The Not-So-Just World Hypothesis

I've long been skeptical of what psychologists call the Just World Hypothesis. A standard statement:

> [T]he just-world hypothesis is the tendency to attribute consequences to—or expect consequences as the result of—a universal force that restores moral balance. This belief generally implies the existence of cosmic justice, destiny, divine providence, desert, stability, and/or order, and is often associated with a variety of fundamental fallacies, especially in regards to rationalizing people's suffering on the grounds that they "deserve" it.

One of the main forms of (alleged) evidence in favor of the Just World Hypothesis is that people derogate and blame the victims of *crimes*. But I've simply never noticed this in real life. All I've seen, rather, is that people claim that *other* people derogate and blame the victims of crimes.

To explore these doubts, I ran three Twitter polls. Yes, I know this is far from decisive evidence. But I still trust it more than many of the studies that got the Just World Hypothesis off the ground.

I started with two paired survey questions:

> *In the typical U.S. crime, how blameworthy is the VICTIM?*
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> *— Bryan Caplan (@bryan_caplan) August 2, 2019*

> *In the typical U.S. crime, how blameworthy is the PERPETRATOR?*
>
> *— Bryan Caplan (@bryan_caplan) August 2, 2019*

Responses match my expectations. Virtually *no one* thinks that crime victims are "highly" or even "somewhat" blameworthy. Almost *everyone* thinks that crime perpetrators are "highly" or at least "somewhat" culpable.

My last survey zoomed out to the Big Question:

How just is the world?

— Bryan Caplan (@bryan_caplan) *August 2, 2019*

Well look at that! Disbelievers in the Just World Hypothesis outnumber believers by over 2:1. Only 3% of respondents think the world is "Very just."

Are my respondents atypical? Indubitably. Nevertheless, I have much more confidence that my results will replicate on a national representative sample than the published academic work on this topic. If anyone wants to try, feel free to use my questions!