



The Just World Gap, Privilege, and Legal Socialization: A Study Among Brazilian Preadolescents

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Abstract

Bridging just world theory and legal socialization research, this study looks at preadolescents' perceptions of justice across race, income, and education, and how these relate to perceptions of the law and legal cynicism. This article takes a novel approach to belief in a just world (BJW) research by analyzing the difference between personal and general BJW: Just World Gap. Drawing from a Brazilian preadolescent sample ($n = 742$, age = 12), results revealed significant differences between education and income brackets, with the Just World Gap being significantly higher in more privileged groups. The Just World Gap had stronger effect sizes across demographic variables than either BJW separately. Partial correlations were conducted controlling for education and income between BJWs (personal and general), Just World Gap, and perceptions of the law and legal cynicism. Results indicated that personal and general BJW were more strongly correlated with items concerning how people view the law, but legal cynicism items were more strongly correlated with the Just World Gap. This reveals the Just World Gap to be a relevant construct in studying the legal socialization and legal cynicism. Results highlight important theoretical considerations for legal socialization and BJW research.

Keywords Just world · Legal socialization · Legal cynicism · Privilege · Preadolescence

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Introduction and Purpose

How people perceive justice in their lives and the world around them can be a powerful influence over their interpretation of events and motivation to action. Just world theory has generated much research on these effects (Hafer & Bègue, 2005; Lerner, 1980). How fair people believe their world is can shape their interactions with authorities (Thomas & Mucherah, 2018), peers (Correia & Dalbert, 2008; Correia, Kamble, & Dalbert, 2009), and motivation to comply with rules (Correia & Vala, 2004; Dalbert & Sallay, 2004). On a largely parallel track is legal socialization research (Cohn & White, 1990; Fagan & Tyler, 2005; Tapp & Levine, 1974). Legal socialization is a process that unfolds in childhood and adolescence when individuals develop an orientation toward law and legal authorities and this orientation shapes their behaviors and attitudes (Fagan & Tyler, 2005; Tyler & Trinkner, 2017). Although legal socialization is theoretically linked with one's perceptions of justice, there is no existing research link between belief in a just world (BJW) literature and legal socialization research. This article brings these approaches together to draw from the empirical evidence of both sides and open a realm of discussion about their relationships and synergistic impact.

In addition to bridging the gap between just world theory and legal socialization, this study takes a novel approach at the characterization of personal and general belief in a just world (BJW). The purpose of this study is to specifically analyze the gap between the justice people perceive in their personal lives (personal BJW) and justice in the broader world (general BJW). In this study, we will call that difference between both constructs the *Just World Gap* (personal BJW minus general BJW). This study looks specifically at the Just World Gap across demographics of privilege (race, income, and education) and how it may relate to adolescents' perceptions of the law and the development of legal cynicism.

This study pulls from a Brazilian preadolescent sample, which is of particular interest in this field of inquiry because early adolescence is a sensitive period for both the development of justice world beliefs (Dalbert & Sallay, 2004) and the process of legal socialization (Fagan & Tyler, 2005; Flanagan, 2004; Trinkner & Cohn, 2014). In addition, the Brazilian society is fraught with social inequalities and pervasive legal cynicism making it an important setting for research on legal socialization and budding perceptions of justice (Lopez-Medina & Rodrigues, 2019; Rodrigues & Gomes, 2017; Rodrigues, Gomes, Oliveira, Veiga, & Brito, 2017; Savell, 2015; Trinkner, Rodrigues, Veiga, Gifford, & Gomes, 2019). Additionally, our findings help shed light on why some studies have revealed contradicting relationships regarding BJW and cynicism (outlined in the section below).

Belief in a Just World: Connection to Legal Socialization

In accordance with the just-world hypothesis, people have a need to believe that the world is a fair place where people get what they deserve and deserve what they get (Furnham, 2003; Lerner, 1980). Melvin Lerner first developed this theory when his experiment revealed that students attributed positive traits to winners of

a lottery even though students knew the outcome was random (Lerner, 1965). A series of subsequent experiments revealed that people tended to form retrospective judgments that made the outcomes seem less random and more just (Lerner & Simmons, 1966; Lerner & Miller, 1978). In accordance with this theory, BJW helps people assimilate and make sense of events (Lerner, 1980). It also helps establish a personal contract because when more people rely on the justice of others, they feel more obligated to act justly as well (Dalbert, 2009; Lerner, 1977; Long & Lerner, 1974).

The notion of a personal contract is closely linked with the political philosophy of a social contract (e.g., Hobbes, Locke, Rousseau, and most recently, Rawls; 1971), which supports legitimization of authority figures and the relationship between citizens and the state. The perception and expectation of justice is presumably a key factor in this legitimization (or lack thereof). Some of these relationships between BJW and legal socialization have been empirically explored, but under different terminologies. For example, in the context of political socialization, BJW has been positively correlated with authoritarianism (Lambert, Burroughs, & Nguyen, 1999), protestant work ethic (Furnham & Rajamanickam, 1992), right-wing political views, and traditional moralism such as the endorsement of faith and private property (Dittmar & Dickinson, 1993). BJW has also been negatively associated with cynical views of American politics (Rubin & Peplau, 1975) and Machiavellian cynicism (i.e., perception that those who are in power are corrupt) (Dittmar & Dickinson, 1993). In addition, those with a lower BJW are more likely to view world poverty as a result of exploitation and war, instead of blaming the poor (Campbell, Carr, & MacLachlan, 2001; Harper & Manasse, 1992).

While these studies help explain how BJW influences how people make sense of their society, it still does not directly tie BJW to legal socialization in adolescence, such as how young citizens are learning to view the law and their levels of legal cynicism. Perceptions of the law sustain institutional legitimacy, and the felt obligation to defer to authorities and accept the decisions associated with legal institutions (Piquero, Fagan, Mulvey, Steinberg, & Odgers, 2005; Tyler, 1990, 2006). Legal cynicism reflects the opinion that laws and authorities are not considered binding; therefore, acting outside of these is appropriate and reasonable (Kirk & Papachristos, 2011; Piquero et al., 2005; Reisig, Scott, & Holtfreter, 2011; Sampson & Bartusch, 1998). Legal cynicism is understood to be a result of negative or unfair interactions with authorities, and it encompasses perceptions that the legal system and authorities are illegitimate and inadequate in promoting public safety (Kirk & Matsuda, 2011; Reisig, Wolfe, & Holtfreter, 2011).

Both BJW and legal socialization have deep theoretical relationships with punishment, compliance and rule violation, and legitimacy of the legal system and legal authorities, but they have largely been studied independently. While there is some existing research linking perceptions of legal authorities and BJW (Correia & Vala, 2004; Thomas & Mucherah, 2018), there is little working on BJW and perceptions of the laws or legal cynicism. The closest studies linking BJW and legal cynicism connection involve two differing conclusions of BJW and cynicism. Studies on workplace cynicism and BJW revealed no significant correlation (Cubela Adoric & Kvartuc, 2007; Gonçalves, 2016). However, this goes against

the previously mentioned studies that found a negative association with BJW and cynicism (Dittmar & Dickinson, 1993; Rubin & Peplau, 1975). The current study explores BJW and legal cynicism on a preadolescent Brazilian sample and suggests an alternative way of looking at BJW and cynicism.

The acquisition of supportive attitudes and values that shape law-related behavior are developed through interactions with legal authorities. However, cynical attitudes toward authorities often have roots in the family context. When individuals experience unfair parental authority, they come to be cynical about the rules at home and also about the rules governing society (Trinkner & Cohn, 2014). Unfair experiences with teachers can also promote legal cynicism. School experiences can either facilitate or undermine the attachment of youth to the social institutions (Reicher & Emler, 1985). Fagan and Tyler (2005) demonstrated that the experiences with police officers and the courts impacted legal cynicism. When the interactions with legal authorities were procedurally fair, citizens were more likely to feel obligated to obey the law and were less cynical. Likewise, when law enforcement engaged in aggressive misconduct in the neighborhood, citizens viewed the law as less legitimate, generating more violence and less cooperation between citizens and legal authorities, particularly the police.

Legal cynicism and legitimacy are seen as processes of development unfolded throughout adolescence (Fagan & Tyler, 2005; Lipsey & Cullen, 2007). A landmark study of legal cynicism, conducted with adolescents in Brooklyn, found that cynicism grows beginning at the age of 12 and its growth is strongly correlated with declining legitimacy at that age (Fagan & Tyler, 2005). Fine and Cauffman (2015), and also Darling, Cumsille, and Martinez (2007, 2008), found similar results regarding parental authority legitimacy. A more recent longitudinal study predicted legal cynicism at the age of 15 from adolescents' lack of bonds to social institutions, lack of moral development, negative experiences with authorities, and involvement in delinquent activities (Nivette, Eisner, Malti, & Ribeaud, 2015). The strongest predictor of legal cynicism is self-reported delinquency (Nivette et al., 2015).

The current study analyzes the relationship between BJW and legal cynicism and perceptions of the law. The possibilities for studying BJW and legal socialization are vast, but yet under-explored. This is in partly because much of the focus of BJW has been spent on explaining why people blame the victim (Furnham, 2003; Lerner, 1980; Lerner & Miller, 1978). Blaming the victim re-establishes justice cognitively and allows a sense of safe distance from the threat of the injustice. Victim-blaming is a retrospective judgment to help make sense of injustices and regain a sense of control and fairness (Furnham, 2003; Lerner, 1980). Although the belief in a just BJW is linked with such harsh social attitudes, it is also correlated with many positive outcomes. BJW has been characterized as having a *trust* function (Bègue, 2002; Correia & Vala, 2004; Cubela Adoric & Kwartuc, 2007; Dalbert, 2009; Lerner, 1980; Zuckerman & Gerbasi, 1977). This belief enables people to trust that they will be treated fairly; thus, they can invest in long-term outcomes (Hafer et al., 2005). BJW has also been described as a way to maintain motivation and an internal locus of control (Sutton & Douglas, 2005; Sutton & Winnard, 2007), and a sense of safety from the fear of senseless tragedies (Dalbert, 2009; Lerner, 1980). To understand this paradox of positive and negative outcomes of this belief, the construct has been

divided into two: the *personal* BJW and the *general* BJW (Dalbert, 1999; Hafer & Sutton, 2016; Lipkus, Dalbert, & Siegler, 1996). The general BJW (how fair the world is) is often related to harsh social attitudes such as victim-blaming (Bègue & Bastounis, 2003; Bègue & Muller, 2006; Sutton & Douglas, 2005) and punishment support (Wu & Cohen, 2017). The personal BJW (how fair my world is) is more closely related to psychological health and achievement markers (Dalbert, 2009; Sutton & Douglas, 2005). However, in more disadvantaged groups, general BJW may have a stronger relationship with well-being compared to more privileged groups (Laurin, Fitzsimons, & Kay, 2011). This is likely because those in higher status groups are more protected from systemic injustices of the broader society. Thus, particularly among privileged samples, it is possible to cognitively understand that the world is not fair (lower general BJW), while still maintaining the notion that one's personal efforts will be compensated in the long run (higher personal BJW).

The Just World Gap: Personal BJW Minus General BJW

Much of the early research on BJW was experimental in nature, and researchers designed situations to elicit judgments and reactions from participants, thus drawing conclusions about how injustices threatened people's BJW (Furnham, 2003; Hafer & Bègue, 2005; Hafer & Sutton, 2016; Lerner, 2003). However, when BJW began to be studied as a personal attribute (with self-reported personal BJW measures), the research also started highlighting its adaptive functions (Furnham, 2003), and the view of personal BJW as a resource took stage (Dalbert, 2001, 2009; Donat, Wolgast, & Dalbert, 2018).

Personal and general BJW seem to have two distinct functions, and developmental studies have suggested that they diverge in adolescence (Cubela Adoric, 2004; Dalbert & Dzuka, 2004; Schönplflug & Bilz, 2004), with general BJW taking a steeper decline (Cubela Adoric, 2004). However, more recent research on adolescents in developing countries has shown that trajectories may differ depending on the SES context, with those in higher privilege having an increasing Just World Gap and those with less privilege maintaining the Just World Gap (Thomas & Mucherah, 2016; Thomas & Napolitano, 2017). The majority of research that has emerged has revealed personal BJW to be higher than general BJW (Bègue & Bastounis, 2003; Correia & Dalbert, 2007; Dalbert, 1999; Lipkus et al., 1996; Sutton & Douglas, 2005). However, it is notable that a few studies in China have found the opposite and attributed it to their collectivistic culture (Wu et al., 2013). Similar patterns were also found in Kenya (Thomas & Mucherah, 2016). Researchers have concluded that personal BJW is higher than general BJW because of a self-serving bias in fairness reasoning (Dalbert, 2002, 2009; Donat, Umlauf, Dalbert, & Kamble, 2012; Donat et al., 2018) often citing Messick and colleague's (1985) work on the tendency to emphasize personal fairness as a self-serving bias. However, in the current study, we would like to revisit this assumption and explore if the gap between personal BJW and general BJW has more to do with privilege and demographics as opposed to a self-serving bias. Perhaps, the tendency of a higher personal BJW over general BJW is because the research tends to collect data from more privileged samples (middle

to upper class in Western countries). However, there some researches that have captured more diverse or less privileged samples have suggested that this trend may be more a reflection of privilege, not human nature.

Past research in Germany has found that adolescents in higher academic track schools tended to differentiate more between the personal and general BJW than those in vocational track schools (Dalbert, 2001). A look into the descriptive statistics reported seems to reveal that the gap was due to both a higher personal BJW and a lower general BJW among students in high-level schools. That study concluded that the differentiation may be indicative of advanced cognitive development. However, it could also be that students who are being prepared to go on to a university education are exposed to a more just reality than those who are expected to follow a vocational training route, and the latter group also tends to be disproportionately poor and of immigrant descent (Berwick, 2015). Recent researches in developing countries with higher inequality rates have revealed that adolescents in demographic groups of less privilege typically differentiate less between the constructs than those with greater societal privilege (Thomas, 2017; Thomas & Mucherah, 2016; Thomas & Napolitano, 2017). A study in Kenya revealed that personal BJW was significantly different across tribal groups and sexes, with females and those in tribes with less power having significantly lower personal BJW (Thomas & Mucherah, 2016). A Brazilian study revealed that those in public schools (typically underfunded and disadvantaged) had significantly lower personal BJW than those in private schools (Thomas, 2017). There were also significant differences across income levels with the same trends noted. In both Brazil and Kenya, there were no significant differences in general BJW (Thomas, 2017; Thomas & Mucherah, 2016). From this, the authors of the studies concluded that the adolescents within each sample had similar outlooks on the world, but they differed with how this was applied to them personally (Thomas, 2017; Thomas & Mucherah, 2016). Those with less power and status differentiated less between self and others, presumably not because of intellectual advancement, but because of social inequality. Similarly, Sutton and Winnard (2007) collected data on at-risk young adults in England and found that among that sample, there were no significant differences between personal and general BJW. In a separate study among European college students, Sutton and colleagues found that, while participants did differentiate between personal and general BJW, they did not perceive their immediate peers to have a lower just world (Sutton, Douglas, Wilkin, Elder, Cole, & Stathi, 2008). That suggests that their BJW differentiation could be connected to perceptions of privilege and power on broader scale. While the origins of these are still under investigation, personal BJW can be seen as a partially experiential and learned construct, being influenced by school and family circumstances and injustices (Dalbert & Stoeber, 2006; Maes & Schmitt, 2004; Umlauf & Dalbert, 2017). If this is true, those in more privileged groups would have a higher personal BJW but have a similar general BJW.

The view of this paper is not to see BJW as a positive or a negative trait, but as a reflection of reality. People may have differing views of justice in the world and in their lives because some truly have access to more justice than others. Individuals in a position of privilege (educational, racial, and economic) may have higher personal BJW than a general BJW because their lives are fairer than the lives of the majority.

Similarly, someone in a very underprivileged situation may look at the world and believe that most of the world is receiving more justice (higher general BJW) than they personally have access to (low personal BJW). The profile of assigning a lower value to one's own access to justice than the perception of others' access can corrode the buy-in to the social contract, leading to increased legal cynicism. In other words, why should you uphold the system if it is working for others better than it is working for yourself? On the other hand, acknowledging that the world is unfair (lower general BJW), but still feeling personal access to justice (higher personal BJW) could be a profile that is less at risk of developing legal cynicism. Underprivileged groups facing greater challenges and suffering from inequality have fewer resources to advocate for themselves and leverage justice on a personal level. People in a higher position of privilege often have greater social capital such as the ability to hire a lawyer, leverage political support, or have more security such as greater police support (less discrimination and more attention), or greater neighborhood security (less violence or theft). Thus, personal access to justice is greater among those with greater privilege, be it racial, economic, or educational.

This study is particularly interested in the Just World Gap: the personal BJW minus the general BJW. Instead of analyzing the BJWs separately, this study looks at the gap between the constructs and what it may reveal about the society and pre-adolescents' perceptions of justice. In line with research that identified personal BJW as a resource (Dalbert, 2001, 2009; Donat et al., 2018), perhaps *comparatively* higher access to justice may help diminish the perceived threat of injustice. This paper analyzes how the differentiation between personal and general BJW is linked to legal cynicism. This means that it would not necessarily be the absolute values of personal and general BJW, but the distance between them. Perhaps, the ability to create distance between the world's injustices and justice expectations in one's own life is linked to lower levels of legal cynicism. This study also looks at the relationship between BJW and perceptions of the laws. The justice system and its perception influence citizens concerning the legal world (Justice & Meares, 2014; Meares, Tyler, & Gardener, 2015). Positive perception of laws leads individuals to feel that it is their obligation to follow the law irrespective of its content. The items addressing perceptions of the law provide a contrast to the construct of legal cynicism to see both a more neutral and a negative outcome of legal socialization. It is expected that, as mentioned in a previous section, that personal BJW and general BJW are related to perceptions of the law because the most positively people perceive the law to be, the more justice they likely anticipate. However, legal cynicism may occur when there is a mismatch between what people believe others are getting, and what they expect to receive themselves. The section below will provide a brief glimpse of the systemic inequalities of Brazilian society to better situate and interpret the results.

Social Context

Inequality is a multidimensional problem and a pervasive global issue, particularly in Latin American. In Brazil, the top 10% in income control 16 times more than the bottom 40%, and the income of the richest 1% is almost 40 times larger

than that of the bottom 50%. Among the top 10% in income, black people and those of mixed race represent only 2.5% (IBGE, 2017). Beyond income inequality, there are injustices related to an unequal distribution of basic rights such as education. Brazil ranks poorly on the Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA, 2015) in all areas (science, reading and math). However, there is a large gap between public and private school performance, which sustains and reproduces the cycle of poverty and inequality. The gap between public and private school's performance on the PISA is one of the largest in the world (OECD, 2015). Students in private schools in Brazil perform comparably to students in developed nations (Gamboa & Waltenberg, 2012). Because of this difference, there is a large overlap between income and education quality, with the wealthier often choosing private schools for their children.

Brazil also has a pervasive problem of school dropout, especially in public schools. By the age of 15, only 60% of Brazilian adolescents are enrolled in school (Bermudez, 2017). This is one of the reasons the current study chose early adolescence as the optimal time frame for data collection, around the age of 12, over 90% are still enrolled in school (Bermudez, 2017), thus allowing for a more representative sample. Brazilian educational inequality undermines social mobility—the ultimate hope and promise of a fair and just democracy. A recent austerity cap on education and social program spending due to the recent recession has exacerbated the problem. Brazil has high perceptions of national corruption scoring a 37 on a scale of 1 (highly corrupt)—100 (clean) (Transparency International, 2017). In the recent history, Brazil impeached a democratically elected president (2016) and has an ongoing high-profile corruption scandal that has uncovered over a billion USD of misappropriated public funds (BBC News, 2018; Kiernan, 2015; Watts, 2017). Due to the high-profile corruption and blatant inequality, it is easy to see how Brazilians would develop a strong sense of legal cynicism and a low perception of laws (Lopez-Medina & Rodrigues, 2019; Savell, 2015).

Current Study, Research Questions, and Hypotheses

The current study has two primary goals: to examine the difference between personal and general BJW (Just World Gap) as a function of privilege, and to show the utility of the Just World Gap through an examination of how it relates to legal socialization.

To address the first goal, we analyzed the demographic data on the Just World Gap and compared it to the traditional BJW approach (personal and general). We hypothesized that the Just World Gap would be significantly higher for those in privileged versus disadvantaged groups. To meet this purpose, a 2×4 ANOVA was conducted on school type (private/public) and race/ethnicity on Just World Gap to see if there is a significant interaction between variables and main effects

for each privilege type. School and race were both included in order to account for a possible interaction between the variables which both imply levels of privilege within the Brazilian society. Income level was analyzed separately due to the amount of levels of the variable and the unviability of a three-way ANOVA given the variable categories. Further, we hypothesized that this Just World Gap difference will be primarily due to privileged groups having a higher personal BJW than less privileged groups (in accordance with Thomas & Mucherah, 2016; Thomas & Napolitano, 2017). To test this, we conducted a mixed measures ANOVAs to see which BJW (personal/general) is responsible for this gap. If the Just World Gap is a function of an accurate view of reality (not a self-serving fairness bias), then the difference will be primarily due to a higher personal BJW, not a differing general BJW.

In the justification for this new construct of Just World Gap, it is important to differentiate it from a subjective feeling of relative deprivation (feeling deprived due to the immediate contrast with a higher privileged group). It is possible that those with less privilege look at their immediate surroundings and notice that they do not have as much as their nearest peers. For example, a student from a low-income family who attends a private school may be especially conscious of their underprivileged status because they are surrounded by wealthier peers. If they had gone to a public school where most of their peers have similar (low) income levels, they may not be as primed to think about their lower status. It is plausible that the Just World Gap is simply a manifestation of this feeling of relative deprivation, where individuals judge the justice to self (personal BJW) and justice to others (general BJW) based on the contrast of their most salient surroundings. If the Just World Gap is a function of relative deprivation, those who come from a higher-income family, yet still attend a public school, would have a higher Just World Gap compared to those whose families earn substantially less yet attend a private school. The former has higher earning power than their classmates, while the latter may feel like the poorest kid in the class. Therefore, if the Just World Gap is simply relative deprivation feelings, the richest in the poorest (public) schools would have the highest Just World Gap, and the poorest students in the richest schools (private) would have the lowest Just World Gap. However, if the Just World Gap is unique from feelings of relative deprivation and is indeed due to a stronger access to societal justice due to privilege, the poorest students in the private schools will have a higher Just World Gap than the poorest students in the public schools, because the former at least have an educational privilege, even though their socioeconomic level is substantially lower than their immediate peers. In order to analyze this hypothesis and ensure that Just World Gap is not a reorganization of the relative deprivation construct, this study will look at these two situations and see how the Just World Gap is manifested in high-contrast social settings.

The second goal was to look at the Just World Gap, personal BJW, and general BJW in relation to legal socialization items (perceptions of the law and legal cynicism) to examine if the Just World Gap has a stronger association with legal socialization than personal and general BJW separately. To examine this question, a partial correlation was conducted (controlling for income and school) looking at the

relationships between the three BJW constructs and items of perceptions of the law and legal socialization. We hypothesize that the traditional views of BJW (personal and general) will be positively correlated with perceptions of the law, as previous research has suggested, but that the Just World Gap would be more strongly correlated with the items of legal cynicism. This is anticipated because legal cynicism may emerge not from the perception of fairness in each realm, but the distance they can place between their personal access to justice and the justice in society at large. Those who can view the injustices of the world, while still maintaining a belief that the system will work for them personally, may be less likely to become cynical.

Methods

Procedure

The present study used data from the São Paulo Legal Socialization Study (SPLSS), a panel survey of students, who attend public and private schools in the city of São Paulo, Brazil. The sampling process followed two stages to select participants born in 2005 and living in the city of São Paulo. The first step was taken through the probability proportional to size (PPS) method and resulted in 112 participating schools total, both public and private. Both the school and student sampling are well distributed geographically in the territory and match the variety of demographic and socio-economic neighborhoods within the city. Further, all city regions were included and the final sample closely matched the school census and school type distribution of São Paulo, according to the Ministry of Education of Brazil (MEC, 2017). After the school selection, fieldwork researchers presented the research to the school staff and distributed the consent forms for the students in order to gain parental consent. On a second visit, the researchers were able to select randomly and interview the participants among those who brought the consent form filled and signed by the parents plus the contact information form. All interviews were held at school place and took approximately 30 min. This research complied with both Brazilian and American standards for ethical research and was approved by the institutional review board.

Participants

The sample consists of 742 preadolescents. They were all born in 2005 and in 7th grade with a mean age of 12. There were 450 from public school and 290 from private school. The participants reside in all five major regions of the city. Forty-six percent of this sample self-identified as White, 10.8% as Black, 30.6% as mixed race, 2.0% Asian, 3.4% Native Brazilian, and 7.2% “don’t know” or did not answer. According to the last census (2010), the Brazilian population consists of 47.73% White, 43.13% multiracial, 7.61% Black, 1.09% Asian, and 0.43% native Brazilian

(IBGE, 2011). A more recent household survey revealed similar results, reporting 43.6% White, 46.8% multiracial, and 8.6% Black (IBGE, 2018).

Measures

Family Income

In Brazil, income is officially measured in national minimum wages. It is fixed in full-time 8 h per day of working or 44 weekly hours, which in 2016 were equivalent to approximately US\$ 260/month, according to the Brazilian Ministry of Labor and Employment. To collect SPLSS family income data, the participant's parents filled a self-report questionnaire. The income scale had six levels of minimum wage categories (from "up to 1 minimum wage" to "more than 20 minimum wages"), as set by the Brazilian Institute of Geography and Statistics (IBGE). In the Results section, these are converted to USD based on a recent conversion rate of \$3.78 (Bloomberg, 2018).

Race

The race categories used in the survey were the same ones used in the Brazilian decennial demographic census. These are: White, Black, multiracial, Asian, and native Brazilian. Asian and native Brazilian were grouped together as "other" category due to the low numbers in each group.

School Type

Schools are grouped between public and private schools selected through the probability proportional to size (PPS) method. The proportional number of students follows the official school census, according to the Ministry of Education of Brazil (MEC), and the school type distribution across the city of São Paulo, according to the São Paulo Secretary of Education (2018).

Belief in a Just World

This was measured through Dalbert's (1999) personal BJW (e.g., "I believe that I usually get what I deserve") and general BJW questionnaire (e.g., "I believe that, by and large, people get what they deserve"). General BJW had been previously validated in Brazil (Pimentel et al., 2010), and both measures have been previously used in Brazilian adolescent samples (Thomas, 2017) with acceptable internal reliability ($\alpha > .60$). In this sample, the internal reliability was acceptable for personal ($\alpha = .65$) and general BJW ($\alpha = .63$). These were averaged to create a composite score for each construct.

Just World Gap

This was measured by the personal BJW minus the general BJW. Lower absolute values indicate a smaller gap between personal and general BJW, and higher values indicate greater difference. Negative values indicate that general BJW is higher than personal BJW.

Perceptions of the Law and Legal Cynicism

Measurements of legal cynicism and perception of laws for SPLSS were based on the New Hampshire Youth Study (NHYS) survey, developed by the Legal Socialization Laboratory at the University of New Hampshire at Durham (for NHYS, see: Cohn, Bucolo, Rebellon, & Van Gundy, 2010; Rebellon, Manasse, Van Gundy, & Cohn, 2012; Trinkner, Cohn, Rebellon, & Van Gundy, 2012; Trinkner et al., 2012; Van Gundy, Stracuzzi, Rebellon, Tucker, & Cohn, 2011). In order to measure perception of laws, participants answered a set of questions: “Laws must be obeyed even when people do not agree with them,” “Some laws can be disobeyed,” “Laws are the same for everyone,” “There are people who are above the law,” “People who break the law should be punished (with fines or prison time),” “Laws serve to protect people,” “Laws can be changed,” and “All laws are good for the country.” In order to measure legal cynicism, participants answered the following questions: “Laws exist to be disrespected,” “It’s okay to do anything you want as long as you don’t hurt anyone,” “To make money, there are no right and wrong ways,” “When two people are fighting no one should interfere,” “People should live pretty much for today without thinking about the future.” A factor analysis was conducted with a maximum likelihood rotation method and a varimax rotation with a Kaiser normalization on all the legal cynicism and perceptions of laws items. As expected, they loaded on two distinct factors ($> .3$) with the exception of the two negatively worded items from the perceptions of the law (which loaded separate from either factor). The items for either scale did not have an acceptable internal reliability ($\alpha < .60$); thus, each item was analyzed separately and not averaged together.

Results

To understand if groups of different privilege status have significantly different Just World Gaps, a 2×4 ANOVA was conducted to examine the effect of school type (private and public) and race (white, black, multiracial, other). Although the cells did not all have equal number of participants, Levene’s test was not significant and thus this test did not violate the homoscedasticity assumption. See Table 1 to see the breakdown

Table 1 Number of participants per cell of the Just World Gap 2×4 ANOVA

	White	Black	Mixed race	Other
Public	140	67	169	67
Private	202	13	58	26

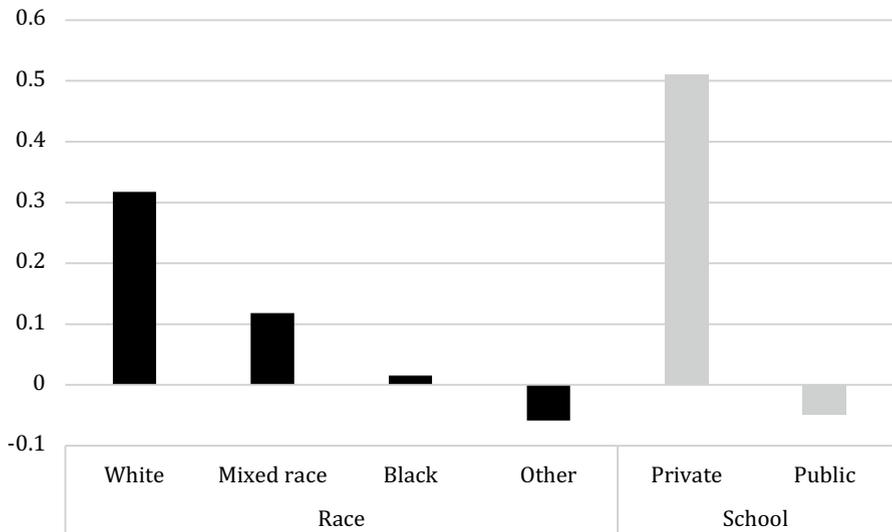


Fig. 1 Just World Gap across race and school type

Table 2 Descriptive statistics of the Just World Gap across race, school type, and income levels

	<i>N</i>	Personal BJW Mean (SD)	General BJW Mean (SD)	Just World Gap Mean (SD)
Race				
White	342	3.192 (.559)	2.875 (.659)	0.269 (.671)
Black	80	3.118 (.604)	3.102 (.610)	0.197 (.637)
Mixed race	227	3.135 (.556)	3.017 (.661)	0.239 (.712)
Other	93	2.976 (.648)	3.034 (.645)	0.072 (.798)
School				
Private	299	3.266 (.549)	2.762 (.666)	0.465 (.697)
Public	443	3.055 (.581)	3.089 (.619)	-0.077 (.700)
Monthly income				
Up to \$232.80	131	2.980 (.624)	3.198 (.578)	-0.218 (.701)
\$232.81 to R\$ \$465.61	213	3.091 (.552)	3.032 (.626)	0.059 (.730)
\$465.62 to \$1164.02	165	3.162 (.572)	2.928 (.632)	0.234 (.674)
\$1164.03 to \$2328.04	98	3.294 (.556)	2.733 (.642)	0.565 (.708)
\$2328.05 to \$4656.08	43	3.230 (.539)	2.600 (.759)	0.63 (.803)
More than \$4656.08	20	3.275 (.555)	2.610 (.682)	0.665 (.574)

All monetary values are in USD

of participants in each cell, and the model was significant ($F(7, 734) = 17.39, p < .001, \eta^2 = .14$). The interaction between race and school was not significant ($p > .05$). Race was not a significant main effect ($F(3, 734) = .09, p > .05$), but there was a significant main effect of school type, $F(1, 734) = 53.41, p < .001, \eta^2 = .068$, with private ($M = .46, SE = .06, 95\% CI .33, .59$) having a higher Just World Gap than public ($M = -.08, SE = .04, 95\% CI -.15, -.01$). See Fig. 1 and Table 2. The effect size comparing private and public schools was large ($d = .80$). A closer look was given to the descriptive statistics of the personal and general BJW of both private (personal BJW $M = 3.27; SD = .55$; general BJW $M = 2.75; SD = .66$) and public school students (personal BJW $M = 3.05; SD = .58$; general BJW $M = 3.10; SD = .61$) to see from where the difference was coming. This comparison infers that the Just World Gap in private school students may be coming from both a higher personal BJW and a lower general BJW compared to public school students. An ANOVA was conducted to examine the effect of monthly family income and Just World Gap, and there was a significant effect $F(5, 664) = 20.71, p < .001, \eta^2 = .13$. Each income level had a progressively higher Just World Gap than the lower-income levels. The effect size between the lowest earning and highest earning groups was very large ($d = 1.38$). See Fig. 2.

To understand if the Just World Gap is primarily a function of a lower general BJW or a higher personal BJW, or both, mixed ANOVAs were conducted with personal and general BJW as the repeated measures factor. A 2 (personal BJW, general BJW) \times 2 (school) mixed ANOVA revealed that there was a significant interaction between personal and general BJW and type of school, $F(1, 738) = 103.051, p < .001, \eta^2 = .123$. To follow up on this interaction, the results were decomposed by school to understand the differences between general and personal BJW. There

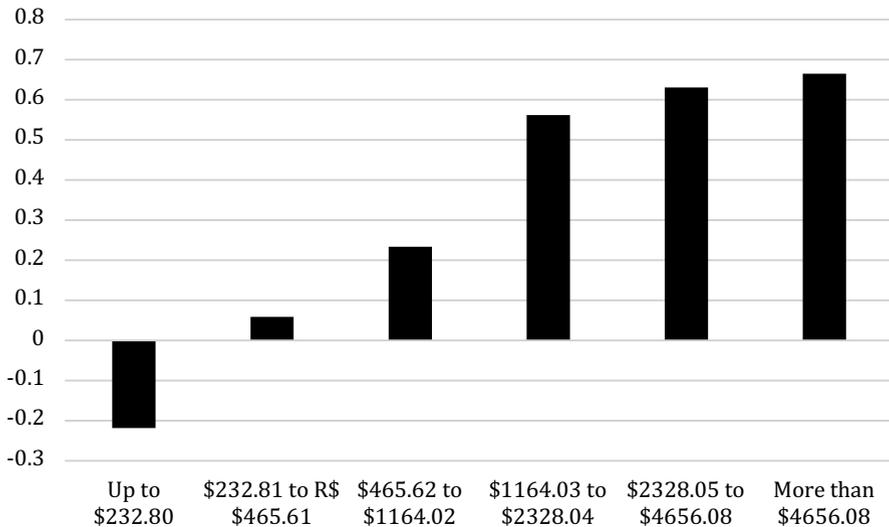


Fig. 2 Just World Gap across all income levels

was a significant difference of both personal BJW, $F(1, 7.86) = 24.318, p < .001, \eta^2 = .032$, and general BJW $F(1, 18.91) = 46.490, p < .001, \eta^2 = .059$. A 2 (personal BJW, general BJW) \times 4 (race) mixed ANOVA demonstrated that there is a significant interaction between BJW type and racial groups, $F(3, 738) = 9.038, p < .001, \eta^2 = .035$. The subsequent decomposition showed it was due to both personal BJW differences, $F(3, 738) = 3.511, p = .015, \eta^2 = .014$, and general BJW differences, $F(3, 738) = 4.195, p = .006, \eta^2 = .017$. A 2 (personal BJW, general BJW) \times 6 (income) mixed ANOVA revealed that there was a significant interaction between BJW and income, $F(5, 664) = 20.714, p < .001, \eta^2 = .135$. The decomposed results revealed that the difference was also due to both personal BJW, $F(5, 664) = 4.250, p = .001, \eta^2 = .031$, and general BJW, $F(5, 664) = 10.892, p < .001, \eta^2 = .076$. These analyses indicate that the Just World Gap difference across school types, racial groups, and income levels is due to those in the more privileged groups have both higher personal BJW and lower general BJW. See Table 2 for descriptive statistics in personal and general BJW.

To further compare the Just World Gap construct with the traditional way of analyzing personal and general BJW independently, one-way ANOVAs were conducted on each of the three dependent variables and independent variables separately in order to compare the effect sizes of each. All tests were statistically significant with partial eta square values ranging from small ($> .01$), medium ($> .06$), and large ($> .14$) (Cohen, 1988). The Just World Gap variable had a stronger effect size than the general and personal BJW separate on race, income, and education, which further contributes to the understanding that the Just World Gap may be a useful construct in understanding privilege and justice. See Table 3.

Just World Gap Versus Relative Deprivation Feelings

To see if the Just World Gap is primarily a function of feelings of relative deprivation, we looked for situations where peers were in relative disadvantage or advantage situations, such as wealthier students in public schools and poorer students in private schools. A cross between these variables indicated that poorer students (those in the second poorest category) in private schools had a higher Just World Gap than those who had the same income level but were in public schools and this difference was of a large effect size (Cohen's $d = -1.00$). See Fig. 3.

These students in private schools are presumably the poorest in their peer group, yet they still had a higher Just World Gap compared with their peers in public schools. Therefore, those in lower-income brackets were only lower in Just World Gap if they

Table 3 Partial η^2 values on ANOVAs between BJW variables and demographic variables

	General BJW	Personal BJW	Just World Gap
Race	0.02*	0.01*	0.04*
Income	0.08*	0.03*	0.14***
School type	0.07*	0.03*	0.13**

* $> .01$ small; ** $> .06$ medium; *** $> .14$ large (Cohen 1988)

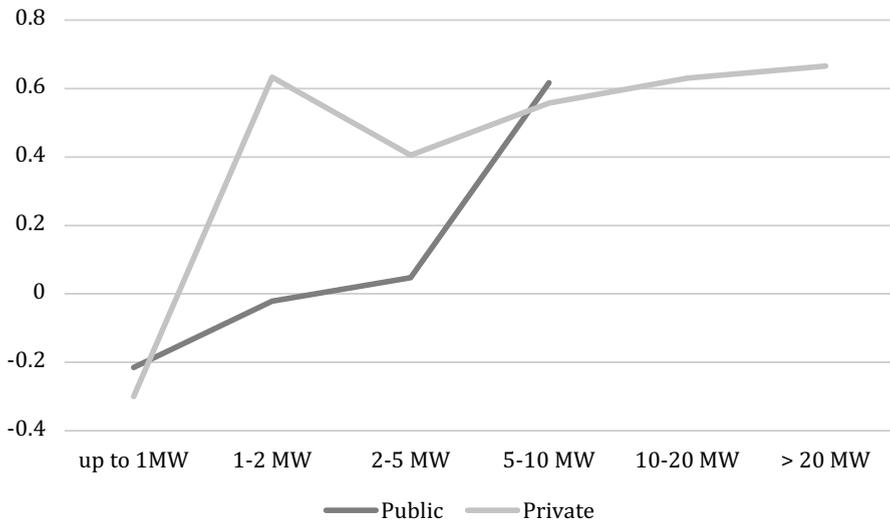


Fig. 3 Just World Gap across income and school type

Table 4 Just World Gap across income and school type

	Public			Private		
	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>n</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>n</i>
Up to \$232.80	-0.21	0.71	126	-0.30	0.57	5
\$232.81 to \$465.61	-0.02	0.71	187	0.63	0.58	26
\$465.62 to \$1164.02	0.05	0.59	79	0.40	0.71	86
\$1164.03 to \$2328.04	0.62	0.79	8	0.56	0.70	90
\$2328.05 to \$4656.08			0	0.63	0.80	43
More than \$4656.08			0	0.66	0.57	20

were also in public schools. This indicates that Just World Gap is unique from feelings of relative deprivation, because those in the highest social contrast situations had a Just World Gap that more closely aligned with their objective privilege levels, not their subjective feelings of social comparison. Note that there were only five in the lowest income bracket in private schools, and only eight participants in the fourth income bracket in public schools. Therefore, we will refrain from drawing any discussion points from those two groups. See Table 4 for a specific breakdown of descriptive statistics and group sizes, and see the Discussion section for further development of this argument.

Just World Gap and Legal Socialization

To understand the relationships between BJW (personal and general), Just World Gap, and the legal socialization variables, partial correlations were conducted. Given the relationship between the Just World Gap and income described above, this analysis controlled for monthly income, race, and school type, so the results below account for the economic differential that influences the BJWs. The perceptions of the law items were negatively related to Just World Gap, but only one of the eight items was significantly correlated: “Laws are good for the country.” Compared to the Just World Gap, personal and general BJW were more strongly correlated with perceptions of the law, particularly the general BJW. All items that were significant had positive relationships. These positive relationships indicate that those with a higher BJW had more positive evaluations of the laws, with the exception of one negatively worded item: “There are people who are above the law.” That item was the only phrase that was significant for general BJW but was not significant for personal BJW. This will be discussed in the next section.

All legal cynicism items were significantly correlated with the Just World Gap correlated. In four of the five items, the correlation was stronger with the Just World Gap than with each BJW individually. The Just World Gap was negatively correlated with all legal cynicism items, indicating that higher cynicism was related to a lower Just World Gap. For all Pearson r values, see Table 5.

Discussion

Just World Gap and Privilege

In accordance with the hypothesis, groups with higher privilege had a higher Just World Gap. Although race was not significant, it was in the expected direction, with those with more racial privilege having a higher Just World Gap. As in any society that has long suffered the historic scars of slavery and racism, race may be obfuscated because the privilege variables are highly associated with one another. It is also challenging to see the overall effect of race due to the variety of racial categories. A look at the descriptive statistics reveals that whites have a higher Just World Gap than mixed race individuals, who in turn have a higher Just World Gap than blacks. The private school students had significantly higher Just World Gap than the students in public schools. Similarly, the richer students had progressively higher Just World Gap than the poorer students. The overwhelming majority of research that includes both personal BJW and general BJW has revealed that personal BJW is typically higher than general BJW (Bègue & Bastounis, 2003; Correia & Dalbert, 2007; Dalbert, 1999; Lipkus et al., 1996; Sutton & Douglas, 2005; Sutton et al., 2008). However, this may be simply because the research has tended to favor the middle class and privileged samples in Western countries. And perhaps more research in developing countries and underprivileged populations will reveal that the ability to distance oneself from the injustices in the broader worlds is itself a privilege.

Table 5 Partial correlations between BJWs, perceptions of the law, and legal cynicism, controlling for income and education and race

	Just World Gap	Personal BJW	General BJW
Laws must be obeyed even if people do not agree with them	-0.07	0.15***	0.21***
Some laws can be disobeyed [†]	-0.06	-0.07	-0.01
Laws are the same for everyone	-0.09	0.16***	0.24***
There are people who are above the law [†]	-0.07	0.02	0.09**
People who break the law should be punished with fines or prison	0.02	0.21***	0.14***
Laws exist to protect people	-0.04	0.25***	0.28***
Laws can be changed	-0.01	0.03	0.04
Laws are good for the country	-0.18***	0.22***	0.39***
Laws exist to be disrespected	-0.08*	-0.09*	0.01
It's okay to do anything you want as long as you don't hurt anyone	-0.26***	-0.12**	0.18***
To make money, there are no right and wrong ways	-0.25***	-0.09*	0.19***
When two people are fighting no one should interfere	-0.09*	-0.07	0.03
People should live pretty much for today without thinking about the future	-0.13**	-0.06	0.09*

[†]indicates a negatively worded item; Education 0 = public, 1 = private; 0 = Non-White, 1 = White

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

The findings of this study are in line with previous research revealing a stronger differentiation of constructs among the privileged (Thomas & Mucherah, 2016; Thomas & Napolitano, 2017), and in line with a study demonstrating that the differentiation might be due to more objective assessments of justice and privilege (Sutton et al., 2008). If it were truly objective, we would expect that the difference in personal and general BJW is related solely to the personal BJW judgments, not the general BJW. However, the data from this study suggest it is a combination, with those with greater privilege having both a higher personal and a lower general BJW. These findings provide an alternate explanation to research that suggested that the differentiation has to do with cognitive ability—that those with higher-order reasoning having a better ability to differentiate personal and general justice cognitions (Dalbert, 2001). Instead, we propose that the differentiation between BJWs is related to societal privilege.

This paper suggests that the personal BJW is not always higher than the general BJW, and it is not necessarily a biased view, but may be interpreted as an accurate description that some groups of privilege have more access to justice than others. Poorer students in private schools (presumably the poorest kids in their class) had a larger Just World Gap than their similarly poor peers in public schools. This goes against the relative deprivation rationale, indicating that the higher gap is not a function of students comparing themselves to less favorable immediate peers. Instead, even the poorer students in the private schools are acknowledging that their lives are fairer than those in the general society (higher personal BJW compared to general BJW), presumably because they are receiving a higher level of education than the majority of other Brazilians.

Those with a better education receive more power in society, have more cultural and social capital, and thus have a more powerful voice. Although everyone will experience some level of injustice in their lives, those in higher positions of power (with better education and from more racially and economically privileged backgrounds) are more knowledgeable of how the system works and can therefore use more efficient means to draw attention and make reparations. In addition, in a society ripe with corruption and inequality, those with more money can pay for more security (thus fewer violent injustices), better lawyers (thus fewer legal injustices) and stronger political representation (thus fewer systemic injustices). When people have different perceptions of justice, it is important to remember that they also have different levels of *access* to justice. For example, in Brazil an individual is not able to serve as their own defender in public courts, a lawyer is legally required. And, while they have the legal right to a free lawyer, many are not told this or it is not practically available in their region (Sadek, 2014). The unequal access to good education mentioned previously in this paper is another example of the unequal access to justice, because the underprivileged do not have the same resources to be compensated and steer their future.

The examples above explain why those in higher privilege groups have a higher personal BJW but do not explain why their general BJW tended to be lower than disadvantaged groups. It could be that those with more privilege have a lower general BJW outlook because they are not as threatened by systemic injustice. This is in line with prior research stating that well-being had a higher relationship to general BJW

among those in more disadvantaged groups (Laurin et al., 2011). They may be able to acknowledge broad injustices without accentuating personal anxieties about how these injustices may shape their personal realities.

Just World Gap and Legal Socialization

Adolescents' perceptions of justice, both personally and generally, were significantly and positively correlated with their perceptions of the law. This was true even after controlling for household income, education, and race. Regardless of income, those who perceived the world to be fairer had more positive perceptions of the law. All of the significant relationships with personal and general BJW and law perceptions were positive, and this goes in line with the hypothesis. However, there was one negatively worded item, "There are people who are above the law." This pattern is also seen in the legal cynicism item "It is okay to do anything you want as long as you don't hurt anyone." This positive significant relationship with general BJW was initially unexpected. However, general BJW is more likely to be related to harsh social attitudes (Bègue & Bastounis, 2003; Bègue & Muller, 2006; Sutton & Douglas, 2005).

Broadly speaking, perceptions of the law more correlated with personal and general BJW than with the Just World Gap. This is consistent with research on the positive correlation between general BJW and right-wing authoritarianism, because a perception of world fairness helps sustain respect for laws and authorities (Furnham, 2003; Hafer & Sutton, 2016). While the perceptions of the law correlation with BJW were consistent with prior research, legal cynicism was more strongly correlated with the Just World Gap than with either BJW construct separately. Prior research has tried to link perceptions of justice with cynicism but has come up with mixed results with some revealing a negative relationship (Dittmar & Dickinson, 1993; Rubin & Peplau, 1975) and some a nonexistent relationship (Cubela Adoric & Kwartuc, 2007; Gonçalves, 2016). Perhaps, this is because cynicism has more to do with the differentiating of justice between self and others than in either one by itself. The results of the current study could indicate that one's BJW is relevant for how people view the law, but their levels of cynicism toward the law will be influenced by the comparison they make between how much justice they have access to compared to others. In this view, justice is an asset inequality distributed. This study helps explain how people can develop similar perceptions of the law (regardless of income), yet differ in levels of cynicism. Those who can distance the justice in their own lives from the justice in society (i.e., larger Just World Gap) are less likely to become cynical. The relationship between Just World Gap and legal cynicism helps illustrate the utility of the construct and can be a relevant construct for future researchers.

This study is particularly relevant because of how young these participants are. Early adolescence is a key time to study the development of legal socialization (Cohn & White, 1990; Fagan & Tyler, 2005; Tapp & Levine, 1974; Tyler & Trinkner, 2017). This study uncovered an important relationship between legal cynicism and participants' Just World Gap. At the age of 12, citizens are already making

important judgments and which are shaping their legal socialization process. This research supports the understanding that cynicism can onset at a young age and that preadolescents already have a nuanced perspective of their access to justice relative to others in society. Brazil has a social mobility problem with grave justice inequalities in race, education, and income levels. These issues shape the social dynamics with direct consequences to the socialization of future citizens, notably in the areas of perceptions of the laws, justice, and legal cynicism.

Limitations and Future Research

The present research is correlational; therefore, it should not be used to make causal attributions. It is theoretically relevant to note the relationship between the Just World Gap and legal cynicism, but this study did not attempt to establish temporal precedence for causal attributions. Longitudinal research is necessary to understand if there is temporal precedence and how the Just World Gap and legal cynicism simultaneously develop in early adolescence.

The current study was not able to establish an adequate internal consistency for legal cynicism or perceptions of the law. For this reason, each item was analyzed separately, so the readers can make their own interpretations about the constructs measured. Future research should seek to develop more culturally appropriate measures that are stronger measures for younger populations. Measures that are appropriate for preadolescents are of particular importance, since research has revealed early adolescence to be a critical time of developing perceptions of the law and legal cynicism (Fagan & Tyler, 2005).

This is a preliminary study bridging just world and legal socialization research and establishing the Just World Gap as a unique construct. This study should also be interpreted within the boundaries of the sample: preadolescents in the city of São Paulo, Brazil. Further studies should seek to understand if the Just World Gap is also witnessed in other age-groups and cultural contexts and how it changes throughout adolescence.

Theoretical Implications

While this paper is only one study, its differences are consistent with other findings in another Brazilian study (Thomas & Napolitano, 2017) and in Kenya (Thomas & Mucherah, 2016), indicating that those with greater privilege have a greater gap between personal and general BJW. There is evidence to believe that researchers should no longer assume that personal BJW is normatively higher than general BJW, nor that this reflects the fairness self-serving bias. This study adds an interesting insight about not just studying the personal and general BJW separately, but the importance of looking at the Just World Gap as a construct in itself.

The second theoretical implication is the understanding that the BJW, while it can be a resource, a delusion, a buffer, or a coping method, it can also be an accurate reflection of the unjust reality, where some individuals have more access to justice than others. Already at the age of 12, the citizens in this study are differentiating

between the personal and general BJW concepts based on their level of power in society. And, above and beyond their family income status, this differentiation (or lack thereof) is related to their levels of legal cynicism.

Lastly, BJW and legal socialization fields can be integrated. This study is an example of how BJW and the Just World Gap are vital components of perceptions of the law and legal cynicism. Future research should explore in greater depth to develop a fuller picture of how children and adolescents are being socialized to relate with authorities and comply with laws and how that is co-developing with their perceptions of justice for both self and the world at large.

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