And justice for all: Revisiting the Global Belief in a Just World Scale

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A B S T R A C T

The Global Belief in a Just World Scale (GBJWS) has been widely used in measuring the Belief in a Just World (BJW) personality trait. Despite its widespread application across the social sciences, the validity of this scale has not been sufficiently tested in the literature. In this research, the authors examine the internal and external validity of the GBJWS using both standard correlational analyses and structural equation modeling (SEM). Specifically, the authors test the concurrent validity, internal consistency, unidimensional structure, convergent validity, and both measurement and latent mean invariance of the scale across gender and culture. The results of a pilot study suggest strong concurrent validity of the GBJWS with other BJW scales, and the findings of the two main studies support the internal and external validity of GBJWS across gender and culture. The authors' results further show an overall greater level of BJW of Chinese individuals compared to Americans. The present research provides a much needed investigation of the validity of the GBJWS, and answers calls for research examining the scale's utility across different populations.

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1. Introduction

The existence of justice in the world is not a universally agreed upon phenomenon, as "some people strongly believe that people get what they deserve and deserve what they get and other people do not" (Lipkus, 1991, p. 1171). This belief, referred to in the literature as "Belief in a Just World" (BJW), is considered a stable personality trait crucially important to the interaction between personality and other domains of social science. In this paper, the authors review attempts to measure BJW in disparate social science literatures, and empirically test the validity of the widely used Global Belief in a Just World Scale (GBJWS). In general, the authors find strong support for the internal and external validity of the scale within the U.S., and between Eastern and Western societies.

The GBJWS is an appealing alternative to other BJW scales due to its relative brevity and high internal consistency, and as such it continues to be used extensively across divergent fields of social science. However, surprisingly little empirical work has been dedicated to investigating its validity. More focused analyses of the scale's properties (e.g., convergent validity, measurement invariance, etc.) are even less common. Therefore, the present research makes three primary contributions to the personality literature

in that it (a) provides a much needed, focused testing of the GBJWS's internal validity; (b) is the first to provide evidence for a stronger form of the scale's external validity (i.e., measurement invariance) by demonstrating that the way individuals interpret and respond to the GBJWS is consistent across gender and culture; and (c) uses the GBJWS to show that, contrary to previous findings, Eastern cultures may have a larger overall BJW than Western cultures. Together, these contributions provide indirect benefits to scientific knowledge by helping researchers better understand a commonly used but poorly understood scale, as well as direct benefits by advancing theoretical knowledge of the intersection between personality and culture.

The authors begin by tracing the history of the construction of various BJW scales, up to and including the GBJWS. Based on this literature review, they propose seven hypotheses concerning the GBJWS and the BJW trait in particular. Next, the authors present a pilot study and two main studies, the results of which support their hypotheses across different populations. Finally, the authors discuss the implications of their findings and propose areas for future research.

1.1. The early years: construct identification and scale development

Some of the earliest work in the area of Just World Theory asserts that, in general, possessing at least some level of BJW is so prevalent because "most people cannot afford, for the sake of their own sanity, to believe in a world governed by a schedule of

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random reinforcements" (Lerner & Simmons, 1966, p. 203). However, individuals who exhibit high levels of BJW face an obvious internal conflict: how can undeserved suffering exist in a world that is, by and large, a fair and just place? Lerner and Simmons (1966) suggest that such individuals will attempt to reconcile their internal conflict by derogating the victim so that his/her suffering appears warranted, and provide experimental support for this claim.

In an attempt to measure the BJW trait more directly, Rubin and Peplau (1973) developed a rudimentary Belief in a Just World Scale (BJWS), which they revised into a more sophisticated 20-item version two years later (see Rubin & Peplau, 1975). However, the psychometric properties of the updated BJWS were criticized by several researchers, leading to the development of a Multidimensional Belief in a Just World Scale (MBJWS) by Furnham and Procter (1988). Although this latter scale was an improvement, it too was criticized shortly after its introduction.

As the authors briefly addressed in the above paragraph, the early BJW scales suffered from a number of major problems. Rubin and Peplau's (1975) BJWS was shown to measure several independent factors (Ambrosio and Sheehan, 1990), to have low internal consistency (Couch, 1998), and to have an inconsistent factor structure across gender (Lipkus, 1991). In addition, Furnham and Procter's (1988) MBJWS was empirically shown to have low internal consistency and weak inter-item correlations, leading to the conclusion that "the utility of the [MBJW] scale is questionable as it now stands" (Lipkus, 1991, p. 1178). Thus, Lipkus (1991) sought to develop a BJW scale that clearly measured a single construct, was not confounded by gender, and had high internal consistency. The resulting 7-item GBJWS met these objectives, as evidenced by Lipkus's (1991) exploratory factor analysis.

1.2. Widespread acceptance of the GBJWS

Other than Lipkus's (1991) own validation study and a more recent meta-analysis (Hellman, Muilenburg-Trevino, & Worley, 2008) demonstrating its high reliability, research evaluating the GBJWS has been scarce. This lack of empirical evaluation is especially surprising given the continued widespread use of the scale across the disciplines of personality and social psychology (e.g., Kogut, 2011; Laurin, Fitzsimons, & Kay, 2011), counseling psychology (e.g., Parikh, Ceballos, & Post, 2013), abnormal psychology (e.g., Nudelman & Shiloh, 2011), education (e.g., Morais & Ogden, 2011), social justice (e.g., Torres-Harding, Steele, Schulz, Taha, & Pico, 2014), law (e.g., Hill, 2009), and marketing (e.g., White, Rhiannon, & Ellard, 2012). In general, the GBJWS has been used extensively across the social sciences since its construction, yet has been subject to relatively little evaluation save for the occasional praise (e.g., Couch, 1998) as a promising alternative to other scales.

1.3. Unexplored areas and potential flaws of the GBJWS

1.3.1. Factor structure
To the authors' knowledge, no study has subjected the GBJWS to a confirmatory factor analysis (CFA). As such, the internal validity of the scale as a one-factor measurement model is still in need of empirical support. Furthermore, one of the few pieces of empirical criticism of the GBJWS comes from an exploratory factor analysis conducted by O'connor, Morrison, and Morrison (1996), which finds support for a two-factor solution for male respondents but not females. However, their work does not include any theoretical justification for a second factor nor does it explain what it might represent. O'connor, Morrison, and Morrison (1996) merely suggest that dropping the lone item (GBJW2) corresponding to the second factor may result in a more robust measure of BJW.

Although exploratory in nature, this preliminary result nevertheless calls into question the GBJWS's factor structure and further justifies the need for a confirmatory investigation of the scale.

1.3.2. Invariance across gender
With one minor exception (see Section 1.3.1 above), the literature generally supports equivalent levels of the BJW personality trait across gender (e.g., Furnham, 1993; O'Connor, Morrison, McLeod, & Anderson, 1996; Rubin & Peplau, 1973), although none of this evidence is based on the GBJWS as a measure of the construct. If the GBJWS is indeed a valid measure of the BJW construct, then subjecting it to gender invariance tests should similarly support both measurement invariance and a lack of significant difference in latent means between males and females.

1.3.3. Invariance across culture
Rubin and Peplau's (1975) assertion of the BJW construct is exclusive to Western societies, as are nearly all published BJW analyses. Direct empirical comparisons between an Eastern society (e.g., China) and a Western society (e.g., the U.S.) are relatively scarce. One notable exception is a cross-cultural comparison of the BJW construct in 12 societies by Furnham (1993), which provides some support for a greater average BJW in the United States than in Hong Kong. However, this comparison was based on Rubin and Peplau's (1975) BJWS. Thus, a cross-cultural comparison of the construct using the GBJWS is still needed. Furthermore, Furnham's (1993) finding runs counter to what one might theoretically expect of a BJW comparison between Eastern and Western societies, as illustrated in the remainder of this section.

In general, Chinese value structures are consistent with higher BJW. Yang and Tang (2010) describe the surprisingly high levels of institutional trust among Chinese consumers and note that "the average levels of public trust… are higher in China than the world averages and most democracies" (p. 416). Furthermore, Yang and Tang (2010) assert that this institutional trust is in part due to prominent pro-authoritarian values in Chinese society. Importantly, Rubin and Peplau (1975) assert that both trust and authoritarian values are strong positive correlates of BJW. Therefore, one should expect higher BJW among Chinese individuals due to the construct's relationship to these prominent societal value structures.

In addition, Furnham (1993) claims that "one of the most robust findings in the literature is the fact that just world beliefs help people cope with disturbing or threatening events (rape, poverty, racism)" (p. 326). Interestingly, Chinese people tend to be more sensitive to such events. For example, the Fear of Crime Index in China is almost twice that of U.S. (NationMaster, 2014). Thus, because BJW helps people cope with threatening events (e.g., crime), a society in which these negative emotions are more pronounced, such as China, should be associated with a greater general BJW as a natural coping mechanism.

Furthermore, cultures that hold karmic beliefs should logically be associated with a greater overall BJW. Karma is defined as "the principle that beings are reborn according to the nature and quality of their past actions" and that "all intentional actions, good or bad, *matter* [emphasis in original]; for they leave a trace on the psyche which will lead to future results" (Harvey, 2012, p. 39). Religion scholars (e.g., Gokhale, 1961) have professed for decades that karmic beliefs are highly consistent with just world beliefs and that karma is inherently consistent with the belief that people get what they deserve. Thus, given that karma is a core tenet of Buddhism (Harvey, 2012) and that Buddhism is the most popular and influential belief system in China (Central Intelligence Agency [CIA], 2014), Chinese society should be expected to display a greater overall BJW (as measured via the GBJWS) than a non-karmic society such as the U.S.