Public support for Vigilantism
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Public Support for Vigilantism

Aan mijn ouders

Public Support for Vigilantism

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Introduction

1.1   Introduction

Lübeck, West-Germany, March 6, 1981. Klaus Grabowski, a 35-year-old butcher who has previously been convicted of the sexual abuse of two girls, is now on trial for the abduction, sexual abuse and murder of 7-year-old Anna. On the third day in court, Anna's mother pulls out a gun and fires eight times at the suspect. He dies on the courtroom floor. Marianne Bachmeier is arrested and charged with murder.

This case of the 'Avenging Mother' was covered extensively by the media at the time. Television crews from around the world traveled to Lübeck, the case inspired several movies and plays, and Marianne Bachmeier sold her exclusive life story to German newspaper "Stern". Many people felt sympathy for the vigilante, and sent her support letters, flowers and money while she was in detention. Interestingly, public opinion shifted once more information surfaced about Marianne Bachmeier's life. It became common knowledge that she had an additional child at age 16 and another one at age 18, who were both given up for adoption. Additionally, the restaurant that she operated in Lübeck was said to be frequented by squatters and dropouts, and her father was linked to the Waffen-SS. All in all, she no longer seemed to fit the role of the 'innocent' mother that was initially ascribed to her, which affected the public's judgment of her vigilantism act.

The trial against Marianne Bachmeier started in November 1982. The opening session was adjourned by the judge after eight minutes, as over 300 reporters, photographers and spectators were fighting over the 200 available seats. The following March, two years after the shooting, Marianne Bachmeier was sentenced to six years imprisonment for manslaughter and the unlawful possession of firearms. She was released after three years and died from illness in 1996 at the age of 46.[1]

Citizens who take the law into their own hands tend to spark heated debates. Moreover, it is not uncommon for vigilantes to receive considerable public support for their behavior, even when they go as far as killing someone, like Marianne Bachmeier. Support for vigilantism can for instance take the form of public outrage when vigilantes are prosecuted for their criminal behavior. A well-known example of such a response occurred in 2002 in Amsterdam, when two supermarket employees chased and arrested a robber, and were subsequently prosecuted for their use of disproportionate violence (Althoff, 2010). There was also support for a jeweler in Tilburg who assaulted and fatally shot a robber in 2002, and for the Oosterhout 'pedokiller' who in the same year stabbed the violator of his son to death (Hageman, 2005). Another Dutch vigilante who could count on some public sympathy was a woman who in 2005, after being robbed of her purse, backed up her car to chase the robbers and ended up killing one of them in the process. A famous case in the United States that evoked considerable support for vigilantism is that of Bernhard Goetz, who became known as the 'subway vigilante' (Fletcher, 1988). In December 1984, he shot at four black males on a New York subway after one of them had asked him for five dollars. Goetz confessed to the shooting but was acquitted by a jury of 17 of the 18 charges, and was only found guilty of illegal gun possession.

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1   "Justiz und Selbstjustiz," 2008; Köpcke, 2006; "Mother stands trial for shooting daughter's alleged killer," 1982; "Selbstjustiz. Die Rache der Marianne Bachmeier," 2008; Weber, 2000.

Interestingly, citizens normally do want to see a formal reaction from the authorities when someone breaks the law (Tyler & Smith, 1995). Public support for vigilantism thus implies that there is something peculiar about vigilantism which causes people to make an exception to the general idea of punishing harm doers. Support for vigilantism is commonly presumed to reflect a lack of confidence in the criminal justice system (Goldstein, 2003; Lenz, 1988). After all, it involves approbation of citizens who deal with crime in spite of the law. However, as the next chapter will reveal, there is not much empirical evidence for this supposed role of confidence. Furthermore, there is reason to believe that other factors may have an important impact on public reactions to vigilantism. Importantly, if support for vigilantism is not (entirely) based on a lack of confidence in the criminal justice system, this should have implications for how such support is commonly interpreted.

Little is known about what it is that causes people to express support toward those who take the law into their own hands. We do not know what public support for vigilantism constitutes, or what it means in light of our criminal justice system. There does exist an extensive body of knowledge on related topics, such as public support for the death penalty, perceived seriousness of crimes, attitudes toward sentencing, empathy with crime victims, and so on. However, despite its relevance from both a social and legal perspective, support for vigilantism has been relatively overlooked in the criminological literature. This is unfortunate, as it can potentially provide unique insights into how people view justice within and outside of the criminal justice system. Studying public opinion about vigilantism can offer an interesting perspective on the psychology of (in)justice. Why do citizens find certain acts of vigilantism justified even though such acts are against the law? How do people view the vigilante and his victim? Why does the public not always find it necessary for vigilantes to be punished for their criminal behavior? Is the legitimacy of the criminal justice system at stake? In the current thesis we seek to improve our knowledge on support for vigilantism. To this end we will use a theoretical and empirical approach to answer the following main research question:

How can public support for vigilantism be explained?

In this introductory chapter we will first provide a background to the topic. This is followed by an outline of the structure and contents of the thesis.

1.2   Background

The state formally holds a monopoly over the legitimate use of violence in most developed countries, thereby harnessing the emotions of citizens into a civilized justice system.[2] The modern state in fact characterizes itself by only permitting violence that is used in preservation and enforcement of the law (Sarat & Kearns, 1992). The presence

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2   Some exceptions to this monopoly, such as self-defense, are addressed in Chapter 3.

of law is generally assumed to result in a less violent society because it provides peaceful alternatives for handling conflicts (Cooney, 1997). In fact, the very existence of a criminal justice system can be justified by contrasting it with the unjustifiability of citizens retaliating against wrongdoers (Gardner, 1998). One of the aims of restricting the prosecution and punishment of offenders to an impartial third party is to minimize emotional excesses. This function has been described in the literature as the *displacement of retaliation*:

> The blood feud, the vendetta, the duel, the revenge, the lynching: for the elimination of these modes of retaliation, more than anything else, the criminal law as we know it today came into existence…The displacement function of criminal law always was and remains today one of the central pillars of its justification. (Gardner, 1998, p.32)

The criminal law thus aims to channel the natural instinct for retaliation and 'turn hot vengeance into cool, impartial justice' (MacCormick & Garland, 1998, p.26). This channeling is deemed necessary as it is commonly believed that people cannot be rational in the judgment of their own cases:

> Self-love will make men partial to themselves and their friends; and, on the other side, ill-nature, passion, and revenge will carry them too far in punishing others, and hence nothing but confusion and disorder will follow, and that therefore God hath certainly appointed government to restrain the partiality and violence of men. (Locke, 1689/1967)

When citizens take the law into their own hands, they pose a clear challenge to the state's ambition to hold a monopoly on the legitimate use of force (Abrahams, 2002). The very existence of vigilantism begs questions about the performance of the state and its justice institutions (Black, 1983; Spencer, 2008). It makes one wonder whether the state's capability to displace retaliation is in jeopardy. Moreover, it has been argued that a state can only exist if it is capable of distinguishing itself as "the only source of legitimate violence in society, to define its law and the enforcement thereof as legitimate while consigning all other forms of violence to the realm of irrationality, of savagery, of chaos" (Goldstein, 2003, p.25). The prevalence of vigilantism may therefore serve as a gauge of perceived state legitimacy. However, what may matter most on a societal level is the collective approval of citizens who take the law into their own hands. Even if vigilantism itself is rare, public support for it can be widespread. Formal responses like the prosecution of vigilantes can trigger considerable public controversy. If such reactions are very common, the legitimacy of the criminal justice system may be at stake.

Ideally, a legal system should represent the moral consensus of the community, maximizing voluntary compliance. The criminal law should lay down "both what is *expected* and what is *excepted* by the members of a society and specifies what conduct is believed to be against the interests of the society as a whole, as represented by the state"

(Eindstadter & Stuart, 1995, p.9). In reality, a justice system will never be able to fully match the values and expectations of all citizens that it is supposed to serve. Legal rules will always diverge to a certain extent from citizens' principles. However, when these discrepancies become too large, the danger exists that public respect for the legal system will be lost (Darley, 2001; Roberts & Stalans, 1997). Such a lack of respect for the law would be detrimental to the functioning of the criminal justice system, as citizens often obey the law because they find the norms to be legitimate and deserving of compliance (Coffee, 1991; Tyler, 1990). It has been argued in the literature that moral contempt for specific laws may generalize to the entire criminal code and to those who created it (Greene & Darley, 1998). Thus, if there is no moral consensus in the community vis-à-vis the formal reactions to vigilantism, the state should at least attempt to explain to its citizens why the existing practice is to be preferred (Greene & Darley, 1998). If not, people may lose confidence in the law and the legal authorities, which may ironically result in a higher frequency of vigilantism itself.

1.3   Outline

The central aim of this thesis is to reach a better understanding of public support for vigilantism. To this end, we start by examining the currently available knowledge on this topic in Chapter 2. We will present two theoretical views on how public support for vigilantism can be explained. The first is the *confidence hypothesis* and focuses on the effect of people's general perceptions of the criminal justice system. The second one is the *situation hypothesis*, which emphasizes the role of the situational context of an act of vigilantism. After describing these two theoretical perspectives, we will review several existing studies to find out whether there is any empirical evidence to substantiate the hypotheses. We will conclude that current research does not provide a clear picture of determinants of support for vigilantism. There is no consensus on what vigilantism constitutes, and the measurement of both support and confidence is generally limited. Moreover, studies so far only tested one of the two main hypotheses at a time, so the relative impact of the two factors as of yet remains unclear. The findings nevertheless do suggest that support for vigilantism may indeed be influenced by confidence in the criminal justice system, but also by characteristics of the vigilantism situation itself. The next step is to improve on the currently available methodology, and to test the effects of confidence and of situational characteristics simultaneously. In preparation of this empirical work, Chapters 3 and 4 focus on the conceptualization of 1) vigilantism and 2) confidence in the criminal justice system.

Chapter 3 concerns the concept of vigilantism. Before being able to empirically study support for vigilantism, it is crucial to first establish what vigilantism itself actually entails. From the literature review it will become evident that vigilantism is a broad term that has been applied to a large variety of behaviors. We therefore proceed by developing our own definition of vigilantism, to be used in the remainder of the thesis. We will also introduce a vigilantism event sequence, which describes the main occurrences

in a common vigilantism situation: the precipitating crime, the formal response to the precipitating crime, and the vigilantism act itself. These three components are subsequently used to construct a typology, in which different situational characteristics of vigilantism and its context are identified. This conceptual analysis paves the road for an empirical test of the situation hypothesis, as the characteristics can be varied in an experimental setting to study their effect on support for vigilantism.

Chapter 4 prepares us for an empirical test of the confidence hypothesis. In order to measure the possible effects of confidence in the criminal justice system on support for vigilantism, a reliable tool to assess such confidence is indispensible. However, existing measures of confidence have considerable limitations, and the operationalization of confidence varies greatly between studies. We will therefore conduct a conceptual analysis of confidence and use it to construct our own assessment tool. We start by reviewing a number of theoretical and methodological insights from the literature on confidence. We will examine confidence on the *concept* level (what is confidence?), as well as on the *object* level (confidence in whom?). These distinctions are subsequently integrated into an elaborate measurement tool, to be used for a reliable assessment of confidence as a possible determinant of support for vigilantism.

In Chapter 5, insights from the previous chapters are combined to design and conduct a first empirical study on support for vigilantism. In this study, the confidence and situation hypotheses are tested simultaneously. Vignettes are used that vary systematically on two situational characteristics from the vigilantism typology, in a between-subjects design. Respondents indicate their support for vigilantism as well as their confidence in the criminal justice system. Support for vigilantism is assessed using a measure that integrates a number of different concepts from the literature, including the justifiability of vigilantism and a desire for punishment of the vigilante. Confidence is measured using items that are based on the conceptual model from Chapter 4. The findings provide strong evidence for the situation hypothesis, in addition to a partial confirmation of the confidence hypothesis. This is thus a first indication that the role of confidence in the criminal justice system is not as straightforward as is often assumed.

Even though our first study provides evidence for the situation hypothesis, besides the confidence hypothesis, it is not yet clear why situational factors influence support for vigilantism. Chapter 6 will therefore focus on explaining why people are affected by information pertaining to the context in which a vigilantism act occurs. In other words, what is the psychological mechanism behind such reactions? To this end we will present just-world theory (Lerner, 1980), which is commonly used to explain social reactions to victimization. According to this theory, people like to believe that the world is a just place in which you get what you deserve and deserve what you get. This belief in a just world (BJW) can be threatened when people are confronted with an injustice, such as an innocent victim. As a result, people experience an aversive (unpleasant) state, which they will try to reduce. They can for instance deny the injustice by blaming the victim, or attempt to restore the injustice by expressing a desire for punishment of the offender. We will argue that these and other reactions to victimization can also occur in response

to an act of vigilantism. From this perspective, responses that are commonly labeled as support for vigilantism can be understood as attempts to preserve one's belief in a just world. We will therefore present just-world theory as a tool for identifying and predicting such reactions. We will describe the main ideas of the theory and subsequently apply them to the vigilantism event sequence (cf. Chapter 3).

In Chapter 7 we present the design and pilot of an empirical study on support for vigilantism that is based on insights from just-world theory. We will use concepts from the theory to construct four different measures of support for vigilantism: *empathy* with the victim of vigilantism, *outrage* at vigilantism, *blame and derogation* of the victim of vigilantism, and *desired punishment* for the vigilante. Just-world theory will also be used to select two situational characteristics from the vigilantism typology which are expected to affect these four measures of support. These characteristics are varied systematically using vignettes in order to empirically test the situation hypothesis. The confidence hypothesis is tested by presenting respondents with a more elaborate version of the confidence tool that is first introduced in Chapter 4. The design of the study thus once again allows for a simultaneous test of both theoretical perspectives on support for vigilantism. We end the chapter by briefly describing the results of a pilot study in which the experimental design and methodology are pretested.

Our final study is carried out among a representative household sample of the Dutch population (N = 2376) and is described in Chapter 8. Confidence in the criminal justice system is measured one month after assessing respondents' reactions to a fictitious case of vigilantism. The findings once again point to a critical role of situational characteristics. Additionally, evidence is found for the confidence hypothesis. We conclude that support for vigilantism is not a response that is necessarily caused by a lack of confidence in the criminal justice system. Instead, support is a complex reaction which is at least partially shaped by characteristics of the context in which an act of vigilantism occurs. Importantly, general support for vigilantism also proves to be a successful predictor of support for a specific case of vigilantism. The study also reveals the added value of just-world theory in studying support for vigilantism. The theory aids in predicting public support for vigilantism, and provides a theoretical basis for differentiating between various types of support. We additionally emphasize the importance of distinguishing different types of confidence in the criminal justice system when investigating the impact of confidence on support for vigilantism. The thesis concludes with a summary of the main findings and their implications in Chapter 9, and offers suggestions for future research on support for vigilantism.

2

Public support for vigilantism: Two hypotheses

Why have otherwise respectable citizens chosen to reject the standard response to the vigilante that the punishment of wrongdoers is to be left to the institutions of the state and that the ordinary citizen must not take the law into his own hands? Do they fail to appreciate that there is much to be lost by our civilization if we fall away from the rule of law? No, Goetz supporters, like myself, have a deep and real affection for the civilized life afforded by the rule of law. When, however, the state abdicates its proper role and does not provide an adequate system of criminal justice, the political and moral obligations to defer the state are no longer operative. (Cohen, 1989, p.1272)

2.1 Introduction

In the literature there exist two main hypotheses on why citizens might support vigilantism. The first hypothesis focuses on people's perspective of the criminal justice system, while the second one emphasizes the role of situational characteristics. They each offer a different view on support for vigilantism, yet are not necessarily incompatible. We will describe both perspectives in detail, and subsequently examine to what extent they are substantiated by the empirical literature. We first present a number of single- and multiple-item survey studies, followed by quasi-experimental research. It will become clear that current findings are limited and do not provide a straightforward picture of why people support vigilantism. The described studies do nevertheless provide us with useful insights regarding the operationalization of support for vigilantism. We conclude by outlining the steps that will be taken in the next two chapters to prepare for our own empirical research on support for vigilantism.

2.2 Two rival hypotheses

In the literature, reasons for *supporting* vigilantism are often thought to be similar to reasons for *consorting* to vigilantism. In other words, an understanding of why people might choose to take the law into their own hands is assumed to also provide insights into why such behavior might be endorsed by the public. As vigilantism is commonly seen as being the result of a lack of confidence in the criminal justice system (Abrahams, 2002; Goldstein, 2003), support for vigilantism is also often taken to mean that the legitimacy of the criminal justice system is at stake. This theoretical perspective will from now on be referred to as the 'confidence hypothesis'.

Secondly, we will present a view on support for vigilantism which is not related to general perceptions of law enforcement. Instead, this approach emphasizes the importance of situational characteristics in shaping reactions to vigilantism, and will thus be labeled the 'situation hypothesis'. Social justice research shows that people's judgments on issues such as fairness, justice and deservingness at least partially depend on contextual factors (Tyler & Smith, 1997). Public reactions to vigilantism may thus also be influenced by the setting in which an act occurs. Part of the empirical literature is therefore aimed at studying the effects of situational characteristics on support for vigilantism.

2.2.1 The confidence hypothesis

According to the confidence hypothesis, support for vigilantism is caused by a lack (or low level) of confidence in the criminal justice system. Linking motives of (support for) vigilantism to perceptions of formal law enforcement makes intuitive sense, as the existence of a state is crucial to the whole concept of vigilantism. In fact, vigilantism has been said to be impossible when "there is no recognized 'establishment,' where conditions of internal war exist, or where there are no rules governing the application of coercion" (Rosenbaum & Sederberg, 1974, p.570). Stated differently, when there is

no law to turn to, one cannot 'take the law into one's own hands'. So even though many scholars maintain that the prevention of vigilantism forms an important justification for the existence of a criminal justice system (e.g. Corstens, 2005; Gardner, 1998; Van Koppen, 2003), the establishment of such a formal system paradoxically creates opportunities for vigilantism by providing people with both legitimate and illegitimate alternatives to deal with crime.

Citizens are often assumed to consort to vigilantism when they are dissatisfied about how the law is enforced (e.g. Grayson, 1992). Vigilantism is said to illustrate what can happen when citizens, from whom authorities are supposed to derive their legitimacy, believe that the system is inadequate (Robinson & Darley, 1995). More specifically, vigilantism is assumed to emerge when the criminal justice system is perceived to fail in the provision of a satisfactory level of security to its citizens (Abrahams, 2002; Benesh & Howell, 2001; Goldstein, 2003). Vigilantism, in other words, can be seen as a direct result of:

> the ineffectiveness, perceived or actual, of our criminal justice agencies. Vigilantes exist for they believe that justice is far better served by their methods as opposed to the formal processes of government….As a result they sense a moral obligation 'to take the law in their own hands' thus circumventing all of the established legal bodies. (Ward, 1974 as cited in Cohen, 1989, p.1273)

Vigilantism can thus occur when citizens have low or no confidence in the formal authorities and therefore want to deal with a crime themselves. However, people can also take the law into their own hands when the legal authorities *have* been involved at first, but not to the satisfaction of the affected party. Thus, even though the justice system is meant to curb emotional excesses, it can sometimes actually be the cause for emotional reactions, including vigilantism. Examples include victims or their relatives who physically attack defendants upon finding out that they are acquitted by a judge or given 'too lenient' a sentence (Weber, 2000). Similarly, in South Africa there are reports of citizens who, due to dissatisfaction with the formal response to crime, collectively pay bail of jailed convicts and subsequently kill them (Minnaar, 2001).

A lack of confidence in the criminal justice system is thus often seen as a reason to consort to vigilantism, and also to *support* it. In other words, when people do not have much confidence in law enforcement in general, they are expected to be more likely to support an act of vigilantism. However, this hypothesis does not pertain to situation-specific perceptions of the criminal justice system. In other words, it does not include the influence of a criminal justice agency's response in a *specific* vigilantism situation on support for vigilantism. Instead, such situational aspects are part of the situation hypothesis: the idea that support for vigilantism is affected by aspects of the vigilantism situation itself. The main ideas behind this hypothesis are discussed next.

2.2.2 The situation hypothesis

The situation hypothesis maintains that support for vigilantism is shaped by aspects of the vigilantism situation itself. As we mentioned in the introduction, this does not imply that confidence does not play a role. Rather, this hypothesis simply points to another determinant of support for vigilantism. From the literature we know that situational characteristics can have a strong influence on judgments of crime and punishment. Warr (1989) for instance demonstrated that the perceived seriousness of crime is affected by aspects such as whether the offender and victim knew each other beforehand. Likewise, a study on public views on punishment preferences reveals an important role of characteristics related to the offenders and victims, as well as crime consequences (Rossi, Simpson, & Miller, 1985).

If public opinion about crime and punishment is indeed affected by situational characteristics, it makes sense to take this into account when examining public support for vigilantism. After all, such support can include judgments of crime seriousness and punishment. Is the act of vigilantism judged as a severe crime? Is the victim of vigilantism perceived as deserving his 'punishment' as carried out by the vigilante? Is the vigilante deemed to deserve punishment for his criminal behavior? We expect that the responses to these and other support-related questions will indeed be influenced by aspects of the vigilantism situation itself.

In summary, we propose that if confidence in the criminal justice system does play a role in shaping support for vigilantism, it is not the only determinant. More specifically, we expect that situational factors of a vigilantism case also have an impact on how the public views vigilantism. If this is true, it would imply that citizens who approve of an act of vigilantism have not necessarily lost their faith in the criminal justice system. In line with this, the case of Marianne Bachmeier that was presented in Chapter 1 also suggests that public opinion about a vigilante can shift in response to new information about the context in which the act has taken place.

2.3   Empirical findings on support for vigilantism

Above we introduced two main explanations for why citizens may support those who take the law into their own hands. The confidence hypothesis focuses on perceptions of law enforcement; the situation hypothesis emphasizes contextual aspects. We will now examine the empirical literature on support for vigilantism to see what evidence it provides for these two hypotheses. Importantly, this research overview is not intended to be exhaustive. Rather, we describe a selection of studies with the aim of presenting what explanations the literature has to offer, finding out how support for vigilantism has been conceptualized, and illustrating some of the existing approaches for studying public support for vigilantism. The overview is structured by the type of methodology that is used in the studies, but reference will be made to the two main hypotheses where relevant.

2.3.1 Single-item measures

In public opinion polls, support for vigilantism is often assessed using single-item measures. Table A1 in Appendix 1 presents ten such items, which mostly originate from surveys that were conducted in the United States. Importantly, single-item measures can be useful for behavioral or observable attributes, such as age and gender, but are usually not appropriate for assessing more complex constructs (Loo, 2001). They are not suitable either for examining the situation and confidence hypotheses, as the methodology does not allow for tests of causality. However, as these items do provide us with insights on how (support for) vigilantism can be conceptualized, we will briefly discuss them nonetheless.

A first observation regarding the items in Table A1 is that the conceptualization of *support* for vigilantism differs greatly between the studies. In some surveys, support is measured by presenting an item about the perceived helpfulness of vigilantes, while others ask respondents to judge the justifiability of certain acts, or to indicate whether they would like to have a specific group of vigilantes in their neighborhood. The conceptualization of *vigilantism* is similarly ambiguous. Some items provide a definition of vigilantism, while others simply refer to 'vigilantes' or do not mention vigilantism at all. Needless to say, these variations in the concept of both vigilantism and support make generalizations challenging, as well as comparisons between surveys.

Item-specificity is another concern regarding the majority of items in Table A1. Many of the items appeared in response to actual cases of vigilantism and intend to measure people's opinion about those specific cases or groups. Items 2 and 3 for instance ask about well-known vigilante groups that were present in the United States at the time, while other items relate to the famous subway vigilante and the Guardian Angels. Although such survey items may be interesting from a local or historic perspective, the findings are less appropriate for drawing conclusions about more general support for vigilantism. The table does include a number of items that have been formulated in broader terms. Ter Voert (1997) for instance used the following item to measure support for vigilantism: "If crime control by the government is inadequate, citizens are justified to take the law into their own hands". Nevertheless, there also lies a danger in using more ambiguous wording, as it leaves room for a variety of interpretations. In this item it is for instance not specified what "inadequate" crime control means, or what type of behavior would qualify as "taking the law into their own hands". It thus appears challenging to find an appropriate level of item specificity, which is especially problematic when only one item is used to measure support for vigilantism.

Explaining support for vigilantism

On the whole we do not consider the presented single-item measures suitable for drawing reliable conclusions about levels of support for vigilantism, nor about its determinants. In other words, they cannot provide us with reliable information about the confidence and situation hypotheses. Despite this, two of these items have been used in the literature in an attempt to *explain* support for vigilantism. Grayson (1992)

used items 5 and 9 (Table A1) to evaluate the confidence hypothesis. More specifically, he studied the effect of confidence in the criminal justice system on support for vigilantism in the United States and Canada. Grayson based his analysis on two comparable vigilantism cases, Goetz (1985) and Kesler (1987), and compared response rates to the corresponding Gallup Poll question: "Do you feel that incidents like these – taking the law into one's own hands – often called vigilantism, are sometimes justified because of the circumstances, or are never justified?" It was hypothesized that support for vigilantism would be lowest in Canada due to lower crime rates and a relatively high level of confidence in police. Despite this, findings showed Americans and Canadians to be equally supportive of the presented case of vigilantism. Importantly, this suggests that factors *other* than confidence in the criminal justice system may affect support for vigilantism. However, due to the nature of the study, no causal relations could be tested. Moreover, the single-item measures of support for vigilantism make generalizations challenging. Additionally, it should be taken into account that the indicators of the (perceived) performance of the criminal justice system are based on national averages. No conclusions can thus be drawn about the actual levels of confidence of those respondents who expressed support for vigilantism in the survey. Lastly, the two presented vigilantism cases are similar but not identical, which may have distorted the results. In spite of these limitations, the findings at least do suggest that the confidence hypothesis may not necessarily tell the whole story.

Another perspective on the confidence and situation hypothesis is provided by findings from a survey by Schulman et al. (in Zimring, 2003). Support for vigilantism was measured by asking about the *justifiability* of a certain act (item 6 in Table A1). The 33 percent of the sample who felt that vigilantism can indeed be justified was subsequently presented with a follow-up question: "What might justify people taking the law into their own hands?" (Multiple answers possible). This open question resulted in a total of 20 different answer categories. Table 2.1 shows the four most mentioned justifications of vigilantism and the corresponding percentages (Zimring, 2003, p.233).

Table 2.1   Most popular vigilantism justifications (N = 330)

When the criminal justice system doesn't work/fails to give equal justice/ bureaucracy doesn't work (unspecified)	30 %
When the criminal goes free/free on a technicality/gets a lenient sentence	17 %
Being present at the crime/self-defense/protection	12 %
When the police/law enforcement don't do their job (unspecified)	10 %

Interestingly, three out of the four most popular justifications relate to a perceived lack of performance of (agencies of) the criminal justice system. Of these three, two relate to evaluations of the authorities *in general*, thus providing evidence for the confidence hypothesis. The other one, however, refers to *situation-specific* performance: acquittal or a lenient sentence for the perpetrator. This justification of vigilantism thus corresponds with the situation hypothesis. People may have confidence in the

criminal justice system in general but still express support for vigilantism due to the perceived failure of authorities in a specific situation. In line with this, some of the *least* popular justifications of vigilantism concern devastating events that are unrelated to performance of the criminal justice system, such as "When a child is murdered" and "When an adult family member is murdered" (both three percent; not in the table). This implies that a serious crime in itself is not necessarily seen as a sufficient justification for taking the law into one's own hands: the criminal justice response to the precipitating crime plays a fundamental role. This notion is in line with what was suggested by Cohen (1989) at the beginning of the chapter, and will be empirically tested in our own studies on support for vigilantism.

2.3.2 Multiple-item measures

In this section we will present three multiple-item measures of support for vigilantism from the literature, and discuss the findings in light of the two main hypotheses. As has been illustrated in the previous section, both 'support' and 'vigilantism' can be conceptualized and interpreted in a variety of ways. Multiple-item measures are therefore highly recommendable for the current context. The advantages of using multiple items include an increased reliability and construct validity, a greater breadth of measurement and an increased variability of scores (Jordan & Turner, 2008). Methodological issues related to single items, such as ambiguity in terminology, are not as problematic when the items are combined into a multiple-item measure.

The items and corresponding findings are presented in Table A2 in Appendix 1. The first study in the table was carried out by Tankebe (2009). Survey data were used to test the confidence hypothesis by examining the effect of police-related attitudes on public support for vigilantism in Ghana. The operationalization of *vigilantism* in this study is broad, ranging from attitudes toward beating up or killing crime suspects to ones about vigilantism in response to (perceived) police malfunctioning. Moreover, the items address different types of *support*, ranging from finding certain acts acceptable to whether the perpetrators should be blamed. In our view, this approach provides a much more informative way of measuring support for vigilantism than the single-item measures above. Nevertheless, one of the items seems out of place, as it appears to measure confidence in police rather than support for vigilantism: "It is pointless to hand over a suspected criminal to the police because they won't bring the offender to justice" (Tankebe, 2009, p.265).

The separate ratings per item were not reported in the article. The author did construct an index of support for vigilantism, which has a mean score of 3.15 (SD = 0.85) and a satisfactory reliability (Cronbach's α = 0.70). Assuming that the items were rated on a 5-point response scale (this is not explicitly mentioned, but it is the scale used for all other items), the mean score indicates that respondents were neutral about vigilantism overall. In order to explain support for vigilantism, the support index was used as the dependent variable in four different regression models. The model with the highest explained variance (20 percent) was the one that included the variable

police trustworthiness. Perceived police trustworthiness was the strongest predictor of support (β = .36, p < 0.01): those who saw the police as less trustworthy were more likely to support vigilantism. This thus provides evidence for the confidence hypothesis. However, this finding may partially be due to the police item that is included in the support for vigilantism measure, as mentioned above. The only other significant determinants of support in this model were age (β = .12, p < 0.05) and education (β = -.22, p < 0.01). Older and less educated people were more likely to express support for vigilantism. Police effectiveness in dealing with crime and respondents' experience of police corruption did *not* influence public support for vigilantism. The author concludes that support for vigilantism is rooted in normative evaluations of policing (can they be trusted?), rather than instrumental ones (do they perform well?). We will further address this distinction in Chapter 4, in our conceptualization of confidence.

The second study in Table A2 does not specifically aim to test the situation or confidence hypothesis, but we included it in our review because it does provide a number of relevant insights. Five items about vigilantism were presented to 10,821 respondents from seven Latin American cities (ratings averaged in the table) and Madrid (Briceño-Léon, Camardiel, & Avila, 2006). For comparative purposes, it is important to take into account that not all items were rated on the same response scale. The first two items were rated on a five-point agreement scale and concern the perceived right to kill. It should be noted that killing in defense of one's family or property is not necessarily an act of vigilantism. In the article, the 'strongly (dis)agree' and '(dis)agree' percentages were summated and reported as combined responses rates (Briceño-Léon et al., 2006). The latter three items concern killing for other reasons, and are more likely to constitute an act of vigilantism. The scale for these three items consists of three answer categories: 'approve', 'disapprove but understand', and 'neither approve nor understand'. Especially the middle category of this scale is an interesting way to measure support, as it seems to pertain to a form of understanding or empathy with the vigilante. Using the findings in the article we deduced the response percentages for this specific category, and reported them in the 'understand' column in Table A2. The authors did not calculate summated scales for the two sets of items, so reliability ratings are not available.

The level of support for vigilantism overall was found to be much lower in Madrid than in the surveyed Latin American cities (Briceño-Léon et al., 2006). The highest level of support was expressed in Caracas, Venezuela, where 70 percent (strongly) agreed with the right to kill to defend one's family. The lowest level of support was found in Madrid for the item on 'social purge' killings, which was rejected ('neither approve nor understand') by 80 percent of the sample. Additionally, less people were found to agree with the right to kill to defend one's property than to defend one's family. This points to the importance of situational characteristics, in line with the situation hypothesis. In Madrid, most understanding was found for a father killing his daughter's rapist; in the Latin American cities more respondents expressed an understanding for the lynching of someone who terrorizes the community.

Using odds-ratios, Briceño-Léon et al. (2006) additionally analyzed the role of demographic variables and found a clear gender effect, with males being generally more supportive of vigilantism. One exception was a high level of approval by women in San José, Costa Rica, of a father killing his daughter's rapist. Another important variable was religion: Catholics were most prone to support the right to kill. With regards to education, the least educated were most keen of vigilantism in Madrid, while the opposite pattern emerged in Latin America. Lastly, those who watched more violent television approved more of vigilantism, as did heavy drinkers. It is mentioned in the article that the questionnaire also included sections about the perceived efficacy of the police and other criminal justice institutions. Findings regarding these perceptions are unfortunately not reported, so the confidence hypothesis cannot be tested. Another limitation to the study is ambiguity in terminology. If a respondent for instance agrees with the notion that someone has a right to kill to defend his or her *property* (Briceño-Léon et al., 2006), it remains unclear whether this would extend to agreement with killing in defense of a trivial possession.

The final study in Table A2 was conducted by Schadt and DeLisi (2007). This study aims to explain support for the death penalty through attitudes toward vigilantism. Determinants of support for vigilantism are not examined, so the findings are not necessarily relevant for the confidence and situation hypothesis. However, the study does provide us with useful ideas regarding the operationalization of support for vigilantism. The six items that were used to measure support for vigilantism together form a reliable scale (Cronbach's α = 0.84). Four of the items regard the respondent's perceived temptation to hurt or kill someone who victimized his or her family. The latter two items concern the wrongfulness and justifiability of (revenge) killing. The table reveals that the levels of support for vigilantism vary considerably depending on the item used, which is consistent with the point made earlier about the risk of drawing conclusions based on single-item measurements. It also points to the role of contextual characteristics, in line with the situation hypothesis. One important factor for instance seems to be whether respondents are asked about *hurting* a perpetrator who victimizes their family, or about *killing* him. It also matters whether people express being *tempted* to take the law into their own hands, or whether they say they actually *would* do so. This implies that even if respondents would feel inclined to do something, they realize that they may not consort to such behavior in reality due to moral – or other – considerations. With regards to demographic variables, only a gender effect was found, with males once again being more supportive of vigilantism.

A limitation to Schadt & DeLisi's (2007) study is that four out of six items limit vigilantism to the act of killing. As a result of this, the findings are not necessarily generalizable to less severe acts of vigilantism. Additionally, it is not entirely clear whether the acts qualify as vigilantism and not as self-defense. Another methodological drawback, as acknowledged by the authors, is that respondents are asked to say what they *think they would do*, which may not be a proper reflection of what they *actually would do* in real life (see DeLisi, 2001; but also Kraus, 1995). This idea is further illustrated by

the fact that 36 percent of respondents (strongly) agree that they would kill someone for hurting their family, which is hardly likely to be the case in reality. Another limitation to the study is that the measure contains rather indefinite expressions, such as "hurt my family", which leaves a lot of room for interpretation on part of the respondent. Lastly, due to the design of the study, no reliable conclusions can be drawn about the situation and confidence hypothesis.

2.3.3 Quasi-experimental studies

In the previous sections we presented both single- and multiple-item measures of support for vigilantism. Studies that use multiple items appear to be more reliable, although some limitations still remain. Conceptualizations of support and of vigilantism vary considerably between surveys, which makes it challenging to draw valid conclusions. The findings nonetheless suggest that support for taking the law into one's own hands at least partially depends on the situational context provided to respondents, in line with the situation hypothesis. Likewise, support was also found for the confidence hypothesis. In order to test the two more hypotheses more directly, quasi-experimental designs are commonly used. In this section, two studies will be discussed in which this methodology has been applied.

The first quasi-experimental study on reactions to vigilantism to be discussed was carried out in the United States by Skitka and Houston (2001). Vignettes, or case studies, were used to examine the relation between people's moral values and their perceptions of fairness and justice in a vigilantism context. The authors varied two situational characteristics, thereby testing the situation hypothesis. Six different versions of a ficticious newspaper description were used, detailing the murder of a young couple during a burglary. The murder suspect ("Smith") is subsequently killed, either through capital punishment or by a vigilante (the father of the male murder victim) on the way to trial. The other experimental factor was the murder suspect's apparent guilt (guilty, innocent or ambiguous). Participants were asked to rate their perception of both procedural and outcome fairness, on a scale from -4 (strongly disagree) to +4 (strongly agree). Procedural fairness was assessed using two items (Cronbach's α = 0.86), including "Justice was served because the process by which Smith was judged was fair". Outcome fairness was measured using three items (Cronbach's α = 0.93), including "Smith deserved what happened to him". The latter scale thus pertains to a sense of deservingness: the victim of vigilantism 'got what he deserved'.

Findings show that putting a guilty murder suspect to death was seen as fair, and that of an innocent murder suspect as unfair, *regardless* of whether it was the result of a formal trial or of vigilantism. When subjects were confident about Smith's guilt or innocence, the perceived fairness of the outcome depended only on whether it matched participants' moral values that the guilty should be punished and the innocent should be set free. In other words, what mattered in the case of a guilty murderer was *whether* he got punished (he was killed), not *by whom* (killed by legal authorities or by a vigilante). How the murder suspect was killed only made a difference if his guilt was ambiguous, in

which case the legal punishment was perceived as a more fair outcome than vigilantism. This suggests that people find an act of vigilantism fair if they believe the precipitating offender deserves to be punished, without caring about the legality of the execution of this punishment. These findings suggest that situational characteristics indeed affect how people view a specific case of vigilantism. Unfortunately, confidence in the criminal justice system was not assessed, so the two hypotheses could not be contrasted with one another. The study nicely illustrates the added value of using vignettes, as it allows for a systematic analysis of various determinants of support for vigilantism.

Another quasi-experimental study on support for vigilantism was conducted by Cook (2006). The effect of two experimental factors, seriousness of the precipitating event and confidence in the legal system, was studied in a 2x2 between-subjects design with vignettes. This study thus aims to test both the situation and confidence hypothesis, but treats confidence as an experimental factor rather than as a stable, personal attitude. Confidence was manipulated by providing subjects with a fictitious positive or negative article about the US justice system. This manipulation was successful: people in the negative article condition expressed less confidence in the justice system and vice versa.

The four versions of the vignette were formatted to look like a police report, and were presented in a between-subjects design. The vigilantism act consisted of a father ("Smith") avenging the death of his daughter by following the suspect ("Collins") home one night and killing him. Seriousness of the precipitating event was manipulated by having the father kill a man who raped and murdered his daughter (high seriousness) or a man who caused her accidental death by reckless driving ('low' seriousness). Support for vigilantism was assessed using the items that are presented in Table 2.2, which together form a reliable scale (Cronbach's α = 0.77). As the table shows, the support measure is composed of various dimensions, including sympathy with both parties as well as outrage at the precipitating crime and at the subsequent act of vigilantism. Interestingly, the measure also includes items about the perceived recidivism risk of the vigilante and the danger he poses to society.

Table 2.2 Items to measure support for vigilantism

How much do you sympathize with the victim, Kevin Collins?
How much do you sympathize with the defendant, Jack Smith?
How serious is the crime with which Jack Smith is accused?
How outraged are you by Kevin Collin's murder?
How responsible for this murder is Jack Smith?
Is Jack Smith a danger to society?
What is the likelihood of Jack Smith repeating this crime?

A main effect was found for the seriousness of the precipitating event: support for vigilantism was higher when it was in response to rape and murder rather than in response to an accidental death. Importantly, this provides more evidence for the situation hypothesis. No main effect was found for confidence in the justice system,

which led the author to conclude that the confidence manipulation was not strong enough to affect subsequent judgments of vigilantism.[3] Confidence did affect support in interaction with personal attitudes, such as right wing authoritarianism and belief in a just world.[4] However, as confidence was not treated as an attitude in this study, the two hypotheses could not be contrasted with one another.

2.4   Two rival hypotheses: Conclusions

In this chapter we presented two main hypotheses on why people support vigilantism. The *confidence hypothesis* posits that support for vigilantism is caused by a lack of confidence in the criminal justice system. Alternatively, the *situation hypothesis* proposes that characteristics of the vigilantism situation affect how people view a case of vigilantism. By reviewing a selection of studies on public support for vigilantism, we examined to what extent the empirical literature supports either or both of these two hypotheses. Additionally, we examined how support for vigilantism has been operationalized in the empirical literature.

We started out by describing a number of single-item measures which have been used in poll research to assess support for vigilantism. Although these measures were limited in their reliability, they did provide a number of useful concepts that can be used in our own operationalization of support. Notably, none of the described studies measured support with a straight-forward yes-or-no question, such as 'Do you support vigilantism?' Instead, items pertain to the justifiability and approval of vigilantism, victim deservingness, perceived seriousness of the vigilantism act, sympathy and understanding for the vigilante, blameworthiness of the vigilante, and so on. Support for vigilantism appears to be a multifaceted construct, which makes multiple-item measures much more appropriate than the single-item ones that are commonly used. In our own empirical research we will combine a number of these concepts in order to construct an elaborate, multiple-item measure of support for vigilantism.

With regards to the two hypotheses, support was found for both in the empirical literature. However, this evidence is mostly based on straight-forward survey studies, in which causality cannot be assessed. In order to further disentangle the effects of situational characteristics and confidence on support, we believe that quasi-experimental research with vignettes can prove to be very valuable. Such methodology allows for a systematic study of the influence of multiple determinants of support for vigilantism. Although we included two quasi-experimental studies on support in the current review, neither of these measured the impact of situational characteristics and confidence simultaneously.[5] In other words, we still do not know anything about the *relative* impact of these factors on support for vigilantism. Does confidence for instance still play a role when situational characteristics are accounted for, or vice versa?

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3   The author did construct an improvised personal confidence measure using responses to the questions about the fictitious US justice article. Using this measure, confidence again was not found to affect support.

4   For more information about belief in a just world (BJW), please refer to Chapter 6.

5   Cook (2006) did measure both, but treated confidence as an experimental factor rather than as an attitude.

Another important conclusion to be drawn from the literature review is that conceptualizations of *vigilantism* vary considerably between the surveys. Related concepts such as self-defense are for instance at times mistaken for vigilantism. In order to conduct a meaningful study on support for vigilantism, it is therefore crucial to first be clear on what vigilantism actually entails. In the next chapter we will therefore review the literature on the concept of vigilantism, provide a working definition of vigilantism, and identify its situational dimensions in a typology. This conceptual analysis will allow for a systematic investigation of the effects of situational characteristics on support for vigilantism, so that the situation hypothesis can be tested. In order to test the confidence hypothesis, we will devote the subsequent chapter to the conceptualization of confidence. We will discuss the literature on confidence in the criminal justice system and use it to construct a reliable instrument to measure confidence. The next two chapters, in combination with the current one, will thus provide us with the tools necessary to test the two main hypotheses in an empirical investigation of public support for vigilantism.

3

The concept of vigilantism

3.1   Introduction

In this thesis we set out to reach a better understanding of public support for vigilantism and its determinants. In the previous chapter it became clear that conceptualizations of vigilantism tend to vary greatly in studies on support for vigilantism. Before carrying out our own empirical research, we therefore first need to determine what vigilantism actually entails. To this end, we will present a number of ways in which vigilantism has been conceptualized in the literature. We will subsequently present our own definition of vigilantism and explain the main considerations that are at its base. Importantly, we do not claim to offer an exhaustive definition: it is merely meant to provide a manageable scope for our current study on public support for vigilantism.

In order to test the situation hypothesis, i.e. the idea that situational characteristics affect support for vigilantism, it is essential to first identify what those characteristics are. To this end, we will present a typology of vigilantism in the second part of the chapter. This typology will provide a structure for categorizing various characteristics of the vigilantism act itself, as well as those related to its context. These characteristics can subsequently be systematically varied in empirical research in order to study their influence on support for vigilantism.

3.2   Defining vigilantism

In the literature, there exists disagreement on a number of seemingly rudimentary elements of vigilantism, such as the *who, what, why, when, how* and *against whom*. Some authors for instance maintain that vigilantes are always private citizens (Johnston, 1996; Little & Sheffield, 1983), while others also envision vigilantism as carried out by state agents (Dumsday, 2009; Huggins, 1991). Most authors agree that vigilantism consists of (threats of) violence (Rosenbaum & Sederberg, 1974), but some also include nonviolent versions like Neighborhood Watches (Hine, 1998). The perceived goal of vigilantes also differs widely, such as defending an established sociopolitical order (Rosenbaum & Sederberg, 1974), imposing law in a lawless setting (Alvarez & Bachman, 2007), putting an end to a an unpleasant situation (e.g. domestic abuse, Ayyildiz, 1995) and the apprehension and punishment of (alleged) criminals (Shotland, 1976; Zimring, 2003). Similarly, some claim that vigilantism is always a premeditated act (Dumsday, 2009; Johnston, 1996), while others also recognize more spontaneous forms (Adinkrah, 2005; Huggins, 1991; Shotland & Goodstein, 1984). Victims of vigilantism also vary widely in the literature, including perpetrators of crime (Brown, 1975), law enforcement officers (Rosenbaum & Sederberg, 1974), minority groups (Sederberg, 1978), whalers (Nagtzaam & Lentini, 2008) and even witches (Adinkrah, 2005).

The broadest approach to vigilantism in the literature is most likely the way Black (1998) portrays it in his discussion of self-help, which is a type of social control and involves "the handling of a grievance by unilateral aggression" (p. xxiv). He suggests that most intentional homicide in modern society is self-help, as well as many other crimes like assault and the destruction of property. Self-help is thus such an over-inclusive

category that it comprises almost all types of crime, at the risk of rendering the term meaningless. Another very broad approach to vigilantism was introduced by Rosenbaum and Sederberg (1974), who identify crime control vigilantism, regime control vigilantism and social control vigilantism. Crime control vigilantism refers to vigilantism against (alleged) perpetrators who are seen to have escaped justice as a result of inefficiency, corruption or leniency on the part of the government (Rosenbaum & Sederberg, 1974). Crime control vigilantism is commonly linked to specific worries about a particular crime problem (Hil & Dawes, 2000). It is the type of vigilantism most frequently associated with vigilantes (Rosenbaum & Sederberg, 1974), and is often portrayed in popular culture, such as in the Death Wish movies starring Charles Bronson (Grayson, 1992). The crime control vigilante can be perceived as having a dual character, embodying both "a law-abiding hero and a law-breaking villain" (Ayyildiz, 1995, p.147). Social control vigilantism concerns violence against groups that are seen as a threat to values in society (Pedahzur & Perliger, 2003; Rosenbaum & Sederberg, 1974). Unlike crime control vigilantism, the victims of social control vigilantism need not have committed a crime. The target groups can be communal (identified by characteristics such as race and religion), economic or political. The early Ku Klux Klan is a case in point, as its members aimed to terrorize Black minorities in order to counter their improving status in American society after the Reconstruction. The San Francisco vigilante committee of 1856 is another example, as it was known for its attacks on Catholics, immigrants and others (Brown, 1975). Regime control vigilantism is directed at the regime itself and is intended to alter it as a result of insurmountable frustrations about its state of affairs (Rosenbaum & Sederberg, 1974). Victims of this type of vigilantism, as well as its perpetrators, tend to be political officials or regime representatives. Examples are political assassinations, coups d'état, and paramilitary groups.

To contrast with these two broad concepts of self-help, there is the more narrow view of Denkers (1985) who defines vigilantism as "any spontaneous and relatively immediate act of private citizens, without consulting the police or justice department, against suspects/perpetrators of a criminal act of which they are a direct victim or a direct witness as a bystander" (p.15, own translation from Dutch). Although this conceptualization seems more functional than the previous one, it can be criticized for being too constricted instead. It for instance excludes all premeditated acts of vigilantism, as well as vigilantes who are not direct victims or bystanders but who act on behalf of others. In light of these considerations, we aim to define vigilantism in a way that is neither over-inclusive, nor over-cautious. We propose the following definition:

Vigilantism is a planned criminal act carried out by one or more private citizens in response to (the perceived threat of) a crime committed by one or more private citizens, targeting the (alleged) perpetrator(s) of that crime.

Below we will discuss the various components of this definition in their order of appearance, and elucidate our main considerations.

Vigilantism is a planned act

Planning concerns the extent to which an act of vigilantism is set up beforehand. In agreement with various other authors, we maintain that some level of planning, however minimal, is necessary in order for an act to be categorized as vigilantism (cf. Dumsday, 2009; Johnston, 1996). Johnston (1996) persuasively argues that spontaneous reactions by victims to an attacker do not qualify as vigilantism, because then "any example of reactive interpersonal conflict might be deemed vigilantist: the pub brawl, the playground scuffle, the spontaneous defense act of violence by the victim of domestic abuse, the retaliatory act of violence by the footballer fouled on the field of play by an opponent" (p.222). In other words, vigilantism would become much too broad a concept if it were to also include spontaneous, unplanned acts of violence. We are interested in public support for people who deliberately choose to consort to vigilantism, in spite of legal alternatives. Support for planned vigilantism in our view is potentially more threatening to the criminal justice system than support for people who act violently due to a sudden emotional state. We will thus not study public support for what are commonly known as 'crimes of passion', such as violence committed in a jealous rage upon discovering infidelity. In the next paragraph, acts like self-defense are also excluded from our definition.

Vigilantism is a criminal act

In the literature there exists no consensus on the legality of vigilantism. Some see it as illegal by definition (e.g. Rutten, 1961), while others recognize legal forms (Grayson, 1992; Johnston, 1996; Little & Sheffield, 1983; Rosenbaum & Sederberg, 1974). Importantly, vigilantism *per se* is not a crime: it is not explicitly prohibited by law. Vigilantes can be prosecuted for committing a particular crime, such as murder, but not for the mere act of taking the law into their own hands. It is the context in which a criminal act occurs which is used to additionally classify it as an act of vigilantism. For current purposes we will focus on criminal forms of vigilantism: we will only examine public support for people who have committed a crime. In addition to excluding crimes of passion (see above), we also refrain from studying support for legitimate behavior, such as 'appropriate' violence in cases of self-defense. Below we will further clarify the distinction between vigilantism and such related phenomena.

Even though most states claim a monopoly of authority in the maintenance of law and order and the use of force (Abrahams, 2002), there are a few exceptions. In the Netherlands, as in many other jurisdictions, citizens are authorized to use violence to defend themselves, their honor and their property against immediate, unlawful assault (Article 41.1 Sr). Such a situation of self-defense functions as a legal justification of violence, under the condition that inevitability and proportionality criteria are met. When the violence is not proportional, it can nonetheless still be considered justified if the lack of proportionality is deemed to be due to an emotional state as caused by the threat faced (Article 41.2 Sr). Apart from self-defense, citizen's arrest is another exception to the state's monopoly on violence. In the Netherlands, any citizen who

catches another citizen in the act of committing a crime is authorized to arrest that person (Article 53 Sv), after which the arrested person needs to be handed over to the authorities as quickly as possible. If force is used to make such an arrest, it needs to be proportional. Citizens in this situation also have the right to confiscate any items carried by the suspect (Article 95 Sv). Aside from the discussed exceptions, citizens are to refrain from using violence in reaction to a criminal act.

In practice it is not always clear whether a violent act qualifies as self-defense, citizen's arrest, vigilantism or something else (cf. Naeyé, 2009). This is at least partially due to the fact that both self-defense and citizen's arrest have the potential to turn into situations of vigilantism. An example of a transition from self-defense to vigilantism for instance took place in 2002 in Tilburg, the Netherlands. A jeweler shot a robber in his store and kicked him in the head after the suspect had already been handcuffed by the police and was laying on the floor ("Tilburgse juwelier schiet op overvallers," 2003). The judiciary ruled that the (fatal) shooting by the jeweler was an act of self-defense. However, he *was* sentenced for kicking the robber, as it was ruled as unjustified physical assault. Similarly, the distinction between self-defense and vigilantism has in the literature been described as follows:

> Vigilantism stands in sharp contrast to self-defense. What distinguishes the vigilante from the man who merely defends himself is that the vigilante takes the law into his own hands. He does not merely protect himself, he also uses the occasion to punish the assailant. (Cohen, 1989, p.1272)

Vigilantism also surfaces in situations of citizen's arrest. An example of this occurred in 2002 in Amsterdam, the Netherlands, when two super market employees were prosecuted for the violence that they used against a shoplifter *after* they had already arrested him. One of the employees for instance kicked the robber when he was already handcuffed. The public prosecutor viewed this as unjustified violence because the shoplifter had already surrendered. One of the suspects was acquitted; the other one was given a 600 Euro fine, half of which was conditional.[6]

By restricting our definition to vigilantism that qualifies as a criminal act, we refrain from studying public support for the abovementioned legitimate forms of violence. In our empirical research, we will therefore only include cases of vigilantism that are clearly distinguishable from situations of self-defense and citizen's arrest. Importantly, by not specifying the type of criminal act, nonviolent forms of vigilantism also fit our definition. Vigilantism can for instance consist of the nonviolent but illegitimate confiscation of property in reaction to a criminal act. Another implication of our focus on criminal acts is that we exclude those forms of vigilantism that qualify as breaches of other types of law, such as civil law.

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6   This case became famous in the Netherlands because a member of the royal family, late Prince Bernhard, publicly expressed support for the act of vigilantism. He even ended up paying the fine of the convicted offender ("Bernhard betaalt boete AH-medewerker," 2003).

Vigilantes are private citizens

In our definition we choose to focus on vigilantes who are private citizens. Our current scope thus does not extend to public support for state agent vigilantes. We are interested in citizens' opinions on violence committed by fellow citizens; not in public opinion about the abuse of force or power by the authorities.

Vigilantism is a response to (the perceived threat of) a crime

We agree with Johnston (1996) that vigilantism can only exist as a reaction to a potential, alleged, or real transgression of norms. In other words, for a crime to be considered an act of vigilantism, it needs to be a response to a previous act (see also Grayson, 1992; Pedahzur & Perliger, 2003). From here onwards we will call this triggering act the *precipitating event*. Importantly, our definition specifically states that the precipitating event needs to be (the perceived threat of) a criminal law transgression. Acts that are committed in response to noncriminal acts are thus not viewed as vigilantism. Even though we recognize that violence aimed at regime or social control can be categorized as vigilantism (cf. Rosenbaum & Sederberg, 1974), we find this approach overly general. Similar to our criticism of Black's (1998) self-help concept, we deem that vigilantism would become too broad a concept if it were to include such acts as political assassinations and attacks against minority groups. Acts that are for instance carried out by organizations like the Ku Klux Klan seem fundamentally different from those committed by private citizens in response to crime. Members of the Ku Klux Klan and similar groups are not necessarily motivated by the occurrence of a crime, so their behavior generally differs too much from our view of vigilantism. We thus limit our definition to vigilantism as a response to a criminal act.

The *perception* element is included in our definition because the vigilante can perceive the (threat of a) crime and act accordingly, while others may not interpret the situation in the same way. An individual can for instance consort to vigilantism in response to an accusation which later proves to be false. Furthermore, by adding the *threat* component, we include vigilantism acts that are aimed at the prevention of crime. Lastly, by not elaborating on what the vigilante aims to achieve, we allow for various goals, including punishment and compensation.

Vigilantism victims are (alleged) perpetrators of a crime

As we focus our research on vigilantism in response to crime, it may seem redundant that we further specify the vigilantism act as being directed at the (alleged) perpetrators of that crime. However, citizens can also take the law into their own hands against family members of the perpetrators, or even against complete strangers. In our study we include only acts of vigilantism directed at those who are themselves accused of having committed a precipitating criminal act. We added *alleged* to this phrase because the vigilante's victim may not have actually been involved in a crime. This is in fact one of the criticisms often expressed vis-à-vis vigilantism: it is especially prone to the persecution of innocent people (Tripp, Bies, & Aquino, 2007).

The victimization that is caused by the vigilante can also be indirect, for instance through the damage of property of the (alleged) offender. The victim of vigilantism thus does not need to be harmed directly. An example of this occurred in Hampshire, England, in August of 2006. A so-called 'phone vigilante' slashed the tires of over twenty cars and left a note warning the owners that they had been seen using a mobile phone while driving ("Phone vigilante slashes car tyres," 2006). Similarly, over 160 cars in Hamburg, Germany, were recently spray painted and scratched because they were (partially) parked on the side-walk ("Man neemt 'wraak' op auto's," 2010). The suspect claimed wanting to re-educate the car drivers.

3.3   A typology

Now that we have presented a definition of vigilantism, we turn to the discussion of our vigilantism typology. We developed a typology in order to identify situational characteristics of vigilantism, which can subsequently be varied in an empirical design to test the situation hypothesis. Whether a crime is qualified as an act of vigilantism depends on the context in which it takes place. Moreover, we expect that the circumstances of an act of vigilantism can affect public support for it. In the typology we will therefore specify not only the relevant characteristics of the vigilantism act itself, but also those related to its situational context.

We will first discuss the five main components of the typology: *1) precipitating event, 2) formal response to the precipitating event, 3) vigilantism, 4) vigilante* and 5) *victim.* The first three together make up the 'vigilantism event sequence' (see Figure 3.1).
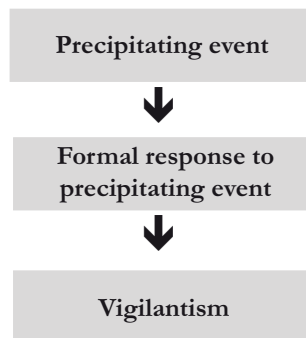
Figure 3.1 Vigilantism event sequence

The vigilantism event sequence outlines the main occurrences that commonly make up a vigilantism situation. By our definition, vigilantism is always a reaction to (the threat of) a crime, which we labeled the precipitating event. Without a prior crime to react to, vigilantism cannot be distinguished from other forms of crime. We therefore included the *precipitating event* as the first main event of the vigilantism event sequence.

Another typical feature that emerges in vigilantism situations is the reaction of the authorities to the precipitating crime, or lack thereof. Vigilantes often claim to take the law into their own hands because they are dissatisfied with how the legal authorities deal with the precipitating crime. The literature review in Chapter 2 also provides examples of people who pointed at a failing criminal justice system as a justification of vigilantism. We thus added the *formal response to the precipitating event* as the second step of the vigilantism event sequence. Importantly, the fact that it is part of the chain of events does not imply that there is always a formal response. Rather, it is an important contextual feature that needs to be further specified in a given situation. The final event in the sequence is the act of *vigilantism* itself. In Figure 3.2 the typology of the vigilantism context and its five main components are illustrated.

The three events of the vigilantism event sequence (Figure 3.1) make up the first three components of the vigilantism typology (Figure 3.2). In addition to these, the typology also contains two person-related components: the *vigilante* and the *victim* of vigilantism.
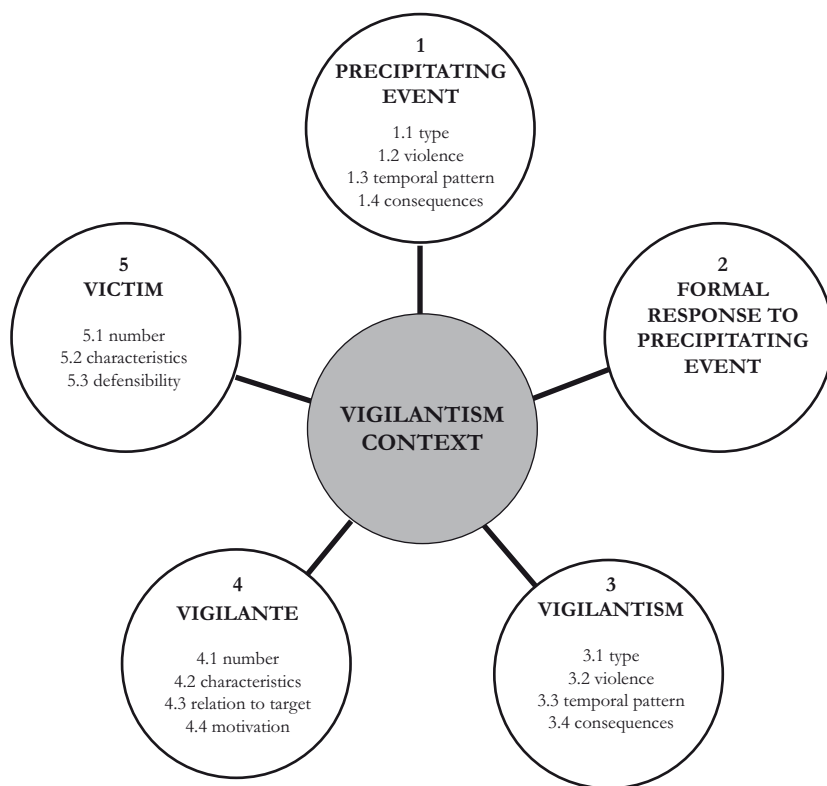
Figure 3.2 Typology of the vigilantism context

These components allow for a description of the person who takes the law into his own hands, as well as of the person who becomes the victim of vigilantism. Research on punishment preferences shows that characteristics of the victim and offender can play an important role in shaping public opinion about crime and punishment (e.g. Rossi et al., 1985).

Characteristics related to all five components of the typology are expected to affect public support for a specific act of vigilantism. For this reason, each of these characteristics is discussed in detail below.

3.3.1 Precipitating event

Type
The type of precipitating event refers to the specific criminal act (or threat thereof) that provokes an act of vigilantism. It can be specified using the formal criminal code qualification, and can for instance consist of intimidation, property damage, an act of violence or rape. The precipitating event can also consist of a combination of acts.

Violence
This characteristic specifies whether violence is used in the precipitating event, and if so, what type and amount. We follow Black (1998) in his definition of violence as "the use of force, such as the infliction of personal injury, the attempt to inflict personal injury, or the threat of personal injury" (p.xiv).

Temporal pattern
The temporal pattern indicates whether the precipitating event is a one-time event or a repeated occurrence. A shop owner can for instance consort to vigilantism the very first time he is robbed, or after he has been the victim of several robberies.

Consequences
The consequences concern the outcome of a precipitating event, including the type and severity, for both offenders and victims. Physical consequences can for instance range from a simple scratch to death as the most serious consequence. Psychological consequences can for example vary from a temporary stressful situation to a long-term trauma. Economic consequences, such as property damage, can be expressed as a monetary value.

3.3.2 Formal response to precipitating event

This component concerns the reaction of the criminal justice system agencies to the precipitating event. This formal response can range from no action at all, to for instance police arrest or a judge's verdict. We did not further identify possible characteristics of this component, as its operationalization is rather straight-forward.

3.3.3 Vigilantism

Type

The type of vigilantism is the kind of criminal act that is committed by the vigilante. It is identical to the type category pertaining to the precipitating event. Thus, the differentiation between intimidation, property damage and so on applies here too.

Violence

Within this category, the use of violence by a vigilante can be specified. Although many authors claim that (the threat of) violence is a necessary element of vigilantism (e.g. Burrows, 1976; Johnston, 1996), others identify nonviolent vigilantism acts such as the confiscation of property without the use of force (Black, 1998; Hine, 1998).

Temporal pattern

The temporal pattern of vigilantism concerns its time characteristic: is it a onetime act or part of a series? An example of the latter is a group of neighbors that repeatedly attacks teenagers who are suspected to have committed public order offenses in the neighborhood.

Consequences

Just like the precipitating event, an act of vigilantism can have physical, psychological, and economic consequences for both the offender and his victim. With regards to the psychological effects of vigilantism, it has been argued in the literature that being a victim of vigilantism can create a stigma (Hine, 1998). People may assume that he or she must have done something to deserve his fate.[7]

3.3.4 Vigilante

Number

Within this characteristic it can be denoted whether the vigilantism act is committed by one or more persons. Some authors maintain that vigilantism is always carried out by groups (Abrahams, 2008; Baker, 2001; Marx & Archer, 1976), while others also recognize individual vigilantes (e.g. Johnston, 1996).

Characteristics

In this dimension, demographic attributes can be specified such as age, gender, educational level, and ethnicity. Personality traits can also be described, as well as attitudes and personal history such as a criminal record.

Relation to victim

This characteristic identifies how the vigilante is related to his victim. In the 'classic' case of vigilantism, the vigilante is the direct victim of a precipitating act, who takes the law into his own hands against the perpetrator of that same act. In other words, the roles of

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7   We will elaborate on this type of response in Chapter 6, in our discussion of just-world theory.

the involved parties are reversed: the victim becomes an offender (the vigilante) and the offender becomes a victim (of vigilantism) (cf. Black, 1998). Another possibility is that the vigilante consorts to vigilantism on behalf of a victim of a precipitating crime (such as a parent acting in the name of a victimized child). The vigilante and his victim can also be strangers to each other prior to the act of vigilantism. One example is that of collective liability, where someone is attacked because of what someone else did (Black, 1998). A vigilante can for instance victimize a person who belongs to a certain group (e.g. an ethnic minority) to even the score with another group member.

Motivation
The vigilante's motivation is what triggers him to consort to vigilantism. He can respond to any type of precipitating event, and can have one or several goals in mind when taking the law into his own hands, including retribution, deterrence and compensation. The vigilante's reason to consort to vigilantism is often said to be related to the (lack of) a criminal justice response to the precipitating event.

3.3.5 Victim

Number
In this characteristic the number of victims is specified. Is it one individual who is victimized by the vigilante, or is it a group of people? Most of the examples in the literature tend to involve single victims, but vigilante acts against groups do occur (e.g. Rodgers, 2007).

Characteristics
Vigilantes can be described by the same characteristics that are used for identifying the vigilante, including demographics and personality attributes. Although the direct target of vigilantism is generally a person, it can also be an object, such as someone's property. In the latter case, people are the indirect victims of the vigilantism act.

Defensibility
The defensibility of the victim relates to the power balance between him and the vigilante. When a child is assaulted by an adult vigilante, the victim's defensibility is for instance much lower than would generally be the case with an adult victim. The same is true for the use of weapons: a unilateral use of weapons by the vigilante decreases the victim's defensibility. Legal defensibility can also be specified in this context: the extent to which the legal system is equally (perceived to be) available to the parties involved.

3.4   Conclusion

As of yet, scholars have not reached consensus on what vigilantism constitutes. There is disagreement on whether it is legal or not, who it is committed by, against whom, and so on. In order to conduct meaningful research on *support for vigilantism*, it is essential

to limit ourselves to a specific conceptualization of vigilantism. In this chapter we therefore formulated the following definition:

> *Vigilantism is a planned criminal act carried out by one or more private citizens in response to (the perceived threat of) a crime committed by one or more private citizens, targeting the (alleged) perpetrator(s) of that crime.*

This definition thus provides the starting point for our empirical analysis of support for vigilantism. Additionally, we constructed a comprehensive typology of vigilantism and its context. This typology provides a structure for identifying situational characteristics that are related to the precipitating event, the formal response to the precipitating event, the act of vigilantism itself, the vigilante and the victim of vigilantism. In the empirical studies to follow, some of these characteristics will be varied systematically in order to examine whether and to what extent they influence public support for vigilantism.

In this thesis we aim to study 1) situational characteristics and 2) confidence in the criminal justice system as possible determinants of support for vigilantism. Now that we have defined vigilantism and identified its characteristics, the next step is to take a closer look at confidence. In Chapter 4 we will present theoretical and methodological insights on confidence in the criminal justice system, and subsequently use them to develop a tool to measure confidence. This will complete the foundation for our first explorative study on support for vigilantism, which will be presented in Chapter 5.

4

The concept and measurement of confidence in the criminal justice system

4.1   Introduction

According to the confidence hypothesis, confidence in the criminal justice system is an important determinant of public support for vigilantism. People who are supportive of vigilantism are assumed to have a relatively low level of confidence. After all, they express support for those who deal with crime in spite of the existence of a legal system. Nevertheless, as we suggested earlier, characteristics of the vigilantism situation may also affect public reactions to it. For this reason we dedicated the previous chapter to a conceptualization of vigilantism and its context so that the situation hypothesis can be empirically tested. The next step is to prepare for an evaluation of the confidence hypothesis. To this end, we will conceptualize confidence in the current chapter. We need to be clear on what confidence constitutes, and how it can be measured, before being able to assess its role within the context of vigilantism.

Theoretical and methodological insights from the literature will be described to establish a conceptualization of confidence in the criminal justice system. Distinctions are made between trust and confidence, procedural justice and effectiveness, the criminal justice system as a whole versus individual agencies, and confidence on a local versus a national level. A number of these distinctions are subsequently integrated into a comprehensive tool to measure confidence. The resulting instrument will allow for an empirical test of the confidence hypothesis.

4.2   Public opinion polls

Confidence in the criminal justice system is a common topic in public opinion polls worldwide. Respondents are usually provided with a list of institutions and are asked to give a single confidence rating for each. Table 4.1 provides three examples of such items and the corresponding answer categories.

Most large-scale public opinion polls, including those in Table 4.1, treat confidence as a rather basic concept.[8] As argued in the literature review on support for vigilantism in Chapter 2, certain concepts are too complex to be assessed using single-item measures. This is also true for confidence. Single-item indicators of confidence are particularly sensitive to measurement error and distortion (Roberts & Hough, 2005b). Some of the main drawbacks of such measures are visible in Table 4.1. The first is *concept*-related: some surveys ask respondents to indicate a level of trust, while others ask for a confidence rating. To what extent such concepts are related remains unclear, but will be addressed in the next section. Secondly, the *object* of confidence differs between the items. Some surveys ask about confidence in the justice system or national legal system, while others ask specifically about confidence in the police or the courts. Another issue concerns the response categories that are used. In some surveys, respondents are for instance given only two options (tend to trust/tend not to trust), while in others they are asked to use a 0-10 point scale. Naturally, all of these disparities make it challenging to draw

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8   For a review of international indicators of confidence in criminal justice, see Jokinen et al. (2009).

valid conclusions about different levels of confidence. It is slightly less problematic to draw comparisons within one survey on a longitudinal basis, as the items and answer categories are usually consistent over time.

Table 4.1   Single-item measures of confidence in the criminal justice system

Survey (last wave)	Item and *institution*
Eurobarometer (wave 71: spring 2009)	"I would like to ask you a question about how much trust you have in certain institutions. For each of the following institutions, please tell me if you tend to trust it or tend not to trust it." *Justice/ the [nationality] legal system*
European Social Survey (wave 5: 2008/2009)	"Using this card, please tell me on a score of 0-10 how much you personally trust each of the institutions I read out. 0 means you do not trust an institution at all, and 10 means you have complete trust." *the legal system* *the police*
World Values Survey (wave 5: 2005-2008)	"I am going to name a number of organizations. For each one, could you tell me how much confidence you have in them: is it a great deal of confidence, quite a lot of confidence, not very much confidence or none at all?" *The police* *The courts*

A large-scale survey which does utilize a more elaborate measurement of confidence, especially in its most recent version (2008-2009), is the British Crime Survey (BCS). Respondents for instance rate their confidence in the effectiveness of various criminal justice system agencies, in relation to various specific functions. These include effectiveness of the police at catching criminals and effectiveness of the courts in dealing with cases promptly. Respondents are also asked to indicate their agreement with attitude statements about the criminal justice system as a whole, and about the police in their area. The BCS is thus much more advanced than the other measures described above, as a large variety of items is used rather than a single indicator of confidence.

4.3   Confidence literature

Apart from the large-scale opinion polls, there exists a rich body of research which focuses on the *mechanism* underlying confidence. In other words, why do people express certain levels of confidence in criminal justice agencies? Studies in this field also aim to identify different types of confidence, relations between them, and the influence of confidence on behavior (Bradford & Jackson, 2009). It is beyond the scope of our research on support for vigilantism to investigate such causal mechanisms. However, as the conceptualizations and operationalizations of confidence in the literature are useful for constructing our own measurement tool, they will be discussed below.

4.3.1 Trust vs. confidence

As mentioned above, opinion polls tend to treat concepts like 'trust' and 'confidence' as synonyms. The terms appear to be similar, yet we find it important to draw a clear conceptual distinction between them. Although both trust and confidence refer to expectations that can result in disappointments, they are said to do so in different ways (Luhmann, 2000). In relation to the criminal justice system, trust is someone's expectation that they *personally* will be treated in a certain way by criminal justice system actors, while confidence reflects more on how the system is perceived to act *in general* (Roberts & Hough, 2005b).

Trust can be defined as "a state of favorable expectation regarding other people's actions and intentions" (Möllering, 2001, p.404). Likewise, Sztompka defines trust as "a bet about the future contingent actions of others" (1999, p.25). Trust can more specifically be perceived as "the belief that a person occupying a specific role will perform that role in a manner consistent with the socially defined normative expectations associated with that role" (Hawdon, 2008, p.185). According to this definition, people trust specific individuals in specific contexts. Applying this perspective to the criminal justice system, trust concerns an interpersonal relationship between a citizen and an individual criminal justice actor (Bradford, Jackson, Hough, & Farrall, 2009). A citizen who for instance trusts a police officer, believes that he or she will behave in the way that can be expected from police officers. Trust is an active process involving actions and expectations at the interpersonal level.

Confidence concerns one's evaluation of criminal justice processes and activities at a more general, abstract level (Bradford, Jackson, Hough et al., 2009). In other words, confidence refers to citizens' belief about the overall system *as an institution*, not specifically in relation to oneself or one's own situation. Confidence is passive and encompasses relatively stable attitudes toward the criminal justice system and its components (e.g. rating the police as an institution). Confidence is arguably less easily affected by a single negative encounter than is the case with trust (Bradford, Jackson, Hough et al., 2009). Nevertheless, confidence is likely susceptible to long term processes or events, and can thus be affected (in a positive or negative manner) by experience.

For current purposes, we focus on confidence. Within the context of public support for vigilantism, we are more interested in how citizens view the criminal justice system and its agencies in general (confidence) than at the more interpersonal level (trust). In other words, we would like to empirically examine whether respondents' confidence in criminal justice system *agencies* affects their view on vigilantism, rather than examining the impact of their trust in specific criminal justice *actors* in one-on-one encounters. With this in mind, we will address confidence in more detail in the next section, and will identify some of its sub components. In line with the main drawbacks of public opinion polls, as described above, we will pay special attention to the *concept* and *object* of confidence.

4.3.2 The concept of confidence

Research consistently shows that confidence is a multi-dimensional concept (Bradford, Jackson, & Stanko, 2009; Hough & Roberts, 2004; Reisig, Bratton, & Gertz, 2007; Sunshine & Tyler, 2003a, 2003b). Confidence is commonly seen as a belief that the criminal justice system "as a set of institutions behaves effectively, fairly, and that it represents the interests and expresses the values of the community" (Bradford, Jackson, Hough et al., 2009, p.142). Importantly, as explained below, a distinction can be made between confidence in *procedural justice* and confidence in the *effectiveness* of the system (Roberts & Hough, 2005b; Skogan, 2009).

Procedural justice

The procedural justice model posits that confidence depends largely on perceptions of *procedural justice* and value alignment (Benesh & Howell, 2001; Sunshine & Tyler, 2003a; Thibaut & Walker, 1975; Tyler, 1990). Proponents of the procedural justice approach maintain that confidence in criminal justice is based predominantly on perceptions of fairness, rather than on instrumental concerns. In other words, people are said to place more importance on the way they are taken care of, than on the nature of the outcome (Roberts & Stalans, 1997). What is at stake is the fairness with which people are treated and the responsiveness of authorities to the wishes of the community (Jackson & Sunshine, 2007).

Research on confidence in police has indeed revealed that citizens primarily have confidence in the police when they experience the police as treating them fairly, which in turn leads to more compliance with the law and more cooperation (Jackson & Sunshine, 2007; Tyler, 1990, 2004, 2006). Examples are police visibility and accessibility. Similarly, in a court setting it has been demonstrated that the more respondents find the court and judges to be fair, the more likely they are to express "a great deal" of confidence in them (Benesh, 2006). The procedural justice model is often contrasted with the instrumental model, which is discussed below.

Instrumental model: effectiveness

According to the instrumental model, confidence is mostly developed and maintained through the *effectiveness* of the justice system (Sunshine & Tyler, 2003b), which is an evaluation of how well the system performs. This assessment depends on the extent to which one's expectations of the institution's functioning are met (Caldeira & Gibson, 1995). Confidence in the courts, for example, is thought to depend on the favorability of the outcome. A civil law study carried out in Scotland shows clear evidence for this effect: 70 percent of successful litigants found the outcome to be fair, compared to 10 percent of those who lost their case (Genn & Paterson, 2001). In the case of police, confidence can be affected by perceptions of their efforts and effectiveness in combating crime and maintaining social order. In a study on satisfaction with police, Weitzer and Tuch (2005) shows public confidence in police to be strongly predicted by respondents' perception of effective crime control. Similar evidence was found by Dekker and Van

der Meer (2007). Adding performance indicators to their model of confidence in the Dutch criminal justice system tripled explained variance. Effectiveness of an institution in instrumental terms can be measured by asking respondents how often the police provide satisfactory service, and how well the courts solve problems (Tyler, 2001). Another method of gauging perceived effectiveness, as applied in the British Market & Opinion Research International (MORI) 2003 poll, is by asking respondents to express how much confidence they have in the effective execution of specific *functions* of the criminal justice system. The functions about which respondents were asked include "stopping offenders from committing more crime" and "creating a society in which people feel safe" (Roberts & Hough, 2005b).

An integration of models

The instrumental model and procedural justice model are commonly seen as divergent perspectives. Substantive research effort has been put into identifying causal relations between procedural justice and effectiveness as well as other aspects such as legitimacy and citizen behavior. However, as our focus lies on *measuring* confidence in the criminal justice system, it goes beyond the scope of our research to examine such causal mechanisms. Moreover, there exists disagreement in the literature on the nature and direction of these causal relations (cf. Hawdon, 2008; Sunshine & Tyler, 2003b). Instead, for current purposes we will combine insights from both the procedural justice literature as well as from the instrumental perspective to create a rich, informative measure of confidence in the criminal justice system. In other words, we will measure perceptions of procedural justice as well as of effectiveness of criminal justice system agencies. An example of the operationalization of such an integrated approach is presented in Section 4.4, after our discussion of the *object* of confidence.

4.3.3 The object of confidence

Who or what 'receives' a particular level of confidence? As mentioned in our discussion of public opinion polls, the *object* of confidence can differ substantively between surveys. Sometimes the objects of interest are the police and the justice system, while items in other surveys refer to the courts, judges, the Supreme Court, or plainly 'justice'. In this section, we start by addressing the distinction between measuring confidence in criminal justice agencies (e.g. judges) within the justice system, and confidence in the system as a whole. Secondly, a distinction is made between confidence at a local level (e.g. in a neighborhood) and at the national level.

Criminal justice system as a whole versus specific agencies

Previous studies clearly demonstrate that a distinction should be made between questioning respondents about the criminal justice system as a whole, and about specific agencies within that system. This distinction is essential because when citizens are asked bout the whole system, they may provide an answer with a specific agency in mind (Dekker & Van der Meer, 2007). Specifying confidence per criminal justice system

agency results in differential confidence ratings, which can for example be seen in the BCS data, where police tend to get a relatively high (effectiveness) rating compared to other legal agencies (Allen, Edmonds, Patterson, & Smith, 2006).[9] Between 2001/02 and 2004/05, for instance, about 50 percent of respondents find that the police do a good or excellent job, compared to only 15 percent for youth courts. All of the other agencies are rated as good or excellent by about 25 percent of respondents. Similar patterns were found in 2002 data from the U.S. National Institute of Justice (NIJ), which show that only 27 percent of Americans expressed a "great deal" of confidence in the criminal justice system as a whole, compared to 59 percent when asked about the police (Tyler, 2004). This 'hierarchy of confidence', with police receiving the highest rating and the courts the lowest, is found in most Western countries where respondents rate the effectiveness of specific agencies (Roberts & Hough, 2005b). To explain this effect, Hough and Roberts (2004) maintain that public confidence tends to be higher for those agencies in the justice system whose function lies closest to the view of criminal justice that most members of the public hold, i.e. the crime control model. Agencies that are responsible for punishment of offenders, such as courts and the prison system, are likely to receive lower levels of confidence.

Previous research carried out in the Netherlands nevertheless leads us to expect the exact opposite pattern of confidence for Dutch respondents. In a study with a representative Dutch sample (N = 1056), a total of 67 percent of panel members expressed a great or fair amount of confidence in judges, compared to 60 percent for police (Koomen, 2006). In 1997 another representative sample (N = 2951) was asked to evaluate the following two (procedural justice) items: "The police are honest and trustworthy" and "Judges are honest and trustworthy" (Ter Voert, 1997). The average rating for police on a 5-point scale was 3.4, compared to 3.6 for judges. Similarly, when a representative sample of Dutch citizens (N = 529) was asked to give an overall grade to various criminal justice agencies on a 10-point scale (10 = highest), judges were given a 7 - on average, compared to a 6 for police and a 6 - for the public prosecution (Elffers & De Keijser, 2004). Importantly, despite the fact that these patterns differ from what is commonly found in Western countries, these findings do confirm the importance of distinguishing between the various agencies of the criminal justice system in confidence assessments.

Local versus national agencies
Another important object distinction to make in the measurement of confidence is between local and national agencies. For instance, with regards to *effectiveness*, ratings have been found to be generally higher when people are asked about local criminal justice agencies than when they are asked to rate effectiveness across the country (Page, Wake, & Ames, 2004). The MORI 2003 survey shows 63 percent of respondents to be confident with the way crime was dealt with in the area where they live, compared to

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9   It should be taken into account that confidence in police is likely to be partially based on perceptions of tasks that are not necessarily related to crime control, such as traffic safety and public order.

only 47 percent on a national (England and Whales) level (Page et al., 2004). The same pattern (although less spectacular) was found in a recent study on confidence in police in the Netherlands (Flight, Van den Andel, & Hulshof, 2006). A total of 67 percent of respondents expressed a great deal or fair amount of confidence in police in their own neighborhood, compared to 61 percent confidence in police in general. In a Home Office study it was found that specific ratings, such as whether the respondent believes that the system is prompt and efficient, also differ between the local and national level (Page et al., 2004). In another UK study, it was demonstrated that when a general confidence question is posed, 71 percent of respondents consider a combination of local and national issues (Smith, 2007).

Importantly, the local versus national distinction is likely to be most relevant in relation to confidence in police. Differentiating between, for instance, confidence in local versus national judges or public prosecutors is probably not as useful or applicable. Not only might one wonder about the added value of such comparisons, respondents will likely base their judgments on a huge 'leap of faith' (Möllering, 2001) due to a lack of experience with such a distinction.

4.4   Operationalization

In the previous sections we presented a number of theoretical and empirical insights from the literature on confidence in the criminal justice system. The current section provides an example of how these can be integrated into a theoretically driven measurement tool. The aim of constructing this tool is to improve on currently available measures of confidence in terms of both validity and reliability.

The main theoretical distinctions that were made concern the *object* and *concept* of confidence. Based on a selection of these distinctions, we constructed an integrated model of confidence for current purposes (see Figure 4.1). The motivation behind this selection, as well as the corresponding items, will be presented below.
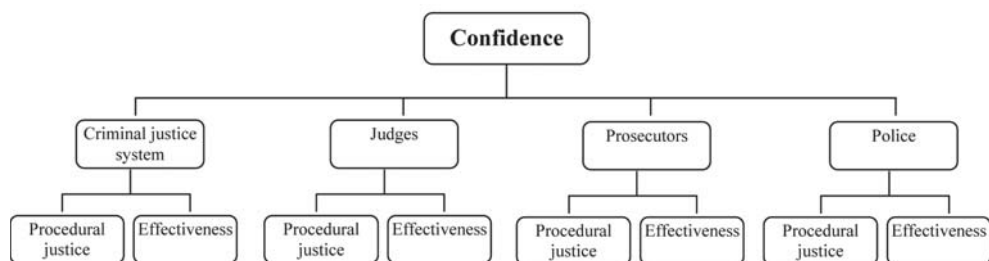

Figure 4.1 An integrated model of confidence

Concerning the *object* distinction, Figure 4.1 shows that we chose to include three criminal justice agencies (police, public prosecution and judges), as well as the system as a whole. All of these individual agencies are expected to be relevant in the context of support for vigilantism. Confidence in the system as a whole is incorporated in order to enable comparisons to confidence in its individual agencies. The distinction between confidence in local and national agencies was left out because of our current interest in confidence, and its relation to support for vigilantism, on a national level. The *concept* distinction was completely operationalized, as we included procedural justice as well as effectiveness for each of the selected agencies.[10]

Table 4.2 shows how we operationalized the model using survey questions. The 27 items are ordered in the table by the different object components: judges, prosecutors, police and the criminal justice system (CJS).[11] The concept column shows the distinction between procedural justice and effectiveness (i.e. the instrumental model). The items that were taken from or based on existing literature are referenced as such in the last column. The concept of *procedural justice* is measured through items about fairness (e.g. "Judges are honest and trustworthy") and engagement ("You can count on the judges to take decisions that are best for society"). The instrumental model, or *effectiveness,* is operationalized using items such as "The Dutch justice system is effective in combating crime". By asking respondents to express their agreement with these items on a Likert scale, we can reach a comprehensive measurement of confidence in the criminal justice system.

4.5   Conclusion

In order to empirically examine confidence in the criminal justice system as a possible determinant of public support for vigilantism, it is important to have a reliable indicator of such confidence. The aim of the current chapter was therefore to construct a theoretically informed measurement tool of confidence. To this end we used a number of theoretical and empirical distinctions from the literature on confidence to develop an integrated model. Distinctions are made between effectiveness and procedural justice, and between the entire criminal justice system versus its constituent agencies (judges, the public prosecution and police). This model was subsequently operationalized into a set of 27 survey items. This specific tool is used in our first study on support for vigilantism, as described in the next chapter. It will allow us to test the confidence hypothesis alongside the situation hypothesis as a determinant of support for vigilantism.

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10   For other contexts and purposes, this model can naturally be extended to other (criminal justice) agencies, such as the prison system. A local dimension can also be added, for instance to compare confidence in police on a neighborhood and national level.

11   This selection of items is applied in our first study, of which the results are reported in Chapter 5. Our second, more elaborate operationalization of the model consists of 44 items, and is presented in Chapters 7 and 8.

Table 4.2   Items to measure confidence in the criminal justice system (CJS)

Item	Object	Concept	Source
1. Judges are impartial	judges	procedural justice	De Keijser et al. (2006)
2. Judges are honest and trustworthy	judges	procedural justice	Ter Voert (1997)
3. You can count on the judges to take decisions that are best for society	judges	procedural justice	Sunshine and Tyler (2003b)
4. Citizens' rights are well-protected by judges	judges	procedural justice	Sunshine and Tyler (2003b)
5. I respect the judiciary	judges	procedural justice	Sunshine and Tyler (2003b)
6. Citizens should accept the judge's verdict, even if they disagree with it	judges	procedural justice	Sunshine and Tyler (2003b)
7. Judges do their job well	judges	effectiveness	Dekker et al. (2004)
8. Judges' verdicts are well deliberated	judges	effectiveness	
9. The Public Prosecution is honest and trustworthy	prosecutors	procedural justice	Ter Voert (1997)
10. You can count on the Public Prosecution to take decisions that are best for society	prosecutors	procedural justice	Sunshine and Tyler (2003b)
11. Citizens' rights are well-protected by the Public Prosecution	prosecutors	procedural justice	Sunshine and Tyler (2003b)
12. I respect the Public Prosecution	prosecutors	procedural justice	Sunshine and Tyler (2003b)
13. The Public Prosecution deserves respect among citizens	prosecutors	procedural justice	
14. The Public Prosecution does its job well	prosecutors	effectiveness	Dekker et al. (2004)
15. Sentence recommendations are well-deliberated by the Public Prosecution	prosecutors	effectiveness	
16. The police are honest and trustworthy	police	procedural justice	Ter Voert (1997)
17. You can count on the police to take decisions that are best for society	police	procedural justice	Sunshine and Tyler (2003b)
18. The police care about the well-being of the everyday citizen	police	procedural justice	
19. Citizens' rights are well-protected by the police	police	procedural justice	Sunshine and Tyler (2003b)
20. Citizens should do what the police tell them to do, even if they disagree with it	police	procedural justice	Sunshine and Tyler (2003b)
21. I respect the police	police	procedural justice	Sunshine and Tyler (2003b)
22. The police are there when you need them	police	effectiveness	
23. The police do their job well	police	effectiveness	Dekker et al. (2004)

24. I trust the way in which laws in the Netherlands are maintained	CJS	procedural justice
25. Citizens can count on it that their case is properly dealt with in the Dutch CJS	CJS	procedural justice
26. The Dutch criminal justice system functions properly	CJS	effectiveness
27. The Dutch justice system is effective in combating crime	CJS	effectiveness

5

An explorative study on public support for vigilantism

5.1   Introduction

In this chapter we present an explorative study on support for vigilantism. As previously indicated, we suggest that confidence in the criminal justice system may not be the only determinant of public support for vigilantism. More specifically, in line with the situation hypothesis, characteristics of the vigilantism context are expected to also affect how people evaluate an act of vigilantism. The main aim of this study is therefore to take a first look at the absolute and relative influence of confidence in the criminal justice system, and situational characteristics, on public support for vigilantism. Respondents will be presented with vignettes that are varied along characteristics from the vigilantism typology (cf. Chapter 3). This will be followed by a measure of respondents' support for vigilantism (cf. Chapter 2) as well as their confidence in the criminal justice system (cf. Chapter 4). This explorative study thereby also allows us to pretest the various measurement instruments that were introduced in the previous chapters.

5.2   Method

In this explorative study on support for vigilantism, we will measure support for a *specific case* of vigilantism.[12] In other words, rather than asking people about their support for vigilantism in general, we will assess their response to a vignette in which a case of vigilantism is described. One of the main advantages of using vignettes, or case descriptions, is that it allows for a systematic variation of specific characteristics within a 'story'. This manipulation makes it possible to study the effect of these characteristics on the dependent variable in isolation from other effects (Rossi & Nock, 1982). More specifically, we can manipulate situational characteristics of a vigilantism case to study their effect on support. Vignettes are also useful for dealing with the fact that people are not always aware of their own attitudes or actual reasons that lie behind their decisions. Clear discrepancies have for instance been found between people's justifications for sentencing and their actual punishment behavior (Carlsmith, 2008; De Keijser, 2001; Roberts & Stalans, 1997). Vignette studies can deal with this issue by not asking people to explain their judgments, but rather by comparing judgments between experimental conditions. Lastly, vignettes provide the opportunity to measure attitudes that are related to concrete situations, rather than on a more abstract level. Literature on sentencing attitudes suggests that people's response is dependent on the specificity of the questions that are posed (cf. Cullen, Fisher, & Applegate, 2000; De Keijser, Van Koppen, & Elffers, 2007; Hutton, 2005; St Amand & Zamble, 2001). General survey questions result in a different and usually more punitive response than questions related to specific case studies.

Although experiments with vignettes generally have a high internal validity, they are often judged to lose considerably on external validity (e.g. Konecni & Ebbesen, 1992). After all, they involve highly specified case descriptions with a very small selection of

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12   We thank Hester van Eeren, Jessica de Jong, Eva Lambooij, Brooke van der Meer and Sylvia Schot for their efforts in this research, which was part of the BA Criminology at Leiden University.

carefully manipulated characteristics, which can be seen as being too far removed from reality. However, with regards to vigilantism, it is common for citizens to be informed about a case of vigilantism through newspaper articles or television news items. Citizens in that case evaluate the vigilantism act as outsiders, based on minimal information, similar to the hypothetical situation of a vignette. We therefore expect the vignette method to be particularly suitable for studying public support for vigilantism.

Choice for crimes in vignettes

Our vignettes describe two criminal acts: a precipitating event and a subsequent act of vigilantism. The precipitating event is shoplifting, which was chosen for two main reasons. Firstly, some of the most famous Dutch examples of vigilantism took place in response to theft in stores, such as the cases of the Amsterdam supermarket and the Tilburg jeweler that were briefly mentioned in the introductory chapter. The media at the time gave the impression of substantial public support for these vigilantes. By presenting a comparable case, we will be able to get an empirical assessment of such reactions. Secondly, shoplifting is a relatively common crime in the Netherlands, which should make it easy for different types of people to relate to. We chose not to present an actual vigilantism case in order to prevent possible effects of media coverage on respondents' judgments.

The vigilantism act itself consists of violence, which is carried out by the victim of the precipitating event against the alleged precipitating offender. The act of vigilantism matches our definition (cf. Chapter 3). We purposely created a time lapse between the precipitating event and the subsequent act of vigilantism in order to clearly distinguish the latter from self-defense and citizen's arrest. For this reason the vigilante happens to meet the alleged thief one day after the shoplifting.

Design

A between-subjects experiment was carried out, in which the vignette varied systematically on two situational characteristics: 1) responsiveness of police to the precipitating event and 2) violence of the vigilantism act (see Appendix 2 for the vignette). The reasons for choosing these experimental manipulations are addressed in the next section. Both factors consisted of two levels (low and high), resulting in a 2x2 design.

Vignette contents

The central story, which is identical in all four conditions, concerns a store owner (Ann) who is under the impression that a particular female customer has been stealing clothes from her store. Ann's suspicion is corroborated by evidence from surveillance tapes. She sends the video footage to the police, in the hope that they will undertake some action. A few days later, Ann sees the notorious customer enter the store again. This time the woman steals a t-shirt, but upon realizing that she has been caught, she manages to escape. The next day, Ann is downtown on a day off when she suddenly catches sight of the shoplifter. She forcefully grabs the woman's arm and physically assaults her.

Figure 5.1 shows the two selected situational characteristics within the vigilantism typology (cf. Chapter 3). Formal response to the precipitating event is the second component of the typology. In the vignette this is operationalized as police responsiveness to the crime reported by Ann. Vigilantism violence belongs to characteristic 3.2: the type and amount of violence used by the vigilante. In the vignette, this concerns the violence used by the store owner against the shoplifter.

We chose to vary *police responsiveness* to the precipitating crime in order to study the effect of situation-specific performance of legal authorities on support for vigilantism. As may be recalled from Chapter 3, formal response to a crime was introduced as one the three main events in the vigilantism event sequence. Responsiveness of legal authorities also surfaced as a possible justification for vigilantism in our literature review on support for vigilantism (Chapter 2). If the authorities do not respond to a crime, people might find it more acceptable for a citizen to subsequently deal with the crime or criminal himself. By including police responsiveness as an experimental manipulation, we can test whether the way in which the police respond to the precipitating event affects support for a subsequent act of vigilantism. Additionally, using the instrument from Chapter 4, we will also measure the effect of *general* confidence in the criminal justice system on support.
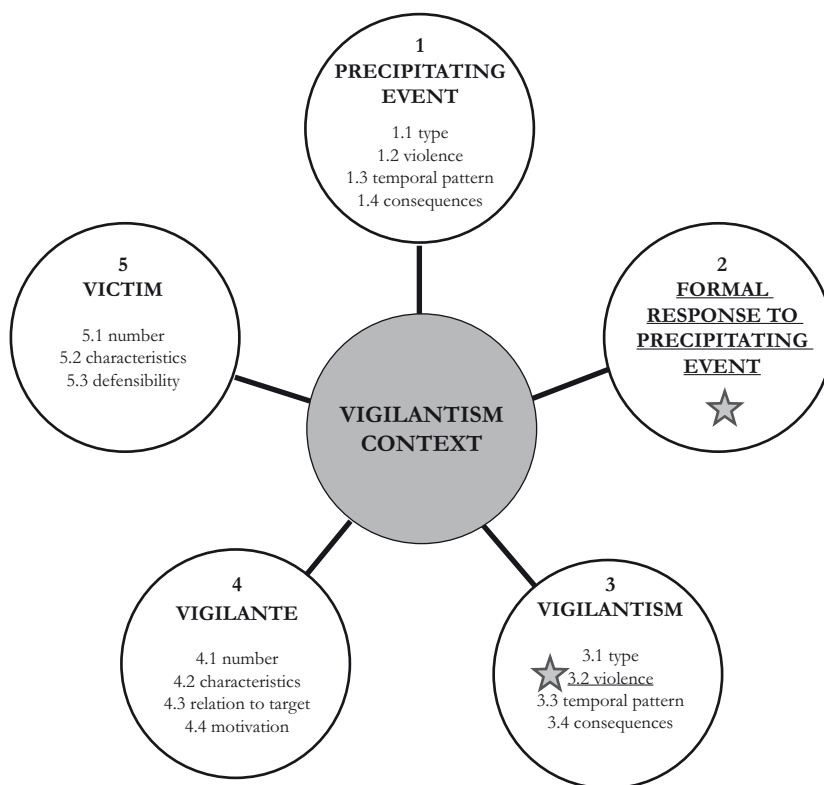

Figure 5.1 Experimental variation (underlined and starred)

Police responsiveness was varied by either having the police respond actively to the tapes that Ann sends them, or having them fail to respond. In the active response condition, a police officer shows up in Ann's store to ask her some questions about the shoplifting. He promises to guard the store more frequently, and gives her a phone number on which he can always be reached. In the alternative condition, Ann does not hear back from the police after sending the tapes. Upon contacting the police again herself, she is told that they do not have time to deal with the crime.

Vigilantism violence was varied because it is precisely the use of violence that often characterizes vigilantism: going against the state monopoly on legitimate violence. Additionally, vigilantes are often critiqued for their excessive use of violence. By varying the amount of violence used by the vigilante in the vignette, we are able to study whether this is an important consideration when people judge vigilantism. Vigilantism violence was manipulated by varying Ann's attacks against the alleged thief, including the resulting injuries. In the version of low violence, she hits the thief, who consequently suffers from a black eye and a headache. In the high violence condition, the woman first falls to the ground after being hit. Ann then goes on to kick her in the head, leaving the victim with a broken jaw and a heavy concussion.

Measures
Respondents were asked to read the vignette and indicate their agreement with corresponding survey items on a 5-point Likert scale. The questionnaire consisted of two main parts: a measure of support for vigilantism and a measure of confidence in the criminal justice system. The order in which these two parts were presented to respondents was varied at random, which allowed us to control for possible order effects of the vignette on the evaluation of the confidence items and vice versa.

The support measure consists of 17 items about the vigilantism case in the vignette (see Table 5.2). The items pertain to a number of different concepts that have been used in the literature to measure support for vigilantism (cf. Chapter 2). They include *empathy* with the vigilante and his victim, *approval* of vigilantism, *punishment deservingness* and *blame*. By presenting a mix of different items, we aimed to establish an elaborate and reliable measure of support for vigilantism. Some of these items were piloted in an earlier study that we conducted on this topic (Haas, De Keijser, & Vanderveen, 2007).

The measure of confidence in the criminal justice system consists of 27 items (see Table 5.3). These items were presented in Chapter 4 as an operationalization of our integrated model of confidence. In addition to measuring confidence in the criminal justice system, we included three items to assess people's general worry about crime (see Table 5.4). Given that vigilantism is a response to crime, we expected that people's general view about crime in society might also affect support for vigilantism. We used three (slightly adapted) items from a measure that has been described in the literature as the General Concern over Crime (GCC) factor (De Keijser et al., 2007). The GCC items were presented along with the confidence items; all were evaluated using the same five-point response scale.

Hypotheses

We start by formulating expectations regarding the effect of situational characteristics on support for vigilantism, i.e. the situation hypothesis. The first characteristic that was varied is police responsiveness to the precipitating event. We expect people to be less forgiving toward the vigilante when she was taken seriously by the police but resorted to vigilantism nonetheless. This results in the following hypothesis:

H1: The higher police responsiveness to the reporting of the precipitating crime, the less support for vigilantism in the vignette.

The second situational variation is the extent to which the vigilante uses violence against the alleged shoplifter. We expect that some amount of violence against a precipitating offender may be seen as justified, but if it becomes too severe it will probably lead to less supportive reactions. We therefore formulate the following hypothesis:

H2: The more violence is used by the vigilante against the (alleged) shoplifter, the less support for vigilantism in the vignette.

We next present our predictions regarding the effect of general confidence in the criminal justice system on support for vigilantism in the vignette. Given that vigilantes deal with crime themselves in spite of legal alternatives, we expect more support for their behavior among those who have a negative perception of the legal system. In line with the confidence hypothesis, we thus formulate the following expectation:

H3: The more confidence in the criminal justice system, the less support for vigilantism in the vignette.

As the vigilante in the vignette responds to a criminal act, we expect that people who are more concerned about crime will be more supportive of this act. When crime is perceived to be on the rise and formal sentencing as being too lenient, vigilantism may be seen as an appropriate alternative. The hypothesis is thus as follows:

H4: The more general concern over crime, the more support for vigilantism in the vignette.

Sample

Data were collected in April 2007 by handing out questionnaires to 390 train passengers in the Netherlands.[13] Travelers in both first and second class compartments were approached, and each participant randomly received one of four versions of the questionnaire. The response level for all passengers was 70 percent; non-response mainly consisted of people who did not speak Dutch or who said to be occupied. Five of the questionnaires were excluded from data analysis due to too many missings, which

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13   We hereby would like to express our gratitude to the Dutch Railways (NS) for granting us permission to conduct a survey among their passengers.

resulted in a final sample of 385 people. Table 5.1 shows the respondent distribution over the four conditions. Mean age was 35 years (SD = 15.96); 55 percent was male. A total of 62 percent indicated being highly educated, which is above the national average of 30 percent (Sanderse & Harbers, 2008).

Table 5.1   Distribution of respondents over conditions

		Police responsiveness		
		low	high	total (N)
Seriousness vigilantism	low	93	97	190
	high	96	99	195
	total (N)	189	196	**385**

5.3   Scale construction

Prior to testing our hypotheses, summated scales were constructed based on responses to the questionnaire items. First, a principal components analysis (PCA) was carried out on all items measuring support for vigilantism in the vignette, resulting in a two-factor solution.[14] Based on the scree plot and interpretability, we repeated the PCA while forcing a one-factor solution. This resulted in the loadings that are presented in Table 5.2.[15] The total explained variance is 51 percent, with an Eigen value of 8.6. Analogous to this structure, a summated scale was constructed which will be used as the dependent variable *Support for vigilantism*. It has a Cronbach's alpha of .93, which indicates a good internal consistency. The mean score is 2.66 (SD = .87) on a five-point scale, with higher values indicating more support. This means that on average, across conditions, people were not very supportive of the vigilantism act.

A PCA was also carried out on the 27 confidence items, using an oblique rotation of components. Table 5.3 shows the two resulting components and their corresponding item loadings.[16] Together they explain 54 percent of total variance.[17] All seven items related to police collapse into one component: *Confidence in police*. The component additionally contains an item about the effectiveness of the Dutch justice system in combating crime, which suggests that respondents associate police with the effectiveness of fighting crime.

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14 No distinction was made between the vignette types (analyses per version gave comparable results). The PCA was rotated obliquely for theoretical reasons; the orthogonal solution was similar. The first factor (14 items) contributed to 50.6 percent of the explained variance, with an Eigen value of 8.6. The second factor (3 items) had an explained variance of 7.6 percent, with an Eigen value of 1.3. (Explained variances refer to the unrotated solution.)

15 Due to the high kurtosis and skewness of some variables, all analyses were also run with log-transformed variables. This led to comparable results.

16 One item was removed due to a low loading (.27): "Citizens should do what the police tell them to do, even if they disagree with it".

17 Eigen values: 12.03 and 1.90. Explained variance refers to the unrotated solution. A PCA using orthogonal (varimax) rotation of components resulted in the same structure and interpretation. Oblique rotation was preferred considering meaningful interpretation of component correlations (r = .59).

Table 5.2 One-factor solution of Support for vigilantism (N = 385, k = 17)

Item	Loading
Ann deserves punishment for what she did	-.85
If Ann gets punished, she gets what she deserves	-.83
Ann should be criminally prosecuted	-.81
Ann cannot be blamed for anything	.79
Ann should do penance for her behavior	-.79
Ann's behavior should absolutely not be tolerated	-.79
The authorities should turn a blind eye to Ann's behavior	.77
What Ann did is justified	.75
Given the situation, Ann's behavior is appropriate	.78
Ann's behavior is completely out of proportion	-.75
Thanks to people like Ann at least something is done against crime	.73
Ann should have looked for another solution	-.70
Behavior like that of Ann forms a threat to the legal system	-.62
The woman has herself to blame for Ann's reaction	.56
Ann's reaction is understandable	.54
I pity the woman who was targeted by Ann	-.49
Ann should have handed the woman over to the police	-.35

The second component can be described as *Confidence in courts & CJS*. It includes all 15 items related to judges and prosecutors. This suggests that these actors are closely related in the eyes of respondents, which may partially be explained by a lack of knowledge about their specific roles within the justice system. Also included in this component is an item about the maintenance of laws in general and two about the proper functioning of the overall justice system. The fact that these items form part of this component likely reflects the role of the courts as perceived by respondents.

Based on the PCA solution, two summated scales were created. The Cronbach's alpha of the scale on confidence in police is 0.89, with a mean rating of 3.07 (SD = .74).[18] The mean score of the scale on confidence in courts & CJS is 3.44 (SD = .68), with a reliability of 0.94. These scales thus have high internal consistencies. The mean rating of the police is lower than that of the rest of the justice system, contrary to what is generally found in the literature (cf. Roberts & Hough, 2005a). It does nevertheless match previous findings within the Dutch context (Elffers & De Keijser, 2004; Koomen, 2006; Ter Voert, 1997). Interestingly, the distinction between procedural justice and effectiveness was not visible in the data. It did nevertheless help us to construct a rich measure of confidence (cf. Chapter 4).

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18   The means refer to the 5-point scale that was used, with lower values indicating less confidence.

Table 5.3   Components of Confidence after oblique rotation (N = 385, k = 26)

Items	Confidence in police	Confidence in courts & CJS
The police are doing a good job	**.87**	-.13
The police are there when you need them	**.82**	-.05
The police care about the well-being of the everyday citizen	**.72**	.05
I respect the police	**.71**	.03
You can count on the police to take decisions that are best for society	**.63**	.20
Citizens' rights are well-protected by the police	**.63**	.24
The police are honest and trustworthy	**.57**	.30
The Dutch justice system is effective in combating crime	**.48**	.19
Judges are honest and trustworthy	-.19	**.88**
The Public Prosecution is honest and trustworthy	-.12	**.87**
Judges do their job well	-.06	**.86**
Judges are impartial	-.15	**.78**
I respect the judiciary	-.06	**.77**
Judges' verdicts are well deliberated	-.01	**.77**
Citizens' rights are well-protected by the Public Prosecution	.11	**.69**
You can count on judges to take decisions that are best for society	.06	**.68**
The Public Prosecution does its job well	.21	**.67**
Citizens' rights are well-protected by judges	.06	**.65**
The Dutch criminal justice system functions properly	.12	**.64**
You can count on the Public Prosecution to take decisions that are best for society	.15	**.63**
I respect the Public Prosecution	.12	**.63**
I trust the way in which laws in the Netherlands are maintained	.21	**.60**
The Public Prosecution deserves respect among citizens	.01	**.60**
Citizens can count on it that their case is properly dealt with in the Dutch CJS	.22	**.56**
Sentence recommendations are well-deliberated by the Public Prosecution	.23	**.48**
Citizens should accept the judge's verdict, even if they disagree with it	.08	**.40**

Three items were used to assess respondents' General concern over crime (see Table 5.4), which together form a reliable scale. The PCA that was carried out resulted in an explained variance of 56 percent. The mean score is 3.63 (SD = .85) on a five-point response scale, which indicates that our respondents on average were slightly concerned about crime. This may be partially due to the relatively high educational level of our sample (cf. Allen, 2006).

Table 5.4 General concern over crime (GCC) scale

Scale	Item	Loading
GCC Eigen value = 1.68 Cronbach's α = .60	Total volume of crime in the Netherlands has, over the past years, increased strongly.	.79
	Crime is a problem that causes me great concern.	.77
	In general, sentences for crimes in the Netherlands are too lenient.	.68

We lastly carried out independent samples t-tests to check whether the vigilantism vignette affected people's attitudes toward the criminal justice system and vice versa. No order effects were found for support for vigilantism, $t(378) = 1.46$, $p = .14$, nor for general concern over crime, $t(380) = .56$, $p = .58$. No order effects were found either for confidence in police, $t(381) = -.86$, $p = .39$, nor for confidence in courts and CJS, $t(377) = -1.33$, $p = .18$.

5.4   Results

To examine the absolute and relative impact of the independent variables on support for vigilantism, we carried out an ordinary least squares (OLS) regression analysis (see Table 5.5). In preparation of this regression, a two-way ANOVA was conducted to separately examine whether there were any interaction effects between the two experimental factors (police responsiveness and vigilante violence). No interaction was found, $F = (2, 376) = .32$, $p = .57$. The situational characteristics thus affected support independently of one another.

Table 5.5 Determinants of support for vigilantism in vignette (N = 374)

Independent variables			
	b	SE	β
Experimental factors			
Police responsiveness	-.22	.08	-.13**
Vigilantism violence	-.46	.08	-.27***
Attitudes			
Confidence in police	-.04	.07	-.03
Confidence in courts & CJS	-.47	.08	-.38***
General concern over crime	.12	.05	.12*
Control variables			
Age	.00	.00	.08
Gender	.11	.08	.06
R^2 (R^2adj) = .29 (.27)			
$F = 20.91$***			

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

A main effect was found for police responsiveness. The more actively the police reacted after receiving the footage of the shoplifting, the less the subsequent vigilantism act was supported, thereby confirming hypothesis 1. The performance of police on the micro-level thus affected people's response to a subsequent act of vigilantism. Secondly, a main effect was found for the violence used by the vigilante. A more violent act led to less support, in line with hypothesis 2. Interestingly, the impact of vigilantism violence on support was more than twice as large as that of police responsiveness. Respondents were thus much more sensitive to the amount of violence used by the vigilante than to whether or not the police had responded to the report of theft. In sum, these findings confirm the *situation hypothesis*.

We next examined the effects of general attitudes. Interestingly, respondents' confidence in police did not influence their support for vigilantism, while confidence in the courts and CJS had the largest effect of all independent variables. Hypothesis 3, or the *confidence hypothesis*, was therefore partially confirmed. These results imply that it is indeed important to differentiate between the different criminal justice agencies, at least when examining the effect of confidence on support for vigilantism. In correspondence with hypothesis 4, people who are more worried about crime were more supportive of vigilantism in the vignette. This finding suggests that vigilantism is indeed seen as a favorable way of dealing with the crimes about which one is concerned. This also suggests that these respondents are not as concerned about the crimes that are committed by vigilantes. Two control variables, age and gender, did not affect support for vigilantism in any significant way. Table 5.6 shows the mean ratings on support for vigilantism per level of the two experimental factors for a further illustration of the main effects.

Table 5.6   Mean scores (scale 1-5) on support per characteristic level (N = 380)

Scale (mean)	Situational characteristic	Mean (SD)
Support for vigilantism (2.66)	Police responsiveness	Low = 2.78 *(.92)*
		High = 2.54 *(.80)*
	Vigilantism violence	Low = 2.87 *(.81)*
		High = 2.45 *(.87)*

5.5   Discussion

In this chapter we presented our first empirical study on public support for vigilantism. Since the justice system aims to prevent vigilantism, it seems reasonable that public support for such behavior is often interpreted as a sign that confidence in the system is lacking: the *confidence hypothesis*. However, we introduced a second hypothesis which posits that situational characteristics may also affect support for vigilantism: the *situation hypothesis*. Both hypotheses were tested in an experimental study with vignettes in which characteristics of the vigilantism situation were systematically varied between different versions. Support for the act of vigilantism was measured by presenting respondents

with a wide variety of items on topics such as justifiability and deservingness. Confidence was assessed using the tool that was developed in Chapter 4.

Results of the study confirm the situation hypothesis: situational characteristics affect support for vigilantism. Violence used by the vigilante and police responsiveness independently affected respondents' reactions to vigilantism. When citizens openly support those who take the law into their own hands, this thus cannot automatically be interpreted as a sign that confidence in the criminal justice system is lacking. People may simply react to situational aspects, without their attitude toward the legal system necessarily playing a role.

Aside from evidence for the situation hypothesis, we also found a partial confirmation of the confidence hypothesis. More confidence in the courts and CJS led to less support for vigilantism, but confidence in police did not influence support. General concern over crime did affect support for vigilantism, in the expected direction: more concern about crime led to more support for vigilantism.

The police responsiveness dimension allowed us to test whether performance of a criminal justice agency on a situation-specific level (rather than on a general level) affects support for vigilantism. Vigilantism in reaction to a 'failing' legal authority was predicted to lead to more support for the vigilante than in the situation where the authorities do undertake action to help the store owner. As this expectation was confirmed, it suggests that the role of authorities in the event leading up to vigilantism can influence public reactions. Confidence in police *in general* did not at all affect ratings in this study; effects were only found on the situation-specific level. This implies that people do consider the conditions leading up to an act of vigilantism, but do not necessarily take into account how they generally view the criminal justice system and its agencies.

Notably, the level of support for the vigilantism was low no matter what condition people were assigned to. Even in the conditions where police responded passively to the store theft or where the vigilantism act was relatively mild, our respondents did not show much support for the vigilante. This may partially be due to the educational level of respondents, which is considerably higher than that of the average population. By repeating these measures with other vigilantism vignettes, and a more representative sample, it will be possible to examine the robustness of these findings.

This study gave us a chance to pretest a number of measurement instruments. We succeeded in constructing a reliable measure of support for vigilantism, as well as of confidence in the criminal justice system. Moreover, the results show that the differentiation between the police and the courts was a meaningful one, as confidence in these agencies had distinct effects on support for vigilantism. Lastly, the vignette methodology proved to be useful for identifying determinants of support for vigilantism. It should nevertheless be noted that respondents were not told that the vigilantism cases were real, nor were the vignettes presented to look like real newspaper articles. To increase the external validity, the vignettes should be made to appear more realistic in future studies.

In conclusion, this explorative study allowed us to test the confidence and situation hypothesis simultaneously, and to determine their absolute and relative effects. Based on the findings we conclude that confidence is not the only determinant of public support for vigilantism. Specific characteristics of the vigilantism situation were found to play an essential role in predicting people's reactions to a vigilantism case. This brings us to an important next step: to explain *why* these situational factors affect people's reactions to vigilantism. To this end we will introduce a theoretical framework in the next chapter: just-world theory (Lerner, 1965, 1980). This theory will be presented as a tool for predicting and measuring public reactions to vigilantism.

6

Just-world theory and support for vigilantism

If the victim had herself committed horrible crimes in the past, I might be able to live with her fate. Especially if additional 'fairy tale' elements were added, so that the 'criminal' had been the husband or father of one of her victims, and had been driven insane by the tragedy she had inflicted on him. And thus the evil that was done generated its own punishment. (Lerner, 1980, p.127)

6.1   Introduction

In our first empirical study we demonstrated that public support for vigilantism can be influenced by factors apart from confidence in the criminal justice system. More specifically, situational characteristics, such as the use of violence by a vigilante, were found to be important determinants of how an act of vigilantism is perceived by an outsider. These results raise a fundamental question: what causes people to judge an act of vigilantism as justified under given situational circumstances? In search of an answer to this question, we draw on social justice research, which focuses on the mechanism underlying people's judgments about justice and injustice (Tyler & Smith, 1997). One of the main lessons from this field is that justice is in the eye of the beholder: "the notion of justice is a subjective construction that is formulated by individuals according to their expectations and feelings of righteousness and 'deservingness'" (Fischer & Skitka, 2006, p.86).

An important theory on the formation of justice perceptions is just-world theory (Lerner, 1965, 1980). This theory proposes that people's reactions to victimization can be understood as attempts to preserve a belief in a just world (BJW): the belief that the world is a place where individuals get what they deserve and deserve what they get. People are said to be keen on protecting their BJW. When confronted with an injustice, i.e. an indication that the world is not just, they will experience an aversive state. As will be explained in more detail below, they will try to reduce this unpleasant state by using strategies to protect their BJW. Such strategies can include denial of the injustice, for instance by blaming the victim, or attempts to restore the injustice, for example by seeking punishment for the offender.

We will argue in this chapter that the victimizations that occur in the vigilantism event sequence can also pose a threat to people's BJW. In this light, public reactions which are commonly labeled as 'support for vigilantism' can actually be interpreted as BJW reactions to vigilantism: aversive states and people's attempts to protect their BJW. An example of the latter is when people blame the victim of vigilantism for his fate: he 'got what he deserved'.

We start by explaining the main ideas of just-world theory, followed by a description of related empirical research. We subsequently present a theoretical model which applies just-world theory to the vigilantism event sequence. Just-world theory will provide us with useful vocabulary as well as a structure for predicting the influence of situational characteristics (from the typology) on support for vigilantism.

6.2   Just-world theory

In essence, support for vigilantism is a reaction to two instances of criminal victimization. The public makes a judgment about a vigilante who uses criminal victimization in

response to (the threat of) criminal victimization.[19] Below we will describe how just-world theory aims to explain reactions to victimization in general, and will then apply it to the specific context of vigilantism.

According to just-world theory, people have a strong need to believe that the world is a just place in which people generally get what they deserve and deserve what they get (Lerner, 1965, 1980). Good things happen to good people and bad things happen to bad people. People tend to construe events in such a way that positive events, traits and attributes are causally connected to positive outcomes, as are negative cognitions to negative outcomes (Lerner, 1980). This is how our brains try to reach harmony among cognitive components, thereby constructing a relatively stable world for ourselves.[20] In fact, these perceived causal relations are so strong that the presence of one component frequently leads to the assumption of the other (Heider, 1958). For instance, if someone has been unemployed for an extended period of time, people will tend to assume that he must be lazy or that his search for a job was inadequate. If someone wins a price, it is assumed that the winner must be a nice person or must have accomplished something that makes him deserve it.

People have a need to believe in a just world so that they can commit to their so-called personal contract (Lerner, Miller, & Holmes, 1976). This personal contract is developed in childhood when a child moves from the 'pleasure principle' to the 'reality principle'. The child learns that it is in his long-term benefit to give up immediate gratification in order to get a more desirable outcome in the future (Lerner, 1977). The child makes the 'deal' that in return for holding back his immediate impulses, he is owed anticipated outcomes. Investing such efforts are believed to pay off in the future: he will get the outcome that he deserves or is entitled to (Lerner et al., 1976). The *need* to believe in a just world is said to motivate most people to form a *belief in a just world* (BJW) and to behave accordingly, even if they are not explicitly aware of endorsing this belief (Hafer & Bègue, 2005).[21] Although Lerner (1965) assumed that BJW is a uniform phenomenon, it is worth noting that individual differences in BJW have been found (Furnham, 2003). We will return to this point shortly.

The BJW serves an important adaptive function, as it enables one to pursue long-term goals (Lerner & Miller, 1978). It provides people with a sense of predictability and assures them that their behavior and attributes entitle them to certain outcomes (Lerner, 1980). Believing that the world is just makes people feel less vulnerable to negative outcomes when they have done nothing to deserve them (Furnham, 2003). Only in a just world is it sensible to engage in long-term goal-oriented behavior in order to achieve positive outcomes and avoid negative ones (Hagedoorn, Buunk, & Van de Vliert, 2002). People who behave appropriately according to society's standards, for

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19 In Chapter 2 we defined vigilantism as "a planned criminal act carried out by one or more private citizens in response to (the perceived threat of) a crime committed by one or more private citizens, targeting the (alleged) perpetrator(s) of that crime".

20 For more information about this tendency of individuals to seek consistency between attitudes and behavior, see cognitive dissonance theory by Festinger (1957).

21 Even though we recognize this difference between a *need* to believe in a just world and the actual *belief* in a just world (BJW), we will commonly only refer to the latter for clarity purposes.

instance by working hard and taking care of their family, can expect to be rewarded accordingly. On the other hand, those who fail to make a contribution to society, for instance by refusing to go to work for no apparent reason, are thought to be entitled to negative consequences such as failure. The same can be said about people's personal characteristics: if someone is perceived as kind and gentle, he will be entitled to desirable consequences such as respect, whereas people with negative attributes such as dishonesty will be seen to deserve a negative fate. All in all, believing that the world is a just place allows people to expect that their lives are orderly, meaningful and controllable (Sutton & Douglas, 2005).

Importantly, the personal contract is only valid to the extent that the individual lives in an environment where people indeed get what they deserve (Hafer & Bègue, 2005). This is part of the reason why people are concerned with the fate of others around them. If someone else suffers undeservedly, the individual will realize that this fate could befall him too. Evidence of innocent suffering therefore casts doubts on how 'just' the world really is. This injustice constitutes a threat to the viability of the personal contract, as it is useless to make an effort if it is uncertain or unlikely that this will lead to the desired outcome. In other words, the injustice threatens the notion of a just world. As a consequence, people are left in an *aversive state*, which is an unpleasant state of mind that they will be motivated to reduce. One way of doing so is by giving up their BJW altogether, i.e. accepting that the world is not a just place. However, this option is not viable because it is presumably advantageous for people to stay committed to their personal contract. Given its important adaptive utility, individuals are quite reluctant to abandon their BJW (Lerner & Miller, 1978). Instead, people will be motivated to reduce the aversive state so that they can maintain their BJW. This can either be achieved by convincing oneself that there was no injustice in the first place because the victim did deserve to suffer, or by restoring the injustice (Lerner & Miller, 1978). Lerner (1980) proposed nine distinct strategies for coping with threats to the need to believe in a just world. The literature mainly focuses on the following four (Hafer & Bègue, 2005):

Cognitive strategies:
1. *reinterpretation of the cause* – <u>blaming</u> the victim by attributing his fate to something he did or failed to do
2. *reinterpretation of character* – <u>derogating</u> the victim as a person ('bad' people deserve bad outcomes)
3. *reinterpretation of the outcome* – making the injustice 'disappear', for instance by reasoning that the suffering made the victim a better person

Behavioral strategy:
4. *restitution* – restoring justice to unjust situations that do occur by helping or compensating the victim, or by punishing the offender

The aim of the three *cognitive* strategies, first of all, is to reinterpret the unjust event rather than accepting its occurrence (Hafer & Bègue, 2005). In other words, people try to psychologically rationalize the victim's fate (Fischer & Skitka, 2006). These strategies are also referred to as non-rational strategies, as they involve a refusal to accept the presence of injustice. People in effect construe the event in such a way that it fits their belief in a just world: they try to persuade themselves that the victim 'deserves' to suffer (Lerner, 1980). This can be seen as a rather disturbing phenomenon, as the victims are derogated and blamed for their own suffering. *Behavioral* strategies, such as restitution, involve accepting the presence of injustice, and are usually seen as a more rational response. Instead of denying that victimization has taken place, people try to restore justice through their behavior.

Research suggests that, when dealing with an injustice, people will first apply the cognitive strategies (such as blaming the victim) before trying to restore justice (such as helping the victim) (Lodewijkx, De Kwaadsteniet, & Nijstad, 2005). The reason for this is said to be that *restoring* justice involves larger costs. So even if people are motivated to help the victim or punish the offender, they will first attempt to reinterpret the injustice in a cognitive way. According to this idea, the more observers apply the cognitive strategies, the more the aversive state will be reduced, and the less need there will be for behavioral restitution. In a study on the labeling of violent incidents by outsiders, subjects who had *no* opportunity to blame the victim were indeed found to be more keen on punishment of the perpetrator (Lodewijkx, De Kwaadsteniet, & Nijstad, 2005). However, we question this supposed evidence for the proposed hierarchy of strategies. In our view, a desire for punishment does not qualify as a behavioral strategy because it does not involve actual behavior. Rather, it belongs to the category of cognitive strategies, as people do not actually restore the justice but only express the intention to do so. Although it makes sense from an ethical point of view that respondents are not asked to punish the offender themselves, we do find it important to make a clear theoretical distinction between these strategies. We therefore propose to classify behavioral *intentions* (such as a desire for punishment, help or compensation) as cognitive strategies. We will call these *cognitive restitutions*, thereby distinguishing them from the behavioral type (*restitution*; strategy 4 above). Importantly, cognitive restitution differs from other cognitive strategies in that it involves an acceptance of the victimization, rather than a denial of it (such as in the case of blame and derogation). So even though cognitive restitution is meant to cognitively reduce the aversive state, it does so by showing the intention to restore justice, rather than pretending that there is no injustice to begin with.

6.3   Just-world theory research

It has been nearly 45 years since Lerner and Simmons (1966) first introduced the notion of a need to believe in a just world. Just-world theory has resulted in a substantial body of research. Recently it was estimated that there exist over 80 peer-reviewed journal

articles on just-world theory in addition to more than a dozen book chapters (Bennet, 2008). Within this field, two main approaches can be identified:

    1) Experimental research on the *BJW mechanism*

    2) Research on *individual differences in BJW* and its correlates

In the literature there exists disagreement with regards to the appropriateness of these two perspectives. Some scholars for instance argue that research on individual differences is too far removed from the original theory (Hafer & Bègue, 2005; Lerner, 1980, 1998, 2003), while others say that it should be seen as a fundamental advancement of just-world research (Furnham, 2003; Maes, 1998). It has nevertheless also been recognized that it is possible to combine the two approaches (Hafer & Bègue, 2005). Measures of individual differences in BJW can for instance be used to garner support for findings in experimental research. As will become clear later on, this is precisely what we intend to do in the next study. We will examine support for vigilantism in a just world context within an experimental setting, while including a measure of individual levels of belief in a just world. The underlying assumption is that if people's need to believe in a just world affects their responses to vigilantism in various experimental conditions, this will be most evident for those who more strongly endorse the BJW. In other words, an interaction is expected between the individual-difference measure and the experimental manipulations. As we will combine the two approaches in our study, each is discussed in more detail below.

6.3.1 Experimental research on BJW

Within the experimental approach, there exist two types of manipulations that have been used most commonly to test just-world hypotheses. The first one consists of presenting subjects with a scenario and manipulating variables that are expected to affect the aversive state that is induced by the scenario (e.g. a manipulation of victim innocence). The second type consists of presenting subjects with a scenario that is designed to induce an aversive state, while manipulating the opportunity to use certain strategies to protect one's BJW (e.g. by giving participants the chance to actually help a victim or not) (Hafer & Bègue, 2005). In our study, we will employ the first type of manipulation, as we are currently interested in studying the impact of characteristics of the vigilantism situation on a threat to people's BJW and their resulting response. We will not investigate the effect of situational characteristics on the appropriateness of different strategies to protect the BJW after exposure to vigilantism.

In reviewing experimental research on BJW, Lerner (1980; 2003) highlights the importance of stimulus impact. He suggests that, depending on how emotionally engaging a stimulus is, people will respond in one of two rather distinct ways. A stimulus with an emotional impact will likely prime an automatic, pre-conscious need to believe in a just world, which will motivate attempts to defend one's BJW or restore justice. This emotional state is a rather primitive and intuitive assessment of the situation. However, a stimulus which is not emotionally engaging may not actually threaten a participant's need to believe in a just world. The response to this type of stimulus is unlikely to reflect

attempts to preserve a sense of justice, and will instead lead to a deliberative, thoughtful response (Hafer & Bègue, 2005). This type of reaction is much more vulnerable to social desirability, as the respondent is likely to be guided by a motivation to adhere to social norms on how an injustice should be responded to (i.e. not by blaming the victim).

In the current study, we are interested in the first type of response: intuitive, emotional reactions to victimization. As such, we will present participants with stimuli that are designed to be emotionally engaging and are likely to pose a threat to their BJW. As will be explained in more detail in the next chapter, we aspire to accomplish this by making use of a realistic looking newspaper article that includes a picture of a crime scene. Additionally, we will tell respondents that it concerns a real article about an actual crime situation, under the assumption that this will make an aversive state more likely to occur.

After having outlined some of the important aspects of experimental research on BJW, we next turn to measures of individual levels of BJW. We will describe some of the scales that have been developed over the years, and will explain our choice with regards to the measurement scale used in our own study. This will be followed by a section in which we turn to the specific application of just-world theory to our research on support for vigilantism.

6.3.2. Individual levels of BJW

Even though Lerner (1965) in his original theory assumed that all people would react to cases of injustice in a rather uniform way, a more recent body of research has revealed that people differ in the extent to which they believe in a just world (see Furnham, 2003). Several questionnaires have been developed to measure individual levels of BJW. The most well-known one is the 20-item "Belief in a Just World Scale" (BJWS) that was introduced by Rubin and Peplau (1975). A selection of items from this scale is presented in Table 6.1.

Table 6.1   Selected items from Rubin and Peplau's Belief in a Just World Scale

People who get "lucky breaks" have usually earned their good fortune
Men who keep in shape have little chance of suffering a heart attack
It is rare for an innocent person to be wrongly sent to jail
By and large, people get what they deserve
Good deeds often go unnoticed and unrewarded

Using the BJWS, it has been demonstrated repeatedly that strong just-world believers tend to respond to victims with more derogation, blame and compensation than weak believers (for reviews, see Hafer & Bègue, 2005; Lerner & Miller, 1978; Montada & Lerner, 1998). Presumably, they are more likely to use such strategies because the threat to their BJW is larger. Nevertheless, although the Rubin and Peplau (1975) scale has been used extensively and is still the most popular one in contemporary studies, it has

been heavily criticized (Furnham, 2003). Mainly, the scale has been found to have a low internal consistency and has been argued to be multi- rather than one-dimensional. Not surprisingly, there have been many efforts to develop psychometrically more valid self-report BJW scales. One example is the more robust 8-item "Global Belief in a Just World" scale (Lipkus, 1991); see Table 6.2.

Table 6.2   Lipkus (1991) Global Belief in a Just World Scale

I feel that people get what they are entitled to have
I feel that a person's efforts are noticed and rewarded
I feel that people earn the rewards and punishments they get
I feel that people who meet with misfortune have brought it on themselves
I feel that people get what they deserve
I feel that rewards and punishments are fairly given
I basically feel that the world is a fair place

A few years after its original appearance, the Global Belief in a Just World Scale was improved by making a distinction between BJW for the Self (BJW-S) and that for Others (BJW-O) (Lipkus, Dalbert, & Siegler, 1996). An example of a BJW-S item is "I feel that the world treats me fairly", whereas the BJW-O version reads as follows: "I feel that the world treats people fairly". The relevance of this bi-dimensionality of BJW has been verified in several studies (cf. Bègue & Bastounis, 2003; Lipkus et al., 1996; Sutton & Douglas, 2005). Although moderate positive correlations have been found between the two scales, each is uniquely related to different indices (Sutton et al., 2008).

BJW-S is commonly associated with measures of subjective well-being, including sleep quality, stress, loneliness, feelings of personal control, life satisfaction and judgments of marital relations (Bègue & Bastounis, 2003; Sutton & Douglas, 2005). BJW-O, on the other hand, is generally connected to harsh attitudes toward disadvantaged groups like the poor, the ill and the elderly (Sutton & Douglas, 2005). Most interesting for current purposes, BJW-O has also been linked to desired punishment for perpetrators, and attributions of responsibility and blame. People who have strong beliefs about a just world for others are generally more concerned with chaos in the world, which in turn leads to more blame and derogation of victims of injustice (Bennet, 2008). In line with this, people who score higher on BJW-O tend to be more punitive in matters of criminal justice (Carroll, Perkowitz, Lurigio, & Weaver, 1987; Kaiser, Vick, & Major, 2004).

In summary, BJW-S is related to indices of subjective wellbeing, while BJW-O is associated with negative social outcomes such as prejudiced attitudes. In the current study, we chose to include a measure of BJW-O, as we are interested in linking it to people's reactions toward the criminal victimization of others in a vigilantism situation. Most Dutch citizens fortunately do not personally become victims of vigilantism, so it makes sense to measure their attitudes toward others who do. In the next section, we will address in more detail how just-world theory can aid us in understanding public support for vigilantism.

6.4 Just-world theory and support for vigilantism

It has been proposed in the literature that just world theory can be applied to a large variety of social relations and phenomena (Hafer & Bègue, 2005). We are interested in using the theory to predict and explain reactions to both victims and offenders in a vigilantism context. Although the just-world literature largely focuses on reactions to recipients of injustice (cf. Hafer & Bègue, 2005; Miller & Vidmar, 1981), it can also be applied in research on people's response to perpetrators of injustice. The role of just-world processes has for instance been studied in research on sentencing goals of laypeople (e.g. Bègue & Bastounis, 2003; Carroll et al., 1987; Kleinke & Meyer, 1990; Wyer, Bodenhausen, & Gorman, 1985). What makes vigilantism a particularly interesting phenomenon is that the roles of the victim and offender are often exchanged: the victim becomes an offender, and the offender becomes a victim.

Just-world theory can be said to equate justice with deservingness, as a just world is a place where people get what they deserve (Hafer & Bègue, 2005). Interestingly, the notion of deservingness regularly surfaces in the context of public support for vigilantism. Supporters of vigilantism often make reference to notions of deservingness, for instance by saying that the victim of vigilantism got what he deserved (e.g. in Fletcher, 1988). Despite the fact that vigilantism is usually not preceded by a formal trial, there seems to be a tendency of outsiders to assume that the vigilantism victim was not innocent and must have done something wrong to deserve his fate (Hine, 1998). On the other hand, there are people who applaud the prosecution of vigilantes and who are convinced about their deservingness of punishment. Either way, deservingness seems to be a central feature of reactions to vigilantism, implying that just-world theory can provide a useful framework for research on this topic.

Research outside of the just-world domain also suggests an important role for deservingness in how people view issues of justice and injustice. The general conclusion to be drawn from research on sentencing preferences, for instance, is that *retribution* is one of the main criteria that is used by laypeople to determine appropriate punishments (Carlsmith, 2008; Darley & Pittman, 2003; De Keijser, 2001; Lambert, Clarke, & Lambert, 2004). The importance of retribution makes perfect sense from the just-world perspective, as it can be seen as an effective way to restore justice (Lerner, 1980; McCullough, Bellah, Kilpatrick, & Johnson, 2001). A preference for retribution as compared to alternative sentencing goals, such as rehabilitation or deterrence, may even stem from people's underlying need to believe in a just world (Hafer & Bègue, 2005).

In light of earlier empirical studies on support for vigilantism, including our own (cf. Chapter 5), it also makes sense to use the BJW approach. Many of the items that were for instance presented in the literature review in Chapter 2 pertain to concepts such as blame, justifiability and deservingness. Some of the items in which such BJW concepts (in italics) are evident are as follows: "People who kill armed robbers should not be *blamed*" (Tankebe, 2009), "If someone were to rape your mother then you would be *morally justified* in killing the perpetrator" (Schadt & DeLisi, 2007) "Smith *deserved* what happened to him" (Skitka & Houston, 2001). In essence, just-world theory

provides a theoretical basis for using such concepts to measure support for vigilantism. Additionally, the theory provides useful vocabulary for distinguishing between different types of reactions to vigilantism. In the next section, we will explain in more detail how just-world theory and notions of deservingness can be applied to the vigilantism context.

6.5   The vigilantism event sequence and BJW

Just-world theory proposes that people's reactions to an injustice can be understood by taking into account the threat posed to their need to believe in a just world. In this section we will explain how to apply this theoretical perspective to understand reactions to both victims and perpetrators of vigilantism. In Chapter 3 we defined vigilantism as "a planned criminal act carried out by one or more private citizens in response to (the perceived threat of) a crime committed by one or more private citizens, targeting the (alleged) perpetrator(s) of that crime". In other words, after a criminal act takes place, someone takes the law into his or her own hands against the alleged perpetrator of that crime. To further disentangle the events that take place in a vigilantism situation, we presented the vigilantism event sequence. This sequence consists of three main events: the precipitating event, the formal response to the precipitating event, and the act of vigilantism itself. We will now integrate insights from the BJW literature to this chain of events, as can be seen in Figure 6.1. Each of the three events is followed by three BJW reactions. The various stages eventually result in the main outcome: public support for vigilantism (see rectangular frame in the diagram). In other words, support for vigilantism in our model consists of people's aversive state in response to the act of vigilantism and their subsequent use of cognitive strategies. As will be explained in more detail later on, the aversive state can for instance be assessed by measuring people's outrage toward the vigilante, as well as their feelings of empathy toward the vigilantism victim. Cognitive strategies can for example include blame and derogation of the vigilantism victim, as well as a desire for punishment of the vigilante.

The idea behind the presented sequence of events is that characteristics of one event can affect reactions to a subsequent event. In other words, it will be possible to make predictions about situational characteristics and their influence on BJW-reactions within the context of vigilantism. When the precipitating event is for instance particularly heinous, and the formal authorities do not respond to it at all, we can expect people to experience a relatively high aversive state. When this is followed by an act of vigilantism, this may function as a cognitive strategy ('justice' after all), thereby reducing the aversive state. Someone's aversive state can thus actually be envisioned as a type of 'liquid', of which the volume increases and decreases depending on the threat that is posed to one's belief in a just world and the use of cognitive and behavioral strategies.
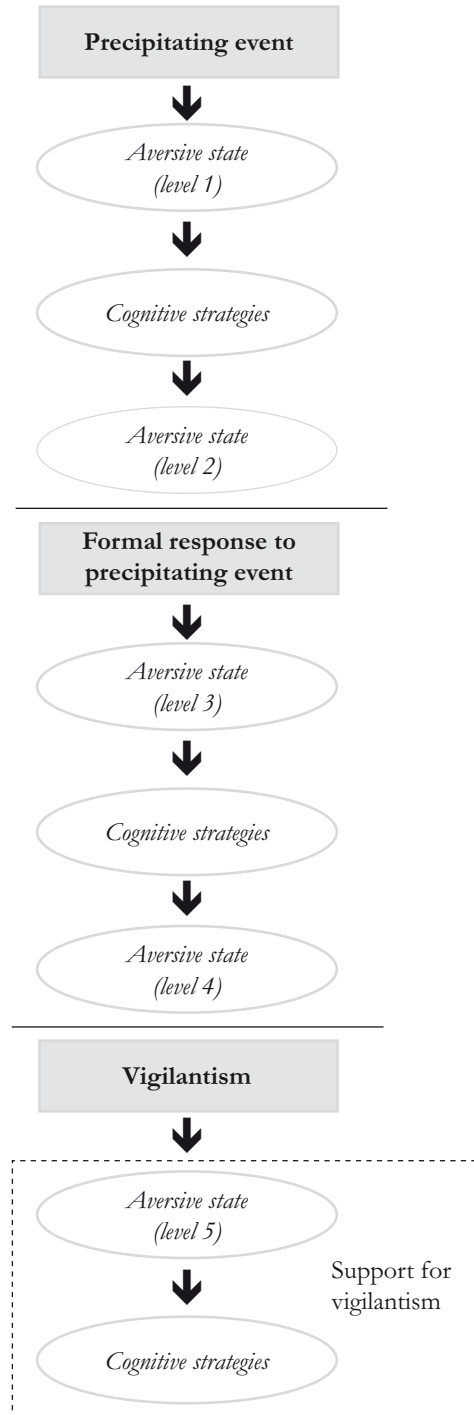
Figure 6.1 BJW vigilantism event sequence

Precipitating event

The first component of the BJW vigilantism event sequence is the precipitating event, which by definition can be any type of crime as long as a vigilantism act occurs in reaction to it. When people find out about this precipitating event, they can experience an aversive state. As can be seen in Figure 6.1, the aversive state starts at level 1, and people try to decrease it by applying cognitive strategies. After these strategies have been used, the aversive state will be at level 2. The more successfully the strategies are applied, the lower the resulting aversive state. The aversive state can also remain unchanged; this is true for all phases in the model. People can technically also use behavioral strategies, such as helping a victim, but we have not included this option in the current model. In real life, people tend to be informed about crimes through the media, which does not usually give them a chance to behaviorally interact with the actual victims or perpetrators.[22] They *can* use cognitive strategies, for instance by blaming the victim for his fate or by desiring punishment for the offender.

Formal response to precipitating event

The next step in the sequence occurs when people are told about the response of formal authorities (e.g. police or judges) to the precipitating event. This information can once again influence their aversive state (level 3). Finding out about the formal response can first of all *decrease* their aversive state, when the offender is for instance perceived to have been appropriately sentenced by a judge. Conversely, information about the legal response can also *increase* their aversive state. When an alleged offender is for instance not arrested or punished, this can further threaten rather than protect people's BJW. Research indeed suggests that when an offender is not punished, this can cause a threat to people's belief in a just world (Correia & Vala, 2003; Lodewijkx, Kersten, & Zomeren, 2008). A 'bad' person who does not suffer can threaten one's belief in a just world in a similar way as when a 'good' person does suffer. To deal with this, people will again consort to cognitive strategies, resulting in aversive state level 4. Presumably, those people who, for instance, mainly rely on a strategy of desiring punishment for the precipitating offender will be most affected by information about the lack of an 'appropriate' legal response.

Vigilantism

The next event in the vigilantism sequence is the vigilantism act itself. Finding out about the vigilantism act will result in aversive state level 5. The severity of the formal response to the precipitating offender will affect the aversive state in response to the act of vigilantism. When the offender is for instance acquitted by a judge, vigilantism can be seen as an alternative means to restore one's BJW: a replacement of the punishment that was supposed to be carried out by the criminal justice system. The precipitating offender 'gets what he deserves' by becoming a victim of vigilantism, thereby reinforcing the

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22   We recognize that some citizens, such as Maarten 't Hart and Maurice de Hond in the Netherlands, do get publicly involved in cases of perceived injustice.

belief that 'bad things happen to bad people'. The fact that the punishment is carried out by a vigilante instead of by authorities may not be relevant from this perspective: it has been argued to be mostly the outcome (punishment) that matters.[23] The aversive state as a result of vigilantism is therefore likely to be relatively low. If, on the other hand, the precipitating offender did receive a 'proper' sentence, the aversive state at vigilantism is predicted to be relatively high. From this perspective, the victim of vigilantism does not get what he deserves: he was already punished by the authorities.

Another way in which a vigilantism act can lead to a relatively high aversive state is when it is considered disproportional to the original crime. There are presumably limits to the extent to which a vigilantism act is perceived as fair, despite certain situational circumstances in favor of the vigilante. So if an act of vigilantism lacks proportionality, it can result in a high aversive state, even when the formal response to the precipitating offender was weak or absent. This idea is supported by research on observers' judgments on revenge (Tripp, Bies, & Aquino, 2002). Tripp and associates argue that it is not the amount of harm itself that determines reactions, but the proportionality of the harm. Approval of revenge is said to depend on whether the consequences of the revenge act are proportional to the harm caused by the original harmdoer's act.

Whatever the height of the aversive state as a result of vigilantism (level 5) may be, people will apply cognitive strategies to lower it. It will probably be relatively easy to for instance blame and derogate the victim of vigilantism, as he is a former offender, which facilitates attributing his negative fate to his character and/or behavior. In line with this, the need to additionally consort to a desire for punishment for the vigilante, as an alternative strategy, will be relatively low. Some people might even find it unnecessary to punish the vigilante at all. This may explain why the prosecution of vigilantes can lead to public outrage.

The sequence can be expanded by adding information about aversive state level 6 (after applying the cognitive strategies), about the formal sentence of the vigilante, and so on. We nevertheless choose to end here, as our interest lies in understanding reactions to vigilantism itself: the last section of the current model.

6.6   Conclusion

Some vigilantism cases result in support for the vigilante and a lack of compassion for the victim. This can be taken as an indication that the victim of vigilantism is perceived to deserve his fate. Moreover, it is not uncommon for the prosecution of vigilantes to cause public outrage. This disagreement with the legal response to vigilantism can be interpreted as a sign that the public does not deem the vigilante deserving of punishment. In this chapter, we have argued that just-world theory (Lerner, 1965, 1980) can help us understand such reactions. According to just-world theory, people generally

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23   Support for this idea was found in an American vignette study (Skitka & Houston, 2001). Perceived fairness of a defendant's fate (death) was solely determined by his guilt, and was not influenced by the procedure (vigilantism or capital punishment). See Chapter 2 for more details on this study.

have a need to believe in a just world. When confronted with evidence of the contrary, such as the suffering of someone innocent, they will experience an aversive state. They are subsequently motivated to reduce this aversive state through the use of cognitive and behavioral strategies.

During the sequence of events in a vigilantism situation, there are three main moments at which people can be confronted with a threat to their need to believe in a just world: the precipitating event, the formal response to the precipitating event, and the act of vigilantism. We argue that what is commonly referred to as support for vigilantism, actually consists of BJW reactions to events within the vigilantism event sequence. When someone is for instance not very upset about an act of vigilantism, this can be viewed as a form of support for vigilantism. Likewise, when someone blames the vigilantism victim for his fate, this can be seen as a cognitive strategy for dealing with the threat posed by the act of vigilantism, but also as a type of support for vigilantism. In other words, we propose that public reactions to vigilantism at least partially depend on the extent to which it is perceived as a threat to people's need to believe in a just world. Importantly, in line with the situation hypothesis, the amount of threat to BJW and subsequent reactions are expected to be influenced by features of the vigilantism situation itself. Situational characteristics from the typology (see Chapter 3) are predicted to affect how upset people are by an act of vigilantism, and to what extent they cognitively try to deal with the injustice. When the victim of vigilantism has for instance previously committed a particularly horrible crime, it will be relatively easier to blame and derogate him for his fate than in case of a minor misdemeanor.

In the next chapter we will explain how our application of just-world theory to the context of support for vigilantism can be tested in an experimental setting. A simplified version of the model will be operationalized in an empirical study to examine its use in predicting and explaining reactions to vigilantism. Characteristics of the vigilantism case will be varied in order to test the situation hypothesis. Respondents' BJW reactions to a specific case of vigilantism will be assessed by measuring their aversive state in response to vigilantism as well as their use of cognitive strategies to reduce this aversive state. These responses to an act of vigilantism will together form our measure of support for vigilantism.

7

Study design and pilot

7.1   Introduction

This chapter prepares us for a second empirical study, in which just-world theory will be used as a theoretical framework for studying public support for vigilantism. Earlier on we presented a vigilantism event sequence that consists of three main events: a precipitating crime, a formal response to the precipitating event, and vigilantism. In the previous chapter, we expanded the theoretical model with belief in a just world (BJW) reactions by adding a number of aversive states and uses of cognitive strategies. The next step is to empirically determine whether this model can help us to predict, measure and explain public support for vigilantism. With this goal in mind, we will present the design of an empirical study in the current chapter. The findings of the actual data collection are described in Chapter 8.

Some of the main components of the design were pretested in a pilot study. We will briefly report the results and implications of this study at the end of the chapter. In response to the pilot study, several adjustments were made to the original study design before carrying out the final data collection. The design as presented below is the final (adjusted) one.

7.2   BJW vigilantism event sequence – A simplified version

In an elaborate test of the BJW vigilantism event sequence model, participants would be presented with three main events, and all in-between aversive state levels and uses of cognitive strategies would be assessed. In practice, however, it is difficult to measure all of these responses without interfering with naturally occurring processes. If participants are for instance asked about the level of their aversive state at five different instances, this can influence their actual aversive state due to their increased awareness of it. The same is true for the cognitive strategies that are used to reduce aversive states: asking people to use these strategies overtly on three different occasions may affect the use of strategies itself. Another concern is that asking people about these techniques, especially about blaming or derogating a victim, will make responses vulnerable to social desirability bias. To deal with all of these issues, we simplified the model for our empirical study by combining some of the intermediate steps. The original model is presented in Figure 7.1, and can be compared to its simplified version in Figure 7.2. The components from the original model that are included in the simplified version have been shaded in both figures.

The first part of the original model remains intact in the adapted version. Respondents are presented with a precipitating event that is expected to induce an aversive state (level 1), which is subsequently assessed. We will also measure the extent to which respondents use cognitive strategies to reduce their aversive state. The phase of measuring the success of these strategies (aversive state level 2 in original model) is skipped. Next, subjects are presented with a vignette in which information about the formal response to the precipitating event and the subsequent act of vigilantism is combined. People's aversive state after finding out about the formal response (level 3
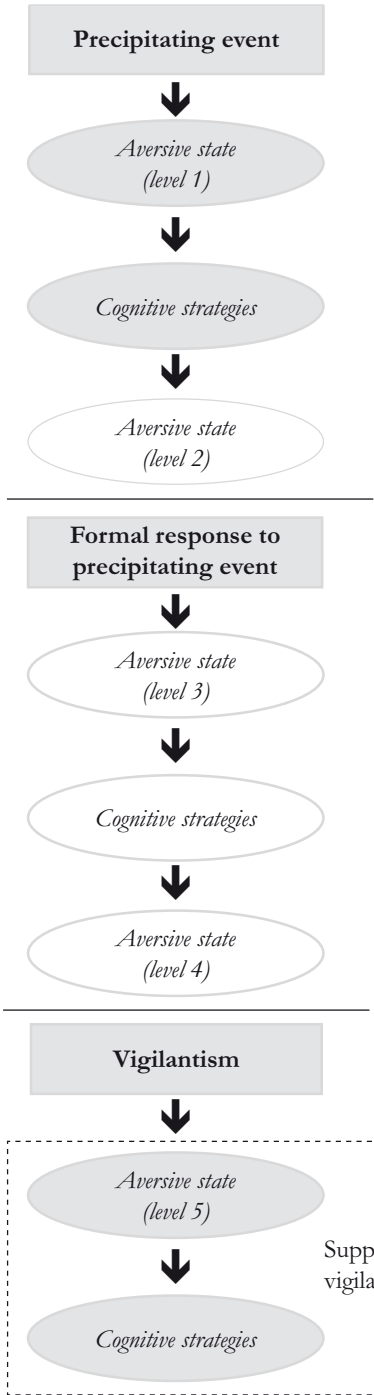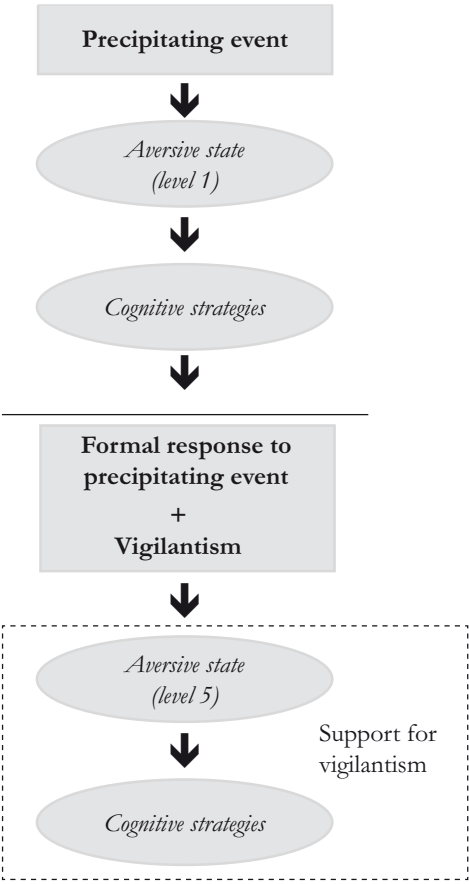
Figure 7.1 BJW vigilantism event sequence
(original)

Figure 7.2 BJW vigilantism event sequence
(simplified)

in original model) is not measured, nor the subsequent use of strategies and its effect on their aversive state (level 4 in original model). The next measurement that takes place is people's aversive state at level 5, after the vigilantism act. Lastly, we again assess the extent to which respondents use cognitive strategies to reduce their aversive state, this time in response to vigilantism. These last two measures together constitute our assessment of support for vigilantism.

The first measures, i.e. aversive state (level 1) and the use of cognitive strategies after the first vignette, function as a manipulation check. Assessing people's response to the precipitating event gives an indication of the extent to which it evokes an aversive state. If our methodology is successful, people should experience an aversive state after reading about the precipitating event, and will be motivated to reduce it by applying cognitive strategies. We chose to include this in-between measure as it allows us to separate the aversive state after vigilantism from the one in response to the precipitating event. This differentiation makes it possible to test whether reactions to the first crime affect reactions further down the sequence.

7.3   The situation hypothesis and confidence hypothesis

Response patterns within the BJW vigilantism event sequence are expected to be similar for all respondents, but the level of responses is likely to vary between respondents. For instance, the description of a precipitating crime will probably induce an aversive state in most (if not all) people, but the extent to which it does is expected to differ between individuals. The central question is how these differences can be predicted. We propose that responses will be affected by factors related to the vigilantism situation as well as by attitudes (including confidence in the criminal justice system) of respondents themselves.

In correspondence with the *situation hypothesis*, predictions can be made using the vigilantism typology that was presented in Chapter 3. The characteristics that are identified in the typology are expected to affect aversive states as well as people's resulting use of cognitive strategies. Research for instance reveals the role of victim innocence: the less innocent a victim is perceived to be, the easier it is to blame and derogate him (Correia, Vala, & Aguiar, 2007; Hafer & Bègue, 2005). In the first part of the current study (Part I), two of the situational characteristics will be varied to examine their impact on reactions in the BJW vigilantism event sequence. The reasons for choosing these characteristics will be presented below.

In line with the *confidence hypothesis,* people's confidence in the criminal justice system is also expected to influence reactions to the vigilantism event sequence. In the second part of the study (Part II) we will therefore assess people's confidence, in addition to several other attitudes.

As will be described in more detail in the next chapter, all material was presented to respondents online. In order to reduce possible effects of the vignettes on the attitude measures, a time lapse of one month was maintained between the two parts of the

study. Thus, in Part I respondents were asked to read a number of vignettes and answer the corresponding questions. One month later, the same respondents were presented with a number of attitude measures in Part II. Participants were not told that Parts I and II belonged to the same study. Both parts are described in detail below.

7.4   Method – Part I

7.4.1 Design

In Part I of the study, vignettes are used to induce aversive states and subsequent applications of cognitive strategies. The design is between-subjects. Each respondent is presented with two vignettes that together present information about all three events from the BJW vigilantism event sequence. Vignette 1 describes the precipitating event, which is followed by a first set of questions. Participants are subsequently presented with Vignette 2, which describes the formal response to the precipitating crime and an act of vigilantism. Vignette 2 is followed by a second set of questions.

The contents of the vignettes vary in correspondence with the experimental variation of two situational characteristics. Experimental factor 1 is the *type of precipitating event*, which is described in Vignette 1 (three versions). Factor 2 is the *formal response to the precipitating event*, and is presented in Vignette 2 (four versions). Figure 7.3 shows the two characteristics within the vigilantism typology; they are both described in detail below.

7.4.2 Vignette 1: precipitating event

The first experimental factor is the *type of precipitating event*. By varying this first event in the BJW vigilantism event sequence, and comparing subsequent responses of participants, underlying theoretical assumptions about BJW processes can be tested. We can examine whether different precipitating crimes lead to different levels of aversive state, and whether this affects reactions to vigilantism down the line. We specifically decided to vary the *type* of precipitating event because research shows that crime type can have a major impact on how a crime situation and the people involved are judged by outsiders (e.g. Carlsmith, Darley, & Robinson, 2002; Rossi et al., 1985; Warr, 1989).

The experimental manipulation was operationalized by constructing three versions of Vignette 1: (A) traffic aggression, (B) a pedestrian crash and (C) a sex offense. These three versions of the precipitating event are described below, after which we will elucidate the choices that we made in this regard. The corresponding vignettes can be found in Appendix 3; Appendix 4 provides their English translation.

In precipitating event vignette A, a 39-year old male cyclist (Alan) is cut off in traffic by a car driver (Dave).[24] Alan reacts to this by raising his fists to Dave, after which the driver purposely forces the cyclist off the road. This causes Alan to fall off his bicycle, resulting in a broken arm, a broken leg, bruised ribs and a concussion. He is taken to a

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24   The variation in names is introduced here to make the different versions more easily distinguishable. In the original vignettes, each precipitating offender (and later vigilantism victim) was named Ruben, and each vigilante was named Frank. The precipitating crime victim in versions B and C was labeled 'nine-year old girl'.
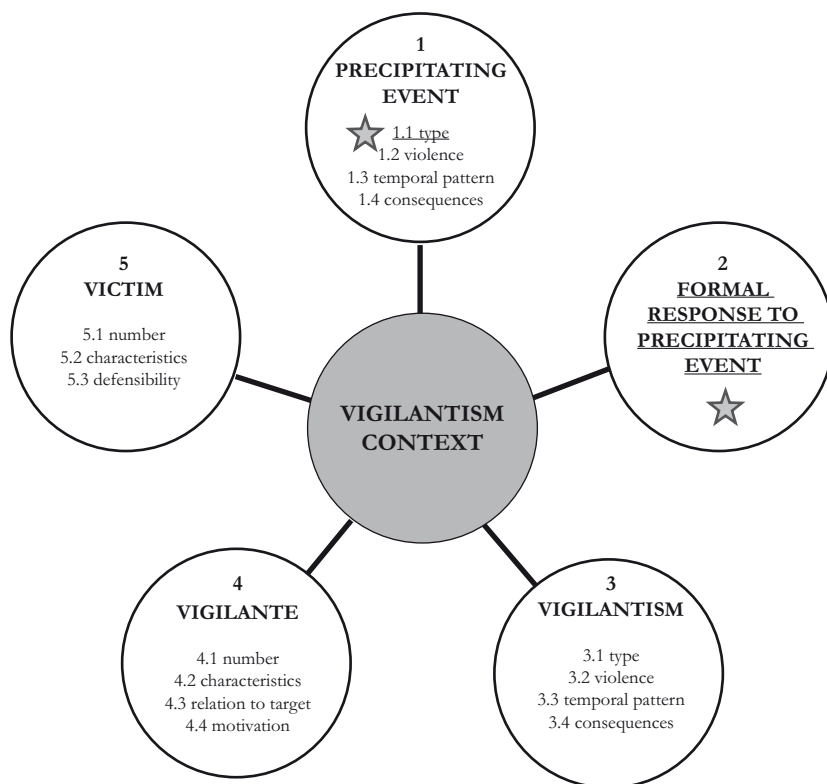
Figure 7.3 Experimental variation (underlined and starred)

hospital. Dave is apprehended by the police and found to have a blood-alcohol level of twice the legal limit.

Version B of the precipitating event vignette describes a 9-year old girl (Betty), who is hit by a speeding car while walking with her bicycle on a pedestrian crossing. The car driver (Ethan) is apprehended by the police and is found to be intoxicated at the same level as Dave in version A. Betty's injuries are exactly the same as those suffered by Alan in version A, and she is also taken to a hospital.

Precipitating event vignette C depicts a sex offense against a child. The victim is a 9-year old girl (Cynthia) who is pulled off her bicycle while on her way home from school. After she falls to the ground, a man (Fred) sexually assaults her. In the struggle that follows, Cynthia is able to get away, and Fred is later apprehended by the police.

All three precipitating event vignettes are intended to induce a considerable aversive state in our respondents. In line with recommendations from the literature on stimulus impact (Hafer & Bègue, 2005), we describe acts that are obviously criminal and which have serious consequences for the victims. The injuries are nevertheless not fatal in order to avoid ceiling effects in the responses. We additionally portray the offenders as being clearly responsible for their act. Intoxication of the drivers is for instance added

to emphasize the blameworthiness of the offenders in the first two versions. In version A we also make it clear that the driver purposely forces the cyclist off the road. The particular nature of the third offense, namely a sex crime by an adult against a child, is also expected to bring about a clear perception of responsibility. We also aim to emphasize the innocence of the victims, for instance by including young girls in two of the vignettes, and by having one of them get hit on a cross walk. The innocence of the victims is expected to make it relatively difficult to blame or derogate them (see Correia et al., 2007), which will likely cause respondents to mostly rely on a punishment desire strategy. This will be further addressed in the next section.

Apart from the type of precipitating event, details are held constant between the three vignettes where possible in order to avoid interference with the experimental manipulation. Such details include the age, gender and place of residence of the precipitating offender, and the time of day and location of the incident. However, it is challenging to vary crime type without varying other situational aspects. The sex offender is for instance not intoxicated, while the two traffic offenders are. Likewise, the sex offense victim does not suffer the same physical consequences as the other two victims. The victims themselves also differ, as two of them are 9-year old girls, while the third one is an adult male. We will discuss possible implications of these differences in the discussion section.

All vignettes were made as realistic as possible by making them appear like articles from a popular Dutch news website: www.nu.nl.[25] By using the same format, font type and colors, the articles were constructed to look as genuine as possible (see Appendix 3). Moreover, a real crime scene picture from the website was added to Vignette 1 to make the precipitating event more easily imaginable, with the intention of increasing the resulting aversive state.[26] Each precipitating event vignette contains the same picture of a damaged bicycle lying in a grassy area between a road and a bicycle path. The picture matches all three precipitating events, as they all involve a bicycle.

7.4.3 Vignette 2: sentence + vigilantism

The second experimental factor concerns the formal response to the precipitating event, which is presented in Vignette 2. We operationalized this manipulation by varying the *sentence for the precipitating offender*, as passed by a criminal judge. We thus chose to vary the second main event of the BJW vigilantism event sequence. This once again allows us to test whether variation in one of the events of the chain affects reactions further down. Instead of varying the police response, as we did in our first study, we now decided to focus on formal sentencing. The public tends to feel strong about sentencing, and often perceives it to be too lenient (e.g. De Keijser et al., 2007, regarding the Dutch). We therefore expect that a variation in sentencing might affect how people feel about a subsequent act of vigilantism. In our study, we specify four versions of

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25 Similarly, in a study on senseless violence and BJW in the Netherlands, respondents were told that a fictitious newspaper article originated from this same website (Van Zomeren & Lodewijkx, 2009).

26 The editors of www.nu.nl gave written permission to use the nu.nl format and picture, provided that subjects would be informed about the fictitious nature of the articles. A disclaimer was given at the end of Part I.

the precipitating offender's sentence: acquittal, a lenient sentence, a normal sentence and a severe sentence (see Table 7.1).[27] In the sex offense condition, there are only two sentencing variations, a lenient and a severe one, which differ slightly from the other sentences. The reason for this exception will be provided in Section 7.6.2, in our discussion of the pilot study.

Table 7.1   Sentences for the precipitating offender (experimental factor 2) [28]

Version	Sentencing level	
A1 B1	acquittal	
A2 B2	lenient:	100 euro fine 2 months suspended driver's license
A3 B3	normal:	180 hours community service 2 months suspended prison sentence 1 year suspended driver's license
A4 B4	severe:	240 hours community service 4 months suspended prison sentence 2 years suspended driver's license
C2	lenient:	40 hours community service 100 euro compensation to victim
C4	severe:	240 hours community service 4 months suspended prison sentence 400 euro compensation to victim

In the acquittal version, the precipitating offender is acquitted by the judge due to a technicality (the wrong date) in the summons. Importantly, it is made clear that the precipitating offender is not released because of a lack of evidence: he is found guilty of the crime. In order to reinforce the suggestion of a lenient, normal or severe sentence, the vignettes also report what sentence the Public Prosecutor had demanded for the precipitating offender. In the normal sentence conditions, the sentence is said to match the prosecutor's demand. In case of the lenient and severe sentences, the demand of the Public Prosecution is 180 hours of community service, a two-month suspended prison sentence and a suspended driver's license for one year. This demand thus equals the sentence given in the normal sentencing condition. In the sex crime versions, the demanded sentence of the Public Prosecution is 180 hours of community service, a two-month suspended prison sentence and 250 euro compensation to the victim.

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27   The version labels in Table 7.1, such as 'A1', refer to the versions that are presented in Table 7.2.
28   We consulted a Dutch criminal judge to get an indication of realistic sentences in the given criminal cases.

All versions of Vignette 2 start off with a description of the sentence passed by the judge to the precipitating offender. Following this information, the vignette reports that the sentenced precipitating offender has been attacked by a vigilante. The *vigilantism act* is identical in all conditions: the vigilante goes to the house of the precipitating offender and throws a brick through the front window. Following this, the precipitating offender walks out his front door and gets beaten up by the vigilante. The resulting injuries of the vigilantism victim (i.e. the precipitating offender) are two broken teeth, a broken nose and contusions. This act of vigilantism matches our definition (cf. Chapter 3). The violence does not qualify as self-defense or citizen's arrest, as it is not a reaction to an immediate threat.

Table 7.2 provides a concise overview of the ten experimental conditions. The three versions of the precipitating event are presented on the left (A, B and C). The ten versions of the corresponding vigilantism vignettes are located on the right section of the table, and are labeled A1 – A4, B1 – B4, C2 and C4.

Table 7.2   Overview of Vignettes 1 and 2 and the corresponding experimental versions

Vignette 1: precipitating event			Vignette 2: sentence + vigilantism			
Precipitating event	Victim	Offender	Precipitating offender's sentence	Vigilantism	Offender (*vigilante*)	Victim
A Traffic aggression	Alan	Dave	**A1** acquittal **A2** lenient **A3** normal **A4** severe	vandalism & assault	Alan	Dave
B Pedestrian crash	Betty	Ethan	**B1** acquittal **B2** lenient **B3** normal **B4** severe	vandalism & assault	George	Ethan
C Sex offense	Cathy	Fred	**C2** lenient **C4** severe	vandalism & assault	Henry	Fred

The identity of the vigilante differs slightly between the conditions due to differences in the precipitating event. In the vigilantism vignettes that follow precipitating event vignette A, the victim of traffic aggression (Alan) consorts to vigilantism against the traffic aggression offender (Dave). By allowing four months between the occurrence of the precipitating crime and the vigilantism act, it is made plausible that Alan recovered sufficiently from his injuries to be able to use violence. In the vignettes that relate to precipitating event B (pedestrian crash), the vigilante (George) is the *father* of the precipitating crime victim: the young girl (Betty) who was hit as a pedestrian. In other words, not the victim of the precipitating event but her father becomes the vigilante. The victim of vigilantism is once again the precipitating offender: the driver (Dave) who drove into Betty on the cross walk. In the C versions, the vigilante (Henry) is also the father of the precipitating crime victim (Cathy): he attacks the sex offender (Fred).

7.4.4 Control groups

Even though our operationalizion allows us to partially deal with the concern of overtly asking about aversive states and uses of cognitive strategies, interference with some of these BJW processes is still possible. After all, people's aversive state and their use of cognitive strategies are still assessed at two different instances. Additionally, in real life the public will usually be informed about a vigilantism case by the media, who will commonly present information about a vigilantism case all at once.[29] The aversive states and resultant uses of cognitive strategies in that case occur in a natural fashion, without being interrupted by questionnaire items in between. We therefore aimed to a) check for possible interference and b) test whether the vignette study is a good replication of the processes that would occur in a real setting. To this end, control groups were created for experimental conditions B2 (pedestrian crash + lenient sentence) and C2 (sex offense and lenient sentence). In the two control conditions, called B2X and C2X, respondents are presented with just one vignette in which all information about the precipitating event, the precipitating offender's sentence and the vigilantism act is combined. These respondents only answer questions after having been exposed to all of the information, and are therefore not interrupted by in-between measures of aversive states or uses of cognitive strategies. They are presented with the same set of questions that respondents in the experimental conditions receive after reading Vignette 2. Responses will be compared between B2 and B2X, and between C2 and C2X. The more similar the responses in the control conditions are to those in the experimental conditions, the higher the validity of the experimental manipulation. Appendix 3 provides an example of a control condition vignette.

7.4.5 Measures

In this section we describe the survey items that are used to measure the various BJW reactions to the vignettes. After reading Vignette 1, respondents are presented with a set of 21 items about the precipitating event (see Appendix 5). Several of these items are similar to those used in our first empirical study to measure support. To phrase the current items as neutrally as possible, the persons in the vignette are referred to by their names instead of labeling them as 'victims' or 'perpetrators'. Unless otherwise specified, respondents indicate their agreement with the items on a 7-point scale (1 = fully disagree; 7 = fully agree).

The first nine items aim to measure respondents' aversive state due to the precipitating event. The literature is ambiguous regarding the concept of aversive state and how it can be assessed. Given that we intend to get an indication of respondents' emotional reactions to the precipitating crime, we decided to present items about moral outrage, empathy with the victim and sympathy for the offender. In past research, similar emotions have been measured to assess the impact of a threat to BJW (e.g. Cook, 2006; Hagedoorn et al., 2002; Lodewijkx, De Kwaadsteniet, & Nijstad, 2005).

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29   The media are likely to report about vigilantism while also providing information about the precipitating event and other situational aspects, because it is precisely this context which makes it an act of vigilantism.

We subsequently measure to what extent subjects apply cognitive strategies to deal with their aversive state. The order in which these cognitive strategies are presented is not varied, as previous research shows that the choice for strategies does not depend on whichever one is first available (Haynes & Olson, 2006). We first present three items that concern derogation of the victim. Similarly to what has been done in the literature (e.g. Correia, Vala, & Aguiar, 2001), people are for instance asked to indicate how 'stupid' the precipitating crime victim is. In the subsequent three items, people are asked to indicate to what extent the precipitating offender and the victim are each to blame for what happened on a 7-point scale: 1 = not to blame; 7 = completely to blame. By including a blame assessment of both the victim and the offender, as has been recommended in the literature (Maes, 1994), we measure both absolute and relative perceptions of blame.

Respondents are next presented with five items that measure their desire for punishment of the precipitating offender. They first respond to three items about the extent to which the criminal justice system should punish the offender for his act (see Appendix 5). Respondents are additionally given a more direct question about whether he deserves to be punished (yes or no). In order to get an indication of the severity of the sanction that respondents have in mind, they are also asked to express their desired punishment in penalty points (0 = no points; 20 = maximum points).

The first set of questions is followed by a presentation of Vignette 2, which describes the formal sentence for the precipitating offender and the act of vigilantism. Respondents are subsequently asked to respond to a set of 24 items (see Appendix 5). These items are almost identical to the ones posed in relation to Vignette 1, except that they are now associated with different acts and actors. Blaming the victim, for instance, now concerns the victim of vigilantism (instead of the precipitating crime victim). The same is true for the items about deserved punishment for the perpetrator (now the vigilante instead of the intoxicated drivers or the sex offender). The actors in the vignette are again referred to by their names rather than by their 'role' as a victim or perpetrator. A new item is included about seeing the vigilante as a victim in this situation, rather than a perpetrator. Just like in the first set of questions, two additional items ask respondents to indicate relative blame of the (vigilantism) victim and the perpetrator (the vigilante). Next, participants indicate whether the perpetrator (the vigilante) deserves punishment (yes or no) and how many penalty points they consider appropriate.

Lastly, we assess whether respondents see the vigilantism act as an appropriate replacement of a formal sentence. In other words, do they feel that the precipitating offender has been punished sufficiently by the vigilante, thereby making formal punishment unnecessary? To this end, respondents are first reminded of the number of penalty points that they gave the *precipitating offender* after reading Vignette 1. They are subsequently asked to indicate whether they, after having read about vigilantism, now want to give the precipitating offender the same punishment as before, more, less or none at all. After answering the last question, participants are informed about the fictitious nature of the newspaper articles.

7.4.6 General predictions

We will now present some of our general expectations. More detailed hypotheses are formulated in Chapter 8, after constructing the specific dependent variables. We will refer to the original model so that all intermediate effects can be discussed. Not all of these predictions can be tested directly because we use a simplified model in the study, as explained in Section 7.2. We will only assess level 1 and 5 of people's aversive state, and the corresponding uses of cognitive strategies.

Based on the original model (see Figure 7.4), we first predict that the precipitating event will lead to an aversive state (level 1), which people will be motivated to reduce through cognitive strategies to reach level 2. Following this, people find out about the formal sentence for the precipitating offender. We expect that the more severe this formal sentence is considered to be, the more their aversive state will be further reduced (from level 2 to 3). After all, one way of restoring justice is by punishing the person who is responsible for the victimization. Moreover, making the precipitating event victims in Vignette 1 appear innocent is meant to make it more difficult for respondents to apply the cognitive techniques of blame and derogation. In an attempt to protect their BJW they are thus expected to mostly rely on the cognitive strategy of assigning punishment to the precipitating offender.[30] If they then go on to read that the precipitating offender was appropriately sentenced by a judge, this should help them to further reduce their aversive state. Alternatively, if people are informed that the precipitating offender is acquitted or sentenced leniently, their aversive state will increase.

In addition to finding out about the precipitating offender's sentence, respondents are informed that he has become the victim of a vigilantism act. We predict that the more severely the precipitating offender is sentenced by the criminal justice system prior to becoming a victim of vigilantism, the more of a threat vigilantism will pose to people's BJW, and the higher the aversive state at level 5 will be. After all, if the precipitating offender was formally sentenced, he already had to 'pay' duly for his crime, making his punishment as carried out by the vigilante seem less justifiable.

Of the strategies that will be used to reduce aversive state level 5, blame and derogation will be the most difficult when the precipitating offender was already sentenced severely by a judge. As a result, respondents in those cases will rely more on the strategy of desiring punishment for the vigilante. Alternatively, if the precipitating offender was acquitted before being attacked by a vigilante, it will be easier to blame and derogate him for his fate. In fact, vigilantism may have a smaller impact on the aversive state if the act is perceived as a suitable replacement for the lack of a formal sentence.

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30   This is thus a *cognitive* strategy, as people express their wish for the offender to be punished, rather than actually (*behaviorally*) punishing him. See Chapter 6 for a more detailed explanation of this distinction.
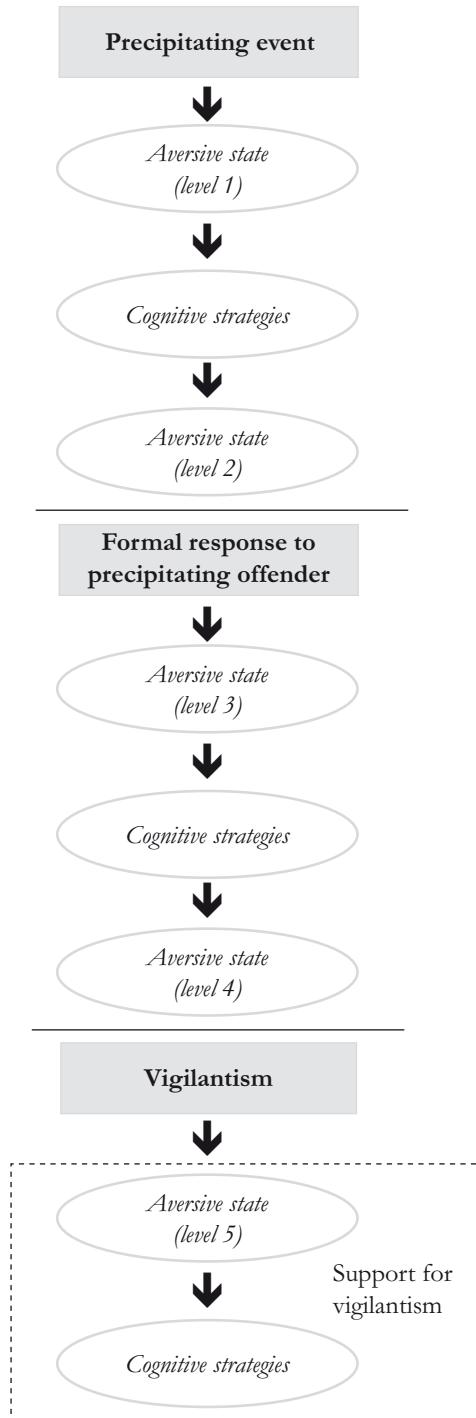
Figure 7.4 BJW vigilantism event sequence (original)

7.5   Method – Part II

One month after responding to questions about the vignettes (Part I), the same participants were requested to participate in another survey (Part II). This part of the study consists of 67 items intended to measure: a) confidence in the criminal justice system, b) general concern over crime, c) general support for vigilantism and d) belief in a just world for others (BJW-O). These four attitudes are discussed in further detail below. All items are evaluated on a 7-point scale that ranges from 1 (fully disagree) to 7 (fully agree). To control for possible order effects, the presentation order of the attitude question sets was varied.[31]

Confidence in the criminal justice system
One of the main aims of our research is to study the influence of confidence in the criminal justice system, aside from situational characteristics, on public support for vigilantism. To this end, we developed an integrated measurement tool of confidence (see Chapter 4). The main theoretical and empirical distinctions that were presented are between procedural justice and effectiveness, and between various criminal justice agencies. In our first vignette study, as described in Chapter 5, we employed a 27-item version of the tool. For the current study, we used 44 items for the measurement of confidence (see Appendix 6). One of the reasons for using this more elaborate measure is that we wanted to present more items on the overall criminal justice system than was done in the previous version. Additionally, we want to achieve a better balance between items about effectiveness and those on procedural justice. The resulting items are evenly divided over police, the prosecutors, judges and the overall criminal justice system.[32] Respondents who are not familiar with the tasks of the criminal court are given the option to click on a pop-up screen for more information (see Appendix 6).

General concern over crime
Four items were used to measure general concern over crime (GCC) (De Keijser et al., 2007). In our first vignette study (Chapter 5), people who were more worried about crime were found to be more supportive of vigilantism. To examine whether this is also the case in the current sample and study, four items on GCC were included in the questionnaire (see Appendix 7). Three of these items were also used in our previous study; an extra one was added in order to reach a higher internal consistency. The GCC items were mixed in with the 44 items on confidence in the criminal justice system, as the contents are similar. This should additionally help to reduce response pattern bias, as the GCC items are worded in a different direction than most of the confidence items.

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31 Half of the respondents first responded to the confidence items (including the GCC items), followed by BJW-O items, and lastly the items on general support for vigilantism. The other half received this order in reverse.

32 Respondents were presented with nine confidence items at a time, consisting of three items about one criminal justice agency (e.g. police), followed by three items about another agency, and so on. Within these sets, we also mixed the effectiveness and procedural justice items as much as possible.

General support for vigilantism

People's reactions to a specific case of vigilantism (such as in a vignette) is expected to be influenced by how they view vigilantism in general. Eight items that aim to measure general support for vigilantism were therefore included (see Appendix 7). We decided to present a mix of items that touch upon various aspects of support for vigilantism, including the desire to prosecute vigilantes as well as approval of vigilantism. One of the items stems from a Dutch study (Ter Voert, 1997); the others are new.

Belief in a just world for others

Research suggests that people tend to differ in the extent to which they believe in a just world (see Chapter 6). We expect that the individual level of belief in a just world, particularly belief in a just world for others (BJW-O), will influence reactions to vigilantism in the BJW vigilantism event sequence. This scale has been associated with punitive attitudes and harsh reactions to the suffering of others (Sutton & Douglas, 2005). We constructed a BJW-O scale based on a Dutch translation (Lodewijkx, De Kwaadsteniet, Zomeren, & Petterson, 2005) of the original Belief in a Just World for Self (BJW-S) scale (Lipkus et al., 1996). As the reliability of the Dutch BJW-S scale was modest ($\alpha = 0.63$), we added three new items to the BJW-O measure. The final set of items can be found in Appendix 7.

7.6 Pilot study

The original set-up of the study was tested in a pilot study; the set-up that was described in the previous sections is the final set-up. In the next sections, the goals and main findings of the pilot study are presented. For current purposes, only those aspects of the pilot study that were relevant for choices about the final set-up of the final study are addressed. We therefore refrain from a detailed discussion of the hypotheses and findings.

7.6.1 Goals

The purpose of the pilot study was to pretest four main aspects of the study design. First, the reliability of the measures was examined. Although many of the vignette-related items were also used in our previous vignette study, there are also novel items related to just-world theory. The pilot was used to test these new items, in combination with the ones that were used before. Confidence in the criminal justice system and general concern over crime were not measured in the pilot study, as they were already tested in our first study (see Chapter 5).

A second goal of the pilot study was to check whether the newspaper article vignettes, presented in the www.nu.nl format, are realistic and severe enough to induce aversive states in our respondents and a subsequent use of cognitive strategies. Furthermore, we were able to test whether the aversive state resulting from reading the first vignette affects reactions to the second vignette. The pilot also made it possible to observe the

effects of adding a picture to Vignette 1. A picture of the crime scene was expected to make the precipitating crime more easily imaginable, leading to a higher aversive state. To test this, a no-picture variation was included in the pilot study for two of the conditions (B + B1; B + B3). This way it could also be ensured that the picture was not too shocking, resulting in missing answers or a respondent drop-out.

The pilot study also provided a chance to test the effects of the main experimental manipulations. The first experimental factor, type of precipitating event, had two variations in the pilot study: version A (traffic aggression) and version B (pedestrian crash). Version C was created only after the pilot study, as will be detailed in the next section. The effects of the second experimental factor (precipitating offender's sentence) on reactions to vigilantism were also pretested. To keep the pilot feasible, we decided against operationalizing all four sentencing types for Vignette 2. Table 7.3 gives an overview of the vignettes that were selected for the pilot study, and the respondent distribution. For version A, the acquittal, lenient and severe sentences were included; for version B the normal sentence and acquittal. Each of the four sentences was therefore incorporated at least once. One of the sentences (acquittal) was operationalized in both versions A and B, so that the effect of the precipitating event on support for vigilantism could be compared while holding the sentence constant.

The pilot study was furthermore used to test whether measuring people's aversive state and threat-reducing strategies on two occasions interferes with natural processes. One group of respondents was therefore presented with a control vignette (B2X), as described above in Section 7.4.4, in which all information was combined and followed by questions about the vigilantism act only.

Table 7.3 Selected vignettes (shaded) and respondent distribution

Version	Type of precipitating event	Precipitating offender sentence	N
Experimental vignettes			
A + A1	Traffic aggression	acquittal	40
A + A2	Traffic aggression	lenient	43
A + A3	Traffic aggression	normal	
A + A4	Traffic aggression	severe	42
B + B1	Pedestrian crash	acquittal	41
B + B1 (no picture)	Pedestrian crash	acquittal	42
B + B2	Pedestrian crash	lenient	
B + B3	Pedestrian crash	normal	44
B + B3 (no picture)	Pedestrian crash	normal	40
B + B4	Pedestrian crash	severe	
Control vignette			
B2X	Traffic aggression	lenient	42
Total			**334**

7.6.2 Data, results, implications

The sample for the pilot study consisted of 334 bachelor students who attended lectures at various departments of VU University Amsterdam in June 2009.[33] The mean age was 21 years; 40 percent of the sample was male. They were randomly allocated to one of the eight conditions.

Measures

The items measuring reactions to the precipitating event all formed reliable scales, ranging from .59 to .80 (Cronbach's α). The lowest Cronbach's α (.59) was found for the outrage at the precipitating offender, so an extra item was added to this set in the final study. The scales measuring reactions to vigilantism were also reliable, as they ranged from Cronbach's α = .80 to .86. The two piloted attitude scales, BJW-O (Cronbach's α = .84) and general support for vigilantism (Cronbach's α = 79), were also reliable and judged suitable for further use.

Reactions to Vignette 1

Both types of precipitating events resulted in high levels of outrage and victim empathy among our respondents. This suggests that the fictitious newspaper articles successfully induced an aversive state. Additionally, respondents were found to apply cognitive strategies in all conditions, with the expected preference for the punishment desire technique. This suggests that the victims were indeed perceived as innocent and that it was difficult to blame and derogate them. The presence or absence of a picture (in version B) did not affect these responses. As we deem that the picture at least adds to the credibility of the article, it was included for all the precipitating event vignettes in the final study (see Chapter 8).

Reactions to Vignette 2

In response to all versions of Vignette 2, respondents expressed outrage at vigilantism as well as empathy with its victim, albeit less than in the case of the precipitating event (Vignette 1). This matches our predictions. Blame and derogation was used more than was the case with the precipitating event vignette. This was also expected, as the victim of vigilantism is easier to blame and derogate due to his previous role as an offender. The experimental manipulation in the vigilantism vignettes did not affect the dependent variables as strongly as predicted. The sentence of the precipitating offender (experimental factor 2) did for instance influence outrage at vigilantism, as well as blame and derogation, but only in response to the traffic aggression precipitating event (A), and only when comparing the lenient sentence with the severe one. Furthermore, there were no effects on empathy with the victim of vigilantism in any of the conditions. In response to the vigilantism vignettes following version B (pedestrian crash), none of the dependent variables differed between the two sentencing variations (acquittal and

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normal). One explanation for these results is that differences between the sentences of the precipitating offender were not large enough. For the main study we therefore increased the sentences and made them more distinguishable from each other.[34]

A surprising finding is that outrage at vigilantism was relatively high in all conditions, even if the precipitating offender had previously been acquitted by the judge. A conceivable explanation for this is that the precipitating offense was not experienced as severe enough to justify a subsequent vigilantism act. To test whether this is the case, an extra precipitating crime was included in the main study that tends to evoke very emotional reactions: the sexual assault of a child (version C). Vigilantism in response to such a heinous crime was expected to lead to less outrage at the vigilante. To test this prediction in combination with the other experimental manipulation, both a lenient and a severe sentence condition were included in the main study. Only two out of four sentences were operationalized, as the extra precipitating event was mainly meant as an extra check of the influence of BJW responses to the precipitating event on support for vigilantism. It should be noted that it was not possible to present the exact same sentences as those given to the other two precipitating offenders, as a suspended driver's license was for instance not applicable for a sex offender. We nevertheless tried to make the severity of the sentencing levels as comparable as possible.

Control group
A comparison of the control condition (B2X) with its experimental counterpart (B2) revealed no differences for any of the reactions to vigilantism between those conditions. This suggests that our study design did not interfere with the naturally occurring BJW processes. To check for this in the main study, control groups were included there too.

7.7   Conclusion

In this chapter we presented a simplified BJW vigilantism event sequence, and subsequently operationalized it in an empirical study. We introduced a quasi-experimental design with two manipulations: the type of precipitating event and the formal sentence for the precipitating offender. We additionally presented the measures related to the vignettes in Part I of the study. Support for vigilantism was operationalized by measuring emotional reactions to vigilantism (e.g. outrage), the use of blame and derogation techniques (e.g. blaming the vigilantism victim), as well as desired punishment for the vigilante. We also introduced the attitude measures that make up Part II of the study, including an assessment of confidence in the criminal justice system.

After explaining the study design, we conducted a pilot study to pretest some of the main components. All in all, the findings of this pilot study suggest that our study design is suitable for current purposes. After making a few minor adjustments, the final study was carried out. In the next chapter we will present the sample, data collection and findings.

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34   The sentences that are presented in Table 7.1, and the corresponding vignettes in Appendix 3, are those that were used in the final study (Chapter 8).

8

Testing the propositions

8.1   Introduction

In this chapter we present the findings of the empirical study that was piloted in Chapter 7. In this study we test both the confidence hypothesis and the situation hypothesis, while using just-world theory as a tool to predict and measure public support for vigilantism.

Part I of the study is an operationalization of the BJW vigilantism event sequence, and consists of vignettes and corresponding questionnaire items. Part II consists of four attitude measures: General support for vigilantism, BJW-Others, General concern over crime, and Confidence in the criminal justice system. We start off with a description of the online panel that was used for the data collection, and describe the resulting sample. This is followed by scale construction. We subsequently formulate and test our hypotheses. The chapter ends with a reiteration of the findings and a discussion of the implications.

8.2   Online panel

Data were collected by CentERdata among a selection of members of the Longitudinal Internet Studies for the Social sciences (LISS) panel.[35] This online panel consists of 5000 households, comprising a total of nearly 9000 individuals, and is based on a true probability sample of households drawn from the population register by Statistics Netherlands. The reference population is the Dutch speaking population that permanently resides in the Netherlands. Children below 16 years of age are excluded. Households that could otherwise not participate are loaned equipment to provide access to the Internet via a broadband connection. Panel members complete online questionnaires every month of about 20 to 30 minutes in total, and are paid for each completed questionnaire.

Using the LISS panel allowed us to reach a representative sample of the Dutch population in terms of age, gender, educational level, ethnic background, household size and numerous other demographics. It additionally provided the opportunity to survey the same participants on two different occasions, for Parts I and II of the study. The online aspect of the panel additionally facilitated the random allocation of participants to the various conditions, and provided extra options for the presentation of the stimuli and survey questions.

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35   Funding for the establishment of the LISS panel was provided by the Netherlands Organization for Scientific Research (NWO). For more information about this panel, see www.centerdata.nl.

8.3   Sample and representativeness

For Part I of the study, approximately half of the LISS panel was approached (N = 4440) in September 2009. After two reminders, a total of 2707 participated; yielding a response rate of 61 percent for Part I.[36] The second part of the data collection took place in October 2009, for which 4383 LISS panel members were contacted. A total of 2705 participated after two reminders had been sent out, yielding a response rate of 62 percent for Part II.

Of the 2707 panel members who completed Part I of the survey, 88 percent (N = 2393) also participated in Part II. A total of 312 panel members only participated in Part II of the study. For the analyses, only those respondents were included who participated in both parts of the study, and who did not have too many missing values in either Part I or II. This resulted in a final sample of 2376 respondents, of whom 47 percent were male. Participants were between 19 and 89 years old, with a mean age of 53 years (*SD* = 13.9). The participation frequencies are presented in Table 8.1.

Table 8.1   Participation frequencies

	N
Part I (total)	2707
Part II (total)	2705
Part I *and* II	2393
Missings	17
Final sample	**2376**

The educational levels of the sample were representative of the Dutch population. Table 8.2 presents the allocation of respondents over the twelve conditions.[37]

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36   Due to a mistake in CentERdata programming, respondents in one condition (pedestrian crash + lenient sentence) were presented with the wrong vigilantism vignette. To replace this group, 314 respondents were randomly selected from those who had only participated in Part II (attitude measures). They were asked one month later to participate in Part I (vignettes), which yielded a response rate of 66 percent (N = 208). The fact that they participated in the opposite order (first Part II, then Part I) did not affect responses. Independent samples t-tests on the eight dependent variables resulted in no significant differences with respondents whose participation was in the original order (all *p* > .05).

37   The names of the conditions, such as A + A1, refer to Table 7.2 in Chapter 7.

Table 8.2   Respondent distribution

Condition	Type of precipitating crime	Precipitating offender's sentence	N
Experimental vignettes			
A + A1	Traffic aggression	acquittal	177
A + A2	Traffic aggression	lenient	202
A + A3	Traffic aggression	normal	190
A + A4	Traffic aggression	severe	205
B + B1	Pedestrian crash	acquittal	222
B + B2	Pedestrian crash	lenient	203
B + B3	Pedestrian crash	normal	176
B + B4	Pedestrian crash	severe	185
C + C2	Sex offense	lenient	197
C + C4	Sex offense	severe	215
Control vignettes			
B2X	Traffic aggression	lenient	204
C2X	Pedestrian crash	lenient	200
Total			**2376**

8.4   Scale construction

To prepare for the main analyses, summated scales were constructed based on responses to all Likert items. We will first describe the scales of Part I, which are based on responses to Vignette 1 and Vignette 2. We will subsequently construct scales based on the attitude items that were presented in Part II of the study.

8.4.1   Part I

Reactions to Vignette 1: precipitating event
In line with the theory, the items about Vignette 1 (precipitating crime) were summarized into four summated scales (see Table 8.3).[38] The first two scales are measures of the aversive state as induced by the precipitating event vignette. The first one consists of statements that express empathy with the victim of the precipitating event. The second scale covers items expressing outrage at the precipitating offender. In the questionnaire, respondents were given the opportunity to use three techniques to deal with these aversive states. The first two options were blame and derogation of the precipitating event victim, i.e. cognitive ways to *reduce* the injustice. These are summarized in one scale as a combined strategy. The third option was a cognitive attempt to *restore* the injustice by expressing desired punishment for the precipitating offender, as summarized in the final scale.

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38   One item was removed due to low item-total correlations: "When reading this article, I realize that what happened to X can also happen to me".

Table 8.3   Reactions to <u>Vignette 1</u> (precipitating event), four scales (N = 1972) [39]

Scale	Item
Aversive state	
Empathy precipitating crime victim Cronbach's α = .82 Mean *(SD)* = 6.16 *(.99)*	I find it terrible what happened to X I pity X I feel for X
Outrage at precipitating offender Cronbach's α = .70 Mean *(SD)* = 6.18 *(.89)*	Y's behavior is not justifiable in any way Y's behavior is morally reprehensible I am angry at Y I feel sympathy for Y *(reverse coded)* Y's behavior is understandable *(reverse coded)* I feel for Y *(reverse coded)*
Cognitive strategies	
Blame/derogation of precipitating crime victim Cronbach's α = .84 Mean *(SD)* = 1.91 *(1.11)*	X has herself/himself to thank for the car collision/sex crime X is to blame for the collision/sex crime X is unwise X is irresponsible X is stupid
Desired punishment for precipitating offender Cronbach's α = .83 Mean *(SD)* = 6.60 *(.76)*	Y should be prosecuted for what he did Y should do penance for his behavior The authorities should ignore the car collision/ sex crime *(reverse coded)* Y is to blame for the collision/sex crime

The four scales are overall in line with the solution of a principal axis factoring analysis (PAF), which was carried out without distinguishing between the experimental conditions.[40] We did nevertheless move three items for theoretical reasons.[41] The component loadings and Eigenvalues can therefore not be reported.

Reactions to Vignette 2: sentence + vigilantism
We next created summated scales based on respondents' reactions to Vignette 2, which describes the precipitating offender's sentence and the subsequent act of vigilantism. Four scales were constructed that parallel the four precipitating crime scales described

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39   The Cronbach's α values in the table are based on the whole sample (minus the control groups). The reliabilities for each separate precipitating version were comparable; the lowest Cronbach's α was .68.

40   The PAF was rotated obliquely; an orthogonal rotation resulted in the same solution. Respondents in the control conditions (N = 404) were excluded, as they did not answer any questions about the precipitating event.

41   This concerns the three reverse coded items in the outrage scale, which were originally part of the desired punishment component. We found them more suitable as part of an aversive state scale, and added them to the Outrage scale so that all six items measure people's reactions to the precipitating event.

above.[42] Table 8.4 shows the resulting four scales that together measure support for vigilantism. These are very similar to the PAF solution, but not completely as we moved three items to match the scales to the precipitating crime ones.[43] The Eigenvalues are therefore not reported.[44]

Table 8.4   Reactions to Vignette 2 (sentence + vigilantism), four scales (N = 2376) [45]

Scale	Item
Aversive state	
Empathy vigilantism victim Cronbach's α = .85 Mean *(SD)* = 3.42 *(1.61)*	I find it terrible that Y was beaten up I pity Y I feel for Y
Outrage at vigilante Cronbach's α = .86 Mean *(SD)* = 4.42 *(1.36)*	X's behavior is not justifiable in any way X's behavior is morally reprehensible I am angry at X I feel sympathy for X *(reverse coded)* X's behavior is understandable *(reverse coded)* X was completely right in beating up Y *(reverse coded)*
Cognitive strategies	
Blame/derogation of vigilantism victim Cronbach's α = .83 Mean *(SD)* = 4.42 *(1.51)*	Y has himself to thank for the assault Y is to blame for the assault Y is stupid Y is crazy Y is bad
Desired punishment for vigilante Cronbach's α = .88 Mean *(SD)* = 4.88 *(1.63)*	X should be prosecuted for what he did X should do penance for his behavior The authorities should ignore the assault *(reverse coded)* X is to blame for the assault

8.4.2   Part II

In this section we describe the summated scales from Part II of the study, which measure four different attitudes: General concern over crime, Confidence in the criminal justice system, General support for vigilantism, and Belief in a just world for others. All items were rated on a 7-point response scale (1 = fully disagree; 7 = fully agree).

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42   Two items were removed due to low item-total correlations: "When reading this article, I realize that what happened to Y can also happen to me" and "X is the victim of the situation, not the offender".

43   The moved items are "I am angry at X" (originally part of the empathy component), "Y is to blame for the assault" and "X was completely right in beating up Y" (both originally part of the punishment component).

44   The PAF was rotated obliquely in light of theoretical considerations; the orthogonal solution was very similar.

45   The Cronbach's alpha values for each separate version were comparable; the lowest value was .79.

General concern over crime

The four items measuring people's general concern over crime (GCC) form a reliable scale, which was supported by a one-factor solution in a PAF (see Table 8.5). As intended, adding a fourth item helped to improve the reliability (cf. Cronbach's α = . 60 in our first study). The average rating on the scale suggests that our respondents tend to be somewhat concerned about crime.

Table 8.5   General concern over crime, component and loadings (N = 2376)

Component	Item	Loading
General concern over crime	Total volume of crime in the Netherlands has, over the past years, increased strongly	.80
	Crime is a problem that causes me great concern	.67
λ = 2.16	In general, sentences for crimes in the Netherlands are too lenient	.65
Cronbach's α = .71 Mean *(SD)* = 5.10 *(1.05)*	Offenders in the Netherlands are currently punished more severely than they were ten years ago *(reverse coded)*	.35

Confidence in the criminal justice system

A total of 44 items was used to measure confidence in the criminal justice system (CJS). A PAF was carried out to test whether the summated scales should distinguish between the various CJS actors and/or between effectiveness and procedural justice. Based on the scree plot, Eigen values and interpretability, a two-factor solution was found to be the most suitable summary of the data (Table 8.6).[46] The two factors differ on the CJS-agency level: the first one consists of all items regarding judges, the public prosecution and the criminal justice system as a whole; the second one consists of all items on police. This is similar to what was found in our first study: people seem to regard police differently than they do the other criminal justice agencies. The distinction between procedural justice and effectiveness was not visible in the solution.

In line with the PAF solution, two summated scales were constructed.[47] The scale with items on judges, the prosecutors and the criminal justice system in general was labeled 'Confidence in courts and CJS'. It has a Cronbach's alpha of .97, and an average rating of 4.45 on a 7-point scale. The second scale was labeled 'Confidence in police'; it has a Cronbach's alpha of .90 and a mean rating of 4.30. In correspondence with our earlier findings, but in contrast to international patterns, confidence in police was again the lowest.

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46   PP = Public Prosecution; CJS = criminal justice system

47   Five items were removed due to low (below .30) loadings in the PAF: "Sometimes it is better to ignore the law and solve problems yourself"; "Citizens' rights are not protected well by the Public Prosecution"; "In the Dutch justice system, there is too much emphasis on the rights of perpetrators"; "On the condition that you don't harm anyone, it's acceptable to disobey a law"; "Police orders do not always need to be obeyed".

Table 8.6 Confidence in the criminal justice system, components and loadings (N=2376)

Items	Confidence in courts and CJS	Confidence in police
Judges do their job well	.90	-.07
Judges' verdicts are well deliberated	.90	-.15
Judges treat people fairly	.90	-.15
I respect judges	.86	-.14
Judges are trustworthy	.85	.02
You can count on judges to take decisions that are best for society	.79	.03
Judges deserve respect among citizens	.78	-.08
Sentence recommendations are well-deliberated by the Public Prosecution	.76	.06
The Public Prosecution deserves respect among citizens	.76	-.07
The Dutch criminal justice system functions properly	.75	.06
When a judge passes a low sentence, he will have a good reason for doing so	.75	.00
The Public Prosecution is trustworthy	.74	.13
The Dutch criminal justice system is trustworthy	.73	.14
Citizens can count on it that their case is properly dealt with in the Dutch CJS	.72	.09
The Dutch criminal justice system is fair	.71	.13
I respect the Dutch criminal justice system	.70	.14
You can count on the PP to take decisions that are best for society	.68	.18
Judges know what is going on in society	.68	.10
The Public Prosecution treats people fairly	.67	.22
The Public Prosecution does its job well	.67	.23
I respect the Public Prosecution	.67	.18
If the PP recommends a light sentence, it will have a good reason for that	.66	.07
The Dutch justice system succeeds at bringing criminals to justice	.54	.26
I trust the way in which laws in the Netherlands are maintained	.50	.34
The Public Prosecution manages to prosecute the right people	.50	.15
Judges are prejudiced *(reverse coded)*	.45	.05
Citizens' rights are not adequately protected by judges *(reverse coded)*	.44	.03
The Dutch criminal justice system is effective in combating crime	.44	.36
The Public Prosecution is prejudiced *(reverse coded)*	.41	.03

Items	Confidence in courts and CJS	Confidence in police
The police do their job well	.02	.87
The police are there when you need them	-.10	.86
The police take citizens seriously	.04	.82
The police are effective in combating crime	.04	.80
The police are trustworthy	.17	.71
The police care about the well-being of the everyday citizen	.03	.70
You can count on the police to take decisions that are best for society	-.22	.67
When the police decide not to arrest someone, they have a good reason not to	.21	.43
I do not respect the police *(reverse coded)*	.02	.40
Citizens' rights are not adequately protected by the police *(reverse coded)*	-.10	.36

General support for vigilantism

A set of eight items was used to measure respondents' general level of support for vigilantism (see Table 8.7). Together they form a reliable scale, confirmed by a one-factor solution in a PAF with an explained variance of 51 percent. The agreement ratings for each of the items can be found in Table A4 in Appendix 8. The mean rating on this scale ($M = 3.47$) suggests that overall respondents are negative to neutral about vigilantism. This implies that people are generally not supportive of the idea of fellow citizens taking the law into their own hands. For only two out of eight items (3 and 5 in Table A4) does the agreement with 'pro vigilantism' items considerably exceed the agreement with 'contra vigilantism' ones.

Table 8.7   General support for vigilantism, component and loadings (N = 2376)

Component	Item	Loading
General support for vigilantism λ = 4.04 Cronbach's α = .86 Mean *(SD)* = 3.47 *(1.20)*	If an offender is not sentenced by the legal system, I approve of it when a citizen takes the law into his own hands	.80
	If the government is not successful in their fight against crime, citizens are justified to take the law into their own hands*	.78
	Citizens should take the law into their own hands more frequently	.74
	Some cases of citizens taking the law into their own hands are justified	.67
	Citizens who take the law into their own hands should always be prosecuted *(reverse coded)*	.62
	If an offender is not sentenced by the legal system, I find it understandable for a citizen to take the law into his own hands	.60
	Citizens who take the law into their own hands form a danger to society *(reverse coded)*	.55
	Under no condition do I approve of people who take the law into their own hands *(reverse coded)*	.48

* *Based on Ter Voert (1997)*

Belief in a just world for others

Eleven items were used to measure Belief in a just world for others (BJW-O). A PAF resulted in one main component consisting of six items, and two small components which were difficult to interpret separately from the first one.[48] Based on low communalities and reliability analyses, two negatively formulated items that loaded onto the second factor were removed.[49] For theoretical reasons we subsequently forced a one-factor solution, which explains 45 percent of variance. Table 8.8 shows the principal component loadings of this solution and the nine items that form the resulting BJW-O scale. The mean score indicates that our respondents on average are neutral in their belief in a just world for others.

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48   An oblique rotation was used; rotating orthogonally yielded the same solution.
49   "I feel that the world is an unfair place" and "I feel that people are treated unfairly in life" (both new items).

Table 8.8   Belief in a just world for others, component and loadings (N = 2376)

Component	Item	Loading
Belief in a just world for others	I feel that people get in life what they are entitled to have	.78
	I feel that the world treats people fairly	.71
	I feel that people treat each other fairly in life	.69
λ = 4.01	I feel that people earn the rewards and punishments they get	.68
Cronbach's α = .84	I feel that the world is a fair place *(new)*	.60
Mean (*SD*) = 3.56 *(.88)*	I feel that people treat each other with the respect they deserve	.59
	I feel that people get in life what they deserve	.52
	I feel that people's efforts are noticed and rewarded	.48
	I feel that when people meet with misfortune, they have brought it upon themselves	.41

Scale construction: Summing up

Eight summated scales were constructed to be used as dependent variables. Four of these concern the reactions to Vignette 1 (precipitating event) and are mirrored by four scales that summarize reactions to Vignette 2 (sentence + vigilantism). The latter four scales together measure support for vigilantism: *empathy* with the vigilantism victim, *outrage* at the vigilante, *blame and derogation* of the vigilantism victim, and *desired punishment* for the vigilante. When empathy with the vigilantism victim is low, for instance, this can be seen as a way of supporting the act of vigilantism. Similarly, when people are not (very) outraged at the vigilante, or place a lot of blame on his victim, this can also be seen as a type of support. The same is true when people do not want the vigilante to be punished for what he did.

Additionally, five scales were constructed that will be used as independent variables. They are measures of the following attitudes: Confidence in the courts and CJS, Confidence in police, General concern over crime, General support for vigilantism and Belief in a just world for others. Table 8.9 shows the correlations between these five attitude scales. As expected, general support for vigilantism is negatively related to both measures of confidence in the criminal justice system. The more people confide in criminal justice agencies, the less supportive they are of those who take the law into their own hands. Additionally, in line with our predictions, people who are more worried about crime are more supportive of vigilantism: they most likely see it as a fitting alternative to a 'failing' justice system in certain cases. Interestingly, BJW-O does not correlate significantly with general support for vigilantism, and only marginally with GCC. We will further address this finding in the discussion section. BJW-O does correlate positively with confidence: stronger believers in a just world for others are more confident in both the police and the courts. Those who see the world as fair thus seem to include the criminal justice system in their judgment.

Table 8.9   Correlations between attitudes (N = 2376)

	General support for vigilantism	Belief in a just world for others	General concern over crime	Confidence in police
Belief in a just world for others	-.04	–	–	–
General concern over crime	.23**	-.09**	–	–
Confidence in police	-.37**	.21**	-.23**	–
Confidence in courts/CJS	-.46**	.24**	-.33**	.75**

*** p < .01*

8.5   Hypotheses

We first present our expectations related to the *situation hypothesis*: the effects of the two experimental factors on support for vigilantism. We will first discuss our hypotheses related to experimental factor 1, the precipitating crime event, followed by those corresponding to experimental factor 2, the precipitating offender's sentence. We secondly formulate a number of predictions in light of the *confidence hypothesis*: the expected influence of attitudes, including confidence in the criminal justice system, on how people view vigilantism in the vignette. This is followed by a plan of analysis. Lastly, reactions to Vignette 1 (precipitating event), the control conditions as well as the order effects will be discussed in a section on manipulation checks.

Experimental factor 1: precipitating crime type
The first set of hypotheses concerns the effects of the precipitating crime type on reactions to the second vignette: sentence + vigilantism. The reactions consist of two aversive state variables and two variables that measure the use of cognitive strategies. Aversive state was measured through *outrage* at the vigilante and *empathy* with the vigilantism victim. The cognitive strategies were *blame and derogation* and *desired punishment* for the vigilante.

Experimental factor 1 was operationalized by presenting three types of precipitating events: traffic aggression, a pedestrian crash, and a sex offense. As sex offenders, especially pedophiles, generally evoke very emotional public reactions, we hypothesize that when he becomes the victim of a vigilante, outrage and empathy levels will be lower than when the two intoxicated car drivers are victimized. Of the latter two, aversive state will probably be lowest when the driver who injured the young girl becomes the victim of a vigilante. The other driver injured an adult male instead of a young girl, and his victim can be seen as having partially provoked his fate by raising his fist. Vigilantism against the latter offender will lead to a higher aversive state. The hypotheses can thus be formulated as follows:

1A: Empathy will be lowest for the sex offender who becomes the victim of vigilantism, followed by the car driver who hits a pedestrian, and highest for the victimized traffic aggression offender.

1B: Outrage will be lowest at the vigilante who assaults the sex offender, followed by the vigilante who assaults the driver who hit a pedestrian, and highest at the vigilante who assaults the aggressive car driver.

The aversive state in response to the vigilantism act will also result in the use of cognitive strategies. Due to the fact that the victims of vigilantism have previously committed a crime, we expect it to be relatively easy to blame and derogate them. As a result of this, there will be relatively less need for the third strategy: desired punishment for the vigilante. Regarding the effect of the precipitating event, we expect that the victimized sex offender will be blamed and derogated the most, and the traffic aggression offender the least. Desired punishment will follow this pattern. The resulting hypotheses are as follows:

1C: Blame and derogation of the vigilantism victim will be negatively related to desired punishment for the vigilante, in all conditions.

1D: Blame and derogation of the victim of vigilantism who is a sex offender will be highest, followed by the car driver who hit a pedestrian, and lowest for the traffic aggression offender.

1E: Desired punishment will be lowest for the vigilante who assaults the sex offender, followed by the vigilante who assaults the driver who hit a pedestrian, and highest for the vigilante who assaults the aggressive car driver.

Experimental factor 2: <u>precipitating offender's sentence</u>
We next discuss our expectations concerning the sentence for the precipitating offender. We specified four sentences: acquittal, a lenient sentence, a normal and a severe sentence. Only two of these were operationalized in the sex crime condition: a lenient and severe sentence.

In line with the theoretical framework, we expect that the severity of the precipitating offender's sentence will be positively correlated to the aversive state resulting from a subsequent vigilantism act. In other words, the more severely the precipitating offender is sentenced by the authorities, the more upset people will be when he is subsequently also "punished" by a vigilante. These are the corresponding hypotheses:

2A: Empathy with the victim of vigilantism will be lowest in the acquittal condition, followed by the lenient and normal sentencing types, and highest in the severe sentence condition.

2B: Outrage at the vigilante will be lowest in the acquittal condition, followed by the lenient and normal sentencing types, and highest in the severe sentence condition.

To deal with the aversive state that occurs in response to the vigilantism act, people will be inclined once again to use cognitive strategies. We expect that the cognitive strategy of blame and derogation will be most prominent in the acquittal condition, as an unpunished precipitating offender is easier to dislike and blame for his fate. The punishment desire technique will vary accordingly, with the lowest desired punishment for the vigilante who assaults the acquitted precipitating offender. This leads to the following hypotheses:

2C: Blame and derogation of the victim of vigilantism who was acquitted will be highest, followed by the lenient and normal sentencing types, and lowest in the severe sentence condition.

2D: Desired punishment will be lowest for the vigilante who assaults the acquitted precipitating offender, followed by the lenient and normal sentencing types, and highest in the severe sentence condition.

Attitudes

One month after completing Part I, all respondents in the final sample also participated in Part II of the study. Part II consisted of four questionnaires, measuring Confidence in the criminal justice system, General concern over crime, General support for vigilantism and Belief in a just world for others (BJW-O). We will now formulate our expectations of the relations between these attitudes and respondents' reactions to vigilantism in the vignette.

Confidence in the criminal justice system

Earlier we constructed two confidence scales: Confidence in police, and Confidence in the courts and CJS. As these scales are positively and strongly correlated (.73), our hypotheses apply equally to both scales (together labeled as 'Confidence in the criminal justice system'). In line with the findings from our first study, we expect a negative relation between confidence in the justice system and support for vigilantism. People who have high confidence are thought to be more likely to consider criminal justice procedures as legitimate and adequate, and will therefore react negatively to vigilantism. This also applies to the case of acquittal, as the judge has a procedural reason for not punishing the precipitating offender. People with high confidence in the criminal justice system are not expected to see vigilantism as an acceptable alternative to legal procedures in any of the conditions. They will therefore be less likely to blame and derogate the victim of vigilantism, and more likely to react through severe punishment of the vigilante. This leads to the following hypotheses:

3A: Confidence in the criminal justice system will be positively related to empathy with the vigilantism victim.

3B: Confidence in the criminal justice system will be positively related to outrage at the vigilante.

3C: Confidence in the criminal justice system will be negatively related to blame and derogation of the vigilantism victim.

3D: Confidence in the criminal justice system will be positively related to desired punishment for the vigilante.

General concern over crime

An attitude in our study which is related to the confidence measures is general concern over crime. In line with our findings from the first study, we expect people who are more worried about crime to be more supportive of vigilantism. In their view, vigilantism can be seen as a fitting alternative to legal procedures for dealing with crime. They will thus be more likely to use blame and derogation techniques in an attempt to deny the injustice, and will be less likely to try to reduce the injustice through a desire for punishment. Our hypotheses are therefore as follows:

3E: General concern over crime will be negatively related to empathy with the vigilantism victim.

3F: General concern over crime will be negatively related to outrage at the vigilante.

3G: General concern over crime will be positively related to blame and derogation of the vigilantism victim.

3H: General concern over crime will be negatively related to desired punishment for the vigilante.

General support for vigilantism

General support for vigilantism is expected to correlate positively with measures of specific support for vigilantism in our study. In other words, the more people are generally favorable toward the idea of taking the law into one's own hands, the more likely they are to express specific support for vigilantism in the vignettes. We for instance expect them to have a preference for the blame and derogation technique to deal with the injustice, instead of wanting to restore the injustice through punishment. This leads to the following hypotheses:

3I: General support for vigilantism will be negatively related to empathy with the vigilantism victim in the vignette.

3J: General support for vigilantism will be negatively related to outrage at the vigilante in the vignette.

3K: General support for vigilantism will be positively related to blame and derogation of the vigilantism victim in the vignette.

3L: General support for vigilantism will be negatively related to desired punishment for the vigilante in the vignette.

Belief in a just world for others
We have specific expectations with regards to the effect of BJW-O on the four measures of support for vigilantism across the conditions. Overall, without distinguishing between the two experimental factors, we expect that BJW-O will be negatively related to aversive state resulting from the act of vigilantism. We expect that those who strongly endorse the idea that the world is a just place where people get what they deserve and deserve what they get, will perceive the act of vigilantism as 'punishment deserved'. It will be reasoned that the victim of vigilantism deserves his fate due to the precipitating crime that he previously committed. In line with this, we expect their use of cognitive strategies to be relatively low, as they will not have as much aversive state (if any at all) to reduce. The above considerations lead us to the following four hypotheses:

3M: Belief in a just world for others will be negatively related to empathy with the vigilantism victim in the vignette.

3N: Belief in a just world for others will be negatively related to outrage at the vigilante in the vignette.

3O: Belief in a just world for others will be negatively related to blame and derogation of the vigilantism victim in the vignette.

3P: Belief in a just world for others will be negatively related to desired punishment for the vigilante in the vignette.

8.6   Plan of analysis

We will start by conducting a two-way analysis of variance (ANOVA) on each of the four measures of support for vigilantism: *empathy* with the vigilantism victim, *outrage* at the vigilante, *blame and derogation* of the victim of vigilantism and *desired punishment* for the vigilante. This will give a first indication of the main effects of the two experimental variables, as well as of their possible interaction. Next, we will conduct ordinary least squares (OLS) hierarchical regressions in order to examine the relative effects of the experimental manipulation in addition to the role of attitudes and control variables. These regression analyses will be carried out for each of the four dependent variables, and will each consist of three models. In the first regression model, only the effects of the experimental conditions on the dependent variable will be examined. In the second model, attitudes are added; the third model additionally includes control variables.

In our discussion of the effects of the experimental conditions, we will refer to results of the two-way ANOVAs where necessary to test the hypotheses. The effect

of the second experimental variable, the precipitating offender's sentence, will be analyzed separately for the sex offense condition. The reason for this is that the design is unbalanced: the two sex offense vignettes only have two sentencing levels (lenient and severe), and they also differ slightly in the operationalization.

The experimental conditions were allocated randomly to respondents. However, as this is not the case for attitudes and control variables, correlations may exist between the different blocks of variables. This means that the impact of the independent variables may be affected by the order in which they were entered into the regression analyses. Differences in explained variance between the different models may thus not give a reliable estimate of their relative impact. To deal with this problem, sheaf coefficients (Heise, 1972) were calculated. By doing so, the combined direct effect of two or more independent variables on the dependent variable can be estimated (Whitt, 1986). In other words, each sheaf coefficient represents a summary measure of the independent variables in each block. These standardized measures range from 0 (no effect on the dependent variable) to 1 (a factor that explains the entire dependent variable).

Lastly, in order to get an indication of the effects of specific independent variables, the beta (β) values will be presented. These standardized values allow for comparisons between variables even if they have different units of measurement.

8.7   Manipulation checks

This section describes three manipulation checks that were carried out before conducting the main analyses. The first one concerns reactions to the precipitating event. We will examine the responses to Vignette 1 to check whether we successfully induced an aversive state, and subsequent uses of cognitive strategies. The means are compared using analyses of variance (ANOVAs) to test the influence of experimental factor 1, precipitating crime type, on reactions to the vignette. The second manipulation check involves the control conditions. As explained in the study set-up in Chapter 7, two control groups were created to check whether posing questions after the precipitating crime vignette interferes with naturally occurring BJW processes. ANOVAs will be used to compare responses between the two control conditions and the corresponding experimental conditions. Lastly, a manipulation check will be conducted on order effects of the attitude measures in Part II. The order in which the attitude measures were presented was varied, and independent samples t-tests will be carried out to check whether this had any influence on responses.

8.7.1 Reactions to precipitating crime vignette

We first examined whether the precipitating event vignettes successfully induced an aversive state in our respondents. The average ratings of all four dependent variables were compared for each of the three precipitating events (see Table 8.10).

Table 8.10   Mean scores for dependent variables, per precipitating event (N = 1972)

Scale (overall mean)	Precipitating event	Mean *(SD)*
Empathy precipitating crime victim (6.16) [a]	Traffic aggression (N=774)	5.77 *(1.08)*
	Pedestrian crash (N=786)	6.36 *(.90)*
	Sex offense (N=412)	6.52 *(.70)*
Outrage at precipitating offender (6.18) [b]	Traffic aggression (N=774)	6.08 *(.93)*
	Pedestrian crash (N=786)	6.14 *(.91)*
	Sex offense (N=412)	6.47 *(.71)*
Blame/derogation precipitating crime victim (1.91) [c]	Traffic aggression (N=774)	2.55 *(1.22)*
	Pedestrian crash (N=786)	1.55 *(.83)*
	Sex offense (N=412)	1.36 *(.70)*
Desired punishment precipitating offender (6.60) [c]	Traffic aggression (N=774)	6.49 *(.87)*
	Pedestrian crash (N=786)	6.63 *(.72)*
	Sex offense (N=412)	6.78 *(.58)*

[a] = Differences between sex offense and pedestrian crash significant at $p < .05$; the rest significant at $p < .001$.
[b] = Difference between sex offense and the other two events significant at $p < .001$. Pedestrian crash and traffic aggression do not differ from one another, $p = .36$.
[c] = All differences significant at $p < .01$.

The means of empathy and outrage in the table show that we indeed managed to induce an aversive state in our respondents. People highly empathized with the victim and were highly outraged at all three precipitating offenders, as all but one of the average ratings were above 6 on a 7-point-scale. The lowest (yet still relatively high) average was found for empathy with the traffic aggression victim. This is likely due to the fact that the victim may be seen to have slightly 'provoked' the precipitating crime by raising his fist to the car driver.

The use of cognitive strategies was examined next. We expected a relatively low use of the blame and derogation techniques, as we tried to convince our respondents that the victims were innocent in each of the precipitating crime vignettes. As a result, we expected that respondents would mostly turn to strategy of desiring punishment for the precipitating offender. Table 8.10 shows that this is indeed the case. The mean level of blame and derogation of the precipitating crime victim ($M = 1.91$) is at the low end of the 7-point scale. This suggests that we were successful in creating vignettes that portray relatively innocent victims. Respondents seemed to have trouble blaming and derogating the precipitating crime victim, and tried to reduce their aversive state by punishing the precipitating offender instead. Indeed the mean level of punishment of the precipitating offender was near the high end of the scale (6.60). To further test this, we examined the relation between the uses of the two cognitive strategies. The correlation was -.39 for traffic aggression, -.55 for the pedestrian crime, and -.54 for the

sex offense (all significant at $p < .01$). In other words, the more respondents were able to use the blame and derogation strategy, the less they consorted to desiring punishment.

The victim of traffic aggression was blamed and derogated the most, and the sex offense victim the least. In other words, in the condition with the most innocent victim, cognitive techniques were used the least, and vice versa. The fact that the traffic aggression victim was a male, compared to a 9-year old girl in the other versions, may explain why the largest difference was found between traffic aggression and the other two.

The responses to the yes/no question, regarding whether the precipitating offender deserved to be punished, also matches this pattern. Nearly all respondents (98 percent on average) answered affirmatively. Those who did *not* find the offender deserving of punishment were mostly found in the traffic aggression condition (22 people), followed by 14 for the pedestrian crash, and 2 in the sex offense condition. Those respondents who did want to punish the precipitating offender, were asked to express their desired punishment in so-called penalty points on a scale of 0 (none) to 20 (maximum). The number of penalty points differed significantly overall, $F(2, 1929) = 9.35$, $p < .001$. Post-hoc analyses revealed that only the difference between the traffic aggression offender (13.9) and the driver who hit the pedestrian (15.0) was significant, $p < .001$. The sex offender received an average of 14.3 points.[50]

8.7.2 Control conditions

Respondents in the two control conditions were presented with one vignette in which information about the precipitating event, precipitating offender's sentence, as well as the act of vigilantism, was combined. They subsequently only responded to questions about the vigilantism act. In this section we compare the responses between the control conditions and the matching experimental ones to test the effect of vignette presentation on the responses.

We first compared version B2 (traffic aggression and a lenient sentence) with its control version, B2X. Independent samples t-tests were used to examine the differences between the mean ratings. Due to the multiple comparisons, we applied a significance level of .01 in order to reduce the chances of making a Type I error. There were no significant differences for outrage at the vigilante, $t(405) = .95$, $p = .33$. Blame and derogation of the victim of vigilantism did not differ either, $t(405) = -1.7$, $p = .09$, nor did desired punishment for the vigilante, $t(405) = 1.63$, $p = .10$. Penalty points were not affected by the vignette presentation either, $t(293) = .12$, $p = .91$. The only significant effect that was found was for empathy with the vigilante, $t(405) = 3.48$, $p = .00$. Respondents who received separate vignettes were more empathetic with the vigilante than those in the control condition.

Before further discussing this finding, we will take a look at the other pair of conditions: C2 and C2X. These both concern vigilantism against a sex offender who

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50   The sex offender received less penalty points than one might expect, which may be due to the ambiguity of the crime situation. The vignette states that the girl is sexually assaulted, but does not specify whether it concerns a rape. For this reason, people may not have given higher numbers of penalty points.

received a lenient sentence. Independent samples t-tests showed no effect of vignette presentation on outrage at vigilantism, t(395) = 1.19, p = .24, nor on empathy with the vigilantism victim, t(395) = 1.83, p = .07. Blame and derogation of the vigilantism victim did not differ either between the two conditions, t(395) = -1.31, p = .19, nor did desired punishment for the vigilante, t(395) = -.18, p = .86. Penalty points once again did not differ between the groups, t(223) = 1.17, p = .25.

Out of the eight comparisons between experimental and control groups, one was found to be significant: empathy with the vigilante in the traffic aggression conditions. Although we could speculate about possible causes, it seems to be an exception to the rule. Moreover, the scale only consists of three items, compared to eighteen that were used in total to measure reactions to vigilantism. This means that it will have a relative small impact, if any, on our interpretations. We therefore conclude that we will be able to take our findings regarding the experimental conditions at face value.

8.7.3 Order effects in attitude measures

The last manipulation check concerns possible order effects in the attitude measures. Half of the sample first received questions about the criminal justice system (including GCC items), followed by BJW-O, and lastly items measuring general support for vigilantism. This order was reversed for the other (random) half of the sample. Using independent samples t-tests, no order effect was found for general support for vigilantism, t(2374) = 1.42, p > .10, nor for general concern over crime, t(2374) = .94, p > .10. Confidence in the CJS and courts was not affected by presentation order either, t(2374) = -1.54, p > .10, nor was confidence in police, t(2374) = -1.09, p > .10. We did not find an order effect on the middle part of the questionnaire (BJW-O) either, t(2374) = -2.39, p > .01.

8.8   Reactions to sentence + vigilantism vignettes

We conducted ordinary least squares (OLS) regression analyses to examine the effects of the situational characteristics (situation hypothesis), as well as attitudes (confidence hypothesis) and a number of control variables, on support for vigilantism in the vignette. These analyses were carried out for each of the four measures of support: *empathy* with the vigilantism victim, *outrage* at the vigilante, *blame and derogation* of the vigilantism victim, and *desired punishment* for the vigilante.

Before conducting the regression analyses, we carried out a two-way ANOVA for each of the four dependent variables to test for main effects and interactions (see Table A5 in Appendix 8). The main effects were significant for all reactions to vigilantism, except for the effect of precipitating offender sentence level on blame and derogation. The impact of the type of precipitating event was higher than the effect of the sentencing level for all four measures of support. The findings are further discussed below, in our description of the regression analyses. No interaction effects were found; the effects of the two factors are independent from one another for each of the four variables.

Table 8.11   Reactions to vigilantism, per precipitating event type (N = 1972)

Scale (overall mean)	Precipitating event	**Mean** (SD)
Empathy vigilantism victim (3.57) [a]	Traffic aggression (N=774)	4.20 *(1.46)*
	Pedestrian crash (N=786)	3.40 *(1.57)*
	Sex offense (N=412)	2.69 *(1.43)*
Outrage at vigilante (4.53) [a]	Traffic aggression (N=774)	5.12 *(1.17)*
	Pedestrian crash (N=786)	4.33 *(1.25)*
	Sex offense (N=412)	3.78 *(1.27)*
Blame/derogation vigilantism victim (4.32) [b]	Traffic aggression (N=774)	3.94 *(1.40)*
	Pedestrian crash (N=786)	4.12 *(1.45)*
	Sex offense (N=412)	5.40 *(1.26)*
Desired punishment vigilante (4.99) [a]	Traffic aggression (N=774)	5.54 *(1.37)*
	Pedestrian crash (N=786)	4.90 *(1.54)*
	Sex offense (N=412)	4.13 *(1.68)*

[a] = All differences significant at $p < .001$.
[b] = The difference between traffic aggression and pedestrian crash is significant at $p < .05$; the rest at $p < .001$.

Table 8.11 shows the ratings on the dependent variables per precipitating event (experimental factor 1). In Table 8.12, the responses to vigilantism are presented per level of the precipitating offender's sentence (experimental factor 2). The means for the sex crime condition are presented separately, in Table 8.13.

As mentioned above, the reason for this separate presentation is that there are two rather than four sentencing levels for the sex offense vignette, so they are not directly comparable. For this same reason, we did not identify the two experimental factors separately in the regression models (see Tables 8.14 – 8.17). Instead, nine experimental conditions were entered into the models as one block of variables, and one condition (traffic aggression, acquittal) served as the reference category. By doing so, the effects of the two experimental manipulations can be examined directly by comparing the *b*-values of the various conditions in the regression tables. By adding or subtracting the *b* values to the constant (i.e. the reference condition) in each of the regression tables, average ratings for the various conditions can be calculated. For instance, in Table 8.14, the level of empathy for the leniently sentenced sex offender in Model 1 is calculated by adding 3.79 (constant) to -1.16 (*b*), resulting in an empathy rating of 2.63. This mean rating corresponds to the one presented in Table 8.13.

The asterisks behind the *b*-values express the significance of differences between each condition and the reference category. They also apply to the *β* (beta) values in the final column of each model; we did not specify them separately. Importantly, the asterisks do not indicate the outcome of the two-way ANOVAs on the experimental manipulations; those significance values are reported separately where relevant.

*Table 8.12   Reactions to vigilantism, per sentencing level, for the <u>traffic aggression</u> and
                <u>pedestrian crash</u> conditions (N = 1560)*

Scale (overall mean)	Type of sentence	Mean *(SD)*
Empathy vigilantism victim (3.80) [a]	Acquittal (N=399)	3.33 *(1.56)*
	Lenient (N=405)	3.88 *(1.51)*
	Normal (N=366)	3.96 *(1.57)*
	Severe (N=390)	4.05 *(1.55)*
Outrage at vigilante (4.73) [b]	Acquittal (N=399)	4.33 *(1.22)*
	Lenient (N=405)	4.74 *(1.29)*
	Normal (N=366)	4.88 *(1.28)*
	Severe (N=390)	4.97 *(1.22)*
Blame/derogation vigilantism victim (4.03) [c]	Acquittal (N=399)	4.14 *(1.49)*
	Lenient (N=405)	4.08 *(1.37)*
	Normal (N=366)	3.95 *(1.43)*
	Severe (N=390)	3.94 *(1.40)*
Desired punishment vigilante (5.23) [d]	Acquittal (N=399)	4.83 *(1.54)*
	Lenient (N=405)	5.23 *(1.47)*
	Normal (N=366)	5.41 *(1.46)*
	Severe (N=390)	5.44 *(1.42)*

[a] = Differences between the acquittal version and the other three are significant at $p < .01$; the rest is not.
[b] = Differences between the acquittal version and the other three are significant at $p < .001$, and between the lenient and severe sentencing conditions at $p < .001$. Other differences are not significant.
[c] = None of the differences are significant, $F(3, 1556) = 1.89$, $p = .13$
[d] = Differences between the acquittal version and the other three are significant at $p < .001$; the rest is not.

Table 8.13   Reactions to vigilantism, per sentencing type, for the <u>sex offense</u> condition (N = 412)

Scale (mean)	Type of sentence	Mean *(SD)*
Empathy vigilantism victim (2.69)	Lenient (N=197)	2.63 *(1.44)*
	Severe (N=215)	2.74 *(1.43)*
Outrage at vigilante (3.78)	Lenient (N=197)	3.70 *(1.32)*
	Severe (N=215)	3.85 *(1.22)*
Blame/derogation victim vigilantism (5.40)	Lenient (N=197)	5.39 *(1.27)*
	Severe (N=215)	5.42 *(1.24)*
Desired punishment vigilante (4.13)	Lenient (N=197)	4.01 *(1.66)*
	Severe (N=215)	4.25 *(1.69)*

Note: the differences between the lenient and severe sentencing levels are not significant for any of the four measures of support for vigilantism.

Empathy with the victim of vigilantism
Table 8.11 reveals that the levels of empathy with the victim of vigilantism are not very high, as they lie below or at the midpoint of the 7-point answer scale. Respondents thus did not seem very empathetic toward the victim of vigilantism. Even when the precipitating offender was given a severe sentence, people did not feel so bad for the fact that he was beaten up by a vigilante.

Table 8.14 shows the outcome of the regression analyses for empathy with the victim of vigilantism. The first model tests the effects of the experimental conditions. In the second model, the attitudes are added. The last model includes a number of control variables. All three models will be presented for each of the four dependent variables, followed by a section in which the relative effects of the independent variables are discussed.

Model 1: experimental conditions
We will first take a look at the effects of the first experimental variable, the type of precipitating event, on *empathy*. As expected, empathy was found to be the lowest for the sex offender who is assaulted by a vigilante, and highest for the victimized traffic aggression offender. Post-hoc analyses using Tukey revealed all differences between the means to be significant at $p < .01$. Hypothesis 1A is thereby confirmed.

Regarding the second experimental factor, Tables 8.12 and 8.13 reveal that the level of empathy did not necessarily differ between the sentencing levels. In the traffic aggression and pedestrian crash conditions, a one-way ANOVA revealed that the level of empathy with the vigilantism victim differed overall, $F(3, 1556) = 17.66, p < .001$, but only when comparing the acquittal version to the other three (all $p < .01$). As expected though, empathy with the vigilantism victim was the lowest in the acquittal condition. Hypothesis 2A was thereby partially confirmed. Within the sex offense condition, no differences were found at all between the two sentencing levels, $t(410) = .76, p = .45$.

Model 2: adding attitudes
We next examined the effects of attitudes on empathy with the victim of vigilantism, which are included in the second model in Table 8.14. We predicted that confidence in the criminal justice system would be positively related to empathy with the vigilantism victim. Confidence in the courts and CJS indeed shows this pattern, but confidence in police was not found to influence empathy at all. This matches the findings from our first study, and partially confirms Hypothesis 3A. A measure that is related to confidence, namely general concern over crime, was found to influence empathy in the expected direction. In line with hypothesis 3E, people who tend to be worried about crime had relatively less empathy for the victim of vigilantism in the vignette, although the beta value is not particularly high. Confirmation was also found for hypothesis 3I, as people who are more supportive of vigilantism in general expressed less empathy for the victim of vigilantism. Lastly, BJW-O was not found to affect empathy for the vigilantism victim. Hypothesis 3M was therefore rejected. We will further address this finding in the discussion.

Table 8.14   Predictors of <u>empathy</u> with the vigilantism victim (N = 1972)

Independent variables	Model 1		Model 2		Model 3		
	b (SE)	β	b (SE)	β	b (SE)	β	
Constant							
Traffic aggression – acquittal	3.79** (.11)		4.21** (.33)		4.34** (.34)		
Experimental conditions							
Traffic aggression – lenient	.50** (.15)	.09	.53** (.14)	.10	.54** (.14)	.10	⎫
Traffic aggression – normal	.56** (.16)	.10	.49** (.14)	.09	.51** (.14)	.09	⎪
Traffic aggression – severe	.55** (.15)	.10	.53** (.14)	.10	.55** (.14)	.10	⎪
Pedestrian crash – acquittal	-.84** (.15)	-.17	-.81** (.14)	-.16	-.81** (.14)	-.16	⎬ Sheaf
Pedestrian crash – lenient	-.31* (.15)	-.06	-.30* (.14)	-.06	-.30* (.14)	-.06	= .38**
Pedestrian crash – normal	-.24 (.16)	-.04	-.21 (.15)	-.04	-.20 (.15)	-.04	⎪
Pedestrian crash – severe	-.07 (.16)	-.01	-.14 (.15)	-.03	-.13 (.14)	-.02	⎪
Sex crime – lenient	-1.16** (.15)	-.22	-1.12** (.14)	-.21	-1.12** (.14)	-.21	⎪
Sex crime – severe	-1.05** (.15)	-.21	-1.06** (.14)	-.21	-1.04** (.14)	-.20	⎭
Attitudes							
General support for vigilantism			-.26** (.03)	-.19	-.26** (.03)	-.19	⎫
Belief in a just world for others			-.03 (.04)	-.02	-.03 (.04)	-.02	⎪ Sheaf
General concern over crime			-.13** (.03)	-.09	-.10** (.03)	-.07	⎬ = .33**
Confidence in courts & CJS			.23** (.05)	.14	.23** (.05)	.15	⎪
Confidence in police			.05 (.05)	.03	.05 (.05)	.03	⎭
Control variables							
Age					-.01** (.00)	-.06	⎫ Sheaf
Gender					-.17** (.06)	-.05	⎬ = .09**
Educational level					.17* (.07)	.05	⎭
R²	.15		.27		.28		
F for change in *R²*	38.48**		62.79**		6.80**		

* p < .05; ** p < .01

Model 3: adding control variables

The third regression model in Table 8.14 adds a number of control variables. Male participants in our study expressed less empathy with the victim of vigilantism than their female counterparts. This parallels the result of Briceño-Léon et al. (2006), who found more support for vigilantism among men (see Chapter 3). Additionally, we found highly educated respondents to be more empathetic. Briceño-Léon et al. (2006) also found less support for vigilantism among men in Madrid (the opposite was found in Latin America), as did Tankebe (2009) in Ghana. The effect of age is also significant, but it is too small to be interpreted.

Relative effects

As explained in the Plan of Analysis, we calculated sheaf coefficients (Heise, 1972) to study the relative impact of each block of variables. The sheaf coefficients next to Table 8.14 reveal that all three blocks have a significant effect on empathy. The experimental factors and attitudes have an equally large impact; the control variables only have a minor one.

The beta values reveal that general support for vigilantism has the largest impact of all independent variables on empathy, with the exception of the two sex crime conditions. The next largest beta value is the pedestrian crash condition in which the offender was acquitted, followed by confidence in the courts and CJS. The impact of the latter is larger than all but three of the experimental conditions. The beta values furthermore reveal that respondents' confidence in police does not affect how much they empathize with the victim of vigilantism in the vignette.

Outrage at vigilante

We next analyzed another measure of support for vigilantism, which is the second indication of people's aversive state: *outrage at the vigilante*. The mean scores of the scales in Table 8.11 reveal that levels of outrage at the vigilante overall are higher than levels of empathy with his victim. In other words, our respondents were more upset about the vigilante and his behavior than that they felt pity for his victim. The findings of our regression analysis on outrage can be found in Table 8.15, and are discussed below.

Model 1: experimental conditions

Regarding the first experimental factor, least outrage was found when the vigilante attacked the sex offender, and most in the traffic aggression condition. Post-hoc analyses showed all differences to be significant at $p < .001$; thereby confirming hypothesis 1B. Concerning the second experimental factor, we first looked at the traffic aggression and pedestrian crash conditions. Post-hoc analyses reveal that the lowest level of outrage, which was found in the acquittal condition, differs significantly ($p < .001$) from each of the other three sentencing conditions. As expected, people were not as upset about the vigilante if his victim, the precipitating offender, had previously been acquitted of his crime. A significant difference in outrage was also found between the lenient and severe sentence conditions ($p < .001$), in the expected direction. Differences between the other sentences were not significant, so hypothesis 2B was only partially confirmed. With regards to the sex offense condition, differences between the two sentencing levels (normal and severe) were not significant, t(410) = - 1.14, $p = .26$. Outrage at the vigilante was low in both conditions. In other words, the sentence received by the sex offender did not influence the amount of outrage at the vigilante who assaulted him.

Model 2: adding attitudes

The second model shows that general support for vigilantism again has the largest impact of all attitudes. In line with hypothesis 3J, people who are generally more

Table 8.15   Predictors of <u>outrage</u> at the vigilante (N = 1972)

Independent variables	Model 1		Model 2		Model 3		
	b (SE)	**β**	**b (SE)**	**β**	**b (SE)**	**β**	
Constant							
Traffic aggression – acquittal	4.76** (.09)		5.63** (.26)		5.66** (.27)		
Experimental conditions							
Traffic aggression – lenient	.40** (.12)	.09	.45** (.11)	.10	.45** (.11)	.10	⎫
Traffic aggression – normal	.53** (.13)	.12	.46** (.11)	.10	.47** (.11)	.10	
Traffic aggression – severe	.51** (.12)	.12	.49** (.11)	.11	.49** (.11)	.11	
Pedestrian crash – acquittal	-.77** (.12)	-.18	-.73** (.11)	-.17	-.72** (.11)	-.17	
Pedestrian crash – lenient	-.43** (.12)	-.10	-.42* (.11)	-.10	-.41** (.11)	-.09	Sheaf
Pedestrian crash – normal	-.31* (.13)	-.07	-.27* (.12)	-.06	-.26* (.12)	-.06	= .41**
Pedestrian crash – severe	-.11 (.13)	-.02	-.17 (.11)	-.04	-.16 (.11)	-.04	
Sex crime – lenient	-1.05** (.13)	-.24	-1.00** (.11)	-.23	-1.00** (.11)	-.23	
Sex crime – severe	-.91** (.12)	-.21	-.90** (.11)	-.21	-.90** (.11)	-.21	⎭
Attitudes							
General support for vigilantism			-.36** (.02)	-.32	-.35** (.02)	-.31	⎫
Belief in a just world for others			-.05 (.03)	-.04	-.05 (.03)	-.03	
General concern over crime			-.06* (.03)	-.05	-.07** (.03)	-.06	Sheaf
Confidence in courts & CJS			.16** (.04)	.12	.17** (.04)	.13	= .42**
Confidence in police			.03 (.04)	.02	.02 (.04)	.02	⎭
Control variables							
Age					.00 (.00)	.02	⎫ Sheaf
Gender					-.12* (.05)	-.04	= .05**
Educational level					-.00 (.06)	.00	⎭
R²	.18		.35		.35		
F for change in *R²*	46.76**		104.10**		1.97		

* p < .05; ** p < .01

supportive of vigilantism express less outrage after reading about vigilantism in the vignette. Similar to our findings on empathy, a higher confidence in the courts and CJS was found to result in more outrage at the vigilante, while confidence in police had no significant effect. Hypothesis 3B was thereby partially confirmed. BJW-O had no effect on outrage, so hypothesis 3N was rejected. General concern over crime had a significant but negligible effect and was not interpreted, so hypothesis 3F was also rejected.

Model 3: adding control variables
Lastly, the third model on outrage shows a gender effect, with male respondents being less outraged at the vigilante than females. This is in line with the gender effect on empathy as described above. No effects were found for educational level or for age.

Relative effects

The sheaf coefficients of the three models once again reveal equally large effects for the experimental factors and attitudes, and a significant but small influence of control variables. The beta values reveal that general support for vigilantism has the largest impact of all independent variables. In other words, how people view vigilantism in general is the best predictor for how much outrage they experience after reading about a specific vigilantism act.

Additionally, the two sex crime conditions have relatively large effects, as was the case with determinants of empathy (the other aversive state measure). The impact of confidence in the courts and CJS is greater than that of six of the experimental conditions.

Blame and derogation of the victim of vigilantism

Table 8.11 shows that the average level of *blame and derogation of the vigilantism victim* is somewhat above the midpoint of the scale ($M = 4.32$). Table 8.16 presents the findings of the regression analyses on this cognitive strategy.

Model 1: experimental conditions

With regards to the first experimental variable, the means in Table 8.11 clearly show that blame and derogation of the sex offender is relatively high compared to the other two victims of vigilantism. Post-hoc analyses reveal that the difference between traffic aggression and pedestrian crash is significant at $p < .05$; all other differences are significant at $p < .001$. As expected, blame and derogation was highest for the victimized sex offender and lowest for the traffic aggression offender, thereby confirming hypothesis 1D.

For the second experimental factor, we once again first looked at the traffic aggression and pedestrian crash conditions (see Table 8.12). The blame and derogation ratings did not differ significantly between the two types of precipitating events, $F(3, 1556) = 1.89$, $p = .13$. Nevertheless, the expected pattern was partially visible, as the highest blame and derogation was found for the acquittal version, and the lowest one for the severe sentence version. Within the sex offense condition (see Table 8.13), the sentence received by the offender did not influence the subsequent uses of the blame and derogation strategy either, $t(410) = -.22$, $p = .83$. Hypothesis 2C was thus rejected for all three conditions. Although unexpected, these findings do correspond with the fact that the aversive state measures did not differ between all of the sentencing levels either.

Table 8.16 Predictors of <u>blame and derogation</u> of the vigilantism victim (N = 1972)

Independent variables	Model 1			Model 2			Model 3			
	b (SE)	β		**b (SE)**	β		**b (SE)**	β		
Constant										
Traffic aggression – acquittal	4.04** (.10)			2.53** (.31)			2.49** (.32)			
Experimental conditions										
Traffic aggression – lenient	.02 (.14)	.00		.01 (.13)	.00		.01 (.13)	.00		
Traffic aggression – normal	-.20 (.15)	-.04		-.14 (.14)	-.03		-.15 (.14)	-.03		
Traffic aggression – severe	-.21 (.15)	-.04		-.16 (.13)	-.03		-.17 (.13)	-.04		
Pedestrian crash – acquittal	.20 (.14)	.04		.19 (.13)	.04		.20 (.13)	.04		
Pedestrian crash – lenient	.07 (.14)	.01		.07 (.13)	.01		.07 (.13)	.01		Sheaf
Pedestrian crash – normal	.03 (.15)	.01		.03 (.14)	.01		.03 (.14)	.01		= .37**
Pedestrian crash – severe	.04 (.15)	.01		.10 (.14)	.02		.10 (.14)	.02		
Sex crime – lenient	1.36** (.14)	.27		1.33** (.14)	.27		1.33** (.14)	.27		
Sex crime – severe	1.38** (.14)	.29		1.40** (.13)	.29		1.39** (.13)	.29		
Attitudes										
General support for vigilantism				.20** (.03)	.16		.21** (.03)	.16		
Belief in a just world for others				.06 (.03)	.03		.06 (.03)	.04		
General concern over crime				.26** (.03)	.18		.24** (.03)	.16		Sheaf
Confidence in courts & CJS				-.11* (.05)	-.07		-.11* (.05)	-.07		= .32**
Confidence in police				-.06 (.04)	-.04		-.06 (.04)	-.04		
Control variables										
Age							.00 (.00)	.03		Sheaf
Gender							.05* (.06)	.02		= .05**
Educational level							-.09 (.07)	-.03		
R^2	.15			.25			.25			
F for change in R^2	36.95**			55.37**			1.61			

* p < .05; ** p < .01

Model 2: adding attitudes

In the second model, the effects of attitudes on blame and derogation are presented. General concern over crime was found to be the largest predictor. In line with hypothesis 3G, people who are more worried about crime were more likely to blame and derogate former criminal offenders for being victimized. The effect of general support for vigilantism also matches our expectations. In correspondence with hypothesis 3K, stronger supporters of vigilantism in general were keener on blaming the victims of vigilantism in the vignette for their fate. Interestingly, neither of the confidence measures affected the use of this cognitive strategy. Even though the effect of confidence in the courts and CJS is significant, it is too small to be interpreted. Hypothesis 3C was thereby rejected. No effect for BJW-O was found either: whether people were strong or weak believers in a just world for others did not affect their respective uses of the blame and

derogation strategy. Hypothesis 3O was thus also rejected.

Model 3: adding control variables
None of the control variables affected blame and derogation of the victim of vigilantism.

Relative effects
The sheaf coefficient shows that the control variables did affect blame and derogation as a block of variables. However, this effect is rather minor when compared to the sheaf coefficients of the experimental conditions and attitudes. The total impact of experimental conditions on blame and derogation is approximately the same as that of the set of attitudes. The beta values reveal that the impact of general support for vigilantism is equal to that of general concern over crime. Both values are higher than those of the experimental conditions, again with the exception of the sex crime conditions. The beta values confirm that confidence in criminal justice does not affect blame and derogation levels of the vigilantism victim.

Desired punishment for the vigilante
The last set of regression analyses concerns the second cognitive strategy: *desired punishment for the vigilante* (see Table 8.17). The average score, as reported in Table 8.11, shows that people are much more keen on punishing the vigilante ($M = 4.99$) than on punishing the precipitating offender ($M = 6.60$, in Table 8.10).

Apart from the four items that were used to construct the desired punishment scale, respondents were asked to give penalty points to the vigilante. They were asked to express deserved punishment on a scale from 0 (no penalty points) to 20 (maximum penalty points). Respondents were also asked whether they changed their mind about the sentence that they had given to the *precipitating offender*, after finding out that he became a victim of vigilantism. They had to indicate whether he now deserved the same punishment, more, less or none at all. It was expected that those who viewed vigilantism as a fitting alternative to the legal one would indicate that the precipitating offender now deserved less or no punishment. These findings, as well as the mean penalty point ratings, will be discussed below in conjunction with the other results.

Model 1: experimental conditions
In line with hypothesis 1E, the vigilante who attacked the sex offender was punished the least by respondents, and the one who assaulted the traffic aggression offender the most (see Table 8.11). The differences between conditions were all significant at $p < .001$ and in the expected direction. The vigilante who attacked the traffic aggression offender was also given the most penalty points: he received a mean of 10.47 ($SD = 5.28$) points, compared to 8.21 ($SD = 5.03$) in the pedestrian crash condition and 7.47 ($SD = 5.08$) for the vigilante who attacked the sex offender. The means on penalty points differ significantly overall, $F(2, 442) = 44.61$, $p < .001$. Post-hoc analyses reveal that all differences between the conditions are significant at $p < .001$, with the

exception of the pedestrian crash and sex offense (*p* = .14*)*. Responses to the yes/no question of whether the vigilante deserves punishment match this pattern. In the traffic aggression condition, 14 percent of respondents did not find the vigilante deserving of punishment, compared to 26 percent for the pedestrian crash, and 41 percent in the sex offense condition. Especially the latter percentage is a sign of considerable support for vigilantism: four out of ten respondents did not find the vigilante who assaulted the sex offender punishment worthy, despite the fact that his victim had already been sentenced by the courts.

Table 8.17   Predictors of <u>desired punishment</u> for the vigilante (N = 1972)

Independent variables	Model 1		Model 2		Model 3		
	b (SE)	β	b (SE)	β	b (SE)	β	
Constant							
Traffic aggression – acquittal	5.20** (.11)		6.73** (.32)		6.75** (.33)		
Experimental conditions							
Traffic aggression – lenient	.40** (.15)	.08	.44** (.14)	.08	.44** (.14)	.08	
Traffic aggression – normal	.47** (.16)	.09	.38** (.14)	.07	.37** (.14)	.07	
Traffic aggression – severe	.46** (.15)	.09	.42** (.14)	.08	.44** (.14)	.08	
Pedestrian crash – acquittal	-.68** (.15)	-.13	-.64** (.13)	-.13	-.66** (.13)	-.13	Sheaf
Pedestrian crash – lenient	-.35* (.15)	-.07	-.33* (.14)	-.06	-.34* (.14)	-.06	= .34**
Pedestrian crash – normal	-.07 (.16)	-.01	-.04 (.14)	-.01	-.06 (.14)	-.01	
Pedestrian crash – severe	-.01 (.16)	.00	-.09 (.14)	-.02	-.10 (.14)	-.02	
Sex crime – lenient	-1.20** (.16)	-.23	-1.16** (.14)	-.22	-1.16** (.14)	-.22	
Sex crime – severe	-.95** (.15)	-.19	-.96** (.14)	-.19	-.95** (.13)	-.19	
Attitudes							
General support for vigilantism			-.37** (.03)	-.27	-.38** (.03)	-.28	
Belief in a just world for others			-.16** (.04)	-.09	-.17** (.04)	-.10	Sheaf
General concern over crime			-.18** (.03)	-.11	-.11** (.03)	-.07	= .42**
Confidence in courts & CJS			.27** (.05)	.17	.26** (.05)	.16	
Confidence in police			.00 (.04)	.00	.02 (.04)	.01	
Control variables							
Age					-.01** (.00)	-.10	Sheaf
Gender					.17** (.06)	.05	= .13**
Educational level					.23** (.07)	.07	
R²	.13		.31		.32		
F for change in *R²*	31.69**		103.08**		13.54**		

* p < .05; ** p < .01

Concerning the second experimental variable, we found a similar pattern as before. As expected, punishment desire was lowest for the vigilante who victimized someone who had been acquitted by the legal system (see Table 8.12). The difference in desired

punishment between the traffic aggression and pedestrian crash conditions was significant overall, but only between acquittal and the other three sentencing types (all $p < .001$). Penalty points differed significantly, F(3, 770) = 4.47, $p < .01$, but only for acquittal vs. normal and acquittal vs. severe. As expected, the lowest number of penalty points was given in the acquittal condition ($M = 8.51$).

Respondents who had previously indicated that the precipitating offender deserved punishment (98 percent in the traffic aggression and pedestrian crash conditions) were asked whether they changed their mind after having read about the act of vigilantism.[51] The largest proportion of respondents, 87 percent, indicated that they would not change their previous sentencing judgment. A small minority (4 percent) said that he deserved less punishment than before, and only 2 percent said that he no longer needed to be sentenced formally. Lastly, 7 percent stated that the precipitating offender deserved a *more* severe sentence than before he was victimized by the vigilante. This latter finding is surprising, but people may have used this extra sentencing judgment as another way of reducing their aversive state in response vigilantism. In other words, assigning a sentence to both the vigilante and his victim may have functioned as an extra cognitive strategy.

We lastly examined the punishment patterns within the sex crime conditions (see Table 8.13). Desired punishment for the vigilante did not differ between the two sentencing levels, t(410) = - 1.49, $p = .14$. The number of penalty points did not differ either, t(241) = .32, $p = .75$. Concerning respondents' opinion about the precipitating offender's sentence after the act of vigilantism, the pattern was similar to what was found in the other two conditions. A total of 88 percent did not change the sentence, 7 percent called for a higher sentence, 4 for a lower one and 1 percent said that the sex offender no longer deserved to be sentenced after having been victimized by a vigilante.[52]

Model 2: adding attitudes
In the second model, all attitudes except for confidence in police have a significant impact on desired punishment for the vigilante. The beta value of BJW-O is nonetheless rather small, so it will not be interpreted. We thereby reject hypothesis 3H. In line with hypothesis 3L, more general support for vigilantism led to less desired punishment for the vigilante. Hypothesis 3D was partially confirmed, as only confidence in the courts and CJS led to a higher call for punishment. Lastly, as predicted in hypothesis 3P, stronger believers in a just world for others were less likely to assign punishment to the vigilante. This may imply that, across conditions, a higher BJW-O led people to see the act of vigilantism as deserved, thereby making it less necessary to punish the vigilante for what he did. However, we did not find any impact of BJW-O on the measures of aversive state, or on the other cognitive strategy (blame and derogation).

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51 Of the 2 percent who previously did not sentence the precipitating offender, 56 percent still did not do so.
52 Of the 4 respondents who did not sentence the sex offender, only 1 adhered to his or her previous judgment.

Model 3: adding control variables

The third and final regression model on the punishment desire strategy reveals a relatively large effect of educational level. Highly educated people expressed a stronger wish for punishment of the vigilante. This matches the results described above regarding empathy with the victim of vigilantism: it was found to be positively related to educational level. The model also indicates that males are more likely to punish the vigilante than females. This is somewhat surprising, as males expressed less outrage at the vigilante. The effect of age is too small to be interpreted.

Relative effects

The sheaf coefficients reveal that the combined effect of attitudes on desired punishment is larger than that of the experimental conditions. This implies that when people are asked to express a punishment desire for the vigilante in the vignette, they are influenced more by personal attitudes than by the type of precipitating crime and sentence given to the precipitating offender. This was not the case for the other three dependent variables, where the impact of both blocks was approximately equal. Control variables are more predictive of punishment desire than of the other three dependent variables, but once again have a smaller impact than the other two blocks of independent variables.

The beta values reveal that general support for vigilantism has the largest impact of all independent variables, as was the case with empathy. It has a larger effect than all of the individual experimental conditions. This scale thus proves to be a very important predictor of people's response to a specific case of vigilantism. We will further address this finding in the discussion section. Compared to the experimental conditions, except for the sex crime conditions, confidence in the courts and CJS also had a relatively large impact.

Lastly, after having analyzed the two cognitive strategies (*blame and derogation; desired punishment*) separately, we calculated correlations between them to test hypothesis 1C. We predicted that the use of the blame and derogation strategy would be negatively related to the alternative: a desire for punishment. The correlations were all significant at $p < .01$ and in the expected direction: $r(774) = -.39$ for traffic aggression, $r(786) = -.55$ for the pedestrian crash, and $r(412) = -.54$ for the sex offense.

8.9 Discussion

Just-world theory states that when someone's belief in a just world is threatened, he will apply cognitive and behavioral strategies with the intention of reducing or eliminating the threat. Such strategies include blame and derogation of the victim, as well as desired punishment for the offender. In the current study, just-world theory was used to predict reactions to events in the vigilantism event sequence. These reactions were measured in response to vignettes in Part I of the study; Part II consisted of four attitude measures.

In Part I, respondents were presented with two fictitious news articles, of which the first one described a precipitating event. The second article described the formal sentence

for the precipitating offender, as well as an act of vigilantism directed against him. We measured the aversive states as induced by both crimes, as well as the subsequent uses of cognitive strategies. The reactions to the second vignette resulted in the following dependent variables: *empathy* with the vigilantism victim, *outrage* at the vigilante, *blame and derogation* of the vigilantism victim, and *desired punishment* for the vigilante. These four variables together constitute the measure of support for vigilantism: our main interest in this study.

By varying two of the three main events of the vigilantism event sequence, we were able to test a number of just-world predictions about the effects of situational characteristics on support for vigilantism. The first experimental manipulation consisted of a variation of the *precipitating event* in Vignette 1: traffic aggression, a pedestrian crash or a sex crime. The second experimental manipulation was the *precipitating offender's formal sentence*, and was presented in Vignette 2. The four variations of the sentence were acquittal, a lenient sentence, a normal, and a severe sentence. Table 8.18 provides an overview of all hypotheses that were tested, and indicates whether they were (partially) confirmed or rejected.

Findings – the role of situational characteristics
We expected that variations in the beginning of the vigilantism event sequence would affect reactions further down in the sequence. A precipitating event that led to higher aversive states, for instance, was predicted to lead to a lower aversive state after vigilantism. These expectations were confirmed. Vigilantism against the sex offender resulted in the lowest levels of empathy and outrage. In line with this, the sex offender was blamed and derogated relatively more for being victimized by the vigilante. The vigilante who attacked the sex offender was also given less punishment than vigilantes who attacked the other two precipitating offenders. In fact, about 40 percent of respondents did not even find it necessary at all to sentence the vigilante if his victim was a sex offender.

The analyses on the effects of experimental factor 2 were carried out separately for the sex offense condition, due to the unbalanced design (two sentencing levels instead of four). Within the traffic aggression and pedestrian crash offense conditions, our expectations were confirmed, but only when comparing the acquittal condition with the severe sentence one. Levels of aversive state and uses of cognitive strategies generally did not differ between the lenient, normal and severe sentences, but they each did differ from the acquittal condition. It thus seemed mostly relevant for respondents *whether* the precipitating offender was acquitted before being assaulted by a vigilante, and not as much what *type* of sentence he received if he was not acquitted. Another explanation is that the sentencing types did not differ sufficiently; the differences in severity were perhaps not perceived as strongly as expected. However, as the sentences were already adjusted after the pilot study, this does not seem as plausible.

Table 8.18   Overview of hypotheses and their confirmation status

#	Hypothesis	Confirmed?
	Effects of type of precipitating event (Factor 1) on support for vigilantism	
1A	empathy lowest for sex crime; highest for traffic aggression	yes
1B	outrage lowest for sex crime; highest for traffic aggression	yes
1C	blame/derogation negatively related to punishment desire (all conditions)	yes
1D	blame/derogation highest for sex crime; lowest for traffic aggression	yes
1E	desired punishment lowest for sex crime; highest for traffic aggression	yes
	Effects of precipitating offender's sentence (Factor 2) on support for vigilantism [53]	
2A	empathy lowest for acquittal, then lenient, normal and severe	partially
2B	outrage lowest for acquittal, then lenient, normal and severe	partially
2C	blame/derogation highest for acquittal, then lenient, normal and severe	no
2D	punishment desire lowest for acquittal, then lenient, normal and severe	partially
	Effect of attitudes on support for vigilantism	
3A	confidence in CJS (criminal justice system) positively related to empathy	partially
3B	confidence in CJS positively related to outrage	partially
3C	confidence in CJS negatively related to blame/derogation	no
3D	confidence in CJS positively related to punishment desire	partially
3E	GCC (general concern over crime) negatively related to empathy	no
3F	GCC negatively related to outrage	no
3G	GCC positively related to blame/derogation	yes
3H	GCC negatively related to punishment desire	no
3I	general support for vigilantism negatively related to empathy	yes
3J	general support for vigilantism negatively related to outrage	yes
3K	general support for vigilantism positively related to blame/derogation	yes
3L	general support for vigilantism negatively related to punishment desire	yes
3M	BJW-O (belief in a just world for others) negatively related to empathy	no
3N	BJW-O negatively related to outrage	no
3O	BJW-O negatively related to blame/derogation	no
3P	BJW-O negatively related to punishment desire	yes

Within the sex offense conditions, the precipitating offender's sentence did not have any impact at all on the four dependent variables. Whether the sex offender received a lenient or a severe sentence did not have any influence on reactions to the subsequent act of vigilantism of which he becomes a victim. There are a few possible explanations for this finding. First of all, there was no acquittal condition for the sex offense vignette. In the case of the other two precipitating crimes, it was precisely in the acquittal

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53   The confirmations in Table 8.18 for hypotheses 2A through 2D concern the traffic aggression and pedestrian crash conditions. In the sex crime condition, all four hypotheses were rejected.

condition that differences were found on the dependent variables when compared to the other sentencing levels. Another possibility is that the nature of the precipitating offense (sex crime against a child) caused people to be less outraged at the vigilante and less empathetic with his victim, regardless of what type of sentence the sex offender had received. Support for this idea comes from the fact that the average rating of outrage and empathy was lower for both levels of sentencing than in any of the traffic aggression and pedestrian crash conditions. Even in the severe sentence condition of the sex crime, the aversive states in response to the vigilantism act were lower than in the acquittal versions of the other two precipitating crimes.

Findings – the role of attitudes

A recurrent finding is that confidence in the courts and CJS is a significant predictor of reactions to vigilantism, while confidence in the police is not. This may be explained by the fact that the legal authorities in the vigilantism vignette are not the police, but the public prosecution (who proposes a sentence) and a judge (who passes a sentence). People with high confidence in the latter authorities may thus be more upset when the sentence for (or acquittal of) the precipitating offender, as determined in court, is followed by an act of vigilantism. We will further address this finding in the discussion chapter. Our analyses of the beta-values revealed that confidence in the courts and CJS generally had a larger impact than most of the individual experimental conditions, with the exception of the sex crime conditions.

Our measure of *general* support for vigilantism turned out to be a very important predictor of how people reacted to vigilantism in a vignette. In other words, how people view vigilantism in general proves to be a strong indicator of how they respond to a specific case of vigilantism. Beta values revealed it to be the strongest predictor of all independent variables for both outrage at the vigilante and punishment desire. Moreover, its effect on all four measures of support for vigilantism was larger than the two measures of confidence in the criminal justice system. This is noteworthy, as the role of general support for vigilantism was not the main focus of our research. We merely included it as another attitude measure under the assumption that it might affect specific support for vigilantism, but we did not expect it to have this large of an impact. We will elaborate on the meaning and implications of this finding in the discussion chapter.

Another interesting finding is that people who scored high on the general concern over crime (GCC) factor were more likely to blame and derogate the victim of vigilantism. On one hand, this makes sense, as these respondents find the criminal justice system too lenient, and for this reason may see the 'punishment' as carried out by the vigilante as a deserved fate. On the other hand, this finding seems counterintuitive, as the vigilantes are in fact themselves criminal offenders, so people should actually be worried about them too. A plausible explanation for this contradiction is that they probably do not imagine ever becoming the victim of a vigilante themselves. In line with just-world theory, you get what you deserve: if you do not commit crimes, you will

not be targeted by a vigilante. Thus, although their general concern over crime implies that they do realize that they may become undeserving victims of crime in the future, this does not seem to include vigilante crime. GCC did not have a substantial impact on the other three measures of support for vigilantism.

Lastly, we only found an effect of BJW-O in the regression on punishment for the vigilante, with a higher BJW-O resulting in a lower desire for punishment. We will further elaborate on this result in the discussion chapter.

Findings – differential measurement of support

What can be concluded about the levels of support for vigilantism in the vignettes? Were our respondents supportive of vigilantism as described in the fictitious newspaper articles? With regards to levels of support for vigilantism in this study, it is noticeable first of all that there were vast differences when comparing the four measures of support, namely empathy, outrage, blame and derogation, and desired punishment (cf. Tables 8.11 – 8.13). Empathy for the victim of vigilantism could for example be low in one condition, while a desire for punishment of the vigilante was high at the same time. Within the traffic offense and pedestrian crash conditions, the average level of empathy with vigilantism victims was for instance below the midpoint of the 7-point scale ($M = 3.80$), while people did find the vigilante deserving of punishment ($M = 5.23$). These findings suggest that it is important to be aware of different forms of support when drawing conclusions about how an act of vigilantism is viewed by the public. The fact that people do not feel empathy for the victim of vigilantism does not automatically imply that they believe that the vigilante should not be prosecuted or punished. Rather, a lack of empathy or outrage may simply be a sign that the precipitating offender was seen to deserve his fate (as a just-world reaction), but this may not have any consequences for the perceived punishment worthiness of the vigilante. The importance of distinguishing between different types of support is further illustrated by responses to the general support for vigilantism scale (cf. Table A4 in Appendix 8). A total of 46 percent respondents for instance find it *understandable* that a citizen would take the law into his own hands if an offender is not sentenced by the legal system, while only 18 percent would *approve* of it.

Keeping in mind the distinction between the different support components, we can conclude that support for vigilantism does not seem extraordinarily high. Empathy with the victim of vigilantism was low overall; outrage at the vigilante was generally higher. Within the traffic aggression and pedestrian crash conditions, outrage was 4.73 on average, compared to 3.78 in the condition where the sex offender is victimized. Blame and derogation was rather neutral in the two traffic conditions ($M = 4.03$), but relatively high for the sex crime condition ($M = 5.40$). Average ratings on desire for punishment were above the midpoint in all conditions: 5.23 for traffic aggression and pedestrian crash, and 4.13 for the vigilante who assaults the sex offender. Additionally, most respondents did not change their sentencing judgment of the precipitating offender after having read about the vigilantism act; only 4 percent in all conditions called for

a lower sentence. We conclude that support for vigilantism, at least in response to our vignettes, is not as high as the media and politicians may make it out to be.

Findings – conclusions

The main goal of the current study was to further our understanding of support for vigilantism. One of the main findings is that situational characteristics have a significant impact on reactions to a concrete case of vigilantism, with the exception of desired punishment for the vigilante. Personal attitudes also strongly affected support for vigilantism, especially respondents' general view on vigilantism (i.e. general support for vigilantism). Confidence in the courts and CJS also played an important role, while confidence in police was not found to influence any of the four measures of support.

The effect of situational factors is in line with the findings of our earlier study, and suggests that public support for specific cases of vigilantism should not be interpreted as an automatic sign of lacking confidence in criminal justice authorities. People's responses are also guided by how they are emotionally affected by the vigilantism situation, which is not necessarily related to their views on the criminal justice authorities. Support for vigilantism can thus coincide with a high level of confidence in the criminal justice system. We will further address the implications of these findings in the final chapter.

Methodological issues

One of the limitations of our study is the indirect measurement of aversive states and the uses of cognitive strategies. We inferred from our respondents' reactions that our vignettes posed a threat to their sense of justice, but we did not measure the presumed underlying processes directly. Respondents were for instance explicitly asked how outraged they were at the vigilante and to what extent they blamed the victims for their fate. This methodology is vulnerable to social desirability bias, and may have affected our results. Even though we were mostly interested in the relative effects of our experimental manipulations, and not so much in the absolute levels of support for vigilantism, it is important to keep this limitation in mind. In the future, one could consider using an adapted version of the Stroop test, as has been done by Hafer (2000) in a BJW-context. Participants in the Stroop paradigm are typically asked to identify the color in which words are presented as quickly as possible. Research shows that people take more time naming the color of those words that threaten them, such as words like 'bark', 'leash' and 'pet' for those who are afraid of dogs. Within the BJW-context, respondents who had been exposed to an injustice were found to have more trouble identifying the color of justice-related words (Hafer, 2000). The Stroop test thus corroborated past research on BJW and responses to innocent victims.

Despite our use of indirect measures, the findings suggest that social desirability probably did not have a large effect, if any at all. Our respondents were for instance not hesitant to blame and derogate precipitating offenders. Especially the fact that 41 percent of respondents in the sex offense condition did not find the vigilante worthy of punishment, seems to indicate that people were not too concerned about giving socially

desirable answers.

It should also be noted that our measures of aversive state (empathy/outrage) may have been the *result* of the application of cognitive strategies. In other words, we may have measured the aversive state level after these strategies had already been used by respondents, even though we had not yet explicitly asked them to do so (e.g. by asking them about blame and derogation). However, we do not view this as problematic because it would be the case for all vignettes, and would thus not explain the differences that we found between the conditions.

Another limitation to our study is that there were differences between the vignettes that were not a direct result of the two experimental factors. For instance, the victims of the pedestrian crash and sexual offense were 9-year old girls, while the traffic aggression victim was an adult male. Likewise, the vigilante in the former two cases was the father of the girl victim, while in the latter case it was the victim himself who assaulted the precipitating offender. These differences may have affected people's responses to the vignettes, apart from the two experimental manipulations. People may have for instance been more upset about the pedestrian crash than about the traffic aggression simply because the former involves a child victim. These issues nonetheless do not affect our main conclusion, namely that situational factors affect support for vigilantism. In order to further disentangle the exact impact of such factors, an attempt should be made in future studies to make vignettes even more comparable, aside from the differences that are due to experimental manipulations.

There are certain limitations to vignette studies in general, as our respondents were for instance not confronted with real crime victims. Nevertheless, previous research has shown that the actual presence of a victim is not necessary to induce emotional reactions; mental images of a victim are sufficient (cf. Hoffman, 1990). Moreover, real-life situations of vigilantism are not that different from the one in our study: people read newspaper articles about vigilantism and respond accordingly. Especially the fact that we made the articles seem as real as possible, adds to the external validity of our results. Interestingly, some of the respondents expressed having difficulty in deciding to what extent the perpetrators deserved punishment because they had so little information in the vignettes. This suggests that it may be easy for citizens to complain about the severity of a sentence when reading about it in the newspaper, but that coming up with one's own judgment is a whole different ballgame (cf. De Keijser et al., 2007). In fact, some respondents wondered why we asked them to assign punishment at all, and not those who are trained to do so: judges.

9

Discussion

Meanwhile populist politicians pander to retaliatory instincts by threatening to publish names and addresses of ex-offenders, to force ex-offenders to reveal old criminal records, even to license vigilantes in the form of private security guards - all in order 'to hand justice back to the people'. What they do not appear to appreciate is that all of this makes the justification for the criminal law less stable, not more so. For if the criminal law cannot successfully displace retaliation against wrong-doers, but instead collaborates with it, then a central pillar of its justification has collapsed…That victims do not try, convict, sentence, or punish criminal offenders, and have no official part in the trial, conviction, sentencing, and punishment of criminal offenders, is not an accident of procedural history. It is, on the contrary, one of the main objects of the whole exercise.
(Gardner, 1998, pp. 51-52)

9.1 Introduction

After having been missing for a week in March of 2010, a Dutch girl named Milly was found dead in the backyard of a policeman who lived across the street from her ("Milly Boele dood gevonden," 2010). Shortly after her death, thousands of people participated in a silent march in remembrance of Milly, and a few weeks later more than 22.000 messages had been left on a condolences website ("Massale belangstelling stille tocht Milly," 2010). Even complete strangers expressed their sincere sympathy with Milly's family, showed their outrage at her death, and called for a severe punishment of her alleged murderer.

Crimes can evoke a whole range of emotional reactions, of which a common one is to call for punishment of the offender (Tyler & Smith, 1995). Wanting to punish those who do harm appears to be a universal, intuitive response. This is nevertheless not always the case in situations of vigilantism. There exist numerous examples of public outrage when vigilantes are prosecuted and sentenced for their crimes. Rather than applauding the criminal justice response to vigilantism, some citizens show admiration for the vigilantes and express the wish that they go unpunished. At first glance, such public support for vigilantism thus seems inconsistent with common reactions to crime. However, as we have shown in this thesis, this is not necessarily the case. People do not express support for vigilantism because they appreciate vigilante crime, but because the vigilante made sure that another offender 'got what he deserved'. In other words, support for vigilantism can match the idea of wanting to punish wrongdoers. It concerns endorsement of a wrongdoer's punishment as carried out by a vigilante instead of by the criminal justice system, or in addition to it. And if such an act of vigilantism is not seen as wrongful, it is comprehensible that the public does not always find it necessary to prosecute the vigilante for his crime.

Support for vigilantism is an intriguing topic, as it can potentially have considerable consequences for the functioning and legitimacy of the criminal justice system. After all, it concerns support for those who deal with crime in spite of the criminal law. What do such reactions tell us about the perceived legitimacy of the formal ways of handling crime? Do people support vigilantism because they have lost their faith in the criminal justice system? Despite its relevance, support for vigilantism has been an understudied subject in the criminological literature. Not much is known about why some citizens express support for those who take the law into their own hands, or whether it reveals anything about their views of the criminal justice system. Furthermore, the meaning of 'supporting' vigilantism has remained ambiguous up to now. What does it mean to support a vigilante? Does it imply complete approbation of his or her behavior? By answering these and other questions in the current study, we aim to reach a better understanding of support for vigilantism.

Two theoretical views on determinants of support for vigilantism are central to this thesis: the *confidence hypothesis* and the *situation hypothesis*. The former states that support for vigilantism is caused by a lack (or low level) of confidence in the criminal justice system. As vigilantes deal with crime in spite of the law, it is assumed that their 'supporters' are

also not keen of the justice system. Alternatively, the situation hypothesis focuses on the influence of situational characteristics on support for vigilantism. In other words, aspects of the situation surrounding an act of vigilantism are assumed to affect public reactions to it. One of the main contributions of this thesis is that both hypotheses are tested in conjunction, which (to our knowledge) has not been done before.

The main components of the thesis are reiterated below, including a brief summary of the findings of the two empirical studies that were carried out. This is followed by a discussion of implications and methodological considerations. We conclude the chapter by offering suggestions for future research on public support for vigilantism.

9.2   Summary

We reviewed the literature on support for vigilantism in Chapter 2 to see whether we could find any empirical evidence to corroborate the confidence and situational hypothesis. The methodology of most studies was limited, but the findings did provide some evidence for both hypotheses. However, none of the described studies investigated the role of confidence and situational characteristics jointly. In order to reliably assess their absolute and *relative* impact on support for vigilantism, we developed new measurement tools and used them to test both hypotheses in our own research.

Measuring support for vigilantism
The literature review in Chapter 2 additionally provided us with useful insights regarding operationalizations of support for vigilantism. Notably, none of the described studies asked people directly whether they support vigilantism or not. Instead, some studies presented respondents with items about the justifiability of vigilantism, while others for instance focused on sympathy with the victim or blameworthiness of the vigilante. We concluded that support is a multifaceted construct which can only be measured reliably using multiple-item measures. In our empirical studies, as further discussed below, we therefore introduced new measures of support that integrate a variety of reactions to vigilantism.

Defining vigilantism
Chapter 3 was dedicated to the conceptualization of vigilantism. Our literature review shows that there is no consensus on what vigilantism constitutes, as the term is used to describe a large variety of behaviors. In order to conduct meaningful research on support for vigilantism, a clear definition of vigilantism is indispensable. We therefore provided the following definition of vigilantism for current research purposes:

> *"Vigilantism is a planned criminal act carried out by one or more private citizens in response to (the perceived threat of) a crime committed by one or more private citizens, targeting the (alleged) perpetrator(s) of that crime".*

Apart from defining vigilantism, we also introduced a typology of vigilantism in which characteristics of vigilantism itself as well as its context are identified. The typology consists of two person-related components (the vigilante and his victim), and three components that together make up the so-called vigilantism event sequence: the precipitating event, the formal response to the precipitating event, and the vigilantism act. Characteristics that are related to these five components can be varied in research in order to study their impact on support for vigilantism, thereby testing the situation hypothesis.

Measuring confidence
To prepare for an empirical test of the confidence hypothesis, we next presented a conceptual framework of confidence in the criminal justice system (CJS) in Chapter 4. Theoretical and empirical insights from the literature were used to build a conceptual model of confidence, which was subsequently operationalized into a measurement tool. This operationalization of confidence includes procedural justice and effectiveness, and differentiates between various criminal justice agencies and the system as a whole.

Study 1
After conceptualizing support, vigilantism as well as confidence, we presented our first empirical study on support for vigilantism in Chapter 5. Four versions of a vignette about vigilantism were constructed, based on a systematic variation of two characteristics from the vigilantism typology: police responsiveness to the precipitating event and vigilantism violence. Support was measured by assessing a variety of reactions, including the justifiability of the vigilantism act and desired punishment for the vigilante. Both situational characteristics were found to affect support, thus providing evidence for the situational hypothesis. Additionally, confidence in the courts and CJS was a predictor of support for vigilantism, with more confidence resulting in less support. Confidence in police did not have any impact, so the confidence hypothesis was only partially confirmed. General concern over crime also affected support: the more worried people were about crime, the more supportive they were of vigilantism in the vignette.

Just-world theory
After having explored a number of determinants of support for vigilantism in our first study, we presented a theoretical framework in Chapter 6. Just-world theory (Lerner, 1980) was introduced as a basis for reaching a further understanding of the causal mechanism behind support. In other words, it adds to our understanding of why and how people are affected by situational aspects of a vigilantism case, aside from the role of confidence. In short, just-world theory proposes that people like to believe that the world is a just place where people get what they deserve and deserve what they get. When such a belief in a just world (BJW) is threatened through a confrontation with someone's undeserved victimization, people are motivated to use cognitive and behavioral strategies to protect their BJW. Such strategies include victim blaming and a desire of punishment

for offenders. The relevance of the theory within the context of support for vigilantism lies in the fact that there exist at least two instances of victimization within the common vigilantism event sequence. The first one occurs as a result of the precipitating event, i.e. the criminal act that precedes vigilantism. The second instance is the act of vigilantism itself: the victimization that is caused by the vigilante and directed at the precipitating offender. In our view, what is commonly labeled as support for vigilantism can thus actually be interpreted as a BJW-reaction to a vigilantism situation.

Study 2

We applied ideas from just-world theory in our second empirical study to predict and measure reactions to a precipitating crime and a subsequent act of vigilantism. After describing the study design and a pilot study in Chapter 7, we presented the findings of the final study in Chapter 8. Respondents were presented with two fictitious articles from a news website. The first one concerned the precipitating event, while the second one described the formal sentence for the precipitating offender and a subsequent act of vigilantism. The articles were varied along two characteristics from the vigilantism typology: the type of precipitating event and the formal sentence for the precipitating offender. Concepts from just-world theory were operationalized into four measures of support for vigilantism: *empathy* with the victim of vigilantism, *outrage* at the vigilante, *blame and derogation* of the vigilantism victim, and *desired punishment* for the vigilante. One month after responding to the vignettes, the same respondents were presented with a number of attitude measures, including confidence in the criminal justice system.

The main conclusions match those of the first study: support for vigilantism is not just affected by confidence in the criminal justice system, but also by situational characteristics. More confidence in the courts and criminal justice system led to less support, while confidence in police did not have an impact. Just like in our first study, the confidence hypothesis was thereby partially confirmed. We also found new evidence for the situation hypothesis, as both manipulated situational characteristics affected support for vigilantism. The type of precipitating event especially had a strong influence. Empathy with the victim of vigilantism was for instance much lower when he was a sex offender than when he had committed a traffic offense. In line with this, desire for punishment of the vigilante who assaulted the sex offender was also relatively low: 41 percent of respondents did not find it necessary to punish him at all. Regarding the sentencing manipulation, differences in support were mainly found when comparing the acquittal condition to the other three sentencing levels. Outrage at the vigilante was for instance lowest when the precipitating offender had previously been acquitted by a judge. However, in the conditions where he *had* been sentenced, the level of the sentence in general did not affect responses to the act of vigilantism. Respondents were thus mostly influenced by whether the precipitating offender had been acquitted or sentenced before becoming a victim of vigilantism, and not necessarily by the level of sentencing. As long as the offender was not acquitted, people seemed to accept the judge's verdict, even if the sentence was mild.

9.3 Explaining support for vigilantism

Our findings reveal that public reactions to those who take the law into their own hands are not necessarily rooted in a lack of confidence in the criminal justice system: characteristics of the vigilantism situation have an independent influence. We found strong empirical evidence for the *situation hypothesis* in both studies. People do not appear to have a straight-forward positive or negative reaction to a case of vigilantism depending on how much confidence they have in the formal justice system. Instead, people's support for vigilantism can at least partially be understood as a reaction to deal with the threat it poses to their belief in a just world. The extent of such a threat, and the corresponding use of cognitive strategies to reduce the resulting aversive state, is strongly influenced by characteristics of the vigilantism act and its context. These situational characteristics affect perceptions of deservingness and justice: in essence what support for vigilantism is all about. When the victim of vigilantism had previously sexually molested a child, our respondents for instance saw his fate as more deserving than in the case of a traffic offender. People are thus not necessarily thinking about the criminal justice system when they react to vigilantism. People are sensitive to the situational context of vigilantism and as such support for vigilantism should not be interpreted as a rational reaction that is simply a result of a lack of confidence in the legal authorities.

Apart from the influence of situational characteristics, we found a partial confirmation of the *confidence hypothesis*. In both studies, confidence in the courts and the criminal justice system predicted support for vigilantism, while confidence in police did not have any impact. We propose that this may have to do with the distinct functions of these agencies within the criminal justice system. When citizens take the law into their own hands, they tend to 'take over' duties that are specifically reserved for the courts, such as making sentencing decisions. In fact, vigilantes take these duties even further by actually carrying out the punishment against (alleged) offenders. Their actions can thus be seen as a threat to those who have confidence in court agencies. While these results reveal the importance of using a differentiated measure of confidence, we deem it necessary to further test the robustness of these findings in future research. We especially recommend a replication of our study in countries where confidence in the criminal justice system is generally lower than in the Netherlands. Such research can potentially provide insights regarding the relative impact of confidence and situational characteristics on support for vigilantism in those places where citizens cannot rely (as much) on the state to deal with crime.

Even though our research was mainly focused on testing the situation and confidence hypothesis, one of the main predictors of public support for vigilantism turned out to be a different factor: *general support for vigilantism*. In other words, how people generally view vigilantism is a strong predictor of how they will react to a specific case of vigilantism. Although the relation between specific and general support makes intuitive sense, we were rather surprised by the size of the attitude's impact as compared to that of the other factors. A possible explanation for this is that our measure of general

support for vigilantism captures a *moral mandate* about vigilantism: an attitude that is rooted in a moral conviction (Skitka, 2002). Moral mandates are strong beliefs about the rightfulness or wrongfulness of something, or about its (im)moral character (Skitka, Bauman, & Sargis, 2005). Moral mandates are said to result from strongly internalized norms such as "thou shalt not kill" (Skitka, 2002). Examples include strong attitudes toward abortion and cannibalism. According to the so-called moral mandate hypothesis, attitudes that are based on moral convictions have a stronger impact on people's judgments of people or situations than nonmoral attitudes (Skitka et al., 2005). If our measure of general support for vigilantism indeed reflects a moral mandate about the rightfulness or wrongfulness of taking the law into one's own hands, this can explain why it transcended the effects of other factors in most of our analyses. It is apparently so strong that it affected respondents' aversive states as a result of vigilantism, as well as their uses of cognitive strategies (blame and derogation and punishment).

If our measure of general support for vigilantism can be interpreted as a moral mandate, this does not imply that other factors have no influence on how people react to a case of vigilantism. After all, we did find a substantial impact of situational characteristics and attitudes other than general support for vigilantism. With regards to the former, we suspect that certain situational aspects, if they are sufficiently impressive, can 'overrule' people's moral mandate about an issue. If the precipitating crime is for instance particularly appalling, people may support vigilantism against the precipitating offender even if they are generally against taking the law into one's own hands. Evidence for this argument is provided by the fact that the sex crime conditions in our study had a larger impact on some of the specific support measures than did general support for vigilantism.

The impact of general support for vigilantism was larger than that of confidence in the courts and CJS on all four measures of vignette-related support (confidence in police had no effect). This means that the general support for vigilantism scale captures a certain sentiment which is not automatically related to confidence. As a moral mandate it may simply pertain to a sense of wrongfulness (or rightfulness) of taking the law into one's own hands, which is at least partially independent of how 'the law' is perceived. In any case we did find a significant correlation of -.46 between general support for vigilantism and confidence in the courts and CJS, which reveals at least some overlap between the scales.

In order to further investigate whether our measure of general support for vigilantism indeed reflects a moral mandate on vigilantism, it is important to critically review the items that we used (see Table A4 in Appendix 8). Our scale includes a number of 'moral mandate'-like statements, such as "Citizens who take the law into their own hands should always be prosecuted" and "Under no condition do I approve of people who take the law into their own hands". However, it also includes more 'conditional support' items, such as "If the government is not successful in their fight against crime, citizens are justified to take the law into their own hands". For future research in this domain, it is advisable to construct a more 'pure' measure of this moral mandate.

9.4   Implications for the criminal justice system

A noteworthy observation regarding confidence as a determinant of support, is the difference between confidence on a situation-specific level and a more general level. As mentioned in the previous section, confidence in police on a general level did not affect support for vigilantism. However, when police responsiveness was varied in the first vignette study, it did have an impact on support. In other words, how criminal justice authorities are perceived to deal with a precipitating crime *can* play an important role in determining how people react to a subsequent act of vigilantism, even if confidence in such authorities on a general level does not. This conclusion can prove to be valuable for criminal justice agencies, as it underlines the impact of their situation-specific response to a precipitating crime on how a vigilantism case is viewed by the public. We deem it important for the criminal justice authorities to communicate to the public what their role has been in the events leading up to the vigilantism act. Given the demonstrated influence of perceived deservingness in people's judgments of a case, it is for instance important to explain the formal response or lack thereof in response to the precipitating crime, especially if the precipitating offender was not arrested or prosecuted prior to the act of vigilantism. Similarly, it is recommendable for the authorities to convey why a particular vigilante is subjected to a criminal investigation. When communicating about a vigilantism case, the ambiguity of distinguishing between victims and offenders needs to be taken into account.

In the Amsterdam supermarket case that was mentioned in earlier chapters, communication on part of the prosecutors may have actually led to more public support for the act of vigilantism (Althoff, 2010). The decision to prosecute the two supermarket employees for their use of disproportionate violence against a thief was announced right after the death of 22-year-old René Steegmans. The latter criticized two youngsters for their antisocial behavior against an old lady, in response to which they beat him up. None of the bystanders helped René during this fight, and he died from his injuries two days later. People were upset about the fact that no one intervened, which caused all the more outrage when two men who did intervene (the supermarket employees) were prosecuted. The case evoked a heated debate about the state's expectations of citizen involvement in crime control on one hand, and their prosecution of those who do so (disproportionately) on the other.[54] In this particular situation, it would have been wise for the Public Prosecution to communicate more clearly that the supermarket employees were not prosecuted because of the fact *that* they intervened, but because of their use of violence after the thief had already surrendered. In other words, they should have more clearly conveyed why the prosecution was justified in their view. In order to appeal to the public's sense of justice and deservingness, they could have also placed more emphasis on their prosecution of the thief: the 'real' offender.

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54   For a detailed analysis of this debate in the Netherlands, see the report by Stichting Maatschappij, Veiligheid en Politie (2007).

9.5   Theoretical implications

The literature provides numerous examples of how just-world theory can be used to explain social reactions to victimization. In this thesis, we applied just-world theory to predict and explain reactions to victimization within the context of vigilantism. With regards to measurement, first of all, the concepts 'aversive state' and 'cognitive strategies' proved to be very useful. By gauging respondents' emotional reactions to vigilantism, as well as their ways of dealing with these emotions, we were able to construct elaborate and reliable measures of support for vigilantism. Secondly, insights from the BJW literature were successfully used to predict the effects of situational characteristics on support for vigilantism. Variation of the type of precipitating event, for instance, affected responses further down the vigilantism event sequence. Thirdly, putting public support for vigilantism in the context of BJW-reactions has increased our understanding of the support phenomenon. We discovered that when someone supports vigilantism, this is (partially) an indirect effect from the aversive state that was induced by the precipitating crime. If this aversive state is not successfully eliminated by sentencing of the precipitating offender, support for vigilantism becomes an alternative threat-reducing strategy. Lastly, we investigated reactions to offenders as well as victims in our study, which has not been done very frequently in just-world research (Hafer & Bègue, 2005).

Despite the fact that just-world theory proved to be a useful framework for studying support for vigilantism, individual differences in belief in a just world (i.e. BJW-O) did not predict many of respondents' reactions to the vignettes. It was expected that the injustice as portrayed in the newspaper articles would present a greater threat to people who strongly believe in a just world, and would lead to a higher motivation to engage in cognitive strategies. In other words, we assumed that the individual difference measure BJW-O would corroborate the existence of the processes assumed to underlie the effects of our two experimental manipulations. These expectations were rejected for all but one of the four dependent variables (desired punishment for the vigilante). One reason for this is that people may not always be aware of their need to believe in a just world, making self-reports an unsuitable method for measuring individual levels of BJW (cf. Hafer & Bègue, 2005). Our findings in any case do not form an exception to the literature, as interactions between just-world manipulations and individual difference-scales have often been found to be elusive. Dalbert (2001) has proposed that the implicit and explicit versions of BJW may explain the sporadic support for individual scales as predictors of reactions in experimental studies. Within experiments, people's judgments are likely to be rather intuitive, whereas self-report measures are likely to be more cognitive. We used realistic and engaging stimuli in order to induce automatic, emotional reactions rather than deliberated, socially-desirable responses. The BJW-O items, on the other hand, form a rather straight-forward, conscious measure. This may thus explain why BJW-O is not strongly related to the emotional reactions that were induced by the vignettes.

9.6   Methodological considerations

Our findings demonstrate that it is important to treat support for vigilantism as a multifaceted concept. We for instance established that low empathy with the vigilantism victim does not necessarily imply that the public is against formal sentencing of the vigilante. Additionally, our analyses revealed that the role of determinants depends on which support measure is examined (see Table 8.18 in the previous chapter). General concern over crime for instance predicted blame and derogation of the vigilantism victim, while it did not affect the other three support measures. These findings stress the importance of assessing a number of different sentiments, rather than simply asking people whether they support vigilantism or not. This is true for measures of support for a specific vigilantism act, as well as for an assessment of how people view vigilantism in general. The same can be said about the measurement of confidence in the criminal justice system. As stated earlier, not all types of confidence affected support for vigilantism, which points to the importance of using elaborate and multiple-item instruments of confidence in this context. The measures of support and confidence that were developed and tested in this thesis are examples of such a differentiated approach.

We now turn to our use of vignettes. In both of our empirical studies, respondents were presented with information about cases of vigilantism in the form of vignettes. Although the vignettes in the second study were made to look more authentic than those in the first study, respondents may not have believed that the articles were real. As such, their resulting reactions may not have been as strong as would have been the case with actual newspaper articles. Another point of criticism that is often raised in the context of vignette studies is that this methodology tends to lose on external validity (Konecni & Ebbesen, 1992). Respondents are commonly presented with highly specific case descriptions in which a number of characteristics have been manipulated. Such stimuli have been criticized for being unrealistic and overly simplistic. However, we feel that this applies less to the current context, as vignettes are very similar to how the public is normally informed about crime, including vigilantism. After all, they tend to read about criminal cases in (online) news articles, or through brief news items on television. In those cases citizens also form an opinion based on minimal information. Research indeed confirms the validity of vignettes in such contexts, and suggests that vignettes can be especially useful when examining the reactions of observers to situations such as violent incidents (Robinson & Clore, 2001; Van Zomeren & Lodewijkx, 2005).

With regards to the operationalizion of the crimes in our vignettes, we realize that we only included crimes that had no fatal consequences for their victims. We can imagine that support for vigilantism would have been higher if it had been in response to even more severe criminal acts. However, we were interested in the effects of situational manipulations on support for vigilantism, and expected that we would find ceiling effects if death or very severe injuries were involved in either the precipitating crime or the subsequent act of vigilantism. We also wanted to include vigilantes who acted in response to their own victimization, and this would obviously not have been possible if the precipitating acts had caused their death or severe, permanent injury. Lastly, we

wanted to include an acquittal condition in the second study, and felt that this would not be credible in a case where the precipitating crime caused someone's death. In any case we did vary the crime types in our studies, thereby increasing the generalizability of our findings.

Another issue concerning the vignettes in the second study is that some of the crimes differ on aspects that are not necessarily related to the experimental variation. We aimed to only vary the precipitating crime type, but this also resulted in variations regarding the consequences for the victim. The victim of the sex crime for instance did not suffer from the same injuries as did the two traffic victims. This difference is inherent to the crime type, but should nevertheless be taken into account when interpreting the findings. Similarly, the perceived responsibility of the sex offender may have been higher than that of the two intoxicated drivers. As respondents probably regarded the sex crime as more deliberate, this may have added to the relatively strong emotional reactions to the sex offender. Another inconsistency is that the precipitating crime victim himself was the vigilante in one of the vignettes, while the father of the victim was the vigilante in the other two cases. Even though these aspects have no consequences for our main conclusion, namely that situational characteristics affect support for vigilantism, it is advisable to pay special attention to this matter in the design of future studies.

Within the sex offense conditions, it was noticeable that the level of sentencing had no impact whatsoever on the support for vigilantism ratings. The results might have been different had we included a condition in which the sex offender was acquitted, as it was precisely the acquittal version that led to different responses for the other two precipitating crimes. We can also speculate about what the findings would have been like if the 'severe' sentencing level had been even more severe than the current one (a combination of community service, a suspended prison sentence and victim compensation). Would a lengthy, unsuspended prison sentence have led to different results? We suspect that for some crime types, people are not easily satisfied with any type of formal sentence, for which reason they might 'appreciate' the extra punishment by a vigilante no matter what.

9.7   Future research

In our studies several situational characteristics were varied to measure their impact on support for vigilantism. Naturally, this research can be extended by varying other characteristics from the typology. Of these, vigilante motive may especially be an interesting one. If support for vigilantism can indeed be interpreted as a just-world based reaction, it may be especially affected by deservingness-related vigilante motives such as retribution. Moreover, how respondents themselves view punishment goals in general may also play a role. If someone attaches particular value to deterrence, rather than retribution, would this change his or her view of a retribution-driven act of vigilantism?

Many cases of vigilantism, including those in our research, involve violence. Most Western countries have abolished corporal punishment. In other words, when a vigilante beats up an offender, he accomplishes a type of punishment which cannot be realized through the criminal justice system. Imaginably, this facet of vigilantism can cause outrage, but it may also lead to support for vigilantism. Especially in response to a heinous crime, people may prefer for an offender to be punished corporally rather than through community service or a prison sentence. Sentiments such as 'eye for an eye' may play a role here: if an offender used violence against his victim, some might find that he should suffer a similar form of violence as a punishment, and not 'get away with it' through a nonviolent type of sentence. Such emotions might be interesting to explore in future research on vigilantism. Similarly, we wonder what would happen if the vigilante *did* accomplish a type of sentence that could also be the outcome of a criminal justice procedure, such as compensation for the victim of the precipitating crime. Would it in that case still matter to people that the procedure is illegitimate, or would the outcome be dominant in determining their response? Research from the United States on death through capital punishment versus death through vigilantism (Skitka & Houston, 2001), as briefly described in Chapter 2, suggests that it may be the outcome that matters more than the procedure.

In our second study we tested a simplified version of the BJW vigilantism event sequence model. For fear of interfering with natural reactions to the vignettes, we for instance did not assess people's opinions about the sentencing of the precipitating offender. Even though the study design allowed us to indirectly measure the effects of the legal response, it might be interesting in future research to further investigate such sentiments. Furthermore, respondents' views on policies and practices of the criminal justice system regarding specific crime types may also be assessed. If people for instance have confidence in the legal authorities overall, but are dissatisfied with their specific approach to sex offenders, this may also affect their views on vigilantism against such perpetrators.

We chose to study support for acts of vigilantism that clearly do not qualify as cases of self-defense or other legally justifiable behavior. The reason for this, as explained before, is that for now we were mostly interested in public reactions to those who deliberately deal with alleged criminals in spite of the law. In other words, we did not examine public opinion regarding immediate, emotional reactions to crime that turn into vigilantism. Recent qualitative research suggests that public opinion regarding the latter type of violence might be similar to what we found in our studies (Althoff, 2010). Respondents were presented with two vignettes based on the case of the Tilburg jeweler who shot a robber, and the case of the lady who chased the thieves of her purse (see Chapter 1). Interviews for instance showed that respondents disapproved of the vigilantism acts, while at the same time expressing an understanding for the vigilante. Additionally, they seemed keen on blaming the victim of vigilantism for his fate (death in both cases), which parallels our findings on deservingness and just-world sentiments. Althoff and colleagues (2010) furthermore conclude that their respondents

did not express support for vigilantism because they lack confidence in the criminal justice system, or out of disrespect for the state's monopoly on violence. Instead, respondents felt that citizens sometimes need to take responsibility in a crime situation as enforcement of the law, and not in spite of it. In future studies it might be interesting to compare such sentiments between self-defense related vigilantism and more planned types.[55]

Lastly, as just-world theory proved to be a useful framework for studying public support for vigilantism, we propose that it may also help to reach a better understanding of why people might *consort* to vigilantism. In other words, what is it that drives people to take the law into their own hands? As addressed in Chapter 3, it is commonly assumed that vigilantism, as well as support for it, is rooted in a lack of confidence in the criminal justice system. However, the current literature does not provide many empirical insights into vigilante motives. Based on our findings we would expect people's general support for vigilantism (or moral mandate on vigilantism) to play an important role. Additionally, given that situational factors were found to be important determinants of support for vigilantism in our study, they may also aid in explaining the occurrence of vigilantism itself. Vigilantes, just like supporters of vigilantism, are probably motivated by situational aspects in addition to a possible lack of confidence in the criminal justice system. It is probable that their reasons to take the law into their own hands can (at least partially) be explained as just-world reactions to an injustice. Retributive reactions such as the illegal punishment of an alleged offender are likely based on feelings of deservingness, and can thus be expected to be affected by situational factors. Likewise, the situation-specific reactions of the criminal justice authorities to the precipitating crime are also likely to play an important role in the events leading up to a case of vigilantism. Even if someone generally has a high level of confidence in the criminal justice system, he may resort to vigilantism when he perceives the authorities to have failed in a specific crime situation. In order to prevent vigilantism, the criminal justice authorities may be advised to put substantial effort into explaining their response to a precipitating crime, or lack thereof, to those involved. This is purely speculative, as we have not studied vigilantes and their motivations, but our current findings do point to the importance of the formal response to the precipitating crime.

9.8   Conclusion

In the introduction to this thesis we wondered whether the existence of support for vigilantism suggests that there is something peculiar about vigilantism that causes the public to make an exception to the general rule of punishing harm doers. After all, when the public supports vigilantism, this seems to go against general notions of how crime and criminals should be responded to. We conclude by saying that this reaction is not necessarily an exception to the rule. Vigilantes can be seen as the ones who make

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55   In an earlier study, we found that more planning led to less support for vigilantism, but the presented case was not a self-defense situation (Haas et al., 2007).

sure that harm doers 'get what they deserve'. For this reason vigilantism may not always lead to public outrage, and empathy with its victims may be low. However, our research has revealed that this does not necessarily imply that people want the vigilante to go unpunished. Furthermore, we have demonstrated that such reactions are not necessarily caused by a lack of confidence in the criminal justice system, as they are also affected by situational characteristics and by people's general views on vigilantism.

If we had found substantial public support for vigilantism, would this constitute a call for change of the criminal justice system and the state's monopoly on legitimate violence? Would we need to consider expanding citizens' rights when responding to criminal acts, as has for instance been proposed by some Dutch politicians (e.g. Teeven, 2010)? Would the state have to refrain from prosecuting citizens who take the law into their own hands? Would judges have to be milder in their sentencing of vigilantes, simply because there is an understanding for their behavior in society? In our opinion, support for vigilantism would never form grounds for changing the status quo. Even if the criminal justice system fails at times, we would much prefer an imperfect system over a society in which the formal distinctions between right and wrong fade. We are strongly convinced of the importance of the state's displacement of retaliation, and do not wish to go toward a situation of random and disproportional punishment. Although the current criminal justice system may sometimes cause disappointment and outrage on the part of those who are directly or indirectly affected by crime, we believe that this is incomparable to the detrimental effects vigilante justice would have if it were to become a regular part of our society.

Appendices

Appendix 1:   Measures of support for vigilantism

Table A1 Single-item survey measures

Survey information	Items	Findings
Data collection: Gallup Poll (1937) Survey method: personal Sample: 1,500 adults in US (approximation)	1. "Do you approve of the citizen groups, called vigilantes, which have sprung up recently in strike areas?"	24 % yes 76 % no
Data collection: Harris & Associates (1970) Survey method: personal Sample: 1,590 adults in US	2. "Many different types of people with new viewpoints have sprung up in this country over the past few years. Tell me which of the following you feel to be helpful to the country, which ones are harmful, and which are neither helpful nor harmful… Vigilante groups such as the Minutemen, White Citizens' Council, and the Like."	6 % helpful 58 % harmful 12 % neither helpful nor harmful 24 % not sure
Data collection: Harris & Associates (1973) Survey method: personal Sample: 1,546 adults in US	3. "(Let me ask you about different types of people in this country. For each, tell me if you feel they do more good than harm, more harm than good, or are neither helpful nor harmful?) … Vigilante groups such as the Minutemen, white citizens' councils, and the Ku Klux Klan."	21 % more good than harm / neither / not sure 79 % do more harm than good
Data collection: Gallup Organization (1985) Survey method: telephone Sample: 1,009 adults in US	4. "Do you feel that taking the law into one's own hands, often called vigilantism, is justified by circumstances?"	3 % always 68 % sometimes 23 % never 6 % don't know
Data collection: Gallup Report (1985) Survey method: telephone Sample: 1,528 adults in US	5. "Do you feel that incidents like these (the recent incident in a New York City subway in which a man shot and wounded four teenagers who demanded money from him) – taking the law into one's hands, often called vigilantism – are sometimes justified because of the circumstances, or are never justified?"	8 % always 72 % sometimes 17 % never 3 % no opinion
Data collection: Schulman et al. (1991) Survey method: telephone Sample: 1,000 adults in US	6. "Do you think that vigilantism (sometimes when people lack confidence in the criminal justice system's ability to deal with a crime, they take the law into their own hands and attack the person who they think is responsible for the crime) is ever justified?"	33 % yes 61 % no 6 % not sure

(Zimring, 2003, pp.230-236)

Table A1   Single-item survey measures

Survey information	Items	Findings
Data collection: Weisburd (1982) Survey method: personal Sample: 404 Gush Emunim settlers in Israel (Weisburd, 1989)	7. "It is necessary for settlers to respond quickly and independently to Arab harassments of settlers and settlements" (strongly) (dis)agree, 5pt scale)	48 % strongly agree 28 % agree 13 % disagree 2 % strongly disagree 9 % no opinion
Data collection: annual survey Toledo (1984) Survey method: telephone Sample: 700 adults in Toledo, Ohio (Perry & Pugh, 1989)	8. "I would like to see the Guardian Angels in my own neighborhood" (strongly) (dis)agree, 5pt scale)	(strongly) agree: 60 % (18-29 yrs old) 43 % (30-49 yrs old) 38 % (≥ 50 yrs old)
Data collection: Canadian Gallup Poll (1987) Survey method: personal Sample: 1,017 adults in Canada (http://www.library.carleton.ca/ssdata/surveys/doc/glfp-87-jan517_1-doc)	9. "In the past few weeks, there have been a number of incidents involving firearms used by retail store owners. Do you feel that incidents like these – taking the law into one's own hands, often called vigilantism – are sometimes justified because of the circumstances, or are never justified?"	8 % always 68 % sometimes 21 % never 3 % no opinion
Data collection: NSCR (1996) Survey method: personal and by mail Sample: 2,152 adults in the Netherlands (Ter Voert, 1997)	10. "If crime control by the government is inadequate, citizens are justified to take the law into their own hands"	12 % fully agree 4 % agree 24 % agree nor disagree 44 % disagree 16 % fully disagree

Table A2 Multiple-item survey measures

Survey information — **Items** — **Findings**

Data collection: Tankebe (2006)
Survey method: survey at home
Sample: 374 residents of Accra, Ghana

(Tankebe, 2009)

Items *(strongly (dis)agree, 5pt (?) scale)*:
"It is all right for members of the public to beat up crime suspects."
"People who kill armed robbers should not be blamed."
"It is sometimes OK for people to take the law in their own hands if they feel the police are unable to protect them."
"It is pointless to hand over a suspected criminal to the police because they won't bring the offender to justice."
"Each community should organize itself to provide it with security against criminals even if the police disagree with that."

Findings: Overall mean: 3.15 (SD=.85). Agreement percentages per item are not available.

Data collection: Norms and attitudes toward violence, active Pan American Health Organization (1996–1997)
Survey method: personal
Sample: 10,821 national adults in 7 Latin American cities and Madrid

(Briceño-Léon et al., 2006)

(strongly (dis)agree, 5pt scale)

Item	Latin America (s)agree	Latin America (s)disagree	Latin America neutral	Madrid (s)agree	Madrid (s)disagree	Madrid neutral
"A person has the right to kill to defend his or her family"	60 %	35 %	5 %	47 %	48 %	5 %
"A person has the right to kill to defend his or her property"	45 %	50 %	5 %	17 %	79 %	4 %

(approve, disapprove but understand, neither approve nor understand) "Would you approve if…"

Item	Latin America approve	Latin America understand	Latin America neither	Madrid approve	Madrid understand	Madrid neither
…a person killed someone who had raped his daughter?	44 %	38 %	18 %	19 %	49 %	32 %
…there was a person who keeps a community in a state of uproar/anguish and someone killed him?	25 %	46 %	30 %	7 %	29 %	64 %
…a group of people began to carry out a social purge, that is, killing undesirable individuals?	13 %	34 %	53 %	5 %	14 %	81 %

Data collection: Schadt and DeLisi (2007)
Survey method: survey in class
Sample: 218 undergraduate students in the US

(Schadt & DeLisi, 2007)

(strongly (dis)agree, 5pt scale)

Item	(s)agree	agree	neutral	disagree	(s)disagree
"If anyone ever victimized my family… …I would be tempted to hurt the person responsible"	9 %	25 %	24 %	29 %	13 %
"…I would hurt the person responsible"	4 %	6 %	24 %	38 %	28 %
"If anyone hurt my family… …I would be tempted to kill the person responsible"	27 %	53 %	7 %	10 %	3 %
"…I would kill the person responsible"	11 %	25 %	31 %	27 %	6 %
"Revenge killing is always wrong"	10 %	27 %	36 %	22 %	5 %
"If someone were to rape your mother then you would be morally justified in killing the perpetrator"	12 %	19 %	19 %	38 %	12 %

Appendix 2:   Vignette with experimental manipulations [56]

Ann is the owner of a clothing store downtown. For a few weeks now, she has been seeing a woman come into her store who looks around but always leaves without making a purchase. Ann starts to suspect that she takes clothes from her store without paying for them. This suspicion of theft is confirmed when Ann watches the tapes of her surveillance cameras. She sends the footage to the police, hoping that they will take some action.

A few days later, Ann still has not heard back from the police, so she decides to contact them again herself. During the phone conversation with a police officer, it becomes clear to her that the police have no time to deal with the theft. *[or: A few days later, a local police officer visits Ann in her store. The officer asks her for additional information about the shoplifting. He emphasizes that he and his colleagues will keep an eye on things by increasing surveillance. He also gives her a phone number on which he can always be reached.]*

After a few days, Ann sees the woman come into her store again. Ann watches her carefully and then sees her putting a shirt into her purse. She goes up to her to confront her with this, but the woman catches on and disappears into the crowd. She promises herself to teach her a lesson next time. The next day, Ann has a day off and walks around town when she suddenly runs into the same woman. She goes up to her without hesitation. The woman tries to run away, but Ann forcefully grabs her by her arm. **Ann then hits her in her face. The woman ends up with a black eye and a headache for a few days.** *[or: Ann then hits her in the face, after which the woman ends up on the ground. Ann then kicks her in the head a few times. The woman ends up with a broken jaw and a heavy concussion.]*

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56   The parts that are printed in **bold** and *italics* represent different versions of the vignette in correspondence with the two experimental factors (police responsiveness and vigilante violence)

Appendix 3:   Examples of vignettes

In this Appendix we present a selection of vignettes from the main study, which are indicated by boldface print and shading in Table A3. We first present all three versions of Vignette 1, followed by selected versions of Vignette 2. This is followed by an example of one of the two control vignettes (C2X). The English translation of the vignettes can be found in Appendix 4.

Table A3   Selected versions of Vignette 1 (all 3) and Vignette 2 (3 out of 10)

Vignette 1: precipitating event			Vignette 2: sentence + vigilantism				
Precipitating event	Victim	Offender	Precipitating offender's sentence		Vigilantism	Offender (vigilante)	Victim
A Traffic aggression	Alan	Dave	**A1** **A2** **A3** **A4**	acquittal lenient normal severe	vandalism & assault	Alan	Dave
B Pedestrian crash	Betty	Ethan	**B1** **B2** **B3** **B4**	acquittal lenient normal severe	vandalism & assault	George	Ethan
C Sex offense	Cathy	Fred	**C2** **C4**	lenient severe	vandalism & assault	Henry	Fred

Precipitating event vignette, version A (traffic aggression)

Precipitating event vignette, version B (pedestrian crash)

Precipitating event vignette, version C (sex offense)

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Meisje (9) van fiets getrokken en onzedelijk betast

Uitgegeven: 20 februari 2009 22:42
Laatst gewijzigd: 20 februari 2009 22:58

DORDRECHT – Een 9-jarig meisje uit Dordrecht is vrijdagmiddag door een man van haar fiets getrokken en onzedelijk betast.

Meisje van fiets getrokken en betast   fotoserie

Een 35-jarige man uit Rotterdam is vrijdag aangehouden op verdenking van het onzedelijk betasten van een 9-jarig meisje in Dordrecht.

Het meisje was op weg van school naar huis. Plotseling kwam er een man naast haar fietsen die haar hardhandig van haar fiets trok. Nadat het meisje ten val kwam, werd ze door de man onzedelijk betast.

Omdat het meisje zich verzette, kon ze wegkomen en de politie waarschuwen. De man, Ruben S., werd later op de dag op basis van het signalement aangehouden.

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◀ Vorige artikel   Volgende artikel ▶

Vigilantism + sentence vignette, version A1 (acquittal)

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Man (35) mishandeld door voormalig slachtoffer

Uitgegeven: 25 juli 2009 15:07
Laatst gewijzigd: 25 juli 2009 15:18

ROTTERDAM – Een 35-jarige man uit Rotterdam is vrijdagavond mishandeld door een 39-jarige man uit Dordrecht die hij in februari had aangereden.

Het slachtoffer van de mishandeling, Ruben S., werd afgelopen dinsdag door de rechter vrijgesproken van een ernstig verkeersongeval.

Bij dat ongeval in februari raakte de 39-jarige Frank H. uit Dordrecht zwaargewond. De bestuurder, Ruben S., bleek met drank op achter het stuur te hebben gezeten. Hij werd echter vrijgesproken vanwege een vormfout omdat in de dagvaarding de verkeerde datum stond. De rechter zei dat hij Frank H. wel had aangereden, maar dat dit niet op de aangegeven datum gebeurde. Hij sprak S. daarom vrij.

Drie dagen na zijn vrijspraak werd S. opgeschrikt toen er een baksteen door de ruit van zijn woonkamer werd gegooid. Toen hij naar buiten liep, werd hij bij de voordeur door Frank H. opgewacht, die hem begon te schoppen en te slaan. S. hield er twee gebroken tanden, een gebroken neus en kneuzingen aan over.

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Vigilantism + sentence vignette, version B3 (normal sentence)

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Vader mishandelt man die dochter had aangereden

Uitgegeven: 25 juli 2009 15:07
Laatst gewijzigd: 25 juli 2009 15:18

ROTTERDAM – Een 35-jarige man uit Rotterdam is vrijdagavond mishandeld door een man uit Dordrecht wiens dochter hij in februari had aangereden.

Het slachtoffer van de mishandeling, Ruben S., werd afgelopen dinsdag door de rechter veroordeeld tot een werkstraf van 180 uur, 2 maanden voorwaardelijke gevangenisstraf en een rijontzegging van 1 jaar in verband met een ernstig verkeersongeval.

Bij dat ongeval in februari raakte de 9-jarige dochter van Frank H. uit Dordrecht zwaargewond. De bestuurder, Ruben S., bleek met drank op achter het stuur te hebben gezeten. De straf komt overeen met de eis van het Openbaar Ministerie (OM).

Drie dagen na zijn veroordeling werd S. opgeschrikt toen er een baksteen door de ruit van zijn woonkamer werd gegooid. Toen hij naar buiten liep, werd hij bij de voordeur door Frank H. opgewacht, die hem begon te schoppen en te slaan. S. hield er twee gebroken tanden, een gebroken neus en kneuzingen aan over.

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Vigilantism + sentence vignette, version C4 (severe sentence)

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Vader mishandelt man die dochter onzedelijk had betast

Uitgegeven: 25 juli 2009 15:07
Laatst gewijzigd: 25 juli 2009 15:18

ROTTERDAM – Een 35-jarige man uit Rotterdam is vrijdagavond mishandeld door een man uit Dordrecht wiens dochter hij in februari onzedelijk had betast.

Het slachtoffer van de mishandeling, Ruben S., werd afgelopen dinsdag door de rechter veroordeeld tot een werkstraf van 240 uur, 4 maanden voorwaardelijke gevangenisstraf en een schadevergoeding van 400 euro in verband met de onzedelijke betasting van een minderjarig meisje.

In februari werd de 9-jarige dochter van Frank H. uit Dordrecht op weg naar huis door Ruben S. van haar fiets getrokken en onzedelijk betast. De door de rechter opgelegde straf is zwaarder dan de eis van het Openbaar Ministerie (OM), dat om een werkstraf van 180 uur, 2 maanden voorwaardelijke gevangenisstraf en een schadevergoeding van 250 euro had gevraagd.

Drie dagen na zijn veroordeling werd S. opgeschrikt toen er een baksteen door de ruit van zijn woonkamer werd gegooid. Toen hij naar buiten liep, werd hij bij de voordeur door Frank H. opgewacht, die hem begon te schoppen en te slaan. S. hield er twee gebroken tanden, een gebroken neus en kneuzingen aan over.

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Control group vignette, version C2X (sex offense + lenient sentence)

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NUfoto
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NUvideo
NUbijlage
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Vader mishandelt man die dochter onzedelijk had betast

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ROTTERDAM – Een 35-jarige man uit Rotterdam is vrijdagavond mishandeld door een 39-jarige man uit Dordrecht wiens dochter hij in februari onzedelijk had betast.

Meisje van fiets getrokken en betast   fotoserie

Het slachtoffer van de mishandeling, Ruben S., werd afgelopen dinsdag door de rechter veroordeeld tot een werkstraf van 40 uur en een schadevergoeding van 100 euro in verband met de onzedelijke betasting van een minderjarig meisje.

In februari was de 9-jarige dochter van Frank H. op weg van school naar huis, toen er plotseling een man naast haar kwam fietsen die haar hardhandig van haar fiets trok. Nadat het meisje ten val kwam, werd ze door de man onzedelijk betast. Omdat het meisje zich verzette, kon ze wegkomen en de politie waarschuwen. Ruben S. werd later op de dag op basis van het signalement aangehouden.

De werkstraf van 40 uur tezamen met de schadevergoeding van 100 euro is lager dan de eis van het Openbaar Ministerie (OM), dat om een werkstraf van 180 uur, 2 maanden voorwaardelijke gevangenisstraf en een schadevergoeding van 250 euro had gevraagd.

Drie dagen na zijn veroordeling werd S. opgeschrikt toen er een baksteen door de ruit van zijn woonkamer werd gegooid. Toen hij naar buiten liep, werd hij bij de voordeur door Frank H. opgewacht, die hem begon te schoppen en te slaan. S. hield er twee gebroken tanden, een gebroken neus en kneuzingen aan over.

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Appendix 4:   Translated texts of selected vignettes

Precipitating event vignette A   **Traffic aggression**

Man (39) heavily injured by aggression in traffic
DORDRECHT – On Friday afternoon, a 39-year-old man from Schiedam was forced off the road by a car on a bicycle path in his home town. The victim, Frank H., was cut off when he wanted to turn right into the Mauritsweg on his bicycle. He reacted to this by raising his fists to the driver, Ruben S. Shortly afterwards, H. was forced off the road by the same driver, causing him to fall. Frank H. ended up with a broken leg, a broken arm, bruised ribs and a heavy concussion. He was taken to a hospital in Rotterdam by ambulance. The 35-year-old driver Ruben S. from Rotterdam was taken in for interrogation. He was found to have a blood-alcohol level that was twice the legal limit.

Precipitating event vignette B   **Pedestrian crash**

Girl (9) heavily injured after car accident
DORDRECHT – On Friday afternoon, a 9-year-old girl from Dordrecht was hit by a car when she was walking on a pedestrian crossing. The girl ended up with a broken leg, a broken arm, bruised ribs and a heavy concussion. She was taken to a hospital in Rotterdam by ambulance. The girl wanted to walk her bicycle across the Mauritsweg. While she was walking on the pedestrian crossing, she was hit by a car that was driving at high speed. The 35-year-old driver Ruben S. from Rotterdam was taken in for interrogation. He was found to have a blood-alcohol level that was twice the legal limit.

Precipitating event vignette C   **Sex offense**

Girl (9) pulled from bicycle and sexually assaulted
DORDRECHT – On Friday afternoon, a 9-year-old girl from Dordrecht was pulled off her bicycle and sexually assaulted by a man. A 35-year-old man from Rotterdam was apprehended on Friday for the sexual assault of a 9-year old girl in Dordrecht. The girl was on her way home from school. Suddenly a man pulled up next to her on his bicycle and forcefully pulled her off her bicycle. After the girl had fallen onto the ground, he sexually assaulted her. As the girl resisted, she was able to get away and notify the police. The man, Ruben S., was later apprehended on the basis of her description.

Vigilantism + sentence vignette A1   **Acquittal**

Man (35) beaten up by former victim
ROTTERDAM – A 35-man from Rotterdam was beaten up Friday night by a 39-year-old man from Dordrecht, whom he had hit by car in February. The victim of the beating, Ruben S., was acquitted by a judge on Tuesday from involvement in a serious traffic accident. As a result of the accident in question, 39-year-old Frank H. from Dordrecht was seriously injured. The driver, Ruben S., was found to have been driving while under the influence of alcohol. He was acquitted, however, due to a technicality, as the summons reported the wrong date. The judge said that he did collide with Frank H., but that this did not happen on the indicated date. He thus acquitted Ruben S. Three days after his acquittal, S. was startled when a brick was thrown through the window of his living room. When he walked outside, he was awaited near the front door by Frank H., who started hitting and kicking him. S. was left with two broken teeth, a broken nose and contusions.

Vigilantism + sentence vignette B2   **Normal sentence**

Father beats up man who collided with his daughter on the road
ROTTERDAM – A 35-man from Rotterdam was beaten up Friday night by a 39-year-old man from Dordrecht, whose daughter he had hit by car in February. The victim of the beating, Ruben S., was sentenced by the judge last Tuesday to 180 hours of community service, a 2-month suspended prison sentence and a suspended driver's license for 1 year due to his involvement in a serious traffic accident. As a result of the accident in question, the 9-year old daughter of Frank H. from Dordrecht was seriously injured. The driver, Ruben S., was found to have been driving while under the influence of alcohol. The sentence matches the Public Prosecutor's demand. Three days after his conviction, S. was startled when a brick was thrown through the window of his living room. When he walked outside, he was awaited near the front door by Frank H., who started hitting and kicking him. S. was left with two broken teeth, a broken nose and contusions.

Vigilantism + sentence vignette C4   **Severe sentence**

Father beats up man who molested his daughter
ROTTERDAM – A 35-man from Rotterdam was beaten up Friday night by a 39-year-old man from Schiedam, whose daughter he sexually assaulted in February. The victim of the beating, Ruben S., was sentenced by a judge last Tuesday to 240 hours of community service, a 4-month suspended prison sentence and 250 euro compensation as a result of the sexual assault of an under age girl. In February the 9-year old daughter of Frank H. from Dordrecht was on her way home when she was pulled off her bicycle and sexually assaulted by Ruben S. The judge's sentence is more severe than the Public Prosecutor's demand, which was 180 hours of community service, a 2-month suspended prison sentence and 250 euro compensation. Three days after his conviction, S. was startled when a brick was thrown through the window of his living room. When he walked outside, he was awaited near the front door by Frank H., who started hitting and kicking him. S. was left with two broken teeth, a broken nose and contusions.

Control vignette C2X   **Sex offense + lenient sentence**

Father beats up man who molested his daughter
ROTTERDAM – A 35-man from Rotterdam was beaten up Friday night by a 39-year-old man from Schiedam, whose daughter he sexually assaulted in February. The victim of the beating, Ruben S., was sentenced by a judge last Tuesday to 40 hours of community service and 100 euro compensation as a result of the sexual assault of an under age girl. In February the girl was on her way home from school when a man suddenly pulled up next to her on his bicycle and forcefully pulled her off her bicycle. After the girl had fallen onto the ground, he sexually assaulted her. As the girl resisted, she was able to get away and notify the police. Ruben S. was later apprehended on the basis of her description. The 40 hours of community service in combination with the 100 euro compensation is less severe than the Public Prosecutor's demand, which was 180 hours of community service, a 2-month suspended sentence and 250 euro compensation. Three days after his conviction, S. was startled when a brick was thrown through the window of his living room. When he walked outside, he was awaited near the front door by Frank H., who started hitting and kicking him. S. was left with two broken teeth, a broken nose and contusions.

Appendix 5:   Measures of reactions to vignettes [57]

Items in response to Vignette 1 (precipitating event)	Items in response to Vignette 2 (sentence + vigilantism)

Aversive state

1. I find it terrible what happened to X
2. I pity X
3. When reading this article, I realize that what happened to X can also happen to me
4. I feel for X
5. Y's behavior is not justifiable in any way
6. Y's behavior is morally reprehensible
7. I am angry at Y
8. I feel sympathy for Y
9. Y's behavior is understandable
10. I feel for Y

Aversive state

1. I find it terrible that Y was beaten up
2. I pity Y
3. When reading this article, I realize that what happened to Y can also happen to me
4. I feel for Y
5. X's behavior is not justifiable in any way
6. X's behavior is morally reprehensible
7. I am angry at X
8. I feel sympathy for X
9. X's behavior is understandable
10. X was completely right in beating up Y
11. X is the victim of this situation, not the offender

Blame

11. X has herself/himself to thank for the car collision/sex crime
12. X is … for the car collision/sex crime*
13. Y is … for the car collision/sex crime*

Blame

12. Y has himself to thank for the assault

13. X is … for the assault*
14. Y is … for the assault*

Derogation

14. X is unwise
15. X is irresponsible
16. X is stupid

Derogation

15. Y is stupid
16. Y is crazy
17. Y is bad

Desire for punishment

17. Y should be prosecuted for what he did
18. Y should do penance for his behavior
19. The authorities should ignore the car collision/sex crime

Desire for punishment

18. X should be prosecuted for what he did
19. X should do penance for his behavior
20. The authorities should ignore the assault

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57   The labels of the 7-point response scales are 1 = fully disagree and 7 = fully agree. For the items with an *, the labels are 1 = not to blame and 7 = completely to blame. A few additional questions were posed with alternative response scales (e.g. yes or no). See Section 7.4.6 for more details on these questions.

Appendix 6 :   Items to measure confidence in the criminal justice system

Item	Object	Concept	Source
Judges are prejudiced	judges	procedural justice	De Keijser et al. (2006)
Judges treat people fairly	judges	procedural justice	Jackson & Sunshine (2007)
Judges are trustworthy	judges	procedural justice	Ter Voert (1997)
You can count on the judges to take decisions that are best for society	judges	procedural justice	Sunshine & Tyler (2003)
I respect judges	judges	procedural justice	Sunshine & Tyler (2003)
Judges deserve respect among citizens	judges	procedural justice	
If a judge passes a light sentence, he will have a good reason for that.	judges	procedural justice	
Judges' verdicts are well deliberated	judges	performance	
Judges do their job well	judges	performance	Dekker et al. (2004)
Judges know what's going on in society	judges	performance	Koomen (2006)
Citizens' rights are not protected well by judges	judges	performance	Sunshine & Tyler (2003)
The Public Prosecution is prejudiced	prosecutors	procedural justice	De Keijser et al. (2006)
The Public Prosecution treats people fairly	prosecutors	procedural justice	Jackson & Sunshine (2007)
The Public Prosecution is trustworthy	prosecutors	procedural justice	Ter Voert (1997)
You can count on the Public Prosecution to take decisions that are best for society	prosecutors	procedural justice	Sunshine & Tyler (2003)
The Public Prosecution deserves respect among citizens	prosecutors	procedural justice	
I respect the Public Prosecution	prosecutors	procedural justice	Sunshine & Tyler (2003)
If the Public Prosecution recommends a light sentence, it will have a good reason for that.	prosecutors	procedural justice	
The Public Prosecution does its job well	prosecutors	performance	Dekker et al. (2004)
The Public Prosecution succeeds in prosecuting the right people	prosecutors	performance	
Sentence recommendations are well-deliberated by the Public Prosecution	prosecutors	performance	
Citizens' rights are not protected well by the Public Prosecution	prosecutors	performance	Sunshine & Tyler (2003)

Item	Object	Concept	Source
The police are trustworthy	police	procedural justice	Ter Voert (1997)
The police care about the well-being of the everyday citizen	police	procedural justice	
You can count on the police to take decisions that are best for society	police	procedural justice	Sunshine & Tyler (2003)
The police take citizens seriously	police	procedural justice	
If the police decide not to arrest someone, they will have a good reason for that	police	procedural justice	
I do not respect the police	police	procedural justice	Sunshine & Tyler (2003)
Police orders do not always need to be obeyed	police	procedural justice	
The police do their job well.	police	performance	Dekker et al. (2004)
Citizens' rights are not protected well by the police	police	performance	Sunshine & Tyler (2003)
The police are effective in combating crime	police	performance	
The police are there when you need them	police	performance	Ter Voert (1997)
The Dutch criminal justice system is fair	CJS	procedural justice	
The Dutch criminal justice system is trustworthy	CJS	procedural justice	Ter Voert (1997)
I trust the way in which laws in the Netherlands are maintained	CJS	procedural justice	
Citizens can count on it that their case is properly dealt with in the Dutch CJS	CJS	procedural justice	
Sometimes it is better to ignore the law and solve problems yourself	CJS	procedural justice	
I respect the Dutch criminal justice system	CJS	procedural justice	
On the condition that you don't harm anyone, it's acceptable to disobey a law	CJS	procedural justice	
The Dutch criminal justice system functions properly	CJS	performance	
The Dutch justice system succeeds in bringing criminals to justice	CJS	performance	Caldeira et al. (1995)
The Dutch justice system is effective in combating crime	CJS	performance	Sunshine & Tyler (2003)
In the Dutch justice system, there is too much emphasis on the rights of perpetrators	CJS	performance	Rattner et al. (2001)

Information about the courts

Dutch (original) version:
Het Openbaar Ministerie (OM) zorgt ervoor dat strafbare feiten worden opgespoord en vervolgd. Het OM is in de rechtszaal vertegenwoordigd door een officier van justitie. Komt een zaak voor de rechter, dan legt de officier van justitie uit waarvan iemand wordt verdacht en welke straf hij eist. De rechter onderzoekt vervolgens of de verdachte een strafbaar feit heeft gepleegd en daarvoor gestraft moet worden.

English version:
The Public Prosecution Service (PPS) is responsible for the detection and prosecution of criminal offenses. In court the PPS is represented by a prosecutor. When a case is taken to court, the prosecutor explains the charges that have been filed against the defendant and requests a sanction. The judge subsequently investigates whether the defendant has committed a crime and to what extent he will be sanctioned for it.

Appendix 7:   Attitude measures

General concern over crime (De Keijser et al., 2007)

Total volume of crime in the Netherlands has, over the past years, increased strongly

Crime is a problem that causes me great concern

In general, sentences for crimes in the Netherlands are too lenient

Offenders in the Netherlands are currently punished more severely than they were ten years ago

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General support for vigilantism

If an offender is not sentenced by the legal system, I approve of it when a citizen takes the law into his own hands

If the government is not successful in their fight against crime, citizens are justified to take the law into their own hands*

Citizens should take the law into their own hands more frequently

Some cases of citizens taking the law into their own hands are justified

Citizens who take the law into their own hands should always be prosecuted

If an offender is not sentenced by the legal system, I find it understandable for a citizen to take the law into his own hands

Citizens who take the law into their own hands form a danger to society

Under no condition do I approve of people who take the law into their own hands

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Based on Ter Voert (1997)

Belief in a just world for others (Lipkus et al., 1996)

I feel that people get in life what they are entitled to have

I feel that the world treats people fairly

I feel that people are treated unfairly in life *(new)*

I feel that people treat each other fairly in life

I feel that the world is an unfair place *(new)*

I feel that people earn the rewards and punishments they get

I feel that the world is a fair place *(new)*

I feel that people treat each other with the respect they deserve

I feel that people get in life what they deserve

I feel that people's efforts are noticed and rewarded

I feel that when people meet with misfortune, they have brought it upon themselves

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Appendix 8:   General support for vigilantism

Table A4   General support for vigilantism – agreement percentages per item [58]

Item	disagree	neutral	agree
1. If an offender is not sentenced by the legal system, I approve of it when a citizen takes the law into his own hands	62	20	18
2. If the government is not successful in their fight against crime, citizens are justified to take the law into their own hands [*]	60	19	21
3. Citizens should take the law into their own hands more frequently	71	18	11
4. Some cases of citizens taking the law into their own hands are justified	33	21	46
5. Citizens who take the law into their own hands should always be prosecuted	25	22	53
6. If an offender is not sentenced by the legal system, I find it understandable for a citizen to take the law into his own hands	34	20	46
7. Citizens who take the law into their own hands form a danger to society	26	24	50
8. Under no condition do I approve of people who take the law into their own hands	38	25	37

[*] *Based on Ter Voert (1997)*

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58   The items were measured on a 7-point scale. In this table, scores 1-3 are in the 'disagree' category, score 4 is labeled as 'neutral', and scores 5-7 together constitute the 'agree' percentages.

Table A5   Results of two-way ANOVAs on four reactions to vigilantism (N = 1972)

Empathy with vigilantism victim				
SOURCE	**SS**	**df**	**MS**	**F**
precipitating event	673.30	2	336.15	152.81**
sentence level	104.62	3	34.87	15.85**
precipitating crime * sentence level	3.01	4	.75	.34
error	4315.87	1962	2.20	

Outrage at vigilante				
SOURCE	**SS**	**df**	**MS**	**F**
precipitating event	539.33	2	269.66	184.48**
sentence level	78.62	3	26.21	17.93**
precipitating crime * sentence level	3.45	4	.86	.59
error	2868.02	1962	1.46	

Blame and derogation of vigilantism victim				
SOURCE	**SS**	**df**	**MS**	**F**
precipitating event	538.52	2	269.26	139.46**
sentence level	8.35	3	2.78	1.44
precipitating crime * sentence level	3.93	4	.98	.51
error	3788.21	1962	1.93	

Desired punishment for vigilante				
SOURCE	**SS**	**df**	**MS**	**F**
precipitating event	539.38	2	269.69	12.79**
sentence level	84.98	3	28.33	12.69**
precipitating crime * sentence level	5.02	4	1.26	.56
error	438.77	1962	2.23	

*** p < .01*

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Samenvatting

Dankwoord

Curriculum vitae

Samenvatting
Maatschappelijke Steun voor Eigenrichting

Waarom kunnen eigenrechters op maatschappelijke steun rekenen? Waarom verzetten burgers zich in bepaalde gevallen tegen de bestraffing van een eigenrechter door de autoriteiten? Op een strafbaar feit moet toch immers een strafrechtelijke reactie volgen? Hoe kan worden verklaard dat eigenrichting niet zelden als rechtvaardig wordt ervaren? Ondanks de sociale relevantie, is er weinig bekend over reacties op eigenrichting. Dit proefschrift heeft tot doel maatschappelijke steun voor eigenrichting te verklaren.

Vaak wordt verondersteld dat steun voor eigenrichting wordt veroorzaakt door een gebrek aan vertrouwen in het strafrechtsysteem. In dit proefschrift wordt dit de 'vertrouwenshypothese' genoemd. Een alternatief perspectief op steun voor eigenrichting legt juist de nadruk op situationele kenmerken. Deze 'situatiehypothese' stelt dat reacties op eigenrichting worden beïnvloed door kenmerken van de eigenrichting zelf. Hoofdstuk 2 laat zien dat er enige empirische ondersteuning bestaat voor beide hypothesen, hoewel bestaande onderzoeken kampen met methodologische beperkingen. Bovendien zijn de twee hypothesen nooit gelijktijdig en in relatie tot elkaar getoetst, waardoor hun relatieve rol bij het verklaren van steun voor eigenrichting niet bekend is. De literatuur biedt echter wel een aantal bruikbare manieren om steun voor eigenrichting te conceptualiseren en meten.

Alvorens empirisch onderzoek te verrichten naar steun voor eigenrichting, is het van belang om een aantal concepten te verhelderen. Met de term eigenrichting wordt in de literatuur een breed scala aan gedragingen beschreven, waardoor het onduidelijk is wat eigenrichting precies inhoudt. In Hoofdstuk 3 wordt dan ook een nieuwe definitie van eigenrichting gepresenteerd. Tevens worden de drie belangrijkste gebeurtenissen van een situatie van eigenrichting geïntroduceerd: de aanleiding, de formele reactie op de aanleiding, en de eigenrichting zelf. Deels op basis van dit model wordt er vervolgens een typologie gepresenteerd waarin de belangrijkste contextuele kenmerken van eigenrichting worden geïdentificeerd en geclassificeerd. Deze kenmerken kunnen in empirisch onderzoek worden gevarieerd om te meten in hoeverre zij van invloed zijn op steun voor eigenrichting. Dit maakt het mogelijk om de situatiehypothese te toetsen.

Om de invloed van vertrouwen op steun voor eigenrichting te onderzoeken, is het noodzakelijk om een duidelijk beeld te hebben van wat vertrouwen in het strafrechtsysteem precies inhoudt. Niet alleen eigenrichting maar ook vertrouwen wordt in de literatuur op verscheidene manieren geconceptualiseerd en gemeten. In Hoofdstuk 4 worden de belangrijkste conceptuele kenmerken van vertrouwen besproken. Er wordt bijvoorbeeld onderscheid gemaakt tussen vertrouwen in het gehele strafrechtsysteem en dat in specifieke instanties, zoals politie en rechters. Ook wordt er onderscheid gemaakt tussen vertrouwen in de effectiviteit van het strafrechtelijk systeem enerzijds, en vertrouwen in procedurele rechtvaardigheid anderzijds. Op basis van deze conceptuele analyse wordt vervolgens een meetinstrument ontworpen, dat kan worden gebruikt om de vertrouwenshypothese te toetsen.

Na het verduidelijken van de belangrijkste concepten, wordt de eerste empirische studie uitgevoerd. De opzet en resultaten hiervan staan beschreven in Hoofdstuk 5. Respondenten krijgen een vignet voorgelegd in een quasi-experimenteel design, waarin twee situationele kenmerken (uit de typologie) worden gevarieerd. De eerste experimentele factor is responsiviteit van de politie; de tweede betreft de mate van geweld die door de eigenrechter wordt gebruikt. In dit onderzoek wordt zowel steun voor de eigenrichting in de casus gemeten, als het vertrouwen van respondenten in het strafrechtsysteem. De bevindingen ondersteunen zowel de vertrouwenshypothese als de situatiehypothese: steun voor eigenrichting wordt beïnvloed door zowel situationele kenmerken als door vertrouwen in het strafrechtsysteem. Dit laatste geldt echter alleen voor vertrouwen 'in de rechtbank' (rechters, OM en het gehele strafrechtsysteem); vertrouwen in de politie speelt geen rol.

De eerste studie wijst onder andere uit dat situationele kenmerken van invloed zijn op steun voor eigenrichting, maar niet waarom dat zo is. Waarom zijn mensen bij hun beoordeling van een casus over eigenrichting gevoelig voor contextuele kenmerken? Om reacties op eigenrichting beter te begrijpen, introduceren wij in Hoofdstuk 6 de rechtvaardige-wereldtheorie (RWT) (Lerner, 1980). Deze theorie wordt in de literatuur veelal gebruikt om reacties op slachtofferschap te verklaren, en veronderstelt dat mensen over het algemeen graag willen geloven dat de wereld rechtvaardig is. Wanneer men wordt geconfronteerd met het tegendeel, bijvoorbeeld met een onschuldig slachtoffer, veroorzaakt dit een ongemakkelijk gevoel. Om van dit gevoel af te komen, zijn mensen geneigd bepaalde technieken te gebruiken om hun geloof in een rechtvaardige wereld te herstellen. Zij geven bijvoorbeeld het slachtoffer de schuld van zijn lot ("eigen schuld, dikke bult"). Wij verwachten dat deze reacties ook optreden in gevallen van eigenrichting, en dat ze vanuit de rechtvaardige-wereldtheorie kunnen worden voorspeld. Deze theorie biedt tevens bruikbare concepten voor het meten van reacties op eigenrichting, zoals hieronder wordt beschreven.

Na een beschrijving van de opzet en een voorstudie in Hoofdstuk 7, worden de bevindingen van de hoofdstudie gepresenteerd in Hoofdstuk 8. In deze studie wordt steun voor eigenrichting bestudeerd vanuit de rechtvaardige-wereldtheorie. De geloof-in-een-rechtvaardige-wereld reacties worden opgewekt door respondenten twee vignetten voor te leggen die er uitzien als berichten van www.nu.nl, en die elk een delict beschrijven. Het eerste vignet, de aanleiding, heeft drie varianten: een aanrijding, verkeersagressie en een zedendelict. Dit is de eerste experimentele factor. De tweede experimentele factor is de straf die de dader van de aanleiding krijgt opgelegd door een rechter (vrijspraak, lichte, normale of zware straf), voorafgaand aan de eigenrichting. Het tweede vignet beschrijft een geval van eigenrichting, dat in alle gevallen bestaat uit geweldpleging tegen de dader van het delict in het eerste vignet. Steun voor eigenrichting wordt geoperationaliseerd door vier verschillende geloof-in-een-rechtvaardige-wereld reacties te meten: *empathie* met het slachtoffer van eigenrichting, *morele verontwaardiging* over de eigenrechter, het *verwijten en misprijzen* van het slachtoffer van eigenrichting, en de *strafwaardigheid* van de eigenrechter. Een maand later worden bij dezelfde respondenten

attitudes gemeten, waaronder vertrouwen in het strafrechtsysteem en algemene steun voor eigenrichting.

Een belangrijke conclusie uit de hoofdstudie is dat steun voor eigenrichting niet alleen wordt beïnvloed door vertrouwen in het strafrechtsysteem. Situationele kenmerken, zoals de soort aanleiding, zijn ook van invloed op steun. Empathie met het slachtoffer van eigenrichting was bijvoorbeeld veel lager als het een zedendelinquent betrof, dan wanneer het ging om een dronken bestuurder die iemand had aan- of klemgereden. Wat betreft de strafniveaus, werden er vooral verschillen gevonden wanneer vrijspraak werd vergeleken met de andere drie niveaus. Morele verontwaardiging over de eigenrechter was bijvoorbeeld het laagst wanneer de dader van de aanleiding was vrijgesproken. Wanneer de dader wel was bestraft, was de strafzwaarte doorgaans niet van invloed op steun voor eigenrichting. Het deed er dus vooral toe óf het slachtoffer van eigenrichting al was bestraft, en niet hoe zwaar die straf was. De vertrouwenshypothese werd deels bevestigd: meer vertrouwen in de rechtbank en in het gehele strafrechtsysteem leidde tot minder steun voor eigenrichting, maar vertrouwen in politie speelde geen rol.

De opzet van de hoofdstudie maakt het mogelijk om niet alleen de absolute maar ook de relatieve invloed van attitudes (waaronder vertrouwen) en situationele kenmerken op steun voor eigenrichting te onderzoeken. Hieruit komt naar voren dat de vijf attitudes gezamenlijk evenveel impact hadden op steun voor eigenrichting als de situationele kenmerken. Een uitzondering daarop vormt de *strafwaardigheid* van de eigenrechter, die relatief meer door attitudes werd beïnvloed. De invloed van de attitudes op steun kan vooral worden toegeschreven aan de invloed van algemene steun voor eigenrichting. Hoe mensen over het algemeen tegen eigenrichting aankijken bleek één van de belangrijkste voorspellers te zijn van hoe ze reageerden op eigenrichting in de vignetten. Een mogelijke verklaring voor deze relatief grote impact is dat onze meting van algemene steun (deels) een morele overtuiging reflecteert over eigenrichting. Uit de literatuur is bekend dat morele overtuigingen van grote invloed kunnen zijn op hoe mensen reageren op een bepaalde persoon of situatie. Echter, zelfs als wij inderdaad een soort morele overtuiging over eigenrichting hebben gemeten, dan wil dat niet zeggen dat andere factoren geen rol spelen. Onze bevindingen laten duidelijk zien dat de andere attitudes, en situationele kenmerken, ook een belangrijke rol spelen bij steun voor eigenrichting.

Conclusie

In dit proefschrift zijn twee belangrijke hypothesen over steun voor eigenrichting gelijktijdig getoetst: de vertrouwenshypothese en de situatiehypothese. De bevindingen laten allereerst zien dat steun voor eigenrichting niet één op één kan worden betrokken op een gebrek aan vertrouwen in het strafrechtsysteem: situationele kenmerken hebben een onafhankelijke invloed op steun. Hoe mensen een geval van eigenrichting beoordelen wordt onder andere beïnvloed door de mate waarin de eigenrichting een bedreiging vormt voor hun geloof in een rechtvaardige wereld. Dit gevoel van (on)rechtvaardigheid is deels afhankelijk van situationele kenmerken, en zegt dus niet automatisch iets over

het al dan niet hebben van vertrouwen in het strafrechtelijk systeem.

Wat betreft de rol van vertrouwen, laten beide onderzoeken zien dat vertrouwen in de rechtbank en het gehele systeem wel van invloed is op steun voor eigenrichting, maar vertrouwen in politie niet. Wij vermoeden dat dit te maken heeft met de specifieke functies van de verschillende strafrechtelijke instanties. Als burgers het recht in eigen hand nemen, nemen zij 'taken over' die toebehoren aan officieren van justitie en rechters, zoals de vervolging en berechting van een dader. Eigenrichting is wellicht vooral een bedreiging voor degenen die veel vertrouwen hebben in die specifieke instanties. Onze bevindingen bevestigen dan ook het belang van een gedifferentieerde meting van vertrouwen. Toekomstig onderzoek moet de robuustheid van onze bevindingen uitwijzen. Wij raden vooral een replicatie van dit onderzoek aan in landen waar niveaus van vertrouwen in het strafrechtsysteem lager liggen dan in Nederland. Dergelijk onderzoek kan waardevolle inzichten opleveren over de relatieve invloed van vertrouwen en situationele kenmerken in gebieden waar burgers niet (of in mindere mate) op de overheid kunnen rekenen wanneer zij worden geconfronteerd met criminaliteit.

Een andere belangrijke conclusie is dat de invloed van vertrouwen in het strafrechtsysteem op steun afhangt van het niveau waarop vertrouwen wordt bekeken. Algemeen vertrouwen in politie is bijvoorbeeld niet van belang bij steun voor eigenrichting, terwijl de manier waarop de politie reageert op de aanleiding wel van invloed is (zie eerste studie). Dit impliceert dat bepaalde reacties en beslissingen bij een geval van eigenrichting, zoals het al dan niet vervolgen van een eigenrechter, duidelijk naar het publiek toe moeten worden gecommuniceerd en verantwoord.

Onze bevindingen benadrukken tevens dat steun voor eigenrichting als een complex concept moet worden gezien. Het is niet zo dat mensen óf wel, óf geen steun hebben voor eigenrichting; reacties op eigenrichting liggen een stuk genuanceerder dan vaak wordt aangenomen. Mensen kunnen bijvoorbeeld weinig empathie hebben met een slachtoffer van eigenrichting, maar tegelijkertijd wel vinden dat de eigenrechter moet worden gestraft. Ook is de rol van bepaalde factoren, zoals algemene bezorgdheid over criminaliteit, afhankelijk van welke reactie op eigenrichting men bekijkt.

Over het algemeen waren onze respondenten weinig positief over eigenrichting. Steun voor eigenrichting, in ieder geval in reactie op onze vignetten, lijkt lager te zijn dan vaak door de media en politici wordt verondersteld. Als wij echter meer steun voor eigenrichting hadden gevonden, zou dat betekenen dat het strafrechtsysteem moet worden aangepast? Zouden we moeten overwegen om de rechten van burgers uit te breiden bij reacties op een strafbaar feit, zoals sommige Nederlandse politici hebben voorgesteld? Zouden rechters milder moeten zijn bij hun beoordeling van eigenrechters, simpelweg omdat er in de samenleving begrip bestaat voor hun gedrag? Naar onze mening moet maatschappelijke steun voor eigenrichting nooit een reden zijn om het huidige strafrechtsysteem te veranderen. Ook al zijn slachtoffers van criminaliteit soms ontevreden of teleurgesteld, wij verwachten dat dit nog veel meer het geval zal zijn wanneer het straffen van daders door burgers door de politiek wordt aangemoedigd.

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Curriculum vitae

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