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PATTERNS OF JUSTIFICATION OF THE UNITED STATES' 'WAR AGAINST TERRORISM' IN AFGHANISTAN

J.C.Cohrs- J.Maes- B.Moschner- S.O.Kielmann
Friedrich-Alexander University of Erlangen-Nuremberg, University of Trier, Carl von Ossietzky University of Oldenburg, University of Trier, Germany

RESUMEN

Según la teoría de la guerra justa, las intervenciones militares deben cumplir varios criterios para estar legitimadas (Haspel, 2002). Estos criterios se corresponden con cuatro procesos de desconexión moral descritos por Bandura (1999): la justificación moral, la negación de responsabilidad, el menosprecio de las consecuencias negativas y la culpabilidad de la víctima. A partir de datos de un estudio alemán en Internet con 1536 participantes, analizamos si estos aspectos de interpretación se relacionan con la actitud hacia la Guerra de Afganistán, si existen modelos específicos de desconexión moral, y cómo se relacionan con las actitudes. Todos los aspectos de interpretación se relacionan entre si para apoyar a la guerra. Sin embargo, nosotros identificamos varios modelos de desconexión moral y sólo el menosprecio de las consecuencias negativas y el rechazo de responsabilidad se encontraron en todos los modelos.

ABSTRACT

According to just war theory, military interventions have to fulfill several criteria in order to be legitimate (Haspel, 2002). These criteria correspond broadly to four processes of moral disengagement described by Bandura (1999): moral justification, denial of responsibility, minimization of negative consequences, and blame of the victim. Using data from a German Internet study with 1,536 participants, we examined whether these aspects of interpretation relate to attitude toward the Afghanistan War, whether there are specific patterns of moral disengagement, and how these patterns relate to attitudinal variables. All aspects of interpretation related to support for war. We identified various patterns of moral disengagement. However, only minimization of negative consequences and denial of responsibility were found in all patterns.

Key words: moral disengagement, war, political attitudes, justice, internet study

Why do moral people accept imposition of deadly violence on others? According to Bandura (1991, 1999), there are four broad processes of moral disengagement enabling this: (1) justification of the act (e.g., through worthy purposes or 'palliative' comparisons), (2) denial, displacement, or diffusion of responsibility, (3) blaming and dehumanization of the victim, and (4) negation or minimization of negative consequences. These cogni-

tive mechanisms can be applied to military intervention, or war (see Cohrs & Moschner, 2002; Grussendorf, McAlister, Sandstroem, Udd, & Morrison, 2002; McAlister, 2001). For example, governments argue that (1) they carry out a military intervention in pursuit of humanitarian purposes (e.g., to prevent massive violations of human rights), (2) they are forced to use troops as a last resort and therefore bear no responsibility, (3) the intervention has positive consequences (negative consequences like human suffering due to bombings are kept out of sight), and (4) the enemy is dangerous, immoral, and responsible for the conflict (e.g., think of the 'slaughterer of Belgrade'). These arguments relate broadly to normative criteria of evaluation of war that are specified by just war theory (see Fuchs, 1996; Haspel, 2002; Walzer, 1992), namely right intention, last resort, proportionality, and just cause. According to just war theory, a war is not justified unless all of these criteria (and some more, e.g. legitimate authority, reasonable hope of success, discrimination of combatants and noncombatants) are fulfilled. In other words, the criteria are necessary conditions for a military intervention to be legitimate.

Subjective interpretations relating to the four processes described by Bandura (1991, 1999) are linked to positive evaluation of war. Cohrs and Moschner (2002) showed that positive attitudes toward North Atlantic Treaty Organization's war in Yugoslavia (the Kosovo War) are strongly related to belief in worthy purposes of the intervention, denial of responsibility for the war, and minimization of negative consequences of the intervention. The fourth cognitive aspect, blame of Yugoslavia, was also present in war critics and thus did not contribute to support for war. Detailed considerations of two competing structural equation models led Cohrs and Moschner (2002) to conclude that the cognitive interpretations both exert causal effects on evaluation of war and function as subsequent justifications of a pro-war position. In fact, preliminary longitudinal results concerning the war in Afghanistan supported this view: Support for the war measured at time 1 led to stronger denial of responsibility and observation of less negative consequences measured at time 2, and anticipation of negative consequences and denial of responsibility measured at time 1 led to stronger support for the war measured at time 2 (Cohrs, Moschner, Kielmann, & Maes, 2002).

However, it is not clear which of these interpretations or subsets of interpretations are necessary, and sufficient conditions for support for military intervention on an empirical level. If subjective appraisals of military intervention correspond with the normative model specified by just war theory, all of the processes described by Bandura (1999) need to be present

in order to develop a pro-war attitude. If subjective assessments do not follow just war theory, however, there may be subsets of processes that lead to acceptance of military intervention, regardless whether other cognitive interpretations are present or not. In this study, we explore the degree of correspondence between subjective evaluations and normative requirements by examining whether there are specific patterns of interpretations of war with regard to the war in Afghanistan that was waged by the United States after the terrorist attacks on September 11th, 2001. Furthermore, we explore whether these different patterns of justification are related to various political attitudes and other individual difference variables. This may enable us to suggest some possible psychological origins for the different patterns of interpretation of war.

Method

Participants

Our research questions were examined with data from a large-scale study on attitudes toward September 11th, 2001, and related topics (see Cohrs, Kielmann, Maes, & Moschner, 2002, for a detailed description of the study). Data collection took place from February 27th to September 12th, 2002, and was done via the Internet (92%) and using traditional paper-and-pencil questionnaires (8%). The questionnaire was in the German language. The following results are based on a sample of 1,536 participants (42% female, 58% male). The majority was of German nationality (93%). Age ranged from 13 to 76 years (M = 32.04, SD = 11.18). Educational levels were high, as 47% were university students and 36% had a university degree. Politically, the sample was biased to the left (political ideology, indicated on a ten-point scale extending from 1 (*extremely left*) to 10 (*extremely right*): M = 4.13, SD = 1.54; voting intention: 30% Green party, 15% Social Democrats, 12% Democratic Socialists, 8% Christian Democrats, 9% Liberals, 17% no answer). Despite this bias, the sample includes a substantial number of war supporters, as is shown in the Results section.

Instruments

Attitude toward the Afghanistan War was assessed by three items: "I reject firmly the military intervention in Afghanistan" (reversed), "By and large, I consider the military intervention in Afghanistan justified", and "The military intervention in Afghanistan clearly went beyond a justifiable degree" (reversed). Internal consistency was very high (Cronbach's α=.91). Two items asked for *Attitudinal ambivalence*: "The question whether the

military intervention in Afghanistan was right is difficult to answer: On the one hand, there is a lot to be said for it, but on the other hand, there is a lot to be said against it" and "In contrast to those who are undecided, I have a firm opinion whether the military action in Afghanistan was justified or not" (reversed). For these two items, Cronbach's α was .73. All of these and the following items had to be answered on six-point rating scales with answers being coded from 0 (*do not agree at all*) to 5 (*agree completely*).

Cognitive interpretations of the war were assessed by 37 items concerning responsibility issues, blame of the Taliban, goals and motives for the military action, and direct and long-term consequences of the intervention. Two items concerning blame of the Taliban were excluded because of ceiling effects. The remaining items were submitted to factor analysis, using the principle components method and subsequent Varimax rotation. The first eight eigenvalues were 12.71, 2.76, 1.64, 1.47, 1.33, 1.04, 1.00, and 0.88. In accordance with the parallel analysis criterion (see Enzmann, 1997), five components were extracted. The sixth eigenvalue was lower than the corresponding eigenvalue based on random data. Four of these factors were well interpretable. The fifth factor was characterized mostly by residual loadings and was discarded. The first factor was named *Justification of the war*. Here, items on U.S. motives (e.g., "contribute to democratization in Afghanistan", "free the Afghan people from the Taliban regime", "make the world a safer place in the long term") and on long-term effects of the intervention (e.g., "It will strengthen human rights", "It will make the world a safer place in the long term", "It will deter future terrorist attacks") had high factor loadings. On the second factor, which was termed *Blame of the U.S.*, items referring to egoistic, dishonest motives of the U.S. had high loadings (e.g., "maintain their leading position in the world", "secure economic advantages for themselves", "get access to oil and gas wells", "demonstrate power and strength"). The third factor was named *Negative consequences*. It was marked mainly by items on short-term effects of the intervention (e.g., "It has led to an uncontrollable escalation of violence", "It has destabilized the political situation in the world", "It has caused enormous suffering for innocent people", "It has improved the humanitarian situation of the Afghan people" [reversed]). The fourth factor comprised items on responsibility issues and thus was termed *Denial of responsibility*. Exemplary items are "If the U.S. wanted to protect their freedom, they had no choice but to intervene by military means", "Realistically, the U.S. did not have any other alternative but to strike back with the use of troops", "There was enough scope for not being forced to resort to military action" (reversed), and "In my estimation, the military action in

Afghanistan was illegal according to international law" (reversed)[1]. For the subsequent analyses, factor scores for the four components were computed.

A large number of other variables were assessed in the questionnaire (see Cohrs, Kielmann et al., 2002). Here, only those measures that related to the patterns of interpretation of the Afghanistan War (see below) and that are included in the following analyses are mentioned. These measures are: *Attribution to the U.S./Western countries* (belief that the terrorist attacks on September 11th were due to ruthless American foreign policy and to military presence of the West in Arabic countries, for instance; four items, α = .67), *Indignation at the U.S./Western countries* (feelings of enragement by the policies of the U.S. and European governments; two items, α = .83), *Hope* (confidence that we will cope with worldwide terrorism; two items, α = .65), *Attitude toward the U.S.* (general evaluations of U.S. foreign and military policies and U.S. society and democracy; six items, α = .88), *Belief in a just world* (belief that the world is basically a just place where everybody gets what he/she deserves; see Dalbert, Montada, & Schmitt, 1987; Lerner, 1980; six items, α = .77), and *Reactivity of terrorism* (belief that terrorism is an understandable response to unjust oppression; three items, α = .82).

Results

To replicate the results by Cohrs and Moschner (2002) concerning the Kosovo War, we computed the correlations between the factor scores for the cognitive interpretations and Attitude toward the Afghanistan War. Attitude toward the Afghanistan War correlated with Justification of the War (r =.30), Blame of the U.S. (r = -.31), Negative consequences (r = -.49) and Denial of responsibility (r = .62, all ps < .001). As the factor scores are orthogonal, each cognitive interpretation contributed uniquely to evaluation of the war in a regression analysis: 81% of the variance in Attitude toward the Afghanistan War could be explained. Thus, the relevance of the factors of moral disengagement for attitudes toward military intervention has been demonstrated again. Denial of responsibility and minimization of negative consequences were most strongly related to support for vs. opposition to the war in Afghanistan. The two other correlations were somewhat lower. Does this mean that there are war supporters who both deny that the war was justified and attribute blame to the U.S., so that these two cognitive interpretations may not be necessarily linked to support for war? To explore this question, we performed cluster analyses.

First, we divided the sample into three groups. This was done by cluster analysis based on the five items concerning attitude toward the war and attitudinal ambivalence. Ward's (1963) method was used to get a preliminary solution, which was subsequently optimized by the k means algorithm (MacQueen, 1967). To find an adequate number of clusters, three statistical criteria were used (see Bacher, 2001): the amount of variance explained by a given number of clusters (η^2), the proportional reduction of error over the solution with one cluster less (*PRE*), and the F statistic analogous to the F value in analysis of variance (F_{max}). In this case, all criteria were completely consistent in suggesting a solution with three clusters (see Table 1). With three clusters, there was an 'elbow' in the amount of variance explained, the proportional reduction of error dropped substantially, and the F_{max} value was highest. The three groups were easily interpretable as war supporters (n = 374), undecided (n = 643), and war opponents (n = 519). Mean scale values in Attitude toward the Afghanistan War of the three groups were 4.14 (SD = 0.68), 2.17 (SD = 0.82), and 0.36 (SD = 0.50) respectively, and mean values in Attitudinal ambivalence were 1.64 (SD= 1.04), 3.87 (SD = 0.87), and 1.07 (SD = 0.95) respectively.

Table 1
Statistical Criteria for Determining
the Number of Clusters (Main Groups)

Number of clusters	η^2	*PRE*	F_{max}
2	.41	.41	1049.96
3	.62	.36	1246.13
4	.68	.15	1068.50
5	.72	.13	972.43
6	.74	.08	867.28
7	.76	.10	826.49
8	.79	.09	797.69
9	.80	.07	761.69
10	.81	.06	730.99

The relationship between support for war and the cognitive interpretations found in the correlational results can also be illustrated by group differences in the factor scores (see Table 3, below). The war supporters had positive means in Justification of the war and Denial of responsibility and

negative means in Blame of the U.S. and Minimization of negative consequences. The standard deviations were highest for Justification of the War and Blame of the U.S., reflecting the lower correlations of these scales with Attitude toward the war. The war opponents had positive means in Blame of the U.S. and Minimization of negative consequences and negative means in Justification of the war and Denial of responsibility. The undecided had means close to zero in all four factors.

Now, in order to identify specific patterns of interpretation of the war, we performed cluster analyses based on the factor scores for the four cognitive interpretations separately for the war supporters, undecided, and war opponents, in the same way as described above. The statistical criteria for deciding on the appropriate number of clusters are shown in Table 2.

Table 2
Statistical Criteria for Determining the Number of Clusters (Subgroups)

	War supporters			Undecided			War opponents		
Nº of clusters	η^2	*PRE*	F_{max}	η^2	*PRE*	F_{max}	η^2	*PRE*	F_{max}
2	.25	.25	108.57	.20	.20	143.83	.19	.19	105.72
3	.40	.20	108.76	.34	.17	142.38	.37	.23	134.39
4	.47	.11	94.25	.42	.12	132.76	.47	.15	133.19
5	.50	.07	81.77	.49	.12	132.42	.50	.06	114.30
6	.55	.09	78.59	.53	.08	124.38	.56	.12	115.96
7	.57	.04	70.41	.56	.06	116.47	.59	.06	106.47
8	.62	.13	75.71	.58	.06	110.39	.61	.07	101.88
9	.65	.06	73.27	.62	.08	111.20	.63	.04	94.68
10	.67	.06	71.30	.64	.06	108.32	.65	.06	92.86

The F_{max} value was highest for two and three clusters among the war supporters and among the undecided, and highest for three and four clusters among the war opponents. In each case, we decided that the amount of variance explained and the proportional reduction of error by the more differentiated solution was sufficient to select the higher number of clusters. Thus, three groups of war supporters, three groups of undecided, and four groups of war opponents were formed. The characteristics of these ten subgroups in the factor scores that were the basis for the clustering are presented in Table 3.

Table 3.
Means and Standard Deviations of the Main Groups and Subgroups in the Factor Scores

	N	Justification of the war	Blame of the U.S.	Negative conse-quences	Denial of responsibility
War supporters	374	0.49 (1.15)	-0.45 (1.18)	-0.69 (0.86)	0.89 (0.83)
War supporters 1	105	1.37 (0.75)	-1.45 (0.80)	-0.59 (0.73)	0.50 (0.73)
War supporters 2	109	-0.63 (0.78)	-0.75 (0.77)	-0.82 (0.91)	0.94 (0.86)
War supporters 3	114	0.75 (0.84)	0.76 (0.63)	-0.65 (0.90)	1.23 (0.72)
Undecided	643	-0.06 (0.96)	0.06 (0.94)	-0.02 (0.96)	0.04 (0.85)
Undecided 1	212	-0.09 (0.78)	0.32 (0.78)	-0.79 (0.66)	-0.52 (0.73)
Undecided 2	199	0.60 (0.75)	0.39 (0.73)	0.63 (0.69)	0.34 (0.73)
Undecided 3	154	-0.89 (0.75)	-0.74 (0.92)	0.22 (0.86)	0.43 (0.74)
War opponents	519	-0.27 (0.79)	0.25 (0.80)	0.51 (0.84)	-0.69 (0.72)
War opponents 1	125	0.56 (0.56)	0.56 (0.56)	0.72 (0.59)	-0.92 (0.56)
War opponents 2	142	-0.79 (0.52)	0.48 (0.52)	0.97 (0.56)	0.01 (0.51)
War opponents 3	123	-0.52 (0.54)	0.41 (0.61)	-0.44 (0.57)	-1.10 (0.54)
War opponents 4	68	-0.27 (0.76)	-1.06 (0.71)	0.89 (0.75)	-1.00 (0.60)

Let us first have a look at the war supporters. Here, all three groups minimized negative consequences and all three groups denied U.S. responsibility for the war. Thus, in our sample, ignoring single exceptions, these two factors may be interpreted as necessary conditions for support for war. In contrast, there is one group (cluster 2) that did not believe that the war was justified and still approved of the military intervention. Analogously, there is one group (cluster 3) that attributed blame to the United States but still supported the intervention. Thus, these two interpretations are not necessary for support for war. Overall, among the war supporters, at least three of the four legitimizing cognitive interpretations were present.

Secondly, among the war opponents, all groups believed U.S. responsible for the war, pointing again to the significance of this factor. The other three factors do not represent necessary conditions for opposition to war. There is one group (cluster 3) that minimized negative consequences of the war, one group (cluster 1) that believed that the war was justified, and one group (cluster 4) that strongly rejected attribution of blame to the United States. Overall, at least three of the four legitimizing interpretations were rejected by the war opponents.

Thirdly, the undecided were characterized by stronger conflict among the four factors. This corresponds with the high mean score in attitudinal ambivalence mentioned above. In cluster 1, minimization of negative consequences was present, but also blame of the United States and denial of U.S. responsibility for the war. In cluster 2, the war was seen as justified and responsibility was denied, but there was also blame of the U.S. and observation of negative effects of the war. In cluster 3, there was denial of responsibility and rejection of blame of the U.S., but also rejection of moral justification of the war and some observation of negative consequences.

How do the clusters differ from one another in more generalized attitudinal variables? There are significant differences between the three main clusters in all attitudinal variables. The war supporters scored lowest in Attribution to the U.S./Western countries, Indignation at the U.S./Western countries, and Reactivity of terrorism and highest in Hope, Attitude toward the U.S., and Belief in a just world, while the opposite was true for the war opponents. As regards political ideology, for example, the supporters were most right ($M = 5.09$, $SD = 1.59$), the undecided were moderate ($M = 4.12$, $SD = 1.38$), and the opponents were most left ($M = 3.54$, $SD = 1.44$).

However, how do the different patterns of interpretation relate to these attitudinal variables? This was analyzed by examining group differences among the three clusters of war supporters, the three undecided, and the four war opponents, respectively. First, there were significant and substantial (i.e., with effect sizes greater than .05) differences among the groups of supporters in attitudinal variables that may be interpreted consistently. These characteristics are presented in Table 4.

The first cluster, in which all four factors of cognitive interpretation were oriented to a pro-war position (see Table 3), did not attribute blame for the terrorist attacks on September 11th, 2001, to the U.S. and to Western countries, was not at all incensed by the United States and European governments, was confident that we will cope with terrorism, had a positive general attitude toward the U.S., was relatively high in belief in a just world, and did not believe that terrorism is a reaction to oppression. Thus, this cluster appears to have adopted the official position regarding the war against terrorism. As the high levels of confidence and belief in a just world indicate, this may have resulted from idealization tendencies or unrealistic optimism. The clusters 2 and 3 were also conspicuous in most of these variables in comparison with the war opponents and undecided (see column "Other" in Table 4). However, they were much less extreme in their orientations than cluster 1. We do not see any obvious psychological interpretation of differences between these two clusters.

Table 4
Subgroup Means and Standard Deviations in External Variables (War Supporters)

	Supporters 1	Supporters 2	Supporters 3	Other
Attribution to the U.S./West	1.72 (0.99)	2.36 (0.97)	2.85 (0.91)	3.14 (0.88)
Indignation at the U.S./West	1.45 (1.31)	2.60 (1.39)	2.88 (1.46)	4.26 (0.91)
Hope	2.54 (1.23)	1.63 (1.16)	1.93 (1.23)	1.47 (1.21)
Attitude toward the U.S.	2.95 (0.87)	2.15 (0.94)	2.25 (0.97)	1.19 (0.76)
Belief in a just world	1.87 (0.85)	1.32 (0.72)	1.38 (0.72)	1.08 (0.72)
Reactivity of terrorism	1.71 (1.05)	2.35 (1.12)	2.67 (0.99)	3.39 (0.91)

Note. All variables are scaled from 0 (*full disagreement*) to 5 (*full agreement*).

Concerning the subgroups of war opponents, effect sizes greater than .05 emerged only for two variables (see Table 5). Cluster 4 of the opponents, which rejected blame of the U.S. (see Table 3), did not attribute blame for the terrorist attacks to the U.S. and Western countries and did not feel particularly incensed by the U.S. and European governments. The most extreme values occurred in cluster 2. Finally, among the undecided, there were no substantial differences between the subgroups in external variables.

Table 5
Subgroup Means and Standard Deviations in External Variables (War Opponents)

	Opp. 1	Opp. 2	Opp. 3	Opp. 4	Other
Attribution to U.S./West	3.41 (0.87)	3.53 (0.90)	3.32 (0.85)	2.86 (1.03)	2.78 (0.97)
Indignation at U.S./West	4.64 (0.54)	4.82 (0.41)	4.63 (0.50)	4.18 (0.94)	3.37 (1.43)

Discussion

This paper showed that in general, denial or displacement of responsibility for the war, minimization of negative consequences of the war, justification of the war, and low attribution of blame to the U.S. were strongly related to evaluation of the Afghanistan War, supporting the view that Ban-

dura's (1991, 1999) model of moral disengagement can be applied to evaluation of war. This can be regarded as a replication of the findings by Cohrs and Moschner (2002) concerning attitude toward the Kosovo War.

Furthermore, our cluster-analytical results suggest a more differentiated view, as subgroups of war supporters, undecided, and war opponents were characterized by specific patterns of interpretation of the war. The most important aspect seemed to be denial of responsibility, that is, estimation whether on the one hand, military action can be avoided or, on the other hand, there is no alternative to military intervention and it is supported by international law. All groups of war supporters, and none of the groups of war opponents, showed this cognition, so it may be regarded as a crucial factor in war attitudes. Similarly, all groups of war supporters minimized negative consequences of the intervention, so this factor may also be seen as an important condition for support for war. However, on the other side, one may minimize negative consequences but still be opposed to war, as is reflected in cluster 3 of the war opponents. For peace activists, these findings point to the significance of uncovering and popularizing alternative ways of conflict management and stressing negative consequences of a war.

Moral justification of the war and absence of blame of the U.S. turned out to be not that crucial in determining war attitudes. There were groups of war supporters that did not believe that the war was morally justified or did believe that the U.S. intervened because of dishonest motives. Obviously, this did not prevent them from approving of the war. Yet, according to just war theory, this should be the case (Fuchs, 1996; Haspel, 2002): A war should only be regarded as legitimate when a whole number of conditions are fulfilled. Thus, evaluation of military force on an empirical level does not follow the normative requirements specified by just war theory.

Further exploratory analyses suggested that –given a pro-war, anti-war, or moderate position –the role of more generalized attitudinal factors in determining which pattern of interpretation of the war emerged is limited. There are substantial attitudinal and personality differences between war opponents and war supporters (see also Cohrs, in press), but in our analyses we found only small differences between subtypes of war opponents and between subtypes of war supporters. Among the war supporters, however, a group could be identified that was characterized by seemingly uncritical adoption of the official position regarding the war. This very consistent pro-war position may have been due to tendencies of unrealistic idealization or illusionary optimism, as high values in hope and belief in a just world indicated.

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1. It should be noted that one of the mechanisms described by Bandura (1991, 1999) is not represented by these factors, namely attribution of blame to the opponent. Items tapping this aspect have been dropped because of ceiling effects. The second factor, blame of the U.S., was not described by Bandura, but may be seen as a mirror image of attribution of blame to the opponent.

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J. Christopher Cohrs works in the Social Psychology Section at the Friedrich Alexander University of Erlangen-Nuremberg. His current research is on attitudes toward war, patriotism, ideology and prejudice, and career development. A recent publication is "Antiwar knowledge and generalized political attitudes as determinants of attitude toward the Kosovo War".

Jürgen Maes received his Dr. rer. nat. from the University of Trier, where he currently works in the Educational and Applied Psychology Section. **Barbara Moschner** received her Dr. rer. nat.. from the University of Trier. She currently works as a professor in the School of Education at the Carl von Ossietzky University of Oldenburg. And **Sven Kielmann** currently works on his diploma thesis at the University of Trier.

Address: Christopher Cohrs, Friedrich-Alexander-Universität Erlangen-Nürnberg, Lehrstuhl Sozialpsycholoige, Bismarckstr. 6, D-91054 Erlangen, Germany.