Public support for Vigilantism

Haas, N.E.

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.

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]

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.

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 Vignette 1 (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

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).

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 Cronbach's α = .71 Mean *(SD)* = 5.10 *(1.05)*	In general, sentences for crimes in the Netherlands are too lenient	.65
	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.

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.

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 λ = 4.01 Cronbach's α = .84 Mean (*SD*) = 3.56 *(.88)*	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
	I feel that people earn the rewards and punishments they get	.68
	I feel that the world is a fair place *(new)*	.60
	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: <u>precipitating crime type</u>

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

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 traffic aggression and pedestrian crash 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 sex offense 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 empathy 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	Sheaf = .38**
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	
Pedestrian crash – lenient	-.31* (.15)	-.06	-.30* (.14)	-.06	-.30* (.14)	-.06	
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	Sheaf = .33**
Belief in a just world for others			-.03 (.04)	-.02	-.03 (.04)	-.02	
General concern over crime			-.13** (.03)	-.09	-.10** (.03)	-.07	
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 = .09**
Gender					-.17** (.06)	-.05	
Educational level					.17* (.07)	.05	
R^2	.15		.27		.28		
F for change in R^2	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 outrage 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	Sheaf = .41**
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	
Pedestrian crash – normal	-.31* (.13)	-.07	-.27* (.12)	-.06	-.26* (.12)	-.06	
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	Sheaf = .42**
Belief in a just world for others			-.05 (.03)	-.04	-.05 (.03)	-.03	
General concern over crime			-.06* (.03)	-.05	-.07** (.03)	-.06	
Confidence in courts & CJS			.16** (.04)	.12	.17** (.04)	.13	
Confidence in police			.03 (.04)	.02	.02 (.04)	.02	
Control variables							
Age					.00 (.00)	.02	Sheaf = .05**
Gender					-.12* (.05)	-.04	
Educational level					-.00 (.06)	.00	
R^2	.18		.35		.35		
F for change in R^2	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 blame and derogation 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	Sheaf = .37**
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	
Pedestrian crash – normal	.03 (.15)	.01	.03 (.14)	.01	.03 (.14)	.01	
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	Sheaf = .32**
Belief in a just world for others			.06 (.03)	.03	.06 (.03)	.04	
General concern over crime			.26** (.03)	.18	.24** (.03)	.16	
Confidence in courts & CJS			-.11* (.05)	-.07	-.11* (.05)	-.07	
Confidence in police			-.06 (.04)	-.04	-.06 (.04)	-.04	
Control variables							
Age					.00 (.00)	.03	Sheaf = .05**
Gender					.05* (.06)	.02	
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 desired punishment 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	
Pedestrian crash – lenient	-.35* (.15)	-.07	-.33* (.14)	-.06	-.34* (.14)	-.06	Sheaf = .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 = .42**
General concern over crime			-.18** (.03)	-.11	-.11** (.03)	-.07	
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 = .13**
Gender					.17** (.06)	.05	
Educational level					.23** (.07)	.07	
R^2	.13		.31		.32		
F for change in R^2	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).

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

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.