

PERCEPTIONS OF VICTIMHOOD: EFFECTS OF CULPABILITY
AND SEVERITY OF MISFORTUNE

by

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ABSTRACT

Numerous social psychological studies have examined the factors that influence cognitive, emotional, and behavioral responses to victims of misfortune. However, this body of research does not offer clear evidence regarding the factors that distinguish victims from non-victims. The current investigation sought to assess the role of two variables in decisions about victimhood: degree of culpability and severity of misfortune. Each of these variables was considered in three distinct levels to determine whether perceptions of victimhood function linearly with increases in culpability and misfortune severity. Participants read about a negative life event (i.e., a house fire) in which degree of culpability and severity of misfortune were manipulated, and then watched a video interview with the person who experienced the event. Participants then reported their emotional responses to the person's misfortune, their attributional and interpersonal judgments about the person, and their appraisals of the person as a victim. Culpability and misfortune severity had significant linear effects on participants' emotional responses, attributions, and interpersonal judgments of the person. More importantly, increased misfortune severity and decreased culpability led to stronger perceptions of the person as a victim and greater legitimacy of the person's victim role benefits. Contrary to predictions, no interaction of culpability and misfortune severity occurred, suggesting that these two factors operate independently to shape observers' perceptions of others as victims following a negative life event.

LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS AND SYMBOLS

M	Mean: the sum of a set of measurements divided by the number of measurements obtained
SD	Standard deviation: a measure of variability; the square root of the variance of a sample
n	Number of participants in a given group
α	Cronbach's alpha, a measure of internal consistency
ERS	The Emotional Response Scale used to index empathy and sympathy
IJS	The Interpersonal Judgment Scale
HSD	"Honest significant difference"
F	Fisher's F ratio: a ratio of two variances
p	The probability of obtaining a value equal to or more extreme than the observed value under the conditions of the null hypothesis
<	Less than
=	Equal to
Λ	The multivariate equivalent of F
R^2	Explained variance
β	Standardized beta coefficient: unit change in the dependent variable per standard deviation increase or decrease in the independent variable

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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

The concept of victimhood has attracted considerable attention among social scientists who have explored its political, sociological, and cultural dimensions. Although it may seem at first glance that social psychology has contributed much to the study of victimhood, this is not necessarily the case. Social and personality psychologists have studied several phenomena that are likely to comprise and relate to victimhood, such as shared affective experiences, empathic reactions, helping behaviors, and other attributions. However, these findings have not been integrated into a coherent study of victimhood. In attempting to synthesize these various findings toward a more comprehensive understanding of victimhood, two questions emerge. The first concerns the nature of the misfortunes that qualify individuals for the victim role. The second pertains to the way that observers' emotional, cognitive, and behavioral reactions to someone who has experienced a misfortune combine to produce appraisals of that person as a victim and shape the type of help that he or she is afforded.

In the current investigation, as implied by previous research (e.g., Stokols & Schopler, 1973), I posit that perceptions of an individual as a victim depend largely on the severity of an individual's misfortune and the degree to which they are responsible for that misfortune. Despite the essential nature of these variables, no social psychological studies have examined the extent to which severity of misfortune and degree of culpability combine to influence perceptions of a person as a victim. It is possible that these two variables are each linearly related to the perception of others as legitimate victims. On the other hand, they may combine in complex

ways to affect victimhood appraisals and judgments about victim role benefits. In addition, it is possible that severity of misfortune and degree of culpability will produce unique cognitive, emotional, and behavioral responses that will inform perceptions of victimhood. The current study sought to explicate these relationships further by examining the role of severity of misfortune and degree of culpability in observers' judgments about others as victims following a negative life event.

Characteristics of Victims of Misfortune

When someone experiences a misfortune or negative life event, it is common for them to be afforded financial, social, and emotional benefits. Such outpourings of support for victims of misfortune likely originate in observers' empathic emotional responses to victims, which are then filtered through cognitive appraisals about the victim and the circumstances of his or her victimization, before finally producing an observable emotional or behavioral response.

Although these processes routinely result in benefits for victims, they are at other times viewed with suspicion or even disdain (e.g., Kenney, 2002). These negative responses derive from the possibility that some individuals may attempt to exploit the victim role in an effort to reap the benefits that the role entails (e.g., Gray & Wegner, 2011). Although most people would agree that the victim role exists, we nevertheless have a poor scientific understanding of the nature of the victim role. In this section, I review the existing empirical evidence regarding victims and discuss the potential limitations of our scientific understanding of the victim role and the factors and qualities that influence decisions about victimhood.

Previous research on victims and victimization has largely focused on the situational factors that shape responses to victims and the qualities of the helper that influence when help is offered. With regard to situational factors, previous research indicates that the nature of a

situation, such as the level of immediate threat posed to a victim (Fischer, Greitemeyer, Pollozek, & Grey, 2006; Fischer et al., 2011) or the number of passive bystanders (Darley & Latané, 1968; Latané & Nida, 1981), is crucial in determining whether a victim receives help and how quickly or effectively that help is given. Likewise, the characteristics of the individual offering help play an important role in these situations. For instance, victims tend to receive more help from bystanders who are male (Eagly & Crowley, 1986), who have a strong belief in a just world (DePalma, Madey, Tillman, & Wheeler, 1999), or who have been trained in emergency response (Hawks, Peck, Vail-Smith, 1992). Collectively, these studies provide insight into the conditions that lead to helping. However, these studies have generally paid little attention to the characteristics of the person in need of help, and the relation of those characteristics to their likelihood of receiving help.

Some researchers have redirected their focus from the more peripheral or situational aspects of victimization to the various qualities that characterize victims and how those qualities influence people's reactions to victims. This body of research indicates that victims are perceived more positively and receive greater social rewards associated with the victim role when their need is acute rather than chronic (Lishner, Batson, & Huss, 2011; Small, 2010), when the victim is perceived as being similar to a friend or close other who has experienced a similar misfortune (Small & Simonsohn, 2008), when help is directed toward a single identified victim (e.g., Bob, who has cancer) rather than a group of identified victims (e.g., cancer victims; Kogut & Ritov, 2005), or when perceived connectedness with the victim is high (Cialdini, Brown, Lewis, Luce, & Neuberg, 1997). With regard to helping behavior, there is evidence to suggest that a victim's characteristics, such as outgroup membership (Nazione & Silk, 2013; Saucier, Miller, & Doucet, 2005), gender (Eagly & Crowley, 1986), social status (Nadler & Chernyak-Hai, 2014), or level

of dependence on the potential helper (Bornstein, 1994), can operate to increase or decrease helping. Considered together, these studies suggest that observers' evaluations of a person experiencing a misfortune are important determinants of whether the person will be regarded as a victim.

Unlike other social roles, the victim role is problematic because it can be used exploitatively to secure undeserved benefits and advantages. Across three studies, Gray and Wegner (2011) examined whether previous victimhood or past good deeds could be used for personal gain, namely, in escaping blame for a misdeed. The researchers asked participants to read about a target individual who had either previously performed good deeds or been victimized in some way. Participants then read a vignette that described the target individual engaging in a misdeed, such as pocketing money dropped by a stranger or endangering a stranger's life through workplace negligence. In each of the three studies, Gray and Wegner (2011) found that target individuals who were depicted as former victims were blamed less than target individuals who had performed good deeds, suggesting that portraying oneself as a victim could be an effective strategy in reducing blame and, by extension, acquiring other social benefits.

Although the body of research discussed above touches on various aspects of victimization, previous research is limited in the extent to which it has assessed the features that define a victim. More specifically, previous researchers have addressed the various factors that influence individuals' reactions to specific misfortunes, but few have studied the impact of the severity of a misfortune on observer responses to victims. In one study of severity of misfortune, researchers found that participants perceived a target as less attractive when she experienced medical and social complications related to a miscarriage than when her miscarriage occurred

without these complications (Stokols & Schopler, 1973). Although these findings are novel, this study contained important limitations, namely, in the execution of its severity manipulation. Whereas participants in the low severity condition were told that only the target's closest friends and advisers were aware of her pregnancy and that they successfully kept the information confidential, participants in the high severity condition were led to believe that rumors and scandal surrounded the target's pregnancy. The negative social information included in the high severity condition may have communicated some degree of fault or deviance on the part of the target, thus leading to the observed victim blaming effects. In contrast, recent research on severity of misfortune suggests that victims of more severe misfortunes tend to be treated more fairly and viewed more positively than victims of minor misfortunes (Adams-Price, Dalton, & Sumrall, 2004). However, this study tested misfortune severity as a repeated-measures factor, with participants providing responses to several different misfortunes of varying severity rather than one type of misfortune whose outcomes are more or less severe. One drawback of assessing the effects of misfortune severity in this way is that participants' cognitive, emotional, or behavioral responses to one misfortune may affect or constrain responses to a subsequent misfortune of differing severity.

Despite giving some indication as to the effects of severity of misfortune on attributional and interpersonal responses to individuals who have experienced negative life events, these studies do not consider the influence of severity of misfortune on judgments about whether someone qualifies as a victim. Although it is reasonable to expect that shared emotions, felt compassion, obligation to help, and perceptions of an individual as a victim might increase linearly with the severity of the misfortune, other patterns of this relation are possible. For example, there may be a threshold of severity that must be achieved before observers consider

someone who has experienced a misfortune a victim. Or it may be the case that there is a degree of severity beyond which observers disengage from the victim. Questions such as these have yet to be answered by previous investigations and warrant further consideration.

Culpability and Responsibility in Victims

Previous research largely indicates that the degree to which a person is responsible, or culpable, for his or her misfortune is a crucial factor in shaping how people perceive and respond to individuals in the victim role (cf. McDonald, 1977). The influence of victim responsibility on reactions to victims has been demonstrated across various scenarios and types of misfortune. Across two studies, van Dijk and colleagues found that participants experienced less sympathy and greater *Schadenfreude*, or pleasure at another's misfortune, when a target individual was responsible for a career- or school-related setback (van Dijk, Goslinga, & Ouwerkerk, 2008; van Dijk, Ouwerkerk, Goslinga, & Nieweg, 2005). Other researchers have found a similar effect of victim responsibility on sympathy, such that culpable victims were given less sympathy and judged more harshly than blameless victims following a drug-related arrest (Feather & Oberdan, 2000) or the disruption of plans to attend medical school (Brigham, Kelso, Jackson, & Smith, 1997).

Similarly, Kogut (2011) found that participants donated less money to an individual who contracted AIDS through intravenous drug use than to an individual who contracted the disease from a carrier mother. This effect disappeared, however, when the target of donations was a group of AIDS victims. Weiner, Perry, and Magnusson (1988) examined the degree to which the responsibility of a target individual for the onset of an illness or misfortune influenced participants' attributional and affective responses to that individual. Specifically, the researchers manipulated target individuals' responsibility for the onset of AIDS, Alzheimer's disease,

blindness, cancer, child abuse, drug addiction, heart disease, obesity, paraplegia, or “Vietnam War syndrome”. They found that attributions of blame, responsibility, and anger were higher and reactions such as liking, pity, personal assistance, and charity were lower when target individuals were responsible for the onset of their misfortune.

In contrast, there is evidence to suggest that in some instances, the absence of responsibility could be detrimental to victims. Previous research indicates that innocent victims pose a significant threat to individuals’ belief that the world is a just place in which people get what they deserve, also known as belief in a just world (Correia, Vala, & Aguiar, 2007; Hafer, 2000; Lerner & Simmons, 1966). Individuals who profess a strong belief that the world is just tend to react negatively when confronted with innocent victims, often by derogating victims, withholding assistance, or ascribing blame to victims (Aderman, Brehm, & Katz, 1974; Hafer, 2000; Kogut, 2011; Lerner & Miller, 1978; Lerner & Simmons, 1966; van den Bos & Maas, 2009). The stark contrast between this body of research and other research indicating positive outcomes for innocent victims suggests that the relationship between victim culpability and observer responses may not be direct or linear and may depend on observer, victim, or situational variables.

Although previous research has considered the responsibility of victims for their misfortune as a factor in determining reactions to victims, no studies to date have assessed the impact of victim responsibility beyond two levels of culpability (i.e., *blameless* vs. *culpable*). Although in some instances it may be less plausible to examine levels of culpability as a causal factor (such as in the contraction of AIDS), the degree to which a person is responsible for a misfortune could greatly influence outcomes for victims in other scenarios. For example, previous research exploring the relationship between culpability and rape has considered the

influence of victim alcohol use on judgments about victims (Maurer & Robinson, 2008; Richardson & Campbell, 1982; Untied, Orchowski, Mastroleo, & Gidycz, 2012). These studies depict victims in one of two conditions, sober or intoxicated, rather than considering the effects of varying levels of intoxication. With rape as with other forms of misfortune, examining culpability as a dichotomous factor could potentially limit the degree to which the victim role can be explored and understood. Moreover, conceptualizing victim responsibility for a misfortune on a spectrum rather than as a dichotomy could be crucial in understanding the complex processes involved in making judgments about victims, especially in instances in which culpability is partial or ambiguous.

In addition, the extent to which victim culpability produces effects in a linear pattern may depend on other factors or conditions. In order to more fully understand the dynamics of multiple levels of culpability, it is important to consider other variables that might modulate the effects of culpability on emotional, cognitive, and behavioral responses to victims, as well as the perceived legitimacy of an individual's victimhood. Previous research suggests that the impact of victim culpability will depend on the level of severity of a misfortune, with culpability having a stronger effect on subjects' attributions at lower levels of misfortune (Adams-Price et al., 2004). Applying these findings to my thinking about victimhood appraisals, it seems likely that the degree to which culpability operates in a linear fashion to affect judgments about victimhood may depend on severity of misfortune, as well. For instance, it could be the case that as misfortune severity increases, emotional responses to a victim will overwhelm any negative cognitions related to the victim's culpability, thus leading to stronger perceptions of legitimate victimhood and greater social benefits for the victim regardless of his or her responsibility for the misfortune. However, this idea has yet to be tested in the literature.

The Current Study

Based on the implications and limitations of previous research, the current study sought to examine the effects of varying levels of culpability and misfortune severity on reactions to a target who has experienced a misfortune. Specifically, I was interested in the degree to which degree of culpability and misfortune interact to influence: (1) participants' emotional, cognitive, and behavioral reactions to a target person experiencing a misfortune; (2) participants' perception of a target person as a victim; and (3) the perceived legitimacy of benefits accrued through the victim role. In addition, I sought to determine whether observers' emotional (e.g., empathy), cognitive (e.g., attributions and target perceptions), and behavioral responses (e.g., victim role benefits) are affected by these factors in a way that suggests a coherent and singular response to victims, or whether these output variables are affected in separate and less coherent ways.

To assess these effects, I asked participants to read about an individual who experienced a house fire, watch a video interview with that individual, and then complete a series of measures intended to assess various reactions to that individual. Culpability and misfortune severity were depicted in low, moderate, and high levels. I predicted that as culpability increases, the deservingness of the victim label and the social rewards it entails would decrease. I expected that increases in misfortune severity would produce an opposite effect, such that individuals experiencing more severe misfortunes would be seen as more deserving of the victim label and its associated rewards. Lastly, I predicted an interaction between culpability and misfortune, such that negative reactions associated with increasing levels of culpability will be more potent at low levels of misfortune and less potent at high levels of misfortune.

CHAPTER 2: METHOD

Participants

A total of 361 participants (278 women) were recruited from a subject pool of introductory psychology students at the University of Alabama to participate in the current study. Participants were between the ages of 17 and 32 ($M = 18.70$, $SD = 1.39$) and received partial course credit for their participation. Participants classified themselves as African American ($n = 33$), Asian ($n = 7$), Caucasian ($n = 306$), Hispanic ($n = 7$), or Other ($n = 8$). All participants were required to complete a separate study before participating in the current study.

Overview and Design

The design was a 3 (degree of culpability: low vs. moderate vs. high) X 3 (severity of misfortune: low vs. moderate vs. high) factorial design. Participants were randomly assigned to read one of nine insurance incident reports about a house fire, each representing one of the nine experimental conditions. After reading the incident report, participants viewed a photograph purportedly from the scene of the fire and then watched a video interview with the homeowner who experienced the event. Following the video, participants completed a series of measures intended to assess their emotional and cognitive reactions to the event and their impression of the homeowner, particularly the appropriateness of considering him a victim.

Materials

Incident reports. In the current study, participants were asked to read an incident report about a misfortune (i.e., a house fire). These reports were created by the researcher for the purposes of the study. To enhance the realism of the reports, their structure, formatting, and

content were based on examples of official insurance company fire and accident reports. Each of the nine reports depicted a single male homeowner experiencing a fire-related event in his recently purchased home. Each report included a summary of events, a discussion of the contributing factors and liability, a conclusion statement, an estimate of the homeowner's responsibility (0%, 40%, or 80% responsible), and other extraneous information intended to establish the setting of the event, reinforce the verisimilitude of the study, and deliver the culpability and severity manipulations (see Appendix A for an example). In all cases, the homeowner was depicted as male.

Each report differed in the severity of the misfortune that was described and the degree to which the homeowner was culpable for that misfortune. For the severity of misfortune manipulation, the fire was described as resulting in one of three misfortunes: minor damage to the kitchen in the form of smoke damage and damage related to the use of fire retardant spray (low severity); moderate structural damage to the kitchen and surrounding rooms including the destruction of kitchen structures, kitchen appliances, and an inner wall (moderate severity); or total loss of the home and all possessions therein (high severity).

For the culpability manipulation, participants were told the fire began as a result of one of three causes: an electrical surge caused by lightning striking the house (low culpability), an electrical surge caused by the accidental overloading of substandard electrical wiring of which the homeowner was aware (moderate culpability), or an electrical surge caused by the homeowner having tampered with the fuse/circuit box and knowingly overloading the severely substandard wiring (high culpability). To make culpability manipulations more salient, the incident report indicated that the homeowner received one of three messages from home inspectors before moving into the house: (1) to move in when ready (low culpability); (2) to have

the substandard wiring replaced immediately and to take caution in moving into the house (moderate culpability); or (3) to have the wiring replaced immediately and that the homeowner should not move into the house until he had done so (high culpability).

Homeowner interview. Participants were asked to watch a video interview in which the homeowner described his experience of the events detailed in the report. The interview video was included as an attempt to personalize the participants' psychological experience of the target. In the cover story, the video was depicted as supplementary material that was collected for insurance purposes. The homeowner was portrayed by a male actor in his mid-twenties. The script for the interview was written by the experimenter for the purposes of the current study and was based on real-life fire victim interviews from news reports. In addition, the script was written in such a way that the video would be equally believable across all of the nine conditions.

Measures

Emotional Response Scale. A modified version of the Emotional Response Scale (ERS) was used to assess participants' own emotional reactions as well as participants' projections of the homeowner's emotional reactions. The ERS was first introduced by Coke, Batson, and McDavis (1978) to measure empathic concern and has been used by other researchers in its original or a modified form to measure empathy and sympathy (Barnett, Tetreault, Esper, & Bristow, 1986; Batson, Early, & Salvarani, 1997; Batson, O'Quin, Fultz, Vanderplas, & Isen, 1983; Small & Simonsohn, 2008). Previous research indicates moderate ($\alpha = .82$; Small & Simonsohn, 2008) to high ($\alpha = .90$; Batson et al., 1983) reliability for this measure. Participants were asked to indicate on a 10-point scale (1 = *not at all*, 10 = *extremely*) the degree to which they believed that the homeowner felt each of a series of emotions. Using the same emotion words, they were asked to report how they felt, personally, while reading about the homeowner's

misfortune. For the remainder of the paper, I will refer to these groups of emotions as “target emotions” and “subject emotions”, respectively. For these two emotion rating tasks, participants gave ratings for the following emotions: *saddened, upset, frustrated, distressed, contented, regretful, anxious, tense, irritated*. Using a different emotion rating scale, the participants were asked to report the social emotions they felt about or toward the homeowner as they read the report and watched the interview. Participants rated the degree to which they felt the following emotions about or toward the homeowner: *concerned, critical, connected, compassionate, disapproving, supportive, similar, tender*.

Interpersonal Judgment Scale. Participants were asked to complete a slightly modified version of the Interpersonal Judgment Scale (IJS; Appendix B). Because participants were not asked to work with the homeowner on a subsequent experimental task, the item originally labeled “Working Together in an Experiment” was re-labeled “Working Together”. This measure was originally intended to assess four aspects of interpersonal judgment: liking, desire to interact, similarity, and other judgments (Stockert, 1994). For the current study, the IJS was used to measure participants’ interpersonal reactions to the homeowner’s enactment of the victim role following his misfortune.

Procedure

The present study was conducted online. After completing a separate study, participants were contacted via email and invited to participate in the current study. The email contained a link to the website where the study was conducted. To keep participants’ responses anonymous, the included link contained a randomly generated code for each participant.

Participants navigated to the study webpage using the link provided in the email. Upon reaching the overview page of the research study, participants were randomly assigned to one of

nine conditions using a block randomization procedure. On the first three pages, participants read and listened to a set of general instructions regarding their participation, an overview of the study, and an information statement regarding their rights and protections as research participants. On the following pages, participants were exposed to several pieces of information regarding a house fire that they were told had occurred recently. Participants read and listened to a brief overview of this information and a set of instructions before viewing the information itself.

The first of the pieces of information regarding the house fire was the incident report described above. Participants were told that this report was created shortly after the event occurred. After reading and listening to the incident report, participants viewed one of three photographs, each depicting a home that had experienced damage roughly equivalent to that described in the incident report. Participants then watched the video interview in which the homeowner described his experience of the events detailed in the report.

Immediately following the pages containing the details of the house fire, participants were asked to recall in their own words the events described in the incident report and the interview and then elaborate on the damage and property loss experienced by the homeowner. These narrative tasks were included with the intended goal of having participants elaborate on and become more emotionally connected to the homeowner and his experience, as well as to assess participants' effort and attentiveness and the effectiveness of the manipulations.

After completing the short narrative tasks, participants navigated through a series of pages containing questionnaire measures intended to assess their reactions to the homeowner and his misfortune. The first of these measures was the modified version of the Emotional Response Scale (ERS). The different ERS measures were presented on separate pages in the following

order: target emotions, subject emotions, and social emotions. After indicating their emotional responses to the misfortune, participants completed several attributional measures. These measures asked participants to indicate on a 10-point scale (1 = *not at all*, 10 = *extremely*) the degree to which the following four factors played a role in the misfortune experienced by the homeowner: bad luck, poor effort, bad judgment, and low intelligence.

On the following page, participants were asked to read about and rate the appropriateness of the help, assistance, and benefits that they were told the homeowner actually received or requested in the aftermath of the fire. Ratings were made on an 11-point scale (-5 to +5). Participants were instructed that positive numbers represented a response or request that was excessive or more than what the homeowner deserved and that negative numbers indicated that a response was insufficient or less than what the homeowner deserved. The information provided to the participants indicated that the homeowner

- held a fundraiser with members of his social group to help cover expenses not covered by insurance,
- began a support group for individuals who had experienced emotional or psychological trauma following a house fire,
- started an online blog that chronicles his recovery from the fire,
- received a few days off of work to handle various tasks related to the fire,
- requested further time off of work to cope with emotional trauma that he was experiencing as a result of the fire,
- received coverage from insurance for a certain percentage (10%, 55%, or 95%) of his losses, and
- was visited by his parents who were concerned for his well-being.

After responding to these items, participants completed the Interpersonal Judgment Scale (IJS; Appendix B). Next, participants responded to the primary dependent variables, the appropriateness of calling the homeowner a victim and the legitimacy of the homeowner's social and emotional benefits following his misfortune. The questions appeared as follows: (1) "To what degree do you feel that it is appropriate to call the homeowner a 'victim'?"; and (2) "To what degree do you feel that using the term 'victim' in this case would be a legitimate (fair, reasonable, appropriate) attempt by the homeowner to get financial or emotional support?". Both questions were measured on a 10-point Likert scale, with anchors *not at all appropriate* (1) and *extremely appropriate* (10) for question one and *not at all legitimate* (1) and *very legitimate* (10) for question two.

The next pages included several sets of ancillary measures. The first set of measures concerned the degree to which participants believed that the average person's impression of the homeowner would change if he engaged in certain behaviors or had certain experiences related to his victimhood. Participants rated these items on an 11-point scale (-5 to +5) with higher numbers indicating a positive change of impression and negative numbers indicating a negative change of impression. The homeowner's behaviors and experiences included his

- setting up a website to solicit donations and support,
- claiming physical or medical problems resulting from his experience,
- claiming psychological or emotional problems resulting from his experience,
- receiving donations that were collected by close friends and family on his behalf, and
- receiving donations that his coworkers collected from around the workplace to help aid his recovery.

Participants were then asked to indicate which of the following amounts and sources of support the homeowner should have received: (1) no support, (2) support from immediate family, (3) support from family and close friends, (4) support from family, friends, and coworkers, and (5) support from family, friends, coworkers, and the community at large. On the next page, participants indicated their reactions to various hypothetical victim role behaviors and benefits. For the first item on this page, participants were asked to supply a numerical value indicating the number of days off of work they believed the homeowner should have been allowed. All of the remaining items used 10-point scales, each with unique anchor terms.

Participants were asked to

- rate the appropriateness of the homeowner's social group raising donations to help his recovery (1 = *not at all appropriate*, 10 = *extremely appropriate*),
- indicate the percentage of the costs related to the misfortune that they believed insurance should have covered (1 = 10%, 10 = 100%),
- indicate how likely they would be to help the homeowner if he were a member of their community (1 = *not at all likely*, 10 = *very likely*), and
- report how responsible they thought the homeowner was for the incident (1 = *not at all*, 10 = *completely*).

The following page contained a set of three manipulation check variables. Participants were asked to: (1) select from four options the extent of the damage to the homeowner's residence as described in the incident report, (2) indicate the number of people living in the home at the time of the event, and (3) select from three options the condition of the home's electrical wiring as described in the incident report. In addition to these manipulation check questions, participants' activity on each page of the study was timed to ensure that participants gave

adequate consideration to each set of measures in the study. On the final page of the study, participants read a full explanation of the study's goals and manipulations and were thanked for their participation.

CHAPTER 3: RESULTS

Manipulation Checks

Before conducting preliminary analyses and tests of main hypotheses, I examined participants' responses to the manipulation check questions. A number of participants were removed from the study for failing to adequately respond. Participants failing to correctly indicate the number of people living in the house at the time of the event ($n = 8$) were removed from the sample as I believed an incorrect response to this question demonstrated a fundamental lack of attention during crucial portions of the study. The wording of the answer choices for the remaining two manipulation check questions were highly specific, thus making a correct response tantamount to knowing one's condition. Because of this high degree of specificity, participants who responded incorrectly to only one of these items were kept in the final dataset.¹ However, any participants providing incorrect responses to two or more of the three manipulation check questions ($n = 33$) were removed from the study.²

Preliminary Analyses

After removing participants who failed the manipulation checks, I performed several preliminary analyses. First, I inspected the outcome variables for deviations from normality. No noteworthy issues in skewness or kurtosis were observed. Next, I examined the correlations between all outcome variables to check for any unexpected or unusual relationships that might signal problems with the dependent measures. I found no relationships that operated counter to my expectations.

Next, I used factor analysis techniques (principal component analysis using direct oblimin rotation) to distill items within four groups of variables into a smaller set of latent variables for each group. Two of these groups consisted of emotion words from the ERS intended to index, separately, target emotions and subject emotions. For both the target emotion ratings and the subject emotion ratings, the factor analyses suggested a single factor containing all of the emotion words. The only term not included in these factor analyses was *contented*, which was excluded because it did not load strongly on the identified factor. These factors seem to represent the extent of negative emotions felt by the subject or projected on the target. The third group of variables consisted of the ERS terms intended to assess the observers' social emotions. The factor analysis of these items produced two distinct factors: (1) empathic emotions (e.g., compassionate); and (2) negative judgmental emotions (e.g., disapproving). The final set of variables contained the items from the IJS. This group of items produced a single factor indexing general liking of the homeowner. See table 1 for factor labels and item loadings.

For each of the factors above, a factor score was calculated for each participant. The regression method was used to transform the participants' raw responses to a standardized score reflecting the sum of the participants' weighted item responses. To recap, these factor scores are:

- Subject emotions – the negative emotions felt by participants after being exposed to the incident report and interview video.
- Target emotions – the negative emotions that participants believed the homeowner would have felt after the fire occurred.
- Empathic emotions – participants' level of empathic concern for the homeowner after being exposed to the incident report and interview video.

- Negative judgmental emotions – participants’ disapproving and critical feelings toward the homeowner.
- General liking – a general measure of interpersonal liking for the homeowner.

As previously discussed, participants also responded to a set of attributional measures and a number of items assessing their reactions to various victim role behaviors. Because these groups of items did not relate conceptually to any underlying constructs, they were not subjected to dimension reduction techniques.

Tests of the Main Hypotheses

I conducted primary analyses using 2-way univariate or multivariate analyses of variance (ANOVA) with misfortune severity and culpability as predictors. Tukey’s HSD post-hoc test was employed to determine differences between groups. Unless otherwise specified, these techniques were used in all of the following analyses.

Emotional responses. After testing the main hypotheses, I assessed the effects of misfortune severity and culpability on emotional reactions to the homeowner. First, I examined effects of misfortune and culpability on ratings of target emotions. There was a significant main effect of misfortune severity, $F(2, 352) = 11.38, p < .001$. Participants expected that target emotions would be significantly more negative when the homeowner experienced a highly severe misfortune ($M = .33, SD = .87$) than when misfortune severity was low ($M = -.21, SD = .97$) or moderate ($M = -.14, SD = 1.07$), with no significant differences between low and moderate conditions. There was no main effect for culpability, $F(2, 352) = 1.25, p = .29$, and the interaction of culpability and misfortune severity on target emotions was not significant, $F(4, 352) = .31, p = .87$.

A similar pattern of results occurred for subject emotions. Again, there was a significant main effect of misfortune severity, $F(2, 352) = 7.87, p < .001$. Reports of subject emotions were significantly more negative when misfortune severity was high ($M = .26, SD = 1.05$) than when misfortune severity was low ($M = -.25, SD = .93$). Subject emotions in the moderate severity condition ($M = -.03, SD = .95$) did not differ from those in the low or high conditions. Again, there was no main effect for culpability, $F(2, 352) = .54, p = .58$, and no interaction of culpability and misfortune severity, $F(4, 352) = 1.05, p = .38$.

Next, I tested the influence of misfortune severity and culpability on participants' social emotions regarding the homeowner and his experience. I found significant main effects of both misfortune severity, $F(2, 352) = 7.44, p < .01$, and culpability, $F(2, 352) = 10.41, p < .001$, on empathic emotions. For misfortune severity, participants felt significantly greater empathic emotion when misfortune severity was either moderate ($M = .03, SD = 1.06$) or high ($M = .22, SD = .95$) than when it was low ($M = -.27, SD = .95$). The difference between moderate and high conditions was not significant. For the main effect of culpability, participants reported stronger empathic emotions for the homeowner at low ($M = .26, SD = .99$) and moderate ($M = .07, SD = .96$) levels of culpability compared to high levels of culpability ($M = -.31, SD = .97$), with no differences existing between low and moderate conditions. The interaction of misfortune severity and culpability on empathic emotions was not significant, $F(4, 352) = .41, p = .80$.

An analysis of the effects of misfortune severity and culpability on participants' negative judgmental emotions toward the homeowner revealed a main effect of culpability, $F(2, 352) = 28.78, p < .001$. Participants reported stronger negative judgmental emotions toward the homeowner at moderate ($M = .15, SD = 1.01$) and high ($M = .35, SD = .94$) levels of culpability compared to low levels of culpability ($M = -.51, SD = .85$). No differences occurred between

moderate and high culpability conditions. There was no main effect of misfortune severity, $F(2, 352) = .37, p = .69$, and the interaction of misfortune severity and culpability was not significant, $F(4, 352) = .88, p = .48$.

Attributional judgments. For these analyses, only the results of significant multivariate and univariate tests will be reported. As no interactions occurred, means and standard deviations are displayed in separate tables for misfortune severity (Table 2) and culpability (Table 3). There were significant multivariate main effects of both misfortune severity, Wilks' $\Lambda = .94, F(8, 692) = 2.89, p < .01$, and culpability, Wilks' $\Lambda = .44, F(8, 692) = 44.20, p < .001$, on attributions of bad luck, poor effort, bad judgment, and low intelligence. Misfortune severity had a significant effect on attributions of bad luck, $F(2, 349) = 6.14, p < .01$, such that attributions of bad luck were greater for more severe misfortunes. Culpability had a significant influence on bad luck, $F(2, 349) = 47.24, p < .001$, poor effort, $F(2, 349) = 100.54, p < .001$, bad judgment, $F(2, 349) = 193.42, p < .001$, and low intelligence, $F(2, 349) = 39.36, p < .001$, such that attributions of bad luck were lower and attributions of poor effort, bad judgment, and low intelligence were higher when the homeowner was more culpable for the misfortune.

General liking. There was a significant main effect of culpability, $F(2, 352) = 33.13, p < .001$, but not misfortune severity, $F(2, 352) = .89, p = .41$, on ratings of general liking. Participants reported liking the homeowner most in the low culpability condition ($M = .52, SD = .90$), followed by the moderate culpability condition ($M = -.08, SD = .97$), with reports of liking being lowest in the high culpability condition ($M = -.43, SD = .90$). All differences between groups were significant. Lastly, the interaction of misfortune severity and culpability was not significant, $F(4, 352) = .51, p = .73$.

Legitimacy of victim role. The main hypotheses in the current study concerned the degree to which misfortune severity and culpability would impact the appropriateness of calling the homeowner a victim as well as the benefits that he accrued as a result of his victim status. I first examined the effects of misfortune and culpability on perceptions of the homeowner as a victim. I found main effects for both misfortune severity, $F(2, 350) = 21.46, p < .001$, and culpability, $F(2, 350) = 44.67, p < .001$. Consistent with my hypotheses, participants felt it was significantly more appropriate to call the homeowner a victim when misfortune severity was moderate ($M = 5.93, SD = 2.49$) or high ($M = 6.54, SD = 2.40$) compared to when misfortune severity was low ($M = 4.74, SD = 2.14$). No differences occurred between moderate and high conditions. Also consistent with my hypotheses, increasing levels of culpability led to decreasing ratings of appropriateness of the victim label, with significant differences occurring between low ($M = 7.09, SD = 2.17$), moderate ($M = 5.73, SD = 2.27$), and high ($M = 4.53, SD = 2.23$) culpability conditions. The interaction of misfortune severity and culpability was not significant, $F(4, 350) = .18, p = .95$.

Next, I examined the effects of misfortune severity and culpability on the legitimacy of the homeowner's social and emotional benefits. I observed significant main effects for both misfortune severity, $F(2, 351) = 21.57, p < .001$, and culpability, $F(2, 351) = 27.11, p < .001$. As expected, the homeowner's benefits were perceived as more legitimate as the severity of misfortune increased, with significant differences occurring between low ($M = 4.39, SD = 2.48$), moderate ($M = 5.49, SD = 2.45$), and high ($M = 6.31, SD = 2.41$) misfortune severities. In addition, participants significantly differentiated between three levels of culpability, with the homeowner's benefits being perceived as most legitimate at low levels of culpability ($M = 6.54, SD = 2.28$), followed by moderate culpability ($M = 5.39, SD = 2.45$), with benefits being

perceived as least appropriate at high levels of culpability ($M = 4.39$, $SD = 2.49$). The interaction of misfortune severity and culpability on reactions to the homeowner's benefits was not significant, $F(4, 351) = .61$, $p = .65$.

Victim role behaviors. The next set of analyses concerned the effects of misfortune severity and culpability on a variety of ancillary measures regarding the homeowner's enactment of the victim role. For this section, only the results of significant multivariate and univariate tests will be reported. As no interactions occurred, means and standard deviations are displayed in separate tables for misfortune severity (Table 2) and culpability (Table 3).

First, I assessed the degree to which different levels of culpability and misfortune severity would affect participants' opinions about the average person's impression of the homeowner if he engaged in certain victim role behaviors. There was a significant main effect of misfortune severity on ratings of the average person's impressions, Wilks' $\Lambda = .93$, $F(10, 690) = 2.74$, $p < .01$, such that impressions of the homeowner were generally more positive when his misfortune was more severe. Misfortune severity impacted ratings of impression change for several hypothetical behaviors on the part of the homeowner, including making a website chronicling his experiences, $F(2, 349) = 6.40$, $p < .01$, claiming medical problems as a result of the misfortune, $F(2, 349) = 3.90$, $p < .05$, receiving aid from a fundraiser put on by his close friends and family, $F(2, 349) = 5.84$, $p < .01$, claiming emotional or psychological problems as a result of the misfortune, $F(2, 349) = 8.50$, $p < .001$, and receiving donations from coworkers, $F(2, 349) = 7.22$, $p < .01$. The effect of culpability was not significant, Wilks' $\Lambda = .97$, $F(10, 690) = 1.22$, $p = .27$.

Next, I considered the degree to which misfortune severity and culpability influenced participants' ratings of appropriateness of various victim role behaviors and related benefits.

There were multivariate main effects of both misfortune severity, Wilks' $\Lambda = .78$, $F(10, 684) = 8.86$, $p < .001$, and culpability, Wilks' $\Lambda = .28$, $F(10, 684) = 60.79$, $p < .001$, such that the homeowner's behaviors and benefits were viewed more positively when his misfortune was severe and, separately, when his culpability was low. Misfortune severity had a significant effect on participants' estimations of how many days off work were appropriate for the homeowner, $F(2, 346) = 12.54$, $p < .001$, how appropriate it would be for the homeowner's social group to raise donations on behalf of the homeowner, $F(2, 346) = 37.67$, $p < .001$, the appropriate percentage of insurance coverage for the misfortune, $F(2, 346) = 7.32$, $p < .01$, and how willing participants would be to help the homeowner, $F(2, 346) = 18.47$, $p < .001$. Culpability had a similar impact on ratings of the appropriateness of victim role behaviors, with significant effects for days off of work, $F(2, 346) = 5.83$, $p < .01$, donations raised by the homeowner's social group, $F(2, 346) = 6.16$, $p < .01$, insurance coverage, $F(2, 346) = 326.00$, $p < .001$, willingness to help the homeowner, $F(2, 346) = 22.46$, $p < .001$, as well as perceived responsibility for the misfortune, $F(2, 346) = 211.69$, $p < .001$.

Lastly, I examined the effects of misfortune severity and culpability on participants' ratings of the amount and sources of support the homeowner should receive. A univariate analysis of variance revealed significant effects of misfortune severity, $F(2, 352) = 28.01$, $p < .001$, and culpability, $F(2, 352) = 15.79$, $p < .001$, such that more severe misfortunes were associated with more help and higher culpability was associated with less help.

In addition to the previously reported analyses, I assessed the influence of misfortune severity and culpability on participants' reactions to several victim role behaviors that the homeowner was purported to actually have engaged in following his misfortune. Although I found significant multivariate and univariate effects, a closer inspection of the means suggests

that participants did not fully understand these measures. For example, a significant main effect of misfortune severity on perceptions of the homeowner's request for more days to cope with his experience revealed that participants felt that this request was more excessive when the misfortune severity was high ($M = 7.07, SD = 2.41$) than when it was low ($M = 5.59, SD = 3.12$). Because the means for all of the significantly affected items showed a similar reversal of my expectations, my confidence in the reliability of these measures was diminished and I chose not to interpret them further.

Exploratory Analyses

To more fully understand the factors influencing perceived legitimacy of the victim role and its associated rewards, I conducted a series of exploratory analyses using linear regression. Because the experimental conditions representing increasing severity of misfortune and level of culpability corresponded to increasing numerical values (e.g., severity of misfortune: low = 1, moderate = 2, high = 3), I treated the grouping variables as continuous predictors in these analyses. I first regressed the appropriateness of the victim label on continuous measures of misfortune severity and culpability using the enter method. The overall model was significant, $R^2 = .27, F(2, 356) = 67.00, p < .001$. Both culpability ($\beta = -.43, p < .001$) and misfortune severity ($\beta = .29, p < .001$) were significant predictors of appropriateness of the victim label. I then regressed the legitimacy of the homeowner's social and emotional benefits on misfortune severity and culpability. Again, the overall model was significant, $R^2 = .21, F(2, 357) = 48.11, p < .001$. Both culpability ($\beta = -.34, p < .001$) and misfortune severity ($\beta = .30, p < .001$) significantly predicted the legitimacy of the homeowner's benefits. These results replicated the findings of the analyses of variance concerning the effects of culpability and misfortune severity on appraisals of victimhood and judgments about victim role benefits.

Next, I conducted hierarchical linear regression analyses with the inclusion of the factor-analyzed variables and attributional measures. I regressed appropriateness of the victim label on several blocks of variables, each using the enter method (see Table 4 for regression statistics). The first block contained the manipulated independent variables, misfortune severity and degree of culpability. The second block contained the four emotion variables: target emotions, subject emotions, empathic emotions, and negative judgmental emotions. The third block contained the attributional measures: bad luck, low intelligence, poor effort, and bad judgment. The fourth block contained the variable indexing general liking. The final model was significant, $R^2 = .51$, $F(10, 345) = 36.42$, $p < .001$. Significant predictors of victim label appropriateness (sorted by standardized beta size) were empathic emotions, general liking, negative judgmental emotions, misfortune severity, homeowner culpability, attributions of bad luck, and target emotions. An identical analysis was conducted with legitimacy of the homeowner's benefits as the dependent variable (see Table 5 for regression statistics). Again, the overall model was significant, $R^2 = .39$, $F(11, 345) = 20.31$, $p < .001$. Significant predictors of legitimacy of the homeowner's benefits (sorted by standardized beta size) were empathic emotions, misfortune severity, negative judgmental emotions, general liking, attributions of bad luck, subject emotions, and attributions of low intelligence.

CHAPTER 4: DISCUSSION

The goal of the current study was to assess the effects of severity of misfortune and degree of culpability on the perceived legitimacy of an individual's victimhood following a negative life event. Several predictions were associated with this goal. First, I expected that the appropriateness of calling the target a victim and the legitimacy of his social or emotional rewards would decrease as his degree of culpability for the misfortune increased. Second, I predicted that increasing levels of misfortune severity would produce the opposite effect, with participants rating the victim label as more appropriate and his benefits as more legitimate at higher levels of misfortune. These two predictions received strong support. Lastly, I expected an interaction of misfortune severity and degree of culpability such that the effect of culpability would decrease in potency as the severity of the misfortune increased. In other words, culpability would produce the predicted linear pattern of responses, but only at lower levels of misfortune severity. The results of the current investigation did not support this prediction.

The results of this study provide novel insight into the influence of culpability and misfortune severity on emotional, cognitive, and behavioral responses to individuals who have experienced misfortune. When considered independently, increasing severity of misfortune and rising levels of culpability influenced responses to the homeowner much as one would predict based on intuition. However, the observed nonsignificant interaction of these two factors is less intuitive. Whereas one might expect that the influence of culpability on responses to individuals who have experienced misfortune would weaken at a certain level of misfortune, it appears that these two variables do not depend on each other whatsoever, but rather operate uniquely and

independently to affect responses to and appraisals of individuals as victims. To put this in the terms used in my hypothesis, it seems that there is no level of severity of misfortune at which a victim's culpability ceases to be a potent influence on perceptions of victims. In the context of the current study, this means that even when the homeowner lost his entire home and all of his possessions, participants were still sensitive to his degree of culpability for the misfortune. These findings directly conflict with the predictions and results of previous examinations of the relationship between severity of misfortune and degree of culpability (e.g., Adams-Price, 2004; Stokols & Schopler, 1973) and suggest that further research on this relationship is needed.

Based on these findings, one might assume that the decision-making process underlying judgments about victim legitimacy is fairly straightforward, consisting of only two components: (1) an independent assessment of culpability such that as a person's responsibility for a misfortune increases, their relative legitimacy as a victim decreases; and (2) an independent assessment of the severity of a misfortune such that a more severe misfortune confers greater legitimacy. However, the exploratory analyses that I conducted suggest that decisions about victim legitimacy are somewhat more complicated, with numerous other factors playing a role in how people think about and perceive victims. When general liking, attributional measures, and emotion measures were considered as predictors alongside degree of culpability and severity of misfortune, a total of seven variables significantly predicted a unique portion of the variance in both the appropriateness of calling the homeowner a victim and the legitimacy of his receiving victim benefits. This suggests that individuals simultaneously engage in several disparate processes (e.g., assessments of liking, attributions of bad luck, empathic emotional responses) when interacting with an individual who has experienced a misfortune. By revealing the constellation of factors that push and pull on observers' decisions about what constitutes a

legitimate victim, these analyses illustrate the complex nature of victimhood and help to explain the often counterintuitive ways that people respond to victims.

In addition, the results of the exploratory analyses raise questions about other possible influences on judgments about victimhood. After accounting for the effects of culpability and misfortune severity, it appears that participants' emotional responses, attributions, and feelings of general liking for the homeowner have some additional influence on perceptions of victimhood beyond that which can be explained by the study's manipulations. This suggests that there must be factors outside of those considered in this investigation that contributed to participants' judgments about the homeowner. Furthermore, because participants' emotional responses, attributions, and feelings of general liking had independent and unique effects on perceptions of victimhood, it seems unlikely that this other source of variance functioned similarly across the various measures in the study. One possibility is that this factor or group of factors represents some individual difference variable that was not accounted for in the current study. It is also possible that the current investigation overlooked some crucial aspect of the homeowner's misfortune that helps to explain appraisals of the homeowner as a victim and judgments about the legitimacy of his victim role benefits. Further research is needed to identify and more fully understand this other source of variance and its influence on perceptions of victimhood.

One noteworthy aspect of the current study is that participants seemed to have a relatively coherent response to victims. By this, I mean that when significant effects of severity of misfortune and degree of culpability did occur, they functioned in a consistent and predictable way across measures. For instance, at higher levels of misfortune severity, participants reported stronger empathic emotions, greater appropriateness of victim role behaviors, and more positive changes in the average person's impression of the homeowner. Likewise, increased culpability

was associated with weaker empathic emotions, less general liking, and lower ratings of the appropriateness of victim role behaviors. Importantly, these general trends mirror those observed for appraisals of the homeowner as a victim and judgments about the legitimacy of the benefits he received. Considered together, these findings provide some indication of the types of cognitive, emotional, and behavioral responses that are fitting for individuals who qualify for the victim role.

Another interesting outcome of the current study is that degree of culpability and severity of misfortune had differential effects on interpersonal responses to the homeowner. Whereas participants' ratings of general liking decreased and attributions of poor effort, bad judgment, and low intelligence increased at higher levels of culpability, these measures did not appear to be affected by the severity of the homeowner's misfortune. This discrepancy may be due in part to differences in the degree to which the manipulations of culpability and misfortune severity were suggestive of the homeowner's qualities outside of the misfortune scenario. For example, at higher levels of culpability, the homeowner was described as engaging in risky and deviant behaviors such as disregarding home inspectors' recommendations and tampering with his fuse box. These actions provide some insight into the homeowner's character and suggest that he may be similarly deviant in other areas of his life. In contrast, the manipulation of misfortune severity was somewhat more objective and quantitative and, thus, did not reveal any information about the homeowner that would warrant consideration on an interpersonal level. Although the unique effects of culpability and misfortune severity were not included in my predictions, these results seem reasonable when considered from this perspective.

As mentioned previously, there seems to be some disagreement in the literature as to whether blameless victims evoke empathic responses from observers, resulting in various social

or emotional benefits (e.g., Weiner et al., 1988), or whether they pose a threat to observers, resulting in derogation and attributions of blame (e.g., Hafer, 2000). The present study lends support to the body of research suggesting that blameless victims are perceived more positively than culpable victims. There are a couple of reasons that this might be the case. On the one hand, it could be that in the context of this investigation, blameless victims did not threaten participants' belief in a just world, instead evoking a genuine empathic response that led to greater perceptions of legitimacy. Given the consistency of participants' responses to the homeowner's culpability, this scenario seems likely. On the other hand, it is possible that two aspects of the study's design negated any possible just world effects. First, the incident reports used in the current study indicated that a professional insurance adjustor had determined an explicit level of culpability on the part of the homeowner. This information likely removed any ambiguity associated with the homeowner's misfortune that could have threatened just world beliefs. Second, participants were led to believe that the homeowner was compensated for his losses in proportion to his degree of culpability. Perhaps the combined effects of these two aspects of the study eliminated any need to derogate the homeowner as a means of reducing just world threat. Future studies of this kind could explore this possibility further by including a condition in which no explicit information concerning culpability or compensation is provided in reference to a blameless victim.

In addition, the outcomes of the current study have broader implications for research on the relationship between culpability and victims. As previously discussed, most studies in this area of research tend to consider culpability as a dichotomous factor (i.e., *blameless* vs. *culpable*) and have not examined the possible effects of partial or ambiguous culpability. The current investigation revealed minimal unique effects associated with partial culpability, suggesting that

the standard approach to studying culpability in the literature is in most cases valid. Furthermore, because degree of culpability and severity of misfortune do not appear to interact, there is little reason to expect that any previously reported effects attributed to culpability could instead be the result of the unique influence of culpability at a given severity of misfortune. However, it is worth noting that for several dependent measures, responses at moderate levels of culpability were minimally different from responses at either low or high levels of culpability. Thus, in these instances, considering only two levels of culpability (e.g., low vs. moderate, moderate vs. high) would have missed an effect. Future research on this topic should take this into consideration when devising culpability manipulations.

Limitations

Although the current study provides novel insight into the factors and processes that influence perceptions of individuals as legitimate victims, there are a number of limitations that could have impacted the study's outcomes. One possible limitation is that participants could have experienced confusion when completing the measures regarding the appropriateness of the homeowner's actual behaviors and benefits following his misfortune, thus leading to biased or altered responding on subsequent measures. This is especially worrisome given that these measures immediately preceded the IJS, a significant predictor of legitimacy, as well as the primary dependent measures. However, because participants responded with great consistency to the remaining measures in the study, it seems unlikely that their misinterpretation of the aforementioned measures had any deleterious effects on the outcome of the study as a whole.

Another potential limitation to the current study is the lack of an assessment of participants' suspicions about the materials that were created for this investigation. Without this information, there is no way to be sure that participants found the details of the misfortune

believable, perceived the incident reports as being legitimate documentation from an insurance company, or believed that the homeowner (who, admittedly, had a very youthful appearance) could legitimately be the owner of the house. Additionally, although participants were asked to report the degree to which they felt the homeowner's actions led to the fire, there was not a question assessing how severe they perceived the misfortune to be. Subjective assessments of misfortune severity could have offered unique perspectives on victimhood in addition to those that were offered by the manipulated severity of misfortune variable. These considerations will be useful in designing future studies.

Lastly, there is the conceptual concern of whether my questions regarding the appropriateness of the victim label and the legitimacy of the homeowner's benefits adequately captured the phenomenological experience of deciding whether or not a person is a victim. For instance, whereas I conceptualized victim legitimacy on a spectrum, it is possible that decisions about victimhood in real-life situations more closely resemble a sorting process (i.e., "victim" vs. "non-victim"). If decisions about victimhood are made this way, it might be more pertinent to ask "How confident are you in your decision to call this person a 'victim'?" than to ask "To what degree do you feel that it is appropriate to call the homeowner a 'victim'?". More research is necessary to explore the validity of these two perspectives on decisions about victim legitimacy.

Conclusion

The current study represents one of the first empirical attempts to elucidate the processes underlying appraisals of individuals as victims. Although previous studies of victimhood have examined the impact of various observer, victim, and situational variables on responses to individuals who have experienced misfortunes, few have integrated the disparate social psychological findings regarding victims into a more complete understanding of the victim role

itself. The results of the present investigation indicate that although severity of misfortune and degree of culpability play a role in appraisals of others as victims, their contributions to this decision-making process are independent and unique. Additionally, this study suggests that there is likely a multi-faceted, but somewhat coherent, structure to both victimhood and observers' responses to the victim role. Although this investigation provides novel perspectives on victimhood, further research is needed to more fully understand the role of severity of misfortune and degree of culpability in people's perceptions of others as victims.

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FOOTNOTES

¹ To ensure that the results of the experiment were not biased by allowing participants with one failed manipulation check question to remain in the sample, the same preliminary analyses and tests of main hypotheses were conducted on a sample that excluded these individuals. With one exception, the outcomes were the same in both cases. Whereas the multivariate main effect of misfortune severity on the attributional measures was significant in the reported findings, this result was nonsignificant when excluding participants who failed only one of the manipulation check questions. Because the trimmed sample contained nearly 90 fewer participants, this difference is likely due to a drop in power for this analysis.

² Preliminary analyses and tests of main hypotheses were conducted on a sample that contained all of the participants who provided complete records, including those who failed two or more of the manipulation check questions. Although there were minor fluctuations in dependent variable means and the results of post hoc tests, these analyses produced similar results. Only one analysis produced different results. In both samples, there was a significant multivariate main effect of misfortune severity on variables concerning change in impression. However, whereas univariate tests of change in impression following the homeowner's report of physical or medical claims were significant in the reported findings, the outcome of this test in the full sample was nonsignificant.

TABLES

Table 1

Results of factor analysis

Emotion Word	Emotions				General Liking
	Target	Subject ^a	Social	Judgmental	
Anxious	.757	.835			
Distressed	.854	.883			
Frustrated	.830	.828			
Irritated	.778	.743			
Regretful	.553	.668			
Saddened	.768	.727			
Tense	.835	.883			
Upset	.863	.834			
Compassionate			.865		
Concerned			.756		
Connected			.684		
Similar			.591		
Supportive			.858		
Tender			.849		
Disapproving				.846	
Critical				.849	
Well Adjusted					.692
Knowledge of Current Events					.717
Perceived Morality of Victim					.667
Liking					.803
Similarity					.749
Intelligence					.697
Desire to work together					.820

^a Target emotions and subject emotions are separate and distinct factors, but are based on the same emotion terms. To avoid redundancy, they are presented here together.

Table 2

Means (standard deviations) for the influence of misfortune severity on attributional judgments and victim role behaviors

	Low	Moderate	High
<u>Attributional Measures</u>			
Bad luck	4.82 _a (2.78)	6.01 _b (2.77)	5.48 _{a,b} (3.04)
Poor effort	5.36 (2.90)	5.63 (2.83)	5.30 (3.02)
Bad judgment	5.67 (3.17)	5.66 (2.97)	5.67 (3.22)
Low intelligence	3.72 (2.55)	3.33 (2.41)	3.98 (2.74)
<u>Change in Impression</u>			
Making a website	4.70 _a (2.39)	5.28 _{a,b} (2.33)	5.78 _b (2.47)
Claims medical problems	4.11 _a (2.20)	4.86 _b (2.47)	4.86 _b (2.33)
Friends/family fundraiser	5.99 _a (2.49)	6.49 _{a,b} (2.26)	7.02 _b (2.41)
Claims psychological problems	3.95 _a (2.07)	4.66 _b (2.47)	5.12 _b (2.19)
Donations from coworkers	5.59 _a (2.47)	6.45 _b (2.21)	6.71 _b (2.41)
<u>Perceived Appropriateness</u>			
Number of days off work	4.40 _a (4.67)	7.43 _b (7.44)	9.24 _b (9.75)
Donations from social group	4.60 _a (2.26)	6.16 _b (2.15)	7.01 _c (2.13)
Insurance coverage	5.30 _a (3.12)	6.23 _b (2.89)	6.09 _b (2.78)
Willingness to help	4.92 _a (2.49)	6.07 _b (2.36)	6.74 _b (2.38)
Perceived responsibility	5.83 (3.30)	5.61 (3.14)	5.73 (3.10)
<u>Support Received by Homeowner</u>			
Amount and sources of support	2.96 _a (.81)	3.37 _b (.84)	3.79 _c (.97)

Note. Means with different subscripts are significantly different from each other as indicated by Tukey's HSD post-hoc test. Means sharing subscripts are not significantly different.

Table 3

Means (standard deviations) for the influence of culpability on attributional judgments and victim role behaviors

	Low	Moderate	High
<u>Attributional Measures</u>			
Bad luck	7.22 _a (2.62)	5.04 _b (2.73)	4.10 _c (2.44)
Poor effort	2.98 _a (2.25)	6.32 _b (2.45)	6.97 _b (2.29)
Bad judgment	2.55 _a (1.97)	6.72 _b (2.54)	7.70 _c (1.93)
Low intelligence	2.20 _a (1.70)	3.99 _b (2.54)	4.83 _c (2.65)
<u>Change in Impression</u>			
Making a website	5.61 (2.17)	5.36 (2.58)	4.85 (2.50)
Claims medical problems	4.90 (2.27)	4.55 (2.37)	4.42 (2.42)
Friends/family fundraiser	6.75 (2.21)	6.67 (2.40)	6.16 (2.59)
Claims psychological problems	5.01 (2.20)	4.48 (2.29)	4.30 (2.35)
Donations from coworkers	6.63 (2.09)	6.31 (2.53)	5.88 (2.53)
<u>Perceived Appropriateness</u>			
Number of days off work	8.43 _a (9.62)	7.81 _a (8.80)	5.18 _b (3.93)
Donations from social group	6.48 _a (2.34)	5.87 _{a,b} (2.34)	5.52 _b (2.41)
Insurance coverage	8.94 _a (1.41)	5.49 _b (1.71)	3.29 _c (2.09)
Willingness to help	6.95 _a (2.06)	5.92 _b (2.51)	4.98 _c (2.56)
Perceived responsibility	2.50 _a (2.15)	6.79 _b (2.22)	7.87 _c (2.06)
<u>Support Received by Homeowner</u>			
Amount and sources of support	3.68 _a (.91)	3.43 _a (.91)	3.06 _b (.91)

Note. Means with different subscripts are significantly different from each other as indicated by Tukey's HSD post-hoc test. Means sharing subscripts are not significantly different.

Table 4

Hierarchical regression of victim label appropriateness on misfortune severity, culpability, and factor-analyzed variables

Predictor	ΔR^2	Model <i>F</i>	<i>b</i>	<i>SE</i>	β
Model 1	.272***	66.03***			
Misfortune severity			.88	.14	.29***
Homeowner culpability			-1.28	.14	-.43***
Model 2	.188***	49.53***			
Misfortune severity			.65	.12	.22***
Homeowner culpability			-.74	.13	-.25***
Target emotions			.18	.10	.07
Subject emotions			-.29	.12	-.12*
Negative judgmental emotions			-.69	.11	-.28***
Empathic emotions			1.00	.13	.41***
Model 3	.022**	35.79***			
Misfortune severity			.64	.12	.21***
Homeowner culpability			-.48	.15	-.16**
Target emotions			.19	.10	.08
Subject emotions			-.26	.12	-.11*
Negative judgmental emotions			-.53	.13	-.21***
Empathic emotions			.86	.13	.35***
Bad luck			.13	.04	.15**
Low intelligence			-.05	.05	-.06
Poor effort			-.05	.05	-.06
Model 4	.031***	36.42***			
Misfortune severity			.62	.12	.21***
Homeowner culpability			-.45	.15	-.15**
Target emotions			.23	.10	.09*
Subject emotions			-.18	.12	-.08
Negative judgmental emotions			-.51	.12	-.21***
Empathic emotions			.62	.14	.25***
Bad luck			.12	.04	.14**
Low intelligence			.03	.05	.03
Poor effort			-.02	.05	-.02
General liking			.60	.13	.24***

Note. The variable concerning attributions of bad judgment was removed from this analysis because of tolerance violations.

* $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$. *** $p < .001$.

Table 5

Hierarchical regression of legitimacy of victim role benefits on misfortune severity, culpability, and factor-analyzed variables

Predictor	ΔR^2	Model <i>F</i>	<i>b</i>	<i>SE</i>	β
Model 1	.204***	45.46***			
Misfortune severity			.93	.15	.30***
Homeowner culpability			-1.04	.15	-.34***
Model 2	.142***	30.20***			
Misfortune severity			.75	.14	.24***
Homeowner culpability			-.57	.15	-.19***
Target emotions			.20	.12	.08
Subject emotions			-.41	.14	-.16**
Negative judgmental emotions			-.61	.13	.35***
Empathic emotions			.89	.14	-.24***
Model 3	.029**	20.81***			
Misfortune severity			.72	.14	.23***
Homeowner culpability			-.27	.19	-.09
Target emotions			.19	.12	.08
Subject emotions			-.43	.14	-.17**
Negative judgmental emotions			-.53	.15	-.21***
Empathic emotions			.81	.15	.32***
Bad luck			.15	.04	.17**
Low intelligence			.07	.06	.07
Poor effort			-.01	.06	-.02
Bad judgment			-.07	.07	-.09
Model 4	.018**	20.31***			
Misfortune severity			.70	.14	.23***
Homeowner culpability			-.24	.18	-.08
Target emotions			.22	.12	.09
Subject emotions			-.37	.14	-.14*
Negative judgmental emotions			-.52	.14	-.20***
Empathic emotions			.62	.16	.24***
Bad luck			.14	.04	.16**
Low intelligence			.13	.06	.13*
Poor effort			.01	.06	.01
Bad judgment			-.07	.07	-.09
General liking			.47	.15	.18**

* $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$. *** $p < .001$.

APPENDIX A

Subject: Expanded 72-hour Report
Homewood, AL Fire; September 5, 2012

To: Designated Agency Safety and Health Official

THE FOLLOWING INFORMATION IS PRELIMINARY AND SUBJECT TO CHANGE

Location: Homewood, AL.

Date of Occurrence: September 5, 2012.

Time of Occurrence: Approximately 8:15 PM.

Number of Injured: None.

Number of Fatalities: None.

Property Damage: Moderate structural damage in kitchen area and adjacent rooms.

Summary of Events:

On September 5th, 2012 at approximately 8:15 PM, the sole resident of the house was at home conducting typical daily activities (i.e., watching television, completing household chores). Expert analysis suggests that the event was precipitated when faulty wiring in the kitchen began to spark, catching fire to an inner wall of the room. According to witness reports, the fire spread to one of the appliances in the room, leading to an explosion encompassing the entire kitchen area. The explosion resulted in moderate structural damage, isolated to the resident's kitchen and surrounding rooms.

Once outside the home, the homeowner placed a 911 call and firefighters were dispatched. The firefighter team arrived within 15 minutes and began work to contain the fire. The team entered the home to suppress the fire at its source, but was unable to keep the fire isolated to the kitchen area. The fire caused moderate structural damage to the kitchen, destroying the kitchen structures (i.e., cabinets, island), ruining the appliances, and burning through an inner wall. The fire spread from the kitchen to adjacent rooms, tarnishing the walls with smoke and causing damage to the carpeting and furniture before firefighters were able to contain it.

Causes, Contributing Factors, and Liability:

Home inspection records from the owner's recent purchase of the house indicate that the home was generally in compliance with current safety and health standards, but that the electrical wiring was fairly old and unreliable. Inspectors encouraged the owner to have the wiring replaced immediately and to take caution in moving in as moderate to high levels of electrical use could overload the existing circuitry. The owner confirmed that he understood the inspector's warnings and moved in as planned. Post-event analysis suggests that the initial spark that caused the fire was most likely due to circuitry overload resulting from extensive electrical use.

Conclusion:

The resident was able to escape the house without injury and the fire was contained before spreading to the remainder of the house. The event resulted in moderate structural damage to the kitchen and surrounding rooms. In addition to the loss of property and damage to his appliances, professional restoration will be necessary and the resident will be required to leave his home for a week, possibly two. Lastly, expert examination suggests that the building inspector accurately assessed the substandard wiring and provided adequate warning to the owner. The owner is partially at fault for the events that transpired because he (a) ignored the inspector's report and (b) failed to avoid overloading the circuits. The insurance settlement will likely reflect this culpability.

Insured's Responsibility: 35%

APPENDIX B

Please give your first impression of the person with whom you will be interacting.

1. Intelligence (check one)

- 1 I believe that this person is very much above average in intelligence.
- 2 I believe that this person is above average in intelligence.
- 3 I believe that this person is slightly above average in intelligence.
- 4 I believe that this person is average in intelligence.
- 5 I believe that this person is slightly below average in intelligence.
- 6 I believe that this person is below average in intelligence.
- 7 I believe that this person is very much below average in intelligence.

2. Personal Feelings (check one)

- 1 I feel that I would probably like this person very much.
- 2 I feel that I would probably like this person.
- 3 I feel that I would probably like this person to a slight degree.
- 4 I feel that I would probably neither particularly like nor particularly dislike this person.
- 5 I feel that I would probably dislike this person to a slight degree.
- 6 I feel that I would probably dislike this person.
- 7 I feel that I would probably dislike this person very much.

3. Knowledge of Current Events (check one)

- 1 I believe that this person is very much below average in his (her) knowledge of current events.
- 2 I believe that this person is below average in his (her) knowledge of current events.
- 3 I believe that this person is slightly below average in his (her) knowledge of current events.
- 4 I believe that this person is average in his (her) knowledge of current events.
- 5 I believe that this person is slightly above average in his (her) knowledge of current events.
- 6 I believe that this person is above average in his (her) knowledge of current events.
- 7 I believe that this person is very much above average in his (her) knowledge of current events.

4. Similarity (check one)

- 1 I believe that this person is very similar to me.
- 2 I believe that this person is similar to me.
- 3 I believe that this person is somewhat similar to me.
- 4 I believe that this person is not particularly similar nor particularly dissimilar to me.
- 5 I believe that this person is somewhat dissimilar to me.
- 6 I believe that this person is dissimilar to me.
- 7 I believe that this person is very dissimilar to me.

5. Working Together (check one)

- 1 I believe that I would very much dislike working with this person in an experiment.
- 2 I believe that I would dislike working with this person in an experiment.
- 3 I believe that I would dislike working with this person in an experiment to a slight degree.
- 4 I believe that I would neither particularly dislike nor particularly enjoy working with this person in an experiment.
- 5 I believe that I would enjoy working with this person in an experiment to a slight degree.
- 6 I believe that I would enjoy working with this person in an experiment.
- 7 I believe that I would very much *enjoy* working with this person in an experiment.

6. Adjustment (check one)

- 1 I believe that this person is extremely maladjusted.
- 2 I believe that this person is maladjusted.
- 3 I believe that this person is maladjusted to a slight degree.
- 4 I believe that this person is neither particularly maladjusted nor particularly well adjusted.
- 5 I believe that this person is well adjusted to a slight degree.
- 6 I believe that this person is well adjusted.
- 7 I believe that this person is extremely well adjusted.

7. Morality (check one)

- 1 This person impresses me as being extremely moral.
- 2 This person impresses me as being moral.
- 3 This person impresses me as being moral to a slight degree.
- 4 This person impresses me as being neither particularly moral nor particularly immoral.
- 5 This person impresses me as being immoral to a slight degree.
- 6 This person impresses me as being immoral.
- 7 This person impresses me as being extremely immoral.

APPENDIX C

Office for Research

Institutional Review Board for the
Protection of Human Subjects

THE UNIVERSITY OF
ALABAMA
R E S E A R C H

February 3, 2015

James C. Hamilton, Ph.D.
Department of Psychology
College of Arts & Sciences
The University of Alabama
Box 870348

Re: IRB # 14-OR-006-R1 "At The Intersection of Blame and Magnitude of
Misfortune: What Makes A Victim?"

Dear Dr. Hamilton:

The University of Alabama Institutional Review Board has granted your
renewal application approval.

Your renewal application has been given expedited approval according to 45
CFR part 46. Approval has been given under expedited review category 7 as
outlined below:

*(7) Research on individual or group characteristics or behavior (including, but not limited
to, research on perception, cognition, motivation, identity, language, communication, cultural
beliefs or practices, and social behavior) or research employing survey, interview, oral
history, focus group, program evaluation, human factors evaluation, or quality assurance
methodologies.*

Your application will expire on February 2, 2016. If your research will
continue beyond this date, complete the relevant portions of the IRB
Renewal Application. If you wish to modify the application, complete the
Modification of an Approved Protocol Form. Changes in this study cannot
be initiated without IRB approval, except when necessary to eliminate
apparent immediate hazards to participants. When the study closes,
complete the appropriate portions of the IRB Study Closure Form.

Should you need to submit any further correspondence regarding this
proposal, please include the above application number.

Good luck with your research.

Sincerely,



Stuart Usdan, Ph.D.
Chair, Non-Medical Institutional Review Board
The University of Alabama



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