

An investigation of perceptions of (un)just systems: Tests of rationalization in the context of Irish austerity measures

Séamus A. Power<sup>1</sup>, Tara M. Mandalaywala<sup>2</sup>, & Aaron C. Kay<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup>University of Copenhagen, Department of Psychology

<sup>2</sup>University of Massachusetts Amherst, Department of Psychological and Brain Sciences

<sup>3</sup>Duke University, Fuqua School of Business and Department of Psychology and Neuroscience

**© 2020, American Psychological Association. This paper is not the copy of record and may not exactly replicate the final, authoritative version of the article. Please do not copy or cite without authors' permission. The final article will be available, upon publication, via its DOI: 10.1037/pac0000540**

Recommended citation: Power, S.A., Mandalaywala, T. and Kay, A. (in press). An investigation of perceptions of (un)just systems: Tests of rationalization in the context of Irish austerity measures. *Peace & Conflict: Journal of Peace Psychology*.

Address all correspondence to: Séamus A. Power, Department of Psychology, Øster Farimagsgade 2A, 1353 København K, Denmark. Email: [seamus.power@psy.ku.dk](mailto:seamus.power@psy.ku.dk)

### **Abstract**

Following a global economic collapse in 2008, the Irish accepted economic hardship in the years immediately following the financial downturn without demonstrating. Why didn't the Irish protest in response to economic collapse, especially when other countries hit by the economic collapse did? Here we empirically test ideas put forth in previous qualitative work: that a culturally ingrained moral principle, in life, "you reap what you sow", helps explain why the Irish passively accepted austerity without protesting. We predicted if Irish acceptance of austerity occurred because of the belief their own actions caused their plight, then reminding them of this culpability should decrease support for civic engagement and protest and increase acceptance of austerity. Across a large sample of Irish participants ( $N = 570$ ), we found no evidence that experimental induction of culpability affected support for protest or acceptance of austerity. However, we found inter-individual variation in the extent to which participants did not support protest and saw austerity measures as fair was associated with several psychological mechanisms that might underlie a "reap what you sow" mentality, namely with an increased tendency to support system justifying policies and endorse the belief the world is an inherently fair place. Our contribution highlights the importance of conducting ecologically valid research into unfolding social, economic, and political phenomena, and integrating qualitative with quantitative methods to gain a holistic and psychologically-rich understanding of contemporary phenomena.

Keywords: Ecological Validity; Financial Crisis; Ireland; Protest; System Justification.

In 2008, the economies of Ireland, Greece, and Spain collapsed. In response, the governments of these countries imposed harsh austerity measures. However, while the residents of Greece and Spain actively engaged in protests in response to austerity measures, the Irish passively accepted austerity for six years without demonstrating only to protest during an economic recovery from 2014 and 2015. The curious case of the Irish provides an interesting opportunity to investigate cultural variation in how people experience, understand, and react to economic hardship. Under what conditions can and do people living in democratic nations accept hardship without engaging in democratic activities, such as demonstrating, to effect social change? And under what circumstances does their tolerance turn to protest and other forms of democratic engagement and civic discontent? And what are the psychological mechanisms underlying these behaviors? There are a number of relevant social psychological theories, and psychological traits, that help explain why groups do not protest. In this paper, we focus on system justification theory (SJT) and three related individual traits that help explain maintenance for the status quo: belief in a just world, locus of control, and proneness to guilt and shame. These psychological explanations exist independently of the localized Irish case. However, we use these psychological constructs to examine, and unpack, the thickly descriptive ethnographic reports of Irish inaction against austerity and the “reap what you sow” moral explanation used to describe this localized form of system justification.

System justification theory posits people have a motivation to justify the prevailing status quo (Jost et al. 2004). System justification is a “process by which existing social arrangements are legitimized, even at the expense of personal and group interest” (Jost et

al. 2004, p. 2). Most of the supporting evidence is based on experimental and correlational social psychological research (Jost, 2019). The theory highlights the tendency to accept the status quo and to imbue it with legitimacy, such that the system in which one lives is seen as morally good, fair, natural, desirable, inalterable, and therefore inevitable (Jost, 2020). Justification for, and ultimately acceptance of, the system in which one lives – regardless of actual legitimacy and morality – occurs to satisfy fundamental human needs for certainty, security, and social acceptance. This motivation partly explains how disadvantaged groups – like the unemployed – might come to internalize feelings of inferiority (Power, 2015; 2017; 2018a). Overall, the theory offers one explanation to help understand why people do not often advocate for socio-political change, even when they could benefit from doing so.

In the Irish context, previous qualitative research that employed interviews with a group of public elites (i.e. TV and radio personalities; economists in the public eye; members of prominent financial institutions; journalists) suggested there was a culturally pervasive ideology or schema that might explain the lack of protest in Ireland in response to the initial austerity measures: in life you reap what you sow – that in life, you get what you deserve (Power, 2016; 2017; 2018; Power & Nussbaum, 2014). The Irish who were interviewed suggested people in Ireland were partly responsible for the current economic collapse. From this viewpoint, the Irish are atypical of many other European Union (EU) residents. Although bankers, the government, financial regulators, and the EU were vilified for the financial crisis in Ireland, so too was the Irish public. Respondents said it would be illogical for the Irish to protest, because they share in the blame. They must suffer austerity as a consequence of enjoying financial excesses during the boom years. As one prominent

and influential economic adviser stated during an interview, “We are stuck with the world we live in. Within these confines there are lots of things we can do, and will do, and austerity is just a consequence of what we do. We suffer it with dignity, we suffer it in anger, or you suffer it in one way or another. The motivation is to whether you suffer it in silence or in rage. That is probably the key question” (original quotation in Power, 2015).

Interviews with unemployed Irish people revealed how they have internalized this idea. They often said they were partially at fault for their own negative financial and social situation. There is no motivation to protest when one feels culpable for one’s own social position (Power, 2015; 2017; 2018). Unemployed youth, like prominent public elites, gave internal blame attributions for the economic collapse and hardship associated with austerity (Power, 2018a).

However, in 2014 and 2015 Ireland had the fastest growing economy in the European Union (Fitzgerald 2014; Honohan 2014). During this recovery, there were unequal gains: the rich got richer, and the rest got left behind. The gap between expectations and lived experiences generated feelings of frustration and legitimized protest (Stouffer, et al. 1949; Power, et al, 2020). An introduction of a new charge on water galvanized a broader anti-austerity social movement (Power, 2017; 2018, 2018a, 2018b). People had endured harsh austerity and expected to reap the rewards of an economic recovery. Thus, during this period of stark economic growth there were mass demonstrations, clashes with the police, and other expressions of civic discontent. Subsequent ethnographic research suggested the “reap what you sow” moral principle was again helpful in understanding this reaction: people in Ireland expected to reap the benefits

of having endured austerity, but the economic recovery was unequal, leaving many feeling they were not rewarded for their sacrifices (Power, 2018; 2018a; Power & Nussbaum, 2016).

These narratives told by public elites and unemployed youth in Ireland to account for the lack of a protest movement following the economic collapse can also be seen as legitimizing folk psychological understandings: they are localized narratives told to make sense of broader issues concerned with unfairness, inequality, and maintenance of the status quo (Jost, Banaji, & Nosek, 2004; Jost, Chaikalis-Petrtsis, Abrams, Sidanius, van der Toorn, & Bratt, 2012; Jost, Kay, & Thorisdottir, 2009; Laurin, Gaucher, & Kay, 2010). The link between conclusions drawn from the qualitative research and system-justification theory, largely developed and supported by quantitative research, opens up the possibility of testing ideas across methodologies. Qualitative and ethnographic research can be generative of new, ecologically valid, hypotheses that can be tested experimentally. The cyclical and synthetic relationship between qualitative and quantitative methods can be mutually beneficial. This relationship is important for theory testing and development (Power, Velez, Qadafi, & Tennant, 2018; Power & Velez, 2020; Rozin, 2001; 2009).

In this paper, we quantitatively test qualitatively derived hypotheses: In the Irish context, does a belief in “reaping what you sow” lead to greater acceptance of austerity, blame for the recession on the actions of ordinary people, and lack of support for civic engagement and protest? Several established psychological mechanisms are theoretically and conceptually similar to the “reap what you sow” moral principle. No prior research has examined the relation between these mechanisms that might account for the overall

construction of a “reap what you sow” mentality. To this end, we explore several psychological mechanisms that might underlie Irish citizens beliefs in “just desserts.” In particular, we discuss three psychological factors that could explain, at least in part, why people accept economic hardship without protesting: endorsement of system justifying beliefs, belief in an external locus of control, and proneness to guilt and shame.

There is evidence the Irish might endorse a particular type of system justifying belief, that in life you “reap what you sow”. This belief is a historically ingrained, culturally viable, narrative told by some Irish to explain, understand, and even justify the system in which they live. Previous research illustrated variations of this narrative to explain suffering and hardship in the Irish context (Power, 2015; 2016; Scheper Hughes, 1981/2001; Sullivan, 1990). For example, Irish people who were suffering from depression attributed blame for their condition to their own actions (Sullivan, 1990). Meritocratic beliefs, such as “reap what you sow,” are used to justify hardship and maintain the status quo (Davidai & Gilovich, 2015; Jost & Hunyady, 2002; Jost & Kay, 2010; Weber, 1905/2009), thus, the “reap what you sow” moral principle is likely to be a localized version of a larger, perhaps universal, process (Cassaniti & Menon, 2017; Lerner, 1980).

In addition to endorsement of system justifying beliefs, there are other potential factors that could help explain when Irish do or do not protest in response to austerity measures. These measures, like system justification theory, might be universal psychological constructs and certainly exist independent of the Irish context. However, as evidenced in the ethnographic research, these universal traits manifest in local cultural and

temporal contexts. In particular, people's tendency to hold an external locus of control (i.e., the belief factors outside of one's control are responsible for much of one's outcomes: Rotter, 1966). We focus here primarily on external, rather than internal, locus of control because internal locus of control has been extensively researched in the context of justice outcomes, with the general consensus that higher personal control is a state that can be maintained by engaging in victim-derogation (Lerner, 1980; Jost & Kay, 2010). More recent theory has started to suggest a potential link between seeing outside agents as controlling and legitimizing ideologies (Kay & Eibach, 2013), and the apparent overlap with that research and the qualitative findings reviewed above led us to want to explore that particular relationship. This does not mean internal locus of control will not also relate to protest behaviors; it likely impacts many related variables, including efficacy and blame. We simply chose here to emphasize the more novel question of how external locus of control will also relate to protest behavior in the context of societal injustice. Previous research into a "reap what you sow" mentality in Ireland suggests it could relate to the Irish response (or lack thereof) to austerity measures in two quite distinct ways. First, people who hold an external locus of control, believing their own actions are unlikely to engender systemic change, might *be less* likely to support protest or to view austerity measures as unfair. In other words, their belief in an external locus of control might manifest specifically as the belief they are unable to change their economic and political contexts through collective action. As qualitative evidence for this, interviews with unemployed, Irish youth, for example, contained themes around a disbelief protest would generate social, political, or economic change (Power, 2015; 2018a). In this case, there are no clear predictions for how locus of control beliefs might relate to placement of blame for the



economic downturn (i.e., there is no clear prediction for whether those holding an external locus of control would be more likely to blame local or global factors).

However, an external locus of control, by focusing attention on external causes instead of internal attributions of blame, might also relate to *greater* support for protest, increased belief austerity measures are unfair, and increased blame for economic woes on institutional or global factors and decreased blame on the Irish people themselves. In other words, by endorsing the belief that their own actions – and the actions of Irish people more generally – would simply have been incapable of causing the economic downturn, holding an external locus of control could induce a “reap what you sow” mentality and engender collective action. This hypothesis is congruent with later ethnographic research that revealed after a tipping point, Irish people’s tolerance for economic hardship gave way to intolerance (Power, 2018). People took to the streets. In this context, they demonstrated against the introduction of a new charge on water in the context of an aggregate, though unequally felt, economic recovery people reported was unfair. They no longer blamed themselves for causing the recession. While they used metaphors suggesting it took Irish people some time to “wake up” to protest, it was the injustice of a new charge on water which was emblematic of an unequally felt aggregate economic recovery that motivated anti-government protests. It was the government, not ordinary people, who should “reap what they sowed” (Power, 2018; Power & Nussbaum, 2016). Thus, examining the relation between an external locus of control and support for civic engagement, beliefs about the (un)fairness of austerity measures, and beliefs about who is to blame for the economic

downturn will provide interesting evidence on the particular mechanisms by which a “reap what you sow” mentality can lead to the particularly Irish response to austerity.

Finally, previous ethnographic work suggests the “reap what you sow” moral hypothesis has its roots in Irish Catholicism where “you pay for your sins” (Power, 2016). Ethnographic evidence suggests the Irish iteration of Catholicism is punitive and people internalize suffering (Scheper-Hughes, 1981/2001). Therefore, we included a proneness to guilt and shame scale to investigate whether people who scored highly on these dimensions were less likely to support protest because they felt culpable for the current economic crisis and were too ashamed to demand social, economic, or political change (Cohen, Wolf, Panter, & Insko, 2011). This scale is an attempt to capture a personality trait indicative of a predisposition to experience negative feelings about personal wrong doing even when this wrong doing occurs privately. It is a modified version of previous trait based personality instruments aimed at comprehending feelings of guilt and shame and their associations with morality and unethical behavior. This research endeavor is supported by evidence predominantly from participants from the USA (see Cohen, Panter, & Turan, 2012). The association between similar feelings and ethical and moral worldviews has also been documented in the anthropological literature indicating cultural variance between global regions in terms of emotion, behavior, and moral reasoning (e.g. Shweder, Much, Park, & Mahapatra, 2003; Shweder, 2008).

Building off prior qualitative analysis of interviews with Irish citizens that suggested the lack of protest among Irish citizens in response to the economic crisis and the implementation of austerity measures stemmed from their endorsement of a “reap what

you sow” mentality. We sought to test this hypothesis experimentally, to examine whether Irish participants: (1) support for civic engagement and protest, (2) beliefs about the fairness of austerity measures, and (3) the extent to which they blame Ireland (it’s people or institutions) for the economic crisis could be explained by the quantifiable presence of a “reap what you sow” ideology.

Based on the “reap what you sow” hypothesis, we predicted when Irish participants are primed to believe the actions of ordinary people (as opposed to external factors beyond ones’ control) were to blame for the economic crisis in Ireland, participants would be: 1) less likely to support civic engagement and protest, 2) less likely to think austerity measures are unfair, and 3) be more likely to blame the actions of the Irish people and institutions, rather than global institutions, for causing the economic crisis.

Moreover, we were interested in investigating how psychological mechanisms that are theoretically and conceptually linked to a “reap what you sow” mentality might predict variation in our dependent variables, within the culturally unique situation of the Irish response to an economic downturn. We predicted participants who were high in belief in a just world would be less likely to support protest, more likely to think austerity was fair, and more likely to blame the actions of ordinary Irish people for the recession. Similarly, we predicted those participants who have a high external locus of control could perceive and react to austerity measures in a variety of ways. Participants high in an external locus of control might support protest less and be more likely to think austerity is fair. However, an external locus of control, by focusing attention on external causes instead of internal attributions of blame, might also relate to *greater* support for protest, increased belief

austerity measures are unfair, and increased blame for economic hardship on institutional or global factors and decreased blame on the Irish people themselves. Finally, we predicted participants who were high in guilt and shame would support protest less, be more likely to think austerity was fair, and be more likely to blame the actions of ordinary Irish people for the recession.

## Method

### Participants

Participants ( $N = 570$ ) came from two distinct populations within Ireland. The first population consisted of faculty and students from an Irish institution in a midsized city ( $n=342$ ,  $M_{age} = 39.9$  years, 61% male). The second population consisted of a general populace (i.e., non-university) sample ( $n = 228$ ,  $M_{age} = 24.2$  years, 36% male). The materials and procedure were identical across both populations; however, participants recruited from a non-university sample were compensated for their participation. Across all studies, we report all study measures, conditions, and manipulations. Data from both the university population, as well as from the general population, were collected in December 2015. Data were analyzed upon completion of data collection, after which no additional data were collected or included in analyses. Although we did not anticipate that responses would vary across these two populations, we included population type (i.e., university or general populace) as a random factor in all analyses to account for any population-level differences.

## Procedure

**Predictors.** Prior to receiving the experimental manipulation, participants completed four scales, presented in a randomized order, assessing: (1) the extent to which they endorse system justifying beliefs and view the world as just and fair (two scales, one relevant to the self and one relevant to others more generally), (2) whether they hold an internal or external locus of control, and (3) their tendencies to feel guilt and shame. Details of each predictor, and the exact instructions and questions asked of participants are included in the Supplemental Online Materials (SOM). To assess support for system justification, we used two belief in a just world scales, one as applied to the self and one as applied to others (Lipkusa, Dalbert, Siegler, 1996). For both scales, participants answered questions on a seven-point Likert scale, ranging from strongly disagree (1) to strongly agree (7). Responses were reverse coded where necessary such that a higher value indicated greater belief in a just world, and responses to questions within each scale were averaged so each participant received a mean score on each scale. To assess participants' locus of control, we used the Rotter (1966) Locus of Control Scale. Participants were presented with 14 scenarios and for each one selected a response option that indicated either an external (coded as 1) or internal (coded as 0) locus of control. Responses were summed across all scenarios so that each participant was accorded a score between 0 and 14, such that a higher value indicated a greater belief in an external locus of control and a lower value indicated a greater belief in an internal locus of control. To assess the participants' proneness to feeling guilt or shame, we used the Guilt and Shame Proneness Scale (Cohen, et al, 2011). For both scales, participants responded to descriptions of a behavioral response to hypothetical scenarios, rating their likelihood of responding in the

described manner using a seven-point Likert scale, ranging from very unlikely (1) to very likely (7). Responses were reverse coded where necessary such that a higher value indicated greater proneness to guilt and shame and averaged so each participant received a mean score.

**Condition manipulation.** After filling out these four scales, participants were told they were going to read a newspaper article that had been published in the last decade and they would then be asked questions on the content. Participants were randomly assigned to read one of two possible articles, both of which were fictional newspapers articles from *The Irish Times* (see the SOM for condition specific primes). Each fictional newspaper article was designed to prime a distinct set of beliefs. Half the participants read an article that emphasized how hard work, dedication, and entrepreneurial efforts of regular Irish people led to the economic boom known as the Celtic Tiger (“Irish to Blame” condition:  $N = 274$ ; university  $n = 175$ , general populous  $n = 99$ ). By extension, the logic is the actions of ordinary Irish people played a significant role in other economic events, including the downturn. The other half of the participants read a newspaper article that argued the economic boom in Ireland from the late 1990’s into the 2000’s was driven by external factors, such as increased foreign investment and strong trading with foreign partners such as the USA and the UK (“External Factors” condition:  $N = 296$ ; university  $n = 167$ , general populous  $n = 129$ ). The role of hard work, effort, and dedication of ordinary people was downplayed in this condition. As such, other economic events such as the collapse could then be attributed to external factors, not the actions of ordinary Irish people. To ensure participants read the article they were randomly assigned, two attention-check questions followed each fictional newspaper article. Failure to correctly answer either of these

questions meant the participant was unable to continue in the study and thus these participants were omitted from analyses. We included no check to see if the manipulation worked as expected, and preliminary analyses indicated no condition-level differences in any dependent variables. Therefore, and as described in full detail in the Data analysis section below, condition was included as a random factor in all analyses.

**Dependent variables.** After reading the article and answering attention-check questions, participants completed three questionnaires, in random order. These three questionnaires were created based on findings from previous qualitative studies (Power, 2015; 2016; 2017; 2018, 2018a & b) which suggested Irish people did not protest against austerity because they felt partly culpable for causing the economic downturn and assessed participants: (1) support for civic engagement and protest in the face of austerity, (2) beliefs about the unfairness of austerity measures, and (3) attribution of blame for the economic crisis in Ireland (i.e., the extent to which Irish people, Irish institutions, or broader, international factors were to blame for the situation in Ireland).

To assess participant support for civic engagement and protest following implementation of austerity measures, participants were asked to indicate the extent to which they support a set of protest-related actions that varied in intensity (e.g., signing a petition, writing to a politician, organizing a demonstration, going on strike) on a seven point Likert scale, ranging from very likely to support (1) to very unlikely to support (7) (see Table S1 in Supplementary Online Materials (SOM) for all protest-related actions). Questions were reverse coded such that a greater value indicated greater support for civic engagement and protest. All items in the dependent variables were derived from thickly descriptive ethnographic research during the recession and recovery in Ireland. These

items have high levels of ecological validity and are therefore meaningful and appropriate for participants to respond to.

To assess the extent to which people felt austerity measures were unfair, participants were asked to rate the fairness of fifteen austerity measures that had been implemented in Ireland (e.g., reducing social welfare for people under the age of 21, introducing a charge on water services, cutting the child benefit allowance to all Irish mothers) on a seven point Likert scale from strongly disagree (1) to strongly agree (7) (see Table S2 in SOM for all austerity measures). Questions were reverse coded such that a greater value indicated greater belief that austerity measures were unfair.

Finally, to assess the extent to which participants blamed different types of factors for the economic crisis in Ireland, participants were asked to evaluate the extent to which: (1) the Irish people (e.g., Irish people not working hard enough, Irish people accruing too much personal debt), (2) Irish institutions (e.g., banking sector in Ireland, the financial regulators in Ireland), and (3) broader, international factors (e.g., US financial collapse, international politics) contributed to the economic crisis. Participants were given a series of 28 possible reasons, people, or institutions to blame for the economic crisis and rated each from “highly to blame” (1) to “highly innocent,” (7). Each of these factors corresponded to one of the three categories listed above (see the SOM for a full list of all institutions and people, separated into the three categories above). Questions were reverse coded such that a greater value indicated placing more blame on that particular category. After completing all scales, participants provided demographic information.

**Data analysis.** Data were analyzed in R using linear mixed-effects regression modelling (lme4 package: Bates, Mächler, Bolker, & Walker, 2015). Each of the four



dependent variables was examined in a separate model. In all models, we included condition (Irish to Blame vs. External Factors) and sample type (university vs. general populous) as random effects to adjust for any effects. To explore the role of different possible factors in predicting any of the three dependent variables, we also included all four predictor variables (i.e., locus of control, belief in a just world – self, belief in a just world – others, guilt and shame proneness) as fixed effects in the model. As we observed only moderate correlation between several of these factors (from  $r = -0.37 - 0.63$ ), and because the variance inflation factor (VIF) for each model indicated no issues with multicollinearity (i.e., all VIFS were below 1.9) we were able to examine simultaneously the main effect of each predictor variable. All continuous predictor variables were mean centered. All data and analytic code are available through Open Science Framework ([https://osf.io/4akex/?view\\_only=99e5fe116752430a80f8062b370f55d7](https://osf.io/4akex/?view_only=99e5fe116752430a80f8062b370f55d7)).

## Results

There were no effects of belief in an external locus of control or proneness to guilt and shame on participant's support for civic engagement and protest. However, belief in a just world (both the "self" and "others" versions) were related to participant support for civic engagement and protest. As predicted, participants with greater belief in a just world for the self or others showed less support for civic engagement and protest (see Table 1 for the test statistics and the 95% Confidence Intervals (CI) for all results).

In contrast, neither type of belief in a just world was associated with participant's feelings that the austerity measures were unfair. However, there was a main effect of belief in an external locus of control. In line with the hypothesis that holding an external locus of control reduces belief in one's own ability to engender change, and thus a willingness to

accept measures that might otherwise be considered unfair, participants with greater belief in an external locus of control showed decreased endorsement of the idea that austerity measures were unfair. There was also a main effect of proneness to guilt and shame on belief that austerity measures were unfair; participants more prone to feeling guilt and shame were less likely to say that austerity measures were unfair.

The only predictor variable that predicted blaming the Irish people for the economic downturn was the belief in a just world for others. In a pattern contrary to our hypothesis, greater belief in a just world for others was associated with being less likely to blame the Irish people for the downturn.

There was an effect of belief in a just world for the self (but not belief in a just world for others) on the belief that Irish institutions were to blame for the economic downturn. Again, contrary to our hypothesis, greater belief in a just world for the self was associated with being less likely to blame Irish institutions for the downturn. There was also an effect of proneness to guilt and shame, although this pattern was in line with our hypothesis. Greater proneness to guilt and shame was associated with being more likely to blame Irish institutions for the downturn. There was no effect of participants' locus of control.

Finally, we observe a similar pattern when examining which variables best predict blaming international-level factors for the economic downturn. Again, there was no role of either belief in a just world for others, or locus of control. There was an effect of belief in a just world for the self, where greater belief in a just world for the self was associated with being less likely to blame international factors for the downturn, a pattern in line with our hypothesis. Finally, there was an effect of proneness to guilt and shame on the belief that international factors were to blame for the economic downturn; participants more prone to

feeling guilt and shame were also more likely to blame international factors, a response not in line with our hypotheses.

Table 1. Results of linear mixed-effects models.

Dependent variables	Predictor variables			
	Belief in an external locus of control	Belief in a just world - self	Belief in a just world - others	Proneness to guilt and shame
Support for civic engagement	$\beta = 0.01$ , SE = 0.02, z = 0.69, 95% CI(-0.03, 0.05)	<b><math>\beta = -0.14</math>, SE = 0.06, z = -2.17, 95% CI(-0.26, -0.01)</b>	<b><math>\beta = -0.17</math>, SE = 0.05, z = -3.06, 95% CI(-0.27, -0.06)</b>	$\beta = -0.06$ , SE = 0.06, z = -0.86, 95% CI(-0.18, 0.07)
Feeling that austerity measures are unfair	<b><math>\beta = -0.05</math>, SE = 0.01, z = -3.59, 95% CI(-0.08, -0.02)</b>	$\beta = 0.02$ , SE = 0.05, z = 0.38, 95% CI(-0.07, 0.11)	$\beta = 0.15$ , SE = 0.04, z = 3.93, 95% CI(0.08, 0.23)	<b><math>\beta = -0.14</math>, SE = 0.05, z = -3.93, 95% CI(-0.23, -0.05)</b>
Blaming Irish people for the economic downturn	$\beta = 0.01$ , SE = 0.02, z = 0.43, 95% CI(-0.03, 0.04)	$\beta = 0.06$ , SE = 0.05, z = 1.17, 95% CI(-0.04, 0.17)	<b><math>\beta = -0.18</math>, SE = 0.05, z = -4.01, 95% CI(-0.27, -0.09)</b>	$\beta = 0.06$ , SE = 0.05, z = 1.16, 95% CI(-0.04, 0.17)
Blaming Irish institutions for the economic downturn	$\beta = 0.01$ , SE = 0.01, z = -0.64, 95% CI(-0.03, 0.01)	<b><math>\beta = -0.10</math>, SE = 0.03, z = -2.84, 95% CI(-0.16, -0.03)</b>	$\beta = -0.02$ , SE = 0.03, z = -0.58, 95% CI(-0.07, 0.04)	<b><math>\beta = 0.09</math>, SE = 0.03, z = 2.69, 95% CI(0.25, 0.16)</b>
Blaming international factors for the economic downturn	$\beta = 0$ , SE = 0.01, z = -0.02, 95% CI(-0.03, 0.03)	<b><math>\beta = -0.11</math>, SE = 0.04, z = -2.81, 95% CI(-0.19, -0.03)</b>	$\beta = -0.02$ , SE = 0.03, z = -0.46, 95% CI(-0.08, 0.05)	<b><math>\beta = 0.09</math>, SE = 0.04, z = 2.09, 95% CI(0.01, 0.17)</b>

\*Bold font indicates that 95% Confidence Interval (CI) does not include zero.

## Discussion

The present research used quantitative methods to test a qualitatively derived hypothesis: that the placid acceptance – without street demonstrations - of the Irish in response to the economic downturn and consequent austerity measures was due to endorsement of the idea that you “reap what you sow.” Using a variety of measures from social psychological research on system justification, locus of control, and guilt and shame,

we attempted to quantify the extent to which participants held a reap what you sow mentality, and whether this mentality predicted a lack of support for civic engagement and protest, a belief austerity measures were fair, and a tendency to blame the Irish people – instead of institutions or other global factors – for the economic downturn. We found mixed evidence to support our hypothesis that the lack of protest among Irish citizens in response to the economic crisis and the implementation of austerity measures stemmed from endorsement of a “reap what you sow” mentality.

We found several pieces of evidence that supported our hypothesis. For example, we found that participants with greater belief in a just world for self and others showed less support for civic engagement and protest. This finding is congruent with previous literature illustrating similar associations between thinking the world is fair, natural, and just and maintaining the status quo (Jost, 2019). Second, when examining willingness to accept austerity measures, participants with greater belief in an external locus of control showed decreased endorsement of the idea that austerity measures were unfair. This is also consistent with approaches to system justification theory that suggest beliefs in external control are a driver of the tendency to see society as fair (or less unfair). Interestingly, past work testing this idea has generally done so via measuring (or manipulating) belief in self-based internal control (Landau, Kay, & Whitson, 2015), none (to our knowledge) has looked directly at external locus of control as a predictor variable. We also found that participants who were more prone to feeling guilt and shame were less likely to say that austerity measures were unfair. This relationship is perhaps unsurprising given deep historical roots and cultural importance of Catholicism in Ireland which emphasizes suffering and redemption (Scheper Hughes, 1981/2001).

However, in a pattern contrary to our hypothesis, and in contrast to the qualitative research from which the hypothesis was generated, we found that greater belief in a just world for others was associated with being less likely to blame the Irish people for the downturn. One possibility is the data was collected in late 2015, seven years after the economic collapse, when people had access to a broader range of facts regarding the causes of the economic recession. We might gain some insight into this contradictory pattern when we consider the broader Irish context when this study was conducted. At the period of data collection, in December 2015, Irish participants were asked about their attitudes and opinions of austerity, protest, and blame, in a context of a stark unequal economic recovery, not a recession. Importantly, the introduction of a controversial new charge on water – in the context of a recovering economic – was deemed unfair. It galvanized a broader anti-austerity social movement and a significant portion of Irish took to the streets to protest in response (Power, 2018, 2018a). Thus, the macro-level sociological changes might have informed the expression, and our measurement, of micro-level psychological processes and their relation to earlier events. In this interpretation, the “reap what you sow” hypothesis is malleable because it can be applied to blame oneself or to others for hardship. When the economy collapsed, Irish people partly blamed their actions for causing the recession and did not protest. During the recovery, further ethnographic evidence – gathered after the experimental data was collected – illustrated people expected to reap the rewards of having suffered austerity, but instead were hit with a new charge on water in the context of rapid economic growth. In this context, it was the government who, according to the protesters, should “reap what they sow” and resign from power (Power, 2018, 2018a). The timing of experiments, and the context in which they are conducted, may

be highly influential and help account for variance in results obtained from various methods. Specifically, this reason might explain why the proposed manipulation was ineffective at influencing mindsets, and why some results ran contrary to our hypothesis.

The research presented here illustrates how qualitative research methods can be generative of experimental hypotheses with high degrees of ecological validity (Brewer, 2000; Power, et al, 2018), and triangulation of research findings using different psychological methods can lead to a more holistic approach to understand social phenomena (Campbell & Fiske, 1959; Denzin, 2012). Quantitatively testing insights from qualitative research provides an opportunity to test the psychological mechanisms underlying ethnographic research (Power, et al, 2018; Rozin, 2001; 2009). The studies reported herein provide deeper insight into the underlying psychological dynamics, in a complicated real-world context. Specifically, we derived our overarching “reap what you sow” hypothesis from ethnographic observations and descriptions. These data were analyzed, interpreted, and helped make sense of an unfolding, broader, socio-political issue concerning reactions to economic hardship. In this instance, we went one step further and used these ethnographic data to generative predictions from the hypothesis that could be tested using standard experimental procedures. In order to make these predictions valid, the items used as dependent variables were constructed from ethnographic research and therefore were appropriate for Irish research participants. The various scales included in the experiment were carefully chosen as close approximations of potential mechanisms underlying the localized, and culturally and temporally, specific master narratives developed through the ethnographic research. Experimental social psychology has its roots in contextual research, yet over time these experiments have become more divorced from

lived realities (Power, 2011; Rozin, 2001; 2009; Wagoner, 2017). We demonstrate how ecologically valid hypotheses can be extracted from thick ethnographic research, how culturally sensitive variables can be developed, and how results from locally meaningful manipulations, can be interpreted in light of qualitative studies. That our results provided mixed insights from the qualitatively derived hypothesis, does not undermine the substantive qualitative conclusions themselves. The mechanisms related to, and underlying, the “reap what you sow” hypothesis are multifaceted, complex, and likely to change over time: revealing a limitation of the experimental method to capture psychological processes related to unfolding socio-political phenomena (Power & Velez, 2020), and illustrating the power of multi-methods approaches to investigating complex social phenomena.

One of us – along with colleagues – recently proposed a mixed-methods model and formalized a process to combine qualitative and quantitative methods that might guide future research attempts of other authors trying to replicate this process of using ethnographic and experimental methods together (Power, Velez, Qadafi, & Tennant, 2018). A wise, or *SAGE* model, was proposed where the importance of a *Synthetic* model was highlighted, where qualitative methods were *Augmentative* to quantitative methods, where they were *Generative* of hypotheses where predictions could be tested experimentally, and where qualitative methods could be used to examine *Experiences* that evade experiment reductionism. In the present research, the content of the two independent variables – presented in the form of two newspaper articles – were derived from previous qualitative research. This research suggested narratives concerned with blaming external factors (a global economic recession) in contrast to internal factors (actions of ordinary people

causing the economic recession) might generate different mindsets where one could then associate different outcome measures. The precise form and content of these independent variables were also generated from prior qualitative research. As such, these items were contextually and culturally meaningful for respondents. Moreover, interpretation of the experimental findings generated necessity to comprehend why Irish people supported protest more when made to think they were culpable for the recession. Subsequent ethnographic research, and qualitative interviewing, aimed to comprehend this phenomenon. Interpretations of this evidence was informed, and augmented by, results from the experimental data presented here. It is proposed that the *SAGE* model is a useful approach to conducting social psychological research to more holistically understand the individual in context.

The transition through levels of analysis – from ethnographic to experimental – and the attempt to triangulate across multiple methods is not seamless. One implication of incongruence between quantitative and qualitative research findings is to point to boundary conditions of both ethnographic and experimental social psychological research to augment one another. Generating experimental hypotheses, and mechanisms of observed behavior, requires a cyclical relationship between interpreting ecologically valid behaviors on the ground, those manipulated in the lab, and pre-existing social-scientific theory (Wundt, 1897). Moreover, although experimental procedures provide quantified detail into specific aspects of unfolding phenomena, they often are sensitive to external factors, such as socio-political change, and thus might show different relations as a function of these external social factors (Bartlett, 1930; 1958; Moghaddam, 2002; 2018; Power &



Velez, 2020; Reicher & Haslam, 2012; Wagoner, 2017; Wagoner, Jensen, & Oldmeadow, 2012).

In this way, the paradoxical reactions of the Irish – who endured austerity only to protest during an economic recovery – might not actually be so paradoxical after all, and might rather serve to highlight the limitation of a snap-shot experiment to fully understand unfolding processes in an abstracted and generalizable way. Moreover, there is nothing particularly “Irish” about the Irish case. The overarching research question derived from the qualitative research is: under what conditions, can, and do, people accept economic hardship? Future research can investigate predictions derived from the “reap what you sow hypothesis” across a variety of domains and populations. Moreover, further ethnographic research revealed that having accepted austerity as the economy collapsed, the Irish protested during a stark economic recovery (Power 2017; 2018, 2018b). This leads to a related question that future research can examine experimentally: Under what conditions does tolerance for economic hardship give way civic engagement, protest, and socio-political change? Multi-method social psychological research, where qualitative and quantitative methodologies work in conjunction with each other can provide a fruitful model to investigate unfolding, dynamic, real-world phenomena, such as reactions to the economic collapse in Ireland (Power, 2020). By more fully understanding the “tipping point” between tolerance and intolerance for economic inequality - justification for or against the prevailing system – we can better understand the process and timing of social change. We can also comprehend how, why, and when people do or do not choose to engage in collective action to create fairer societies.

### References

- Bartlett, F. C. (1930). Experimental method in Psychology. *The Journal of General Psychology*, 4(1-4), 49-66.
- Bartlett, F. (1958). Thinking: An experimental and social study.
- Bates, D., Mächler, M., Bolker, B., & Walker, S. (2014). Fitting linear mixed-effects models using lme4. *arXiv preprint arXiv:1406.5823*.
- Brewer, M. B. (2000). Research design and issues of validity. *Handbook of research methods in social and personality psychology*, 3-16.
- Campbell, D. T., & Fiske, D. W. (1959). Convergent and discriminant validation by the multitrait-multimethod matrix. *Psychological bulletin*, 56(2), 81.
- Cassaniti, J. and Menon, U. (2017). *Universalism without the Uniformity: Explorations in Mind and Culture*. University of Chicago Press: Chicago.
- Cohen, T. R., Panter, A. T., & Turan, N. (2012). Guilt Proneness and Moral Character. *Current Directions in Psychological Science*, 21(5), 355–359. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0963721412454874>
- Cohen, T. R., Wolf, S. T., Panter, A. T., & Insko, C. A. (2011). Introducing the GASP scale: a new measure of guilt and shame proneness. *Journal of personality and social psychology*, 100(5), 947.
- Davidai, S., & Gilovich, T. (2015). Building a more mobile America—One income quintile at a time. *Perspectives on Psychological Science*, 10(1), 60-71.
- Denzin, N. K. (2012). Triangulation 2.0. *Journal of mixed methods research*, 6(2), 80-88.
- Fitzgerald, J. 2014. Ireland's recovery from crisis. CESifo Forum 15(2):8–13.
- Honohan, P. 2014. Ireland's EU-IMF Programme: delivering what it said on the Tin. CESifo Forum 15(2):3–7.
- Jost, J. T. (2020). *A theory of system justification*. Harvard University Press.
- Jost, J. T. (2019). A quarter century of system justification theory: Questions, answers, criticisms, and societal applications. *British Journal of Social Psychology*, 58(2), 263-314.. <https://doi.org/10.1111/bjso.12297>

- Jost, J. T., Chaikalis-Petritsis, V., Abrams, D., Sidanius, J., Van Der Toorn, J., & Bratt, C. (2012). Why men (and women) do and don't rebel: Effects of system justification on willingness to protest. *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin*, 38(2), 197-208.
- Jost, J.T., & Kay, A.C. (2010). Social Justice: History, theory, and research. S.T. Fiske, D. Gilbert, & G. Lindzey (Eds.), *Handbook of social psychology* (5th edition, Vol. 2, pp.1122-1165). Hoboken, NJ: Wiley.
- Jost, J. T., Kay, A. C., & Thorisdottir, H. (2009). *Social and psychological bases of ideology and system justification*. Oxford University Press.
- Jost, J. T., & Hunyady, O. (2005). Antecedents and consequences of system-justifying ideologies. *Current directions in psychological science*, 14(5), 260-265.
- Jost, J. T., Banaji, M. R., & Nosek, B. A. (2004). A decade of system justification theory: Accumulated evidence of conscious and unconscious bolstering of the status quo. *Political psychology*, 25(6), 881-919.
- Laurin, K., Shepherd, S., & Kay, A. C. (2010). Restricted emigration, system inescapability, and defense of the status quo: System-justifying consequences of restricted exit opportunities. *Psychological Science*, 21(8), 1075-1082.
- Lerner, M. J. (1980). The belief in a just world. In *The Belief in a just World* (pp. 9-30). Springer, Boston, MA.
- Lipkusa, I. M., Dalbert, C., & Siegler, I. C. (1996). The importance of distinguishing the belief in a just world for self versus for others: Implications for psychological well-being. *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin*, 22(7), 666-677.
- Moghaddam, F. M. (2018). *Political Plasticity and Revolution*. In Brady Wagoner, Fathali Moghaddam, and Jaan Valsiner (Eds.). *The Psychology of Radical Social Change: From Rage to Revolution* (pp. 122 – 139). Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Moghaddam, F. M. (2002). *The Individual and Society: A cultural integration*. New York: Worth.
- Power, S.A. (2020). The psychology rallies, riots, and revolutions. *Current Opinion in Psychology*. 35, v-x.
- Power, S.A. (2018c). Actual Democracy and a United Europe of States: A case study of Austerity and Protest in the Republic of Ireland. In Brady Wagoner, Ignacio Brescó, and Vlad Glaveanu (Eds.). *The Road to Actualized Democracy: A Psychological Perspective* (pp. 147 – 164). Charlotte, N.C.: Information Age Publishing.
- Power, S.A. (2018b). Remembering and Imagining in Human Development: Fairness and Social Movements in Ireland. In Constance de Saint-Laurent, Sandra Obradovic, and

- Kevin Carriere (Eds). *Imagining Collective Futures: Perspectives from Social, Cultural and Political Psychology* (pp. 221 – 235). Palgrave Macmillan: UK.
- Power, S.A. (2018a). Economic Inequality and the Rise of Civic Discontent: Remembering and Deprivation in the Republic of Ireland. In Brady Wagoner, Fathali Moghaddam and Jaan Valsiner (Eds). *The Psychology of Radical Social Change: From Rage to Revolution* (pp. 29 – 53). Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Power, S.A. (2018). The Deprivation – Protest Paradox: How the perception of unfair economic inequality leads to civic unrest. [Lead article with commentaries]. *Current Anthropology*. 59, (6), 765 - 789.
- Power, S.A. (2017). *From the elites to the streets: The psychology of democracy and economic inequality*. (doctoral dissertation). The University of Chicago, Chicago, USA.
- Power, S. A. (2016). A Violent Past but a Peaceful Present: The Cultural Psychology of an Irish Recession. *Peace and Conflict: Journal of Peace Psychology*, 22 (1), 60 – 66.
- Power, S.A. (2015). To Understand the Eurozone Crisis, Consider Culture. *Chicago Booth Review*. (p.63- 65).
- Power, S. A. (2011). On social psychology and conflict. *Psychology & Society*, 4(1), 1-6.
- Power S.A., Madsen T, Morton TA, (2000). Relative Deprivation and Revolt: Current and Future Directions, *Current Opinion in Psychology*, doi: <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.copsyc.2020.06.010>
- Power, S. A., & Velez, G. (2020). The MOVE framework: Meanings, observations, viewpoints, and experiences in processes of social change. *Review of General Psychology*, DOI: 1089268020915841.
- Power, S.A., Velez, G., Qadafi, A. and Tennant, J. (2018). The SAGE Model of Social Psychological Research. *Perspectives on Psychological Science*, 13(3), pp. 359 – 372.
- Power, S.A. & Nussbaum, D. (2016). ‘You Reap What You Sow’: The Psychology of Irish Austerity Protests. *The Guardian*.
- Power, S.A. & Nussbaum, D. (2014). The Fightin’ Irish? Not when it comes to recession and austerity. *The Guardian*.
- Reicher, S. D., & Haslam, S. A. (2012). *Change we can believe in: The role of social identity, cognitive alternatives, and leadership in group mobilization and transformation* (pp. 53-73). Information Age Publishing.
- Rotter, J. B. (1966). Generalized expectancies for internal versus external control of reinforcement. *Psychological monographs: General and applied*, 80(1), 1.

- Rozin, P. (2001). Social psychology and science: Some lessons from Solomon Asch. *Personality and Social Psychology Review*, 5(1), 2-14.
- Rozin, P. (2009). What kind of empirical research should we publish, fund, and reward?: A different perspective. *Perspectives on Psychological Science*, 4(4), 435-439.
- Scheper-Hughes, N. (1981/2001). *Saints, Scholars & Schizophrenics: Mental Illness in Rural Ireland*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Shweder, R. A. (2008). The cultural psychology of suffering: The many meanings of health in Orissa, India (and elsewhere). *Ethos*, 36(1), 60-77.
- Shweder, R. A., Much, N. C., Mahapatra, M., & Park, L. (1997). The “big three” of morality (autonomy, community, divinity) and the “big three” explanations of suffering. *Morality and health*, 119, 119-169.
- Stouffer, S. A., Suchman, E. A., DeVinney, L. C., Star, S. A., & Williams Jr, R. M. (1949). *The American soldier: Adjustment during army life.*(studies in social psychology in world war ii), vol. 1.
- Sullivan, M. (1990). *Cultural Meanings of Mental Illness: Depression and Alcoholism among the Irish*. Unpublished PhD Dissertation in the Department of Comparative Human Development at the University of Chicago.
- Wagoner, B. (2017). *The constructive mind: Bartlett's psychology in reconstruction*. Cambridge University Press.
- Wagoner, B., Jensen, E., & Oldmeadow, J. A. (2012). *Culture and social change: Transforming society through the power of ideas*. IAP.
- Weber, M. (1905/2009). *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*. Trans. Talcott Parsons, Norton Critical Edition, New York: Norton.
- Wundt, W. (1897). *Outlines of psychology* (C. H. Judd, Trans.). St. Clair Shores, MI: Scholarly Press.