Personality, values and belief in a just world

Uwe Wolfradt and Claudia Dalbert
Martin-Luther-University Halle, Germany


Requests for reprints should be addressed to Dr. Uwe Wolfradt, Department of Psychology, Martin-Luther-University, D-06099 Halle, GERMANY
Abstract

This study investigated the relationship between general belief in a just world (BJW) and different values (conformity, security, self-direction) as well as personality traits (five-factor-model) among 104 Austrian students and 108 professionals. Previous findings have showed that BJW is positively related to the value domains conformity and security as well as to extraversion and negatively to neuroticism and openness. In this study, a negative correlation between BJW and openness was found. Furthermore BJW correlated positively with security and conformity (especially among the group of professionals). A cluster analysis on BJW and the value domains revealed three types: value-conscious (high in all values and low in BJW), dependent-just (high in BJW, security and conformity, low in self-direction) and self-directed (only high in self-direction). Value-conscious and dependent-just participants showed higher scores on conscientiousness, whereas self-directed participants scored higher in openness. Further research should take into account the individual function of BJW and values for personality functioning.

Keywords: five-factor model, personality, values, just world belief
Personality and Just World Belief

Personality, values and belief in a just world

Lerner (1980) assumed that people need to believe in a just world in which people get what they deserve and deserve what they get. This belief serves important adaptive functions in everyday life, e.g. enabling to invest in one’s future, enhancing achievement behavior, reducing stress (for an overview see Dalbert, 1998). Because of its everyday functions, individuals are motivated to defend their belief in a just world (BJW) when confronted with injustice. The psychological consequences of the BJW is the maintenance of one’s mental health, namely an increased subjective well-being as well as a higher self-esteem (Dalbert, 1992, 1998; Lipkus, Dalbert, & Siegler, 1996). BJW is conceptualized (Rubin & Peplau, 1973) as an interindividually varying construct, which can be measured by just world scales (Dalbert, Montada, & Schmitt, 1987; Lipkus, 1991; Rubin & Peplau, 1975). Just world research has a long tradition in explaining reactions towards disadvantaged subjects (for a review Furnham & Procter, 1989), and – more recently – in predicting coping with self-experienced unfairness (e.g. Hafer, in press; Tomaka & Blascovich, 1994; for a review Dalbert, 1996).

Far less is known about the belief in a just world and its meaning within the framework of personality. Furnham and Proctor (1989) reviewed the research, and found that the BJW is positively related to conservative social attitudes, the Protestant work ethic, deference to authority, and conformity to social rules. Recently, Feather (1991, 1994) showed a close
association between BJW and values in the restrictive conformity domain (such as polite, obedient, self-controlled etc.).

Schwartz and Bilsky (1987) described values in terms of whether they were concerned with desirable goals or endstates (terminal values) or rather with desirable modes of conduct or behaviors (instrumental values). According to both authors, values serve as a basic requirement, namely to satisfy biological needs, to achieve coordinated social interaction and to meet social demands for group welfare and survival. Rokeach (1973) emphasized that specific values (e.g., politeness) have an adjustive and an ego-defensive function to control impulses that might be personally and socially unacceptable.

Similarly to the BJW, values also serve adaptive functions. Recently, in this context implicit motives were differentiated from explicit or self-attributed motives (McClelland, Koestner, Weinberger, 1989). BJW can be reframed as indicating an implicit justice motive and should be differentiated from self-attributed motives as personal strivings (Emmons, 1996), life tasks (Cantor, 1994), current concerns (Klinger, 1975), personal projects (Little, 1983), personal goals (Brunstein, 1993), or values (Rokeach, 1973). In the field of achievement and affiliation, we have first results about the interaction of implicit and explicit motives (e.g., Brunstein, Schultheiss, & Grässmann, 1998). But in the field of justice, we have no insight into the interplay of implicit and self-attributed motives, namely BJW and values. Our study is a first endeavor to describe possible BJW and values patterns.
Personality traits seem to be correlated with BJW as well. In studies by Heaven and Connors (1988) and Rim (1983), a negative correlation between BJW and neuroticism was found. Moreover, women who scored low on BJW were more introverted (Heaven & Connors, 1998), but Rim (1983) found no such relationship. Lipkus et al. (1996) found inconsistent and weak correlations between general BJW and personality traits. Applying four different general just world scales together with scales assessing a belief in a just world for self and a belief in a just world for others, no consistent result pattern was observed. The general belief in a just world scale of Dalbert et al. (1987) correlated positively with extraversion and openness. The same was true for the belief in a just world for self, which also correlated negatively with neuroticism.

A number of studies have been carried out to investigate the relationship between values and personality traits. In this context, the five personality factors were often used. Herringer (1998) found that specific values were significantly related to openness (conformity, self-direction, maturity, altruism), conscientiousness (security, achievement, maturity, altruism), agreeableness (achievement, altruism) and neuroticism (conformity). Yik and Tang (1996) found a positive relation between emotional stability and tradition and between openness and hedonism, whereas a negative correlation to benevolence and security was reported. Dollinger, Leong and Ulicni (1996) found that openness was positively correlated with broadmindedness and negatively with social recognition, cleanness, obedience, responsibility and self-control. The close relationship between
values and personality traits can be viewed as caused by a common motivational base of both concepts (Bilsky & Schwartz, 1994). For example, a motivation to avoid negative events can precipitate in the personality traits anxiety or neuroticism as well as in high importance to the value of security.

Within the framework of BJW, values and personality, the positive relationship between BJW and conservatism is the most often confirmed one. One aim of the present study was to further explore the relationship between BJW and values. The belief in a just world provides individuals with the trust in being treated fairly by others. Hence, a positive relationship between BJW and the security domain may be observed as well. Within the personality domain, a negative relationship between BJW and neuroticism was evidenced. Sometimes, positive relationship between BJW and extraversion and a negative between BJW and openness was observed as well.

Besides the replication and extension of these relationships, our study was aimed at a second goal. In some studies it has been found that there is a relationship between BJW and prosocial behavioral consequences such as helping accident victims (Bierhoff, Klein, & Kramp, 1991), West Germans showing high solidarity with East Germans (Schmitt, 1998), and being highly socially responsible (Bierhoff, 1994). In contrast, BJW can be followed by less prosocial reactions (e.g., disdain of the disadvantaged, blaming the victim) which restore justice psychologically (e.g., Furnham & Procter, 1989; Montada, Schmitt, & Dalbert, 1986). One moderator deciding about the consequences of a high BJW may be seen in the observer’s self-
efficacy. Only if the observer is convinced to have behavioral alternatives for successfully restoring justice in reality, prosocial activities will be observed (Lerner, 1970; Lerner & Simmons, 1966). Otherwise, unfairness will be assimilated to one’s BJW by means of cognitively reconstructing of fairness.

However, there are other moderators which are capable of explaining the different reactions towards observed unfairness. The BJW may be embedded within different values and these differential value patterns may be an additional moderator in explaining alternative behavioral consequences of a high BJW. As a first endeavor to test this hypothesis, we explored whether meaningful types of BJW - value configurations could be discriminated and how these value types are related to personality.

Overall, we expected that the BJW should be (1) positively related to conformity, (2) security (3) extraversion and (4) negatively to neuroticism and (5) openness. Finally, we explored value type patterns and their relationship with personality.

METHOD

Participants
The Ss were 104 students from the university of Innsbruck (55 females and 49 males) in Austria and 108 persons with different professions. The total sample of 212 subjects consisted of 107 women and 105 men. The mean age of this sample was 29.05 years (SD = 9.49, range 18-59 years). All subjects were volunteers and were not paid for their participation.
Measures

The questionnaire consisted of the General Belief in Just World Scale by Dalbert, Montada and Schmitt (1987), twelve terminal values by Schwartz and Bilsky (1987) and the five personality dimensions of the NEO-FFI by Costa and McCrae (1989; German version by Borkenau and Ostendorf, 1993).

1. The General Belief in a Just World Scale consists of 6 items which represent a series of statements expressing general attitudes to justice (e.g., 'I am convinced that in the long run people will be compensated for injustices' or 'I think people try to be fair when making important decisions'; internal consistency: $\alpha = 0.73$).

2. The 12 terminal values by Schwartz and Bilsky (1990) were selected to represent the different value domains conformity (e.g., politeness), self-direction (e.g., freedom) and security (e.g., national security). Values were preceded by the statement 'Following values are important for me', and subjects responded to all values on a 5-point Likert-type scale ranging from totally disagree (= 1) to totally agree (= 5). Based on a principal component analysis with varimax rotation, three factors with eigenvalues over 1 (3.1, 2.1, 1.3) were extracted which accounted for 54% of the variance. The first factor explained 25.8% variance and represents conformity (politeness, obedience, self-discipline and honor of parents); the second factor (17.8%) stands for self-direction (self-determination, independence, freedom, varied life); finally, the third factor (10.5%) is best described as security (economic security, national security, security for
the family, social order. The internal consistencies for the three value domains were: conformity $\alpha = 0.73$, self-direction $\alpha = 0.66$ and security $\alpha = 0.66$.

3. The NEO Five-Factor-Inventory (NEO-FFI) consists of 60 items which measure the dimensions of the five-factor personality model: neuroticism, extraversion, openness, agreeableness and conscientiousness. The internal consistencies for the subdimensions were: neuroticism $\alpha = 0.79$, extraversion $\alpha = 0.77$, openness $\alpha = 0.67$, agreeableness $\alpha = 0.72$ and conscientiousness $\alpha = 0.80$.

On all measures the subjects were instructed to respond on 5-point rating scales (1 = totally disagree to 5 = totally agree). The unweighted scale means were used as scale values with high values indicating a strong construct.

RESULTS

Relationships among the measures

Insert Table 1 about here

Pearson correlations were calculated for all measures. As expected, the BJW correlated positively with conformity, security, and negatively with openness. Furthermore, BJW was positively correlated with conscientiousness, and negatively with self-direction (see Table 1). The expected correlations of BJW with neuroticism and extraversion were not be observed.
Table 2 provides the correlations with BJW for men and women as well as for students and professionals, separately. Overall, BJW correlated negatively with openness in all subsamples. But the positive relationship between BJW and conscientiousness could be evidenced for females and students only. Although not observed in the total sample, the expected negative relationship between BJW and neuroticism was seen for women and students only. BJW correlated positively with conformity and negatively with self-direction for all subgroups but the students, and the positive relationship between BJW and security was exclusively observed within men and professionals.

In sum, the BJW – value relationships were mostly substantiated for men and women as well as professionals, but not for students; but the BJW – personality relationships were best evidenced in the female and student subsamples. The more the subjects (with the exception of the students) endorsed the belief in a generally just world the more conformity and security values and the less self-direction values were important for them; moreover, the stronger subjects’ BJW (especially students’ and women’s) was the weaker their neuroticism, the lower their openness, and the stronger their conscientiousness.
Gender and group differences on the measures

A 2 X 2 ANOVA was performed to examine gender and group differences on all measures. Only main effects were found. As can be seen in Table 3, significant gender effects were found for neuroticism and agreeableness. Females were more neurotic and agreeable than males.

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Insert Table 3 about here
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Main effects for the group factor were found for two other personality dimensions. The university students were more open and less conscientious than the professional group. Furthermore, the professional group reached higher values in BJW than the university students. For the value domains the following picture was revealed: the university students scored higher in self-direction than the professionals, while the professionals gave higher priority to conformity and security than the students.

Different BJW and value groups

K-means cluster analyses of the subjects were performed on the data, using the standardized scores of the BJW and the three value domains. The clustering algorithm is an iterative procedure that assigns cases to a specified number of non-overlapping clusters (Hartigan, 1975). The cluster analysis divided subjects into two, three, four etc. mutually exclusive subject groups until one or several of the groups contained only a few cases and clustering a higher \( n \) produced further fragmentation. The cluster analysis revealed three groups which
showed no significant differences with regard to gender, but for 
groups. Figure 1 showed the mean differences of the three 
clusters.

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Insert Figure 1 about here

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Cluster 1 ($n = 80$, 35 students, 45 professionals) is 
characterized by person’s high scores on all value domains 
except BJW, and was labeled ‘value conscious’. The second 
cluster ($n = 52$, 17 students, 35 professionals), ‘dependent-
just’, is characterized by high scores on the BJW and a low 
score on self-direction. Individuals in cluster 3 ($n = 72$, 48 
students, 28 professionals), ‘self-directed’, had high scores on 
self-direction and low scores on conformity, security and BJW. 
The self-directed cluster was typically observed for students, 
whereas the dependent-just cluster consists mainly of 
professionals ($\chi^2(2) = 15.41, p < .001$).

Mean differences between the cluster groups

One-way ANOVAs with cluster group (values-conscious; 
dependent-just; self-directed) as the between-subjects factor 
were performed for the personality dimensions. These analyses 
revealed significant differences for neuroticism, openness and 
conscientiousness. Table 3 shows the results.

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insert Table 3 about here

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The dependent-just group scored significantly higher in neuroticism than the value-conscious group. The self-directed group was significantly less conscientious than the value-conscious and the dependent-just group. Finally, the self-directed group was more open than the value conscious which was still more open than the dependent-just group.

DISCUSSION

The aim of the present study was to investigate the relationship between BJW and values as well as different personality traits. As expected, the greater the degree that subjects, except the students, endorsed the belief in a generally just world the more conformity and security values were important for them. Additionally, BJW and self-direction values showed a negative relationship. In line with our hypotheses, a strong BJW was associated with weak neuroticism and low openness. These results confirm partly the findings of previous studies (Heaven & Connors, 1988; Rim, 1983). Furthermore, individuals with a strong BJW showed as well as tendency for conscientiousness. These relationships between BJW and personality were especially true for students and women. Contrary to our assumption, BJW did not correlate with extraversion (cf., Lipkus et al., 1996).

In our theoretical framework, BJW and values should have both adaptive, but different functions for the individual’s everyday behavior and mental health. Therefore, we were interested in further clarifying the complex relationship between BJW and values. Three BJW – value groups could clearly
be distinguished by means of cluster analysis. The dependent-just group was characterized by a strong BJW and extremely low emphasis on self-direction, accompanied by medium preferences for conformity and security values, higher neuroticism and lower openness than both other groups. This dependent-just group can be confronted with the self-directed group. Here, a weak belief in a just world went along with no preferences for conformity and security values, the lowest tendency for conscientiousness compared to both other groups, but emphasis on self-direction and the highest tendency for openness. The third group, value-conscious, showed a medium BJW combined with stronger emphasis on all three value domains and medium openness.

The distinct BJW-value clusters and their plausible differences on the personality dimensions, namely neuroticism, openness and conscientiousness, illustrate that the narrow look on the bivariate correlations between, BJW, values, and personality may be too short-sighted. For the subsamples of women and students, the expected negative relationship between BJW and neuroticism was evidenced. But the common pattern of the value-clusters and personality provides a more intensive understanding of the interplay of BJW and neuroticism. Subjects with a strong BJW and, at the same time, extremely low preferences for self-direction values (e.g., self-determination, varied life) showed significantly higher values on neuroticism compared to both other groups. Or state otherwise, although there seems to be an overall negative linear trend between BJW and neuroticism, we can identify a group of subjects with a high BJW and high neuroticism. But this can only be done, if the
value orientation, here particularly self-direction, was simultaneously taken into account.

Several studies evidenced an adaptive relationship between BJW and mental health (see for a review, Dalbert, 1998). This relationship may be more clearly understood in light our results. The neurotic subjects of the dependent-just cluster may have their specific mental health problems. Furthermore, the members of the self-direction cluster showed the highest openness and the lowest conscientiousness. This strong dedication to self-direction and openness seemingly without any correction by conscientiousness or social orientations may be as well not without its problems.

We expect that these BJW – value pattern could shed further light on the different reactions towards injustice. McClelland et al. (1989) demonstrated that explicit motives are usually activated by explicit, often social, incentives such as rewards, demands or expectations and implicit motives are more apt to be aroused by task incentives. Therefore, we would expect that dealing with unfairness may be guided for the self-directed group by a tendency to maintain one’s own independence and freedom when asked for choices and decisions for the disadvantaged (value-congruent activities), but that the self-directed group – at the same time – should not be satisfied by justice restoring activities per se (motive-incongruent activities). On the contrary, members of the dependent-just group should be satisfied by reactions aimed at restoring justice (motive-congruent activities), and they should not be motivated to fulfil demands for freedom and variation (value-
incongruent activities). Finally, the value-conscious group should react sensitive towards value-congruent demands and incentives, but at the same time should be satisfied by justice-restoring activities (motive-congruent activities).

In sum, this study is the first to examine in detail the interplay between BJW, values, and personality. These initial promising results suggest that distinct BJW – value pattern can be identified and have different relations with personality. Future research is needed to replicate our results and to further investigate the consequences of the different BJW – value pattern. We would recommend to more closely examine the personality and health consequences as well as the reactions towards unfairness.
References


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Lipkus, I. M., Dalbert, C., & Siegler, I. C. (1996). The importance of distinguishing the belief in a Just World for self versus for others: Implications for psychological well-


Table 1
Intercorrelational matrix of all variables

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Note. * p < .05; ** p < .01; *** p < .001.
Table 2
Zero-order-correlations between the BJW and personality and values
for gender and groups separately

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**Note.** * p < .05; ** p < .01; + p < .10.
Table 3
Mean differences between gender and groups on all measures

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<td>4.17</td>
<td>ns</td>
<td>4.71*</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note. * p < .05; ** p < .01; *** p < .001.
Table 4
Mean scores among the groups on the five personality dimensions

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>value-conscious (n = 80)</th>
<th>dependent-just (n = 52)</th>
<th>self-directed (n = 72)</th>
<th>M</th>
<th>M</th>
<th>M</th>
<th>F</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Neuroticism</td>
<td>2.53&lt;sub&gt;a&lt;/sub&gt;</td>
<td>2.77&lt;sub&gt;b&lt;/sub&gt;</td>
<td>2.68&lt;sub&gt;a,b&lt;/sub&gt;</td>
<td>3.33&lt;sup&gt;*&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Extraversion</td>
<td>3.43&lt;sub&gt;a&lt;/sub&gt;</td>
<td>3.44&lt;sub&gt;a&lt;/sub&gt;</td>
<td>3.54&lt;sub&gt;a&lt;/sub&gt;</td>
<td>ns</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Openness</td>
<td>3.54&lt;sub&gt;b&lt;/sub&gt;</td>
<td>3.33&lt;sub&gt;a&lt;/sub&gt;</td>
<td>3.86&lt;sub&gt;c&lt;/sub&gt;</td>
<td>20.42&lt;sup&gt;***&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Agreeableness</td>
<td>3.57&lt;sub&gt;a&lt;/sub&gt;</td>
<td>3.48&lt;sub&gt;a&lt;/sub&gt;</td>
<td>3.54&lt;sub&gt;a&lt;/sub&gt;</td>
<td>ns</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Conscientiousness</td>
<td>3.80&lt;sub&gt;b&lt;/sub&gt;</td>
<td>3.71&lt;sub&gt;b&lt;/sub&gt;</td>
<td>3.48&lt;sub&gt;a&lt;/sub&gt;</td>
<td>8.27&lt;sup&gt;***&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
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</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note. * p < .05; ** p < .01; *** p < .001. Means in the same row that do not share subscripts differ at p < .05 in the Scheffé significant difference comparison.
Figure 1
Cluster solution
BJW = Belief in Just world
CONF = Conformity
SEC = Security
SED = Self-direction