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The Threat of an Innocent Victim: How Perspective-Taking and Mood Affect Perceptions of Victims

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The Threat of an Innocent Victim:
How Perspective-Taking and Mood Affect Perceptions of Victims

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Abstract

Previous research on the phenomenon of victim blaming indicates a significant interaction of just-world beliefs and perspective-taking, such that imagining oneself in the situation of a victim causes a significant threat to the self. This in turn leads to moral judgments that reduce this threat and restore just-world beliefs. The purpose of this study was to identify the effect of mood on individual tendencies to blame victims of human trafficking. While the results failed to fully support the connection between mood, perspective, just-world beliefs, and blame, a weak, though significant, relationship was found between just-world beliefs and victim blame. Implications of this study for future victim blame research as well as a number of alternative strategies for restoring just-world beliefs are discussed. Limitations for this study are primarily related to its reliance on a web-based survey, as well as possible issues with the stimulus material.

Victim blaming is very much a contextually dependent phenomenon, and thus calls for further research into the situations most likely to bring about this paradoxical reaction. The present study is situated within the context of human trafficking, a widespread, global issue affecting tens of millions of people worldwide. Estimates from the United States Department of State and the International Labour Organization place the number of human trafficking victims between 20 and 30 million men, women, and children at any given time. Only a small fraction of these individuals receive the help they need, however, as public awareness of this problem remains alarmingly low. Victim identification is the key to combatting human trafficking, and is dependent on the public's ability to help law enforcement and non-governmental organizations recognize important indicators of possible victims. Numerous organizations have been working to educate people about human trafficking, many of which rely on the sharing of victims' stories. The victim blame literature and more recent perspective-taking literature indicate a number of issues with this approach, however, and this study intended to help fill these knowledge gaps. While the results were largely inconclusive, they point to some suggested best practices that may be useful for future public awareness campaigns. Further research is required to determine the most beneficial way to share information about victims of human trafficking and help end this global crisis.

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Chapter 1: Victim Blaming

Perspective-Taking

Many of the organizations working to raise awareness about victims of abuse, human trafficking, and sex trafficking use victims' stories to motivate action and spur social change (e.g. Childhelp, 2013; Polaris Project, 2013b; MTV EXIT, 2013). This is consistent with earlier literature on perspective-taking, which suggests that imagining oneself in another's situation or imagining another's perspective decreases stereotyping and in-group biases (Galinsky & Moskowitz, 2000), increases intergroup contact (Wang, Kenneth, Ku, & Galinsky, 2014), increases social coordination and bonding (Galinsky, Ku, & Wang, 2005), increases liking (Davis, Conklin, Smith, & Luce, 1996), and increases prosocial behavior (Batson, 1991; Dovidio et al., 1990). These positive effects are most often linked with the association of the self with the other and vice versa, in which positive perceptions of the self spill over onto perceptions of the other, thus, improving intergroup relations through the association of the self with the out-group (Galinsky, Ku, Wang, 2005). More recently, however, researchers have called into question the benefits of perspective-taking in specific, real-world contexts, suggesting that it may instead produce an opposite, ironic effect, in which perspective-taking may actually harm intergroup relations (Vorauer & Sasaki, 2009).

Paradoxical Perspective-Taking. This counterintuitive effect of perspective-taking is context specific, however, and is dependent on the presence of a number of personal and interpersonal factors. In close intergroup interactions,

for example, negative effects of perspective-taking are attributed to inferences about how the out-group perceives the in-group (i.e. metastereotypes), which interfere with the positively-associated self-other overlap otherwise seen in perspective-taking (Vorauer & Sasaki, 2009). Importantly, there must be the opportunity for reciprocal, critical evaluation by the out-group member. This opportunity to be perceived negatively increases individuals' focus on how others will perceive them, reducing the focus on how others would feel or how they would feel in the other's situations. A similar effect was demonstrated in the context of close personal relationships, in which perspective-taking increased transparency overestimation, that is the perceived amount to which one's own thoughts and emotions are apparent to another (Vorauer & Sucharyna, 2013). Again it is the focus on the self and potential negative evaluations that hinder the positive potential of perspective taking.

  Perspective Types. Within the perspective-taking literature, researchers have identified and examined the effects of different perspective types with which to approach a situation; the three primary types being the objective observer, imagine-self, and imagine-other. And, while some researchers fail to distinguish between imagine-self and imagine-other – or simply conflate their effects – both have been identified as disctinct perspectives resulting in different outcomes (Batson, Early, Salvarani, 1997). The imagine-self perspective calls for individuals to imagine how they would feel in another's situation, whereas imagine-other calls for individuals to imagine how another is feeling in a specific situation. The important distinction is the focus on either the self's (imagine-self)

or the other's (imagine-other) reaction to a given context, which orients further perceptions and judgments through the activation of certain self- or other-related concepts. In situations where the perspective-taking process is non-interactive (i.e. conducted alone or in the absence of the out-group members), the imagine-self perspective was shown to increase personal distress, or the negative, self-oriented emotional response to witnessing the plight of a victim. Subsequently, imagine-self perspective-takers are often driven by egoistic motivations to relieve this personal distress. The imagine-other perspective, on the other hand, primarily increased empathic distress, or the other-oriented emotional response to seeing the plight of a victim and the related concern for the victim, which leads to the more altruistic motivation of relieving the victim's distress (Batson, Early, Salvarani, 1997). Here, the imagine-other perspective is more socially beneficial, as it inspires prosocial, helping behavior, whereas the imagine-self perspective promotes egocentric self-preservation. The results of imagine-self or imagine-other perspectives is highly dependent on the context in which perspective-taking is conducted, in that the potential for evaluation of the perspective-taker by the out-group has been shown to produce the opposite, ironic effects discussed previously (e.g. Vorauer & Sucharyna, 2013; Vorauer & Sasaki, 2014)

Batson and Ahmad (2009) further suggest that perspective taking may actually prime stereotypes and out-group differences, leading to quite the opposite result of Galinsky and colleagues' earlier studies. This has led to an examination of power dynamics in relation to the efficacy of perspective-taking, in which dominant groups tended to come away with improved perceptions of marginalized

groups, while non-dominant groups exhibited little to no positive change in out-group perceptions and, in fact, may have reinforced negative out-group perceptions (Batson et al., 2003; Bruneau & Saxe, 2012; Galinsky, Magee, Inesi, & Gruenfeld, 2006). A more in-depth understanding of the process of perspective-taking across different contexts is necessary to determine when and where this powerful tool may best be applied. The current study aims to contribute to this line of research by exploring the influence of mood and the context of human trafficking on the outcome of perspective taking.

Just-World Beliefs

Perspective taking is further complicated by an individual's belief in a just world (BJW), as described by Melvin Lerner's "justice motive" or Just-World Theory (1977, 1980). With this he suggested that people in general feel the need to believe in a world where justice prevails and actions warrant their consequences, such that morally right deeds are rewarded and morally wrong deeds are punished. Moreover, there is a drive to preserve these just-world beliefs, which leads people to make moral judgments that conform to just-world theory. When people encounter situations that are incongruous with this outlook, they find their belief in a just world threatened (Hafer, 2000a), and are thus compelled to resolve the internal discord by bringing their observations in line with their preexisting conceptions of justice in the world. One way of accomplishing this reconciliation is by reinterpreting the situation in some way. For example, when observing the suffering of an innocent victim, an onlooker may attempt to reduce

the threat he or she experiences by derogating the victim's character or blaming the victim for his or her misfortune.

Threatening the BJW. While this response is dependent on the presence of a perceived threat to the BJW, it is the strength of this threat that tends to predict an individual's likelihood to blame or otherwise derogate the victim. In their review of the just-world theory literature, Hafer and Bègue (2005) outline a number of factors contributing to the threat to the BJW, including "the presence or absence of an unjust event, the extent or duration of injustice, the salience of an injustice, the behavioral responsibility of a victim of injustice, target respectability, and perpetrator punishment, among others" (p. 136). Lerner (1980, 2003) and other just-world theory researchers (Chaiken & Darley, 1973) have specifically called attention to the issue of stimulus impact – i.e. the emotional impact of the perceived injustice. This is further influenced by stimulus believability or realism (e.g. Williams, 1984, Study 2) and the seriousness of the injustice (e.g. Hafer, 2000b, Study 2; Lerner, 2003). In summary then, to be sufficiently threatening to result in victim blaming or other BJW-restorative behaviors, an injustice must be emotionally engaging, believable, and perpetrated on an innocent victim.

BJW & Perpsective Taking. In a newer line of research within the just-world theory literature, recent studies suggest the combination of perspective taking and strong just-world beliefs leads to a significant threat to the self and to the BJW (Granot, Balcetis, Uleman, in prep). As discussed previously, the threat to one's self is consistent with the concept of direct distress (i.e. distress directed

towards the self) described by Batson, Early, and Salvarani (1997) as the result of imagining oneself in a victim's position. This is compounded by the threat to the BJW, which, as described above, varies across contexts and is related to the severity and emotional impact of a perceived injustice. The combination of these two poses a serious issue for awareness-raising campaigns (e.g. Kogut, 2011), as they often present victims' stories to viewers, while imploring them to imagine the pain and suffering of the victims (imagine-other) or the pain and suffering they might experience in the victims' situations (imagine-self).

Mood and Perceptions of Victims

There are many other subtle factors affecting the likelihood that individuals will blame a victim, including but not limited to victim-observer similarity (Correia et al., 2012), individual differences in BJW, and observer mood (see Hafer & Bègue, 2005 for a review). Despite mood's demonstrated effect on cognition and perception (see Forgas, 2012 for review), little research to date has been conducted on mood's effect on victim blaming (e.g. Goldenberg & Forgas, 2012). Goldenberg and Forgas' recent study demonstrated that positive mood decreases and negative mood increases tendency to blame the victim; however, the researchers did not account for the effects of perspective-taking, allowing participants to instead spontaneously take a first or third person perspective.

While mood has been shown to effect how we process information (Bless & Fiedler, 2006; Bower & Forgas, 2001; Forgas, 1995), recent studies suggest

that it is instead the motivational influence of mood (e.g., Raghunathan & Trope, 2002) that drives its effect on victim blaming (Furnham, 2003; Goldenberg & Forgas, 2012). As victim blaming is partly motivated by the need to alleviate the negative affective state caused by observing an innocent victim (Thornton, 1984), positive mood may act as a buffer, reducing the need blame, while negative mood may intensify these feelings, leading to greater blame (Dalbert, 2001). Mood is further theorized to function as a motivational resource, allowing individuals to better cope with negative or threatening information (Raghunathan & Trope, 2002; Trope, Ferguson, Raghunathan, 2000).

Research Questions & Hypotheses

This study aims to fill the gaps in the victim blame and perspective-taking literature addressed above. Given the effects of perspective-taking and BJW (Granot, Balcetis, Uleman, in prep) and the effects of mood (Goldenbert & Forgas, 2011) on victim blame, this study proposes to answer the following:

- **RQ1**: How will the combination of mood and perspective-taking affect individuals' tendency to blame a victim of human trafficking?

- **RQ2**: How will individual differences on general belief in a just world affect victim blame in this context?

Also, using the literatures on just-world theory, perspective taking, and mood as they relate to victim blaming, the following four hypotheses are proposed:

H1: Participants in the positive affect condition will engage in less victim blaming and victim derogation than participants in the negative and neutral affect conditions.

H2: Participants in the negative affect condition will engage in greater victim blaming and victim derogation than participants in the positive and neutral affect conditions.

H3: Participants in the personal perspective condition will engage in greater victim blaming and victim derogation than participants in the objective observer condition

H4: Participants with stronger beliefs in a just world will engage in greater victim blaming and victim derogation than participants with weaker beliefs in a just world.

Chapter 2: Human Trafficking

Research on human trafficking has been a difficult and rather imprecise task, due in large part to the variations in how human trafficking is defined and the inherently covert nature of this clandestine activity. In particular, the use of different definitions across organizations and institutions has created confusion among researchers as to what should be considered trafficking and has hindered attempts to accurately assess the number of victims, profiles of victims and perpetrators, and the economic scale of the global trafficking industry. This section will provide an overview of the United Nations' definition of human trafficking as well as a number of common issues concerning the application of this definition to anti-trafficking efforts.

Defining Human Trafficking

The United Nations Convention against Transnational Organized Crime was adopted in November, 2000, and includes the The Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons, especially Women and Children, which was entered into force in December, 2003. As of February, 2014, 159 states have ratified this protocol, which is the first "global legally binding instrument with an agreed definition on trafficking in persons" (UNODC, n.d.). The protocol defines "Trafficking in Persons" as

> the recruitment, transportation, transfer, harbouring or receipt of persons,
> by means of the threat or use of force or other forms of coercion, of
> abduction, of fraud, of deception, of the abuse of power or of a position of

vulnerability or of the giving or receiving of payments or benefits to

achieve the consent of a person having control over another person, for the

purpose of exploitation. Exploitation shall include, at a minimum, the

exploitation of the prostitution of others or other forms of sexual

exploitation, forced labour or services, slavery or practices similar to

slavery, servitude or the removal of organs. (United Nations, 2003)

It is further defined by the presence of three constituent elements:

1. the *act* (of recruiting, transporting, transferring, harbouring, or

   receiving of persons);

2. through the *means* of (threat or use of force, coercion, abduction,

   fraud, deception, abuse of power or vulnerability, or giving payments

   or benefits to a person in control of the victim);

3. for the *purpose* of (exploitation, which includes exploiting the

   prostitution of others, sexual exploitation, forced labour, slavery or

   similar practices and the removal of organs). (emphasis added, United

   Nations, 2003)

Special consideration is given to children under the age of 18, such that any of the

acts listed above will be considered trafficking even in the absence of any of the

specified means.

This internationally agreed upon definition makes a couple of important

choices regarding the specifics of "coercion" and "exploitation." The UN drafters

note the wide array of activities constituting "coercion," which are not limited to

physical force or threats and include such acts as an abuse of a "position of

vulnerabilitiy" (United Nations, 2003). They chose not to explicitly define "exploitation," however, offering instead a number of examples that are considered exploitative. This broad definition of human trafficking serves as a template on which other organizations may base their operationalizations of human trafficking.

Common Misperceptions and Critiques. While the U.N. definition provides a useful foundation for the understanding of what constitutes human trafficking, there are still a number of issues critics and commentators have raised about the application of its terminology, the first of which is directly related to the UN's distinction between human trafficking and migrant smuggling. These crimes are often conflated by the general public due to the significant overlap in their definitions. Human trafficking is distinguished from migrant smuggling by the use of coercion, threats, or deception for the purpose of exploitation, whereas smuggling is assumed to be a financially beneficial service of illegally transporting persons across national borders. Here, another important clarification must be made. Human trafficking is not restricted to the movement of persons across national borders; rather, it includes the "recruitment and facilitated movement of a person *within or across* national frontiers" (emphasis added; Lee, 2011); thus, movement across borders is not required as long as the victim is somehow coerced for the purposes of exploitation. This makes identifying and successfully proving cases of human trafficking somewhat difficult, as traffickers may use more subtle forms of coercion that are less apparent to onlookers.

Combatting Human Trafficking

Human trafficking is a widespread, global issue; however, despite the prevalence of this crime, public awareness remains relatively low. In the United States, human trafficking came to the government and public's attention in the 1990s, after noticing a spike in activity from Eastern Europe and the former Soviet Union (Jahic & Finckenauer, 2005; Jones, 2013). By 2002, the British Broadcasting Corporation had declared it the world's biggest crime problem, and in the United States Department of State's (US DoS) "Trafficking in Persons Report 2013" they estimated 27 million men, women, and children are victims of human trafficking at any given time (Kalaitzidis, 2005; US DoS, 2013). Yet according to government data only 40,000 of these victims were identified in 2012, due in large part to inadequate victim identification (US DoS, 2013). The International Labour Organization (ILO) similarly estimates approximately 20.9 million people are victims of forced labor, with at least 1.5 million in the United States, European Union, and other developed economies (ILO, 2012). Victim identification has been indicated as the most important effort in combatting the issue of human trafficking (FBI, 2012; US DoS, 2013).

As such, organizations like Traffick911, MTV EXIT, Polaris Project, and dozens of others are attempting to raise awareness about human trafficking and how to properly identify victims (MTV EXIT, 2013; Polaris Project, 2013a; Traffick911, 2013). This has led them to share many stories of victims and survivers of human trafficking. While this approach is consistent with early perspective taking literature, it may be problematic in its potential to increase

instances of victim blaming (see Chapter 1). Thus, further research is needed to

determine the best way to share information about victims of human trafficking

and how members of the general public can help end this global issue.

Chapter 3: Methods

Design and Participants

Participants for this study were recruited through introductory psychology courses at Syracuse University. Students signed up for the study using the psychology department's SONA System, through which they were provided the link to the survey, hosted on Qualtrics Research Suite. All participants were given a half hour credit towards their course requirements.

There were 161 participants (41 male, 119 female, 1 did not respond to demographic questions), aged 18 to 25 (M=19.1, SD=1.26). They were predominantly White/Caucasian (N=106), followed by Asian/Pacific Islander (N=19), Hispanic/Latino-Latina (N=16), and Black/African-American (N=10).

This study used a 3 (mood) x 2 (perspective) between subjects design with participants randomly assigned to one of six conditions: Happy-First (N=29), Happy-Observer (N=20), Neutral-First (N=28), Neutral-Observer (N=24), Sad-First (N=26), or Sad-Observer (N=34).

Stimuli

Mood Induction. The mood induction was developed using Jenkin and Andrewes' (2012) study of effective film stimuli for eliciting specific emotions. They identified two clips, one with dialogue and one non-verbal clip, for each emotion they tested, including happiness, sadness, and neutral. Accordingly, participants in the happy conditions were presented with either a scene from *Marie Antoinette* (Coppola & Coppola, 2006), in which Marie Antoinette spends

time at a peaceful countryside manor with her young daughter, friends, and

animals, or a scene from *Deep Blue*, in which beautiful ocean scenery is

accompanied by uplifting orchestral music. Participants in the neutral conditions

saw one of the two clips from *Open Water* (Lau & Kentis, 2003), showing a man

Table 1
Film Clips for Mood Induction

Affect Condition	'Clip name' and *Film name*	Length	Description
Positive	Verbal: 'Marie Antoinette' from *Marie Antoinette* (Coppola & Coppola, 2006)	2 min 13 s	"French Queen Marie Antoinette spends time at her picturesque country house with her young daughter, farm animals and friends."
	Non-verbal: 'Deep Dolphins' from *Deep Blue* (Tasioulis, Tidmarsh, Fothergill, & Byatt, 2003)	2 min	"A pod of dolphins are shown swimming through the ocean, with magnificent cinematography and music."
Neutral	'Open Water Neutral V' from *Open Water* (Lau & Kentis, 2003)	1 min 1 s	"A man packs a car with luggage and makes some calls on a mobile phone. A woman is also shown talking on a mobile phone."
	'Open Water NV' from *Open Water* (Lau & Kentis, 2003)	1 min 5s	"Images of a beachside town, dive-shop and divers making preparations on a boat."
Negative	'My Girl' from *My Girl* (Grzer & Zieff, 1991)	2 min 15 s	"A young girl reluctantly attends the funeral of her friend but is unable to accept the boy's death."
	'Sylvia' from *Sylvia* (Owen & Jeffs, 2003)	3 min 54 s	"Sylvia Plath prepares breakfast for her children, seals off the kitchen, and gases herself to death. Her husband mourns for her."

packing his car and talking on the phone and a group of divers preparing for a dive in a beachside town. Participants in the sad conditions were shown either a scene from *Sylvia* (Owen & Jeffs, 2003), in which Sylvia Plath seals the room and commits suicide, or a scene from *My Girl* (Grazer & Zieff, 1991), in which a young girl learns of and mourns her friend's death. The clips ranged in length from one to five minutes, though the two clips for each condition differed in length by no more than one minute.

Human Trafficking Story. The news article was written by the researcher, drawing details from a number of stories about human trafficking victims. Though based on true stories, the article did not include any identifiable information relating to any one victim's story. The article told the story of Janice, a 17-year-old girl from North Dakota, who ran away from an abusive home. She learns of a job opportunity on her way to Chicago, IL, and ends up at a motel a few hours outside the city. Here, she is forced to work as a housekeeper without pay. Participants were not told, however, what happened to Janice after being coerced into forced labor, nor were they given much information regarding the perpetrators of her abuse. This was done in an attempt to focus participants' attention on the details of the victim, rather than the perpetrators.

Questionnaires. The blame and identification questions were adapted from a recent victim blame study by Granot, Balcetis, and Uleman (in prep) and consisted of five blame/responsibility questions, two victim identification questions, and two questions about the participant's perspective while reading the story (see Appendix, p. 43).

1. To what extent was [victim name] to blame for what happened to her?

2. How responsible was [victim name] for what happened?

3. How foreseeable were the events that took place?

4. To what extent did [victim name] cause the events?

5. To what extend could [victim name] have prevented what happened?

6. How similar are you to [victim name]?

7. How close do you feel to [victim name]?

8. To what extend did you adopt an objective perspective when reading the story?

9. To what extent did you read the article as if the events were happening to you personally?

The BJW scale was adapted from Dalbert and Yamauchi (1994) and Lipkus (1991), including eight questions about global just-world beliefs (see Appendix, p. 43).

1. I think basically the world is a just place

2. I believe that, by and large, people get what they deserve.

3. I am confident that justice always prevails over injustice.

4. I am convinced that in the long run people will be compensated for injustices.

5. I firmly believe that injustices in all areas of life (e.g., professional, family, politics) are the exception rather than the rule.

6. I think people try to be fair when making important decisions.

7. I feel that people who meet with misfortune have brought it on themselves.

8. I feel that rewards and punishments are fairly given.

Procedure

The SONA System sign-up page provided participants with a link to the survey, where they were first asked to read the consent form and indicate their willingness to continue or end the study at that time. Participants were then presented with the mood induction and were instructed to watch the short clip before continuing the experiment. Next they were told they would be read a brief news article, and were asked to either imagine themselves in the subject's position or to read the article as an objective observer. They then answered two sets of questions, one measuring victim blame and one measuring just-world beliefs, both of which used seven-point likert scales. This was followed by demographic questions and a debriefing statement, explaining the study and its purpose.

Chapter 4: Results

Manipulation Checks

Of the initial sample, data from 20 participants were excluded based on the length of time spent completing the study. Participants who completed the study in under 4 minutes (240 seconds; N=13) or more than 1 hour and 30 minutes (5400 seconds; N=7) were excluded from further analyses. The sample was not significantly altered by the exclusion.

Two manipulation check questions were included in the survey to test the effectiveness of the perspective manipulation. Independent samples t-tests were used to test for significant differences between perspective conditions on objectivity and the extent to which participants read the story as if it were happening to them. The results of these analyses indicated a significant difference between the first-person condition (M=3.58, SD=2.01) and the objective condition (M=2.67, SD=1.52) on the extent to which participants imagined themselves in the victim's situation, t=8.74, p=.004. However, there was no significant difference between the first-person condition (M=4.01, SD=1.64) and the objective condition (M=3.96, SD=1.65) for objectivity, t=.02, p=.88. That only one manipulation check yielded a significant result and that the means for both manipulation checks was relatively low (at or below scale midpoint) suggests that the perspective-taking manipulation may have only been partially effective. As removing participants with low scores for the manipulation checks did not benefit further analyses, no data were excluded based on these findings.

Victim Blaming

An analysis of covariance (ANCOVA) was conducted to examine the effects of mood and perspective on victim blaming. Total blame was calculated as the mean of the five blame questions ($\alpha=.81$); identification, the mean of the two identification questions ($\alpha=.73$); and global BJW, the mean of the eight BJW questions ($\alpha=.79$). For the analyses, identification and global BJW were used as covariates with mood and perspective conditions as the independent variables. The results of this test yielded no significant main effect of mood, $F(2,133)=1.02$, $p=.36$, or perspective, $F(1,133)=.32$, $p=.57$, and no significant interaction, $F(2,133)=.80$, $p=.45$, on total victim blame; however, results indicated a significant covariate of global BJW, $F(1,133)=6.22$, $p=.01$.

When male participants were excluded from the analyses a significant interaction emerged, $F(2,102)=3.58$, $p=.03$; however, there were still no significant main effects of mood, $F(2,102)=.60$, $p=.55$, or perspective, $F(1,102)=.03$, $p=.86$., and only a marginally significant covariate of global BJW, $F(1,102)=3.86$, $p=.052$. Post hoc analyses using Bonferroni corrections indicated a significant difference between the Happy-First condition (M=2.80, SD=.26), the Happy-Objective (M=3.76, SD=.37, $p=.04$), and the Neutral-First condition (M=3.89, SD=.26, $p=.01$).

H1 and H2, predicting decreased blame from positive mood and increased blame from negative mood, were largely unsupported – except for the significant difference between the Happy-First, Happy-Objective, and Neutral-First

conditions among female participants. H3, which predicted increased blame in the

first-person perspective condition, was not supported.

Table 2
ANCOVA Test for Significant Differences Between Conditions on Total Blame

Source	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
TotBJW	9.060	1	9.060	6.224	.014*
TotID	.050	1	.050	.035	.853
MoodCond	2.961	2	1.480	1.017	.364
PerspCond	.470	1	.470	.323	.571
MoodCond * PerspCond	2.339	2	1.169	.803	.450
Error	193.616	133	1.456		
Total	1803.280	141			
Corrected Total	209.833	140			

*denotes significance at $\alpha < .05$

Table 3
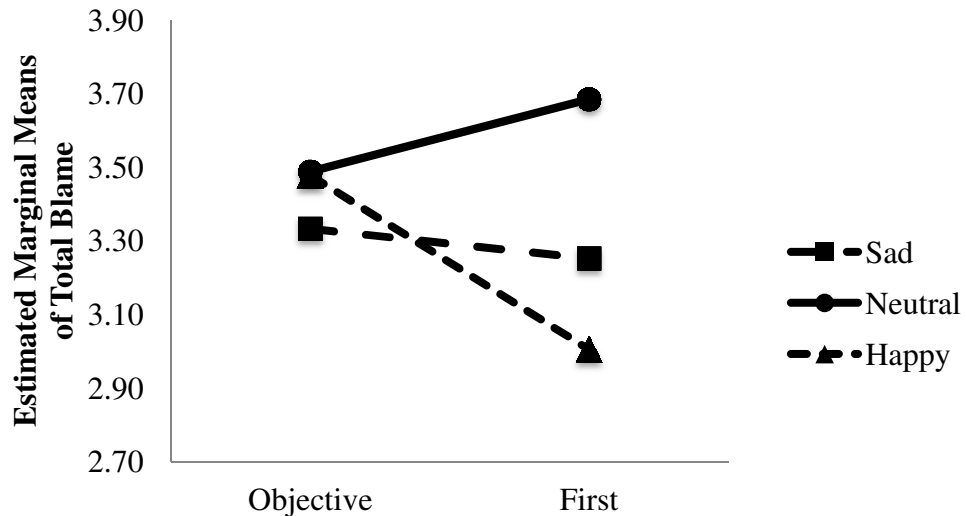*Estimated Marginal Means for Total Blame Across All Conditions (Male and Female)*

Mood Condition	Perspective Condtion	Mean	Std. Error
Sad	Objective	3.333[a]	.210
	First	3.252[a]	.257
Neutral	Objective	3.488[a]	.266
	First	3.685[a]	.247
Happy	Objective	3.478[a]	.305
	First	3.005[a]	.243

a. Covariates appearing in the model are evaluated at the following values:
Global BJW = 3.7305, Identification = 1.8156.

Table 4

Estimated Marginal Means for Total Blame Across All Conditions (Female only)

Mood Condition	Perspective Condition	Mean	Std. Error
Sad	Objective	3.333[a]	.210
	First	3.252[a]	.257
Neutral	Objective	3.488[a]	.266
	First	3.685[a]	.247
Happy	Objective	3.478[a]	.305
	First	3.005[a]	.243

a. Covariates appearing in the model are evaluated at the following values:
Global BJW = 3.7305, Identification = 1.8156.

Figure 1: *Differences in estimated marginal means (male and female) of*

The connection between BJW and victim blame predicted in H4 was partially supported by a significant correlation between total blame and BJW scores, $r=.22$, $p=.01$. This relationship was further explored using a categorical analysis of total BJW scores. Participants were divided into three groups based on BJW tertiles, such that participants in the bottom tertile (BJW≤3.375, N=53) were labeled Low BJW, participants in the second tertile (3.375<BJW<4.2083, N=41)

were labeld Mid BJW, and participants in the third tertile (BJW≥4.2083, N=47) were labeled High BJW. An ANOVA was subsequently conducted to test for significant differences in blame across these three groups. The results demonstrated a significant difference between the three tertiles, $F(2, 138)=4.66$, $p=.01$, with post hoc tests using Bonferroni corrections indicating that the High BJW tertile (M=3.76, SD=1.18) was significantly greater than the Low BJW tertile (M=3.03, SD=1.22, $p=.008$), but not the Mid BJW tertile (M=3.33, SD=1.17, $p=.72$).

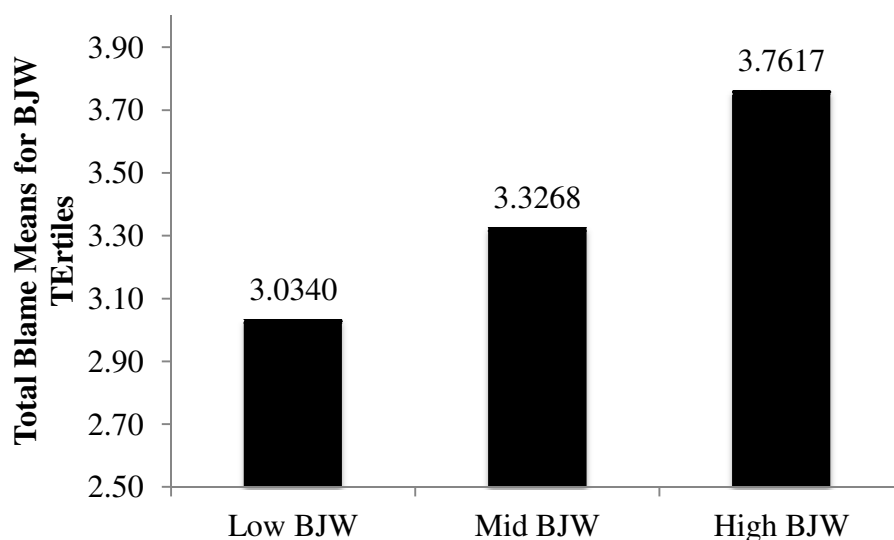**Figure 2:** *Differences in Total Blame means between Global Beliefs in a Just-World tertiles*

Identification

In order to examine other possible BJW-restorative practices, means for identification were analyzed. An ANOVA showed no significant main effect of mood, $F(2,135)=.2.43$, $p=.09$, or perspective, $F(1,135)=.32$, $p=.57$, nor a significant interaction, $F(2,135)=.18$, $p=.84$. Means across conditions were extremely low, with a global mean across all conditions of only 1.82 (SD=1.01).

Identification was not correlated with either Global BJW ($r=.08$, $p=.38$) or Total

Blame ($r=.01$, $p=.90$).

Table 5
Means for Identification Across All Conditions

Mood Condition	Perspective Condition	Mean	Std. Deviation	N
Sad	Objective	1.8030	1.03787	33
	First	1.8864	1.10121	22
	Total	1.8364	1.05433	55
Neutral	Objective	1.4524	.75672	21
	First	1.6875	.62228	24
	Total	1.5778	.69048	45
Happy	Objective	2.0625	1.16726	16
	First	2.0400	1.22406	25
	Total	2.0488	1.18746	41
Total	Objective	1.7571	1.00629	70
	First	1.8732	1.01319	71
	Total	1.8156	1.00785	141

Chapter 5: Discussion

The present study examined the effects of mood, perspective taking, and global beliefs in a just-world on individuals' tendency to blame an innocent victim of human trafficking. Results indicate a weak, but significant, relationship between BJW and victim blame; however, the relationships between mood, perspective taking, and blame were not supported. Theoretical implications and possible methodological issues are discussed.

Mood, Perspective, and Blame

Conflicting Manipulations. The results showed no significant relationship between mood, perspective, and blame, even after attempting to remove participants who likely did not follow the experiment instructions. One possible reason for this is the failure of the mood manipulation to fully induce the intended emotional state. Interestingly, the only condition that was significantly different was the Happy-First among female participants. Participants in this condition followed the predicted pattern of reduced blame compared to the neutral condition; however, contrary to the predicted pattern, blame was significantly less in the first-person condition than in the objective perspective condition. This paradoxical result suggests that a positive mood may provide sufficient motivational resources to reduce the effect of the otherwise threatening combination of first-person perspective and a threat to BJW. Additionally, the instructions to adopt an objective perspective may have caused participants across the three objective x mood conditions to suppress the emotional effects of the mood induction, leading to a more neutral affective state regardless of the mood

manipulation. This explanation is supported by the closeness of Total Blame means across objective x mood conditions.

Psychological Distancing. Another possible explanation for low levels of victim blame is the use of psychological distancing as a BJW-restorative technique (Hafer & Bègue, 2005; Lerner & Miller, 1978). This is supported by the low means for identification across conditions, suggesting participants may have reduced the threat they were experiencing by dismissing the possibility that a similar fate may befall them. This is accomplished through a process of reinforcing differences between the individual and the victim, such that the victim "Is not like me, so I don't have to worry about his/her fate." The lack of a significant correlation between identification, Total Blame, and Global BJW, however, complicates this explanation, as psychological distancing should relate to other BJW-restorative practices.

Failure to Threaten BJW. It is also possible that the victim story itself was not sufficiently convincing, realistic, or emotionally arousing to significantly threaten participants' beliefs in a just world. Stimulus impact and emotionality have been identified as major influences on the likelihood to blame a victim due to their influence on threats to just-world beliefs (see Hafer & Bègue, 2005 for review). Previous studies have shown that injustices that are perceived as minor (Adams 1965; Lerner, 2003), very brief (Correia & Vala, 2003; Hafer, 2000b, Study 2; Lerner & Simmons, 1966), or not believable (Anderson, 1992; Gruman & Sloan, 1983) do not sufficiently threaten BJW, and thus do not necessitate the use BJW-restorative practices, like victim derogation or blaming. "Low impact"

contexts, like hypothetical stories and situations that provide sufficient time for deliberation, allow individuals to use more thoughtful consideration of social norms, such that they may rely more heavily on injunctive norms (i.e. socially approved responses) of deservingness and fairness when making judgments (Alves & Correia, 2013).

Low public awareness and common beliefs that human trafficking does not occur within the United States, especially to American citizens, may have made the story less believable, and thus less threatening. Furthermore, while no resolution to the victim's story was provided in this study, the story may have been made more threatening by indicating continued suffering, adding an image of the victim, or describing in greater detail the harm done to the victim.

Global BJW Scale

Despite the popular use of just-world belief scales in the current BJW literature, recent scholars have questioned their validity in measuring long-term, general beliefs (see Hafer & Bègue, 2005 for review). The major issue with these scales is the likely implicit nature of just-world beliefs, which are not often explicitly endorsed, thus problematizing the use of self-report measures (see Dalbert, 2001; Fazio & Olson, 2003; Lerner, 1998; Lerner & Goldberg, 1999). Explicit endorsement on these scales may instead be a method of coping with threats to BJW, similar to "motivated denial of injustice in the world" (Lerner, 1980, 1998; Lerner & Miller, 1978; as cited in Hafer & Bègue, 2005). This is supported by the significant correlation between BJW and victim blame as well as

the tertile comparisons, as people with higher BJW scores engaged in greater victim blaming.

Limitations and Future Research

 Overall the results of this study provide only weak support for the hypothesized relationships between mood, perspective, just-world beliefs, and victim blame. A number of methodological issues arose out of the experiment's reliance on a web-based survey; however, the stimulus material may also have lacked significant impact.

Online studies have a number of benefits from easy access to large, diverse populations to the promise of anonymity, allowing participants to answer more freely and perhaps more honestly. They also have considerable drawbacks, as well, for some of the same reasons (Birnbaum, 2004; Skitka & Sargis, 2006). The anonymity of online studies allows participants to adopt any persona they wish, leading to reduced self-regulation and subsequent antisocial behavior (see Skitka & Sargis, 2006 for review). In the present study, it is believed that many participants did not properly follow the experiment instructions, which caused a number of issues related to the failure of mood and perspective-taking manipulations. This was evinced by the number of participants who completed the entire experiment in inordinately short or long periods of time.

The other major issue with this study was the victim story, which was likely insufficiently threatening to participant's beliefs in a just world. This was

indicated by the overall lack of statistically significant support for the hypotheses, as well as a closer examination of the BJW literature (see Hafer & Bègue, 2005).

Future studies would benefit from a more controlled environment be that online or in-person. For studies conducted online, time restrictions for each part of the experiment would allow experimenters to ensure that the appropriate amount of time is spent on each section – even if participant attention cannot be guaranteed. Similarly, the amount of time spent on each section can be recorded using simple survey tools offered by many popular survey-hosting sites.

Victim blame stories created for future studies should follow the guidelines outlined in Hafer and Bègue's (2005) comprehensive review of the just-world literature, including the suggestions discussed above. Participants' observation of an innocent victim should be sufficiently emotionally arousing and indicative of a serious injustice to cause the necessary threat to individuals' just-world beliefs.

Conclusions

The present study failed to find adequate support for the predictions made in the just-world literature; however, they are suggestive of the relationships between perspective, mood, and BJW. As such, it would be unwise to draw any hard conclusions from these data with regards to the best practices for sharing the stories of human trafficking victims. That being said, the results do indicate that social awareness campaigns may want to avoid closely associating victims with just-world beliefs, and would likely benefit from asking individuals to imagine

how the victim feels or felt, rather than how they might feel in the victim's situation. Further research is required to support these claims and should explore in more detail the specific media through which individuals are exposed to victims' stories.

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Appendices

A. IRB-Approved Consent Form

Syracuse University IRB Approved

JAN 1 9 2014   JAN 1 8 2015

DEPARTMENT OF PSYCHOLOGY

430 Huntington Hall, Syracuse, NY 13244 2340, (315) 443-2354

Mood and Social Perceptions Study

You are invited to participate in a research study on how individuals' current mood affects their perceptions of others. You have the right not to answer any of those questions if you are uncomfortable doing so. The purpose of this research is to understand people's attitudes and understand some of the factors that shape those attitudes.

This study will take no more than 30 minutes of your time. You will be asked to watch a brief movie clip, read about an important social issue, and complete an online survey about perceptions of the individuals involved. All information will be kept confidential. This means that your specific answers will not be linked to your name in any way. Research study materials will be identified only by participant numbers, not by names.

In exchange for your participation, you will receive a half hour of credit to be counted as part of your requirements for Introductory Psychology (PSY 205). If at some point during the course of the experiment, you wish to withdraw, you will still be given a half-hour of credit. Additionally your participation may help us understand how to better share information with the goal of increasing public awareness or spurring social change.

The potential risks to you of participating in this study include moderate discomfort or uneasiness due to the emotional content of the experiment. This should not exceed everyday levels of discomfort experienced while watching or reading the news or viewing a commercially produced movie.

If you do not want to take part, you have the right to refuse to take part, without penalty. If you decide to take part and later no longer wish to continue, you have the right to withdraw from the study at any time, without penalty.

Should you feel it necessary to discuss any feelings or emotions you experienced during the experiment with a professional, you may contact Syracuse University Health Services at 315-443-2666, or go to their office located at 111 Waverly Avenue, Syracuse, New York 13244-1200.

If you have any questions, concerns, complaints about the research, contact Reid Searls at rasearls@syr.edu, 407-920-5768 or Leonard Newman at lsnewman@syr.edu, 315-443- 4633. If you have any questions about your rights as a research participant, you have questions, concerns, or complaints that you wish to address to someone other than

the investigator, if you cannot reach the investigator, contact the Syracuse University Institutional Review Board at 315-443-3013.

All of my questions have been answered, I am 18 years of age or older, and I wish to participate in this research study. Please print a copy of this consent form for your records, if you so desire.

By clicking here I agree to participate in this research study.

B. Qualtrics-hosted Online Survey

SYRACUSE UNIVERSITY

Department of Psychology

430 Huntington Hall, Syracuse, NY 13244 2340, (315) 443-2354

Mood and Social Perceptions Study

You are invited to participate in a research study on how individuals' current mood affects their perceptions of others. You have the right not to answer any of those questions if you are uncomfortable doing so. The purpose of this research is to understand people's attitudes and understand some of the factors that shape those attitudes.

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The potential risks to you of participating in this study include moderate discomfort or uneasiness due to the emotional content of the experiment. This should not exceed everyday levels of discomfort experienced while watching or reading the news or viewing a commercially produced movie.

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All of my questions have been answered, I am 18 years of age or older, and I wish to participate in this research study. Please print a copy of this consent form for your records, if you so desire.

○ By clicking here I agree to participate in this research study.

○ I do not agree to participate in the study, and do not wish to continue.

Click to continue >>

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Please watch the following clip:

Open Water

0:00 / 1:08

Click to continue >>

Next you will read a brief news article about a social issue. While reading this story, <u>imagine yourself in the subject's position.</u>

SYRACUSE UNIVERSITY

Next you will read a brief news article about a social issue. Read this story as an <u>objective observer</u>.

Human Trafficking Hits Close to Home
By **Beverly Clark**, CNN
updated 10:54 PM EST, Mon August 6, 2012

CNN -- Janice grew up in a suburban town in North Dakota. After years of neglect from her often absent mother and abuse from her alcoholic father, she ran away from home at the age of 17. She decided she needed to get away from her parents and used what little cash she had to take a bus heading towards Chicago, about 12 hours away.

At a rest stop a few hours outside Chicago, Janice saw a man drop his wallet as he was walking into a small café. When she returned the wallet, the man was so grateful he offered to buy her a cup of coffee. After the long bus ride, she was grateful for the offer and she sat down to have a drink with him.

As they were talking, she explained her situation and her desperate need of a fresh start in a new place. He told her about a job at a motel near his hometown a couple hours outside Chicago, where she could save up some money for a place closer to the city. He offered to drive her to the motel, if she was interested, as he was already on his way home. Janice, in desperate need of a job and a place to sleep, accepted the offer and accompanied him to the motel.

The manager at the motel set her up in a small room near the janitorial supplies in the back office. She was offered a place to sleep and food from the kitchen in return for doing housekeeping work. After some time, however, the conditions got steadily worse. The manager was extremely strict, not allowing Janice to leave and forcing her to work extremely long hours for almost no pay. The manager also made it clear that she was forbidden to leave the hotel or speak with the guests. When she would approach the topic with him, he would yell at her and threaten her.

Click to continue >>

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Please answer the following questions on a scale of 1 (Not at all) to 7 (Completely).

	Not at all	-	-	-	-	-	Completely
To what extent was Janice to blame for what happened to her?	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
How responsible was Janice for what happened?	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
How foreseeable/predictable were the events that took place?	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
To what extent did Janice cause the events?	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
To what extent could Janice have prevented what happened?	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
How similar are you to Janice?	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
How close do you feel to Janice?	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
To what extent did you adopt an objective perspective when reading the story?	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
To what extent did you read the article as if the events were happening to you personally?	○	○	○	○	○	○	○

Please rate your level of agreement with the following statements on a scale of 1 (Strongly Disagree) to 7 (Strongly Agree).

	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Somewhat Disagree	Neither Agree nor Disagree	Somewhat Agree	Agree	Strongly Agree
I think basically the world is a just place.	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
I believe that, by and large, people get what they deserve.	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
I am confident that justice always prevails over injustice.	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
I am convinced that in the long run people will be compensated for injustices.	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
I firmly believe that injustices in all areas of life (e.g., professional, family, politics) are the exception rather than the rule.	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
I think people try to be fair when making important decisions.	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
I feel that people who meet with misfortune have brought it on themselves.	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
I feel that rewards and punishments are fairly given.	○	○	○	○	○	○	○

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What is your age?

What is your gender?

- ○ Male
- ○ Female
- ○ Trans*

What year of college are you in?

- ○ Freshman
- ○ Sophomore
- ○ Junior
- ○ Senior
- ○ Graduate Student
- ○ Other

What is your major?

Pick a racial category that best describes you.

- ○ American Indian/Alaskan Native
- ○ Asian/Pacific Islander
- ○ Black/African-American
- ○ White/Caucasian
- ○ Hispanic/Latino-Latina
- ○ Native Hawaiian/Other Pacific Islander
- ○ Middle Eastern
- ○ Multiracial (please specify)
- ○ Other (please specify)
- ○ Prefer not to respond

What is your total household income?

- ○ Under $15,000
- ○ $15,001 to $24,999
- ○ $25,000 to $34,999
- ○ $35,000 to $49,999
- ○ $50,000 to $74,999
- ○ $75,000 to $99,999
- ○ $100,000 to $149,999
- ○ $150,000 to $199,999
- ○ $200,000 or more
- ○ Prefer not to respond

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Thanks for your help. You watched a short movie clip, read a story about a victim of human trafficking, and responded to questions about how much to blame and how responsible the victim was for her circumstance.

Some people in this study watched movie clips meant to make them feel happy, some watched a clip meant to make them feel sad, and some watched a neutral clip. Our purpose of "setting the mood" in this study is to determine the effect mood has on perceptions of victims.

People generally have some amount of belief in a just world – that is a world in which good things happen to good people, and bad things happen to bad people. When you learn about a victim, like Janice, this belief is threatened. This is especially true when you attempt to imagine how you would feel in her position. For this reason, some participants were instructed to read the story as if they were in Janice's position or as if they were an objective observer.

In this study, we are trying to determine the influence mood and perspective have on people's understanding of and perceptions about victims. More specifically, we want to see if people will blame a victim more or less if they are happy or sad, and whether their perspective when reading the story will effect victim blaming.

If you have any questions please contact Dr. Leonard Newman at lsnewman@syr.edu, 315-443- 4633.

Thanks!

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Summary of Capstone Study

Conventional wisdom and years of psychology research extol the benefits of "walking a mile in another's shoes." This has been shown to increase a number of prosocial, helping behaviors and reduce negative attitudes towards stigmatized others (e.g., Batson, 1991; Galinsky, Ku, & Wang, 2005). Yet, this generally laudable practice of perspective-taking has a darker side to it as well. More recently, researchers have demonstrated the rather paradoxical phenomenon of victim blaming, often the result of observing injustices done to innocent victims and further by imagining oneself in the situation of those victims (e.g., Granot, Balcetis, Uleman, in prep; Vorauer & Sasaki, 2009, 2014). This particular instance of perspective-taking has the effect of threatening our beliefs in a just-world, or that good things happened to good people, and bad things happened to bad people (Lerner, 1980; see Hafer & Bègue, 2005 for review). This poses a serious problem for social awareness campaigns that use victims' stories as motivators to increase both public awareness and aid in combatting a number of global issues. The present study, "The Threat of an Innocent Victim: How Perspective-Taking and Mood Affect Perceptions of Victims," intended to address these issues and offer insights into how best to share stories of innocent victims.

A web-based survey was used to examine the issue of victim blaming within the context of human trafficking, as well as how an individual's current mood influences this behavior. This involved the development of a mood manipulation by extracting clips from a handful of feature length films from the past ten years, including *Sylvia*, *Marie Antoinette*, *Deep Blue*, *Open Water*, and

My Girl. Clips from these films were identified as particularly useful in priming the emotions of happiness and sadness, as well as some that produced a more neutral affect, or emotional state (Jenkins & Andrewes, 2012). Next, a fake news article about a fictitious victim of human trafficking was created by aggregating details from a number of real stories (for examples, see Polaris Project's "Survivor Stories"). This article told the story of Janice, an American girl in her late teens with an abusive family, who just needed to get away and start a new life. Unfortunately, what she thought was a fortuitous opportunity for a fresh start turned out to be the gateway to years of forced labor, servitude, and continued abuse. Finally, a set of questionnaires were developed to gather information about participants' responses to this story (adapted from Granot, Balcetis, & Uleman, in prep) and their general beliefs in a just-world (adapted from Dalbert & Yamauchi, 1994 and Lipkus, 1991). These were then implemented online using the Qualtrics Research Suite.

Participants in this study were 161 Syracuse University students (41 male, 119 female, 1 did not respond to demographic questions), ranging in age from 18 to 25. They were predominantly White/Caucasian, followed by relatively equal representation of Asian/Pacific Islander, Hispanic/Latino-Latina, and Black/African-American students. Participants signed up for the studying through the psychology department's SONA System, and received a half-hour credit towards their course requirements for experiment participation. The SONA System sign-up directed them to the Qualtrics-hosted survey, where they were first presented with an electronic consent form.

Once indicating their desire to continue with the study, participants were presented with one of six clips from the movies listed above. There were two clips for each mood (happy, sad, and neutral), one with dialogue and one non-verbal. These clips ranged in length from one to five minutes, though the clips for each mood condition differed by no more than one minute. Next, they were given one of two sets of instructions, both beginning with: "Next you will read a brief news article about a social issue." Participants in the first-person perspective conditions were told, "When reading this story, imagine yourself in the subject's position," while particpants in the objective observer condition were told, "Read this story as an objective observer" (emphasis in original). This was immediately followed by Janice's story, formatted to appear as if it were a screenshot taken from CNN.com, a relatively neutral news service in terms of political biases. After reading the story, participants were asked to complete the questionnaires described previously, using a seven-point Likert scale (1= Not at all, 7=Completely for questions about the victim story; 1=Stronly Disagree, 7=Stronly Agree for questions about just-world beliefs), as well as a number of demographic questions.

Once data collection was complete, the data were downloaded from Qualtrics and entered into IBM's SPSS for analysis. A number of statistical tests were conducted (e.g., independent samples t-tests, bivariate correlations, analyses of variance [ANOVAs], and an analyseis of covariance [ANCOVA]) to test for the predicted relationships. Based on prior research, participants in the negative mood conditions were expected to engage in more victim blaming, and those in

the positive mood conditions were expected to engage in less (Goldenberg & Forgas, 2012). Similarly, those in the first-person perspective conditions were expected to engage in more victim blaming than those in the objective observer conditions (Granot, Balcetis, Uleman, in prep). And, as a measure of individual differences, strong global beliefs in a just-world were expected to lead to greater tendency to blame the victim (Lerner, 1980). The results provided only partial support for these predictions.

As a whole, the results did not show the predicted effect of mood, as participants across the three mood conditions did not significantly differ on their responses to the blame questionnaire. Interestingly, however, when male participants were excluded from the analyses, participants in the Happy-First condition showed significantly less victim blaming than those in the Happy-Objective and Neutral-First conditions. This suggested a peculiar interaction of the "objective observer" instructions and the mood manipulation, as the two may have effectively cancelled each other out. The general lack of significant results for the entire sample indicated that the mood manipulations may not have been effective in priming the intended emotions. This is believed to be the result of participants failing to follow the experiment instructions, which will be discussed further in relation to the study limitations.

The predicted effect of perspective-taking was also not supported by the results, as again participants across conditions did not significantly differ on victim blaming. The perspective-taking instructions did produce an unexpected effect described above; however, it is believed that the instructions were not

reinforced well enough. This was suggested by low scores for the relevant conditions on two manipulation check questions, asking to what extent participants read the story objectively or as if they were in the victim's situation. This has implications for how social awareness campaigns should address the dissemination of information, as it may be useful to better understand the perspective individuals use to interpret information when specific instructions are given or not.

Despite the lack of significant results for the first three predictions, the results did provide partial support for the fourth prediction regarding global just-world beliefs and victim blaming. A significant correlation was found between the two (r=.22, p=.01), which prompted further analysis into this relationship. To do this, the sample was divided in thirds to create groups for Low, Mid, and High just-world beliefs. These groups' victim blame scores were then compared using an ANOVA test, which indicated a significant difference between the High and Low groups. Along with the significant correlation, this result provided support for the relationship between just-world beliefs and victim blaming, such that individuals with stronger just-world beliefs will be more likely to engage in victim blaming to restore these beliefs when threatened by an innocent victim.

Overall, the results of this study provide only moderate support for the otherwise well-documented phenomenon of victim blaming. There were a few methodological issues that may have negatively impacted this study, including weak stimulus material and general problems with online studies. Upon further review, Janice's story may not have been significantly threatening to participants'

beliefs in a just-world due to a lack of believability, serverity, and emotionality. For future studies, it is suggested that stories include images of the victim, vivid descriptions of the crimes committed, and emotionally-charged details to elicit the intended response. These are elements often included in the stories told by organizations attempting to raise awareness about human trafficking; however, in an attempt to make the story sufficiently ambiguous, in terms of culpability, and to closely resemble a news article some of these details were omitted. The study also likely suffered from participants' failure to follow the instructions, as indicated by very short or very long experiment durations. As such, twenty participants, who completed the entire study in less than four minutes or more than an hour and a half, were excluded from analyses because this amount of time would not allow for thoughtful completion of the experiment – the mood induction clips alone were one to five minutes – or was excessively long.

While the results were somewhat inconclusive, they do point to a few suggestions for social awareness campaigns and for future research on the topics of victim blame and human trafficking. For example, this study suggests that orgnizations may want to avoid closely associating victims with just-world beliefs, and would likely benefit from asking individuals to imagine how the victim feels or felt, rather than how they themselves might feel in the victim's situation. Further research is required to support these claims and should explore in more detail the specific media through which individuals are exposed to these stories. Additional research should investigate the effects of different perspectives (e.g. imagine how the victim feels vs imagining one's own feelings), how

individuals shift from one perspective to another, and what effects the

presentation of the victim or survivor stories have on these perspectives.