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# I Like It Because It Hurts You: On the Association of Everyday Sadism, Sadistic Pleasure, and Victim Blaming

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Past research on determinants of victim blaming mainly concentrated on individuals' just-world beliefs as motivational process underlying this harsh reaction to others' suffering. The present work provides novel insights regarding underlying *affective* processes by showing how individuals prone to derive pleasure from others' suffering—individuals high in everyday sadism—engage in victim blaming due to increased sadistic pleasure and reduced empathic concern they experience. Results of three cross-sectional studies and one ambulatory assessment study applying online experience sampling method (ESM; overall  $N = 2,653$ ) document this association. Importantly, the relation emerged over and above the honesty–humility, emotionality, extraversion, agreeableness, conscientiousness, and openness personality model (Study 1a), and other so-called dark traits (Study 1b), across different cultural backgrounds (Study 1c), and also when sampling from a population of individuals frequently confronted with victim–perpetrator constellations: police officers (Study 1d). Studies 2 and 3 highlight a significant behavioral correlate of victim blaming. Everyday sadism is related to reduced willingness to engage in effortful cognitive activity as individuals high (vs. low) in everyday sadism recall less information regarding victim–perpetrator constellations of sexual assault. Results obtained in the ESM study (Study 4) indicate that the relation of everyday sadism, sadistic pleasure, and victim blaming holds in everyday life and is not significantly moderated by interpersonal closeness to the blamed victim or impactfulness of the incident. Overall, the present article extends our understanding of what determines innocent victims' derogation and highlights emotional mechanisms, societal relevance, and generalizability of the observed associations beyond the laboratory.

*Keywords:* everyday sadism, sadistic pleasure, victim blaming, harm, empathic concern

Pleasure is sweetest when it is paid for by another's pain.

—Ovid

Our reality is full of instances where we are confronted with unjust suffering of other individuals, instantiated, for example, in the global suffering of civilian war victims, but also represented by teenage bullying victims at school or rape victims. Furthermore, we are confronted with these victims' suffering in many different ways. For instance, we may directly learn from close others that they have been treated unfairly by being bullied or laughed at. Otherwise, we may be confronted with others' plight more distantly via (social) media, for example, by reading about a woman having been sexually assaulted, or by watching a depiction of war

victims in the news. In many cases, learning about another person's suffering induces tender emotional reactions regarding the victim such as empathic concern, compassion, or sympathy (e.g., Batson, 2009; Goetz et al., 2010; Sassenrath et al., 2022). However, besides these emotional reactions fostering prosocial behavior that aims at enhancing others' well-being, another prevalent reaction when learning about others' suffering is holding the victims responsible for their misfortunes (e.g., Lerner, 1980; Lerner & Miller, 1978; Savani et al., 2011; van den Bos & Maas, 2009). Blaming innocent victims for the victimizing events they experienced is in line with theoretical frameworks derived from Lerner's (1980) concept of the belief in a just world involving convictions about how everyone gets what they deserve.

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and methodology. Yngwie Asbjørn Nielsen played supporting role in conceptualization, data curation, formal analysis, investigation, methodology and writing—review and editing. Stefan Pfattheicher played lead role in conceptualization, formal analysis and investigation, supporting role in writing—original draft and equal role in data curation.

All data, materials, and analytic methods and code reported in this article can be accessed via the Open Science Framework (<https://osf.io/9fgv4/>).

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## Goals of the Current Work

The present contribution focuses on the harsh and unsympathetic reaction of victim blaming when being confronted with the suffering of innocent others and has three main goals. First and foremost, by examining how affective reactions in the face of others' suffering influence the degree of victim blaming, the present research provides new insights on the determinants of derogating innocent victims. Past research mainly centered on individuals' belief in a just world as key determinant of victim blaming and derogation (see [Dawtry et al., 2020](#), for an overview). Given that the belief in a just world involves ideas about the world being a predictable and just place where everybody reaps what they sow, this notion originates from the self-regulatory motivation to control one's surrounding, which is necessary for the pursuit of long-term goals ([Hafer, 2000](#)). The present research goes beyond this motivational explanation for victim blaming. Specifically, it systematically examines whether individuals prone to experience pleasure derived from another's suffering ([O'Meara et al., 2011](#)), namely individuals high in everyday sadism, are particularly likely to engage in victim blaming and whether this is related to the degree of sadistic pleasure experienced meanwhile. Thereby, this contribution also aims at reconciling empirical inconsistencies evidenced by recent findings that are incompatible with just-world-based explanations of victim blaming (e.g., [Callan et al., 2007, 2014](#); [Harvey et al., 2014](#); [Lens et al., 2014](#)). The current research, thus, takes a novel route by addressing the impact of affective experiences, while learning about others' suffering as another relevant determinant of victim blaming, regardless of individuals' just-world beliefs.

Second, by relating individuals' proneness to everyday sadism and blaming innocent victims, this research complements literature on everyday sadism as one aspect of the "Dark Tetrad of Personalities" ([Paulhus, 2014](#)) and how these traits relate to person perception and moral judgment. Also, literature on the positive association of everyday sadism and aggressive behavior (e.g., [Buckels et al., 2013, 2019](#); [Chester et al., 2019](#); [Pfattheicher et al., 2021](#)) is augmented. Specifically, research on the relation between "dark traits" ([Paulhus, 2014](#)) and person perception indicates that everyday sadism, in particular, is associated with dehumanizing tendencies ([Rogers et al., 2018](#)). Moreover, findings with regard to moral judgments indicate that individuals high in everyday sadism show impaired patterns of person perception and moral judgment regarding the perpetrator due to their enjoyment of cruelty when facing others' suffering ([Trémolière & Djeriouat, 2016](#)). The current work turns from perceptions regarding the perpetrator to perceptions and judgments regarding the victim of harmful events.

The core feature of everyday sadism as a stable trait lies, besides a lack of empathic concern, in the proclivity to experience pleasure from the infliction or observation of others' pain, degradation, or humiliation ([Buckels et al., 2013](#); [Paulhus, 2014](#); [Trémolière & Djeriouat, 2016](#)). Individuals high (vs. low) in everyday sadism should, thus, perceive and evaluate other individuals' suffering differently. Consequently, they should also act differently in the face of suffering. In this context, we identify reduced willingness to engage in effortful cognitive activity regarding a victim-perpetrator constellation in the context of sexual assault as relevant behavioral outcome associated with everyday sadism. Precisely, we show that the readiness to engage in effortful cognitive activity decreases the stronger individuals' proclivity for everyday sadism and their engagement in victim blaming is pronounced.

The third aim of this research is to address societal relevance as well as generalizability of the association between everyday sadism and victim blaming. Accordingly, we investigate whether everyday sadism is positively associated with victim blaming due to experienced sadistic pleasure across a variety of relevant societal contexts (e.g., blaming victims of [a] online mobbing, [b] sexual assaults, [c] racism, and [d] homophobia). We have also included four samples originating from so-called non-WEIRD (Western, Educated, Industrialized, Rich, and Democratic; cf. [Henrich et al., 2010](#)) countries. Furthermore, by including an ambulatory assessment (AA) applying the experience sampling method (ESM), we are not only able to assess the prevalence and meaningfulness of the association in everyday life. By assessing via which source individuals learned about others' suffering (i.e., online via [social] media or face-to-face via direct communication) and whether the misfortunate person was a close other or not, we are able to examine two potentially relevant boundary conditions in the association of everyday sadism, sadistic pleasure, and victim blaming in everyday life (cf. [Dawtry et al., 2020](#)). Notably, recent research indicates the relevance of studying psychological phenomena in everyday life in order to resolve both empirical and theoretical inconsistencies, because contexts studied in the lab may or may not match the contexts in which the studied psychological phenomenon occurs in daily life (e.g., empathy; [Depow et al., 2021](#)). Accordingly, the current work can be considered a theoretically and methodologically innovative contribution to research on the role of observers' affective experiences in victim blaming.

In the following, we describe the current state of research on victim blaming and its key determinants. Subsequently, we present previous research on everyday sadism and how it relates to person perception, moral judgment, and aggressive behavior. In doing so, we present our reasoning why individuals' level of everyday sadism, independent of their belief in a just world, predicts derogating innocent victims who face suffering. This relation should be driven by increased sadistic pleasure and decreased empathic concern the stronger individuals' propensity to everyday sadism.

## Key Determinants of Victim Blaming

As elaborated above, blaming and derogating victims with regard to their misfortunes represent a widespread reaction when learning about others' disadvantages (e.g., [Hafer, 2000](#); [Lerner, 1980](#); [Lerner & Miller, 1978](#); [Savani et al., 2011](#); [van den Bos & Maas, 2009](#)). Based on [Lerner's \(1980\)](#) concept of belief in a just world, it is proposed that individuals have the need to believe in a just world where good things happen to good people and bad things happen to bad people (cf. [Lerner, 1977](#)). In the case of being confronted with someone not getting what they deserve, people's convictions of deservingness are violated. As a consequence, individuals frequently restore their belief in a just world by helping an innocent victim, if possible. Importantly, when the events that have happened cannot be changed, another way of restoring deservingness conviction is by blaming victims for being responsible for and having deserved what happened to them (i.e., derogating the victim; cf. [Hafer & Bègue, 2005](#); [Lerner, 1980](#); [Lerner & Simmons, 1966](#)). Thereby, the belief in the world as a predictable place is restored, a conviction that seems necessary for individuals to be able to follow their long-term objectives (cf. [Callan et al., 2009](#); [Hafer, 2000](#); [Lerner, 1977](#)).

Accordingly, past research investigating conditions that influence the degree of victim blaming has primarily applied the belief in a just

world as theoretical background, showing that victim blaming represents one route to system justification (Kay et al., 2005). Correspondingly, victim blaming is a function of the degree to which individuals endorse just-world beliefs, but only if they apply a mindset involving propositional and consistency-based information processing (van den Bos & Maas, 2009). Furthermore, activating the concept of free choice in individuals increases victim blaming, but only for individuals socialized in independent (as opposed to interdependent) cultures (Savani et al., 2011). However, despite broad empirical evidence regarding the positive association of victim blaming and the endorsement of just-world beliefs (see Hafer & Bègue, 2005, for an overview), recent research revealed findings inconsistent with just-world-based explanations of victim blaming. Some research, for instance, failed to show the victim-blaming effect at all (e.g., Callan et al., 2014; Harvey et al., 2014). Moreover, some findings indicate that observers whose just-world belief had been threatened judged a victim's character even more positively compared to observers whose just-world belief had not been threatened (e.g., Callan et al., 2007; Lens et al., 2014). To reconcile this contradictory empirical evidence, recent theorizing on victim blaming and derogation had emphasized the impact of observers' current affective states when being confronted with victims on the inclination to blame an individual for victimizing experiences (cf. Dawtry et al., 2020).

### Moral Mechanisms and Victim Blaming

Beyond research examining just-world-based processes and moderating conditions, recent research indicates that victim blaming as one form of blame attribution is related to intuitive moral evaluations as introduced by moral foundations theory (Graham et al., 2013). Specifically, empirical findings indicate that individualizing foundations—that is, moral reasoning and concerns focusing on the comfort and integrity of individuals with the objective to shield them from suffering—are negatively associated with blame attributions regarding the victim (Milesi et al., 2020). In contrast, binding foundations—that is moral reasoning and concerns centering on the protection of groups and the maintenance of social hierarchies—have been positively associated with victim blaming (e.g., Niemi & Young, 2016). The differential association of individualizing and binding foundations and victim blaming have been explained by different perceptions regarding the suffering victim. Binding foundations predicted perceptions of the victim as contaminated and tainted, including perceptions of higher victim responsibility, greater victim, and lower perpetrator blaming. Individualizing foundations, in contrast, predicted perceptions of the victim as suffering and being significantly injured (Niemi & Young, 2016), also involving emotional reactions such as empathic concern and compassionate feelings for the victim (Graham et al., 2013; see also Deitz et al., 1982, 1984; Watts et al., 2017). Hence, as these findings already suggest, emotional reactions when being confronted with others' suffering appear to play a role in determining the degree to which individuals engage in victim blaming.

### Emotional Mechanisms and Victim Blaming

Emphasizing emotional reactions involved in victim blaming, we argue that affective processes are in fact highly relevant when it comes to determinants of victim blaming. Specifically, in the

following, we outline why individuals' level of everyday sadism, marked by a lack of empathic concern and the experience of pleasure at another's suffering (Buckels et al., 2013; Paulhus, 2014), predicts victim blaming across a variety of contexts and how this is associated with nonassistance with individuals in need. By associating everyday sadism with victim blaming, we incorporate the role of observers' affective reactions when being confronted with suffering individuals (Dawtry et al., 2020). Thereby, this research so far goes beyond the mainly motivational (in the case of just-world beliefs) as well as morality-based explanations of victim derogation (cf. Hafer & Bègue, 2005; Milesi et al., 2020; Niemi & Young, 2016).

### Everyday Sadism, Person Perception, and Victim Blaming

Everyday sadism as a stable trait describes the tendency to experience pleasure from either watching or causing psychological (e.g., emotional) or physical suffering in other individuals (O'Meara et al., 2011; Trémolière & Djeriouat, 2016). Within the context of everyday sadism, pleasure typically refers to general positive affect as well as more specific emotions such as joy and excitement (Buckels et al., 2019; Chester, 2017). In fact, the enjoyment of cruelty represents the unique feature distinguishing everyday sadism from other antisocial traits (e.g., narcissism, Machiavellism, psychopathy; Buckels et al., 2013; Paulhus, 2014). More precisely, all "dark traits" share the tendency to disregard others' concerns and preferences (cf. Moshagen et al., 2018; Paulhus, 2014), which is why the individual disposition of subclinical sadism is positively correlated with various other antisocial traits (Johnson et al., 2019). However, the aspect of experiencing pleasure in the face of others' pain is not essential for other antisocial traits. Accordingly, everyday sadism explains variance in behavioral correlates, over and above the other antisocial traits (e.g., Johnson et al., 2019; Moshagen et al., 2018).

In recent literature, the overlap of the above-described enjoyment of cruelty as unique feature of everyday sadism with Schadenfreude as affective reaction referring to joy derived from observing others' misfortunes has been discussed (cf. Greenier, 2018; Schumpe & Lafrenière, 2016). However, the two affective reactions can be differentiated given that everyday sadism as a stable trait implies the unfluctuating proclivity to experience pleasure in the face of others' suffering or humiliation, whereas Schadenfreude refers to a transitory experience of pleasure following the observation of other's deserved minor misfortunes for which the observer is not responsible (cf. Ben-Ze'ev, 2009; Trémolière & Djeriouat, 2016). In the present research, we refer to sadistic pleasure as the instantaneous emotional reaction of experiencing positive affect in the face of others' suffering, which we predict to be positively associated with both individuals' levels of everyday sadism and victim blaming.

In other words, besides lacking empathic concern (Buckels et al., 2013) individuals high (vs. low) in everyday sadism experience sadistic pleasure while watching/performing harmful behavior toward others (cf. Paulhus, 2014). Notably, in individuals high in everyday sadism, the degree of experienced pleasure is positively correlated with severity of harm (Chester et al., 2019). Correspondingly, research yields a positive association between everyday sadism and antisocial behavior (Thomas & Egan, 2022), such as killing bugs or harming unknown others (Buckels et al., 2013; Pfattheicher et al., 2021), internet trolling (Buckels et al., 2019), sexual aggression (Russell et al., 2017), bullying at schools

(Pfattheicher et al., 2023), vandalism (Pfattheicher et al., 2019), and a preference for playing violent video games (Greitemeyer, 2015).

Regarding the relation of antisocial traits and person perception, recent findings in the context of dyadic interactions indicate that target persons scoring high (vs. low) on everyday sadism tend to dehumanize their interaction partners in dyadic face-to-face interactions which likely facilitates antisocial behavior toward them (Rogers et al., 2018). On the other hand, target persons scoring high on everyday sadism were perceived as less positive, attractive, and likable by their interaction partners. This effect was uniquely associated with target persons' levels of everyday sadism, irrespective of their level of Machiavellianism, narcissism, and psychopathy (Rogers et al., 2018). This pattern of results suggests that although similarities among antisocial personality traits exist (Paulhus, 2014), unique patterns regarding everyday sadism associated with aspects of interpersonal perception emerge, even when controlling for overlap with scores on the other dark traits (cf. Buckels et al., 2013; Paulhus & Dutton, 2016; Rogers et al., 2018). Furthermore, research in the context of moral judgments indicates that enjoyment of cruelty experienced by individuals high (vs. low) in everyday sadism when facing other individuals' suffering leads to judgments of perpetrator exoneration (cf. Trémolière & Djeriouat, 2016).

Based on the above delineated literature, it can be concluded that individuals high (vs. low) in everyday sadism likely perceive and evaluate other individuals' suffering quite specifically. They react with sadistic pleasure combined with little empathic concern for the suffering of others (Buckels et al., 2013; Paulhus, 2014). Consequently, we predict that individuals high (vs. low) in everyday sadism should be more likely to engage in victim blaming as one form of moral judgment in the face of others' suffering due to sadistic pleasure experienced in this context. In other words, independent of individuals' belief in a just world, their propensity to everyday sadism should predict derogating innocent victims who face suffering. This relation should be driven by an increased sadistic pleasure and decreased empathic concern associated with high (vs. low) levels of everyday sadism.

Furthermore, we argue that everyday sadism is also related to a significant correlate of victim blaming: reduced willingness to engage in effortful cognitive activity regarding a victim–perpetrator constellation. That is, we argue that victim blaming as one core feature of moral disengagement (Bandura et al., 1996) is negatively associated with the tendency to act supportively and prosocially (cf. Koehler & Weber, 2018; Schacter et al., 2016; Song & Oh, 2018). Hence, individuals high (vs. low) in everyday sadism who engage in victim blaming should be less likely to act supportively, for instance, by recalling less relevant information that may help protect (future) victims from suffering. Accordingly, we predict that observers' level of everyday sadism is negatively associated with willingness to engage in effortful cognitive activity regarding a victim–perpetrator constellation.

## Overview of Studies

In this article, we report on three cross-sectional studies with the first cross-sectional study consisting of seven different samples, four of these from non-WEIRD countries. Besides these three cross-sectional correlational studies (overall  $N = 2,380$ ), we have approached our research question also by conducting an AA study based on the ESM ( $N = 273$ ).

Overall, the first cross-sectional correlational study targets the association of everyday sadism and victim blaming systematically, with Study 1a examining whether victim blaming relates to everyday sadism, beyond the honesty–humility, emotionality, extraversion, agreeableness, conscientiousness, and openness (HEXACO) personality model. Study 1b extends this analysis by assessing the association of everyday sadism and victim blaming controlling for the other dark traits (Paulhus, 2014). Study 1c examines whether the association is also detectable in so-called non-WEIRD samples (i.e., samples from Malaysia, the Philippines, Kenya, and Nigeria). Study 1d assesses the relation of everyday sadism and victim blaming in a sample originating from a population of individuals who are often-times confronted with victims and perpetrators, namely police officers. In all of these studies, individuals' just-world beliefs were assessed as additional predictor of victim blaming.

Studies 2 and 3 investigate a relevant correlate of victim blaming: the willingness to engage in effortful cognitive activity in the face of others' suffering. Specifically, Study 2 investigates how observers' level of everyday sadism relates to the amount of information recalled in the context of a sexual assault when being asked to report as much information as possible in order to detain the perpetrator. Study 3 introduces a potential moderating variable and examines whether observers' willingness to engage in effortful cognitive activity is differentially related to everyday sadism when the task is introduced either as a memory task assessing cognitive ability or as a task with the goal to detain the perpetrator of a sexual assault, as in Study 2. In Studies 2 and 3, individuals' just-world beliefs were again assessed as additional predictor of victim blaming.

Finally, applying an AA approach with an ESM, Study 4 investigates the relation of everyday sadism, sadistic pleasure, and victim blaming in everyday life. Moreover, potential boundary conditions of this association are exploratorily examined, namely interpersonal closeness to the misfortunate person and impactfulness of the incident (cf. Dawtry et al., 2020). After completing a baseline survey including measures of everyday sadism along with the other dark personality dimensions as well as participants' belief in a just world, participants were prompted three times a day, on 10 consecutive days, to answer short, signal-contingent surveys. In each of these short surveys, it was assessed whether participants (a) had the opportunity to perceive the suffering of another individual, and (b) if so, who that individual was (e.g., a stranger, romantic partner, good friend, or loose acquaintance), (c) the source where they learned about the other's suffering (e.g., in real life, online via social media, on television), and the degree of (d) sadistic pleasure and (e) victim blaming they had experienced if such an episode occurred.

Overall, the present article is devoted to a better understanding of what determines innocent victims' derogation. Research on key determinants of victim blaming mainly concentrated on underlying motivational or moral–cognitive processes so far. The present research goes further by addressing affective processes determining victim blaming independent of the above-mentioned processes. Moreover, willingness to engage in effortful cognitive activity as relevant correlate of victim blaming is scrutinized. Finally, by examining the relation of everyday sadism and victim blaming across various contexts, in different samples and by applying an ambulatory assessment approach, the current work investigates the association's prevalence and generalizability beyond the laboratory as well as its societal relevance.

## Research Ethics Statement and Data Handling

The studies reported in this contribution were conducted in full compliance with the Ethical Guidelines of the German Association of Psychologists (G\*Power 3) and the American Psychological Association. Moreover, the ethics committee of Ulm University, the institution where the first author is employed, declared all of the studies reported in this article exempt from approval.

Additionally, in our online studies, we aimed at improving data quality using attention checks (“This is an attention check item. Please answer: I completely agree”). Each of the reported studies was conducted using an online platform providing access to (mostly German) individuals (see Study 1c, for exception) who are willing to participate in studies in exchange for a small amount of money (<https://www.clickworker.com>). We also ensured that participants were unable to participate repeatedly in the studies. Reported sample sizes indicate the number of participants who successfully completed all attention check items and finished the respective study. All materials, applied vignettes, preregistration documents, information on the experimental procedures and protocols, as well as all data reported in the following four studies can be accessed via the Open Science Framework (OSF; see <https://osf.io/9fgv4/>).

## Statistical Power

Sample sizes for the cross-sectional correlational studies were determined based on a priori power analyses using G\*Power (Faul et al., 2009). In line with a meta-analysis (Richard et al., 2003), indicating that effect sizes in published personality and social psychology studies hover around  $r = .20$ , we conducted power analysis for two-tailed tests to detect at least small to medium effect size ( $\rho = 0.20$ ), with  $\alpha = .05$  (two-tailed) and high statistical power of  $\beta = .95$ . Using these parameters, analyses suggest a sample size of 314 participants (see also Schönbrodt & Perugini, 2013). We aimed at 320 participants. Sample size consideration for Study 3 introducing an experimental variation as well as Study 4 applying ambulatory assessment will be described in the respective method section of the study.

## Studies 1a–1d

The aim of this first set of cross-sectional correlational studies was to examine the association of everyday sadism and victim blaming systematically from various perspectives. Specifically, we tested whether individuals high (vs. low) in everyday sadism are more inclined to blame the target of victimizing events due to experienced sadistic pleasure while learning about the victimizing events. Here, we investigated whether this relation emerges under control of prominent personality traits, the HEXACO (cf. Ashton & Lee, 2009; Study 1a). Furthermore, we tested whether the association of everyday sadism and victim blaming holds over and above the dark triad of personality by including psychopathy, Machiavellianism, and narcissism (Paulhus, 2014; Paulhus & Williams, 2002) in our analyses (Study 1b). As mentioned above, it should be noted that everyday sadism overlaps (i.e., shares variance; e.g., Moshagen et al., 2018) with other dark personality traits. Therefore, when controlling for the other dark traits this implies subtracting relevant and significant variance from everyday sadism. Furthermore, this procedure also implies that the residual variance associated with the residual sadism variable consists of less reliable variance compared

to the original sadism variable. This is particularly the case the more the dark traits are associated with the original sadism variable (cf. Lynam et al., 2006; Pfattheicher et al., 2021; Sleep et al., 2017). Therefore, we focus on the zero-order correlations of everyday sadism and victim blaming. Nevertheless, we also report on the association of victim blaming and everyday sadism when controlling for the other dark traits, even though this approach should be used precautiously (cf. Miller et al., 2019).

In Study 1c, we tested generalizability of the association of everyday sadism and victim blaming across different cultural backgrounds by including four non-WEIRD samples from countries with a large English-speaking population: Malaysia, the Philippines, Kenya, and Nigeria. Finally, we wanted to see whether the association also holds for individuals who are often confronted with victim-perpetrator constellations, namely police officers (Study 1d).

Overall, the study’s main test is whether individuals high (vs. low) in everyday sadism are more likely to blame others for their victimizing experiences—due to experienced sadistic pleasure and reduced empathic concern. Thereby, we add novel insights to the phenomenon of blaming innocent victims. We included belief in a just world in all studies (Studies 1–4) as additional predictor in our main analyses.

## Method

### Procedure

In total, we collected data comprising seven diverse samples. All studies were conducted online via <https://www.clickworker.com>. Table 1 depicts sample characteristics of the respective Studies 1a–1d, as well as means, standard deviations, and Cronbach’s  $\alpha$  for the focal variables of everyday sadism, sadistic pleasure, empathic concern, and victim blaming. Furthermore, the zero-order correlations of everyday sadism and victim blaming are depicted across the seven subsamples. For all applied scales and statements, answers were given using a 7-point Likert scale ranging from 1 = *I strongly disagree* to 7 = *I strongly agree*.

### Everyday Sadism

In Studies 1a–1d, we applied a 15-item version of the Comprehensive Assessment of Sadistic Tendencies (CAST; Buckels & Paulhus, 2014; see also Buckels et al., 2013, 2014; Greitemeyer, 2015), which assesses verbal sadism (e.g., “I enjoy making jokes at the expense of others.”), physical sadism (e.g., “I have dominated others using fear.”) as well as vicarious sadism (e.g., “I enjoy playing the villain in games and torturing other characters.”). Please note that we report results for the overall everyday sadism scale given that results are consistent when analyzing associations of victim blaming with the three subscales of everyday sadism.

### Victim Blaming

Throughout Studies 1a–1d, we assessed participants’ inclination to blame and derogate innocent victims by presenting vignettes that describe victimizing events that a target person experiences. After reading each vignette, participants first indicated the degree of sadistic pleasure they experienced, while reading (see below for details) and then how much they agreed with the following statement: “While reading about what happened to [X], I thought that

**Table 1**  
**Overview Over Characteristics and Variables of Studies 1a–1d and Correlations Between Everyday Sadism and Victim Blaming**

Study	Country (language questionnaire)	N	M <sub>age</sub>	SD <sub>age</sub>	% women	Everyday sadism		Sadistic pleasure		Empathic concern		Victim blaming		Correlation <sup>a</sup> r
						M (SD)	α	M (SD)	α	M (SD)	α	M (SD)	α	
1a	Germany (German)	322	36.18	13.51	41.9	2.14 (0.97)	.91	1.57 (0.86)	.94	4.61 (1.26)	.94	2.77 (1.06)	.84	.523
1b	Germany (German)	310	35.54	11.80	44.8	2.04 (0.98)	.92	1.52 (0.89)	.82	5.08 (1.29)	.91	2.25 (1.22)	.78	.456
1c	Malaysia (English)	111	28.61	8.86	33.6	2.47 (1.06)	.85	1.97 (1.37)	.91	5.36 (1.22)	.86	2.82 (1.58)	.77	.266
	Kenya (English)	116	27.43	6.03	41.2	2.65 (1.09)	.82	1.80 (1.18)	.80	5.90 (1.25)	.81	2.59 (1.56)	.65	.449
	Nigeria (English)	112	31.34	7.96	19.5	2.44 (1.06)	.84	1.98 (1.15)	.70	5.88 (1.01)	.66	3.01 (1.43)	.41	.291
	Philippines (English)	170	29.22	8.14	62.6	2.10 (0.99)	.85	1.82 (1.22)	.87	5.37 (1.29)	.83	2.56 (1.44)	.56	.177
1d	U.K. police officers (English)	96	32.09	7.02	39.2	2.33 (0.83)	.81	1.17 (0.49)	.85	5.50 (1.12)	.83	1.57 (0.76)	.41	.442

Note. Higher means indicate stronger inclination for everyday sadism and tendency to blame innocent victims.

<sup>a</sup>For all correlations,  $p < .020$ ; labels of all applied scales ranged from 1 = *I strongly disagree* to 7 = *I strongly agree*.

what happened to him/her was partly also caused by how s/he acted.”

In Study 1a, we presented 10 different vignettes describing victimizing events in different relevant societal contexts, such as mobbing in school and at the workplace, cyber mobbing, sexual assault, homophobic, and prejudice-based assaults, and violent assaults in intergroup conflicts. After each vignette, participants indicated their degree of victim blaming by indicating their agreement with the above-described statement. As preregistered, based on these 10 answers, we computed a mean victim-blaming score.

In Studies 1b–1d, we used only three vignettes, one describing an incident of sexual assault and two vignettes describing an episode of mobbing in school and an episode of cyber mobbing. Again, victim blaming was assessed after each vignette by participants’ agreement with the above-described statement. Based on the respective three answers, a mean score of victim blaming was computed. All vignettes can be accessed via the OSF (see <https://osf.io/9fgv4/>)

### Empathic Concern

In all studies, participants’ empathic concern for the target person undergoing a victimizing event was assessed after each vignette by indicating how *sympathetic*, *sensitive*, *soft-hearted*, *compassionate*, *tender*, and *moved* participants felt (cf. [Batson et al., 2007](#)). As for victim blaming, in Study 1a, we assessed empathic concern for the respective target person of the victimizing events described in 10 different vignettes, thus, the empathic concern score represents the mean of 10 answers regarding their empathic concern for each target. In Studies 1b–1d, the empathic concern score is computed based on the answers regarding the target person depicted in the three different vignettes as described above.

### Sadistic Pleasure

Based on the prior literature (e.g., [Lui et al., 2020](#); [Schumpe & Lafrenière, 2016](#)), throughout Studies 1a–1d we measured participants’ experienced pleasure, while learning about the victimizing events of the target person with three items: “While reading about what happened to [X], I couldn’t resist a little smile.” “While reading about what happened to [X], I found some of his/her misfortune a bit amusing.” and “While reading about what happened to [X], it was somehow entertaining to read about what happened to [X].” Again, in Study 1a the mean sadistic pleasure score is based on participants’ answers regarding the 10 different vignettes, in Studies 1b–1d, the score is based on answers regarding three vignettes.

### HEXACO

In Study 1a, we assessed the HEXACO personality model. Here, we applied the 60-item version of the HEXACO Personality Inventory–Revised (HEXACO-60; [Ashton & Lee, 2009](#); 10 items per dimension). All six dimensions showed adequate reliability ( $\alpha > .72$ ), except for agreeableness ( $\alpha = .63$ ). As mentioned above, please see the OSF (<https://osf.io/9fgv4/>) for information on all parameters of all other measures in the respective study (the HEXACO, the Dark Triad, Belief in a just world).

### **Dark Triad**

In Study 1b, we applied the 27-item Short Dark Triad questionnaire (D. N. Jones & Paulhus, 2014) to measure Machiavellianism, narcissism, and subclinical psychopathy with nine items per dimension. All subscales revealed adequate reliability ( $\alpha > .71$ ).

### **Belief in a Just World**

In all Studies 1a–1d, we assessed individuals' belief in a just world by applying the 13-item belief in a just-world questionnaire (Dalbert, 1999), consisting of a seven-item personal belief in a just-world subscale ( $\alpha = .93$ ; e.g., "I believe that most of the things that happen in my life are fair." or "I believe that, by and large, I deserve what happens to me.") as well as a six-item global belief in just-world subscale ( $\alpha = .85$ ; e.g., "I think basically the world is a just place." or "I believe that, by and large, people get what they deserve."). Please note that we report all results including both subscales as predictors of victim blaming.

### **Participants**

As can be seen in Table 1, we fell short of the threshold indicated by our power analyses in Study 1b due to several participants' failures in our attention check items. To be more precise, in Study 1a, 2.80% of participants failed the attention check item. In Study 1b, 1.30% of participants failed the attention check item. In Study 1c, 4.00% of participants in the Filipino sample, 2.50% of the Kenyan sample, 4.30% of the Malaysian sample, and 5.10% of the Nigerian sample failed the attention check item. In Study 1d, 1% of participants failed the attention check item.

Moreover, in Study 1c, including four non-WEIRD samples from four different countries, we reached an overall sample size of  $N = 527$ . The four subsamples for each country are smaller (see Table 1 for details). Please note that we included further descriptive information on the four non-WEIRD samples in the supplemental materials (see <https://osf.io/9fgv4/>). In Study 1d, which comprises police officers in the United Kingdom, we also fell short of our threshold due to a restricted pool of participants.

### **Results and Discussion**

As depicted in Table 1, analyses revealed significant positive correlations between participants' level of everyday sadism and their inclination to blame innocent victims across the seven subsamples with correlation coefficients ranging from  $r = .18$  (a small effect) to  $r = .52$  (a large effect) based on Cohen's (1992) categorization of effects sizes. Consecutively, we tested whether the association of everyday sadism and victim blaming emerged over and above the HEXACO (Study 1a), the dark triad (Study 1b), and the belief in a just world (Studies 1a–1d). When controlling for the HEXACO, everyday sadism still statistically predicted victim blaming ( $r_{\text{partial}} = .46, p < .001$ ). Similarly, when controlling for the dark triad, everyday sadism still remained a significant predictor of victim blaming ( $r_{\text{partial}} = .40, p < .001$ ). A detailed description of results of the multiple regression analyses predicting victim blaming, while controlling for the HEXACO, the dark triad, and the belief in a just world in the respective subsamples can be found in the supplemental materials on the OSF (see <https://osf.io/9fgv4/>).

Please note that we have developed and applied our own vignettes in conjunction with ad hoc measures of sadistic pleasure and victim blaming adapted to the vignettes. This may be problematic given that the validity of the vignettes and our ad hoc responses remains untested and thus largely unknown (cf. Flake et al., 2017; Flake & Fried, 2020). However, to increase credibility of our results, we conducted random-effects integrative data analyses (IDAs) by combining the data from all Studies 1a–1d to get a more reliable overall estimate of our effects.

Furthermore, conducting an ESM study (Study 4) allows us to assess whether the observed associations of everyday sadism, sadistic pleasure, empathic concern, and victim blaming also hold in ecologically valid everyday situations.

### **Integrative Data Analysis**

Specifically, to estimate the overall effect size, we computed a random-effects IDA (Curran & Hussong, 2009), which revealed an overall effect of everyday sadism on victim blaming of  $\beta = 0.37$ , 95% CI [0.27, 0.47]. Furthermore, since we assessed everyday sadism and the belief in just world in all seven subsamples, we again computed a random-effects IDA to estimate the effect sizes for everyday sadism predicting victim blaming while controlling for the belief in a just world. Across Studies 1a–1d, everyday sadism predicted victim blaming beyond participants' belief in a just world ( $\beta = 0.36$ , 95% CI [0.26, 0.46]).

### **Mediation Analysis**

Given that we predict the positive association of everyday sadism and victim blaming to be driven by increased sadistic pleasure and decreased empathic concern experienced while learning about others' suffering, we conducted an IDA with everyday sadism as a predictor, sadistic pleasure, and empathic concern as (simultaneous) mediating variables, and victim blaming as dependent variable. We conducted this analysis based on all samples simultaneously by running multilevel structural equation modeling (SEM), as implemented in lavaan (Rosseel, 2012). We report the aggregate within-study effects. The results revealed a significant indirect effect in that individuals high (vs. low) on everyday sadism engaged more in victim blaming due to increased sadistic pleasure (95% CI indirect effect [0.22, 0.31]) and decreased empathic concern (95% CI indirect effect [0.05, 0.09]), given that both confidence intervals excluded zero (see Figure 1, for detail).

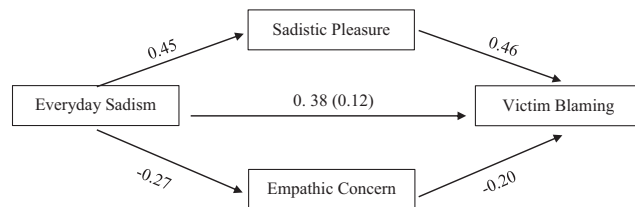
### **Quadratic Effects**

Finally, we used IDA to investigate potential nonlinearities in the relationship between sadism and victim blaming by regressing victim blaming on sadism and its squared term. The coefficient for the squared term was nonsignificant ( $p < .432$ ) and 24 times smaller than the coefficient for the linear term ( $B = 0.019$  vs.  $B = 0.455$ ). Overall, there seems to be little evidence of a nonlinear, quadratic relationship. Please see our supplemental materials on the OSF (<https://osf.io/9fgv4/>), for further detail.

### **Multilevel Analysis of Vignettes**

In our previous analyses, we treated participants' responses to the different vignettes as a multi-item scale. That is, we took averages

**Figure 1**  
*Association of Everyday Sadism and Victim Blaming With Sadistic Pleasure and Empathic Concern as Mediating Variables*



*Note.* SEM = structural equation modeling; IDA = integrative data analysis. IDA with everyday sadism as predictor, sadistic pleasure, and empathic concern as (simultaneous) mediating variables and victim blaming as dependent variable based on all samples (Studies 1a–1d) simultaneously using multilevel SEM; standardized  $\beta$ -coefficients are reported; all coefficients are significant at  $p < .001$ .

across all vignettes to get an overall measure of victim blaming, sadistic pleasure, or empathic concern. We then treat the averages as fixed effects (except in the new IDA, where it is entered as both a fixed and a random effect across studies). To investigate this matter further, we ran an additional analysis in which we did not aggregate across vignettes, but rather treated them as random effects. Specifically, we fitted a linear mixed model with random effects across both participants and vignettes. For this purpose, we used the data from Study 1a as this was the only study using 10 vignettes (the remaining studies use three or one vignette). The analysis, also reported in the supplemental materials on the OSF (<https://osf.io/9fgv4/>), revealed almost zero by-vignette variance in the slopes of sadism, sadistic pleasure, or empathic concern. In fact, including by-vignette random slopes often yielded singular fit and convergence issues. This suggests that there is nothing to be gained from modeling the vignettes as random effects.

### Measurement Invariance

In order to gain insights with regard to whether participants across the samples understood our items similarly, we tested for measurement invariance (see supplemental materials on the OSF; <https://osf.io/9fgv4/>). Here, we were able to establish full configural and partial scalar invariance for the sadistic pleasure measure (one item loaded differently across samples). Furthermore, we were also able to establish full metric invariance for the empathic concern measure. As such, there were some differences in the measurement model of sadistic pleasure and empathic concern across the samples. These differences may explain why the relationship between sadism and victim blaming varied across the samples. We note, however, that in spite of imperfect measurement invariance, the effect of sadism on victim blaming emerged in all samples (Studies 1a–1d).

To sum up, results of Studies 1a–1d support the notion that, independent of individuals' belief in a just world, their propensity to everyday sadism predicts derogating innocent victims who face suffering. The results of a mediation analysis are consistent with this relation being driven by (a) increased sadistic pleasure while learning about the suffering and (b) reduced empathic concern associated with increased levels of everyday sadism. Importantly, the positive association of everyday sadism and victim blaming emerged beyond basic personality traits reflected in the HEXACO model (Study 1a) and also

over and above other antisocial traits (Study 1b). Moreover, the relationship appeared across different cultural backgrounds given that it was also demonstrated with samples originating from WEIRD (i.e., Germany, United Kingdom) and non-WEIRD countries (Study 1c). Finally, by including a sample of police officers (Study 1d)—a sample of individuals who are, due to their job, presumably often-times confronted with victim–perpetrator constellations—we also examined the association of everyday sadism and victim blaming in a relevant and ecologically valid context.

### Study 2: Behavioral Correlate of Victim Blaming: Willingness to Engage in Effortful Cognitive Activity as an Indicator of Readiness to Assist a Person in Need

The aim of Study 2 is to assess a meaningful mechanism associated with victim blaming in the context of victim–perpetrator constellations. Given that a substantial body of evidence regarding victim blaming has been investigated in the context of sexual assault (e.g., Best & Demmin, 1982; Bohner et al., 2013; Callan et al., 2007; Deitz et al., 1982, 1984; Milesi et al., 2020; see also Van der Bruggen & Grubb, 2014, for an overview), we also chose this context. Specifically, we tested whether observers' degree of everyday sadism is associated with their willingness to engage in effortful cognitive activity regarding a victim–perpetrator constellation of sexual assault, when being informed that by remembering as much as possible they contribute to preventing that other women may become the victims of such a perpetrator. Here, we predict that individuals high (vs. low) in everyday sadism engage in victim blaming to greater extent—due to reduced empathic concern and increased sadistic pleasure as results from Studies 1a–1d indicate—and consequently also remember less information regarding the victim–perpetrator constellation. As elaborated above, this should be the case because victim blaming represents one core feature of moral disengagement (Bandura et al., 1996), which is negatively associated with supportive and prosocial tendencies (Koehler & Weber, 2018; Schacter et al., 2016; Song & Oh, 2018). Engagement in effortful cognitive activity (recall) under the instruction that remembering more information can help to reduce (future) suffering corresponds to supportive and prosocial tendencies.

### Method

#### Procedure and Participants

As with Studies 1a–1d, we collected this sample online via <https://www.clickworker.com> and obtained complete answers from 314 participants (1.00% of participants failed the attention check item;  $M_{\text{age}} = 36.76$ ,  $SD_{\text{age}} = 12.45$ , 49.7% women). Participants provided online informed consent and received 3.16 € for their participation. For all applied scales and statements, answers were given using a 7-point Likert scale ranging from 1 = *I strongly disagree* to 7 = *I strongly agree*, except for items assessing sadistic pleasure, which applied a 5-point Likert scale ranging from 1 = *not at all* to 5 = *very much*.

After having provided informed consent, participants learned that they were to read about a victimizing event a target person has undergone and that after having read about the event, they would be asked to report on their feelings. Notably, participants were also informed that later on their task was to report on details regarding the

event which is why they should read the complete scenario attentively. After these general instructions, participants indicated their proneness to everyday sadism. Then, the scenario of the target person Sara experiencing an incident of sexual assault was presented. Afterward, sadistic pleasure while reading the scenario was assessed, then victim blaming was measured and finally, empathic concern regarding the target person was assessed. Next, we assessed participants' belief in a just world as well as their epistemic motivation as control variables (i.e., need for cognition [NFC], faith in intuition, need for closure, see details below). Finally, after all these questionnaires had been administered, participants were instructed to imagine they were asked by the police to remember as much as possible from the scenario they read before. They were reminded that remembering as much as possible was helpful to detain the perpetrator, and thus, reduce the likelihood that other women become future victims of the perpetrator. After having completed the recall task (see details below), further control questions were included to assess helping intentions (see OSF, <https://osf.io/9fgv4/>). At the end, participants were thanked, debriefed, and compensated.

### **Everyday Sadism**

As in Studies 1a–1d, we used the CAST (Buckels & Paulhus, 2014) to measure individuals' proneness to everyday sadism ( $M = 2.05$ ,  $SD = 0.95$ ,  $\alpha = .91$ ).

### **Victim Blaming**

In this study, we assessed victim blaming by presenting one of the 10 vignettes we implemented in Studies 1a–1d. Specifically, we chose the vignette describing how a target person called Sara undergoes the victimizing experience of sexual assault. Given that we also aimed at assessing willingness to engage in effortful cognitive activity in the context of victim blaming, we slightly changed the vignette from the previous studies and added detailed information regarding the target person Sara, the perpetrator as well as the location where the assault took place (see OSF, <https://osf.io/9fgv4/>, for the complete scenario). To assess victim blaming, participants indicated, as in Studies 1a–1d, how much they agreed with the following statement: "While reading about what happened to Sara, I thought that what happened to her was partly also caused by how she acted." Since we only presented one vignette (instead of presenting several instances of victimizing events as in Studies 1a–1d), we adapted items from Modesto and Pilati (2017) and also asked participants to indicate how much they agreed with the three following statements: "Sara is responsible for the situation she now finds herself in." "Sara is to blame for the situation she now finds herself in." and "Sara could have prevented the situation she now finds herself in." ( $M = 2.33$ ,  $SD = 1.26$ ,  $\alpha = .88$ ). These items capture perceived controllability, responsibility, and guilt attributed to the target person.

### **Willingness to Engage in Effortful Cognitive Activity**

To assess readiness to engage in effortful cognitive activity, participants were instructed to note down as many details as possible they remembered from the scenario describing the incident of sexual assault. Prior to noting down, participants were instructed that they

should imagine being asked by the police regarding the incident and that by remembering as much as possible they could contribute to reducing possible future suffering of other women. Open answers were coded by one coder (unaware of participants' everyday sadism levels) with regard to whether the information written down was correct in that it had been mentioned in the scenario. Therefore, a coding scheme was developed a priori that determined 50 meaningful pieces of information which could be identified in the scenario. An information was coded as correct if participants either literally recalled it from the text or paraphrased the wording and noted it down. The number of correctly noted information was counted and a sum score was built accordingly ( $M = 16.07$ ,  $SD = 10.31$ ). As with the complete scenario, the coding scheme can also be found at the OSF (<https://osf.io/9fgv4/>).

### **Empathic Concern**

As in Studies 1a–1d, participants indicated their empathic concern regarding the target person Sara using the items adapted from Batson et al. (2007;  $M = 4.89$ ,  $SD = 1.38$ ,  $\alpha = .93$ ).

### **Sadistic Pleasure**

We followed the procedures of Trémolière and Djeriouat (2016) and assessed sadistic pleasure by letting participants indicate how *joyful*, *delighted*, *cheerful*, *enthusiastic*, and *excited* they felt when learning about the victimizing events of the target person Sara. Moreover, we included five items assessing negative feelings such as *outraged*, *down-hearted*, *disgusted*, *sad*, and *loathing*, which were presented together with five filler items taken from the positive and negative affect schedule (Watson et al., 1988;  $M = 1.87$ ,  $SD = 0.47$ ,  $\alpha = .73$ ).

### **Belief in a Just World**

As in Studies 1a–1d, we assessed individuals' belief in a just world by applying the 13-item beliefs in a just-world questionnaire (Dalbert, 1999) to assess personal ( $M = 3.80$ ,  $SD = 1.04$ ,  $\alpha = .93$ ) as well as global belief in a just world ( $M = 2.71$ ,  $SD = 0.97$ ,  $\alpha = .85$ ).

### **Epistemic Motivation**

Serving as control variables, we assessed participants' dispositional NFC reflecting the tendency to engage in and enjoy effortful cognitive activities (Cacioppo & Petty, 1982). Importantly, NFC can provide evidence concerning the validity of our assessment of willingness to engage in effortful activity with the number of information pieces recalled. NFC ("It is enough for me that something gets the job done, I don't care how or why it works." recoded,  $M = 4.95$ ,  $SD = 1.07$ ,  $\alpha = .92$ ) reflects the motivation to engage in effortful cognitive activity and accordingly, a positive correlation of NFC with information pieces recalled would speak to the validity of our operationalization.

Also, *faith in intuition* (Epstein et al., 1996), which corresponds to engagement and confidence in one's intuitive abilities as well as *need for cognitive closure*, reflecting preference to settle for any kind of answer as opposed to further proceed with ambiguity (cf. Webster & Kruglanski, 1994) were assessed. Faith in intuition ("I believe in trusting my hunches."  $M = 4.33$ ,  $SD = 0.92$ ,  $\alpha = .90$ ) was assessed using the German version (Keller et al., 2000) of the rational-experiential inventory by Epstein et al. (1996). Need for

closure was assessed with a German version (cf. Keller, 2005) of the need for closure scale (“I dislike unpredictable situations.”  $M = 4.76$ ,  $SD = 0.71$ ,  $\alpha = .87$ , Webster & Kruglanski, 1994).

## Results

We assumed that individuals’ level of everyday sadism positively predicts their level of victim blaming as increased levels of everyday sadism should be associated with increased sadistic pleasure and decreased empathic concern experienced while learning about the target person’s suffering. Moreover, we predicted that both individuals’ level of everyday sadism and the extent to which they engage in victim blaming are negatively associated with their willingness to engage in effortful cognitive activity. Accordingly, in a first step, we tested whether everyday sadism emerged as significant predictor of (a) victim blaming over and above individuals’ belief in a just world. Next, we tested whether the degree to which individuals engaged in victim blaming predicted (b) effortful cognitive activity over and above their epistemic motivation (i.e., their NFC, faith in intuition, and need for closure).

In line with Study 1, everyday sadism was positively correlated with victim blaming ( $r = .24$ ,  $p < .001$ , please see Table 2, for all zero-order correlations). A multiple linear regression analysis revealed, as depicted in Table 3, that everyday sadism significantly predicted victim blaming over and above individuals’ belief in a just world. Moreover, victim blaming predicted effortful cognitive activity (recall) beyond individuals’ epistemic motivations as well as their just-world beliefs and level of everyday sadism (see Table 3, for details). Notably, NFC also predicted recall, thereby validating our operationalization of effortful cognitive activity. Also, results for victim blaming as criterion do not change when including individuals’ epistemic motivations (besides their just-world beliefs) as predictors into analyses.

Notably, indirect effect analyses also reveal that the association of everyday sadism and victim blaming is again mediated by increased sadistic pleasure and decreased empathic concern associated with increased levels of everyday sadism (see supplemental materials on the OSF; <https://osf.io/9fgv4/>).

## Discussion

In summary, these results provide relevant insights with regard to how individuals’ level of everyday sadism and the associated extent of victim blaming is related to a relevant outcome, namely

individuals’ effortful cognitive activity in the context of a victim–perpetrator constellation. The present findings are in line with our above delineated theorizing. Victim blaming represents one vital feature of moral disengagement (Bandura et al., 1996), which is negatively associated with acting supportively and prosocially (cf. Koehler & Weber, 2018; Schacter et al., 2016; Song & Oh, 2018). Accordingly, the higher individuals’ level of everyday sadism the less relevant information about a victim–perpetrator constellation they remember, mirroring that the inclination to derogate the victim also increases with everyday sadism. In other words, individuals’ level of everyday sadism is negatively associated with their degree of being supportive with regard to reducing (future) suffering of other individuals. Thereby, we identify a relevant indicator of information processing—effortful cognitive activity under the instruction that remembering more information helps reduce (future) suffering—being related to individuals’ proneness to everyday sadism going along with increased victim blaming and derogation.

In the following Study 3, we again investigated the relationship between everyday sadism and effortful cognitive activity in the context of victim–perpetrator constellations. However, we also introduced a potential moderating condition. Namely, we varied whether the recall task is introduced either as memory task requiring good task performance or as a procedure with the goal to reduce potential future suffering.

### Study 3: Task Instruction as Moderating Variable of the Relation of Everyday Sadism and Effortful Cognitive Activity as Indicator of Readiness to Assist a Person in Need

Study 3 has two central goals. One aim was to replicate our findings from Study 2, which indicate that individuals’ level of everyday sadism is negatively associated with their degree of being supportive with regard to reducing (future) suffering of other individuals. Furthermore, Study 3 tested a potential boundary condition of this relation. Specifically, we examined whether altering the task instruction with regard to what good performance in the recall task stands for—in one condition reflecting supportive and prosocial tendencies and in the other reflecting good working memory capacity as an aspect of general intelligence (Conway et al., 2003)—differentially affects individuals’ task performance depending on their level of everyday sadism. Blaming an innocent victim is a central constituent of moral disengagement that sets the stage for refraining from acting

**Table 2**  
*Zero-Order Correlations of the Applied Scales in Study 2 (N = 314)*

Assessed constructs	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
1. Everyday sadism	—									
2. Sadistic pleasure	.39**	—								
3. Empathic concern	-.16**	-.14*	—							
4. Personal belief in a just world	-.02	.03	.09	—						
5. Global belief in a just world	.15**	.20**	.09	.27**	—					
6. Need for cognition	-.21**	-.23*	.09	.13*	-.14*	—				
7. Faith in intuition	-.04	.02	.21**	.07	.22**	-.17**	—			
8. Need for closure	-.13*	-.12*	.16**	-.06	.03	-.07	.11	—		
9. Victim blaming	.23**	.36**	-.28**	.08	.20**	-.15**	.07	.04	—	
10. Willingness to engage in cognitive activity	-.21**	-.29**	-.13*	.02	-.34**	.29**	-.07	.04	-.21**	—

\*  $p < .05$ . \*\*  $p < .01$ .

**Table 3**  
*Results of Multiple Linear Regression Analysis in Study 2 (N = 314)*

Assessed constructs	$\beta$	SE	p	[95% CI]	
				LL	UL
(a) Victim blaming					
Personal belief in a just world	0.04	0.06	.500	-0.073	0.150
Global belief in a just world	0.16	0.06	.005	0.051	0.276
Everyday sadism	0.21	0.06	<.001	0.097	0.314
(b) Willingness to engage in effortful cognitive activity					
Everyday sadism	-0.11	0.06	.061	-0.215	0.005
Personal belief in a just world	0.05	0.06	.339	-0.056	0.163
Global belief in a just world	-0.18	0.06	.002	-0.292	-0.066
Need for cognition	0.22	0.06	<.001	0.111	0.331
Faith in intuition	-0.004	0.06	.949	-0.111	0.104
Need for closure	0.05	0.05	.350	-0.055	0.156
Victim blaming	-0.12	0.06	.030	-0.229	-0.012

*Note.* SE = standard error. LL and UL refer to the lower and upper 95% confidence intervals, respectively. Regression analyses with (a) Victim blaming as criterion and everyday sadism, personal, and global belief in a just world as predictors as well as (b) Willingness to engage in effortful cognitive activity as criterion and everyday sadism, global, and personal belief in a just world, epistemic motivation as well as victim blaming as predictors in Study 2 (N = 314).

prosocial regarding individuals in need (cf. Bandura et al., 1996). Accordingly, applying a task instruction that introduces a context in which moral disengagement is not central allows for testing whether the relation of everyday sadism and task performance via victim blaming can be weakened thereby.

## Method

### *Procedure and Participants*

As with the previous studies, we collected this sample online via <https://www.clickworker.com>. We computed an a priori power analyses using G\*Power to determine the adequate sample size necessary to detect interaction effects larger than a small effect size of  $f^2 > .01$ , with  $\alpha = .05$  and  $\beta = .80$ . Analyses revealed that 787 participants are needed. When excluding all participants who failed the attention check items we obtained complete answers from 776 German participants (4.10% of participants failed the attention check item;  $M_{age} = 33.95$ ,  $SD_{age} = 11.10$ , 56.2% women). Participants provided online informed consent and received 3.16 € for their participation. For all applied scales and statements, answers were given using a 7-point Likert scale ranging from 1 = *I strongly disagree* to 7 = *I strongly agree*, except for the items assessing sadistic pleasure, which applied a 5-point Likert scale ranging from 1 = *not at all* to 5 = *very much*. After having provided informed consent, procedures were exactly as in Study 2 except for how the recall task was introduced (see below for details).

### *Everyday Sadism*

As in the previous studies, we used the CAST (Buckels & Paulhus, 2014) to measure individuals' proneness to everyday sadism ( $M = 2.06$ ,  $SD = 0.93$ ,  $\alpha = .88$ ).

### *Victim Blaming*

We applied the same vignette as in Study 2, depicting a scenario of sexual assault, and used the same four items to measure victim

blaming in this context (cf. Modesto & Pilati, 2017;  $M = 2.45$ ,  $SD = 1.37$ ,  $\alpha = .84$ ).

### *Willingness to Engage in Effortful Cognitive Activity*

Effortful cognitive activity was measured as in Study 2. However, depending on the condition, individuals were either instructed, prior to noting down what they remembered, to remember as much as possible, because thereby they would contribute to reducing possible future suffering of other women (this was the same instruction as in Study 2), or they were instructed to do their best given that the memory task assessed working memory capacity, which reflects one aspect of general intelligence (cf. Conway et al., 2003). Open answers were coded using the same coding scheme and procedure as in Study 2. The number of correctly noted information was counted and a sum score was built accordingly ( $M = 13.33$ ,  $SD = 8.53$ ).

### *Empathic Concern*

As in the previous studies, participants indicated their empathic concern regarding the target person Sara using the items adapted from Batson et al. (2007;  $M = 4.81$ ,  $SD = 1.44$ ,  $\alpha = .90$ ).

### *Sadistic Pleasure*

Sadistic pleasure was measured applying the same procedure and using the same items as in Study 2 ( $M = 1.79$ ,  $SD = 0.50$ ,  $\alpha = .74$ ).

### *Belief in a Just World*

As in the previous studies, we assessed individuals' belief in a just world applying the 13-item beliefs in a just-world questionnaire (Dalbert, 1999) measuring personal ( $M = 3.82$ ,  $SD = 1.05$ ,  $\alpha = .90$ ) as well as global belief in a just world ( $M = 2.62$ ,  $SD = 0.92$ ,  $\alpha = .79$ ).

## Epistemic Motivation

Individuals' epistemic motivation (i.e., NFC, Cacioppo & Petty, 1982;  $M = 4.85$ ,  $SD = 1.08$ ,  $\alpha = .89$ ; *faith in intuition*, Epstein et al. (1996);  $M = 4.56$ ,  $SD = 0.96$ ,  $\alpha = .88$ ; *need for cognitive closure*, Webster & Kruglanski, 1994;  $M = 4.91$ ,  $SD = 0.92$ ,  $\alpha = .85$ ) was measured using the same scales as in Study 2.

## Results

Applying an analysis of variance, we tested whether experimentally altering what good performance in the recall task stands for—either supportive behavior or good working memory capacity—affects the number of information pieces mentioned in the recall task. Here, results indicate that individuals remember more information when the task is introduced as assessing working memory capacity as an aspect of general intelligence ( $M = 15.19$ ,  $SD = 8.62$ ) compared to when the task is introduced as assessing supportive behavior ( $M = 11.43$ ,  $SD = 8.01$ ),  $F(1, 775) = 39.54$ ,  $p < .001$ ,  $\eta_p^2 = .05$ .

In order to test whether altering the task instruction differentially affects the relation of everyday sadism, victim blaming, and the willingness to engage in cognitive activity, we computed two moderation analyses, including the experimental condition, everyday sadism, their interaction as well as individuals' belief in a just world as predictors and (a) victim blaming as dependent variable using Process Macro Model 1 (Hayes, 2017). In another moderation analyses, we included the experimental condition, everyday sadism, their interaction as well as individuals' belief in a just world, their epistemic motivation and victim blaming as predictors, and (b) the number of information pieces mentioned in the recall task as criterion.

First of all, and in line with Studies 1 and 2, everyday sadism was positively correlated with victim blaming ( $r = .24$ ,  $p < .001$ , see Table 4 for all zero-order correlations). Moreover, results of the moderation analyses revealed that everyday sadism significantly predicted victim blaming over and above individuals' belief in a just world and that the experimental condition did not alter this association, given that the interaction did not reach statistical significance (see Table 5, for detail). Also, victim blaming predicted the number of information pieces recalled over and above individuals' epistemic motivation and their just-world beliefs and level of everyday sadism (see Table 5, for detail). The experimental condition also did not alter this association, given that the interaction did not reach statistical significance. Moreover, NFC (and need for closure)

also predicted recall of information, thereby validating our operationalization of effortful cognitive activity. Also, results for victim blaming as criterion do not change when including individuals' epistemic motivation (besides their just-world beliefs) as predictors into analyses.

Additionally, we also computed moderated mediation analyses using Process Macro Model 7 (Hayes, 2017). Applying this model allows testing whether an indirect effect for everyday sadism on number of information pieces recalled via victim blaming is moderated by the experimental condition reflecting the two different task instructions. Results revealed that the indirect effect for everyday sadism on number of information pieces recalled via victim blaming is not significantly moderated by the experimental condition given that the 95% bootstrapped CI of the index of moderated mediation included zero  $[-.2053, .2936]$ . Results indicate a significant negative indirect effect for everyday sadism on the number of information pieces recalled via victim blaming in both experimental conditions, given that the 95% bootstrapped CI of the indirect effect excluded zero in the condition in which good performance in the recall task was introduced as reflecting supportive behavior  $[-0.66, -0.17]$  as well as in the condition in which good performance was introduced as standing for good working memory capacity  $[-0.58, -0.15]$ . These findings suggest that introducing an experimental variation with regard to what good performance in the recall task stands for does not significantly change the relation of everyday sadism and memory performance via victim blaming.

Comparably, analyses also reveal that the indirect effect for everyday sadism on victim blaming via (increased) sadistic pleasure and (decreased) empathic concern is not significantly moderated by the experimental condition (see supplemental materials on the OSF; <https://osf.io/9fgv4/>).

## Discussion

Taken together, results of Study 3 provide further insights regarding how individuals' level of everyday sadism and the associated extent of victim blaming relates to memory performance in the context of victim-perpetrator constellations. Specifically, results of Study 3 indicate that individuals are generally more willing to recall information when the task is being introduced as measuring working memory capacity as an aspect of general intelligence compared to when the task is introduced as assessing supportive and prosocial behavior. However, this effect does not

**Table 4**  
*Zero-Order Correlations of the Applied Scales in Study 3 (N = 776)*

Assessed constructs	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
1. Everyday sadism	—									
2. Sadistic pleasure	.28**	—								
3. Empathic concern	-.26**	.13**	—							
4. Personal belief in a just world	-.04	.01	.11**	—						
5. Global belief in a just world	.07	.16**	.07*	.31**	—					
6. Need for cognition	-.12**	-.11**	.004	.06	-.21**	—				
7. Faith in intuition	-.04	.12**	.21**	.10**	.18**	-.18**	—			
8. Need for closure	-.12**	-.05	.20**	.06	.06	-.11**	.07	—		
9. Victim blaming	.26**	.21**	-.31**	-.03	.22**	-.19**	.05	.10	—	
10. Willingness to engage in cognitive activity	-.15**	-.07	.08*	.07	-.14**	.19**	-.02	.07	-.19**	—

\*  $p < .05$ . \*\*  $p < .01$ .

**Table 5**  
Results of Multiple Linear Regression Analysis in Study 2 ( $N = 776$ )

Assessed constructs	$\beta$	<i>SE</i>	<i>p</i>	[95% CI]	
				<i>LL</i>	<i>UL</i>
(a) Victim blaming					
Everyday sadism	0.37	0.14	.012	0.086	0.654
Experimental condition	-0.01	0.09	.911	-0.186	0.166
Interaction (Everyday Sadism $\times$ Experimental Condition)	-0.03	0.09	.717	-0.215	0.148
Global belief in a just world	0.31	0.05	<.001	0.212	0.400
Personal belief in a just world	-0.12	0.04	.008	-0.217	-0.032
(b) Willingness to engage in effortful cognitive activity					
Everyday sadism	-0.45	0.93	.629	-2.282	1.380
Experimental condition	3.78	0.57	<.001	2.658	4.911
Interaction (Everyday Sadism $\times$ Experimental Condition)	-0.12	0.59	.834	-1.289	1.040
Personal belief in a just world	0.78	0.31	.011	0.181	1.381
Global belief in a just world	-1.12	0.32	.001	-1.761	-0.488
Need for cognition	1.16	0.31	<.001	0.559	1.771
Faith in intuition	0.09	0.30	.756	-0.498	0.685
Need for closure	0.67	0.30	.023	0.091	1.255
Victim blaming	-1.00	0.31	.001	-1.604	-0.388

*Note.* *SE* = standard error. *LL* and *UL* refer to the lower and upper 95% confidence intervals, respectively. Experimental condition (0 = framing as supportive task and 1 = framing as memory task). Regression analyses with (a) victim blaming, as criterion and everyday sadism, the experimental condition and the interaction, as well individuals' belief in a just world as predictors as well as (b) willingness to engage in effortful cognitive activity as criterion and everyday sadism, experimental condition and the interaction global and personal belief in a just world, epistemic motivation as well as victim blaming as predictors in Study 3 ( $N = 776$ ).

interact with individuals' level of everyday sadism and the relation to victim blaming and effortful cognitive activity given that we did not find the experimental condition moderating the main effect. In line with this result, the negative indirect effect of everyday sadism on effortful cognitive activity via victim blaming was evidenced in both experimental conditions. In other words, regardless of how the recall task was introduced, the association of everyday sadism, victim blaming and effortful cognitive activity remained stable, suggesting that individuals' level of everyday sadism is negatively associated with effortful cognitive activity concerning a victim-perpetrator constellation going along with an increased inclination to blame innocent victims.

Considering that all previous studies examined the relation of everyday sadism, sadistic pleasure, and victim blaming in online studies representing a short-term correlational approach, in the next study, we aimed at investigating the robustness of the observed relations in everyday life. Hence, we conducted an AA study based on an online ESM in order to assess the prevalence and meaningfulness of the association in everyday life. Moreover, we assessed the source where individuals learned about others' suffering (online/offline) as well as their relation to the target person in order to examine two potentially relevant boundary conditions in the association of everyday sadism, sadistic pleasure, and victim blaming in everyday life: interpersonal closeness to the target person as well as impactfulness of the incident (Dawtry et al., 2020).

#### Study 4: The Role of Everyday Sadism, Sadistic Pleasure, and Victim Blaming in Everyday Life

The central goal of Study 4 was to investigate the relation of everyday sadism, sadistic pleasure, empathic concern, and victim blaming in everyday life, thus examining prevalence, generalizability, and societal relevance of this association. To this end, we conducted

an AA study based on online ESM. We exploratorily investigated whether the relation between everyday sadism, sadistic pleasure, and victim blaming is affected by the source (online vs. offline) where participants learned about another person's misfortunes, the impactfulness of the incident (cf. Dawtry et al., 2020), as well as the personal relation to the misfortunate person. Thereby, we aim to address the call for increased ecological validity when studying specific psychological phenomena (e.g., Schreiter et al., 2013) and apply a mixed-method approach by combining established measures of antisocial personality traits (including everyday sadism; Blötner et al., 2022; Paulhus et al., 2021) and just-world beliefs (Dalbert, 1999) with experience sampling. This approach enables us to consider within-person differences as well as causal heterogeneity which represents a so far overlooked challenge when studying psychological phenomena more generally (Bolger et al., 2019; Depow et al., 2021).

## Method

### Procedure and Participants

Based on previous ESM research on phenomena of social interaction in everyday life (e.g., Depow et al., 2021), we aimed at sampling approximately 300 participants answering at least 80% of the three daily surveys during the study period of 10 consecutive days. This compliance rate was chosen based on previous studies recommending compliance rates of at least 80% in ESM studies (e.g., Jones et al., 2019; Stone & Shiffman, 2002; Turner et al., 2017; Wray et al., 2019), even though there is no clear "gold standard" of compliance in the literature on ESM studies. Participants were recruited via the German research survey company ResponDi (<https://www.respondi.com>), from which they received internal credit points by the survey company for their participation in the study. Data were obtained from 850 individuals, who completed a total of 12,718 daily surveys. In order to receive meaningful indicators for every participant and to

comply with the minimum completion of 80%, 577 participants were excluded from further analyses given that they completed less than 24 of the 30 daily surveys (representing a completion rate below 80%). Accordingly, the final sample comprised 273 German-speaking participants ( $M_{\text{age}} = 46.80$ ;  $SD_{\text{age}} = 14.40$ ; 53.5% women) providing 7,460 daily (ESM) measurements. 58.2% of the participants reported to be currently employed.

The study's procedure was divided into two parts (see Figure 2, for detail): a baseline questionnaire was followed by three daily measurements using an experience sampling approach. At the beginning of the baseline questionnaire, which took about 10 min to complete, participants were informed about the aim of the study and received information about the procedure and participation requirements. Afterward, they filled out measures assessing individuals' proneness to the dark tetrad personality traits (i.e., everyday sadism, psychopathy, narcissism, Machiavellianism), and their belief in a just world. The assessment of demographic information including gender, age, native language, and current occupation completed the baseline questionnaire.

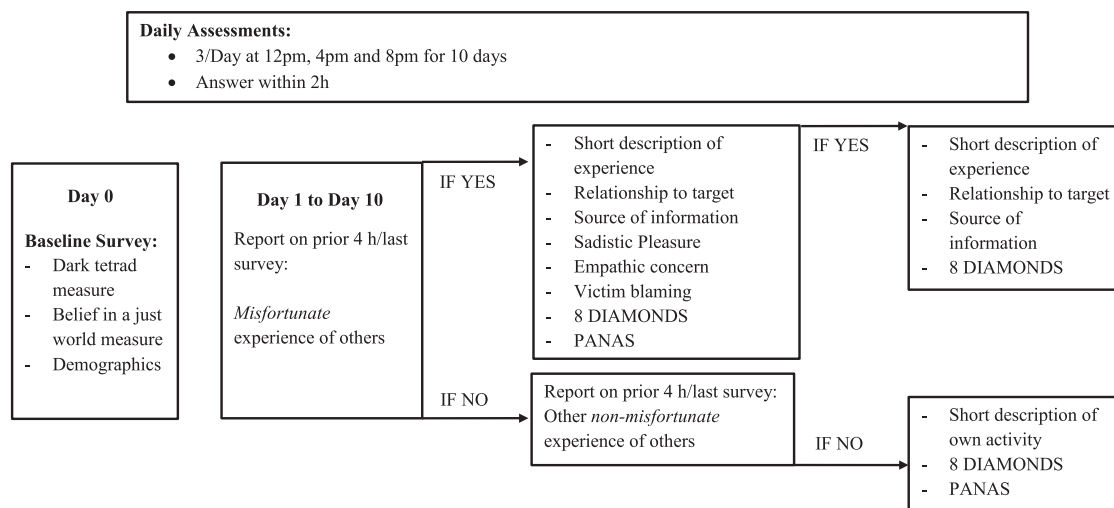
Following the day after baseline measurement was completed, daily ESM assessments were collected during the study period of 10 consecutive days. Based on interval-contingent sampling (Wheeler & Reis, 1991), participants were requested to complete short questionnaires three times per day (12 p.m., 4 p.m., and 8 p.m.). After receiving the link via email notification, participants were able to fill out the ESM assessments within a 2-hr timeframe in order to receive valid entries about recent experiences.

Each measurement point started with the question whether participants had noticed since the last survey (or within the last 4 hr, respectively) that something had happened to another person, which made that other particular person feel bad and negative or not. Here, participants were explicitly instructed to note down anything they noticed in this regard. If participants answered with "yes," they were then asked to indicate the relationship to the target person, namely

whether it was (a) their romantic partner, (b) a good friend, (c) a family member, (d) a loose acquaintance, or (e) someone else. Next, they indicated the source where they learned about the target person's situation, namely whether they learned about it (a) in real life (via direct communication), (b) on television, (c) online (e.g., via an internet platform), (d) via social media (e.g., Twitter, Instagram, Facebook), or (e) in another context, which they could further specify. Afterward, they were asked to describe the situation in more detail, depicting in 4–5 sentences what exactly happened to the target person. This was followed by the assessment of sadistic pleasure, victim blaming, and empathic concern for the victim, each referring to the situation described before. For exploratory reasons and to keep comparability between the different versions of the ESM assessment constant (see below for detail), participants also characterized the situation described above according to the situational eight Duty, Intellect, Adversity, Mating, Positivity, Negativity, Deception, and Sociality (DIAMONDS; Rauthmann et al., 2014) and reported their current affective state (Figure 2).

In case participants did not learn about a situation causing another person to feel bad (i.e., they answered with "no" to the first question of the daily ESM assessment), they were subsequently asked a different set of questions. This was done in order not to incentivize participants indicating "no" (e.g., out of laziness) to our central question of whether they had noticed that something negative had happened to another person. Thereby we aimed to keep questionnaire conditions constant (see Figure 2 for details). Here, we asked participants whether they had learned anything else about the particular situation of another individual since responding to the last survey (or within the last 4 hr, respectively). If participants answered with "yes" to this question, they indicated in a next step—exactly as above—how their relationship to the target person is and through which source they learned about what had happened to the other person, followed by a short-written description about what exactly had happened. Here, participants were also required to

**Figure 2**  
Flowchart of Procedure in Study 4



*Note.* Out of 7,460 episodic responses, in 1,364 episodes (18.3%) participants reported about others' misfortunes, in 806 episodes (10.8%) about others' nonmisfortunate experiences, and 5,290 (70.9%) episodes described their own activities. PANAS = Positive and Negative Affect Scale; DIAMONDS = Duty, Intellect, Adversity, Mating, Positivity, Negativity, Deception, and Sociality.

characterize the situation based on the situational eight DIAMONDS and to indicate their current affective state. If participants indicated that they had not at all learned anything about the situation of another person, they were asked to describe the activity they had carried out in the last hour before responding to the ESM assessment. Again, after having given a short-written description of their activity, participants characterized the situation in which the activity had taken place based on the situational eight DIAMONDS and they also indicated their current affective state (Figure 2).

Notably, with respect to the central goal of this study, only the answers given after participants indicated that they had learned about the misfortunes of another person were of focal interest and were used for further analyses.

### Dark Tetrad

In our baseline questionnaire, we assessed individuals' proneness to the antisocial personality traits using the German version (Blötner et al., 2022) of the Short Dark Tetrad questionnaire (Paulhus et al., 2021), which measures with seven items each individual's level of everyday sadism ( $M = 1.89$ ,  $SD = 0.66$ ,  $\alpha = .75$ ), psychopathy ( $M = 1.85$ ,  $SD = 0.73$ ,  $\alpha = .82$ ), narcissism ( $M = 2.30$ ,  $SD = 0.68$ ,  $\alpha = .80$ ), and Machiavellianism ( $M = 3.20$ ,  $SD = 0.60$ ,  $\alpha = .67$ ).

### Belief in a Just World

In the baseline questionnaire, we applied, as in Studies 1–3, the 13-item beliefs in a just-world questionnaire (Dalbert, 1999) capturing personal ( $M = 3.27$ ,  $SD = 0.84$ ,  $\alpha = .93$ ) as well as global belief in a just world ( $M = 2.55$ ,  $SD = .79$ ,  $\alpha = .83$ ).

### Sadistic Pleasure

At each measurement point, participants' sadistic pleasure while learning about the misfortunate events of the target person was assessed as in Studies 1a–1d using the following three items (applying a 7-point Likert scale ranging from 1 = *I strongly disagree* to 7 = *I strongly agree*): “I couldn't resist a little smile.”; “I found some of his misfortune a bit amusing.”; and “It was entertaining to experience what happened to the other person.” Means and standard errors of sadistic pleasure (and of victim blaming and empathic concern) over all participants across all daily assessment are presented below when reporting descriptive results from the multilevel analyses.

### Victim Blaming

At each measurement point, victim blaming was measured as in the previous studies using the following three items:

When I learned about what happened to the other person, I thought that they (1) are guilty of the situation in which they are; (2) are responsible for the situation in which they are; (3) could have avoided the situation they are in. (Modesto & Pilati, 2017; van den Bos & Maas, 2009)

### Empathic Concern

At each measurement point, participants indicated their empathic concern regarding the target person as in Studies 1–3 using items adapted from Batson and colleagues (cf. Batson et al., 2007).

### Eight DIAMONDS

At each measurement point, individuals' perceptions of the psychological characteristics of the described situations based on eight separate dimensions (duty, intellect, adversity, mating, positivity, negativity, deception, and sociality) were assessed using the S-8-II (Rauthmann & Sherman, 2016), an ultrashort version of the situational eight diamond questionnaire (Rauthmann et al., 2014).

### Current Affect

At each measurement point, we assessed participants' current affective state using the short form of the positive and negative affect schedule (Watson et al., 1988).

### Analysis Plan

With regard to the central goal of this study, namely assessing the relation of everyday sadism, sadistic pleasure, empathic concern, and victim blaming in everyday life, we only analyzed the answers in response to when participants had indicated that they learned about another person's misfortunes since the last measurement point. Acknowledging the multilevel data structure implicated by the study design (cf. Nezlek & Mroziński, 2020), multilevel regression analyses were conducted in R (Version 4.2.0; R Development Core Team, 2021), using the package *lmerTest* (Version 3.1-3; Kuznetsova et al., 2017). Participants' proneness to everyday sadism as well as their belief in a just world represent the relevant Level-2 variables (measured once for each participant at the baseline survey) serving as focal predictors, whereas sadistic pleasure, empathic concern, and victim blaming represent the relevant Level-1 variables (reflected in measurement occasions nested within participants that is measured at each measurement point) and serve as focal criteria. Following the recommendations of Enders and Tofghi (2007), all Level-2 predictors were grand-mean centered prior to the analyses.

Initially, we ran baseline models without any predictors in order to calculate intraclass correlations for every criterion. Next, to test whether individuals high in everyday sadism are particularly likely to experience sadistic pleasure and engage in victim blaming in the face of another person's suffering, multilevel regression models were set up accordingly. First, models with sadistic pleasure and victim blaming each being predicted by everyday sadism were calculated. In a second step, personal and global belief in a just world were added to examine whether everyday sadism remains a significant predictor of sadistic pleasure and victim blaming above and beyond individuals' just-world beliefs.

To examine in an exploratory fashion whether the relation of everyday sadism and victim blaming is affected by interpersonal closeness of observers to the misfortunate target person, a dummy-coded dichotomous indicator was calculated which summarized subjects' relationship to the affected person as follows: The variable indicating “relationship” was assigned the value “1 = interpersonally close” if participants indicated that the target person was either their romantic partner, a family member, or a good friend. It was assigned the value “0 = not interpersonally close” if participants indicated the target person was either a loose acquaintance or someone they did not know personally at all. Similarly, we also examined whether the source (online or offline) where participants learned about the misfortunate target person affected the association

of everyday sadism, sadistic pleasure, and victim blaming. To this end, the source was binarily coded as “1 = offline” if participants indicated they had learned about the misfortunes of the target person in real life, and “0 = online” if they indicate they had learned about it via internet platforms, social media, or via television. To test whether the association of everyday sadism and victim blaming was moderated by either of these boundary conditions, respective interaction terms were added.

For the purpose of testing the potential mediating role of sadistic pleasure and empathic concern in the association of individuals’ proneness to everyday sadism and victim blaming, a method for running multilevel mediation models within R was applied. This approach was originally proposed by Tingley et al. (2014) and is based on the R packages *lme4* (Version 1.1-29; Bates et al., 2015) and *mediation* (Version 4.5.0; Tingley et al., 2014).

## Results

### Descriptives

We first analyzed frequencies of the misfortunate episodes reported during the 10-day experience sampling study. Out of the 7,460 episodic responses gathered in total during the study period, 1,364 (18.3%) comprised the first scenario in which participants had learned about the misfortunes of another person prior to responding to the ESM assessment (or within the last 4 hr, respectively). In 806 cases (10.8%), subjects reported they had learned something else about the particular situation of another individual. The rest of the gathered responses (5,290; 70.9%) involved the description of participants’ own activities. Table 6 displays frequencies of those episodes in which participants reported that they had either learned about others’ misfortunes (misfortunate experiences) or about any other situation of another person (nonmisfortunate experiences) differentiated according to relationship to the target person and source where they learned about the target’s situation.

Notably, taking a closer look at the reported content regarding the misfortunate experiences that participants learned about reveals that the reported misfortunate experiences capture a wide range of suffering-causing events, ranging from rather mild (e.g., friend lost his credit card; wife caught a cold; and son had problems after the first vaccination against COVID-19) to severe hardship (e.g., good friend suffered from an early miscarriage; mother-in-law suffers from depression and does not feel well-cared in psychogeriatric hospital; and sister broke her leg).

Analyses of the intraclass correlations of the dependent variables indicate that for differences in sadistic pleasure, victim blaming, and empathic concern, substantial proportions of variance (32%, 19%, and 28%, respectively) were attributable to Level 2 (participant) variations, thus demonstrating the appropriateness of multilevel regression analyses. Furthermore, the results show that mean sadistic pleasure across all participants and daily assessments yields 1.44 ( $SD = 0.56$ ), victim blaming yields 1.95 ( $SD = 0.54$ ), and empathic concern yields 3.37 ( $SD = 0.60$ ; see OSF, <https://osf.io/9fgv4/>, for more details).

### Multilevel Regression Analyses

To test whether everyday sadism and belief in a just world predicted sadistic pleasure, empathic concern, and victim blaming

**Table 6**  
*Absolute Number of Recalled Episodes*

Relationship to target person	Misfortunate experiences		Nonmisfortunate experiences	
	Offline	Online	Offline	Online
Close target	427	64	401	41
Distant target	340	441	202	140

*Note.* Absolute number of recalled episodes describing misfortunate experiences or nonmisfortunate experiences of another person, as a function of the relationship to the target person and the type of source in Study 4 ( $N = 273$ ).

when having learned about the misfortunate experience of another person, we conducted multilevel regression analyses. Results revealed everyday sadism as a significant predictor of sadistic pleasure ( $B = .39$ ,  $SE = 0.07$ ,  $p < .001$ , 95% CI [0.26, 0.52]) and victim blaming ( $B = .28$ ,  $SE = 0.08$ ,  $p < .001$ , 95% CI [0.13, 0.43], see Table 7 for details), but not of empathic concern ( $B = -.11$ ,  $SE = 0.10$ ,  $p = .297$ , 95% CI [-0.32, 0.10]). When including individuals’ belief in a just world as additional predictor, analyses indicated that global belief in a just world was positively associated with sadistic pleasure and victim blaming, whereas individuals’ personal just-world beliefs did not emerge as significant predictor. Importantly, everyday sadism remained a significant predictor of both sadistic pleasure and victim blaming (see Table 7 for details).

Further exploratory analyses revealed that participants’ relationship to the person suffering as well as the source where participants learned about the suffering person’s situation were associated with the extent of sadistic pleasure participants experienced. However, neither of these variables moderated the association of everyday sadism and sadistic pleasure ( $ps > .25$ ). Consequently, both multilevel regression models were reestimated without the interaction terms.

According to the results of the first model, sadistic pleasure was significantly predicted by everyday sadism ( $B = 0.48$ ,  $SE = 0.07$ ,  $p < .001$ , 95% CI [0.35, 0.62]) and whether or not the relationship was close ( $B = -0.12$ ,  $SE = 0.05$ ,  $p < .023$ , 95% CI [-0.22, -0.02]). This indicates that when everyday sadism was held constant, participants experienced *less* sadistic pleasure when the suffering person was *interpersonally close* to them (i.e., either the romantic partner, a good friend, or a family member) than when they were not close to them (i.e., a loose acquaintance or personally unknown person).

According to the second model, sadistic pleasure was significantly predicted by everyday sadism ( $B = 0.43$ ,  $SE = 0.07$ ,  $p < .001$ , 95% CI [0.30, 0.56]) and whether the event was offline versus online ( $B = -0.19$ ,  $SE = 0.05$ ,  $p < .001$ , 95% CI [-0.30, -0.09]), implying that participants experienced *less* sadistic pleasure when they learned about the suffering person *offline* compared to *online*. Notably, when both variables (relationship and source) were added simultaneously into the model, only source ( $B = -0.19$ ,  $SE = 0.05$ ,  $p = .002$ , 95% CI [-0.30, -0.07]), but not relationship ( $B = -0.05$ ,  $SE = 0.06$ ,  $p = 0.416$ , 95% CI [-0.16, 0.07]) remained as significant predictor of sadistic pleasure together with everyday sadism ( $B = 0.47$ ,  $SE = 0.07$ ,  $p < .001$ , 95% CI [0.34, 0.60]). More importantly, neither their relationship to the suffering person nor the source where participants learned about the misfortunate experiences of the target person significantly affected victim blaming nor did these

**Table 7**  
Results of Multilevel Regression Analyses

Assessed constructs	<i>B</i>	<i>SE</i>	<i>t</i>	<i>p</i>	[95% CI]	
					<i>LL</i>	<i>UL</i>
(a) Sadistic pleasure						
Intercept	1.50	0.13	35.93	<.001	1.42	1.58
Personal belief in a just world	−0.06	0.05	−1.19	.237	−0.17	0.04
Global belief in a just world	0.21	0.06	3.70	<.001	0.10	0.33
Everyday sadism	0.39	0.07	5.97	<.001	0.26	0.52
(b) Victim blaming						
Intercept	1.99	0.05	40.49	<.001	1.89	2.09
Personal belief in a just world	−0.04	0.06	−0.63	.530	−0.17	0.09
Global belief in a just world	0.21	0.07	3.05	.003	0.07	0.34
Everyday sadism	0.28	0.08	3.61	<.001	0.13	0.43

*Note.* *SE* = standard error. *LL* and *UL* refer to the lower and upper 95% confidence intervals, respectively. *N* = 221 reported at least one episode involving misfortunate experiences of another person resulting in  $n_{\text{observations}} = 1,364$ . Multilevel regression analyses with (a) sadistic pleasure as criterion and everyday sadism, personal, and global belief in a just world as predictors as well as (b) victim blaming as criterion and everyday sadism, personal, and global belief in a just world as predictors in Study 4 (overall *N* = 273).

variables significantly interact with everyday sadism in their association with victim blaming (all *ps* > .208).

### Multilevel Mediation Analyses

To test whether the association of everyday sadism and victim blaming is driven by increased sadistic pleasure, we followed procedures recommended by Tingley et al. (2014) and conducted multilevel mediation analyses for the *N* = 1,364 episodes in which participants reported they had learned about the misfortunate experiences of another person. Unlike in the previous three studies, we only included sadistic pleasure and not empathic concern in the mediation analysis because everyday sadism did not significantly predict empathic concern (please see the Discussion section, for an elaboration of possible mechanisms).

When applying these procedures, indirect effect models (including the average direct effect [ADE] and the total effect and the average causal mediational effect [ACME]) are estimated by simulations using the quasi-Bayesian Monte Carlo method based on normal approximation with *N* = 10,000 simulations (cf. Tingley et al., 2014). Results revealed that the estimated average indirect effect (ACME) is statistically significantly different from zero (*B* = 0.28, *p* < .001, 95% CI [0.19, 0.39]), but the estimated ADE is not (*B* = 0.03, *p* = .68, 95% CI [−0.11, 0.16]). This finding indicates that the stronger participants' inclination for everyday sadism, the more they are likely to blame the victim of a misfortunate experience from which they learn in everyday life due to increased sadistic pleasure they experience.

### Discussion

First of all, results of Study 4 document that the association of everyday sadism and victim blaming evidenced in the correlational and cross-sectional Studies 1–3 can also be found when applying AA based on online ESM, thus pointing to the generalizability and relevance of this association. Specifically, results of multilevel mediation analyses indicate that individuals' propensity for everyday sadism, independent of their belief in a just world, predicts the

derogation of innocent victims who face suffering in everyday life due to increased sadistic pleasure. In contrast to Studies 1a–1d, results of Study 4 did not reveal that reduced empathic concern also plays a role in the association of everyday sadism and victim blaming. We can only speculate on the reasons for this unexpected finding. Possibly, the misfortunate experiences reported by target persons in the daily assessments cover such a wide range of varying incidents (e.g., good friend lost his credit card; or, good friend suffering from an early miscarriage) that participants in Study 4 resonated less empathically compared to participants in Studies 1a–1d who had been confronted exclusively with clearly delineated victimizing events (e.g., sexual assault, discrimination, or online mobbing).

When taking a closer look at the descriptive results of this study, it is noteworthy that individuals report in about 18% of the measurement points across the 10 days of the overall study period that they learned about others' misfortunate experiences, and that in about 11% of the measurement points that they learned about nonmisfortunate experiences of others. Correspondingly, results from descriptive analyses of everyday sadism, sadistic pleasure, and victim blaming indicate that although everyday sadism, sadistic pleasure, and victim blaming are not phenomena that apply to everybody since the overall means are rather low, they do occur in everyday life and bear variance. As described above, mean sadistic pleasure yields 1.44 (*SD* = 0.56) and victim blaming yields 1.95 (*SD* = 0.54) across all participants, thus, implying that 70% of mean sadistic pleasure ranges between 0.89 and 2.00 on a 5-point Likert scale and 70% of mean victim blaming in the daily assessment ranges between 1.40 and 2.90 on a 5-point Likert scale (*MW* ± 1*SD*).

Accordingly, these numbers suggest that learning about others' suffering is not a completely uncommon, seldom, phenomenon in everyday life. This justifies the investigation of how individuals react to this suffering, particularly if it concerns a counter-normative reaction such as blaming the victim. Given that we are interested in affective responses to other individuals' suffering, one could argue that an event-based study scheme would have been better suited than the interval-based scheme that we applied in this online ESM study. Interval-based notifications imply the possibility of being distant in time with regard to the event of interest being reported. However,

given that we did not know before how often participants would learn about other individuals' negative events in everyday life, we were concerned that event-contingent assessments would result in too few assessments. Moreover, event-contingent assessments can also be prone to design bias as the result of contextual dissonance, meaning that the choice of event triggering the notification directly influences the number of notifications. Additionally, the ability to anticipate incoming alerts may also result in behavioral reactivity (cf. van Berkel et al., 2019).

Finally, by conducting an AA study based on online ESM, we were also able to exploratorily examine potential boundary conditions of the association of everyday sadism, sadistic pleasure, and victim blaming. Specifically, results of Study 4 indicate that the source where individuals learned about others suffering (i.e., online via social media or offline via direct communication) and the relationship to the suffering target person affected the extent to which sadistic pleasure was experienced when learning about the misfortunate events. When participants learned about the misfortunate experiences of a close other, they experienced less sadistic pleasure. This finding is in line with literature suggesting that less pleasure at another's misfortune is experienced the more the other person is liked (Hareli & Weiner, 2002). Moreover, our results suggest that participants also experienced less sadistic pleasure if they learned about the misfortunate events via an offline (vs. online) source. This finding is plausible given that in online source mechanisms favoring interpersonal distance are more likely to play a role, thus, making sadistic pleasure in the face of another's misfortune more likely (cf. Wei & Liu, 2020). However, these factors (i.e., source; relationship to target person) did not moderate the relation of everyday sadism, sadistic pleasure, and victim blaming significantly, thus implying a certain robustness of this association.

A couple limitations regarding this study should be acknowledged. First, we were not able to establish whether there are meaningful intraindividual patterns of victim blaming, such as whether individuals high in everyday sadism tend to vary more or less in their tendency to victim blame (cf. the Location-Scale model; Hedeker et al., 2008). In fact, we attempted to fit such a mixed-effects location scale model, but it did not converge. This most likely implies that, with our study design and the included participants, we have estimation difficulties due to a too small sample size for this sort of analysis (cf. Hedeker et al., 2008). Moreover, we did not investigate the longitudinal relationships between our focal constructs, that is, whether the effect of sadistic pleasure experienced at one episode extends to a later episode or if the effect decays, also because there are too few consecutive measurement points of sadistic pleasure and victim blaming in order to meaningfully conduct cross-lagged panel analysis. Future research may fill these gaps in the present work.

Nevertheless, following the recent call for more ecologically valid psychological research, which should consider that contexts examined in the lab may or may not match the contexts in which a certain psychological phenomenon occurs in daily life (cf. Bolger et al., 2019; Depow et al., 2021; Diener et al., 2022), this study provides highly valuable insights regarding generalizability and social relevance of victim blaming in everyday life.

## General Discussion

The present contribution shows that affective reactions experienced when being confronted with another person's misfortunate

experiences determine victim blaming—a harsh yet widespread reaction when confronted with suffering (cf. Dawtry et al., 2020; Hafer, 2000). Specifically, across three cross-sectional studies, including the first correlational study, which involved seven different samples, and an AA study based on online ESM (total  $N = 2,653$ ), we were able to demonstrate that individuals prone to experience sadistic pleasure and little empathic concern in the face of others' suffering, namely individuals high in everyday sadism, are particularly likely to engage in victim blaming. Importantly, this association remains robust even when controlling for an established personality model (the HEXACO) as well as for the other "dark traits" (cf. Paulhus, 2014). Thereby, we provide novel insights regarding the determinants of victim blaming that so far go beyond the mainly considered motivational (need for controllability instantiated in the belief in a just world; Hafer, 2000) and moral-cognitive (e.g., Graham et al., 2013; Milesi et al., 2020; Niemi & Young, 2016) explanations for victim blaming. Moreover, by showing that victim blaming by individuals high in everyday sadism relates to little effortful cognitive activity in a victim-perpetrator constellation, we illustrate how this association connects with relevant outcomes of information processing, thus demonstrating its impact over mere person perception and moral judgment. Results from Study 4 clearly indicate that the association of everyday sadism, affective experiences, and victim blaming also holds in everyday life in that individuals high (vs. low) in everyday sadism report higher levels of sadistic pleasure and more victim blaming when learning about the misfortunate experiences of another person in their surroundings. Notably, these findings are neither significantly moderated by individuals' closeness to the target person nor by the source from which individuals learn about the misfortunate experiences.

Our findings indicate that individuals high (vs. low) in everyday sadism engage to a greater extent in victim blaming because they experience sadistic pleasure and little empathic concern when facing others' suffering. This observed association is in line with recent findings indicating that everyday sadism is associated with blunted displeasure as a form of rationalization process when witnessing others' suffering (Hart et al., 2022). Given that personal distress (i.e., negative affect) and empathic concern often arise concurrently when being confronted with other's suffering (cf. Batson et al., 1997; Eisenberg, 2002), both affective reactions should likewise be diminished in individuals high (vs. low) in everyday sadism. Notably, our findings on the role of sadistic pleasure in the association of everyday sadism and victim blaming remain significant when controlling for negative affect (see supplemental materials, for detail).

Beyond providing novel insights regarding the affective processes influencing victim blaming, the present research also documents societal significance of the association of everyday sadism and victim blaming. Specifically, we document that everyday sadism is associated with victim blaming due to sadistic pleasure and little empathic concern not only across different forms of victimizing experiences (e.g., mobbing, sexual assault, or discrimination described in the vignettes used in Studies 1–3) that cover a wide range of misfortunate experiences in everyday life (Study 4), but also across different cultural backgrounds as well as within a sample of individuals who are oftentimes confronted with victim-perpetrator constellations—police officers. Hence, our research illustrates several important contexts in which everyday sadism and victim blaming are associated due to the affective experience

felt, while learning about the victimizing experiences of another person. This highlights the generalizability of the relationship across many situations.

In a similar vein, results of the AA study based on online ESM reveal that learning about others' misfortunes in everyday life is not an uncommon experience. Also, everyday sadism, sadistic pleasure, and victim blaming may not be dispositional reactions by the majority of individuals, but they do occur and given the negative consequences of victim blaming, a better understanding of individual characteristics and underlying processes contributing to it is important.

### Theoretical and Applied Implications

The present research has theoretical implications for our understanding of victim blaming as counternormative reaction in the face of suffering and as blame judgment pertaining to moral judgments that integrate numerous pieces of information (e.g., regarding intentionality, justification, preventability; cf. Malle, 2021). As with other phenomena of information processing, our results indicate that victim blaming is influenced by the currently experienced affect (cf. Clore et al., 2001). This is important, because it opens up new lines of research addressing how victim blaming could be reduced. As mentioned in the beginning, researchers mainly concentrated on motivational processes related to victim blaming, thus, showing how conditions that reduce (foster) the maintenance of just-world beliefs consequently diminish (promote) victim blaming and derogation (cf. Kay et al., 2005; Savani et al., 2011; van den Bos & Maas, 2009). Importantly, the present research suggests that another way of reducing victim blaming might be to reduce sadistic pleasure experienced while learning about others' misfortunes.

Now, one could argue that our research only demonstrated experienced pleasure to promote victim blaming for individuals high in everyday sadism, thereby limiting the meaningfulness of the current findings to a certain group of individuals. However, as we already mentioned in the beginning, recent literature discusses certain overlap of sadistic pleasure and Schadenfreude. While these two affect reactions can be differentiated given that everyday sadism as stable trait implies the stable proclivity to experience pleasure in the face of others suffering and Schadenfreude implies a transitory experience of pleasure when observing other's deserved misfortunes (cf. Ben-Ze'ev, 2009; Trémolière & Djeriouat, 2016), the current findings could still be viewed through the lens of Schadenfreude. Specifically, Schadenfreude is more likely to be experienced when misfortunes happen (a) to a person of high dominance, (b) to someone who is envied, (c) to a rival outgroup member, or (d) when misfortunes appear to be deserved (cf. Boecker et al., 2022; Lange & Boecker, 2019; Smith et al., 2009). Thereby, Schadenfreude bears a regulative function with regard to social comparison and self-enhancement concerns (e.g., Boecker et al., 2022; Smith et al., 2009; van Dijk et al., 2011, 2015).

In our studies, one could argue that Schadenfreude is at play with participants observing the victim's misfortunes and experiencing joy (or pleasure). One may also speculate that those high in trait sadism perceive the misfortunes of others as deserved, and thus, experience a sense of joy (i.e., Schadenfreude). In the context of everyday sadism, however, Schadenfreude likely does not serve self-regulatory functions with regard to social comparison or self-enhancement, because individuals high in everyday sadism

experience pleasure irrespective of the characteristics associated with the target person. This hypothesis, however, needs to be empirically tested in future studies that manipulate, for instance, the level of deservedness of misfortunes for the victim.

Beyond that, the present research also has applied implications. Our findings document the association of everyday sadism and victim blaming across a variety of contexts of victimization, across various cultural backgrounds of observers of others' misfortunes (including individuals with a professional background, which implies frequent confrontation with victim–perpetrator constellations), and also in everyday life. One straightforward practical implication given the robustness of this association is to screen for everyday sadism as one of the antisocial traits (Paulhus, 2014) whenever professional positions are to be filled where individuals have to perform sensitive and complex (moral) judgments in interpersonal contexts, such as positions not only related to jurisdiction (e.g., judges, lawyers, attorneys), law enforcement agencies (e.g., police officers), but also positions related to welfare work (e.g., social workers). Furthermore, strategies targeted at individuals high in everyday sadism to reduce sadistic pleasure and increase their empathic feelings in the face of others' misfortunes and suffering should be brought forward to reduce victim blaming and the associated destructive outcomes in everyday life. For instance, so-called experiential empathy interventions (cf. Weisz & Zaki, 2017) including techniques such as perspective-taking, role-taking, and information sharing aim at increasing internal feelings of empathy, an affective state that individuals high (vs. low) in everyday sadism lack to a certain extent (cf. Paulhus, 2014), and thus might be helpful in this context. To reduce sadistic pleasure experienced in the face of others' suffering, teaching individuals high in everyday sadism the so-called expression-based techniques aiming at recognizing and responding adequately to others' distress might also be fruitful (cf. Weisz & Zaki, 2017).

In the following, when outlining limitations of the current research, we will also elaborate in more detail on how future studies could test experimentally how sadistic pleasure might be reduced and empathic concern could be increased when confronted with others' misfortunes.

### Limitations and Outlook

In this section, we wish to acknowledge that the present research is qualified by limitations, which consequently point to directions for future research that may address these limitations. First and foremost, the current research primarily reports cross-sectional, correlational studies that were conducted online (except for Study 4). Accordingly, although we find indirect effect models based on numerous samples (all seven subsamples of Studies 1a–1d) simultaneously by running multilevel SEM—increased sadistic pleasure and decreased empathic concern mediating the effect of everyday sadism on victim blaming—we cannot establish causality given that we do not provide experimental evidence. This already indicates one important line of future research originating from the present studies. Specifically, in order to test experimentally whether the identified mediating variables (sadistic pleasure and empathic concern) cause the effect of everyday sadism on victim blaming, moderating conditions either reducing sadistic pleasure or increasing empathic concern should be implemented and the association of everyday sadism and victim blaming should be examined

(cf. Jacoby & Sassenberg, 2011). As we elaborated above when discussing applied implications of our research, implementing empathy interventions might be one fruitful approach to decrease sadistic pleasure and increase empathic concern in the face of other's suffering. Future studies could test whether implementing an empathy manipulation prior to learning about other's misfortunes (e.g., explicitly instructing individuals to try to feel with the person they will learn about; cf. Batson et al., 2007; Sassenrath, 2020; Sassenrath et al., 2017, 2019) reduces sadistic pleasure and promotes empathic concern and, thus, weakens the relationship between everyday sadism and victim blaming. Likewise, it could be tested whether including vivid and touching first-person narratives of how the victimizing events affected the target person reduces sadistic pleasure and increases empathic concern when confronted with their misfortune and suffering. In this context, it should be noted that prior research already yields evidence that individuals high in everyday sadism are in fact capable of empathic feelings when being instructed to empathize with others; they simply appear not to be motivated to do so without explicit instruction (cf. Lui et al., 2020).

As already mentioned earlier on, one could argue that the present research highlights the association of phenomena that may apply to only a few individuals (everyday sadism fostering victim blaming due to sadistic pleasure and little empathic concern). Certainly, victim blaming represents the counter-normative and less often displayed reaction to being confronted with others' suffering (i.e., displays of compassion and empathy are surely more common; cf. Boecker et al., 2022; Dawtry et al., 2020). Likewise, everyday sadism is not strongly pronounced in individuals as illustrated by the low means we obtained throughout our studies when assessing everyday sadism (although impression management motives may also play a role here, given the undesirability of sadistic tendencies). Nevertheless, both phenomena *do* exist and the consequences for victims can be severe, so that we must take the phenomena seriously.

To sum up, the present research yields substantial empirical support for the association of everyday sadism and victim blaming due to sadistic pleasure and little empathic concern. Still, future research on potentially moderating conditions is needed to better understand the underlying processes of this association.

## Conclusions

In the present work, we document that individuals' proneness to everyday sadism predicts their degree of victim blaming when being confronted with another's suffering, due to sadistic pleasure and little empathic concern experienced meanwhile. We provide evidence that this association holds across diverse societal contexts, including different forms of victimization, and across various cultural and professional backgrounds of observers of victimization. Going beyond mere cross-sectional correlational findings, we provide evidence that the association plays a role in individuals' everyday life, regardless of whether the suffering individual represents a close other (or not) and regardless of the source from which one learns about the others' suffering. Additionally, we revealed that victim blaming is negatively related to effortful cognitive activity in victim–perpetrator constellations. Thereby, the current work highlights prevalence and generalizability of the association of everyday sadism, sadistic pleasure, and victim blaming beyond the laboratory and also emphasizes its societal relevance. Specifically, when

considering that most of the problems that societies are currently facing (e.g., climate crisis; pervasive acts of war) require cooperative and solidary actions, our research highlights the relevance of creating conditions that reduce the likelihood of experiencing sadistic pleasure, as it entails such antisocial consequences as blaming innocent victims and being less willing to act supportively on their behalf.

Taken together, the current research contributes to a deepened understanding of the affective processes determining the blaming of innocent victims suffering from harmful events—a harsh, but nevertheless, widespread reaction in the face of other's suffering.

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