger and Cropanzano (2001) introduced the description of their fairness theory with the following words 'When people identify an instance of unfair treatment, they are holding someone accountable for an action (or inaction) that threatens another person's material or psychological well-being. If no one is to blame, there is no social injustice. For this reason, the process of *accountability*, or how another social entity comes to be considered blameworthy is fundamental to justice' (p. 1).

The present discussion also proceeds from the proposition that experiences of injustice often presuppose more than the mere perception that somebody's entitlement or deserving has been violated. How people evaluate and react to the perception of violated entitlement also depends on their attributions of the given state of affairs. The emphasis of the central function of attributions is not new. Numerous authors have suggested that judgments of causation, intention, and responsibility are important factors in the assessment of justice and injustice. Actually, two different functions of attributions of responsibility have been discussed in the literature. Some authors focus on the role of responsibility attributions as determinants of entitlement appraisals (e.g. Cohen, 1982; Feather, 1999; Skitka & Tetlock, 1992; Weiner, 1995). Other authors, and the present discussion, focus on attributions of responsibility and blame as mediators and/or moderators of people's reactions to perceived violations of entitlements (e.g. Folger & Cropanzano, 2001; Greenberg, 1984; Mikula, 1984; Miller, 2001; Montada, 1991; Tedeschi & Nesler, 1993; Utne & Kidd, 1980). The latter group of authors argue that observations of violations of entitlement often elicit attributional thinking searching for causes of and responsibilities for the perceived violation of entitlement. The attributions which are finally arrived at are assumed to affect the perceivers' evaluations of justice and injustice, and their emotional and behavioural reactions to the incident or situation in question. Studies exploring the phenomenology of the experience of injustice indeed revealed that attributional cognitions compose an important part of the cognitive activities which follow the perception of injustice (Mikula, 1986, 1987; Mikula & Schlamberger, 1985).² This evidence agrees with findings of Weiner and colleagues which show that people are particularly likely to engage in attributional thinking, and search for the reasons for an actor's behaviour, when the behaviour has led to unexpected, negative and important outcomes (Weiner, 1985, 1995; Wong & Weiner, 1981).

²The remaining cognitive activities which have been identified in this research were action-related cognitions and reflections, evaluations and assessments.

Based upon the above findings, Mikula (1993) conceptualized the judgment of injustice as being composed of multiple elements: (1) the observation that somebody's entitlement has been violated; (2) the attribution of responsibility for the violation to an actor who is not the victim; and (3) perceived lack of sufficient justification for the violation of the entitlement. The attribution of *responsibility* has been conceptualized as being composed of attributions of *causation, control,* and *intention* (cf. Fincham & Jaspars, 1980; Hamilton & Sanders, 1992; Heider, 1958; Schlenker, Britt, Pennington, Murphy, & Doherty, 1994; Shaver, 1985; Shultz & Schleifer, 1983; Weiner, 1995).³ Thus, the attribution of responsibility implies that the violation of entitlement is perceived as having been *caused* by an action or omission of an actor who had *control* over his or her behaviour (i.e. could have acted otherwise), and *intentionally* behaved in the given way.

Since the attribution of responsibility and perceived lack of justification for negative behaviours are the main constituents of the attribution of blame (Heider, 1958; Shaver, 1985), the above conceptualization has later been called *attribution-of-blame model of judgments of injustice* (Mikula, 1994b). Judgments of injustice are conceived as a particular instance of blaming: blaming of an agent who is seen as responsible for the violation of the entitlement of somebody else without sufficient justification. Accordingly, calling something unjust means more than a negative evaluation of a given action or situation. It implies a moral accusation of an agent who is accountable for the given negative state of affairs. In addition, the present conceptualization of injustice also points to the interpersonal or social aspect of judgments of injustice. Judgments of injustice always refer to an interaction and/or relationship taking place between individual persons or other kinds of social entities.

The model proposes that people will perceive more injustice the more they feel that the entitlement of a person has been violated and the more blame they attribute to the causal agent of the incident in question. Considering the components of the attribution of blame, the prediction is that people will perceive more injustice the more they feel that a person's entitlement has been violated, the more personal causation, controllability and intention they attribute to the respective actor, and the less justification they perceive for the violation of entitlement and deserving.

Two caveats may be warranted at this point. First, the attribution-of-blame model of judgments of injustice is basically an explication of the concept of injustice or, in other terms, a logical or prescriptive model. From a conceptual point of view, the variables of the model represent necessary components of judgments of injustice. But this does not mean that naive (i.e. psychological) conceptions of injustice will necessarily correspond with the theoretical conceptualization. The present discussion does not claim that the appraisal process as it is sketched in the model will be completely elaborated in each case. Injustice may be perceived without considering the complete set of elements or if only some of the elements are given. Judgments of injustice presumably vary with respect to the amount of reflection, depth of information processing, and emotional investment versus detachment of the person making the appraisal. Actually, it is very likely that judgments of injustice are often made spontaneously with less, or even without any, cognitive elaboration (cf. Haidt, 2001; Lerner, 1987; Lerner & Goldberg, 1999). Judgments of injustice will more likely correspond with the model when people are motivated and capable of making *reasoned* judgments of injustice. For instance, when they try to figure out whether a given situation is unjust, or when they have to account for their personal justice evaluation of a situation (cf. Tetlock, 1992), or when they reflect upon the justice or injustice of a specific situation in retrospect. This topic will be taken up again in the concluding discussion.

The second caveat refers to the scope of the model. The attribution-of-blame model of judgments of injustice has been proposed for experiences of injustice in the interpersonal domain when violations of

³Foreseeability of the consequences of a person's conduct is neglected in the present discussion because it has not been considered in the original version of the attribution-of-blame model of judgments of injustice (Mikula, 1993) and in the studies reported here.

entitlements primarily follow from actions and omissions of individual actors who can, at least in principle, be identified. The model probably is less valid when violations of entitlements do not result from explicit and identifiable actions or omissions, when no personal causal agents can be identified, or, more generally speaking, when attributions of causality, control, intention, responsibility, and blame cannot be meaningfully made.

The attribution-of-blame model of judgments of injustice has mainly served heuristic purposes thus far. For instance, with respect to perspective-related differences in justice evaluations, the model provided information about possible issues of disagreement between actors and recipients of injustice (Mikula, 1994a; Mikula, Athenstaedt, Heschgl, & Heimgartner, 1998). Disagreements about the existence of injustice can be based on divergent views about (a) what exactly particular people are entitled to, (b) whether or not an existing entitlement has been violated, (c) who is responsible for the violation, and (d) whether sufficient justification is available or not (see also Mikula & Wenzel, 2000). In addition, studies of women's sense of injustice about the division of household labour derived predictions from the model as to the conditions under which injustice will or will not be perceived (e.g. Freudenthaler & Mikula, 1998; Kluwer & Mikula, 2002; Mikula, 1998). Strikingly, the model suggests in this respect that the perception of a violation of an entitlement will *not* lead to any feelings of injustice under certain circumstances. This should be the case when persons who violate the entitlement of somebody else are not regarded as responsible for their actions, or when the actions leading to the violation of entitlements are perceived as being sufficiently justified with reference to some greater good or higher value.

EMPIRICAL STUDIES

The following part of the article describes a series of five studies which analysed whether naive judgments of injustice correspond to the propositions of the attribution-of-blame model. The individual studies focus on different aspects of the basic assumption that judgments of injustice comprise an element of blaming, in addition to the perception that somebody's entitlement has been violated. The first four studies focus on the constituent elements of attribution of blame, i.e. the attributions of causality, control, and intention, and perceived lack of justification. The studies tested the prediction that people perceive more injustice the more they feel that a person's entitlement has been violated, the more personal causation, controllability and intention they attribute to the respective actor, and the less justification they perceive for the violation of entitlement and attributions of blame make independent contributions to the perception of injustice. In addition, the study tests the proposition that the attribution of blame mediates the associations of causality, control, intention, and lack of justification with perceived injustice.

The five studies draw upon different kinds of data. Study 1 asked participants to recall and evaluate incidents where they felt unjustly treated by a friend. The participants of studies 2 and 3 were asked to recall and evaluate anger-eliciting incidents which had occurred to them. Study 4 used vignettes to experimentally manipulate part of the variables of the attribution-of blame model. Study 5 analysed women's perceptions of injustice with respect to the division of household labour.

The first two studies which will be reported had been conducted with another purpose in mind. More specifically, they explored differences in the evaluation of justice of negative incidents in close personal relationships between the person who caused the incident and the person who suffered from the incident (cf. Mikula, Athenstaedt et al., 1998). Since part of the data of these studies referred to variables of the attribution-of-blame model, they have been re-analysed for the present purposes. The

participants of Study 1 evaluated incidents where they were unjustly treated by a close friend. Participants of Study 2 evaluated incidents in which their partner had treated them in a way which made them feel angry, disappointed, or hurt.

Re-analyses of Data from Earlier Studies

Study 1

Sample. The study was carried out with 44 pairs of female close friends in a secondary school. The girls were approached in their classes and asked to nominate a close friend with whom they would like to participate in the study. Participants' ages were between 12 and 17 years with a mean age of 15 years.

Procedure. The two girls of a pair were tested independently from each other. They first reported an incident in which they were unjustly treated by their friend. Then they evaluated the incident on a series of 9-point rating scales (1: not at all, 9: very much). The following ratings were collected from the participants: the amount of injustice perceived ('How unjust did you regard the incident?'), perceived violation of entitlement ('To what extent did you deserve what happened?'), the relative amount of causality attributed to the friend (difference of two items: 'To what extent was the incident due to your?'); perceived control of the person who caused the incident ('To what extent did your friend have the possibility of acting in a different way?') the intention attributed to the friend ('To what extent did your friend deliberately act in the given way?'), and the perceived justification ('To what extent was it justified that your friend acted in that way?').

Results. The multiple regression analysis revealed that perceived intention ($\beta = 0.34$) and lack of justification ($\beta = 0.54$) significantly contributed to the prediction of the justice judgments (see column 1 of Table 1). The perceived amount of violation of entitlement, personal causation and control did not make any significant contributions. The amount of variance explained was 57%.

Study 2

The methodology of Study 2 was similar to that of Study 1 aside from the following changes. First, slight changes were made in the phrasing of the items to improve the measurement of the concepts. Second, except for perceived injustice, all variables of interest were assessed by two items this time.

Table 1.	Studies 1-3: Multiple	regressions analyse	s regressing	perceived	injustice	on the	elements	of the
attribution	of-blame model of jud	Igments of injustice:	Standardize	d regressio	n coeffici	ents		

	Study 1	Study 2	Study 3
Violation of entitlement	0.05	0.64**	0.35**
Personal causation	0.13	0.18**	0.22*
Controllability	0.02	0.03	0.00
Intention	0.34**	0.06	-0.01
Lack of justification	0.54**	0.09*	0.24**
R^2	0.58	0.73	0.46
R^2 adjusted	0.57	0.73	0.45

p < 0.05; p < 0.01.

Third, participants were not asked to describe and evaluate unjust incidents, but incidents in which their partner treated them in a way which made them feel angry, disappointed, offended or hurt. This latter change was made to increase the range of the reported incidents and, consequently, the variance of perceived injustice. Due to the instructions, the material of the study 1 did not include any incidents which were *not* regarded as unjust. It was only the amount of perceived injustice that differed between the reported incidents. By contrast, the instruction of the present study permitted respondents to report unjust as well as not unjust incidents.

Sample. Participants of Study 2 were the female and male partners of 116 cohabitating and married couples. They were partly recruited by means of an advertisement placed in a local parish newspaper and partly by a snowball method. The professions of the participants covered a wide range. Upper-middle-class professions were slightly over-represented in the sample as compared with the population. Ages were between 26 and 56 years.

Procedure. The two partners of a pair were tested independently from each other. They first reported an incident in which they were unjustly treated by their partner and then evaluated the incident on a series of 7-point rating scales (1: not at all, 7: very much). The amount of perceived injustice was assessed by the item 'How unjust was what happened?'. Violation of entitlement was assessed by the items 'To what extent did you deserve what happened?' and 'To what extent has your entitlement been violated in this situation?' (reverse scoring; inter-item correlation r = 0.74). Causal attributions were assessed by the items 'To what extent can it be attributed to your partner that the incident occurred?' and 'To what extent can it be attributed to you yourself that the incident occurred?' (r = -0.23). Control was measured by the items 'To what extent did your partner have the possibility of acting in a different way?' and 'To what extent was your partner somehow forced to act in the given way?' (r = 0.65). The items measuring intention were 'To what extent did your partner deliberately act in the given way?') and 'To what extent did you partner inadvertently act in the given way?' (reversed scoring; r = 0.33). Perceived (lack of) justification was assessed by the items 'To what extent was it justified that your partner acted in that way?' and 'To what extent did you partner act in that way for good reasons?' (r=0.86). Because of low inter-item correlations, single item measures of causal attribution and intention were used in the following analysis instead of the two-item measures which had been considered originally (causal attribution: 'To what extent can it be attributed to your partner that the incident occurred?'; intention: 'To what extent did your partner deliberately act in the given way?').⁴ For the two-item measures, mean scores were calculated and used in the following analyses.

Results. Column 2 of Table 1 shows the results of the regression analysis. The ratings of violation of entitlement ($\beta = 0.64$), personal causation ($\beta = 0.18$), and lack of justification ($\beta = 0.09$) significantly contributed to the prediction of the perceived injustice. Perceived control again did not make a significant contribution. In addition, attributed intention did not significantly contribute to the amount of perceived injustice this time. The amount of explained variance was 73%.

Discussion of Studies 1 and 2

The re-analyses of data from earlier studies provided preliminary support to the attribution-of-blame model of judgments of injustice, though the results were not completely consistent. Lack of justification contributed to the prediction of perceived injustice in both studies. Perceived causality turned out to be significant only in Study 2. But the β -weight of this variable pointed in the same

⁴Analyses using the respective other items lead to virtually identical results as those reported below.

direction and was of the same size in Study 1. Perceived control of the actor did not make any significant contribution in either study. Intention was a significant predictor in Study 1 but not in Study 2. Finally, perceived violation of entitlement, which had been considered only in Study 2, turned out as a significant predictor of perceived injustice in this study. The latter finding lends support to our guess that materials which include not only unjust incidents but also incidents which are negatively evaluated but not regarded as unjust are better suited for testing the model. Based on the experiences gained in the re-analyses of the data of Studies 1 and 2, Study 3 was specifically designed as a test of the attribution-of-blame model of judgments of injustice.

Study 3

The methodology of Study 3 was similar to that of Study 2. In order to achieve a broader spectrum of negative incidents and increase the variance of perceived injustice, the participants were instructed to recall anger-evoking incidents that happened to them. Empirical evidence shows that anger-evoking events are frequently, but not necessarily, regarded as unjust (Averill, 1983; Mikula, Scherer, & Athenstaedt, 1998). Different from the earlier studies, Study 3 did not focus on negative incidents in close personal relationships but left the social context undefined in which the anger-eliciting incidents occurred. Finally, the phrasing of some items again was slightly modified to reduce misinterpretations and problems of understanding.

Sample

The participants of Study 3 were 137 students (83 male and 54 female) with varying majors of study. They were approached in their rooms in student hostels and asked to participate in a study on anger.

Procedure

The instructions asked the participants to recall and describe an anger-eliciting situation that had happened to them recently. Then they rated the incidents on various 7-point rating scales. The amount of perceived injustice was assessed by the item 'How unjust did you regard the incident?'. Two items each assessed perceived violation of entitlement, control, intention, and perceived lack of justification. The two items were aggregated into composite indices for each variable. Violation of entitlement was assessed by the items 'To what extent did you deserve what happened?' and 'To what extent was your entitlement violated in this situation?' (r = 0.48). Control was measured by the items 'To what extent did the person(s) who caused the incident have the possibility of acting in a different way?' and 'To what extent could the person(s) who caused the incident influence what happened in the situation? (r=0.74). The items measuring intention were 'To what extent did the person(s) who caused the incident deliberately act in the given way' and 'To what extent did the person(s) who caused the event act on purpose?' (r = 0.74). Perceived lack of justification was measured by the items 'To what extent was the behaviour of the person(s) who caused the event justified?' and 'To what extent can the behaviour of the person(s) who caused the event be excused?' (r=0.75).⁵ Causation was originally assessed by three items ('To what extent can the incident be attributed to you yourself?', 'To what extent can the incident be attributed to external circumstances?', 'To what extent can the incident be

⁵The ratings of control, intention and justification had to be filled in only when the incident had been caused, at least in part, by another person or group.

attributed to (an)other person(s)?'; *rs* between -0.18 and 0.48). Since many participants obviously misunderstood and did not appropriately differentiate between the latter two items, only the attribution to the victim him or herself (reversed scoring) was used in the analysis.

Results and Discussion

The multiple regression analysis (column 3 of Table 1) revealed that the violation of entitlement $(\beta = 0.35)$, personal causation $(\beta = 0.22)$, and lack of justification $(\beta = 0.24)$ significantly contributed to the prediction of the amount of perceived injustice. The amount of variance explained was 45%. Controllability again did not make any significant contribution. Surprisingly, attributed intention did not make a significant contribution either in this study. This was very likely due to phrasing of the respective item in the German language which could be misinterpreted as referring to the actor's intention of angering the person rather than the intention of acting in a given way.

Study 4

The studies described thus far provide good support to the attribution-of-blame model of judgments of injustice. But they did not test the proposed *causal* effects of the variables on the judgments of injustice. A test of the causal assumptions of the model requires an experimental methodology. First steps in this direction have been made in Study 4.

The study used a vignette methodology. The vignettes described different occurrences in interpersonal settings with negative outcomes for a person. Three different aspects of the situations were varied in different versions of the vignettes: (1) the extent to which the victim of the negative outcome deserved or did not deserve his or her bad fate,⁶ (2) high versus low controllability of the incident by the actor, and (3) availability versus lack of availability of sufficient justification of the actor's conduct.⁷

Sample

The study was conducted with 160 female first- and second year students in psychology and education. The participants were approached on the university campus and asked to participate in a study dealing with questions of justice. The testing sessions were held with single individuals and groups of up to five participants.

Procedure

Two different vignettes were used. One vignette ('Anton') dealt with a lay-off decision. The second vignette ('Linda') dealt with a failure to pass a school admission test. (English translations of the

⁶We use the term 'deserving' instead of 'entitlement' in this study because linguistically it is more appropriate to say that people deserve rather than they are entitled to a bad outcome. Not deserving corresponds to a violation of entitlement.

⁷Two comments seem appropriate with respect to the choice of the experimentally manipulated variables in this study. First, it would have been desirable to experimentally manipulate all five variables of the attribution-of-blame model. But the size and complexity of the resulting design would have too large. Thus, we focused on a subset of variables and omitted those variables which appeared to be less easily manipulated in vignettes. Second, when conducting this study we did not know that the variation of controllability typically does not affect justice ratings.

vignettes are reproduced in the Appendix.) Eight versions of each vignette were constructed, representing a complete crossing of the two levels of the three factors (entitlement/deserving, control, and justification).

Each participant got one version of each of the two vignettes. After reading a vignette, participants rated the described situation on 9-point rating scales. Unlike the earlier studies, the ratings were made from the perspective of an unaffected observer rather than from the perspective of the victim of injustice. The ratings which are relevant to the present analyses referred to the amount of perceived injustice, deserving, control, and justification. The ratings of deserving, control, and justification served as checks of the experimental manipulations. The amount of perceived injustice was assessed by the item 'How unjust do you regard the described situation?' (1: very unjust, 9: not at all unjust). Deserving of the bad outcomes was assessed by the items 'To what extent did X deserve what happened to him/her?' (1: not at all deserved, 9: fully deserved). Control was measured by the item 'To what extent did (person Z, i.e. the person making the decision) have the possibility to make another decision?' (1: very easily, 9: not at all). Justification was assessed by the item 'To what extent was Z's way of proceeding, which led to the bad outcome for X, justified?' (1: not at all justified, 9: completely justified).

Results

Manipulation Checks. The manipulation checks revealed that the experimental manipulation of deserving and justification worked with both vignettes. Two analyses of variance (ANOVAs) of the deservingness ratings yielded significant main effects of deserving with both vignettes (Anton: F(1; 153) = 234.09, p < 0.01; Linda: F(1; 153) = 276.33, p < 0.01). Participants who read the high deservingness version of the vignette rated the stimulus persons' deserving of the bad outcome higher (Anton: M = 6.17, Linda: M = 6.19) than participants who read the low deservingness version of the vignette (Anton: M = 1.91; Linda M = 1.83). No other main and interaction effects proved to be significant.

ANOVAs of the justification ratings yielded significant main effects of justification with both vignettes (Anton: F(1; 195) = 41.81, p < 0.01; Linda: F(1; 153) = 20.91, p < 0.01). Participants who read the high justification version of the vignette rated the justification higher (Anton: M = 6.48, Linda: M = 5.27) than participants who read the low justification version of the vignette (Anton: M = 4.46; Linda M = 4.06). In addition, significant main effects of deserving were obtained with both vignettes (Anton: F(1; 153) = 24.30, p < 0.01; Linda: F(1; 153) = 198.20, p < 0.01). Participants who read the high deservingness version rated the justification higher (Anton: M = 6.22, Linda: M = 6.59) than participants who read the low deservingness version of the vignette (Anton: M = 4.69; Linda: M = 2.78). Beyond that, the two-way interaction deservingness \times justification was significant with the vignette Anton (F(1; 153) = 10.09, p < 0.01) and the interaction deservingness × control was significant with the vignette Linda (F(1; 153) = 5.30, p < 0.05). The deservingness × justification interaction was due to the fact that the expected justification effect was only significant with low deservingness (M = 6.20 vs M = 3.18); but the pattern of means was in the same direction with high deservingness (M = 6.75 vs M = 5.71). The deservingness \times control interaction indicates that the effect of deservingness on the ratings of justification was more pronounced with high (M = 6.92 vs)M = 2.49) than with low control (M = 6.25 vs M = 3.08).

The manipulation of control did not work as planned. The main effect of control was not significant with either vignette (Anton: F(1; 153) = 0.15, p > 0.05; Linda: F(1; 153) = 0.20, p > 0.05). Unexpectedly, main effects of deserving and justification were obtained with both vignettes (deserving/Anton: F(1; 153) = 6.68, p < 0.05; deserving/Linda: F(1; 153) = 34.37, p < 0.01; justification/Anton:

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F(1; 153) = 36.71, p < 0.01; justification/Linda: F(1; 153) = 3.85, p = 0.052). Participants reading the high deservingness version rated the actor's control as higher (Anton: M = 4.75, Linda: M = 3.68) than those reading the low deservingness version (Anton: M = 3.91, Linda: M = 1.91). Similarly, participants reading the high justification version rated the actor's control as higher (Anton: M = 5.34, Linda: M = 3.07) than those reading the low justification version (Anton: M = 3.35, Linda: M = 2.50).

Hypothesis Testing. The predicted effects of deserving, control, and justification on perceived injustice were tested in two 2 (deserving) × 2 (control) × 2 (justification) ANOVAs, one for each vignette. The ANOVAs revealed significant main effects of deserving (Anton: F(1; 153) = 33.21, p < 0.01; Linda: F(1; 153) = 156,85, p < 0.01) and justification (Anton: F(1; 153) = 27.16, p < 0.01; Linda: F(1; 153) = 9.59, p < 0.01) in both ANOVAs. The situations described in the vignettes were regarded more unjust (i.e. less just) when the negative outcome was undeserved by the victim than when it was deserved (Anton: M = 4.68 vs 6.57; Linda: M = 2.64 vs 6.56). In addition, the situations were regarded more unjust (i.e. less just) when there was no sufficient justification for the actor's decision or action than when it was sufficiently justified (Anton: M = 4.78 vs M = 6.49; Linda: M = 4.11 vs M = 5.06). The amount of control had no significant effect in any of the analyses (Anton: F(1; 153) = 0.75, p > 0.05). No interaction effects were significant in any of the analyses.

Discussion

Taken together, the experimental test of the attribution-of-blame model of judgments of injustice was partially successful. The manipulation checks yielded mixed results. The manipulation of deservingness worked as planned. The manipulation of justification had the desired effect upon the participants' perceptions of justification, but simultaneously affected the ratings of deservingness. The manipulation of control did not work at all. It affected the participants' ratings of deservingness and justification, but not the ratings of control. The limited success of the experimental manipulations indicates a well known limitation of the vignette methodology. It is extremely difficult and, to all appearance, sometimes even impossible to experimentally manipulate a particular variable of interest by changing parts of the vignette without simultaneously affecting other aspects of the described situation as well.

The findings of the hypothesis testing correspond to those of the manipulation check. Violation of entitlement and justification affected justice judgments as predicted, while control did not affect the justice ratings in any of the analyses. This pattern of results is in line with the findings of Studies 1–3. As the manipulation checks of control were not significant, it remains unclear how to interpret the lack of impact of control upon the justice ratings. It could either result from the inadequate manipulation of control in the vignettes or it could mean that the control attributed to an agent is irrelevant to the judgment of injustice, as the evidence of the correlational studies suggest. In any case, the present study provides the first experimental confirmation of the proposed causal effects of perceived violation of entitlement and lack of justification upon judgments of injustice.

Study 5

The most extensive test of the attribution-of-blame model of judgments of injustice has been conducted by Freudenthaler (H. H. Freudenthaler, unpublished work, 2002) in unpublished reanalyses of data of an interview study of women's justice perceptions of the division of household labour (Freudenthaler, 2000). Different from the studies described earlier in this paper, Freudenthaler (2000) collected women's ratings of their partners' responsibility and blameworthiness for not doing more housework in addition to their ratings of perceived injustice, violated entitlement, causation, control, intention, and lack of justification. This permitted a test of additional propositions of the attribution-of-blame model which have not been tested before. Freudenthaler (H. H. Freudenthaler, unpublished work, 2002) performed four different regression analyses on his data. The first analysis tested the prediction that violation of entitlement, personal causation, control, intention, and lack of justification contribute to the perception of injustice. The second analysis tested the assumption that attributions of responsibility build upon attributions of causality, control, and intention. The prediction of the third analysis was that women's attributions of blame to their partner build upon perceived violation of entitlement, attribution of responsibility to the partner, and perceived lack of justification for not doing more housework. The fourth regression analysis tested the prediction that violation of entitlement and attribution of blame make independent contributions to the perception of injustice. All together, the four regression analyses largely correspond to a mediational analysis (cf. Baron & Kenny, 1986) testing the assumption that blaming mediates the associations of personal causation, control, intention, and lack of justification with perceived injustice.

Sample

The study was conducted with a convenience sample of 132 employed women who were either married to or cohabitating with an employed man and had a workload outside the home of 20 h at least. Participants' ages were between 20 and 50 years.

Procedure

The ratings which are relevant to the present purposes were collected as part of extended interviews (altogether about 120 questions) which addressed various different aspects of the division of household labour. Different from the studies reported above, women's perception of violation of entitlement was operationalized as the mean difference between the perceived relative amounts of housework they and their partners actually did, and the relative amounts women desired and felt to be entitled to. The actual and desired divisions of housework were assessed by the items 'In general, which percentages do you and your partner contribute to the household labour respectively?' and 'Which division of household labour between you and your partner would you like to have?'. The respective ratings were obtained on 11-point scales running in 10% steps from 'I 100% and my partner 0%' to 'I 0% and my partner 100%'.

A set of four items was used to measure perceived causation. In response to the question 'What are the reasons that your partner does not do more housework than he is actually doing?', the women rated four possible causes on 7-point scales (1: not at all, 7: very much): 'It is due to him'; 'It is due to his professional work load'; 'It is due to societal conditions and norms'; 'It is due to me myself'. Based upon these ratings, the relative amount of personal causation by the partner was calculated as the proportion of causation attributed to the partner relative to the sum total of causation attributed to the four possible causes.

The remaining variables of the model were assessed on 7-point scales by the following items. Perceived injustice: 'How often do you feel your partner treats you unfairly with respect to the division of household labour?'; control: 'How easy would it be for your partner to do more housework than he is actually doing?'; intention: 'In your opinion, to what extent is your partner not doing more housework

on purpose'; justification: 'To what extent is it justified that your partner does not do more housework?'; responsibility: 'To what extent is your partner personally responsible for not doing more housework?'; blame: 'To what extent is your partner to be blamed for not doing more housework?'.

Results and Discussion

The first analysis corresponded to the analyses in Studies 1–3. It regressed women's perceptions of being unjustly treated by their partner on perceived violation of entitlement, causation, control, intention, and perceived lack of justification. Although not completely in line, the results (column 1 of Table 2) largely agree with those of Studies 1–3. Perceived violation of entitlement ($\beta = 0.36$), the intention attributed to the partner ($\beta = 0.25$), and lack of justification ($\beta = 0.23$) significantly contributed to women's perception of being unjustly treated by their partners and explained 37% of variance of the justice ratings. In line with the other studies, controllability did not make any significantly contribute to women's ratings of injustice. The latter fact could be due to the different kind of measuring causation in this study.

The second analysis tested the assumption that attributions of responsibility build upon attributions of causality, control and intention. The prediction was that women will regard their partners more responsible for not doing more housework the more personal causation, control and intention they attribute to them. Perceived violation of entitlement was additionally included in the set of predictors to test not only the convergent but also the discriminant validity of the model. According to the model, perceived violation of entitlement should not contribute to women's attributions of responsibility to their partner. The results of the regression analysis were completely in line with the hypothesis (see column 2 of Table 2): perceived degree of personal causation ($\beta = 0.17$), control ($\beta = 0.32$), and intention ($\beta = 0.20$) significantly contributed to the prediction and explained 27% of the variance of the ratings of perceived responsibility of the partner. Perceived violation of entitlement did not significantly contribute to the amount of responsibility attributed to the partner.

The third regression analysis tested the prediction that women will regard their partner more blameworthy the more they feel their entitlements violated, the more personal responsibility they attribute to the partner, and the less justification they perceive for his not doing more housework. The results agree with the hypotheses (see column 3 of Table 2): Perceived violation of entitlement ($\beta = 0.31$), responsibility ($\beta = 0.39$) and lack of justification ($\beta = 0.29$) significantly contributed to the prediction. The three predictors explained 47% of the variance of the blame ratings.

Criterion	Analysis 1 Injustice	Analysis 2 Responsibility	Analysis 3 Blame	Analysis 4 Injustice
Predictors				
Violation of entitlement	0.36**	0.00	0.31**	0.30**
Personal causation	0.08	0.17*	n.c.	0.01
Controllability	0.08	0.32**	n.c.	0.08
Intention	0.25**	0.20*	n.c.	0.15
Responsibility	n.c.	n.c.	0.39**	n.c.
Lack of justification	0.23**	n.c.	0.29**	0.15
Blame	n.c.	n.c.	n.c.	0.44**
R^2	0.37	0.27	0.47	0.40

Table 2. Study 5: Multiple regression analyses (Freudenthaler)

*p < 0.05; **p < 0.01. n.c. = not considered in the analysis.

The fourth regression analysis served two purposes. First, it tested the prediction that violation of entitlement and attributions of blame make independent contributions to the perception of injustice. Second, it provides an essential step in testing the proposition that the *attribution of blame mediates* the associations of causality, control, intention and lack of justification with perceived injustice (the latter associations have been established already in analysis 1). If blaming is indeed a mediator, then causation, control, intention, and lack of justification will no longer significantly contribute to perceived injustice when attribution of blame is entered as a predictor into the analysis.

The analysis testing the two predictions regressed perceived injustice on perceived violation of entitlement, personal causation, controllability, intention, lack of justification, and attribution of blame. The results lent support to both hypotheses (see column 4 of Table 2): perceived violation of entitlement ($\beta = 0.30$) and women's blaming of their partner ($\beta = 0.44$) significantly contributed to women's perceptions of injustice and explained 40% of the variance of this variable. Perceived degree of personal causation, control, intention and justification did not make any significant independent contributions.

Taken together, the results of Study 5 provide good support to the attribution-of-blame model of judgments of injustice. The results of the first regression analysis agree with those of the studies reported earlier, except for personal causation. The second and third analyses lend support to the predictions concerning the variables which contribute to attributions responsibility and blame respectively. The fourth regression analysis, together with the findings of analyses 1–3, confirmed the role of blaming as a mediator variable. The variables which contribute to the attributions of responsibility and blame, i.e. the attributions of causality, control, and intention, and perceived lack of justification, did not make any significant contributions to the prediction of perceived injustice beyond the blame attribution and perceived violation of entitlement.

GENERAL DISCUSSION

The attribution-of-blame model of judgments of injustice maintains that experiences of injustice frequently presuppose further preconditions than the mere perception that somebody's entitlement or deserving has been violated. The model depicts judgments of injustice as an instance of blaming: blaming of a person who is regarded as responsible for the violation of entitlements of somebody else without sufficient justification. The proposition that justifications and attributions of responsibility play a central role in the evaluation of actions and decisions is not new. Other authors in the field of justice have made similar propositions (e.g. Crosby, 1976, 1982; Folger, 1986; Folger & Cropanzano, 2001; Major, 1994; Montada, 1991; Tedeschi & Nesler, 1993). Similar propositions also have been made in various other domains of social psychological research, and relevant empirical findings lend support to these propositions. For instance, research on aggression (for reviews see Felson & Tedeschi, 1993; Geen, 1998; Mummendey, 1984) and emotion (e.g. Averill, 1983; Quigley & Tedeschi, 1996; Weiner, 1986) shows that the responsibility which is attributed to a harm-doer, and the degree of intention in particular, affect the evaluative, emotional and behavioural reactions of victims and third parties to harmful actions (cf. also Miller, 2001). The agreement of the present model of judgments of injustice with these propositions and findings in other domains of research does not come as a surprise given the overlap of the respective topics. Aggression can be regarded as a particular instance of injustice. And the emotions which have been studied in the investigations mentioned above are largely those which accompany the experience of injustice, such as anger and resentment (see Clayton, 1992; Mikula, 1986, 1987; Mikula, Scherer et al., 1998).

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The present correlational studies analysed the extent to which individuals' justice judgments can be predicted on the basis of their assessments of the component variables of the attribution-of-blame model. Although not completely consistent, the findings generally lend support to the propositions that attributions of causality and intention, and perceived lack of sufficient justification, contribute to the perceived injustice beyond the mere observation that somebody's entitlement or deserving has been violated. Study 5 extended the evidence in support of the model as it additionally tested the elements which contribute to attributions of responsibility and blame, and the mediating role of blaming. The findings are in line with the respective hypotheses. Attributions of blame build upon perceived violation of entitlement, attributions of responsibility and perceived lack of sufficient justification. Attribution of responsibility in turn builds upon the attribution of personal causation, control and intention. The role of blaming as a mediator between causality, control, intention, lack of justification with perceived injustice were no longer significant when the attribution of blame was entered as a predictor into the analysis.

The partial lack of consistency of the results is likely due, at least in part, to the different phrasing of the items in different studies. The phrasing of the items had been changed to avoid misinterpretations and misunderstandings, and improve the measurement of the variables of interest. In retrospect, it seems that a phrasing which does not contain any risk of being misunderstood is difficult to achieve with some of the variables. This holds in particular for the assessment of intention and causal attribution. Part of the problem with measuring perceived intention seems to be that the respective items are sometimes mistaken to refer to the intention of acting unjustly, or the intention of angering a person, while the intention actually should refer to the action itself and not to the injustice or anger resulting from the action. Interestingly, attribution of intention did not significantly contribute to perceived injustice in those two studies (Studies 2 and 3) in which the incidents to be evaluated were anger-eliciting incidents rather than unjust incidents. Possibly, the abovementioned misunderstanding occurs more easily in these cases. The main problem with measuring causal attributions by multiple items which refer to different causes turned out to be that the inter-item correlations often did not meet the expectations.

The different phrasing of the items in different studies must not only be seen as a limitation of the present series of studies. It also can be regarded as a strength in those cases where consistent findings were obtained *in spite of* variations of phrasings. Similarly, the consistency of findings which were obtained in studies which differed with respect to the kinds of incidents the judgments of injustice referred to, and/or the social context in which the incidents occurred, strengthen the confidence in the validity and generalizability of the evidence in support of the attribution-of-blame model of judgments of injustice.

One additional finding deserves to be briefly discussed. No support at all was found in the present series of studies for the assumption that perceived control of the agent violating the entitlement contributes to the perception of injustice. The evidence suggests that attributions of control are not part of the assessment of injustice. However, this does not mean that controllability is completely irrelevant to individuals' evaluations of the state of affairs. Controllability significantly contributed to the attribution of personal responsibility in Study 5 (analysis 2) but did not contribute to the ratings of injustice (analyses 1 and 4 of Study 5). This asymmetry is interesting and deserves to be studied in more detail in the future.

Study 4 provided a first experimental test of the attribution-of-blame model of judgments of injustice. Considering the limitations of the vignette methodology, the findings are promising. They correspond pretty well with those of the correlational studies. Violation of entitlement and justification affected the justice judgments as predicted, while controllability had no effect whatsoever upon perceived injustice. Due to the experimental nature of the study, the findings prove the proposed causal

relation between the variables. Unfortunately, the present study considered only part of the elements of the attribution-of-blame model. Thus, further studies are needed which subject the remaining elements of the model to test.

Taken together, the evidence presented in this article lends good support to the attribution-of-blame model of judgments of injustice. But there are a number of open questions which await to be addressed in future studies. First and most importantly, the present support to the model does not mean that judgments of injustice are always based upon such an elaborated process of appraisals as it is depicted in the model. As has been mentioned in the introduction, judgments of injustice are very likely often made without any cognitive elaboration (cf. Haidt, 2001; Lerner, 1987; Lerner & Goldberg, 1999). Future studies will have to systematically analyse the conditions under which judgments of injustice do and do not correspond to the model. Recent dual-process theories and research on different forms of information processing (cf. Chaiken & Trope, 1999; Kruglanski, 1996; Petty & Wegener, 1998; Wegner & Bargh, 1998, for recent reviews) provide valuable suggestions about situational and individual difference variables, which likely moderate the way in which judgments of injustice are made.

Second, the attribution-of-blame model of judgments of injustice does not distinguish between the different perspectives perceivers can occupy in relation to an injustice, i.e. the perspective of the recipient or victim, the perspective of the actor or perpetrator, and the perspective of a third-party observer. The model should hold for all these perspectives alike. This claim must not be mistaken. It does not mean that people in the three perspectives will agree in their assessment of the injustice. On the contrary, perspective-related differences very likely occur and take a particular shape (cf. Mikula, Athenstaedt et al., 1998). It only means that, independent of any particular perspective, people should perceive more injustice, the more they feel that somebody's entitlement has been violated, the more responsibility they attribute to the respective causal agent and the less justification they perceive for the agent's conduct. The studies which have been reported in the present article focused on the perspectives of victims (Studies 1, 2, 3 and 5) and third-party observers (Study 4). Future studies should extend the focus and analyse whether justice judgments by perpetrators of injustice can also be predicted by the same set of variables.

Third, the model does not distinguish between different kinds of injustice. It does not matter to the model where the sense of entitlement or deserving which has been violated comes from and to which kind of entitlement or deserving it refers to in particular. Thus, the model should equally apply to judgments of distributive, procedural, and retributive injustice. Empirical evidence is needed to see whether this is true or not.

Finally, the model proposes that the perception of a violation of entitlements will not always and necessarily result in feelings of injustice. When the respective agent who violated the entitlement is not regarded as responsible for the respective action or omission, or when the action or omission which leads to the violation of entitlement is perceived as sufficiently justified, no feeling of injustice will arise. Thus, the model points to an interesting asymmetry between justice and injustice. While the fulfilment of entitlements seems to provide a sufficient condition for experiencing justice, feelings of injustice may presuppose more than the mere violation of entitlements. This asymmetry between justice and injustice seems worth exploring in more detail in future research.

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APPENDIX: ENGLISH TRANSLATIONS OF THE VIGNETTES USED IN STUDY 4

The words indicating the different versions of the vignettes were not included in the text which was given to the participants.

Vignette 'Anton'

'Anton is employed in an firm which has to lay off some of the employees because of bad economic conditions. Anton just lately has been hired. He is among those who will lose their jobs'. *Undeserved*: He is known as a reliable person and a well-liked co-worker. (*Deserved*: He is known as an unreliable person and difficult co-worker). *High control*: The personnel manager Mr Kaspar has drawn up the list of those to be dismissed (*Low control*: The personnel manager Mr Kaspar has drawn up the list of those to be dismissed together with representatives of the union). *High justification*: The decision about who will be dismissed is made according to seniority. This means that those who were hired last will be fired first. (*Low justification*: The decision about who will be dismissed is made manager or less at personal discretion).

Vignette 'Linda'

Linda would like to attend a school for social workers after finishing high school. She has to pass an entrance exam in order to be admitted to the school. The exam consists of an intelligence test and an interview in which the social attitudes and the psychological resistance of the candidates are assessed. Dr König is in charge of the entrance examinations. He also conducts and scores the intelligence test.

High control: The interviews are conducted by him together with a colleague. After sharing the impressions of these interviews, Dr König decides about the admission. It is up to him how he weights the test and the interview in his assessment of the qualification of the candidates. (Low control: The interview is conducted by a colleague. After comparing the results of the test and the interview, Dr König decides about the admission. Based upon long-time experience it has been agreed that in case of doubt the interview should have more weight in the assessment of the qualification of the candidates). Deserved: The interview reveals that Linda is not very engaged socially. Recently she has turned down an invitation to take over a group of young people because of the large amount of work which is connected with the leadership of the group. (Undeserved: The interview reveals that Linda is very engaged socially. She has been leading a group of young people with much enthusiasm for many years, in spite of the large amount of work which is connected with the leadership of the group). Linda's result in the intelligence test was clearly above average and passed the cutting score by far. Nevertheless, she gets a letter of renunciation from Dr König one week after the exam. The letter says that she passed the test but was not completely convincing in the interview. High justification: In border cases like this, older candidates are given the preference over younger candidates. (Low justification: In border cases like this, the candidate has to be turned down because of the large number of applications).

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