Benefit Finding and Perceived Obligations of Victims

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BENEFIT FINDING AND PERCEIVED OBLIGATIONS OF VICTIMS

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Abstract

In three studies, I examine the concept of benefit finding in victimization from the perspective of nonvictims, and consider what consequences benefit finding might have for evaluation of victims. In Experiment 1, participants read about a victim of abuse and thought about the lesson of victimization for the perpetrator or the victim. Participants perceived the victim as more obligated to help and to not do harm when focused on the victim as compared to the perpetrator, to the extent that they believed victims should find benefits. In Experiment 2, I examined what happens when a victim does not live up to this expectation of improvement following trauma. Participants read about a victim of abuse and thought about the lessons of the abuse for the victim or perpetrator. As in Experiment 1, when focused on the victim, participants believed more strongly that the victim should find benefits and that they have future obligations. Participants then read that the victim either subsequently had no criminal record or that he sexually abused someone himself. When focused on the lessons of victimization for the victim, participants desired more social distance from the victim who did harm than when focused on the lessons for the perpetrator. The extent that participants believed the victim should have found benefits mediated the condition effect on these responses. In Experiment 3, I compared victims who do harm versus nonvictims who do harm. Participants read about a target with either a victimization history or no victimization history who abused a child as an adult or did not abuse a child as an adult. Participants rated the victim with a criminal record more negatively than the nonvictim with a criminal record, but did not rate a victim

differently from a nonvictim if they had no criminal record. These studies show that victims incur obligations due to the idea that they should find benefits. When victims do not fulfill their obligations towards others, they face negative evaluation. The research shows that the way nonvictims make meaning of victimization has implications for the victim.

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Benefit Finding and Perceived Obligations of Victims

At first glance, the words victim and obligation do not seem to fit together, unless perhaps one were speaking of obligations *to* victims. Not only might obligations or duties not be salient in connection with victims, but because victims by definition have been disadvantaged in some way, they may not be in a position to fulfill any kind of duty. However, rights and duties always come up with issues of justice and individuals must have both for they amount to flip sides of the same coin (Finkel & Moghaddam, 2005). Despite the suffering that victims experience, people do not expect that victims will remain disadvantaged forever. There is a widespread belief that victims can turn their suffering into an advantage—that is that they can find benefits. Benefit finding is one way that people may make meaning of victimization. It refers to the idea that the victim has gained something positive from the negative event, that they have grown as a person, become better, and learned what is really important in life. If a victim gains these advantages in personal growth and character, then it follows that they should use these benefits to help others, and they should know better than to hurt others. This paper examines how nonvictims make meaning of victimization through benefit finding, how that can lead to perceived obligations of victims, and what consequences there might be for victims who do not fulfill their obligations.

The Meaning of Victimization

According to the American Heritage Dictionary, "A victim is one who is harmed by or made to suffer from an act, circumstance, agency or condition." An

important component of this definition is that it includes victims of others' agency, such as interpersonal violence, as well as victims of events with no agent, such as cancer or a natural disaster. For the purposes of the present research, a key component of my working definition is that there should be a social consensus that some injustice has been done. Not everyone will agree in every case that a particular individual or group should be categorized as a "victim." But when victimization is perceived as applicable for a specific other person, awareness of that victim can threaten belief in a just world and shatter people's assumptions about the world's benevolence (Janoff-Bulman, 1992; Kay & Jost, 2003; Lerner, 1980). Confrontation with a negative or unexpected event prompts the search for meaning (Baumeister, 1991). To make meaning of an event is to try to fit it into the larger pattern of life—to give it purpose and have it make sense. It involves fitting the event into an existing belief system so that it remains consistent with a person's prior worldview. King, Hicks, Krull, and Del Gaiso (2006) state that "Lives may be experienced as meaningful when they are felt to have significance beyond the trivial or momentary, to have purpose, or to have a coherence that transcends chaos" (p 179).

There are various ways that people may make meaning of victimization and research on victimization mainly focuses on two primary and distinct methods— benefit finding and sense-making (Davis, Nolen-Hoeksema, & Larson, 1998). With benefit finding, the victim acquires something good from their victimization such as a new purpose or goal in life or an improved character. With sense-making, an explanation for the victimization is found such as attributing it to the victim's actions.

Benefit finding imbues something with value while sense-making imbues it with comprehensibility (Janoff-Bulman & Frantz, 1997). Research has suggested that benefit finding is especially key in adjustment to victimization and perhaps more important than sense-making for psychological well-being (Davis, Nolen-Hoeksema, & Larson, 1998; Janoff-Bulman & Frantz, 1997). It is often not enough to know the cause of a negative event—to make it truly meaningful, it has to have some sense of value and benefit. Most research on observers' judgments of victims has focused on sense-making, such as the just world research that shows people will attribute the cause of victimization to something the victim did (Hafer & Begué, 2005). However, my research will focus on benefit finding.

Benefit Finding from the Victim's Perspective. Victims themselves certainly do engage in benefit finding. Studies with victims of multiple sclerosis, cancer, incest, natural disasters, and heart disease show that victims often focus on the benefits of victimization (Affleck, Tennen, Croog, & Levine, 1987; Mohr et al., 1999; Silver, Boon & Stones, 1983; Taylor, 1983). Victims report benefits such as that they have grown closer to their families, that they have learned what is really important in life, that they have experienced personal growth, and that they have become a better person because of their suffering. Group members also look for benefits in group victimization. Lazar, Chaitin, Gross and Bar-On (2004) asked Israeli students who participated in visits to concentration camps what lessons they learned from this Holocaust-related educational experience. The lessons the students focused on largely

related to finding benefits-that Jewish people should show a stronger, prouder, and more tolerant character because of the victimization they suffered in the Holocaust.

In general, people have a need to feel good about themselves and one way they can do so is by believing that they are improving over time or are better than they were before (Redersdorff & Guimond, 2006). Temporal self-appraisal theory argues that people can maintain high self-esteem by believing they have improved over time (Wilson & Ross, 2001). According to temporal self-appraisal theory, people believe they improve over time, both because of a self-enhancement motive and because of implicit development theories. Implicit theories do not seem to differ too much regardless whether they are applied to the self or another person. When asked to draw plots illustrating how abilities, attitudes, and personality traits change over time, participants did not create different plots for themselves as compared to a friend or average college student (McFarland & Ross, 1987). People have an implicit theory that humans improve in their relationships and inner strength over time, but see such improvement as gradual and slow, and perhaps stronger for themselves and close others. Yet, in considering victims, people believe positive change in such areas should come rapidly and, crucially, it should be gained in response to victimization (Silver & Wortman, 1980).

Victims also feel that those around them encourage them to find benefits (Taylor, Wood, & Lichtman, 1983). Cancer patients report that others urge them to reinterpret their disease in a positive way, to focus less on their illness, and to remain optimistic (Dakof & Taylor, 1990). Victims often experience "implicit social

pressures to be recovered" and to hide their distress (Lehman, Wortman, & Williams, 1987). Silver and Wortman (1980) point out that almost every psychological model addressing how people deal with an aversive event describes a final stage of resolution whereby a sense of meaningfulness is attained. Victims are aware that their friends and family as well as professionals expect that they will come to terms with their victimization eventually (i.e., find meaning).

   Benefit Finding From the Observer's Perspective. Research also suggests that nonvictims embrace the idea that victims gain something of benefit as a result of their victimization. Meaning making can reduce an observer's distress retrospectively— which is partly why it is considered an important coping strategy. Witnesses to some upsetting event can reinterpret the event as something meaningful and subsequently find the event less upsetting (Lazarus, Opton, Nomikos, & Rankin, 1965). Those who have meaningful lives are expected to be better, more moral people by nonvictims (King & Napa, 1998). Research also shows that people praise victims, and occasionally even see them as "super humans" or heroes (Wood, Taylor, & Lichtman, 1985).

   Just world theory and system justification theory propose that people believe victims' positive qualities compensate for their negative situation in order to maintain belief that the world or system is just. Just world theory says that people have a need to believe that the world is fair (Lerner, 1980). Seeing an innocent person victimized, threatens the image of a just world and people will be motivated to restore justice in some way. Lerner (1980) argues that by reinterpreting the outcome of victimization

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so that the victim gained something positive, "the victim's fate is seen as rather desirable, where the suffering had later greater benefit, was good for the soul, made the victim a better person" (p. 20). If victims are better off than they were before the victimization, then the suffering is not considered unfair. People motivated to believe in a just world will compensate someone with a negative outcome by rating them higher on socially desirable traits (Schmitt, 1998). This research suggests that many people expect victims will be compensated in some way for what happened to them, often times in the form of having strength of character.

System justification theory also predicts that people need to believe the hierarchies, roles, and systems of their society are fair. One way to justify the disadvantage experienced by victimized groups is to positively stereotype them on some dimensions and negatively stereotype high status groups on some dimensions. For example, one may view the poor as happier, more carefree, and more honest than the rich (Lerner, 1980). Women are seen as warmer, more helpful, and more moral than men (Eagly & Mladinic, 1989; Glick & Fiske, 1996).

Kay and Jost (2003) had participants think about a wealthy or poor person and found that the poor target was evaluated as more likeable and less immoral than the wealthy target. These complementary stereotypes increase the perceived fairness of society. Kay and Jost (2003) had participants read about four targets with varying degrees of wealth and happiness and found that those participants who read about the "poor but happy" scenario rated the system as more just than those who read about the "poor and unhappy" target while those who read about the "rich but unhappy"

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target rated the system as more just than those who read about the "rich and happy" target. Similarly, Jost and Kay (2004) found that women exposed to complementary stereotypes showed stronger system justification than women not exposed to complementary stereotypes. They also found that people will endorse these complementary stereotypes more when the fairness of the system is threatened (Kay, Jost, & Young, 2005). Thus, seeing victims as benefiting in some way maintains a sense of the fairness of the world.

Benefit finding in victimization by observers may be especially likely for those that have a general preference for order (Landau, Johns, Greenberg, Pyszczynski, Martens, Goldenberg, & Solomon, 2004). When primed with death, those high in personal need for structure show a stronger preference for a story linking a negative event (a fire) to a positive outcome (meeting a new girlfriend) over a story where the positive outcome follows the negative outcome but is not caused by it, compared to a control condition where they are not primed with death. Although, the participants with high need for structure in the death condition showed the highest preference, in general all participants in both conditions preferred the story that said the negative event caused the positive event. This suggests that people can find meaning in a negative event by believing it led to an ultimately positive outcome.

Using benefit finding to make meaning of victimization may depend on the particular affordance offered in a particular cultural setting. As Baumeister says, "Meaning itself is acquired socially, from other people and from the culture at large" (1991, p. 6). People will interpret victimization in a way that makes sense to

themselves and those around them. Americans, in particular, have many versions of the redemption story that detail recovery and personal growth coming from suffering (Tomkins, 1987; McAdams, 2006). A number of popular sayings reflect this idea: "What does not kill us makes us stronger," "When life gives you lemons, make lemonade," "Every cloud has a silver lining," "It's always darkest before the dawn," and so on.

Redemption arcs describe positive outcomes resulting from negative events and they feature largely both in the way the American media and individual Americans tell stories. McAdams (2006) found that from June to September 2002, 52% of the articles on the website of *People*, a popular weekly magazine, featured a story with a redemption arc. When the media covers victims, they often focus on "supercopers" (Wood, Taylor, & Lichtman, 1985). For example, Wood et al. (1985) note that everyday women with breast cancer are presented in the media as triumphing over their disease and being better off than they were before: "Although many are described as having some anxiety, by the end of the article they have usually bounced back, even better adjusted than before their illness" (p. 1180). This leaves people with the image of victims as showing a remarkable ability to adjust and recover from almost any trauma.

People have used religion to place value on suffering and to suggest that happiness and fulfillment can come from suffering (Baumeister, 1991; Weber, 1999). In different cultural and religious settings, the meaning of victimization, or whether any meaning is thought to be found in victimization, might differ. Research shows

that European-Americans use different strategies to cope with negative events than do Asians and Asian-Americans (Kim, Sherman, Ko, & Taylor, 2006; Taylor, Sherman, Kim, Jarcho, Takagi, & Dunagan, 2004). In the United States and elsewhere though, the image of the victim bouncing back better than ever is deeply embedded in the culture.

Obligations of Victims. Even if they cannot find personal benefits, victims often believe that their negative experience will help others (Janoff-Bulman, 1992). In American culture, people connect going through suffering with prosocial motivation (Janoff-Bulman, 1991; McAdams et al., 1997). People believe that victims should use their experience for the good of others.

The idea of recovery and personal growth from a negative event is connected to the idea that people should help others. McAdams et al. (1997) interviewed participants about their life story and coded the responses for features such as redemption arcs (positive events coming from negative events) and prosocial goals. Redemption arcs and prosocial goal references were significantly correlated in people's descriptions of their own life stories. So a crucial component of people's perceptions of their life trajectories is that after finding benefits from suffering the individual sets out to contribute to society. Kenney (2002) interviewed and surveyed parents of murdered children. Some of the parents related that the people around them had urged them to assist others in similar situations. As a result of their traumatic experience, they were expected to reach out and give back to their community by fulfilling such duties as searching for other people's missing children.

When people actively engage in meaning making concerning a victimization event, they may be especially likely to view victims as obligated. If a victim gains benefits and bounces back better than before, then they should put those benefits to good use and help others. Such obligations can apply to victimized groups as well as individual victims. A series of studies examined how non-Jewish Americans made meaning from the Holocaust (Branscombe, Warner, & Klar, 2007). Participants read a brief description of the Holocaust and considered the lessons and implications of the Holocaust for either the victimized group, Jews, or the perpetrator group, Germans. When participants thought about the lessons for Jews, they viewed Jews as more obligated to help other victimized groups and to not harm other groups, compared to when they thought about the lessons for Germans. German obligations and collective guilt assignment to Germany did not differ depending on the target of the lesson. In a second study, participants thought about the lessons of the Holocaust for Jews, Germans, or humans in general. Again, participants viewed Jews as more obligated to help others and not do harm when focused on the lessons of victimization for Jews as compared to when focused on the lessons for Germans or humans. These results make clear that considering the meaning for the victims has different consequences than considering meaning for any other group. We argued that people make meaning in the victim focus condition by uniquely expecting Jews to be better, more moral people as a group as a result of their victimization. Thus, victims of group violence may be burdened by obligations to live up to observer expectations that they will help others and not do harm.

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Evaluation of Victims Who Do Not Fulfill Their Obligations

Victims do not always manage to see what happened to them in a positive light—in effect they fail to find "a silver lining." Lehman, Wortman and Williams (1987) found that a majority of those who lost a spouse or child reported not being able to find any meaning in what happened even several years later. Victims of violence such as rape or assault find it more difficult to make meaning than victims of illness or natural disaster (Taylor, 1989). Victims show lower self-esteem, more depression, and less positive views of the world than nonvictims (Janoff-Bulman, 1989). Sometimes, victims continue a cycle of abuse and turn into perpetrators. In fact, suffering physical abuse, sexual abuse, or neglect increases the risk for later criminal activity (Johnson, 1989; Johnson, 1990). What consequences might there be for those victims who harm others? In the legal system, a mitigating factor is a reason why a criminal should be given a more lenient sentence, while an aggravating factor is a reason why a criminal should be given a harsher sentence. Research is mixed on whether a victimization history results in harsher judgments of harm doers or more lenient judgments of harm doers. However, if the lesson of victimization is to find benefits and help others, then a victimization history should lead to victims being more negatively evaluated than non-victim perpetrators.

Rejection of Poor Copers. Individuals who behave inconsistently with stereotypes and expectations are often more negatively evaluated than those who behave consistently—even when those inconsistent actions, in the abstract, are seen to be more appropriate (Branscombe & Weir, 1992). This applies to victims who do

not cope with their trauma as they are expected to. People disapprove of those who do not follow coping norms, which for North American and Western Europe include recovering quickly and coping well (Weber, 2003). Yee, Greenberg and Beach (1998) asked participants to read a vignette about a crime victim and then rate how much they approved of different coping strategies. Yee et al. did not ask about benefit finding strategies in their study, but they did show that people approve of responses to victimization that involve active coping and other meaning making strategies such as counterfactual social comparisons. People consider negative reactions from the bereaved just months after the loss of a spouse or child socially inappropriate (Lehman, Wortman, & Williams, 1987). In a study of parents who lost children, the parents reported that friends and family treated them very warmly in the first month of their loss, but after that time expected them to be over their loss and avoided them if they still showed signs of grief (Pennebaker, 1993).

People react more positively to a person who shows good or balanced coping and will give more support to them than poor copers, even though they probably need it less. Silver, Wortman, and Crofton (1990) found that participants rated a cancer patient who reported some progress or very good progress as more attractive than a cancer patient who reported hopelessness and depression. They also sat closer to the better copers, smiled at them more than the poor copers, and were more willing to interact with the better copers in the future. Weber (2003) found that participants withheld social support from a target who did not seem to be trying to cope. Those who violate coping norms by discussing their trauma persistently with others report

receiving less social support from friends and family (Nolen-Hoeksema & Davis, 1999). So, even though poor copers need more support than those coping well, they will actually receive less.

Coping may determine evaluation of a victim more than how responsible the victim is for their fate. Schwarzer and Weiner (1991) had participants read about a target that included a mention of physical illness, mental illness, abuse, drug addiction, or obesity. They found that participants felt more anger and less pity for the poor copers as compared to the good copers. They also offered less social support to the poor coper. How the target coped predicted reactions to the target better than the controllability of the stigma.

Coyne et al. (1988) describe how support providers' misconceptions about recovery can ultimately lead to increased distress in the victim. They say that helpers perceive recovery and improvement as easier than it actually is. When a victim does not improve as the helper expects, the helper comes to see the victim as unmotivated and unwilling to put forth the effort it would take to improve. The provider then makes stronger demands of improvement to the victim, leading to the victim's resentment and sense of failure. Sometimes this can result in the support provider feeling that increasingly hostile and cruel behavior is justified since they perceive the victim as undermining their own recovery.

Victimization History as a Mitigating Factor. A victimization history can serve as a mitigating factor for nonvictims. Barnett, Brodsky, and Davis (2005) had participants read vignettes describing a murder. Subsequently, they presented

participants with no information about the murderer's background or information about the murderer's background, either that the murderer were abused by his parents or that the murderer was schizophrenic. Participants assigned the death penalty less when the perpetrator had suffered severe child abuse or had been diagnosed with schizophrenia then when no mitigating circumstance was presented. Hill and Zillman (1999) asked participants to read a crime vignette and found that they gave lesser sentences to a defendant who killed someone who had abused them compared to when the defendant killed someone who had not harmed them. It may be that, in the Hill and Zillman study, victim rights were salient—rather than victim obligations—because the victim acted against the person who harmed them. Thus, there is some evidence that observers may respond less negatively to a target who does harm when they have been victimized in some way.

Furthermore, victims themselves can use their victimization history to mitigate the harm that they do. A victimization history can serve as a justification for harm doing with the idea that if the victimized group does not do harm, harmit will be done to them again in the future (Mamdani, 2002). Research has shown that reminders of ingroup historical victimization can decrease collective guilt acceptance for harm doing toward a different group among victimized group members. Wohl and Branscombe (in press) found that Jewish Canadians who were reminded about the Holocaust felt Israelis should feel less collective guilt for their present treatment of Palestinians than those not reminded of the Holocaust. Wohl and Branscombe suggest that reminders of their past victimization threatened Jews and that this threat led them

to feel less guilt about actions aimed at currently protecting their group. Thinking about the Holocaust reminded the participants that their group was at risk and so acting against a potential source of danger can be seen as justified. Non-Jewish participants did not significantly differ in their judgment of Israel when reminded of the Holocaust or not, although the pattern was in the opposite direction of that obtained with the Jewish participants, such that they assigned more guilt to Israel when reminded of the Holocaust as compared to when not reminded of the Holocaust.

Victimization as an Aggravating Factor. Some research finds that a victimization history does not serve as a mitigating factor for sentencing. Jurors often feel that information about a victimization history is "no excuse" for a crime (Bentele & Bowers, 2002). White (1987) had participants read a vignette of a robbery that ended in murder and varied the background information participants received about the murderer-they received no background information on the murderer, received information that the murder was schizophrenic, or received information that the murderer was abused as a child. They found that participants assigned the death penalty *more* to defendants identified as schizophrenic than defendants they had no such background information on. Their levels of sentencing did not differ for a defendant who suffered abuse as a child compared to a defendant they had no background information on. Presenting evidence that a convicted killer has a mental disability can result in increased probability of a death sentence (Perlin, 1994) rather than a lessening of punishment severity.

A victimization history may frequently fail to serve as mitigating information because people believe that many victims cope well and show good adjustment. Haney (1995) reviewed cases where judges and juries disagreed over whether a victimization history should serve as a mitigating factor. One of the main reasons they did not think a victimization history mitigated harm doing was because they could come up with counterexamples of victims who did not do harm-something Haney calls the "not everbody does it" logic. Since not all victims of abuse go on to hurt others, then a victimization history cannot be used to excuse harm doing. This suggests that thinking of those victims who do adapt and cope well results in harsher judgments of those victims who do not. If the belief that victims can recover and sometimes even bounce back better than before is salient, then evaluation of a victim who fails to do so and instead does harm should be especially negative.

When victimized groups do not live up to their obligations to help others and not do harm, they may face harsher judgments. Branscombe et al. (2007) had participants think about the lessons of the Holocaust for Jews or think about some neutral historical event. Thinking about the Holocaust as compared to a neutral past event led participants to assign Jews and Israel more guilt for harm doing during the Israeli-Palestinian conflict when they also perceived Jews as having moral obligations to help others and not do harm.

Members of victimized groups are also evaluated more negatively when they fail in their moral obligations to be more sympathetic towards members of other victimized groups. Participants rated a target with dwarfism as more unfair and felt

more negatively towards him when he expressed intolerant views toward immigrants than when a nonstigmatized person expressed intolerant views, but felt less negatively toward a dwarf and rated him equally as fair when he expressed tolerant views as compared to a nonstigmatized person who expressed tolerant views (Fernandez, 2007). This effect is heightened to the degree that the person with dwarfism reports feeling victimized—a target with dwarfism who shows intolerance towards immigrants is evaluated more negatively when that person has suffered from discrimination and medical problems in the past as compared to when the person with dwarfism has not suffered. It may be that victims or victimized groups are sometimes held to a higher moral standard. Violation of these moral obligations or expectations may then bring about negative consequences for the victimized group.

Victims may be held to a higher moral standard of conduct because they are expected to have learned something from their experience and be better due to their suffering. Nonvictims make meaning from victimization by believing the victim gains benefits. The victimization is redeemed by the positive outcome that comes as a result of it. Since the victim is ultimately better off, the victimization can be seen as having served a worthwhile purpose. Benefit finding usually takes the form of believing the victim grew as a person-became more empathetic, nicer, and more moral. Good people have the obligation to look out for others. I hypothesized that nonvictims would perceive that personal growth is the primary lesson for the victim that should be learned from victimization and that this would lead to victims having obligations

to help others and not do harm. Violation of these obligations would lead to more negative judgments of victims.

Overview of Studies

The goal of this research is to investigate the effects of observers perceiving benefits in victimization for a victim of interpersonal violence. If someone is expected to know what is important in life and be a better and more moral person as a result of victimization, then it would make sense that they should use these qualities to aid other people and to not do harm. In Experiment 1, I investigated the connection between perceiving benefits for a victim and perceiving the victim as obligated to aid the weak and to not do harm to others. In Experiment 2, I examined how finding benefits in victimization can lead to harsher judgments of a victim who does not live up to these obligations and victimizes someone in the same way they were victimized. In Experiment 3, I looked at evaluations of a harm-doer with a victimization history compared to evaluations of a harm-doer without a victimization history.

Experiment 1

In Experiment 1, participants read about a physically abused child and thought about the lessons for either the victim or the perpetrator. Actively considering the lessons for the victim should increase perception of benefits in victimization, since benefit finding is one of the main ways people make meaning of victimization. I expected that people would perceive victims as more obligated to not do harm to others and to help others when they thought about the lessons for the victim as

opposed to for the perpetrator, to the extent that they believed the victim found

benefits in their negative experience.

Method

Fifty-seven introductory psychology students at the University of Kansas (25

women and 23 men, 1 unknown, $M = 19.35$ years) participated for course credit.

Participants completed the study online. All participants first read a vignette

about a young boy and his stepfather, which read:

In 1960, Dave was a 13-year-old living with his mother in Grand Rapids

Michigan. In July of that year she got remarried to a man named Ted Stevens.

Dave and his stepfather Ted clashed often and by September of that year, Ted

was physically abusing Dave regularly. The abuse finally ended several

months later after Dave had to go to the hospital due to internal bleeding from

a severe beating. He almost died, but eventually recovered from his physical

injuries.

Participants were randomly assigned to either focus on the victim of abuse, Dave, or

on the perpetrator, Ted. In the victim focus condition, participants answered the open-

ended question, "We are interested in the implications or lessons of the abuse that you

see for Dave. What is the primary lesson of the abuse for Dave as an adult? What are

the implications for how Dave should treat other people?" In the perpetrator focus

condition, participants answered the same open-ended questions, with Ted as the

target of the lesson.

Dependent measures

After answering the open-ended question, participants completed a series of items measuring their thoughts about the victim, Dave, on 7-point scales ranging from 1 (Strongly disagree) to 7 (Strongly agree). The items that composed the benefit finding and victim obligations indices can be seen in Appendix A.

Benefit finding ($\alpha = .79$) included "Because of the abuse, Dave should appreciate life more.", "Because of the abuse, Dave should be more motivated to succeed.", "The abuse made Dave more sensitive to the needs of children.", "Because of the abuse Dave experienced, he is likely to be kind to the children that he encounters.", and "Experiencing abuse as Dave did often makes people stronger."

Damage to victim ($\alpha = .56$) included, "The abuse made Dave less able to deal with stress later in life.", "The abuse made Dave trust others less.", and "The abuse made Dave more likely to hurt other people."

Victim obligations ($\alpha = .69$) was adapted from the measure of Jewish obligations used by Branscombe et al. (2007) and included the items "When people have been victimized, they are morally obligated to ensure they never act toward others in the same way.", "A central lesson from the abuse is that Dave must take care not to inflict suffering upon other people.", "A central lesson from the abuse is that Dave should assist weak and abused people.", and "A central lesson from the abuse is that Dave should have a better understanding of other people who are suffering from abuse."

<div align="center">Results and Discussion</div>

Open-ended Responses

I analyzed the open-ended answers using the Linguistic Inquiry and Word Count (LIWC) program to identify how often participants referred to certain themes (Pennebaker, Francis, & Booth, 2001). Each participant's written response was analyzed separately. The LIWC dictionary has 2300 words and word stems. Each word is categorized as belonging to a certain category related to either a psychological construct (e.g. emotion), relativity (e.g. time), or personal concern (e.g. home). The program reports the percentage of words in a selection that correspond to a given category. A one-way MANOVA was conducted looking at the emotional and cognitive content of the responses as well as references to the past or future. The emotional content included categories related to positive and negative emotions, while the cognitive content included categories related to causation, insight, inhibition, and certainty.

Target of lesson had a significant effect on the combined variables measuring emotional, cognitive, and time content, $F(8, 39) = 40.85$, $p < .001$. Participants referred to the future considerably more often in the victim focus condition ($M = 5.24$) than in the perpetrator focus condition ($M = 1.13$), $F(1, 46) = 20.14$, $p < .01$. References to the past did not significantly differ by target of lesson.

Affective Processes. Participants referenced their own emotions more in general when focused on the perpetrator ($M = 10.09$) than on the victim ($M = 6.62$), $F(1, 46) = 5.40$, $p = .025$. The difference between the perpetrator focus condition ($M = 7.04$) and the victim focus condition ($M = 3.99$) on negative emotions was marginally significant, $F(1, 46) = 3.77$, $p = .06$. Positive emotional content did not

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significantly differ by target of lesson.

Cognitive Processes. With regards to cognitive processes, participants referred to causation more in the victim focus condition ($M = 3.25$) than in the perpetrator focus condition ($M = 1.19$), $F(1, 46) = 8.32$, $p < .01$. The causation related statements in the victim focus condition concentrated primarily on explaining how the victim would be in the future due to his victimization experience. For example, "If he learned anything from his own experience, he will not be an abuser to his own children/wife *because* he will have the memory of how terrible of an experience it was." Participants also showed more signs of certainty (using words like always and never) in the victim focus condition ($M = 1.76$) than in the perpetrator focus condition ($M = .35$), $F(1, 46) = 6.82$, $p < .05$. Participants used inhibitory words more, such as block and constrain, in the perpetrator focus condition ($M = 1.25$) as compared to the victim focus condition ($M = .21$), $F(1, 46) = 4.88$, $p < .05$. References to insight did not differ by condition.

Next, two coders categorized each thought generated into one of eight categories relating to different lessons of victimization for the victim or perpetrator, with Cohen's kappa = .87. The lessons focusing on Dave, the victim, consisted of: the victim should find benefits (e.g. *"He [Dave] would also have more respect for others."*), the victim will turn out for the worse (e.g. *"Anger, however, will beget anger and the odds are that Dave will begin beating his children in the future."*), and the victim should have done something to stop the abuse (e.g. *"Dave should have said something in the beginning, when it became obvious he was not getting along*

with Ted."). The lessons focusing on Ted, the perpetrator, consisted of: the

perpetrator should seek help (e.g. *"Ted should seek treatment, and learn to channel*

his anger into a productive activity like golf."), explaining the perpetrator's behavior

(e.g. *"Ted was probably abused as a kid."*), and that the perpetrator should be

punished (e.g. *"Ted should be punished severely for the abuse he did on Dave."*). The

other two categories were no lesson and other, which was used for those thoughts that

did not fit into a defined category. Table 1 presents the mean number of thoughts for

each category by focus condition.

When thinking about the lessons for the victim, participants generated the

most thoughts related to the idea that he should find benefits ($M = 1.31$), followed by

the notion that the victim will be worse off than before ($M = .81$). When thinking

about the lessons for the perpetrator, participants generated the most thoughts related

to the idea that he should seek help ($M = .74$), followed by the idea that the victim

should have taken some action to stop the abuse ($M = .48$).

Believing that the perpetrator should learn to get help and try to become a

better person is similar to the idea that the victim should find benefits—in both cases

participants are saying that the lesson to be learned from a victimized past is to

become a better person and not hurt others. I combined the perpetrator should seek

help and the victim should find benefits into a general benefit finding category. A

one-way ANOVA revealed that the difference between the victim focus ($M = 1.31$)

and the perpetrator focus ($M = .78$) was marginally significant, $F(1, 47) = 3.48, p <$

.07. Participants mainly focused on the perpetrator when asked and the victim when

asked, with the exception of comments about how the victim should have done something to stop the abuse. Participants mentioned this more in the perpetrator focus condition ($M = .48$) than in the victim focus condition ($M = .04$), $F (1, 47) = 5.93$, $p < .05$.

According to the LIWC analyses, participants referred to more negative emotions and more negative states when focused on the lessons of victimization for the perpetrator as compared to when focused on the lessons for the victim. They showed signs of more cognitive processing in the victim focus condition as well. Participants also showed more signs of making meaning through benefit finding in the victim focus condition than in the perpetrator focus condition as revealed in the data from the coders.

In addition, participants mentioned the idea that the victim should have done something to stop the abuse more in the perpetrator condition, which may be an indication of victim blaming. These comments about how the victim should have done something refer to the other main way people make meaning of victimization besides benefit finding—that of sense-making. By saying that the victim should have done something to stop the abuse, participants are implying that the abuse was under the victim's control and attributing the abuse to the victim's actions (or inactions). They are trying to explain the cause of the abuse by attributing it to something the victim did, which is very different from saying the victim gained something beneficial from the abuse. The greater causal attributions in the perpetrator focus condition may be due to a concentration on the victimization event itself, while in the

victim focus condition participants concentrated on the consequences of the event for the future. This is supported by the finding that participants made more references to the future in the victim focus condition. The greater future orientation makes sense given that the manipulation asks participants to think about the lessons for the victim as an adult in the victim focus condition. In the perpetrator focus condition, participants appear to be trying to explain the victimization itself more and trying to undo it, which helps explain the higher levels of victim blaming in this case. In contrast, participants took the occurrence of the victimization event for granted in the victim focus condition and talked more about what they expected would come after it.

Close-ended Responses

A one-way ANOVA showed that participants viewed the victim as finding more benefits when the target of the lesson was the victim ($M = 4.48$) then when the target of the lesson was the perpetrator ($M = 3.70$), $F(1, 47) = 6.01$, $p < .02$. The effect on obligations was marginally significant such that participants viewed victims as more obligated when the target of the lesson was the victim ($M = 4.96$) than when the target of the lesson was the perpetrator ($M = 4.48$), $F(1, 47) = 3.17$, $p = .08$. How damaged the victim was did not differ depending on whether the target of the lesson was the victim ($M = 4.34$) or the perpetrator ($M = 4.74$), $F(1, 47) = 1.17$, $p = .28$.

The target of the lesson had a marginally significant effect on perceived obligations of victims. To examine the mediating effect of benefit finding on this effect, I conducted regressions in line with the method described by Baron and Kenny (1986). The perpetrator as the target of the lesson was coded as 0 and the victim as

the target of the lesson was coded as 1. The effect of target of lesson on victim

obligations was marginally significant, $\beta = .25$, $p = .08$. When both benefit finding

and target of lesson were used to predict victim obligations, benefit finding

significantly predicted victim obligations, $\beta = .51$, $p < .001$, and the effect of target of

lesson became non-significant, $\beta = .08$, $p = .55$. The Sobel test was significant, $Z =$

2.07, $p < .05$. Thus, victims are perceived as having more obligations when people are

focused on the lessons of victimization for the victim as opposed to when they are

focused on the lessons for the perpetrator to the extent that victims are perceived as

finding benefits (*Figure 1*).

Thinking about the lesson of victimization for a victim of interpersonal

violence increases the perceived obligations of a victim as compared to thinking

about the lessons of victimization for a perpetrator. This replicates the findings found

in the Holocaust studies, where thinking about the lessons of victimization for a

victimized group increased perceived obligations as compared to thinking about the

lessons for a perpetrator group (Branscombe, Warner, & Klar, 2007). Experiment 1

showed that benefit finding mediated the effect of target of lesson on perceived

obligations. Victims incur obligations because the lesson of victimization for the

victim is to find benefits in their negative experience. People believe that victims

should become better people and should use their newfound strength and kindness to

help others.

Not all victims do find benefits from their trauma and go on to assist others.

Many continue to suffer years after their victimization (Kendall-Tackett, Williams,

Finkelhor, 1993). Furthermore, some victims go on to perpetrate the same or different forms of harm against others. The central question I pursue in Experiment 2 is how are victims who subsequently become perpetrators evaluated when people believe that victims should find benefits and help others?

Experiment 2

In Experiment 2, I looked at what happens when victims do not find benefits in their victimization and instead harm an innocent person. If people believe that victims should find benefits, they will judge them negatively if they do not. Since considering the lessons of victimization for the victim increases the belief that victims should find benefits as compared to thinking about the lessons for the perpetrator, people who consider the lessons of victimization for a victim will judge the victim more negatively when they do harm as compared to people who consider the lessons for the perpetrator. Considering the lessons of victimization for the victim versus the perpetrator will not affect judgments of a victim who does not do harm.

Method

Introductory psychology students at the University of Kansas (77 women and 40 men, $M = 18.82$ years) completed the study online. The design of the study was 2 (Target of lesson: lesson for victim vs. lesson for perpetrator) X 2 (Future harm doing: no harm doing or harm doing).

Participants learned that they would receive information about a man applying for a job teaching and coaching at a high school. Participants first read a description of the man's childhood that read:

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Dave Reynolds grew up in the Phoenix-metropolitan area. When Dave was 5, his parents divorced amicably and although Dave lived with his mother, he saw his father often. Dave was very interested in sports and participated in a number of after school sports programs. His favorite sport was baseball and he played shortstop for a local little league team. When Dave was 12, his baseball coach was a man named Ted Stevens, who believed that Dave was one of the best players in the league. At first Dave got along with Ted, but then he became uncomfortable with the kind of intimate attention the coach gave him. A few months after Dave's 13th birthday, Ted began molesting Dave.

Participants were then randomly assigned to either focus on the lessons for the victim or for the perpetrator as described in Experiment 1. Participants then completed the benefit finding measure, followed by the damage to victim measure, and then the perceived obligation measure.

After completing the lesson focus and writing manipulation, participants were randomly assigned to one of the two future harm doing conditions. First, in all conditions participants read:

As an adult, Dave continued to have a love of sports. He played baseball in college, where he received a degree in education, specializing in history. He got a job teaching and coaching girl's volleyball at a junior high.

In the no harm doing condition it continued:

According to the thoroughly conducted police background check, Dave never

had any problems at his prior school and never got into any trouble with the

law.

In the harm doing condition it continued:

According to the thoroughly conducted police background check, Dave was

let go from his job after the school learned of an incident where he had

fondled one of his underage players.

Dependent Measures

Benefit finding ($\alpha = .76$) included "Because of the abuse, Dave should

appreciate life more.", "Because of the abuse, Dave became more compassionate

toward others.", "Dave should be more sympathetic to others who have been abused

because of what he experienced.", "Because of the abuse, Dave should be more

motivated to succeed.", "The abuse made Dave more sensitive to the needs of

children.", "Because of the abuse Dave experienced, he is likely to be kind to the

children that he encounters.", and "Experiencing abuse as Dave did often makes

people stronger."

Damage to victim ($\alpha = .62$) included, "The abuse made Dave less able to deal

with stress later in life.", "The abuse made Dave trust others less.", and "The abuse

made Dave more likely to hurt other people."

Victim obligation ($\alpha = .78$) included the items "When people have been

victimized, they are morally obligated to ensure they never act toward others in the

same way.", "A central lesson from the abuse is that Dave should assist weak and

abused people.", and "A central lesson from the abuse is that Dave should have a better understanding of other people who are suffering from abuse."

Social distance (α = .90). Participants completed a measure of social distance using a scale from 1 (strongly disagree) to 7 (strongly agree). The items included: "This person appears to be a likeable person", "I would like this person to be a close personal friend", "I would like this person to move into my neighborhood", "I would like this person to come and work at the same place I do", "This is a person who is likely to be similar to me", "I would like to have this person marry into my family", and "This is the kind of person that I tend to avoid" (all reversed with the exception of avoidance).

Goodness (α = .89). Participants indicated how much they believed a series of trait words described Dave on a scale of 1 (not at all) to 7 (very much). Goodness included "good," "moral," "honest," and "trustworthy."

Manipulation check. Participants were asked "Now, what were you told concerning what the background check revealed about Dave's life as an adult? Please select one: "As an adult, Dave sexually abused a child" or "As an adult, Dave had no criminal record."

Results and Discussion

Thirteen participants were excluded from the analysis for failing the manipulation check or not writing anything in response to the open-ended lesson focus question, leaving 106 participants.

Open-ended Responses

I analyzed the open-ended answers using the Linguistic Inquiry and Word Count (LIWC) program (Pennebaker, Francis, & Booth, 2001). A two-way MANOVA was conducted looking at the emotional, cognitive, and time content of the responses. The categories examined were the same as in Experiment 1.

There was a significant main effect of target of lesson on the emotional, cognitive, and time content of the written responses, $F(8, 95) = 3.06, p < .01$. Participants referred to the future more in the victim focus condition ($M = 4.53$) than in the perpetrator focus condition ($M = 3.03$), $F(1, 102) = 4.18, p < .05$, while there were no significant effects for references to the past. The analyses did not show any significant effects for either the negative or positive emotional content.

Cognitive Processes. Participants referred to causation more in the victim focus condition ($M = 2.14$) than in the perpetrator focus condition ($M = 1.27$), $F(1, 102) = 6.32, p < .05$. Again, this related more to explaining the subsequent actions of the victim. Participants referred to insight related words (think, know, consider) more in the victim focus condition ($M = 3.31$) than in the perpetrator focus condition ($M = 2.20$), $F(1, 102) = 6.23, p < .05$. There were no significant effects on inhibition or certainty.

Two coders categorized each thought into one of eight categories described in Experiment 1, relating to different lessons of victimization for the victim or perpetrator, with Cohen's kappa = .83. Table 2 presents the mean number of thoughts for each category. When thinking about the lessons for the victim, participants generated the most thoughts related to the idea that the victim will be worse off ($M =$

.98), followed by that the victim should find benefits ($M = .96$). When thinking about the lessons for the perpetrator, participants generated the most thoughts related to the idea that the perpetrator should seek help ($M = .73$), followed by the idea that the perpetrator should be punished ($M = .60$).

As in Experiment 1, I combined the perpetrator should seek help and the victim should find benefits into a general benefit finding category. A two-way ANOVA shows that the difference between the victim focus ($M = .96$) and the perpetrator focus ($M = .71$) was marginally significant, $F (1, 101) = 2.96$, $p < .09$. The difference between the victim focus ($M = .08$) and perpetrator focus ($M = .22$) conditions was also marginally significant concerning whether the victim should have taken some action, $F (1, 101) = 3.66$, $p = .06$.

Consistent with Experiment 1, participants referred to the future and causation more in the victim focus condition than in the perpetrator focus condition. They also showed more signs of insight in the victim focus condition. Causation and insight are a sign of cognitive processing in the victim focus condition. Once again, participants showed more signs of thinking the lesson for the victim was to become a better person as compared to the lesson for the perpetrator. Participants also generated fewer thoughts suggesting the victim should have done something to stop the abuse in the victim focus condition as compared to the perpetrator focus condition. This replicates the finding from Experiment 1 that participants are making meaning through sense-making more in the perpetrator focus condition than in the victim focus condition. Benefit finding and sense-making are distinct processes (Davis, Nolen-Hoeksema, &

Larson, 1998). Participants appear more preoccupied with sense-making, that is making a causal analysis, when focused on the perpetrator as compared to the victim while they appear more preoccupied with benefit finding when focused on the victim as compared to the perpetrator.

Close-ended Responses

2 (Target of lesson: victim or perpetrator) X 2 (Future Harm doing: no harm doing or child abuser) ANOVAs were conducted on all the dependent variables. Analysis of simple effects followed significant interactions. Means and standard deviations are summarized in Table 3.

Target of lesson had a significant effect on benefit finding such that participants perceived more benefits for a victim when they considered the lessons of victimization for victims ($M = 4.28$) as compared to when they considered the lessons of victimization for perpetrators ($M = 3.69$), $F(1, 102) = 10.00$, $p < .01$. A significant condition effect was also obtained on obligations such that participants viewed victims as more obligated in the victim focus condition ($M = 5.04$) than in the perpetrator focus condition ($M = 4.57$), $F(1, 100) = 4.14$, $p < .05$. There were no significant effects on damage to victim.

There was also a main effect of harm-doing, such that social distance was higher for targets who do harm ($M = 5.84$) than who do not do harm ($M = 3.49$) $F(1, 102) = 129.73$ $p < .001$.and perceived goodness of a target was lower for targets who do harm ($M = 2.75$) than who do not do harm ($M = 5.05$), $F(1, 100) = 126.12$ $p < .001$. These main effects were qualified by the expected significant interaction

between target of lesson and harm doing on social distance $F(1, 102) = 4.60, p < .05$

and perceived goodness of Dave, $F(1, 100) = 4.26, p < .05$.

Simple effects analyses showed that for targets who do harm in the victim

focus condition, participants marginally increased social distance ($M = 6.09$) as

compared to the perpetrator focus condition ($M = 5.57$), $F(1, 102) = 2.98, p = 09$. In

the victim focus condition, participants rated the target who does harm as marginally

less good ($M = 2.51$) than in the perpetrator focus condition ($M = 3.03$), $F(1, 100) =$

$3.08, p = .08$. Analysis of simple effects revealed that evaluation of the target who did

not do harm did not differ regardless of whether participants considered the lessons of

victimization for the victim or the perpetrator.

I examined the mediating effects of benefit finding on perceived obligations to

see if the results of Experiment 1 were replicated. I coded the perpetrator as target of

lesson as 0 and the victim as target of lesson as 1. Participants were collapsed across

the adult harm doing condition as benefit finding was measured before participants

learned of the victim's subsequent harm doing, which had no effect on benefit

finding. The effect of target of lesson on victim obligations was significant, $\beta = .20, p$

$< .05$. When both benefit finding and target of lesson were used to predict victim

obligations, benefit finding significantly predicted victim obligations, $\beta = .44, p <$

$.001$, and the effect of target of lesson became non-significant, $\beta = .07, p = .45$. The

Sobel test was significant, $Z = 2.67, p < .05$. Consistent with the results of Experiment

1, victims are perceived as having more obligations when people are focused on the

lessons of victimization for the victim as opposed to when they are focused on the

lessons for the perpetrator to the extent that victims are perceived as finding benefits

(*Figure 2*).

I also examined the mediating effects of benefit finding on judgments of

victims who do harm. I selected the participants in the harm doing condition and

coded the perpetrator as the target of the lesson as 0 and the victim as the target of the

lesson as 1. The effect of target of lesson on social distance was significant, $\beta = .30$, *p*

$< .05$. When both benefit finding and target of lesson were used to predict social

distance, benefit finding significantly predicted social distance, $\beta = .53$, *p* $< .01$, and

the effect of target of lesson became non-significant, $\beta = .14$, *p* $= .26$. The Sobel test

was significant, $Z = 1.93$, *p* $=.05$. Participants desire greater social distance from

victims who do harm when focused on the lessons of victimization for the victim as

opposed to when focused on the lessons for the perpetrator to the extent that victims

are perceived as finding benefits (*Figure 3*). Benefit finding did not mediate the effect

of target of lesson on perceived goodness of the harm-doing victim.

Experiment 2 replicated the central findings of Experiment 1 by showing that

focusing on the lessons of victimization for a victim results in higher perceived

obligations for a victim compared to focusing on the lessons of victimization for a

perpetrator. Benefit finding once again mediated this effect. Victims are perceived as

more obligated when considering the lessons of victimization for them because they

are seen as having found benefits. In general, participants appeared less pessimistic

about the victim as measured by the open ended responses and the close ended

responses in Experiment 1 when he was a victim of physical abuse as compared to

Experiment 2 when he was a victim of sexual abuse. A study directly comparing different types of victimization would need to be done to see if people think that certain types of victims have a better chance of finding benefits in their negative experience than other types of victims. People may well have theories about the lasting consequences and lower likelihood of recovery in victims of sexual abuse compared to physical abuse victims.

Considering the lessons of victimization for the victim resulted in a more negative evaluation of a victim who does harm as compared to considering the lessons of victimization for the perpetrator. People desired greater social distance from a victim who does harm when they have considered the lesson of victimization for the victim as compared to for the perpetrator to the extent that they believe the lesson of victimization for the victim is to find benefits. Considering the lessons of victimization for the victim versus perpetrator does not make one judge victims more negatively overall however—evaluation of a victim who does not subsequently do harm was not affected by lesson focus.

Experiment 2 solely examined victims as the target of evaluation. Participants read about someone who did harm or did not do harm, but they always had a victimization history. Another question to be answered is how a target with a victimization history would be evaluated compared to a target without a victimization history, when they do harm or do not do harm as an adult. There is research that suggests a victimization history mitigates harm doing as compared to no victimization history (Barrett et al., 2005). However, other research finds no effect of victimization

history or that a victimization history will actually result in harsher judgments of a harm-doer (White, 1987).

Experiment 3

Experiment 3 examined the evaluation of victims versus nonvictims. I predicted that all those who harm an innocent other will be judged harshly, but this will be especially true for those with a victimization history. I expected that an individual with a victimization history who harms another person would be evaluated more negatively than an individual without a victimization history who harms another person. I did not expect victims in general to be more negatively evaluated—a victim who does not do harm would be evaluated the same as a nonvictim who does not do harm.

Method

Ninety-eight introductory psychology students at the University of Kansas (67 women and 33 men, $M = 18.69$ years) participated for course credit. The design of the study was 2 (History of victimization: abused as a child or not abused as a child) X 2 (Future harm doing: no harm doing or harm doing).

Participants completed the study online and were randomly assigned to either a history of victimization or no history of victimization condition. In the history of victimization condition, participants read the same description of the victim's childhood as was used in Experiment 2. In the no history of victimization condition, participants read:

Dave Reynolds grew up in the Phoenix-metropolitan area. When Dave was

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5, his parents divorced amicably and although Dave lived with his mother, he saw his father often. Dave was very interested in sports and participated in a number of after school sports programs. His favorite sport was baseball and he played shortstop for a local little league team. When Dave was 12, his baseball coach was a man named Ted Stevens, who believed that Dave was one of the best players in the league.

Participants read the information and were *not* asked to write any open-ended responses to what they read, unlike in Experiment 1 or Experiment 2. Next participants were randomly assigned to one of the two harm-doing conditions as described in Experiment 2.

Dependent measures

After reading the information about the victim's childhood and criminal record, participants completed a number of measures evaluating him on 1 (not at all) to 7 (very much) scales. Participants first indicated how likeable they found the victim and how good a job they thought he would do as a teacher.

Next, participants completed items measuring their attitude toward the victim. *Threatening*, ($\alpha = .88$) included dangerous, low in self-control, good (Reversed, R) and trustworthy (R). *Negative emotions* ($r = .83$) consisted of "How angry do you feel toward Dave" and "How disgusted do you feel by Dave?"

Manipulation check

Participants completed the manipulation check by indicating whether the victim, Dave, had suffered abuse as a child and what type of criminal record he had as

an adult. They were asked, "First, what were you told initially concerning Dave's childhood? Please select one: When Dave was a child, he was sexually abused or When Dave was a child, he was not sexually abused." Participants were then asked, "Now, what were you told concerning what the background check revealed about Dave's life as an adult? Please select one: "As an adult, Dave sexually abused a child" or "As an adult, Dave had no criminal record." Ten participants indicated the incorrect answer to one or both of these questions and were excluded from the analysis.

<p align="center">Results and Discussion</p>

2 (History of victimization: abused as a child or not abused as a child) X 2 (Future harm doing: no harm doing or harm-doing) ANOVAs were conducted on all the dependent variables. Analysis of simple effects followed significant interactions. Means and standard deviations are summarized in Table 4.

Harm doing as an adult had significant main effects on perceived threat, likeability, how good a job the target would do as a teacher, and negative emotions toward the target. Targets who did harm were perceived as more threatening ($M = 5.78$) than targets who did not do harm ($M = 2.53$), $F(1, 84) = $, $p < .001$. Targets who did harm were seen as less likeable ($M = 4.16$) than targets who did not do harm ($M = 5.78$), $F(1, 84) = 38.14$, $p < .001$. Targets who did harm were seen as less good of a teacher ($M = 4.05$) than targets who did not do harm ($M = 5.73$), $F(1, 84) = 29.61$, $p < .001$. Targets who did harm evoked more negative emotions ($M = 5.38$) than targets who did not do harm ($M = 1.70$), $F(1, 84) = 215.37$, $p < .01$. History of victimization

had no main effects on the dependent variables.

The main effects of harm doing were qualified by a significant interaction between history of victimization and harm doing on likeability $F(1, 84) = 7.78, p < .01$, how good a job the target would do as a teacher $F(1, 84) = 7.30, p < .01$, perceived threat $F(1, 84) = 3.87, p = .05$, and negative emotions felt toward the target, $F(1, 84) = 3.87, p = .05$.

Simple effects showed that targets without a victimization history who did harm were rated as more likeable ($M = 4.71$) than those with a victimization history ($M = 3.64$), $F(1, 84) = 8.48, p < .001$. Participants also thought that targets without a victimization history who did harm would do a better job as a teacher ($M = 4.52$) than those with a victimization history who did harm ($M = 3.59$), $F(1, 84) = 4.53, p < .05$. Targets without a victimization history who did harm were judged as less threatening ($M = 5.45$) than targets with a victimization history who did harm ($M = 6.06$) $F(1, 84) = 5.16, p < .05$. Simple effects analysis did not show a significant difference between the target with a victimization history who did harm as compared to a target without a victimization history who did harm on negative emotions, although the means are in the opposite direction to what I expected. This appears to be an anomalous finding— particularly in light of the direction of the findings obtained on the other measures. Analysis of simple effects revealed the target without a victimization history who did not do harm did not differ from the target with a victimization history who did not do harm on any of the measures.

As expected, participants judged harm-doers more negatively overall when

they had a victimization history compared to when they did not have a victimization history. They found a harm-doer with a victimization history as less likeable, more threatening, and less good of a teacher than a harm-doer without a victimization history. In this experiment, victimization history clearly did not mitigate evaluation of a harm-doer. However, participants did not evaluate victims more negatively in general. There were no differences in their ratings of targets who did not do harm whether they had a victimization history or not.

General Discussion

Thinking about the lessons and implications of victimization for the victim leads observers to believe that the victim should find benefits in their negative experience. It appears that not only victims, but uninvolved observers as well make meaning of victimization through benefit finding. These studies confirm what victims have reported sensing from those around them—that nonvictims expect that victims should gain something positive from their negative experience (Taylor, Wood, & Lichtman, 1983). With finding benefits such as becoming a stronger, more compassionate person, come obligations to help others and not do harm.

Experiments 1 and 2 showed that focusing on the lessons of childhood victimization for the victim, whether physical or sexual abuse, increased the perception that victims have obligations as compared to focusing on the lessons of victimization for the perpetrator. In both Experiments 1 and 2, perceiving the victim as finding benefits mediated the effect of target of lesson on obligations. Victims are expected to fulfill obligations to the extent that they fit the image of someone who

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helps—someone who has the ability and disposition to reach out to others. Moral, empathetic, and capable people should know better than to hurt others and should look out for the welfare of others. Obviously, someone who is thought to be still suffering, weak, and distrustful of others, will not be expected to have the ability to come to anyone else's aid.

Participants do not only think of benefit finding in victimization when asked explicitly to agree with the idea or not. In examining the open-ended responses, which participants generated before they encountered the closed-ended rating scales, they spontaneously mention ideas such as that the lesson of victimization for the victim is to be respectful towards others, to be kind, and to not hurt others as they were hurt. Previous research shows that people use redemption arcs to describe their own life stories (McAdams, 2006). I have shown that individuals also use redemption arcs for other people's lives and expect that others should redeem the bad things that happen to them. In both Experiment 1 and Experiment 2, participants generated more thoughts about how the lesson of victimization is to be a better person when they focused on the victim as compared to the perpetrator. Benefit finding was the most frequent lesson cited in Experiment 1, and the second most frequent lesson cited in Experiment 2 for victims. In contrast, participants made meaning through sense-making more in the perpetrator focus condition by writing about how the victim should have done something to stop the abuse. In suggesting that something might have been done to stop the abuse, participants appear to be engaging in counterfactual thinking, in that they are attempting to come up with an alternative past (Roese,

1997). Participants are therefore implying that the victim—through his inaction—played some causal role in the outcome. The reasoning appears to be such that "if only he had done something differently, then the abuse would not have occurred." Such counterfactuals are linked to judgments of blame in victims (Branscombe & Weir, 1992).

Sense-making and benefit finding are two of the main ways victims make meaning from victimization (Davis, Nolen-Hoeksema, & Larson, 1998). Nonvictims will also use these methods to imbue victimization with meaning. Just world theory talks about these two strategies—reinterpreting the outcome of a negative event so that it is positive and victim blaming—as ways to deal with the threat a victimization event poses in observers (Lerner, 1980). Most research has focused on the victim blaming and derogation responses as means of dealing with a threat to justice (Hafer & Bégue, 2005). Lerner (1980) categorizes both reinterpreting the outcome and victim blaming as psychological strategies, but does not discuss *when* one type of psychological strategy will be used over the other. Based on this research, one determinant appears to be whether people are focusing on the actual victimization event (perpetrator) or on the consequences of it (for the victim). Focusing on the consequences of victimization offers the observer a way to compensate the victim and avoid victim blaming or derogation. Compensating the victim with positive qualities has been shown to reduce threats to people's sense of justice (Kay & Jost, 2003). If not given this opportunity to reinterpret the victim's outcome so that they find

benefits, people will be more likely to resort to making sense of the victimization and blame the victim's actions.

Going beyond the just world and system justification research, I also looked at what happens when a victim fails to become a better person and fails to fulfill their moral obligations. Experiment 2 showed that when focused on the lessons of victimization for the victim as compared to the lessons for the perpetrator, participants evaluated a victim who does harm more negatively—they rated the victim lower on good qualities and wanted to maintain greater social distance from him. Benefit finding mediated the effect of target of lesson on social distance. Participants desired more social distance from a victim who does harm to the extent that they believed the victim should have found benefits in their victimization. The victim did not learn the lesson they should have and so was especially avoided. Focusing on a victim does not lead to more negative evaluations of victims in general however, as seen by the fact that target of lesson did not affect judgments of victims when they did not subsequently do harm to another person.

Experiment 3 compared evaluations of victims to nonvictims. A perpetrator with a victimization history is evaluated as more threatening and less likable than a perpetrator without a victimization history. This does not appear to be a case of simply derogating someone with a victimization history; nonperpetrators with a victimization history were not more negatively evaluated than nonperpetators without a victimization history.

Experiment 3 adds evidence that a victimization history does not mitigate harm doing. Some prior research has shown the opposite—that mock jurors are more likely to give a life sentence rather than the death penalty to perpetrators who were said to have been abused and neglected as a child compared to perpetrators with unknown childhoods (Barnett et al., 2004). However, Experiment 3 differs from the Barnett et al. study in many ways. In Experiment 3, participants are given neutral information about the target's childhood rather than no information, while participants could have assumed anything about the perpetrator's childhood in the Barnett et al. study. Also the type of harm perpetration is different—molestation versus murder. Murder is certainly a more serious crime, but the molestation mirrors what happened to the perpetrator when he was a child. It may be that victims are obligated to be particularly understanding and sympathetic to other *victims like themselves* and obligated not to do *the specific type of harm that was done to them*.

Experiment 3 also differs from the typical trial setting in which mitigation of harm is usually studied. In such a setting, participants learn of the harm doing before they learn of the victimization history, whereas in Experiment 3 they learned about the victimization history before they were informed of the subsequent harm committed. Perhaps, participants have to learn about a victimization history beforehand, so they can form the expectations of benefit finding prior to learning about harm doing for a victimization history to result in more negative judgments of harm doing as compared to no victimization history. Experiment 2 provides support for the idea that expectations of benefit finding in victimization can drive a more

negative evaluation of a victim-turned perpetrator. However, Experiment 2 only examined perpetrators with a victimization history. In Experiment 3 I examined perpetrators both with and without a victimization history, but I did not measure expectations of benefit finding before participants learned about the harm doing so I was not able to determine whether benefit finding mediates the effect of a victimization history on evaluation of a victim-turned perpetrator. Thus, it is unknown whether it is the case that expecting victims to find benefits will result in a harsher judgment of a perpetrator with a victimization history compared to a perpetrator without a victimization history. A future study could measure a general belief in victims finding benefits after learning about a target with or without a victimization history but before learning about harm doing to see if benefit finding in victimization affects evaluation of a victim who does harm versus a nonvictim who does harm.

Implications for Victims

On the surface, nonvictims wanting victims to grow from their victimization seems like a good thing. Benefit finding is tied to better well being for victims, although it is not clear whether this is actually due to preexisting difference between victims who find benefits and those who do not (Davis, Nolen-Hoeksema, & Larson, 1998). Victims certainly do not find it helpful when those around them remain pessimistic about their future (Dakof & Taylor, 1990). However, observers believing that victims should find benefits clearly has negative consequences for the victim when the victim behaves as many do and cannot find benefits. As Dan McAdams

(2006) says "I believe there is a kind of tyranny in the never-ending expectation in American life that bad things will and should be redeemed" (p. 265). As demonstrated in this research, when observers make meaning of victimization by perceiving benefits, they are harder on victims who do harm. Even if victims do not hurt anyone, but just fail to pull their life together, they may also be judged negatively due to the expectations people have of them. Participants in these studies were observers. It is not known if victims would react in the same way to their own lack of progress or to another victim's lack of progress.

Future Directions

I suggested that nonvictims are more negative about victims who do harm because they hold them to a higher moral standard. However, the standard participants used to evaluate the target's behavior was not directly measured in this research. It would be useful to try to measure the difference in standard of behavior for victims versus nonvictims. For example, participants could be asked to indicate how many hours of time a rape victim would have to donate to a rape crisis hotline to have "done their part" for helping out victims compared to a non rape victim. Alternatively, they could be asked to indicate how favorable a stigmatized target's attitudes, such as a gay man, should be toward African Americans for them to be considered supportive of Black civil rights compared to a heterosexual man. Participants would have greater expectations that the stigmatized target or victim should be kind to other stigmatized targets who also suffer from discrimination. In both cases, participants would need to see more of the behavior from victimized

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group members to judge them as having done their part to help other victims or as being truly supportive of the other victimized group. Conversely, people would need to see less intolerant behavior from a gay man to judge them as prejudiced against African-Americans if they really are being held to a higher moral standard. In general, if people have a higher moral standard for victims or victimized groups about how they should treat other victims, then observers would need to see more helpful behavior and less harmful behavior from them as compared to nonvictimized groups to evaluate them positively.

It is the case that in some situations people may not want victims to become this more moral, saintly person. They may not always want the little boy who saw his parents killed in front of him go on to devote his time to counseling other kids who have been so traumatized. Instead, observers may want him to devote his time to dressing up like a bat and hunting down criminals. Vigilante characters who go outside the law to seek justice, such as Batman, also permeate American culture. In future studies, I would like to explore when people think the lesson of victimization would instead be seeking vengeance as opposed to seeking personal growth. When a perpetrator is likely to go unpunished, people will prefer a victim who harms a perpetrator as compared to a victim who shows personal growth and forgives those who hurt them. People are more approving of vigilante justice when they feel that justice cannot be served through normal means (Gromet & Darley, 2006). When people feel that procedures in place to deal with harm doing are fair, they are more likely to move toward reconciliation and forgiveness, but when people feel that the

procedures are unfair, they are more likely to seek revenge (Messner, Baumer, & Rosenfeld, 2006; Aquino, Tripp, & Bies, 2006). In my dissertation studies, I never told participants what happened to Ted, the perpetrator who abused Dave. I predict that if told the perpetrator was never punished, participants would be more likely to say the victim should seek revenge if given that option, particularly in comparison to if they learned that the perpetrator was punished for his abuse.

Conclusions

Victimization affects both victims and those around them. It prompts the search for meaning in observers and victims alike. Reactions of others to victimization can vary, with observers often believing the lessons of victimization are that victims should become better, more moral people. Observers attribute positive characteristics to victims to compensate for their pain. If a victim became a better person due to their suffering, then the suffering is justified—it served some higher purpose and the world still makes sense and has value.

The belief that victims bounce back better than ever has consequences for the victim. Victims incur obligations to help others and to not do harm as a result of gaining these new positive qualities through victimization. If victims fail in these obligations, then they will be negatively evaluated, especially to the extent that people believe they should have found benefits in their victimization.

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Appendix A

Items in benefit finding and victim obligation indices used in Experiment 1

Benefit Finding
Because of the abuse, Dave should appreciate life more.
Strongly disagree   *1*   *2*   *3*   *4*   *5*   *6*   *7*   ***Strongly agree***

Because of the abuse, Dave should be more motivated to succeed.
Strongly disagree   *1*   *2*   *3*   *4*   *5*   *6*   *7*   ***Strongly agree***

The abuse made Dave more sensitive to the needs of children.
Strongly disagree   *1*   *2*   *3*   *4*   *5*   *6*   *7*   ***Strongly agree***

Experiencing abuse as Dave did often makes people stronger.
Strongly disagree   *1*   *2*   *3*   *4*   *5*   *6*   *7*   ***Strongly agree***

Because of the abuse Dave experienced, he is likely to be kind to the children that he encounters.
Strongly disagree   *1*   *2*   *3*   *4*   *5*   *6*   *7*   ***Strongly agree***

Victim Obligations
When people have been victimized, they are morally obligated to ensure they never act toward others in the same way.
Strongly disagree   *1*   *2*   *3*   *4*   *5*   *6*   *7*   ***Strongly agree***

A central lesson from the abuse is that Dave must take care not to inflict suffering upon other people.
Strongly disagree   *1*   *2*   *3*   *4*   *5*   *6*   *7*   ***Strongly agree***

A central lesson from the abuse is that Dave should assist weak and abused people.
Strongly disagree   *1*   *2*   *3*   *4*   *5*   *6*   *7*   ***Strongly agree***

A central lesson from the abuse is that Dave should have a better understanding of other people who are suffering from abuse.
Strongly disagree   *1*   *2*   *3*   *4*   *5*   *6*   *7*   ***Strongly agree***

Items in benefit finding and victim obligation indices used in Experiment 2

Benefit Finding
Because of the abuse, Dave should appreciate life more.
Strongly disagree   *1*   *2*   *3*   *4*   *5*   *6*   *7*   *Strongly agree*

Dave should be more sympathetic to others who have been abused because of what he experienced.
Strongly disagree   *1*   *2*   *3*   *4*   *5*   *6*   *7*   *Strongly agree*

Because of the abuse, Dave became more compassionate toward others.
Strongly disagree   *1*   *2*   *3*   *4*   *5*   *6*   *7*   *Strongly agree*

Because of the abuse, Dave should be more motivated to succeed.
Strongly disagree   *1*   *2*   *3*   *4*   *5*   *6*   *7*   *Strongly agree*

The abuse made Dave more sensitive to the needs of children.
Strongly disagree   *1*   *2*   *3*   *4*   *5*   *6*   *7*   *Strongly agree*

Experiencing abuse as Dave did often makes people stronger.
Strongly disagree   *1*   *2*   *3*   *4*   *5*   *6*   *7*   *Strongly agree*

Because of the abuse Dave experienced, he is likely to be kind to the children that he encounters.
Strongly disagree   *1*   *2*   *3*   *4*   *5*   *6*   *7*   *Strongly agree*

Victim Obligations
When people have been victimized, they are morally obligated to ensure they never act toward others in the same way.
Strongly disagree   *1*   *2*   *3*   *4*   *5*   *6*   *7*   *Strongly agree*

A central lesson from the abuse is that Dave should assist weak and abused people.
Strongly disagree   *1*   *2*   *3*   *4*   *5*   *6*   *7*   *Strongly agree*

A central lesson from the abuse is that Dave should have a better understanding of other people who are suffering from abuse.
Strongly disagree   *1*   *2*   *3*   *4*   *5*   *6*   *7*   *Strongly agree*

Table 1

Mean Number of Thoughts per Category by Condition Experiment 1

	Victim focus	Perpetrator focus	F (1, 47)
Victim benefit finding	1.31 (1.09)	.04 (.21)	30.06, $p < .001$
Victim worse off	.81 (.85)	.04 (.21)	17.64, $p < .001$
Victim should have done something	.04 (.20)	.48 (.90)	5.93, $p < .05$
Perpetrator seek help	0 (0)	.74 (.75)	25.20, $p < .001$
Explaining perpetrator	0 (0)	.17 (.49)	3.27, $p < .10$
Perpetrator punishment	0 (0)	.39 (.58)	11.74, $p < .001$
No lesson	.04 (.20)	.09 (.29)	.48, $p = .49$
Other	.12 (.33)	.30 (.46)	30.06, $p < .001$

Table 2

Mean Number of Thoughts per Category by Condition Experiment 2

	Victim focus	Perpetrator focus	F (1, 101)
Victim benefit finding	.96 (.86)	.05 (.30)	51.58, $p < .001$
Victim worse off	.98 (.93)	.13 (.39)	37.90, $p < .001$
Victim should have done something	.08 (.27)	.22 (.50)	3.66, $p = .06$
Perpetrator seek help	0 (0)	.73 (.68)	55.37, $p < .001$
Explaining perpetrator	0 (0)	.05 (.23)	3.33, $p = .07$
Perpetrator punishment	0 (0)	.60 (.81)	26.43, $p < .001$
No lesson	.04 (.20)	.02 (.14)	1.32, $p = .25$
Other	.31 (.51)	.55 (.72)	3.79, $p = .05$

Table 3

Evaluations of Target as a Function of Target of Lesson and Harm doing

	Harm doing		No harm doing	
	Victim focus	Perpetrator focus	Victim focus	Perpetrator focus
	$n = 26$	$n = 22$	$n = 25$	$n = 31$
Social distance	6.09_a	5.57_b	3.31_c	3.63_c
	(.78)	(.92)	(1.21)	(1.22)
Perceived goodness	2.51_a	3.03_b	5.22_c	4.90_c
	(1.08)	(1.01)	(.91)	(1.10)
Benefit finding	4.30_a	3.71_b	4.26_a	3.67_b
	(.90)	(1.00)	(.91)	(.98)
Damage to victim	4.32_a	4.57_a	4.49_a	4.81_a
	(1.22)	(1.37)	(1.11)	(1.00)
Victim obligation	4.99_a	4.52_b	5.10_a	4.60_a
	(1.12)	(1.49)	(.83)	(1.25)

Note. Means that are significantly different or marginally significantly different from each other are marked with different subscripts. Numbers in parentheses are standard deviations.

Table 4

Evaluations of Target as a Function of History of Victimization and Harm doing

	Harm doing		No harm doing	
	Victim history	No victim history	Victim history	No victim history
	$n = 22$	$n = 21$	$n = 23$	$n = 22$
Likeability	3.64 a	4.71 b	5.96 c	5.59 c
	(1.29)	(1.62)	(.88)	(.96)
Good job as teacher	3.59 a	4.52 b	6.09 c	5.36 c
	(1.71)	(1.89)	(.79)	(1.14)
Threat	6.06 a	5.49 b	2.47 c	2.59 c
	(.66)	(1.10)	(.72)	(.75)
Negative emotions	5.09 a	5.69 a	1.89 b	1.50 b
	(1.44)	(1.38)	(1.05)	(.71)

Note. Means that are significantly different from each other are marked with different subscripts. Numbers in parentheses are standard deviations.

Figure 1. The Role of Benefit Finding in Mediating the Effect of Target of Lesson on Perceived Victim Obligations: Experiment 1. [+] significant at $p < .10$, [*] significant at $p < .05$. Perpetrator as target coded as 0 and victim as target coded as 1. The number in parentheses reflects the direct effect with the mediator included.
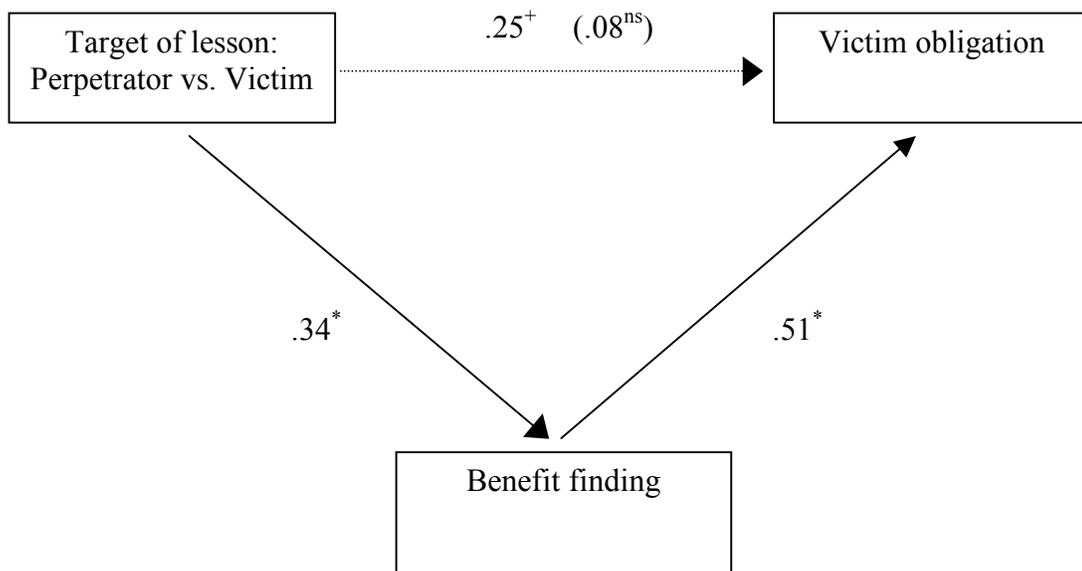
Figure 2. The Role of Benefit Finding in Mediating the Effect of Target of Lesson on Perceived Victim Obligations: Experiment 2. [+] significant at $p < .10$, [*] significant at $p < .05$. Perpetrator as target coded as 0 and victim as target coded as 1. The number in parentheses reflects the direct effect with the mediator included.
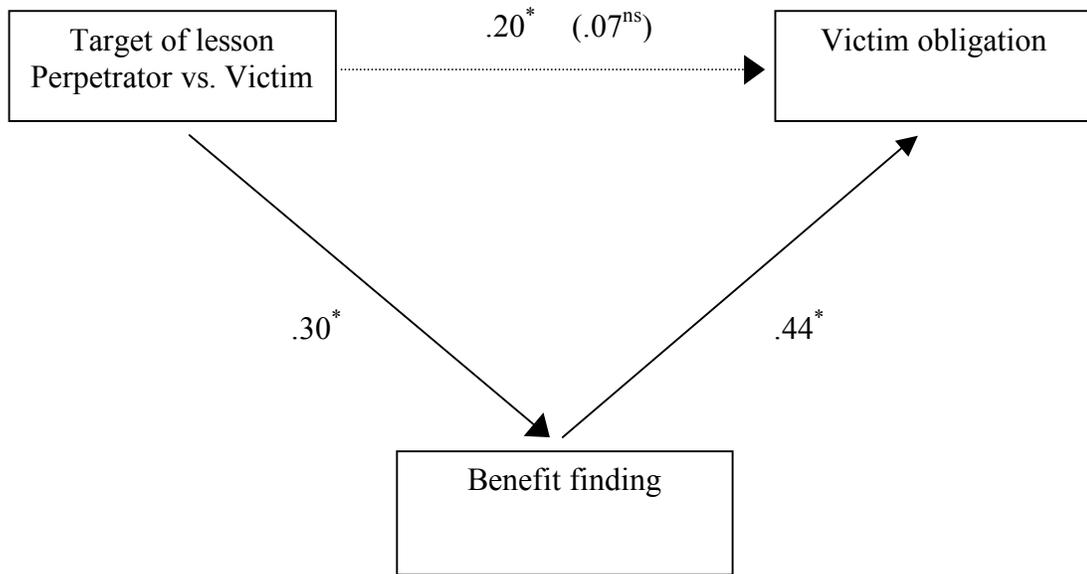
Figure 3. The Role of Benefit Finding in Mediating the Effect of Target of Lesson on

Social Distance: Experiment 2. [+] significant at $p < .10$, [*] significant at $p < .05$.

Perpetrator as target coded as 0 and victim as target coded as 1. The number in

parentheses reflects the direct effect with the mediator included.