

## Attributing “Third World Poverty” in Australia and Malawi: A Case of Donor Bias?<sup>1</sup>

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Causal attributions for poverty in the developing world were examined from the perspectives of “actors” living in a “developing country” (Malawi) and “observers” living in a “developed country” (Australia). Ninety-eight Malawian and 100 Australian weekend shoppers responded to the Causes of Third World Poverty Questionnaire (CTWPQ) and the Just World Scale (JWS), with Australian participants also providing information about their frequency of donating to foreign-aid charities. Consistent with the actor–observer bias, Australians were more likely than were Malawians to attribute poverty to dispositional characteristics of the poor, rather than to situational factors. Among the Australians, situational attributions were in turn associated with frequency of donation behavior. The finding of a donor bias in this sample has important implications for the social marketing of foreign aid to Western donor publics.

The past three decades have witnessed repeated calls for psychology to address issues of development in developing countries (e.g., Mehryar, 1984; Sloan, 1990). Attempts to describe how psychology might contribute to such development have been varied. For instance, Connolly (1985) makes a case for the involvement of psychologists in technology transfer, health care, and population control in developing countries. Connolly’s argument, however, has been criticized for its implicit racism (Revell, 1985) and its “colonial” approach (Moghaddam & Taylor, 1986). In contrast, Moghaddam (1990) has called for the

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development of an indigenous, generative developing world psychology, its main objective being the achievement of societal change.

An alternative approach to defining psychology's role in development is provided by Mehryar (1984). It is argued that the problems of the developing world are fundamentally political and economic, and hence any attempts to "psychologize" these problems will be both unproductive and immoral. Rather, it is proposed that psychologists from rich industrialized countries can play a more valuable role by attempting to sensitize their nations to the problems of the developing world and to the real causes and consequences of world poverty. Jordan (1985) concurs, and further states that psychology in the developed world can assist the developing world by reflecting on the role it plays, directly or indirectly, in perpetuating poverty.

Mehryar's (1984) suggestion that there is a need to bring about a change in those who control the material resources of the world also implies a need for information regarding the attitudes, perceptions, and behavior of these people. Accordingly, there is an increasing volume of literature on lay or everyday perceptions of the causes, consequences, and cures of poverty (Furnham, 1984, 1985, 1988). Much of the work on this topic was stimulated by Feagin (1972), who categorized Americans' explanations of poverty into three groups: *individualistic*, where responsibility for poverty is placed on the behavior of poor people; *structural*, where responsibility is placed on external societal and economic forces; and *fatalistic*, where responsibility is placed on luck and fate. It was found that, on average, individualistic factors were considered much more important than were structural or fatalistic factors in explaining poverty. However, there were socioreligious, racial, regional, age, income, and education differences. Individualistic explanations were given high priority by White Protestants and Catholics, residents of the south and north central regions, the over-50 age group, the middle-income group, and groups with middle levels of education. In contrast, structural explanations were favored by Black Protestants and Jews, the under-30 age group, the low-income group, and the less well-educated.

Feagin's (1972) classification of explanations for poverty into three factors has received considerable support from various factor-analytic studies (Feather, 1974; Furnham, 1982a; Payne & Furnham, 1985; Singh & Vasudeva, 1977). In addition, Feagin's study has been replicated in a range of countries, including Australia (Feather, 1974), India (Pandey, Sinha, Prakash, & Tripathi, 1982; Singh & Vasudeva, 1977), Britain (Furnham, 1982b), Israel (Rim, 1984), the West Indies (Payne & Furnham, 1985), and New Zealand (Stacey & Singer, 1985).

However, the relative importance that individuals place on alternate explanations of poverty has been shown to vary cross-culturally (e.g., Commission of the European Communities, 1977), and to depend on various sociodemographic variables. For instance, individualistic explanations of poverty have been associated

with age (Feagin, 1972; Feather, 1974), religion (Feagin, 1972; Feather, 1974; Furnham, 1982c), higher socioeconomic status (Feagin, 1972; Feather, 1974; Furnham, 1982a), and conservative or right-wing political beliefs (Furnham, 1982b; Pandey et al., 1982).

The results of studies of attributions of poverty can be seen as consistent with various attributional principles, such as the actor-observer bias (Jones & Nisbett, 1972). The *actor-observer bias* is the tendency for actors to attribute their own behavior to external situational factors, and for observers to attribute the same actions to the actors' internal, stable dispositions. In the context of poverty-related beliefs and behavior, the theory would predict that financially secure people would explain poverty in terms of individual characteristics of the poor, while the poor themselves would be more likely to appeal to external societal factors as poverty-creating. This pattern of results has indeed been reported several times (e.g., Feagin, 1972; Feather, 1974; Furnham, 1982a) but, until very recently (Carr, 1996; Carr & MacLachlan, 1998), has never been explained in terms of the psychosocial actor-observer bias, nor investigated across the developed world (observer)/developing world (actor) divide.

The well-documented tendency to attribute poverty to individualistic factors (i.e., to blame victims of poverty for their own plight) is also similar to what Lerner (1980) has termed the *belief in a just world* (Carr, 1996; Carr & MacLachlan, 1998). The just world hypothesis states that individuals have a need to believe that the world is a just and orderly place where people usually get what they deserve (Lerner & Miller, 1978). Thus, if a person is poor, he or she must somehow have deserved that poverty. Lerner and Miller argue that the belief in a just world serves an important adaptive function whereby individuals can confront their physical and social environment as though it were stable and orderly.

Based on this idea, Rubin and Peplau (1975) developed the Just World Scale (JWS) to investigate individual and group differences in the strength to which people believe in a just world. Harper, Wagstaff, Newton, and Harrison (1990) have examined the relationship between individuals' responses on the JWS and on an 18-item Causes of Third World Poverty Questionnaire (CTWPQ; Harper et al., 1990). The scale was similar to the questionnaire originally employed by Feagin (1972), but it included more specific items, such as "There is poverty in Third World countries because their governments are corrupt" (Harper et al., 1990). It was found that the Pro-Just World factor of the JWS, which loaded on items such as "People who meet with misfortune have often brought it on themselves," correlated significantly with the Blame the Poor factor of the CTWPQ, which loaded on items attributing poverty to dispositional factors (e.g., "The population of such countries make no attempt at self-improvement"). More recently, Harper and Manasse (1992) have reported that those with a weaker belief in a just world agreed that poverty in the developing world was a result of

external factors, such as exploitation, war, and world economic systems. Thus, believers in a just world may blame the victim as a way of preserving that belief, or may use their belief in a just world to help justify the status quo (Furnham, 1985b).

Attempts to plan campaigns of social action against poverty in the developing world might benefit by acknowledging such subjective and psychosocial theories of poverty for two reasons. First, if attributional biases are pointed out to those who possess them, these people may be more likely to reconsider their opinions on what causes poverty, and thus how it might be alleviated. Several studies have described enlightenment effects when people are informed of social psychological biases. For instance, Beaman, Barnes, Klentz, and McQuirk (1978) reported that subjects who learned through lectures and films how social psychological factors operate to inhibit helping behavior were more likely to help a victim at a later date than were uninformed subjects.

Second, the different theories of the causes of poverty each imply that different social-action strategies are required to alleviate poverty. For instance, Rainwater (1970) has identified five different perspectives toward the poor that have been used in the popular and scientific literature to explain the condition of poverty. It is proposed that each perspective implies a different form of intervention or social action against poverty. The success of anti-poverty policies may well be influenced by the extent to which these policies have considered actual causal perceptions of poverty among those at whom the policies are directed.

Along these lines, Zucker and Weiner (1993) recently showed that people's causal explanations for poverty can indeed be related to their affective reactions and behavioral intentions toward the poor. Student and nonstudent samples completed a measure of conservatism and rated the importance of various causes of poverty. In addition, subjects indicated the extent to which poor people could control these causes (controllability), how responsible poor people were for their poverty (blame), affects of pity and anger toward the poor, desire to personally help the poor, and how deserving the poor were of welfare assistance. Consistent with previous research, conservatives generally rated individualistic causes of poverty as more important than did liberals, who in turn rated societal causes as more important. Furthermore, these attributional differences were related to both affective reactions and behavioral intentions toward the poor. When the poor were judged to be in control of or responsible for their plight, they were reacted to with anger, and no personal help was extended. Conversely, there were strong positive correlations between feelings of pity and judgments to help personally or through welfare.

Given that those segments of society that make dispositional attributions for poverty appear less likely to help the poor, helping behavior toward the poor might be greatly enhanced by exposing the psychosocial biases inherent in the way these market segments explain poverty. That is, the alleviation of poverty in

the developing world through foreign aid might be enhanced by educating the public as to the real causes of poverty in the developing world. Surveys of Australians' attitudes toward foreign aid indeed suggest that Australians tend to view foreign aid as welfare for foreigners (Kelley, 1989) and that support for foreign aid increases when a country or project is regarded as deserving and the aid is perceived as moral and effective (Apthorpe, Benson, & Stern, 1992).

Recently, Carr and MacLachlan (1998) examined the relationships between the concepts discussed here explicitly in the context of poverty in the developing world. The study was conducted across the developed and developing worlds in order to examine the effect of actor and observer roles on beliefs about the causes of poverty in developing countries. Undergraduate psychology students from Australia (observers of poverty in the developing world) and Malawi (actors) completed the CTWPQ and the JWS, along with a measure of belief in giving money to aid programs in developing countries. It was hypothesized, consistent with the actor-observer bias, that Australians would be more likely than Malawians to attribute developing world poverty to the poor themselves. However, the actor-observer bias was reversed: Malawian students were relatively likely to blame the poor for their poverty, while Australians tended to blame nature, governments, and exploitation.

When data from the Australian students alone were examined, belief in giving aid was inversely related to blaming the poor in developing world countries for their poverty. This result concurs with Zucker and Weiner's (1993) finding of a link between dispositional attributions of poverty and refusal to help the poor. Also consistent with previous research (Harper et al., 1990), Australians who favored dispositional attributions of developing world poverty tended to believe in a just world. Blaming the poor, however, was also strongly associated with belief in an *unjust* world in the Australian sample.

A fundamental problem with Carr and MacLachlan's (1998) study is the reliance on psychology undergraduate participants. Because of this, the generality and applicability of their findings are questionable (Sears, 1986). Moreover, and explicitly bearing in mind the ethos of this journal, applied attempts to raise money for overseas aid are unlikely to target such undergraduates, either in their audience or in the human beings they choose to portray to their intended audience. The (psycho)social marketing of aid is much more likely to focus on general (donor and recipient) publics. The aim of the present research is, therefore, to further examine the relationships between actor and observer roles, attributions of developing world poverty, just world beliefs, and charitable behavior in a non-student sample, that is, from more relevant donor and recipient populations.

Our level of analysis is primarily psychosocial, rather than demographic (e.g., Skitka, McMurray, & Burroughs, 1991), psychopolitical (e.g., Furnham, 1996; Furnham & Proctor, 1992), or psychometric (e.g., Furnham & Procter, 1989; Lipkus, 1991). Primarily, in accordance with the actor-observer bias, it is

hypothesized that people living in a developed nation will be more likely to attribute developing world poverty to dispositional causes (i.e., blame the poor themselves) than will people living in a developing nation.

Two additional hypotheses are formulated for examination specifically in the Australian context. On the basis of the findings of Harper et al. (1990) and Harper and Manasse (1992), it is hypothesized that, in the Australian sample, those who possess high belief in a just world will also attribute developing world poverty to dispositional, rather than situational factors. Furthermore, given that attributions of poverty appear to be related to behavioral intentions (Zucker & Weiner, 1993), it is also hypothesized that donating money to developing world charities will be inversely associated with dispositional attributions for poverty in the Australian sample.

## Method

### *Participants*

A total of 198 respondents participated in the study, 100 from Australia, a developed country, and a further 98 from Malawi, a developing country in sub-Saharan Africa. Australian participants were 42 females and 58 males ranging in age from 16 to 78 years ( $M$  age = 36.7 years). Malawian subjects were 38 females and 60 males ranging in age from 14 to 80 years ( $M$  age = 30.3 years).

For the Australians, occupational classification was determined according to the eight-group classification used by the Australian Bureau of Statistics (1992) for census data. For the Malawians, occupational data were classified into 32 diverse categories.

Among the Australian sample, educational levels varied from between 6 and 10 years ( $n = 25$ ) to less than 13 years ( $n = 48$ ). Many among the Malawian sample would have had little or no schooling (House & Zimalirana, 1992).

In Australia, religious affiliations included Anglican ( $n = 25$ ), Catholic ( $n = 21$ ), no religion ( $n = 25$ ), and a range of others from Uniting Church ( $n = 9$ ), Presbyterian Church ( $n = 5$ ), and Buddhist ( $n = 1$ ). In Malawi, there were 70 Christians, 25 Muslims, and 3 no responses.

For the Australians, chi-square goodness-of-fit tests were performed on age, occupational, and religion data, using proportions based on the 1991 Census (New South Wales data) for the expected proportions (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 1992). The test revealed a tendency for the 20 to 29 age group to be slightly overrepresented, and for the 70-plus age group to be slightly underrepresented in the sample,  $\chi^2(6, N = 100) = 21.09, p < .005$ . In Malawi however, the average life expectancy was estimated by the World Bank to be 49 years (House & Zimalirana, 1992), as compared to 77 years in Australia (World Bank, 1993). The Australian sample also contained a slight overrepresentation of persons

reporting no religion,  $\chi^2(9, N = 100) = 34.44, p < .005$ . Comparable census data from Malawi were not available.

Australian subjects were recruited over five consecutive Saturdays at a shopping mall in the central business district of Newcastle, the marketing testing ground (trial zone) for the country as a whole (Hunter Valley Research Foundation, personal communication, August 1994). This particular time and location was selected in an attempt to both increase the probability of attaining a representative Australian sample and to match Australian subjects as closely as possible with Malawian subjects, who were recruited over four consecutive Saturdays at the central weekend marketplace in the town of Zomba.

### *Apparatus*

Participants responded to the 18-item CTWPQ, developed by Harper et al. (1990), which requires respondents to rate from 1 to 5 the importance of 11 situational and 7 dispositional items as causes of poverty in the developing world. In addition, Rubin and Peplau's (1975) 20-item JWS was administered. On this 6-point scale, respondents rate their agreement with 9 items reflecting belief in an unjust world and 11 items reflecting just world beliefs. Demographic data pertaining to age, gender, country of birth, ethnic background, religion, occupation, years of schooling, and political party preference were also requested.

For Malawian respondents, the questionnaire was translated into Chichewa, the national language, using the back-translation method to ensure that the translation was as accurate as possible.

Australian participants responded to two further sections of the questionnaire that were not appropriate in the Malawian context. The first of these focused on charitable behavior and asked respondents to rate on a 6-point scale ranging from 1 (*never*) to 6 (*always*) how often they donated money to developing world charities, and to provide their reasons for donating or not donating. Nondonors were also asked what might convince them to contribute to developing world charities. The second additional section consisted of 13 questions concerning Australian foreign aid in general. These items were adapted from the qualitative analysis of Apthorpe et al. (1992), and therefore may represent issues which are related to Australians' decisions to donate, or not, to developing world charities. Respondents rate their agreement on a 6-point scale with statements such as "Domestic welfare is more important than foreign aid," "Giving aid to poor countries is a moral obligation," and "I would be more willing to donate to Third World charities if I could see the results."

### *Procedure*

In both Australia and Malawi, potential participants were recruited following a systematic random sampling procedure. Every tenth person entering the mall or

marketplace was approached and asked if he or she would be willing to participate in a study of attitudes toward foreign aid and developing world charities. Participants were explicitly informed that the study was not associated with any of these charities and that no donations would be requested. Consenting participants then responded to the questionnaire in a face-to-face interview with the researcher.

## Results

### *Actor–Observer Differences in Attributions of Poverty*

A principal-components analysis with orthogonal (varimax) rotation was performed on Australian and Malawian participants' CTWPQ responses. The initial solution extracted five factors and accounted for 56.1% of the total variance (Table 1). The first, third, and fourth factors were largely analogous to Harper et al.'s (1990) Blame the Poor, Blame Nature, and Blame Third World Governments factors. However, the second factor appeared clearly to represent Blame War tendencies rather than the Blame Exploitation tendencies detected by Harper et al.

In an attempt to replicate the CTWPQ factor structure reported by Harper et al. (1990), a second analysis specifying four factors was performed. This solution, however, did not yield a more interpretable result. Consequently, four additive poverty attribution scales (Blame the Poor, Blame War, Blame Nature, and Blame Third World Governments) were constructed from the first four factors from the initial analysis.<sup>3</sup> Where a variable loaded on more than one factor, it was included in the scale of the factor on which it loaded highest. Reliability analyses revealed that each of these scales had a reasonably strong Cronbach's alpha (.77, .67, .56, and .66, respectively).

To examine actor and observer differences in attributions of poverty, a MANOVA was conducted, with country (Australia/Malawi) as the independent variable and scores on the four poverty attribution scales as the dependent variables. There was a significant main effect for country,  $F(4, 173) = 15.92, p < .001$ . There were also significant univariate differences between Australians' and Malawians' scores on the Blame the Poor scale,  $F(1, 176) = 44.95, p < .001$ ; and the Blame War scale,  $F(1, 176) = 21.85, p < .001$ , after Bonferroni correction. Specifically, Australian respondents were more likely than were Malawians to attribute poverty to both the poor themselves and to war (Table 2). When age was

<sup>3</sup>One item that loaded on the factor forming the basis of this scale (i.e., "The world economy is loaded against the poor") did not sit well conceptually with the other four scale items. The reliability analysis revealed that this item also had a poor corrected item-to-total correlation (around 0.2). This item was therefore not included in the Blame Nature scale.



Table 1

*Initial Five-Factor Solution of the Causes of Third World Poverty Questionnaire (Combined Sample)*

|                             | Factor 1<br>Poor | Factor 2<br>War | Factor 3<br>Nature | Factor 4<br>Govern-<br>ments<br>unclear | Com-<br>munali-<br>ties |
|-----------------------------|------------------|-----------------|--------------------|---|-------------------------|
| Lack of intelligence        | .75              |                 |                    |   | .59                     |
| No self-improvement         | .71              |                 |                    |   | .60                     |
| Lack of ability and talent  | .69              |                 |                    |   | .51                     |
| Lack of thrift              | .65              |                 |                    |   | .51                     |
| Laziness/lack of effort     | .64              |                 |                    |   | .49                     |
| Won't change old ways       | .57              | .41             |                    |   | .53                     |
| War                         |                  | .83             |                    |   | .69                     |
| Government arms<br>spending |                  | .74             |                    |   | .62                     |
| Pests destroy crops         |                  |                 | .75                |   | .61                     |
| Disease                     |                  |                 | .65                |   | .53                     |
| Land not suitable           |                  |                 | .60                | .32                                     | .53                     |
| Climate                     |                  |                 | .46                | .33                                     | .46                     |
| World economy               |                  |                 | .43                |   | .32                     |
| Government corrupt          |                  |                 |                    | .86                                     | .76                     |
| Government inefficient      |                  |                 |                    | .82                                     | .74                     |
| Exploitation                |                  |                 |                    |   | .75                     |
| Too many children           |                  |                 |                    |   | -.52                    |
| Fate                        |                  | -.45            |                    | .32                                     | .49                     |
| Eigenvalues                 | 3.31             | 2.18            | 1.90               | 1.51                                    | 1.20                    |
| % of variance               | 18.4             | 12.1            | 10.6               | 8.4                                     | 6.7                     |
|                             |                  |                 |                    |   | 56.1                    |

*Note.* Loadings <.30 are not reported. All loadings significant at  $p < .01$ .

entered as a covariate, there was no change in these patterns of significant differences across groups.

*Australians' Attributions for Poverty and Just World Beliefs*

Turning to the Australian sample only, principal-components analyses with orthogonal (varimax) rotation were performed on the CTWPQ and the JWS. The

Table 2

*Mean Scores on Combined Sample Poverty Attribution Scales for Australian and Malawian Respondents*

|                               | Australia | Malawi | <i>p</i>           |
|-------------------------------|-----------|--------|--------------------|
| Blame the poor                | 16.3      | 11.8   | <.001 <sup>a</sup> |
| Blame war                     | 7.3       | 6.0    | <.001 <sup>a</sup> |
| Blame nature                  | 13.0      | 12.1   | .04                |
| Blame Third World governments | 7.2       | 7.2    | .91                |

<sup>a</sup>Significant after Bonferroni correction.

initial principal-components solution for the CTWPQ extracted six factors, but the eigenvalues (3.8, 2.0, 1.8, 1.6, 1.1, and 1.0), suggested a four-factor solution. A second principal-components analysis was therefore performed, specifying four factors. This solution explained 51.4% of the total variance and is presented in Table 3. While there were some small item differences, this four-factor solution closely resembled that reported by Harper et al. (1990), and consequently the factors were similarly labeled Blame the Poor, Blame War and Exploitation, Blame Nature, and Blame Third World Governments.

An initial principal-components analysis of the JWS for Australian respondents extracted eight factors and (with Kaiser's criterion) accounted for 65.4% of the variance. Eigenvalues (2.7, 2.3, 1.9, 1.5, 1.3, 1.2, and 1.0) suggested a three-factor model. The subsequent three-factor solution, presented in Table 4, explained 34.6% of the total variance, and contained clear Anti-Just World and Pro-Just World factors, plus a residual factor that might indicate reserved belief in a just world or a self-serving cynicism. With minor item exceptions, this solution replicates that reported by Harper et al. (1990).

Following the scale development procedure adopted for the combined sample, additive scales of Blame the Poor ( $\alpha = .83$ ), Blame War and Exploitation ( $\alpha = .59$ ), Blame Nature ( $\alpha = .52$ ), and Blame Third World Governments ( $\alpha = .53$ ) poverty attributions were constructed for the Australian sample. Similarly, an Anti-Just World ( $\alpha = .61$ ) and a Pro-Just World scale ( $\alpha = .60$ ) were constructed from the first two factors of the three-factor JWS solution. Mean scores on these six scales were examined across gender, religion, and occupation. ANOVAs revealed no religious differences in poverty attributions or just world beliefs. However, males scored significantly higher on the Pro-Just World scale than did females,  $F(1, 97) = 7.12, p < .01$ ; and students in the sample scored lower on the Blame the Poor scale than did those participants employed in managerial/professional, white-collar, and blue-collar occupations,  $F(4, 93) =$

Table 3

*Four-Factor Solution of the Causes of Third World Poverty Questionnaire (Australian Sample)*

|                            | Factor 1<br>Poor | Factor 2<br>Exploit | Factor 3<br>Nature | Factor 4<br>Govern-<br>ments | Com-<br>monali-<br>ties |
|----------------------------|------------------|---------------------|--------------------|------------------------------|-------------------------|
| Lack of intelligence       | .79              |                     |                    |                              | .62                     |
| No self-improvement        | .78              |                     |                    |                              | .64                     |
| Lack of ability and talent | .75              |                     |                    |                              | .59                     |
| Laziness/lack of effort    | .72              |                     |                    |                              | .58                     |
| Lack of thrift             | .67              |                     |                    |                              | .47                     |
| Won't change old ways      | .55              |                     |                    |                              | .34                     |
| Too many children          | .53              |                     |                    | .40                          | .46                     |
| War                        |                  | .73                 |                    |                              | .62                     |
| World economy              |                  | .70                 | -.36               |                              | .66                     |
| Exploitation               | -.35             | .62                 |                    |                              | .53                     |
| Government arms spending   |                  | .54                 |                    | .51                          | .63                     |
| Climate                    |                  |                     | .71                |                              | .55                     |
| Land not suitable          |                  |                     | .60                |                              | .52                     |
| Pests destroy crops        |                  |                     | .55                |                              | .32                     |
| Disease                    |                  |                     | .50                |                              | .35                     |
| Fate                       |                  |                     | .46                |                              | .25                     |
| Government inefficient     |                  |                     |                    | .77                          | .63                     |
| Government corrupt         |                  |                     |                    | .70                          | .51                     |
| Eigenvalues                | 3.86             | 2.04                | 1.77               | 1.57                         | (Total)                 |
| % of variance              | 21.5             | 11.4                | 9.9                | 8.7                          | 51.4                    |

*Note.* Loadings <.30 are not reported. All loadings significant at  $p < .01$ .

3.92,  $p < .006$ . There was also a significant correlation between age and Blame the Poor scale score ( $r = .22, p < .05$ ): Older respondents were more likely to make dispositional attributions for poverty.

Table 5 presents the correlations between Australians' explanations of poverty and just world beliefs using mean scale scores. Attributing poverty to the poor themselves was significantly correlated with both pro-just world beliefs ( $r = .23, p < .05$ ) and anti-just world beliefs ( $r = .34, p < .01$ ). In addition, anti-just

Table 4

*Factor Solution on the JWS for Australian Subjects*

|  | Factor 1<br>"Anti-Just<br>World" | Factor 2<br>"Pro-Just<br>World" | Factor<br>"Reserved" | Communi-<br>nalities |
|--|----------------------------------|---------------------------------|----------------------|----------------------|
| Good deeds often go unnoticed and unrewarded   | 0.58                             |                                 |                      | 0.43                 |
| It is a common occurrence for a guilty person to get off free in Australian courts   | 0.56                             |                                 |                      | 0.33                 |
| It is often impossible for a person to receive a fair trial in Australia             | 0.51                             |                                 |                      | 0.28                 |
| In professional sports, many fouls and infractions never get called by the referee   | 0.50                             |                                 |                      | 0.25                 |
| It is rare for an innocent person to be wrongly sent to jail                         | -0.50                            |                                 |                      | 0.28                 |
| Careful drivers are just as likely to get hurt in traffic accidents as careless ones | 0.48                             |                                 | -0.36                | 0.38                 |
| I've found that a person rarely deserves the reputation he or she has                | 0.45                             |                                 |                      | 0.30                 |
| People who get "lucky breaks" have usually earned their good fortune                 | -0.39                            | 0.30                            |                      | 0.24                 |
| By and large, people deserve what they get   |                                  | 0.70                            |                      | 0.56                 |

|   |       |       |      |       |
|---|-------|-------|------|-------|
| Basically, the world is a just place  |       | 0.64  |      | 0.41  |
| Many people suffer through absolutely no fault of their own   |       | -0.53 |      | 0.37  |
| When parents punish their children, it is almost always for good reasons                                  |       | 0.51  |      | 0.30  |
| In almost any business or profession, people who do their job well rise to the top                        |       | 0.47  | 0.34 | 0.35  |
| People who meet with misfortune have often brought it on themselves                                       | 0.40  | 0.41  |      | 0.35  |
| Students almost always deserve the grades they receive in school  | -0.31 | 0.40  |      | 0.26  |
| Crime doesn't pay   |       |       | 0.63 | 0.40  |
| Although evil people may hold political power for a while, in the general course of history good wins out |       |       | 0.58 | 0.41  |
| People who keep in shape have little chance of suffering a heart attack                                   |       |       | 0.56 | 0.40  |
| Australian parents tend to overlook the things most to be admired in their children                       | 0.36  |       | 0.54 | 0.42  |
| The political candidate who sticks up for his or her principles rarely gets elected                       |       |       | 0.43 | 0.20  |
| Eigenvalues   | 2.67  | 2.35  | 1.90 | Total |
| % Variance  | 13.3  | 11.8  | 9.5  | 34.6  |

*Note.* Loadings <.30 not reported. All loadings significant at  $p < .01$ .

Table 5

*Correlations Between Attributions of Poverty and Just World Beliefs in the Australian Sample*

|                                     | Anti-just world scale | Pro-just world scale |
|-------------------------------------|-----------------------|----------------------|
| Blame the poor scale                | .34**                 | .23*                 |
| Blame war and exploitation scale    | .19                   | -.12                 |
| Blame nature scale                  | .34**                 | .14                  |
| Blame Third World governments scale | .11                   | -.08                 |

\* $p < .05$ . \*\* $p < .01$ .

world beliefs correlated significantly with blaming nature ( $r = .34, p < .01$ ), and approached a significant correlation with blaming war and exploitation ( $r = .19$ ; critical value for  $N = 100$  at  $p < .05$ , two-tailed is  $r = .20$ ).

*Charitable Behavior and Explanations of Poverty*

Participants' charitable behavior was classified into one of six categories on the basis of their responses to the question, "How often do you donate money to Third World charities?" These categories were *never* ( $n = 23$ ), *rarely* ( $n = 34$ ), *sometimes* ( $n = 29$ ), *often* ( $n = 10$ ), *very often* ( $n = 2$ ), and *always* ( $n = 2$ ). In order to determine what variables might distinguish those who tended to donate from those who did not tend to donate, the never and rarely categories were collapsed into a nominal *nondonor* classification ( $n = 57$ ), and the remaining categories were combined to form a *donor* classification ( $n = 43$ ).

There were no demographic differences across the four donor categories; chi-square tests and univariate ANOVAs revealed that donation frequency was independent of age, ethnicity, religion, education, occupation, and political beliefs. There was, however, a slight (but nonsignificant) tendency for females to donate more often than males,  $\chi^2(3, N = 100) = 6.67, p = .08$ .

To measure attitudinal differences across donor groups, a series of ANOVAs compared mean scores on the four scales of poverty attribution. Only attributing poverty to war and exploitation,  $F(3, 96) = 3.35, p < .03$ , significantly predicted donor behavior. Post-hoc Newman-Keuls tests indicated that, specifically, those who donated often ( $M = 4.1$ ) were more likely than all other respondents (overall  $M = 3.5$ ) to blame war and exploitation. The four donor groups were further compared on the 13 additional questionnaire items concerning Australian foreign aid.

ANOVAs revealed that those who never donated were more likely to believe that foreign aid rarely gets through to those who really need it,  $F(3, 96) = 2.71$ ,  $p < .05$ . Those who never donated were more likely to agree that they could not afford to donate,  $F(3, 96) = 4.30$ ,  $p < .007$ . Those who never donated were also less likely to believe that foreign aid increases both quality and quantity of life,  $F(3, 96) = 4.27$ ,  $p < .008$ . Those who never donated were less likely to believe that most of their friends or family donated,  $F(3, 95) = 2.92$ ,  $p < .04$ . Those who never donated were less likely to believe that giving aid to poor countries is a moral obligation,  $F(3, 96) = 5.39$ ,  $p < .002$ . Finally, those who never donated were less likely to believe that people in the developing world have little or no control over their situation,  $F(3, 96) = 3.82$ ,  $p < .02$ . In other words, and consistent with the literature reviewed, those who never donated were less likely to make situational attributions for poverty.

Many of these sentiments were echoed in participants' open-ended responses to questions about reasons for donating (or not donating) to foreign-aid charities. Most donors referred to either altruistic factors (53.1%), reasons of conscience (12.5%), or media influence (9.4%). Those who did not donate most commonly were skeptical about developing world charities (32.4%), believed that charity should begin at home (21.1%), or could not afford to donate (18.3%). Accordingly, almost half of the nondonors also believed that proof of the effectiveness of foreign aid would convince them to donate (44.2%), and around one in six (15.4%) stated that they would donate if they could afford it.

### Discussion

The results of the current study support the first hypothesis that respondents from an industrial nation (observers) would be more likely than those from a developing nation (actors) to attribute developing world poverty to dispositional causes. Australian respondents were more likely than were Malawians to attribute poverty to the poor themselves and also, somewhat unexpectedly, to war. Our second hypothesis was also supported: There was a significant relationship between Australians' dispositional attributions of poverty and their pro-just world beliefs. Interestingly, both blaming the poor and blaming nature were related to belief in an unjust world. The final hypothesis predicting an inverse relationship between Australians' dispositional attributions for poverty and donating behavior was not borne out by this study. Regular donors were most likely to attribute poverty to war and exploitation, which could however be considered to be a social situational factor (the poor being exploited through the [mis]deeds of others).

The finding of an actor-observer difference in poverty attributions, or a donor bias, in this study of a nonstudent sample complements the findings reported by Carr and McLachlan (1998) in psychology undergraduates. *The dis-*

crepancy between the two studies with regard to the direction of the bias may be accounted for, at least in part, by the nature of higher education in both Australia and Malawi (Carr & MacLachlan, 1998). On the one hand, studies have reported an association between tertiary education in social sciences and tendencies toward situational, rather than dispositional, attributions for poverty and unemployment. For instance, Guimond, Begin, and Palmer (1989) found that, contrary to the predictions of the actor–observer bias, an unemployed Canadian sample blamed the poor and the unemployed more than did social-science students. This result may be relevant for the psychology undergraduates in Carr and MacLachlan’s Australian student sample, particularly given that psychology students in Australia, relatively speaking, have been shown to view socioeconomic conditions as more important reasons for unemployment than individual factors (Feather, 1985). The notion that the reversal of the actor–observer bias in the context of poverty attributions is, in part, related to tertiary education in Australia finds some support within the present study. The Australian students who were part of our sample ( $M$  age = 21 years; range = 16 to 26 years) scored lowest on the Blame the Poor scale, and the tendency to attribute poverty to the poor increased with age.

Concomitantly, the unique position of undergraduate students in developing countries such as Malawi must be taken into account. For instance, it is possible that the privileges awarded to Malawian undergraduates (i.e., full board and health care with good job prospects) are capable of altering students’ perspectives from those of actors to those of observers (for a more detailed discussion, see Carr & MacLachlan, 1998).

An alternative explanation to educational context might focus on political ideology. As we have seen in our review of the literature (e.g., Furnham, 1982b; Pandey et al., 1982), political beliefs have been documented to affect attributions for poverty. According to this account, a student sample may be more liberal and therefore less likely to endorse individualistic attributions for poverty. Post hoc, group-level comparisons between Carr and MacLachlan’s (1998) two student groups (combined  $M = 2.36$  out of 5) and our own two general public samples (combined  $M = 2.36$  out of 5) revealed no apparent difference between mean scores per item on the dispositional factor. Nonetheless, the influence of political ideology remains an important area for future research.

How can the existence of an actor–observer difference in poverty attributions in the present sample (i.e., from two general publics) be explained? One possible explanation is that blaming the victim serves an ego-protecting function, whereby placing the blame for poverty on the poor themselves makes observers feel more comfortable and secure in their own situations (e.g., Lerner, 1980). In this case, observers’ reactions to victims would be less related to the behavior of the victims themselves than to the need to protect one’s own self-esteem (Carr & MacLachlan, 1998).



The actor-observer bias is often accounted for by differing information levels: Actors are privy to more information about their own range of behaviors than that of others. The bias can also be explained in terms of perceptual focus, since others' behavior is often more perceptible than the situation that may have elicited that behavior. While neither actors' behaviors nor their situations are readily and directly observable by people in developed countries, these rationalizations may be applicable in the developed-world/developing-world context with regard to media representations of the developing world (Carr & MacLachlan, 1998). Iyengar (1990) has demonstrated that the way in which television news coverage is framed can impact on people's beliefs about who or what is responsible for domestic poverty. Specifically, when poverty is described in terms of individual victims and particular instances of hardship and when the context is ignored, the poor themselves are most often held responsible for their own plight. Yet when news items include background information about general trends and when poverty is expressed as a collective outcome, people tend to assign responsibility to societal factors, such as economic conditions.

"Crisis journalism" (Dorward, 1996, p. 4), which allegedly characterizes much Western media coverage of the developing world, is similarly likely to perpetuate the negative stereotypical beliefs held by observers in the developed world and thus any donor bias. Godwin (1994) points out that television news items from the developing world emphasize the sensational, the dramatic, and the negative. Stories about famine, war, or other disasters are rarely placed within a wider or causal context. This lack of immediate context is compounded by the fact that while background information about one's own environment is widely accessible, corresponding information about environments as far removed as the developing world is simply not available for viewers in the developed world (Carr, 1996).

Both those who believed strongly in a just world and those with strong unjust world beliefs rated dispositional causes of poverty higher than did low just and unjust world believers. The finding of a relationship between dispositional attributions and belief in a just world was consistent with our hypothesis: In a fair world, the poor must deserve their poverty. The association between blaming the poor for their poverty and believing in an unjust world was unexpected but not illogical: In an unfair world where positive and negative outcomes are equally likely, people are responsible for their own welfare. To the extent that this finding concurs with others using the same scale, both the instrument and the interpretation are convergently validated (Carr & MacLachlan, 1998; Furnham, 1995; for a detailed account, see Carr, McAuliffe, & MacLachlan, 1998). An additional reason, and one well worth further research, is that stronger unjust world beliefs are relatively likely to be linked to cynicism about aid giving and corruption (Furnham, 1995). In our study, there was no correlation between just world scores and inefficiency and corruption, but our items focused on government rather than aid agencies.

Our prediction of a relationship between dispositional attributions for poverty and nondonating behavior was not borne out. Furthermore, while regular foreign-aid donors were more likely to attribute poverty to war and exploitation, donating behavior was not associated with attributions to nature or governments. The associative link between donation and attribution to war and exploitation may be related to contextually activated beliefs about social justice via media exposure. Australians often have sympathy for the working-class underdog (the so-called "battler"), and are often exposed to media images of war and disaster (Carr, Taef, de Ribeiro, & MacLachlan, 1998). Regarding the lack of association between donation and either nature or government inefficiency/corruption, people who believe poverty to be a result of factors beyond the control of the poor (e.g., nature) may feel disempowered as donors. Even if nature is thought to be responsible for poverty, problems of development may still seem too large or abstract to tackle through relatively small individual donations. With respect to attributions about government (also, conceivably, evocative of battlers), the lack of association may say more about beliefs in regard to donation effectiveness than anything else; that is, beliefs about poverty and foreign aid other than causal attributions may be salient. For example, those who did not donate also expressed skepticism about whether foreign aid reaches those most in need; about the quality of life that aid recipients experience; and about the lack of control the poor in developing countries have over their situation (Furnham, 1995).

These findings have important implications for the social marketing of overseas aid. Aid organizations may be overlooking influential social cognitions by using shortcut fundraising strategies that rely largely on emotional appeals (Carr et al., 1998). Among the most common of these strategies is the use of shocking pictures to arouse emotion and guilt tactics (Godwin, 1994). While some of the donors in this study did cite emotion-arousing media images as influential in their decisions to donate, ironically, such tactics may serve to reinforce negative stereotypes that in turn may inhibit donating behavior in others. For instance, Bozinoff and Ghingold (1983) examined the effects of guilt-arousing print advertisements for overseas charities on feelings of guilt and intentions to donate. It was found that while high-guilt ads did, in fact, arouse more guilt feelings, the images also provoked counterarguing on the part of respondents (e.g., statements that donations to foreign charities never reached those in need and that their plight was their own fault). It was concluded that guilt-arousing foreign-aid campaigns may indeed cause so much counterarguing that attitude and behavioral intention change are unlikely to occur.

While it is not our contention that increasing donations to foreign-aid charities will eradicate poverty in the developing world, foreign aid is one aspect, and perhaps a less important one, of the solution. Perhaps just as important as fundraising is consciousness raising. As Mehryar (1984) proposed over a decade ago, the developed world should be sensitized to the real causes and consequences of

poverty in developing countries. Thus, part of the challenge for foreign-aid fundraising campaigns now is what Godwin (1994) terms, "the education of the consumer of the image" (p. 47). This may be especially so, given the economic crises and growing social inequities that seem to characterize our world as we face the new millennium (AusThai Project Team, 1998).

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