

**More Justice Leads to Quicker Blame? An Investigation Into Just World Beliefs and  
Swift Blame**

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**Abstract**

Swift blame is when an individual blames another quickly without considering other circumstances or consequences of the blame. The theoretical basis of swift blame is system 1 thinking, characterized by automatic and quick cognition. The present study investigated possible antecedents for swift blame. Specifically, I investigated a possible relationship between Just World Beliefs (JWB) and swift blame. JWB are the beliefs one has about fairness of the world. Individuals who have higher JWB believe in a world where ‘people get what they deserve and deserve what they get’. They frame situations based on these beliefs, even if it is objectively not the case. I hypothesized that higher JWB are positively correlated with engagement in swift blame in an organizational context. I conducted a survey with two samples, one convenience sample recruited by ourselves ( $N = 114$ ) and another via Prolific Academic ( $N = 80$ ). Participants evaluated their JWB and read a vignette and assumed the role of a manager with an underperforming employee. I assessed swift blame by, for example, confidence in having enough information and time willing to investigate the situation further. The measures align with conceptualizations of swift blame. I also assessed blame variables such as general blame and severity of discipline for the employee. In neither sample did I find a significant relationship between JWB and swift blame. However, I discovered significant relationships between JWB and general blame and severity of discipline. These results have implications for how JWB relate to blame in general and discipline intensity.

*Keywords:* swift blame, Just World Beliefs, blame in organizations

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and Swift Blame**

Suppose person A works as a manager at a firm. They overhear a loud bang coming from a nearby room and go to check where it came from. Person C had dropped an expensive printer and fled the scene immediately, but as person A arrives, they observe another employee, person B looking at the mess. Without much thought, person A yells at person B, calling them bad names and immediately blames them for the damage, even though person C was responsible. This type of blame is referred to as *swift blame*, and occurs when an individual blames another quickly without considering other circumstances or consequences of the blame (Skarlicki et al., 2017).

This paper will discuss swift blame and its possible antecedents. As there is a lack of research and understanding on swift blame and variables which may predict it (Skarlicki et al., 2017), I hope to provide some evidence for possible antecedents. Specifically, the focus of the present study will be on exploring whether higher Just World Beliefs (JWB) relate to engaging in swift blame in an organizational context. In brief, the Just World Hypothesis (JWH) is the idea that generally, good outcomes happen to good people, and bad outcomes happen to bad people (Furnham, 2003). Prior research has established a link between higher JWB and blame, particularly the blaming of victims (Van den Boos & Maas, 2009). The reasoning behind this link is that if people believe that the world works in fair ways, they might be more likely to view victims as deserving (Strömwall et al. 2013). As of current, there is no established relationship in the literature between JWB and swift blame. Therefore, I aim to explore if a relationship exists. In the following sections, I will discuss what is blame, how it manifests in organizations, and why it might occasionally be a highly functional phenomenon. Then, I will explain what is swift blame and show how swift blame is not functional, and lastly, I will explain the proposed link between JWB and swift blame.

**Blame and Its Components**

How to conceptualize blame? The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy (Tognazzini & Coates, 2018) defines blame as “a reaction to something of negative normative significance about someone or their behavior”. Across research, blame has shown to consist of primarily two components, in the following order: 1) assigning responsibility and 2) sanctioning (Skarlicki et al., 2017). However, according to Skarlicki and colleagues (2017), it is possible that responsibility is assigned as a result of sanctioning, to justify these decisions. Additionally, one component can occur without the other (Skarlicki et al., 2017). For example, in the case of managers in organizations, they may sanction an employee for something which they were not fully responsible for, just to assign responsibility for an unwanted behavior or action (Skarlicki et al., 2017).

Blame tends to include both a cognitive component as well as an interpersonal one (Malle et al., 2012). According to Malle and colleagues (2012), the cognitive component explains the thought processes leading up to blame and blame acts, including the attitudes about the action of the agent (Van der Hoorn et al., 2021). The interpersonal component of blame refers to the observable acts related to blame such as how the blame is presented to the agent (Malle et al., 2012). To have the capacity to blame, an individual must possess a theory of mind. A theory of mind grants them access to understanding the mental states of others, and further, knowledge about the norms which guide behavior, and lastly, knowledge about the mental states which may have caused the blame-worthy behavior (Malle et al., 2012). With these components and knowledge, only then is it possible to blame someone.

**Blame in Organizations**

Blame in organizations is becoming an increasingly relevant issue. For instance, the media has introduced the term ‘blame culture’ referring to the norms and ideas in the organizational environment where individuals or groups are regularly blamed and criticized

for mistakes (Brown & Hicks, 2009). The consequences of such a blame culture can cause anxiety for employees around admitting mistakes and the following criticism (Gorini et al., 2012). Furthermore, Senge (2006) found that blame can have negative effects on organizational learning, which can lead to diminished job performance. Additionally, they discovered that experiencing fear around blame can lead to making more rash decisions, resulting in more mistakes (Senge, 2006). This is dysfunctional as it continues the negative blame cycle. However, when considering thoughtful and considerate blame, the outcomes are not always negative. For instance, Lupton and Sarwar (2021) argue that this type of blame can allow for modifications of undesirable behavior and maintenance of the structure within an organization, by strengthening authority and power differences. Additionally, positive effects on self-efficacy can be seen for those doing the blaming (Lupton & Sarwar, 2021).

### **The Function(s) of Blame**

The functions of blame differ based on circumstance. Nonetheless, blaming signals to the person that their behavior is not ideal (Malle et al., 2012). Blaming someone for an action may allow them to increase awareness of their wrongdoings and understanding how to avoid the same behavior in the future (Malle et al., 2012). It is recommended that the person doing the blaming not only focuses on the others' behavior, but also on their values and the standards of the community (Malle et al., 2012). This relates to what was stated earlier, as a large part of blame is to understand norm violations and to infer what may have caused these violations. On a related note, Malle and colleagues (2012) emphasize that another function of blame is to assist in coordination of social interactions, especially those in which costly violations may occur. Furthermore, the authors highlight that blame, socially, has much to do with regulating behavior and passing on these values and ideas (Malle et al., 2012).

Furthermore, Malle and colleagues (2012) distinguish between two categories of blame models: blame-early and blame-late models. Blame-early models suggest that blame

occurs *before* assigning causality, and therefore blame can have an influence on judgment of causality and judgment of the mental state of the person being blamed. The person doing the blaming must infer the reasons and intentionality of the behavior *after* they have assigned blame. On the other hand, blame-late models suggest that blame occurs as a direct result of assessing causality and the mental states of the person being blamed (Malle et al., 2012). The authors suggest that the person doing the blaming must conclude that the other was responsible and at fault for something, and that their behavior is blameworthy *prior* to assigning blame (Malle et al., 2012). A key characteristic of the functions of both blame-early and blame-late models is that there is a reason behind assigning causality or assigning blame. A less functional type of blame occurs when people blame without proper intention or reason (Bradbury & Fincham, 1990).

### **Swift Blame and Its Consequences**

Blaming without proper intention or reason is swift blame (Bradley & Fincham, 1990). Swift blame is characterized as a ‘knee jerk’ reaction, in which individuals take the decision to blame without considering the circumstances or context around the mistake or error (Skarlicki et al., 2017). In essence, it is spontaneous blame which is assigned quickly.

According to Skarlicki and colleagues (2017), swift blame is linked to the workings of dual-process theory as suggested by Kahneman (2011). This theory proposes that we utilize two types or ‘systems’ of thinking: system 1 and system 2. System 1 refers to the more automatic, intuitive, and unconscious cognition, while system 2 refers to deliberate, thoughtful, and effortful cognition (Kahneman, 2011). System 1 tends to be the default-mode, and essentially acts as an autopilot system allowing us to make decisions easier and with less mental effort (Dale, 2015). Under system 1 thinking, an individual fails to assess the realities and alternative explanations of a situation and swiftly blames someone based on limited cognitive effort.

Sitkin & Bies (1994) highlight that those who are the target of swift blame may experience negative emotions such as anger, fear, or guilt. In organizations, it can result in lessened trust among employees, lower job satisfaction, absenteeism, and eroded relationships (Lupton & Sarwar, 2021). Finally, Skarlicki and colleagues (2017) suggest that swift blame can negatively affect the functioning of an organization. Due to these negative effects, swift blame may not be the most productive mechanism for organizations, thus, Skarlicki and colleagues (2017) suggest a no-blame approach where individuals are not blamed and focused is placed on mistakes as learning opportunities, or mindfulness training to increase awareness and reduce swift reactions. Despite the negative effects of swift blame and despite the importance that researchers place on a ‘no-blame approach’, people continue to engage in swift blame and this paper aims to explore why. There are a variety of variables which can be hypothesized as antecedents to swift blame such as personality characteristics or gender. For example, research by Načinović and colleagues (2020) found that workplace deviant behavior, such as blaming colleagues, was best predicted by demographic and personality variables. Focus on this study will be on JWB as a possible antecedent to swift blame, which will be discussed in the following section.

### **The Just World Hypothesis and Swift Blame**

The Just World Hypothesis (JWH) refers to the belief that there exists moral order in the world, and that people get what is coming to them (Lerner & Miller, 1978). According to Roch and colleagues (2019), individuals endorsing high JWB have a need to believe in a just world; a world where actions have consequences and “people get what they deserve and deserve what they get” (Lerner, 1977). If an individual senses a threat to their JWB, they will reframe the situation to fit their beliefs. This also applies in the case when there is not a clear match between the consequence of an action and the character of the people involved (Lerner, 1980).

There are several theoretical and empirical reasons that allow me to speculate a link between JWB and swift blame. For instance, research has shown that those endorsing higher JWB were more likely to engage in victim blaming behaviors (Van den Boos & Maas, 2009). People want to believe that the world is just and fair, so once they are confronted with evidence contradictory to these beliefs, they will reframe the situation and believe that the victim deserved what happened to them (Strömwall et al., 2013). Strömwall and colleagues (2013) discovered that those with stronger beliefs that the world is just and fair (i.e, high in JWB) tend to attribute more blame to the victim across scenarios, though the authors documented these effects in a sexual abuse scenario. Similarly, Ek (2020) found that higher JWB resulted in higher victim-blaming attitudes. Finally, in researching the effects of JWB on attitudes toward domestic violence, Valor-Segura and colleagues (2011) discovered that higher JWB resulted in them being more likely to blame the victim. Interestingly, they noted that this relationship was higher when no cause of the violent incident was included in the description compared to when the cause was listed. Valor-Segura and colleagues (2011) highlight a possible reason for this being that if participants do not know why the abuse occurred, it may be easier for them to explain it through their JWB; that the victim probably deserved it.

Based on the above research, it goes to reason that those endorsing higher JWB would be more likely to engage in swift blame. When presented with a scenario related to blame, they may not require further information about the situation, as hearing that a person was blamed for something may be enough. Additionally, as my study includes a scenario which is quite ambiguous, I hypothesize that this lack of context and information may cause participants to fall back on their JWB, as in the case with Valor-Segura and colleagues (2011) where they noted that the relationship between JWB and victim blaming was higher when no cause of the violent incident was included. They may endorse the belief that this person “got



what they deserve and deserve what they got” (Lerner, 1977) and swiftly blame them. As of current, there is a lack of literature which highlights this relationship, however, as research and understanding into swift blame grows, it is important to identify possible factors which may make someone more (or less) likely to engage in swift blaming behaviors in an organization. Additionally, most studies researching the effects of JWB and blaming behaviors focus on victim blaming in sexual abuse or assault cases, so I will be focusing on more ambiguous cases. Therefore, in the present study, the relationship between JWB and swift blame will be investigated, with the following hypothesis:

**Hypothesis 1:** Higher JWB are positively correlated with engagement in swift blame in an organizational context.

## **Methods**

### **Participants and Design**

Approval from the Ethics Committee of the Faculty of Behavioral and Social Sciences from the University of Groningen (EC-BSS) was received prior to recruiting participants and conducting the study. Participants were recruited in two ways, first, via convenience sampling, in which I shared the link to the Qualtrics survey via social media platforms (e.g., WhatsApp, Instagram, and Facebook). This entailed that I mainly shared the survey with people in my social circles like friends, family, teammates, work colleagues and other members of the community. Later in the process, I decided to distribute the questionnaire via Prolific Academic, to increase the sample size. The participants who were recruited via Prolific received financial compensation for their participation. For the following analysis, when referring to the convenience sample, this includes only the convenience sample. When referring to the Prolific sample, this simply includes only the Prolific Academic sample.

The sample size for the convenience sample came down to a total of 114 participants. The sample included 59 females (51.3%) and 56 males (48.7%). The age of the participants ranged from 18 to 67, with a mean age of  $M = 35.4$ ,  $SD = 14.9$ . A total of 53 participants were university students (45.7%), 60 were not university students (51.7%), and 3 (2.6%) did not wish to report. A voluntary question asked about the approximate years of work experience of the participants. A total of 110 participants answered the question, with the average work experience being  $M = 14.9$  years,  $SD = 13.2$ .

A total of 80 participants were recruited via Prolific Academic. The sample included 53 females (68.8%) and 24 males (31.2%). The age of the participants ranged from 18 to 87, with a mean age of  $M = 38.7$ ,  $SD = 13.9$ . A total of 13 participants were university students (16.3%), 64 were not university students (80%), and 3 (3.8%) did not wish to report. A voluntary question asked about the approximate years of work experience of the participants. All 80 participants answered the question, with the average work experience being  $M = 17.2$  years,  $SD = 12.9$ .

### **Procedures**

Participants completed a cross-sectional online survey via the platform Qualtrics. The survey contained eight questions about Just World Beliefs, an ambiguous blame vignette, and a total of eight blame questions, four assessing swift blame related to the information in the vignette and five assessing additional aspects of blame related to the information in the vignette. Lastly, I asked for demographic information, such as age, gender, years of work experience, and whether the participants are university students.

To assess for the dependent variables of swift blame and additional blame variables, participants read an ambiguous vignette in which they were asked to assume the role of a manager of a customer service support unit where an underperforming employee, Arianne, allegedly provided poor service, which brought about significant costs for the company. The

full vignette is below: *Assume you are the manager our customer service support unit. Arianne one of your employees, has a history of low performance and is frequently late for work. She has struggled with keeping up, completing tasks accurately, and providing adequate customer service. As a result, she was put on probation. However, lately she has made a noticeable effort to improve her work. You agree that she has arrived on time most days and is beginning to meet her performance targets. She has also been actively seeking feedback from her colleagues and customers in order to improve the quality of her work. Yesterday, you received a complaint from a client claiming that Arianne provided them with wrong advice, which cost the company a week in labor and external expenses. Arianne denies this claim. You look into the situation, but it is not clear what actually happened, and Arianne's explanation seems odd. Because Arianne is on probation you need to decide what to do.*

I used this vignette because it is highly ambiguous. In the scenario, it was not clear if Arianne was responsible and if she should be blamed. This made it easier to analyze if the participants' JWB were related to their interpretation of the vignette (i.e, if they used swift blame when deciding on a course of action).

## **Measures**

### ***The Procedural and Distributive Just World Beliefs Scale***

To assess for the independent variable of JWB, The Procedural and Distributive Just World Beliefs scale (Lucas et al., 2011) was utilized. It is a 16-item self-report measure evaluating beliefs about procedural and distributive justice, related to both others and the self. The first eight statements relate to perceptions of justice in respect to others, and the remaining eight relate to perceptions of justice in respect to oneself. Concerning the present study, the items most relevant and therefore included are *only* the eight statements related to

others. Two example items include: “*I feel that people generally earn the rewards and punishments they get in this world*”, “*I feel that people generally use methods that are fair in the evaluation of others*”. Participants indicated their level of agreement with each item via a Likert-scale ranging from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 7 (*strongly agree*). The scale reliability is  $\alpha = .90$ .

### ***Swift blame measures***

The participants were subsequently asked to answer a series of questions regarding the course of action they, as a manager, might undertake in assessing the blameworthiness of the employee Arianne. As swift blame is rather difficult to operationalize, the vignette and questions were created by our team using the operationalization of swift blame in the article by Skarlicki and colleagues (2017). The alignment between the theoretical conceptualizations and the measures used in the present study will be explained in their respective subsections. The full set and outline of the measures can be accessed in Appendix A.

***Confidence in having enough information.*** I assessed the degree of confidence the participants had about having enough information to answer the questions. This was done by asking participants to indicate the extent to which they agreed with the following three statements ( $1 = \text{strongly disagree}$ ,  $6 = \text{agree}$ ): “*The case has adequate amount of detail*”, “*The case provided all the information that I needed to make my judgement*”, and “*I felt I had enough information to answer the questions about the case*”. This directly relates to swift blame as one of its characteristics is that blame is placed swiftly and without considering other alternatives (Skarlicki et al., 2017). The scale reliability is  $\alpha = .89$ .

***Information processing effort.*** Next, I asked participants to reflect on their decision-making process and to indicate the extent to which they agree with the following six statements ( $1 = \text{strongly disagree}$ ,  $7 = \text{strongly agree}$ ): “*I didn’t take a lot of time to decide what to do about Arianne*”, “*I didn’t pay much attention while evaluating this case*”, “*I*

*concentrated a lot while making this choice*”, “*I thought very hard about how to respond to Arianne*”, “*I was very careful about my decision*”, “*It was difficult for me to make this choice*”.

***Self-report effort.*** Another way in which I assessed the degree of effort was to ask participants to indicate (*1 = no effort, 7 = a lot of effort*) how much effort they put into making this decision. This measure, as well as information processing effort, relate to swift blame because swift blame is a manifestation of system 1 thinking, characterized by fast and effortless cognition (Kahneman, 2011). Thus, I am measuring the amount of effort put into answering the questions to detect whether system 1 or system 2 thinking was used.

***Time (hours) willing to investigate.*** Lastly, I asked the participants how much time, in hours, they would be willing to investigate Arianne’s error and her case further. Participants answered the question: “*As a manager who has numerous demands, how many HOURS would you be willing to spend on investigating the case and understanding the context around the error?*” by indicating on a scale from 0 hours to 10 hours. This relates to swift blame as if it was swift blame, individuals would be sure of their blame and would most likely not want to spend many hours investigating further.

### ***Additional blame variables***

I also included additional blame measures to get a general idea of the participants’ views on the situation. These were general blame of Arianne, severity aggregate, severity of discipline, and dismissal endorsement. These additional measures were included because swift blame is not a well validated construct, and the measures are of explanatory nature. Therefore, I wanted to compliment them with other measures. The full set and outline of the measures can be accessed in Appendix A.

***General blame.*** The first additional blame variable was general blame of Arianne. I assessed blame assignment and created three-face valid items. I asked participants to indicate

the extent to which they agree with the following statements about Arianne ( $1 = \textit{strongly disagree}$ ,  $6 = \textit{agree}$ ): “*Responsible for the error*”, “*To be blamed for the error*”, “*At fault for the error*”. The scale reliability is  $\alpha = .70$ .

***Severity aggregate.*** I asked participants how severe they think Arianne’s error is. They were asked to indicate how “*Arianne’s error seems*” on a scale from 1 to 7 about the following adjectives:  $1 = \textit{insignificant}$ ,  $7 = \textit{significant}$ ,  $1 = \textit{not serious}$   $7 = \textit{serious}$ , and  $1 = \textit{minor}$   $7 = \textit{major}$ .

***Severity of discipline.*** As part of the additional blame measures, I asked participants about the severity of discipline for Arianne following her error. Participants indicated, on a scale from 0 to 100 ( $0 = \textit{she should not be disciplined}$ ,  $100 = \textit{she should be disciplined}$ ) how severely they think Arianne should be disciplined.

***Dismissal endorsement.*** The final part of the additional blame measures was to assess whether participants would dismiss Arianne from her job. A simple yes or no question asked participants: “*Recall that Arianne is on probation, and this is her last shot. Would you dismiss her?*”.

## **Results**

In the following section, the results will be presented by sample. I start by investigating the differences between the two samples through an independent samples t-test. Following, Pearson’s correlation coefficients will be calculated between JWB and each of the dependent variables to assess for the strength and relationship between the variables, to test for support for the hypothesis.

### Preliminary Analyses: Comparing samples: Independent Samples t-test

For each of the analyses of the independent samples t-test, equal variances are assumed. This is the case because the p-value of Levene's test for each for the variables was not statistically significant. As can be seen in Table 2 below, there were no significant differences in the means of the convenience and the Prolific sample for most variables. However, for self-report effort, there was a significant difference in the means between the Prolific sample and the convenience sample. For information processing effort, there was also a significant difference in the means between the Prolific sample and the convenience sample. Table 1 below includes all the means and standard deviations of the variables for each sample.

**Table 1**

*Group Statistics for the Convenience Sample and the Prolific Sample*

Variable	Sample	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Time (hours) willing to investigate	Prolific	80	3.42	2.19	.245
	Convenience	117	3.40	2.18	.201
Self-report effort	Prolific	80	5.71	1.15	.129
	Convenience	114	4.59	1.36	.128
Information-processing effort	Prolific	80	5.43	.815	.091
	Convenience	114	4.65	.933	.087
Confidence in having enough information	Prolific	80	2.85	1.47	.165
	Convenience	113	2.82	1.34	.126
General blame	Prolific	80	4.38	.926	.103
	Convenience	118	4.24	.932	.085
Severity of discipline	Prolific	78	42.05	22.81	2.58
	Convenience	112	42.58	23.54	2.22
Dismissal endorsement	Prolific	80	1.19	.393	.044
	Convenience	117	1.20	.399	.037
Severity aggregate	Prolific	80	5.15	1.12	.126
	Convenience	116	4.97	1.25	.116

**Table 2**

*Independent Samples t-test for the Convenience Sample and the Prolific Sample*

	Levene's Test for Equality of Variances		t-test for Equality of Means							95% Confidence Interval of the Difference	
	F	Sig.	t	df	Significance		Mean Difference	Std. Error Difference	Lower	Upper	
					One-Sided p	Two-Sided p					
Time (hours) willing to investigate	.001	.971	.073	195	.471	.942	.023	.317	-.602	.648	
Self-report effort	.939	.334	6.03	192	<.001	<.001	1.12	.187	.757	1.493	
Information-processing effort	.933	.335	6.08	192	<.001	<.001	.786	.129	.531	1.04	
Confidence in having enough information	2.026	.156	.156	191	.438	.876	.032	.205	-.372	.436	
General blame	.025	.874	1.05	196	.146	.292	.142	.134	-.123	.408	
Severity of discipline	.001	.972	-.157	188	.438	.875	-.538	3.428	-7.30	6.22	
Dismissal endorsement	.100	.752	-.158	195	.437	.875	-.009	.058	-.123	.104	
Severity aggregate	.558	.456	1.046	194	.148	.297	.182	.174	-.161	.527	

In the following sections, I will present the Pearson’s correlation coefficients for JWB and all dependent variables by sample. The reason why I am separating the analyses by sample is because there were a few significant differences in the means in the independent samples t-test, for self-report effort and information-processing effort. Pearson’s correlations



will be done to test whether JWB is positively or negatively related to swift blame and the additional blame variables.

### **Convenience sample: Pearson's Correlation Coefficient for JWB and All Dependent Variables**

To test the hypothesis, Pearson's correlation coefficients were measured to examine the strength and direction of the relationship between the variables. As can be seen in Table 3 below, the results showed that there were no significant relationships between JWB and time (hours) willing to investigate, self-report effort, information processing effort, confidence in having enough information, dismissal endorsement, and severity aggregate. However, the results found positive and significant correlations between JWB and general blame ( $r = .191$ ,  $p = .039$ ) and between JWB and severity of discipline ( $r = .230$ ,  $p = .015$ ). These results suggest that the higher participants scored on their JWB, the higher their general blame of Arianne, and the higher their severity of discipline.

**Table 3**

*Pearson's Correlation Coefficients for all Variables in the Convenience Sample*

Variable	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
1. JWB	-								
2. Time (hours) willing to investigate	.003	-							
3. Self-report effort	-.092	.176	-						
4. Information processing effort	-.070	.125	.559**	-					
5. Confidence in having enough information	.114	.082	-.088.	-.124	-				
6. General blame	.191*	.076	.208*	.206	.194*	-			
7. Severity of discipline	.230*	.026	.265**	.199*	.143.	.459**	-		
8. Dismissal endorsement	.153	.027	.067.	.095.	.386**	.358**	.357**	-	
9. Severity aggregate	.099	.086.	.272**	.130	-.113	.294**	.316**	.181	-

Note.

\* indicates that the correlation is significant at a 0.05 level

\*\* indicates that it is significant at a 0.01 level

**Prolific sample: Pearson's Correlation Coefficient for JWB and All Dependent**

**Variables**

To test the hypothesis, Pearson's correlation coefficients were measured to examine the strength and direction of the relationship between the variables. As can be seen in Table 4 below, none of the correlations were found to be statistically significant. No correlation was

found between JWB and information processing effort ( $r = .x0, p = .999$ ). This indicates that there is no relation between these two variables. Lastly, a *marginally* significant correlation was found between JWB and general blame ( $r = -.212, p = .059$ ).

**Table 4**

*Pearson's Correlation Coefficients for all Variables in the Prolific sample*

Variable	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
1. JWB	-								
2. Time (hours) willing to investigate	.169	-							
3. Self-report effort	.077	.330**	-						
4. Information processing effort	.000	.384**	.642**	-					
5. Confidence in having enough information	.040	-.215	.194	-.120	-				
6. General blame	-.212	-.130	-.107	.071	.235*	-			
7. Severity of discipline	-.015	-.030	-.049	.012	.414**	.526**	-		
8. Dismissal endorsement	-.1	.024	-.103	-.108	.128	.457**	.547**	-	
9. Severity aggregate	-.155	.233*	.127	.217	.070	.355**	.420**	.275*	-

Note.

\* indicates that the correlation is significant at a 0.05 level

\*\* indicates that it is significant at a 0.01 level

### General Discussion

The present study investigated the relationship between JWB and swift blame, with the hypothesis stating that higher JWB are positively correlated with engagement in swift blame in an organizational context. All in all, I did not find significant correlations between JWB and the swift blame variables in either sample, indicating that the hypothesis is not supported.

Although I did not discover any significant relationship between JWB and the swift blame variables in either sample, I did find positive and significant relationships between JWB and general blame and between JWB and severity of discipline in the convenience sample. In the Prolific sample, a marginally significant negative relationship was found between JWB and general blame. For the convenience sample, what these results suggest is that higher JWB were associated with placing blame on Arianne for her error in general and with endorsing more severe discipline. For the Prolific sample, as the relationship was only marginally significant, this indicates that it *could* mean that higher JWB were associated with placing less blame on Arianne in general. These findings have some theoretical and practical implications, which will be discussed in the following section.

### Implications

The present study includes some theoretical and practical implications. As for the theoretical implications, the results seem to suggest that having higher JWB is not related to swift blame. This was concluded as none of the correlations between JWB and the swift blame variables in either sample were statistically significant. However, due to the significant correlations discovered between JWB and two of the additional variables (general blame and severity of discipline) in the convenience sample, higher JWB may be associated with general perceptions of blame. For example, Strömwall and colleagues (2013) studying the effects of JWB on blame attribution in a sexual abuse scenario found that those with a higher JWB

attributed more blame to the victim across scenarios. These individuals have a need to believe that the world is just and fair, so once confronted with evidence contradictory to these beliefs, they will reframe the situation and believe that the victim deserved what happened to them (Strömwall et al., 2013). In terms of what our results may implicate, as higher JWB were not significantly related to swift blame, perhaps it is the case that those with higher JWB are more likely to blame (in general) in a considerate and thoughtful way, which would be in line with their importance for justice and fair outcomes. What is interesting to note is that this relationship was only found in the convenience sample, as the relationship between JWB and general blame was negative and only marginally significant in the Prolific sample. This leads to further questions about what characteristics or background of the samples may have caused this difference in the results. It is not possible to speculate, as only surface level information was gathered about the participants, such as age and gender. Therefore, for the future, it may be noteworthy to include questions about personality variables, as this may be where the difference lies, as previous research has discovered a relationship between workplace deviant behavior (such as the blaming of co-workers) and personality (Načinović et al., 2020). Lastly, it may be the case that higher JWB may be associated with endorsing more severe punishments and disciplinary actions.

As for a practical implication of these results, HR or those involved in hiring individuals of power in an organization, such as managers, may take the JWB of candidates into account. As is suggested by our results, those with higher JWB may be more likely to severely discipline others, and depending on the dynamic of the workplace, this can be something to promote or to avoid. Relatedly, as our results suggest that higher JWB do not relate to engagement in swift blame, this may have similar practical implications for the workplace. As swift blame is generally linked to negative consequences for its targets, such as anger, guilt, or fear (Sitkin & Bies, 1994), as well as decreased trust and lower job

satisfaction (Lupton & Sarwar, 2021) this is a behavior which should be avoided. Once again, perhaps HR or those responsible for hiring may want to hire those with higher JWB, as it may be related to more thoughtful blame and avoidance of unthoughtful and swift blame.

Nonetheless, due to the lack of research on swift blame and the associations between JWB and swift blame, it is not possible to say whether the results support findings in the literature. Nevertheless, our study is a good start to further research into this area and this relationship.

### **Limitations**

Despite some notable strengths, naturally, our study included several limitations that will be considered in this section. One key limitation of the present study pertains to self-report data. Our entire questionnaire required participants to report information about themselves and this has the potential for drawbacks. For example, the possibility of the participants not understanding a question/measure properly, inaccurate reporting of personal characteristics, or social desirability bias distorting the accuracy of the responses (Rosenman et al., 2011). To correct for these potential limitations, an experimental design can be implemented, which can eliminate the undesirable outcomes of self-report data.

Another limitation is the lack of research on swift blame. Although the theory behind swift blame, system 1 thinking, is very well understood and research, swift blame in itself is not. While this means that the present study can provide further evidence and understanding to the topic, it also caused difficulties in formulating the literature review as there was a lack of theoretical foundation for the topic. The lack of research made referring to established relationships difficult, in the case of the relationship between JWB and swift blame. This is not an established relationship; therefore, it was challenging once again, to refer to a theoretical basis when formulating the hypothesis. A natural correction for this limitation is more research on the topic and on the associations between JWB and swift blame.

The last and related limitation is since swift blame is not a well-researched topic, it is difficult to operationalize. Due to this lack of established operationalizations, our blame scenario and related questions were created without prior validation. As these measures are not validated, this makes it difficult to assess whether they accurately and reliably encapsulated swift blame. This limitation could affect the interpretation of the results and drawing conclusions about the relationship studied. In order to improve this, further understanding is needed on the topic, which naturally brings operationalizations and measures. This relates directly to the present study as it is exploratory in nature and aims to bring forth new ideas and conclusions.

### **Future Directions**

Research is always progressing, and it is important to consider directions and alternatives for future research. As has been mentioned throughout the paper, further research into swift blame is necessary to understand more about it and possible factors which may predict swift blame. The first suggestion pertains to swift blame in the field of organizational psychology, which was the focus of our study. Specifically, using strictly a sample of working individuals, as this allows for the results to be more relevant to thoughts and behavior patterns of working individuals.

Secondly, as my study was a survey, and the results were correlational in nature, conducting an experiment could be an interesting way to go. For example, bringing our blame vignette to life in the laboratory and having participants assume the role of a manager and make decisions about what to do about the employee. Swift blame could be measured in similar ways, such as time willing to investigate further or confidence in having enough information, but just in a real-life setting. An experimental design could allow for minimizing the potential drawbacks of self-report data (Rosenman et al., 2011) and to establish a cause-

and-effect relationship between swift blame and other antecedents than JWB, such as empathy or forgiveness.

Lastly, as a significant result was found in the convenience sample for JWB and *general* blame, there may be an interesting direction here. Previous research has established a relationship between JWB and victim blaming behaviors (Strömwall et al., 2013), so our result suggests that further research into JWB and general blame may be needed, as well as exploring what other types of blame JWB can be associated with, if not swift blame. A suggestion for future research is to design a similar study with a scenario and questions, but placing the focus on thoughtful and considerate blame, and testing whether those higher in JWB are more likely to blame in general terms.

### **Conclusion**

All in all, the present study did not find a significant relationship between JWB and swift blame. Interestingly however, significant relationships between JWB and general blame, and between JWB and severity of discipline were identified in the convenience sample. In the Prolific sample, only a marginally significant relationship was identified between JWB and general blame. These results provided some interesting conclusions and implications, however, as a final note, further research is needed on the topic and on other possible antecedents which predict swift and unthoughtful blame.



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**Appendix B**

**Measures**

*Time (hours) willing to investigate*

As a manager who has numerous demands, how many HOURS would you be willing to spend on investigating the case and understanding the context surrounding the error?

0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

TIME (hours)

*Self-report effort*

How much effort did you put into making this decision?

NO EFFORT 1	2	3	4	5	6	A LOT OF EFFORT 7
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*Information processing effort*

Reflect on your decision-making process and indicate the extent to which you agree with the following statements:

	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Somewhat disagree	Neither agree nor disagree	Somewhat agree	Agree	Strongly agree
I was very careful about my decision							
I concentrated a lot while making this choice							
I didn't take a lot of time to decide what to do about Arianne							
I thought very hard about how to respond to Arianne							

I didn't pay much attention while evaluating this case							
It was difficult for me to make this choice							

**Confidence in having enough information**

Reflecting on the case that you just read, consider the amount of information that was presented to you and indicate the extent to which you agree with the following statements:

	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Somewhat disagree	Neither agree nor disagree	Somewhat agree	Agree
The case had an adequate amount of detail						
I felt I had enough information to answer the questions about the case						
The case provided all the information that I needed to make my judgment						

**General blame**

Indicate the extent to which you agree with the following statements about Arianne:

	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Somewhat disagree	Neither agree nor disagree	Somewhat agree	Agree	Strongly agree
Responsible for the error							

