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John Jost^a & Orsolya Hunyady^b

^a Stanford University, and the Radcliffe Institute for Advanced Study at Harvard University USA

^b University of Debrecen and the University of California at Berkeley Hungary and USA

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The psychology of system justification and the palliative function of ideology

John T. Jost

*Stanford University, and the Radcliffe Institute for
Advanced Study at Harvard University, USA*

Orsolya Hunyady

*University of Debrecen, Hungary, and the
University of California at Berkeley, USA*

In this chapter, we trace the historical and intellectual origins of system justification theory, summarise the basic assumptions of the theory, and derive 18 specific hypotheses from a system justification perspective. We review and integrate empirical evidence addressing these hypotheses concerning the *rationalisation of the status quo*, the *internalisation of inequality* (outgroup favouritism and depressed entitlement), relations among *ego, group, and system justification motives* (including consequences for attitudinal ambivalence, self-esteem, and psychological well-being), and the *reduction of ideological dissonance*. Turning to the question of *why* people would engage in system justification—especially when it conflicts with other interests and motives—we propose that system-justifying ideologies serve a palliative function in that they reduce anxiety, guilt, dissonance, discomfort, and uncertainty for those who are advantaged *and* disadvantaged.

The primary excusatory function of ideology, therefore, is to provide people, both as victims and pillars of the post-totalitarian system, with the illusion that

Correspondence should be addressed to John T. Jost, Radcliffe Institute for Advanced Study, Harvard University, 38 Concord Ave., Cambridge, MA 02138, USA.
Email: Jost-John@gsb.stanford.edu

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the system is in harmony with the human order and the order of the universe.
(Vaclav Havel, 1991, p. 134)

Throughout the world, most or all of the available wealth, power, privilege, and prestige is enjoyed by a minority of citizens. In the United States, for instance, the richest 1% controls almost half of the country's total financial wealth, and the top 20% possesses 94% of the nation's net wealth (Wolff, 1996, pp. 10–11). European nations have grown somewhat more egalitarian over the course of the 20th century, but even in France, England, and Sweden, the richest 1% still hold 20% or more of the total national wealth, and the top 20% control much more than half (Wolff, 1996, pp. 21–25). Economists calculate a *gini coefficient* to measure the degree to which the distribution of income and wealth is skewed disproportionately in favour of the wealthy, and while there are important differences across countries, the results are fairly similar in the US, Canada, UK, Germany, Italy, Switzerland, Holland, Sweden, Norway, Israel, Australia, and Japan (O'Higgins, Schmaus, & Stephenson, 1990). In all of these nations, there is a wide gap between rich and poor, and the spread of global capitalism seems to be increasing the gap (e.g., Marshall, 2000; Wolff, 1996).

Despite the visibility of a relatively small number of protestors at recent meetings of the World Trade Organisation in both the United States and Italy, the existence of widespread economic inequality does not currently pose a significant threat to the legitimacy or stability of the capitalist system or to that of major national governments in North America, Europe, or Asia. On the contrary, most people seem to find ways of tolerating and even justifying social and economic disparities as fair, legitimate, necessary, and inevitable. Social scientists typically point to the role of ideology in maintaining popular support for the system by explaining, justifying, and rationalising inequality in such a way that people are seen as deserving the outcomes and treatment they receive (e.g., Jackman, 1994; Lane, 1962; Major, 1994; Sidanius & Pratto, 1999; Tyler & McGraw, 1986). Stereotypes of the working class (or immigrants or Gypsies) as lazy, irresponsible, and unintelligent allow people to blame these groups for their own poverty and to deflect blame from the system. Ideological beliefs associated with individualism, meritocracy, belief in a just world, and the Protestant work ethic presumably serve the same function (e.g., Furnham, 1990; Kluegel & Smith, 1986; Lerner & Miller, 1978; Weiss, 1969).

The use of stereotypes and other ideological devices to preserve the legitimacy of the existing social system is a major focus of system justification theory. Although there are several influential precursors discussed in the next section, system justification theory largely originated with an article by Jost and Banaji (1994), which sought to account for the consensuality of social stereotypes across perceiver groups and the

prevalence of outgroup favouritism among members of disadvantaged groups. It was argued that many common forms of stereotyping and intergroup behaviour could not be explained in terms of prevailing theories, which tended to stress either *ego-justifying* motives to maintain or enhance individual self-esteem or *group-justifying* motives to maintain or enhance collective self-esteem and/or positive group distinctiveness. Drawing on such diverse sources as marxism-feminism, cognitive dissonance theory, justice research, and social identity theory, Jost and Banaji proposed the existence of a *system-justifying* motive, whereby people seek to maintain or enhance the legitimacy and stability of existing forms of social arrangements. The most provocative aspect of this argument was that members of disadvantaged groups would themselves engage in system justification (at least under some circumstances), even at the expense of their immediate personal or collective interests or esteem.

Since the publication of Jost and Banaji's (1994) article, research on system justification theory has addressed a much wider set of concerns, many of which are reviewed here. These include the tendency for people to subjectively enhance the desirability of anticipated events (whether good or bad) as they become more likely (Kay, Jimenez, & Jost, 2002); the tendency for members of disadvantaged groups to accept and legitimise their own situations (Haines & Jost, 2000; Jost, 2001); implicit as well as explicit cognitive, affective, and behavioural biases in favour of higher-status groups (Jost, 2001; Jost, Pelham, & Carvallo, 2002; Nosek, Banaji, & Greenwald, 2002); the depressed entitlement effect among women and other disadvantaged groups (Blanton, George, & Crocker, 2001; Jost, 1997; Major, 1994; Pelham & Hetts, 2001); attitudinal ambivalence directed at one's low-status group (Glick & Fiske, 2001; Jost & Burgess, 2000); consequences for self-esteem and psychological well-being among members of disadvantaged groups who support the system and oppose egalitarian reforms (Jost & Thompson, 2000); and the surprising degree of ideological support for the social system and its authorities provided by members of disadvantaged groups (Jost, Pelham, Sheldon, & Sullivan, 2003b). All of these various phenomena pertain, in one way or another, to the antecedent conditions, manifestations, and/or consequences of the system justification motive.

OVERVIEW OF THE CHAPTER

In this chapter, we first trace the origins of the system justification perspective and its major theoretical influences, and we contrast it with other prominent theories of ideology, justice, and intergroup relations. Then we summarise the basic assumptions of system justification theory and derive several specific hypotheses that are unique to the theory. Next, we review and integrate conclusions from a number of empirical studies (most of which

have been published elsewhere) that address the hypotheses of system justification theory. Finally, we address the question of *why* people would engage in system justification, especially when it conflicts with individual and group interests. We speculate that system-justifying ideologies serve a *palliative* function in that they reduce anxiety, guilt, dissonance, discomfort, and uncertainty for people who are in positions that are either advantaged or disadvantaged.

ORIGINS OF THE SYSTEM JUSTIFICATION PERSPECTIVE

System justification theory originated in an effort to integrate and expand upon several bodies of substantive work, including social identity theory, just world theorising, cognitive dissonance theory, marxist-feminist theories of ideology, and social dominance theory. In this section, we summarise major similarities and differences between system justification theory and other prominent theories, before moving on to summarise predictions that follow uniquely from a system justification perspective. Our theory should be thought of as a compliment, a complement, and in some ways also a corrective to its theoretical predecessors.

Social identity theory

The first substantive influence was that of social identity theory, especially its attempt to link patterns of stereotyping, prejudice, and intergroup relations to sociostructural variables such as the perceived legitimacy and stability of the system (e.g., Tajfel, 1981; Tajfel & Turner, 1986; Turner & Brown, 1978). Tajfel (1981, p. 156) explicitly considered the social (as well as cognitive) functions of stereotyping, arguing that:

outgroup social stereotypes tend to be created and widely diffused in conditions which require: (i) a search for the understanding of complex, and usually distressful, large-scale social events; (ii) justification of actions, committed or planned, against outgroups; (iii) a positive differentiation of the ingroup from selected outgroups at a time when such differentiation is perceived as becoming insecure and eroded; or when it is *not* positive, and social conditions exist which are perceived as providing a possibility for a change in the situation (p. 156).

Thus, Tajfel described a link between stereotyping and group ideologies, but the justification function he emphasised had to do with using stereotypes to justify discrimination against and resistance to outgroup members. This fits with the overall prominence (beginning with the

minimal group paradigm) accorded to the phenomenon of ingroup bias in social identity theory (see also Jost, 2001). With regard to the situation facing low-status groups, the key question for social identity theorists is how their members seek to overcome “threatened identities” arising from their position in the hierarchy (e.g., Tajfel & Turner, 1986). The theory emphasises identity-related motives to move “from social stability to social change” (Tajfel, 1981) or from “passive acceptance to collective protest” (Wright, Taylor, & Moghaddam, 1990) or from “social reality to social resistance” (Spears, Jetten, & Doosje, 2001) whenever circumstances allow for these possibilities.

Social identity theory’s *forte* is accounting for situations of intergroup conflict in which sides are highly polarised and antagonistic and boundaries between groups are clear and distinctive (e.g., Brown, 2000; Hewstone, 1989; Turner, Hogg, Oakes, Reicher, & Wetherell, 1987). Because the theory locates all social behaviour on a continuum ranging from “interpersonal” to “intergroup” behaviour (e.g., Tajfel, 1981; Tajfel & Turner, 1986), it fails to account adequately for the fact that unequal social systems are maintained because people support them even when a different system would serve their own personal and group interests better (see Jost, 1995). In part, this is because people find it difficult to imagine “cognitive alternatives,” as Tajfel and Turner (1986) propose (but do not explain), and in part it is because of social psychological motives to justify and rationalise the way things are. Thus, Jost and Banaji (1994) argued that a system justification perspective provides a better and more complete account of outgroup favouritism among low-status groups than a social identity perspective does. A system justification perspective also helps to understand why it is such a difficult personal and collective task to overcome social stability, passive acceptance, and the apparent demands of “social reality”.

The belief in a just world

The second major substantive influence came from the field of justice research, and it did not fit very well with social identity theory’s emphasis on group-serving biases in stereotyping, attribution, and social perception (e.g., Hewstone, 1989; Hogg & Abrams, 1988; Tajfel, 1981). Specifically, work on the “tolerance of injustice” among the disadvantaged (e.g., Martin, 1986; Tyler & McGraw, 1986) seemed to contradict the notion that individuals and groups defend their interests and identities. Similarly, the fact that people want to believe in a “just world” in which people “get what they deserve and deserve what they get” (e.g., Lerner, 1980) may be consistent with self-interest for people who are advantaged, but it leads to self-blame and the internalisation of inferiority among the disadvantaged (e.g., Miller & Porter, 1983).

System justification theory follows up on the possibility that people are motivated to believe that outcomes and arrangements are fair, legitimate, and deserved, but it rejects the idea that the “belief in a just world” is a universal need arising (solely or primarily) from the desire to perceive that one has control over one’s environment (Lerner, 1980). We also disagree with the notion that genuine justice (rather than justification) concerns underlie the belief in a just world. Rather, our theory stresses processes of ideological persuasion and social learning that lead people to rationalise the way things are (e.g., Bem & Bem, 1970; Jost & Banaji, 1994; Kluegel & Smith, 1986; Tyler & McGraw, 1986). And, although Lerner and Miller (1978) commented that insufficient attention had been given to individual differences in the tendency to believe in a just world, almost all of the research in this area over the past two decades has focused on the connection between individual differences in just world beliefs and victim-blaming tendencies (e.g., Furnham & Procter, 1989; Rubin & Peplau, 1975). System justification theory reflects the influence of just world theorising, but we consider a much broader set of causes (dispositional, situational, cultural) and consequences (for ideology, justice, and intergroup relations) of the socially validated belief that the *status quo* is legitimate and necessary.

Cognitive dissonance theory

The most prominent social psychological theory of justification and rationalisation processes is cognitive dissonance theory (e.g., Festinger, 1957). Although system justification theory is strongly influenced by dissonance theory (see especially Jost et al., 2003b; Kay et al., 2002), it differs in at least three significant ways. First, dissonance theory is often interpreted as an ego justification theory, in so far as efforts at dissonance reduction are seen as driven by the desire to preserve a positive image of the self following acts of hypocrisy (Aronson, 1992; Greenwald & Ronis, 1978; Steele & Liu, 1983). By contrast, we propose that when people reduce ideological dissonance, they defend the legitimacy of the *system* in order to maintain a positive image of that system, and this may come at the expense of a positive self-image or a positive group image. A second difference is that most dissonance theorists assume that people must feel personally responsible for the aversive consequences of an action in order to justify it (e.g., Cooper & Fazio, 1984; Wicklund & Brehm, 1976), whereas system justification theory suggests that people justify the status quo, even when they have no direct responsibility for it (Kay et al., 2002). A third difference is that dissonance theory stresses cognitive consistency (e.g., Abelson, Aronson, McGuire, Newcomb, Rosenberg, & Tannenbaum, 1968), whereas system justification theory stresses motives to imbue the system with legitimacy and fairness, even if such beliefs actually *create* dissonance, conflict, and ambivalence (Jost & Burgess, 2000).

Marxist-feminist theories of ideology

The marxist-feminist analysis of ideology, especially as it developed throughout the 20th century (e.g., Elster, 1983; Gramsci, 1971; Lukács, 1971; MacKinnon, 1989), emphasises the *cognitive* dimensions of oppression and system preservation. It builds on Marx and Engels' (1846/1978) observation that, "The class which has the means of material production at its disposal, has control at the same time over the means of mental production, so that, thereby, generally speaking, the ideas of those who lack the means of production are subject to it" (p. 172). This insight concerning the function of dominant ideology as an instrument of social control has been enormously influential in sociology and political science, and it has proved useful even in critiques of Communist systems (e.g., Havel, 1991). Jost (1995) argued that the marxian-feminist analysis of "false consciousness" is useful for understanding why the disadvantaged sometimes hold attitudes and beliefs that play some role in their own subjugation, and Jost and Banaji (1994) applied this concept to analyse consensual stereotyping and outgroup favouritism in particular.

Social dominance theory

Social dominance theory (unlike system justification theory) makes the evolutionary assumption that "all social systems will converge toward the establishment of stable, group-based social hierarchies" (Sidanius & Pratto, 1993, p. 177). One of the mechanisms by which human beings are said to maintain unequal relations between groups is the diffusion of "legitimising myths", which are "hierarchy enhancing" rather than "hierarchy attenuating" (Sidanius & Pratto, 1999). Pratto, Sidanius, Stallworth, and Malle (1994) developed an individual difference scale measuring "social dominance orientation" (SDO), and it has been widely used to predict hierarchy-enhancing attitudes, behaviours, and even career choices (e.g., Altemeyer, 1998; Sidanius & Pratto, 1999). Thus, the SDO scale, like the belief in a just world, provides a reasonably good measure of individual differences in system-justifying tendencies (Jost & Burgess, 2000).

However, Jost and Thompson (2000) argued that conceptual and operational definitions of social dominance orientation have generally confounded two concepts that system justification theorists are at pains to distinguish, namely the desire for ingroup superiority (group justification) and the desire to preserve existing hierarchical arrangements (system justification). In several studies, they found that a (correlated) two-factor solution of the SDO scale fitted the data better than a one-factor solution. Scale items are listed in Table 1, along with loadings from two studies on the

TABLE 1
Factor loadings from the standardised solution of a confirmatory analysis of the correlated two-factor model of the social dominance orientation (SDO) scale

<i>SDO Item</i>	<i>Study 1</i>		<i>Study 2</i>	
	<i>GBD</i>	<i>OEQ</i>	<i>GBD</i>	<i>OEQ</i>
11. It's probably a good thing that certain groups are at the top and other groups are at the bottom. (GBD)	.78	—	.77	—
13. Inferior groups should stay in their place. (GBD)	.72	—	.80	—
6. Superior groups should dominate inferior groups. (GBD)	.70	—	.71	—
16. Sometimes other groups must be kept in their place. (GBD)	.67	—	.74	—
8. To get ahead in life, it is sometimes necessary to step on other groups. (GBD)	.63	—	.67	—
9. If certain groups of people stayed in their place, we would have fewer problems. (GBD)	.63	—	.74	—
1. Some groups of people are just more worthy than others. (GBD)	.48	—	.61	—
3. In getting what your group wants, it is sometimes necessary to use force against other groups. (GBD)	.46	—	.49	—
4. Group equality should be our ideal. (OEQ)	—	.79	—	.78
7. We should do what we can to equalise conditions for different groups. (OEQ)	—	.75	—	.80
10. Increased social equality would be a good thing. (OEQ)	—	.72	—	.87
2. It would be good if all groups could be equal. (OEQ)	—	.72	—	.67
12. We would have fewer problems if we treated different groups more equally. (OEQ)	—	.66	—	.82
5. All groups should be given an equal chance in life. (OEQ)	—	.62	—	.73
15. No one group should dominate in society. (OEQ)	—	.51	—	.60
14. We should strive to make incomes more equal. (OEQ)	—	.42	—	.50

Data are adapted from Jost and Thompson (2000, Studies 1 and 2), aggregating across European and African Americans. "GBD" indicates group-based dominance items; "OEQ" indicates opposition to equality items (reverse-scored).

factors of "group-based dominance" (GBD; similar to group justification) and "opposition to equality" (OEQ; a type of system justification). Jost and Thompson found that GBD was positively related to ingroup favouritism for European Americans and African Americans alike. By contrast, OEQ was related positively to self-esteem and ingroup favouritism for European Americans, but it was related negatively to ingroup favouritism and self-esteem for African Americans. As discussed below, these findings are consistent with a system justification analysis of conflicts among ego, group, and system justification motives.

HYPOTHESES DERIVED FROM SYSTEM JUSTIFICATION THEORY

A system justification view integrates and builds on various ideas from social identity theory, just world research, dissonance theory, marxism-feminism, and social dominance theory. At the most basic level, we postulate the existence of a *system justification* motive, whereby people justify and rationalise the way things are, so that existing social arrangements are perceived as fair and legitimate, perhaps even natural and inevitable. Most of our theoretical and empirical efforts have been focused on this motive, because it has been neglected relative to two other motives long appreciated by social psychologists—*ego justification* and *group justification*. The hypotheses and findings we review in this chapter address the rationalisation of the status quo, the internalisation of inequality (including outgroup favouritism and depressed entitlement), relations among ego, group, and system justification, and the reduction of ideological dissonance.

Rationalisation of the status quo

System justification theory makes several predictions concerning the rationalisation of the status quo in general. These concern the tendency for people to elevate the desirability of anticipated events as their likelihood increases (Kay et al., 2002; McGuire & McGuire, 1991), the tendency for people to use stereotypes to justify status differences between groups (Hoffman & Hurst, 1990; Jost, 2001; Jost & Banaji, 1994)—especially when the system is under threat (Jost, Overbeck, Guermendi, Rubini, Mosso, & Kivetz, 2003a)—and tendencies for members of disadvantaged groups to accept and even legitimise their own powerlessness (Haines & Jost, 2000; Jost, 2001). In so far as people are motivated to imbue the status quo with legitimacy, stability, and rationality, they should exhibit system justification tendencies with respect to judgements of desirability, affect, stereotyping, and memory. Specific hypotheses may be summarised as follows:

- (H1) People will rationalise the status quo by judging likely events to be more desirable than unlikely events, (a) even in the absence of personal responsibility, (b) whether those events are initially defined as attractive or unattractive, and (c) especially when motivational involvement is high rather than low.
- (H2) People will use stereotypes to rationalise social and economic status differences between groups, so that the *same* target group will be stereotyped differently depending on whether it is perceived to be high or low in status.
- (H3) People will defend and justify the social system in response to threat by using stereotypes to differentiate between high- and low-status groups to a greater degree.
- (H4) Providing explanations (or pseudo-explanations) for status or power differences between groups will (a) increase the use of stereotypes to rationalise

differences, and (b) lead members of disadvantaged groups to express more positive (relative to negative) affect.

(H5) Over time, members of disadvantaged groups will misremember explanations for their powerlessness as being more legitimate than they actually were.

Internalisation of inequality

For members of advantaged groups, rationalising the status quo also means rationalising their own position of advantage, which is consistent with the expression of ingroup favouritism. For members of disadvantaged groups, however, one of the (unintended) consequences of rationalising the status quo is the internalisation of inequality. That is, to the extent that one subscribes to the legitimacy of the system and its outcomes, one accepts blame or responsibility for being in a state of disadvantage (e.g., Jost & Banaji, 1994; Lane, 1962; Miller & Porter, 1983).¹ We focus on two examples of the internalisation of inequality: ingroup vs outgroup favouritism and depressed entitlement.

Ingroup vs outgroup favouritism. From the standpoint of system justification theory, outgroup favouritism on the part of low-status group members (like ingroup favouritism on the part of high-status group members) both reflects and contributes to ideological support for the system (Jost & Banaji, 1994). In this sense, it expresses a genuine, internalised sense of inferiority, akin to false consciousness (Jost, 2001; Jost et al., 2002). Departing from at least some interpretations of social identity theory, we argue that outgroup favouritism is neither the result of demand characteristics (Mullen, Brown, & Smith, 1992) nor an insincere, self-presentational display of deference (e.g., Spears et al., 2001). By linking outgroup favouritism to ideological factors (and responses to ideological threats), a system justification perspective also suggests that outgroup favouritism is not merely the result of “halo effects” or consistency biases.

¹ Hofstede (1997) has described an analogous tendency associated with “power distance”, which he defines as “the extent to which the less powerful members of institutions and organizations within a country expect and accept that power is distributed unequally” (p. 28). The thrust of Hofstede’s analysis is on cross-cultural differences with respect to power distance (which, like the belief in a just world and opposition to equality [a subscale of social dominance orientation], we see as a kindred concept to system justification). Although cross-cultural differences are beyond the scope of this chapter, it is worth noting that in Hofstede’s (1997, p. 42) research countries in which Romance languages are spoken (Spain, Portugal, Italy, and France) scored higher on power distance in general than did countries in which Germanic languages are spoken (Germany, England, Holland, Scandinavia). Future research would do well to reconcile these findings with observations made by others (e.g., Tiraboschi & Maass, 1998, p. 408) that Catholic countries (such as Italy) are generally more egalitarian than Protestant countries (such as Germany and the US).

Hypotheses concerning ingroup–outgroup favouritism may be stated as follows:

(H6) Members of low-status groups will exhibit outgroup favouritism even on (a) open-ended, non-reactive, qualitative measures, and (b) implicit, nonconscious cognitive, affective, and behavioural measures.

(H7) As the perceived legitimacy of the system increases, (a) members of high-status groups will exhibit increased ingroup favouritism, and (b) members of low status groups will exhibit increased outgroup favouritism.

(H8) As system justification tendencies increase, (a) members of high-status groups will exhibit increased ingroup favouritism, and (b) members of low-status groups will exhibit increased outgroup favouritism.

Depressed entitlement. Numerous studies conducted over several decades have found that women believe that they deserve less money for their work than men do (e.g., Callahan-Levy & Messé, 1979; Major, 1994; Major, McFarlin, & Gagnon, 1984). From a system justification perspective, this is another (largely implicit) example of the internalisation of inferiority (Jost, 1997). Several additional hypotheses concerning depressed entitlement may be derived from system justification theory (see Blanton et al., 2001; Pelham & Hetts, 2001):

(H9) Members of disadvantaged groups (not just women) will exhibit a depressed sense of entitlement relative to members of advantaged groups, even in explicitly egalitarian environments.

(H10) Members of disadvantaged groups will be more likely to exhibit depressed entitlement (relative to members of advantaged groups) for past work that has already been completed than for future work that has not yet been completed.

Relations among ego, group, and system justification motives

We use the term *ego justification* to refer to the tendency to develop and maintain a favourable self-image and to feel valid, justified, and legitimate as an individual actor (see Jost & Banaji, 1994). *Group justification*, which is the primary (but not sole) focus of social identity theory, captures the desire to develop and maintain favourable images of one's own group and to defend and justify the actions of fellow ingroup members. According to system justification theory, motives for ego, group, and system justification are consistent and complementary for members of high-status or advantaged groups. That is, believing that the social system is structured fairly to reward the worthy and punish the unworthy is also perfectly consistent with motives to feel and assert that one is a good and worthwhile person and that one's social group is valued and respected.

For members of low-status or disadvantaged groups, by contrast, ego, group, and system justification motives are often in conflict with one

another. In this case, the tendency to accept the fairness and legitimacy of the social system is at odds with motives for the enhancement of individual or collective self-esteem. What this means is that the situation faced by members of disadvantaged groups is rife with the potential for conflicts or crises among the self, the group, and the system (see Jost, Burgess, & Mosso, 2001). It also means that the disadvantaged are most likely to engage in system justification when competing motives for ego justification or group justification are low in salience or strength. From these basic theoretical assumptions concerning the existence of a system justification motive and relations among ego, group, and system justification motives, a number of additional hypotheses may be derived concerning attitudinal ambivalence (e.g., Glick & Fiske, 2001; Jost & Burgess, 2000), self-esteem, and well-being (Jost & Thompson, 2000):

- (H11) Members of low-status groups will exhibit greater ambivalence towards their own group than will members of high-status groups.
- (H12) Members of low-status groups will exhibit increased ambivalence towards their own group as system justification is increased.
- (H13) Members of high-status groups will exhibit decreased ambivalence towards their own group as system justification is increased.
- (H14) System justification will be associated with (a) increased self-esteem for members of advantaged groups, and (b) decreased self-esteem for members of disadvantaged groups.
- (H15) System justification will be associated with (a) decreased depression for members of advantaged groups, and (b) increased depression for members of disadvantaged groups.
- (H16) System justification will be associated with (a) decreased neuroticism for members of advantaged groups, and (b) increased neuroticism for members of disadvantaged groups.

The reduction of ideological dissonance

By drawing on the logic of dissonance theory, it may be argued that members of disadvantaged groups should have the *strongest* system justification needs, at least under certain circumstances (Elster, 1983; Jost et al., 2003b; Lane, 1962). Just as suffering paradoxically increases commitment to the sources of one's suffering through dissonance-reduction mechanisms (e.g., Wicklund & Brehm, 1976), members of disadvantaged groups may exhibit *enhanced* levels of system justification relative to members of advantaged groups (Jost et al., 2003b), especially as objective circumstances *worsen* (Glick & Fiske, 2001). Thus, a theoretical hybrid of cognitive dissonance and system justification perspectives leads to the following counter-intuitive predictions:

- (H17) When individual and group needs and interests are low in salience or strength, members of disadvantaged groups will provide *stronger* support for the

social system and its authorities than will members of advantaged groups, in so far as the former will have a stronger need than the latter to reduce ideological dissonance through system justification.

(H18) System justification levels will be *higher* in societies in which social and economic inequality is more extreme rather than less extreme.

EMPIRICAL STUDIES OF SYSTEM JUSTIFICATION HYPOTHESES

In this section, we review and integrate empirical studies addressing the 18 hypotheses derived above from the basic tenets of system justification theory. Most of these studies have been published elsewhere in a variety of sources (e.g., Blanton et al., 2001; Glick & Fiske, 2001; Haines & Jost, 2000; Jost, 1997, 2001; Jost & Burgess, 2000; Jost et al., 2002, 2003b; Jost & Thompson, 2000; Kay et al., 2002; Pelham & Hetts, 2001). Space limitations obviously prohibit a comprehensive review of methods and findings from all of these studies; rather, we cover the highlights in so far as they relate to the hypotheses of interest.

Rationalisation of the status quo

Coming to terms with the inevitable. According to system justification theory, the human capacity for *rationalisation* lends considerable stability and support to the social system. That is, people's remarkable ability to accommodate formerly unwelcome outcomes may help to explain why social and political systems are successful at retaining cooperation and consent and why social change is so difficult to accomplish (e.g., Elster, 1983; Jost, 1995; Lane, 1962). McGuire and McGuire (1991) argued for the existence of both "sour grapes" and "sweet lemon" types of rationalisations, such that people derogate anticipated events as their likelihood decreases and enhance the subjective value of anticipated events as their likelihood increases. Dissonance researchers have also studied rationalisation processes, but they have largely confined their studies to cases in which (a) people are *personally responsible* for the outcomes they justify, and (b) the rationalisation occurs *post hoc*, that is, only after a choice or behaviour has occurred.

Kay et al. (2002) hypothesised that people would engage in a rationalisation of the existing state of affairs, whether or not they were personally responsible for bringing it about and whether they stood to gain or lose. They argued that the legitimization needs of the system would be best served by people anticipating likely outcomes and rationalising them in advance (H1). Kay et al. (2002) investigated the anticipatory rationalisation of the status quo in two studies, one of which addressed

reactions to the US Presidential Election of 2000 between George W. Bush and Al Gore.

In the week immediately prior to the election, we administered a survey to 288 adult respondents in which we (a) manipulated the perceived likelihood that one (or the other) candidate would win, and (b) measured the subjective desirability of each possible outcome. Data were analysed according to a Partisanship (three levels: Republicans, Democrats, and non-partisans) by Outcome Likelihood (five levels ranging from strong likelihood of a Gore victory to strong likelihood of a Bush victory) between-subjects factorial design. Not too surprisingly, Republicans preferred Bush, and Democrats preferred Gore in general. But in both cases effects of partisanship were qualified by higher-order interactions with outcome likelihood. Republican and Democratic respondents rated both candidates to be significantly more desirable as the perceived likelihood of their winning the election increased, as indicated by linear contrast tests (see Figure 1). Non-partisans failed to show any significant rationalisation tendencies, presumably because they were not sufficiently motivationally invested in the outcome of a Bush–Gore election. These results were replicated in a follow-up experiment in which college students were found to rationalise large tuition increases (an unattractive outcome) and decreases (an attractive outcome) as they were seen as more likely to occur, providing further support for the existence of “sour grapes” and “sweet lemons” forms of rationalisation (see Kay et al., 2002).

Stereotyping as rationalisation. Groundbreaking experimental research by Eagly and Steffen (1984) and Hoffman and Hurst (1990) suggested that people use stereotypes as a way of rationalising the unequal distribution of social roles. System justification theory builds on the theme that stereotypes arise (in part) to justify social and economic differences between groups (Jost & Banaji, 1994), proposing that the *same* target group (whether it is an ingroup or an outgroup) will be stereotyped differently depending on whether it is perceived to be high or low in status (H2). Jost (2001) described an experimental paradigm in which perceived socioeconomic success could be manipulated experimentally in the context of real-world group memberships (see sample materials in Table 2). A study by Jost and Burgess (2000, Study 1) made use of this paradigm, leading students at the University of Maryland to believe that alumni from their school were either more or less socioeconomically successful than were alumni from a rival school, the University of Virginia. This simple procedure has been successful (in several studies using a variety of groups) at leading members of “real” groups to explain and justify either the “success” or “failure” of their own group relative to a salient outgroup by showing ingroup favouritism or outgroup

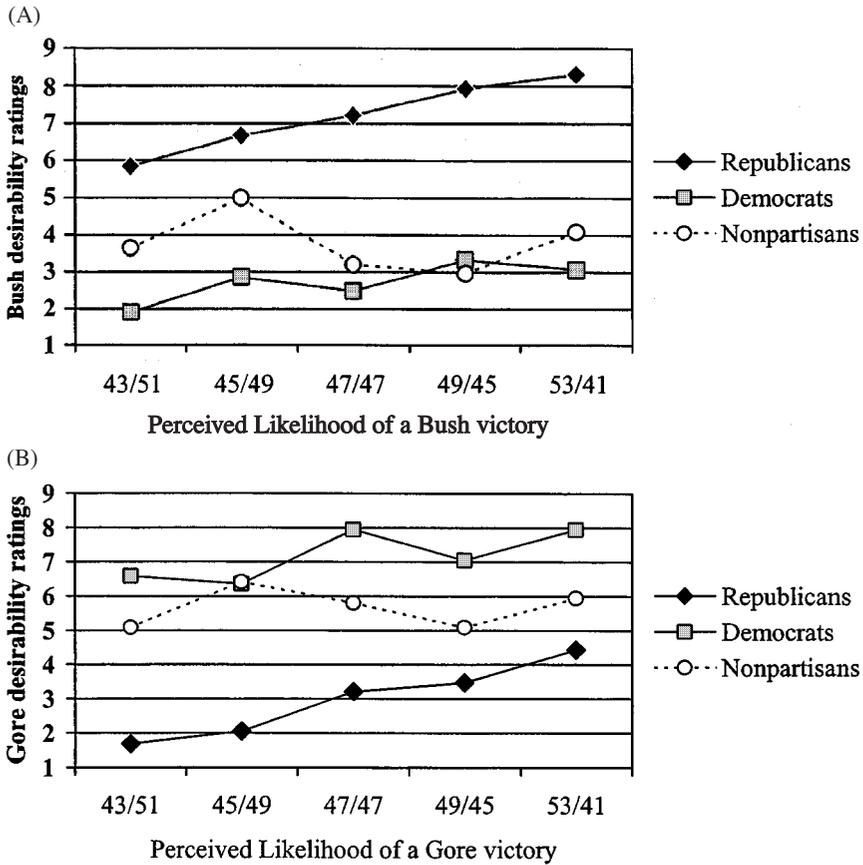


Figure 1. (A) Desirability ratings of a Bush Presidency. (B) Desirability ratings of a Gore Presidency. Adapted from Kay et al. (2002, Study 1). For ratings of both Bush and Gore, higher numbers indicate greater judged desirability. On the X-axis, values range from least to most likely that Bush (A) or Gore (B) would be elected. Linear contrast tests indicated that Democrats and Republicans rated both presidencies (preferred and non-preferred) to be more desirable as their likelihood increased ($p \leq .07$ in all cases), whereas nonpartisans did not.

favouritism, respectively, on achievement-related traits. Importantly, neutral observers show similar patterns of stereotyping: the high-status target group is generally stereotyped as intelligent, hard-working, and competent, whereas the low-status target group is stereotyped as friendly, honest, and likeable (see Jost, 2001). We interpret this evidence as indicating that one function of stereotyping is to explain, justify, and rationalise unequal social outcomes (see also Conway, Pizzamiglio, & Mount, 1996; Glick & Fiske, 2001; Jackman & Senter, 1983; Jost & Banaji, 1994; Ridgeway, 2001).

TABLE 2
 Sample materials for manipulating perceived socioeconomic status in experimental studies involving real-world groups

	<i>Virginia alumni</i>	<i>Maryland alumni</i>
<i>Financial income</i>		
Mean financial income after 5 years	\$38,500	\$24,700
Mean financial income after 10 years	\$53,200	\$39,500
Mean financial income after 20 years	\$69,700	\$54,100
Mean financial income at retirement	\$78,300	\$62,500
<i>Career Advancement</i>		
Mean number of promotions after 5 years	2.4	1.3
Mean number of promotions after 10 years	5.3	3.0
Mean number of promotions after 20 years	9.5	6.2
Number of Chief Executive Officers (CEOs) of major corporations	41	17
<i>Postgraduate education</i>		
Mean years of postgraduate education	1.3	0.4
Percent of applicants admitted to medical school	44%	21%
Percent of applicants admitted to law school	43%	19%
Percent of applicants admitted to business school	57%	30%
Percent of applicants admitted to graduate school	60%	41%
Percent receiving post-baccalaureate degrees (overall)	49%	23%

These materials were used in studies reported by Jost and Burgess (2000) and Jost (2001).

Increased stereotypic rationalisation in response to system threat. Jost et al. (2003a) argued that people would be especially likely to use stereotypes to bolster support for the status quo following an ideological attack on the system. More specifically, we predicted that people would show increased stereotypic differentiation in response to a system-level threat (H3). For members of high-status groups, this is equivalent to scapegoating members of lower-status groups under conditions of system threat, as authoritarianism theory would predict (e.g., Adorno, Frenkel-Brunswik, Levinson, & Sanford, 1950; Altemeyer, 1998). A novel prediction that arises from system justification theory is that members of low-status groups would engage in *self-scapegoating* in order to provide ideological support (through the rationalisation of inequality) for the system at a time when it appears to be vulnerable.

This possibility was investigated in a study conducted in Israel concerning differences between Ashkenazi Jews of European descent, who are relatively high in social and economic status, and Sephardic Jews of Middle Eastern

and African descent, who occupy a much lower-status position both socially and economically (Jost et al., 2003a). Survey respondents were sampled from public trains in the Tel Aviv area and asked about their beliefs concerning the characteristics of Ashkenazim and Sephardim. Just prior to reporting these beliefs, respondents were exposed to either a “high system threat” message or a “low system threat” message.² Mean levels of ingroup and outgroup favouritism (aggregated across the traits of intelligent, ambitious, responsible, hard-working, calm, open-minded, and valuing education) are presented in Figure 2 as a function of group membership and system threat. Under conditions of low threat, both groups exhibited mild ingroup favouritism, claiming that their own group was slightly better in terms of these (largely achievement-related) characteristics. But under conditions of *high* threat, Ashkenazi respondents displayed greater ingroup favouritism, whereas Sephardic respondents displayed *outgroup* favouritism. Much as ego-related and group-related threats have been demonstrated to increase ingroup favouritism in prior research (Branscombe & Wann, 1994; Fein & Spencer, 1997; Grant & Brown, 1995; Oakes & Turner, 1980), we have found that a system-related threat increases consensual stereotypic differentiation between high- and low-status target groups.

Placating the powerless. Haines and Jost (2000) argued that in so far as people are generally motivated to rationalise the status quo, they would accept and bolster even relatively placebic explanations for power differences between groups. Specifically, we hypothesised that exposing members of powerless groups to explanations for their powerlessness would increase the use of stereotypes to rationalise differences (H4a) and lead members of disadvantaged groups to express more positive (relative to negative) affect (H4b). We also considered the possibility that they would imbue those explanations with increased legitimacy over time (H5). These predictions were assessed in an experimental study involving students from Hunter College (in New York City) who believed (in some conditions) that students from a nearby college (Brooklyn College) held power over them. Specifically, in the power difference conditions they were told that Brooklyn

² The high system threat message included the following passage: “These days, many people in Israel feel disappointed with the nation’s condition. Many citizens feel that the country has reached a low point in terms of social, economic, and political factors. People do not feel as safe and secure as they used to, and there is a sense of uncertainty regarding the country’s future.” By contrast, the low system threat message included the following: “These days, despite the difficulties the nation is facing, many people in Israel feel safer and more secure relative to the past. Many citizens feel that the country is relatively stable in terms of social, economic, and security factors. There is a sense of optimism regarding Israel’s future and an understanding that this is the only place where Israeli people can feel secure.”

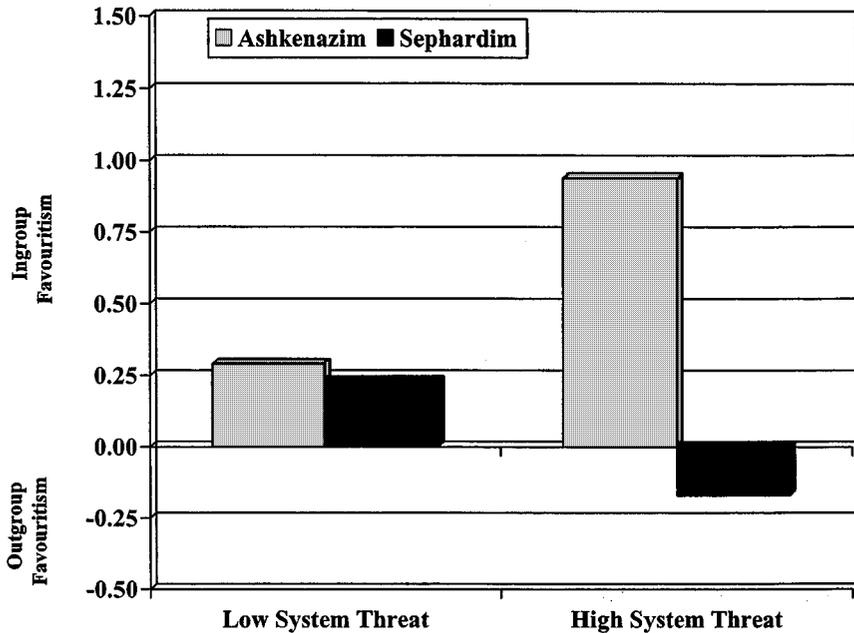


Figure 2. Stereotypical ingroup and outgroup favouritism as a function of group membership and system threat. Adapted from Jost et al. (2003a, Study 5), aggregating across the following traits: intelligence, ambition, responsibility, industriousness, calmness, open-mindedness, and valuing of education. Positive scores indicate ingroup favouritism and negative scores indicate outgroup favouritism. The interaction between group membership and system threat was significant, $p < .05$.

College students would (a) evaluate their abilities at a task that required distinguishing authentic suicide notes from fakes, and (b) decide when they could leave the experiment. In other words, Hunter College students were outcome-dependent relative to Brooklyn College students (e.g., Goodwin, Operario, & Fiske, 1998).

In this context, we investigated the effects of legitimate and illegitimate explanations for power on measures of affect, stereotyping, and memory. Based on pre-testing, we found that expertise, experience, and ability were perceived as the most legitimate reasons why one group would have power over another group (e.g., French & Raven, 1959). Therefore, these reasons were given as the bases of power mentioned in the “legitimate explanation” condition. Raters indicated that being friends with people in power as a way of acquiring power was the most *illegitimate* basis for having power over another group, and so this reason was used in the “illegitimate explanation”

condition.³ A “no explanation” condition was also included in which participants were told nothing about the reasons for the power differences.

Haines and Jost (2000) calculated the ratio of positive to negative affect expressed by students after learning about the power differences (or not) and, if there were power differences, after hearing a legitimate explanation, or an illegitimate explanation, or no explanation at all. Results indicated that there were no statistically reliable differences between the “legitimate explanation” condition and the “illegitimate explanation” condition on the ratio of positive to negative affect. When these two conditions were combined, they were successful in producing a significant improvement in affect over the “no explanation” condition. In other words, people felt better after hearing an explanation, and it did not matter whether it was a legitimate explanation or an illegitimate explanation, supporting (H4b).⁴

We also found that Hunter College students rated the outgroup of Brooklyn College students as significantly more intelligent and more responsible in general when that group had power over them than when they did not (see Table 3), providing additional support for (H2). As Pepitone (1950) argued long ago, people are motivated to think that those who have power over them are qualified, deserving, and benign. The stereotyping data mirrored the affect data: Providing an explanation (whether legitimate or illegitimate) significantly increased the degree to which the outgroup was perceived as intelligent, responsible, and having a “right to judge” them. These data, which are summarised in Table 3, support hypothesis (H4a) that people are more likely to apply stereotypes that justify the use of power when they are provided with an explanation for the power differences than when they are not.

At the conclusion of the experiment, participants were asked to recall the reason that was given just one hour earlier for the power differences between Brooklyn College and Hunter College. Four possible responses were given in a multiple-choice format: (a) “Because they are upper division Psychology students and work in a suicide prevention unit”, (b) “Because the principal investigator graduated from Brooklyn College and knows people from

³ In the legitimate explanation condition, participants were told that the Brooklyn College students were “upper division Psychology students who worked in a suicide prevention unit”, and in the illegitimate explanation condition, they were told that the outgroup was given power because “the principal investigator had graduated from the school and had friends there”.

⁴ Readers may wonder how we square this finding that people did not differentiate between legitimate and illegitimate explanations with the hypothesis (H7) that the degree of perceived legitimacy should affect patterns of intergroup relations. These two ideas may be reconciled by drawing on the concept of attributional ambiguity (see Major & Schmader, 2001, p. 191). It follows from a system justification perspective that under conditions of ambiguity people will tend to exaggerate the legitimacy of the status quo, in the manner suggested by hypotheses (H4) and (H5). When circumstances are unambiguously perceived as illegitimate, however, they should lead to a qualitatively different pattern of responding, as suggested in (H7).

TABLE 3
Effects of power differences and explanation on stereotypical beliefs about the outgroup

	Power differences		
	No power differences (n = 46)	No explanation (n = 48)	Explanation ^a (n = 97)
Intelligent	5.87 (1.09)	5.94 (1.02)	6.37 (1.20)
Responsible	5.76 (1.52)	5.88 (1.42)	6.70 (1.40)
“Right to judge”	4.80 (2.47)	3.75 (2.23)	4.85 (2.36)

Data are adapted from Haines and Jost (2000). Higher means indicate that the outgroup was rated to be more intelligent, more responsible, and as having more of a “right to judge.” (Standard deviations are listed in parentheses.) The “No Power” condition differed from the conditions in which power differences existed (multivariate $F [1, 187] = 3.39, p < .02$); the presence of a power differential between the two groups led participants to rate the more powerful outgroup to be significantly more intelligent ($p < .06$) and more responsible ($p < .01$) but not as having more of a right to judge their work (*n.s.*). The “No Explanation” condition differed from the conditions in which an explanation was given for the power differences (multivariate $F [1, 141] = 4.79, p < .005$); providing an explanation (whether legitimate or illegitimate) significantly increased the favourability of the outgroup stereotype for all three ratings ($p < .05$).

^aMeans for the “Explanation” condition are collapsed across “Legitimate” and “Illegitimate” explanation conditions, which did not differ from one another.

Brooklyn College”, (c) “We weren’t told”, and (d) “I don’t remember”. The percentage of research participants within each condition selecting each of the first three responses is presented in Figure 3. Consistent with (H5), people misremembered the reasons for the power differences as being *more legitimate* than they actually were. In the “no explanation” condition, for instance, people mistakenly chose the legitimate explanation 33.3% of the time, and none of them chose the illegitimate explanation. In the “illegitimate explanation” condition, people falsely chose the *legitimate* explanation 30.2% of the time. This evidence suggests that people are relatively willing to give others—especially authority figures—the “benefit of the doubt” with regard to legitimacy, and even to actively imbue the proceedings with increased legitimacy (Haines & Jost, 2000).

Internalisation of inequality

Outgroup favouritism on open-ended, non-reactive measures. One potential objection to interpreting outgroup favouritism as indicative of system justification (e.g. Jost, 2001; Jost & Banaji, 1994; Jost & Burgess, 2000) is that such evidence may reflect demand characteristics or impression

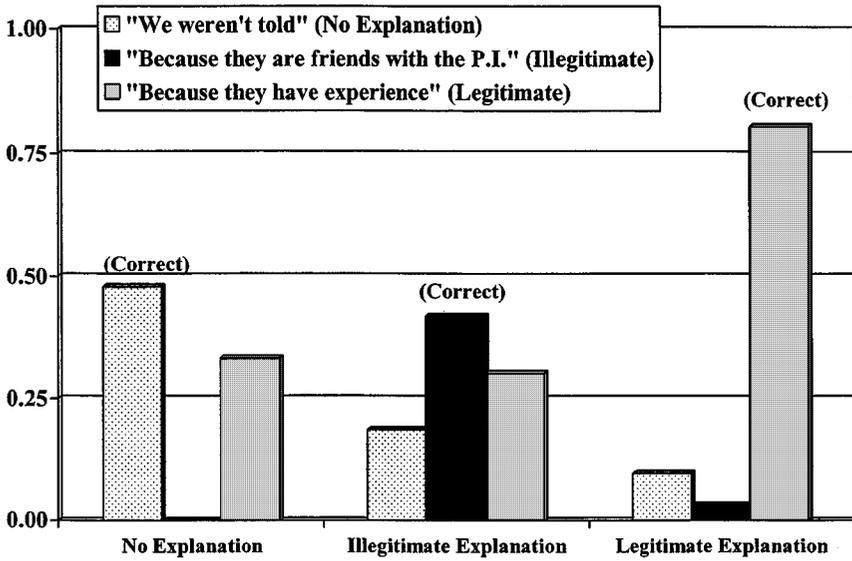


Figure 3. Memory for initial reasons given for the power differences between groups. Adapted from Haines and Jost (2000), omitting “Don’t remember” responses. Values indicate percentage of participants (within each condition) choosing each reason for the power differences between groups. Correct responses for each condition are indicated above the appropriate bar. The results of a chi-square test of independence indicated that people consistently misremembered explanations as being more legitimate than they actually were ($\chi^2 = 32.45, p < .0001, df = 2, n = 107$).

management rather than genuine internalisation on the part of low-status group members (e.g., Mullen et al., 1992; Scott, 1990; Spears et al., 2001). One way of addressing this issue is to utilise open-ended, non-reactive, qualitative measures of ingroup and outgroup favouritism, as suggested by hypothesis (H6a).

In a study reported by Jost (2001) in which perceived socioeconomic success was manipulated with the use of experimental materials illustrated in Table 2, Yale University students were asked to explain why members of their ingroup were either more or less successful than alumni from Stanford University. Two independent judges coded and content analysed the open-ended responses according to whether they focused on the ingroup (Yale) or the outgroup (Stanford) and whether they were favourable or unfavourable (or neutral) about that group. When Yale students were assigned to the high socioeconomic success condition, explanations making reference to characteristics of the ingroup tended to be very favourable (e.g., “Yale admits students with better records who are innately more driven”). When they generated explanations pertaining to the outgroup, these tended to be unfavourable (e.g., “Because Stanford is a sport scholarship-granting

school, they are going to get athletes that are not as intelligent as the students who get in regularly”). Results are illustrated in Figure 4.

When Yale students were assigned to a position of low socioeconomic success, however, the results were very different. Under these conditions, explanations involving the ingroup were generally unfavourable in nature (e.g., “Yale students are too idealistic, and usually have impractical or false imaginations about real world life”), and explanations involving the outgroup were favourable (e.g., “Stanford is a more selective school, so it has smarter people”). Thus, members of low-status groups displayed strong outgroup favouritism in offering their own (unconstrained) attributions for the socioeconomic success differences (see Jost, 2001), suggesting that these rationalising opinions were sincerely generated.

Outgroup favouritism on implicit, non-conscious measures. Three studies conducted by Jost et al. (2002) directly examined the internalisation of status inequality as a non-conscious form of system justification (H6b). The first study made use of the “Implicit Association Test” (IAT) developed by

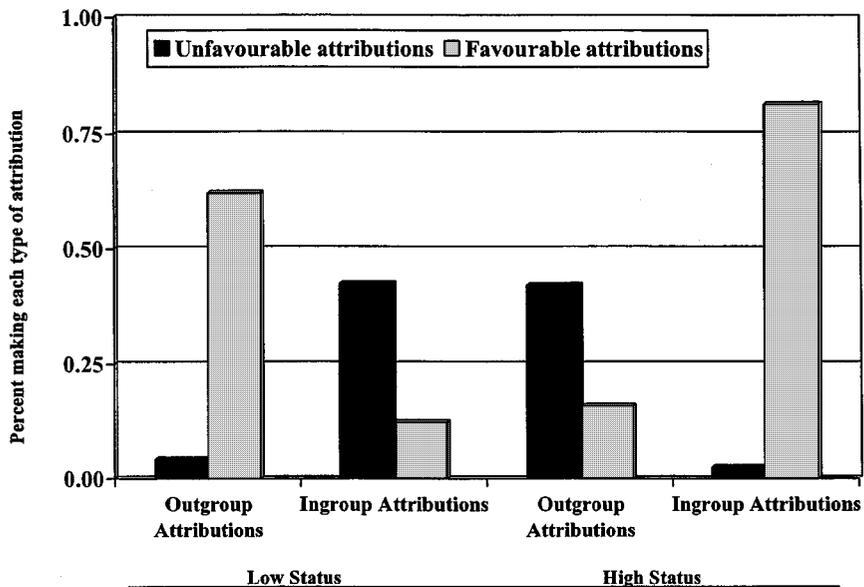


Figure 4. Percentage of favourable and unfavourable attributions generated about the ingroup and the outgroup as a function of relative ingroup status. Adapted from data reported by Jost (2001). Values indicate percentage of participants (within each condition) generating favourable and unfavourable attributions about the ingroup (Yale students) and the outgroup (Stanford students) as a function of low or high perceived socioeconomic success of the ingroup (relative to the outgroup).

Greenwald, McGhee, and Schwartz (1998). Investigating a pre-existing status difference between (high-status) Stanford University students and (lower-status) San Jose State University students, we found that both groups were faster to associate Stanford-related stimuli with academic stereotypes (such as “successful”, “intelligent”, “ambitious”) and to associate San Jose-related stimuli with extracurricular stereotypes (such as “friendly”, “fashionable”, and “fun-loving”). For an affective measure of implicit ingroup vs outgroup favouritism, ingroup and outgroup stimuli were paired with either pleasant words (such as “glory”, “warmth”, and “gold”) or unpleasant words (such as “poison”, “filth”, and “agony”). We found that Stanford students exhibited significant levels of ingroup favouritism, but San Jose students did not. In fact, 36% of the San Jose students had overall reaction times that reflected automatic, non-conscious preferences for the higher-status Stanford outgroup (compared with only 16% of Stanford students who showed outgroup favouritism on this measure).

In addition, we found that implicit favouritism towards Stanford on the affective measure was positively correlated with an IAT measure of implicit self-esteem for Stanford students, but it was negatively correlated with implicit self-esteem for San Jose students (see Table 4), providing at least some evidence of the internalisation of inferiority at the level of non-conscious self-evaluation and group-evaluation (see also Nosek et al., 2002). For the lower-status group of San Jose students, internalisation of implicit stereotypes also predicted outgroup favouritism on the affective measure. For Stanford students, by contrast, there was a positive (non-significant) correlation between implicit stereotyping and ingroup favouritism (see Table 4).

TABLE 4
Correlations between implicit ingroup favouritism (affective measure) and implicit self-esteem/implicit stereotyping as a function of group status

	<i>Correlation with implicit ingroup favouritism</i>	
	<i>Implicit self-esteem</i>	<i>Implicit stereotyping</i>
High status (Stanford University)	0.37* ($n = 38$)	0.20 ($n = 38$)
Low status (San Jose State University)	0.16 ($n = 39$)	-0.50** ($n = 39$)

Data are adapted from Jost et al. (2002, Study 1). Values are bivariate correlation coefficients (Pearson r s). Results indicate that Stanford students who had higher implicit self-esteem and held stronger implicit stereotypes exhibited increased implicit ingroup favouritism on the affective measure. San Jose students who had lower implicit self-esteem and held stronger implicit stereotypes exhibited increased implicit outgroup favouritism.

* $p < .05$, ** $p < .005$

In a second study, Jost et al. (2002) sought to determine whether members of disadvantaged groups would exhibit outgroup favouritism on an indirect behavioural measure, contrary to theories of similarity, homophily, and social identification. American-born UCLA students of either Latino, Asian, or European descent were given the opportunity to choose an interaction partner for a “getting acquainted study” by pairing themselves up with strangers whose last names indicated that they were members of different ethnic groups. Each student received a photocopy of a sign-up sheet that had ostensibly been filled out by 24 other students. The sign-up sheet contained the first initials and surnames (in different handwriting styles) of 24 fictitious students. We manipulated the apparent ethnicity of the bogus interaction partners by using eight common surnames from each of three ethnic groups. Students were asked to choose three different time slots (presumably on the basis of scheduling considerations) and rank their chosen time slots from most preferred to least preferred.

In support of (H6b), members of low-status groups (Latinos and Asian Americans) preferred to interact with members of a higher-status outgroup (Whites) rather than with fellow ingroup members. As illustrated in Figure 5, Latinos and Asians chose to interact with ingroup members only 20–23% of the time, which was significantly below the 33% standard that one would expect on the basis of chance. In addition, members of all three groups revealed preferences for interacting with White interaction partners at least 40% of the time.⁵ A third study demonstrated that parents exhibit implicit gender biases in favour of males in the naming of their children and the advertisement of their births, providing further support for the hypothesis (H6) that inequality is internalized and does not merely reflect demand characteristics or impression management (Jost et al., 2002).

Effects of perceived legitimacy on ingroup and outgroup favouritism. System justification theory suggests an interaction hypothesis (H7), such that perceived legitimacy should increase ingroup favouritism on the part of high-status group members and outgroup favouritism on the part of

⁵ An alternative explanation for these findings is that Latino and Asian American students may have had more familiarity with European Americans than with members of their own group and therefore would have preferred to interact with them in our “getting acquainted” study. However, the familiarity interpretation does not account for all of our data. It seems that Latinos and Asian Americans (but not European Americans) showed a preference for *not* interacting with members of their own group (see Figure 5). They did not avoid members of the other minority group, although these minority groups would have been relatively unfamiliar, compared with Whites.

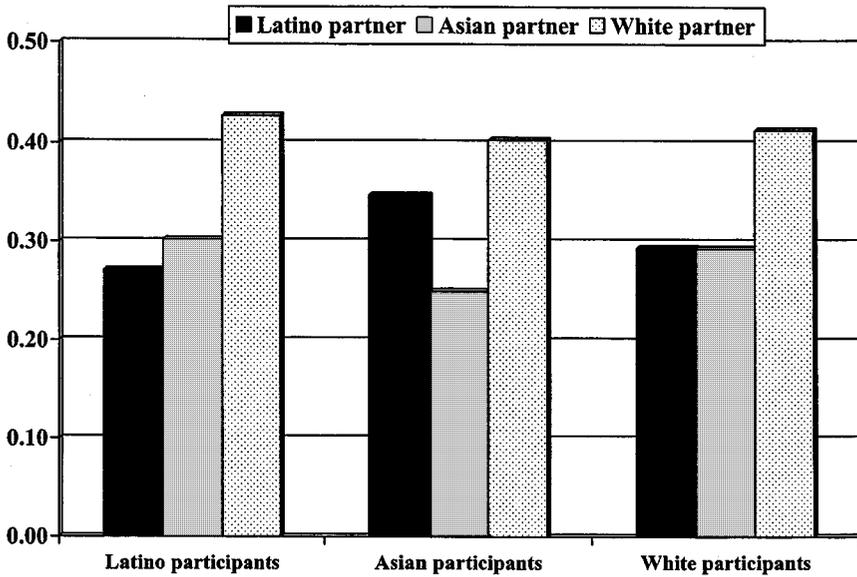


Figure 5. Percentage of Latino, Asian, and White participants choosing interaction partners of each ethnic group. Adapted from Jost et al. (2002, Study 2). Numbers indicate percentage of participants (within each ethnic group) who chose interaction partners from each of the three target groups. Members of all three groups selected White interaction partners at least 40% of the time, which was significantly above the 33% standard that one would expect on the basis of chance ($p < .05$).

low-status group members.⁶ Using materials reproduced in Table 2, Jost and Burgess (2000, Study 1) manipulated perceived socioeconomic success differences between the ingroup (University of Maryland students) and a rival outgroup (University of Virginia students) and measured how fair or unfair, how justifiable or unjustifiable, and how legitimate or illegitimate those differences were ($\alpha = .71$). The interaction hypothesis was supported. As can be seen in Table 5, perceived legitimacy was associated with increased ingroup favouritism for those who were assigned to high-status groups and with decreased ingroup favouritism (or increased outgroup favouritism) for those who were assigned to low-status groups (see also Jost, 2001).

⁶ This hypothesis differs from the main effect prediction of Turner and Brown (1978), who argued that because of status insecurity “[g]roups with illegitimate status relations would display more ingroup bias than those with legitimate status relations” (p. 210), regardless of the status of the ingroup.

TABLE 5
Correlations between perceived legitimacy and ingroup/outgroup favouritism as a function of group status

	<i>Correlation with perceived legitimacy</i>	
	<i>Ingroup favouritism (achievement-related)</i>	<i>Ingroup favouritism (socioemotional)</i>
High-status group members	.18 (<i>n</i> = 69)	.25* (<i>n</i> = 69)
Low-status group members	-.31** (<i>n</i> = 62)	-.32** (<i>n</i> = 62)

Data are adapted from Jost and Burgess (2000, Study 1). Values are bivariate correlation coefficients (Pearson *r*s). Results indicate that the perceived legitimacy of the system had opposite effects on ingroup/outgroup favouritism for members of high- and low-status groups. This was true for both achievement-related (intelligent, hard-working, and skilled at verbal reasoning) and socioemotional (friendly, honest, and interesting) attributes.

p* < .05, *p* < .01

Effects of system justification on ingroup and outgroup favouritism. A conceptually related hypothesis is that system justification in general (as well as perceived legitimacy in particular) should be associated with increased ingroup favouritism on the part of high-status group members and increased outgroup favouritism on the part of low-status group members (H8). Jost and Thompson (2000) validated a scale for measuring economic system justification; items are listed in Table 6. This scale was administered to Northern Italians (high status) and Southern Italians (low status) in the context of a study on ingroup and outgroup favouritism (Jost et al., 2003a, Study 1). As can be seen in Figure 6, increased system justification was associated with increased ingroup favouritism among Northerners and increased outgroup favouritism among Southerners (see also Jost & Thompson, 2000).

Depressed entitlement

Jost (1997) conducted an experimental replication of the depressed entitlement effect (e.g., Callahan-Levy & Messé, 1979; Major et al., 1984) to see if women in an explicitly feminist environment (Yale college in the 1990s) would exhibit the internalisation of inequality by reporting that they deserved to be paid less than men did for their own work (H9). In this study, 132 Yale undergraduates (68 men and 64 women) were required to perform some written work, listing the advantages and disadvantages of home shopping by computer. After evaluating the quality and determining the payment for several other examples of written work, the students were asked

TABLE 6
Items on the Economic System Justification Scale

-
1. If people work hard, they almost always get what they want.
 2. The existence of widespread economic differences does not mean that they are inevitable. (–)
 3. Laws of nature are responsible for differences in wealth in society.
 4. There are many reasons to think that the economic system is unfair. (–)
 5. It is virtually impossible to eliminate poverty.
 6. Poor people are not essentially different from rich people. (–)
 7. Most people who don't get ahead in our society should not blame the system; they have only themselves to blame. (–)
 8. Equal distribution of resources is a possibility for our society. (–)
 9. Social class differences reflect differences in the natural order of things.
 10. Economic differences in the society reflect an illegitimate distribution of resources. (–)
 11. There will always be poor people, because there will never be enough jobs for everybody.
 12. Economic positions are legitimate reflections of people's achievements.
 13. If people wanted to change the economic system to make things equal, they could. (–)
 14. Equal distribution of resources is unnatural.
 15. It is unfair to have an economic system which produces extreme wealth and extreme poverty at the same time. (–)
 16. There is no point in trying to make incomes more equal.
 17. There are no inherent differences between rich and poor; it is purely a matter of the circumstances into which you are born. (–)
-

This scale was used in research reported by Jost and Thompson (2000, Study 4, $\alpha = .73$). Items followed by “(–)” are reverse-scored.

to evaluate their own written work on the same scales.⁷ Results are summarised in Figure 7.

Yale women rated their own written work as less sophisticated, less original, and less insightful than Yale men rated their own work. When asked how much money they deserved to be paid for their work, women paid themselves on average \$1.51 (or 18%) less than men paid themselves. Furthermore, the gender difference on payment remained statistically significant even after controlling for gender differences on the evaluation dimensions. The work was subsequently evaluated by two external, independent judges who were unaware of the author's gender and of the hypotheses of the study. The judges perceived no differences between work that had been written by female authors and work that had been written by male authors. Thus, there were no actual differences between the work of men and women, only a difference in perceived deservingness.

⁷ Specifically, for the measure of payment deservingness, they were asked: “If you were an employer in charge of paying authors for their thought-listing contribution based on quality, how much (from \$1 to \$15) would you pay the author of the thoughts you listed?”

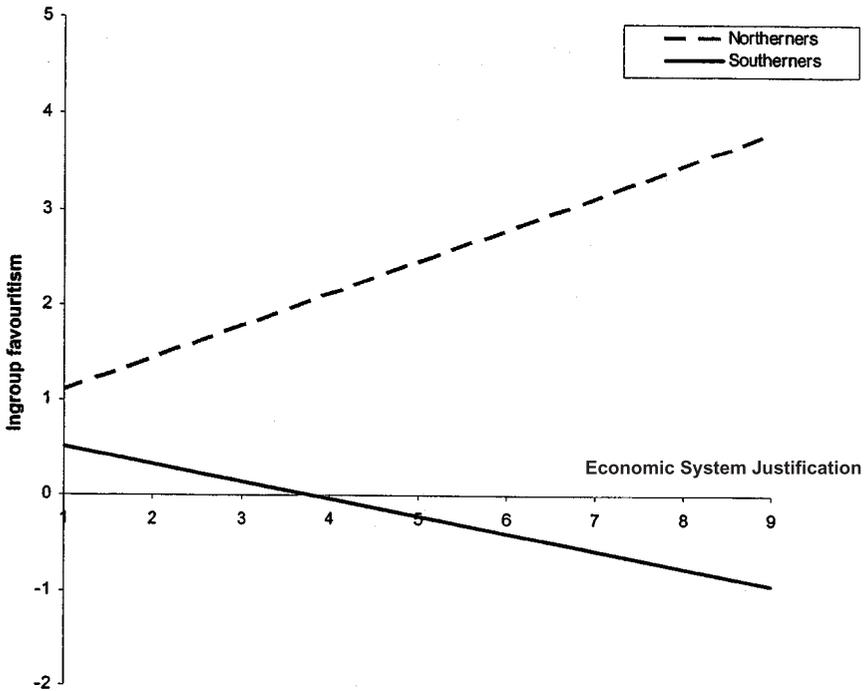


Figure 6. Effects of economic system justification on ingroup and outgroup favouritism among Northern and Southern Italians. Adapted from Jost et al. (2003a, Study 1). Lines are regression slopes for the relation between economic system justification scores (see items in Table 3) and ingroup/outgroup favouritism, aggregated across the following traits: efficient, responsible, productive, active, dominant, educated, ambitious, intelligent, emotional, honest, friendly, extraverted, religious, and happy. The interaction between group membership and economic system justification was significant, $F(1, 154) = 13.47, p < .001$.

Pelham and Hetts (2001) extended the system justification analysis of depressed entitlement effects by demonstrating that members of other disadvantaged groups (not just women) would also feel that they deserved less than others, especially on difficult (as opposed to easy) tasks. Specifically, they found that people who were employed in low-paying jobs, regardless of their gender, believed that their work on difficult tasks was worth less than did people who were employed in higher-paying jobs. This evidence suggests that people internalise and adapt to economic inequality, apparently rationalising their own state of relative disadvantage and lowering their expectations accordingly.

In an integration of cognitive dissonance and system justification theories, Blanton et al. (2001) hypothesised that members of disadvantaged groups would be more likely to exhibit depressed entitlement for past work than for future work (H10), in so far as effort justification applies to the

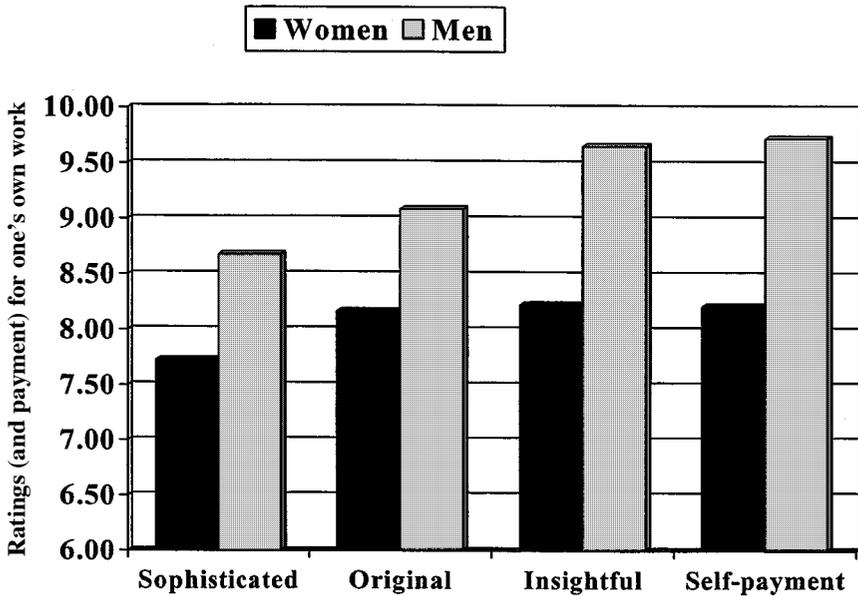


Figure 7. Quality ratings and payment allocations made by men and women for their own work. Adapted from data reported by Jost (1997). Higher numbers indicate higher quality ratings of sophistication, originality, insightfulness, and higher dollar amounts rendered by men and women concerning their own written work. All ratings were made on 15-point scales (including a payment scale ranging from \$1–\$15), and all gender comparisons differ at $p < .10$ or better. The gender difference on payment remained statistically significant even after controlling for gender differences on the evaluation dimensions, $F(1, 129) = 4.04$, $p < .05$.

former but not the latter case. Blanton et al. found that women “paid themselves” less money than men did in the “past work” condition, but not in the “future work” condition. Participants in this study were also given the opportunity to learn the average earnings of either men *or* women who participated in this study. In the “past work” condition, 72% of women chose to find out what other women had earned rather than what men had earned, but in the “future work” condition, this preference was reversed. When considering future outcomes, 72% of women preferred to find out what men earned, and only 28% wanted to know what women earned.⁸ It appears that these women realised that they could not change the past, so they accepted and rationalised it (e.g., Kay et al., 2002); they even rejected

⁸ Men, by contrast, overwhelmingly preferred the social comparison information about their own group, regardless of whether they were in the “past work” or “future work” condition.

the opportunity to find out whether men had earned more than they had in the “past work” condition. With regard to undecided future outcomes, which are less in need of justification, most women chose to learn what men earn, possibly so they could minimise gender discrimination in the future.

Ingroup ambivalence

W.E.B. DuBois wrote in 1903 about African American experience that, “One ever feels his two-ness – an American, a Negro; two souls, two thoughts, two unreconciled strivings; two warring ideals in one dark body, whose dogged strength alone keeps it from being torn asunder” (DuBois, 1903/1995, p. 45). In an effort to understand conflicts between competing needs for group and system justification, Jost and Burgess (2000) hypothesised that low-status group members should exhibit stronger ingroup ambivalence than members of high-status groups (H11). It was also predicted that for members of psychologically meaningful groups (for whom at least moderate levels of group justification motives would be present), ambivalence towards the ingroup would be increased for members of low-status groups as system justification motives were increased (H12) and decreased for members of high-status groups as system justification motives were increased (H13). These hypotheses were addressed in two studies relayed by Jost and Burgess (2000).

In the experiment involving University of Maryland students (described above), participants who were led to believe that their group occupied a relative position of either high or low socioeconomic success (see Table 2) rated their own group on a series of unipolar scales that contained both positively worded and negatively worded judgements (e.g., intelligent vs unintelligent, lazy vs hard-working, friendly vs unfriendly). Conceptually, a maximally ambivalent person would be one who reports (on one item) that the

TABLE 7
Correlations between perceived legitimacy and ambivalence as a function of group status

<i>Correlation with perceived legitimacy</i>	<i>Low status</i>	<i>High status</i>	<i>Difference (Z-score)</i>
Ambivalence towards ingroup (SIM)	.32**	-.20	-2.99**
Ambivalence towards ingroup (CRM)	.22	-.16	-2.15*
Ambivalence towards ingroup (GTM)	.24*	-.13	-2.10*

Data are adapted from Jost and Burgess (2000, Study 1). Formulae for calculating the three models of ambivalence are described by Priester and Petty (1996). “SIM” refers to the “Similarity Intensity Model”, “CRM” refers to the “Conflicting Reaction Model”, and “GTM” refers to the “Gradual Threshold Model”. Z-score tests for the difference between correlations are two-tailed. * $p \leq .05$, ** $p \leq .005$

group is extremely intelligent and (on another) that the group is extremely unintelligent. For three measures of ambivalence reviewed by Priester and Petty (1996),⁹ Jost and Burgess found that ambivalence towards the (same) ingroup was significantly higher for people who were assigned to the low-status condition than for people assigned to the high-status condition. Furthermore, perceived legitimacy was associated with increased ambivalence on the part of low-status groups and with decreased ambivalence on the part of high-status groups (see Table 7). Thus, (H11) and (H12) were both supported.

In a second study, men and women read about a female plaintiff who was suing her university for gender discrimination and therefore posing a challenge to the overarching social system. Results indicated that women experienced a significant degree of emotional conflict and ambivalence,¹⁰ especially to the extent that they endorsed system-justifying beliefs. As can be seen in Table 8, emotional ambivalence scores were correlated positively with just world beliefs and social dominance orientation among women respondents, but they were negatively correlated with social dominance orientation among men and uncorrelated with just world beliefs, in general support of (H12) and (H13). As DuBois (1903) observed, ingroup ambivalence seems to be one consequence of the psychological conflict that exists for members of low-status (but not high-status) groups between group and system justification motives (Glick & Fiske, 2001; Jost & Burgess, 2000).

Self-esteem, depression, and neuroticism

To the extent that members of disadvantaged groups are also faced with a conflict between ego and system justification needs, they should suffer in

⁹ Following Priester and Petty (1996), “dominant” (D) and “conflicting” (C) attitudinal components were identified for each pair of trait ratings (e.g., intelligent vs unintelligent). For example, if the ingroup received a “6” for the rating of “intelligent” and a “3” for the rating of “unintelligent”, then $D=6$ and $C=3$. The three formulae for calculating ambivalence (SIM, CRM, and GTM) are as follows: for the Similarity Intensity Model: $Ambivalence (SIM) = 3C - D$; for the Conflicting Reactions Model: $Ambivalence (CRM) = 2C$; for the Gradual Threshold Model: $Ambivalence (GTM) = 5(C + 1)^{-.5} - D^{1/C+1}$. An ambivalence score was calculated for each individual research participant and for each attribute pair (e.g., intelligent/unintelligent) according to the above three formulae. Overall ambivalence towards the ingroup was then calculated by taking the means of the ambivalence scores across each of the six attribute dimensions. Thus, ambivalence was calculated in a within-participant fashion for each trait independently, before aggregating across traits and participants, so that ambivalence is a property of individual respondents rather than a property of the group as a whole.

¹⁰ Participants were asked to answer seven questions about positive and negative feelings towards the female plaintiff. An index of positive feelings towards the plaintiff ($\alpha = .94$) was created by averaging responses to four items (respect, support, pride, and sympathy). An index of negative feelings ($\alpha = .89$) was created by averaging three items (anger, unfairness, shame). The same three measures of ambivalence (SIM, CRM, GTM) were calculated on the basis of these indices of positive and negative feelings towards the plaintiff.

TABLE 8
Correlations between social dominance orientation/belief in a just world and
ambivalence as a function of group status

	<i>Low status</i>	<i>High status</i>	<i>Difference (Z-score)</i>
<i>Correlation with social dominance orientation</i>			
Ambivalence towards female plaintiff (SIM)	.23	-.39**	-2.65**
Ambivalence towards female plaintiff (CRM)	.23	-.41**	-2.72**
Ambivalence towards female plaintiff (GTM)	.21	-.52**	-3.17***
<i>Correlation with belief in a just world</i>			
Ambivalence towards female plaintiff (SIM)	.44***	.00	-1.92*
Ambivalence towards female plaintiff (CRM)	.34**	-.02	-2.26**
Ambivalence towards female plaintiff (GTM)	.36**	-.07	-1.81*

Data are adapted from Jost and Burgess (2000, Study 2). Formulae for calculating the three models of ambivalence are described by Priester and Petty (1996). "SIM" refers to the "Similarity Intensity Model", "CRM" refers to the "Conflicting Reaction Model", and "GTM" refers to the "Gradual Threshold Model". Z-score tests for the difference between correlations are two-tailed. * $p \leq .05$, ** $p \leq .005$

terms of psychological well-being (see Jost et al., 2001). Consistent with this analysis, Quinn and Crocker (1999) found that ideological endorsement of the Protestant work ethic was associated with a decrease in well-being among overweight women (as measured by self-esteem, depression, and anxiety), but it was associated with an increase in psychological well-being among normal weight women. Research by Jost and Thompson (2000) indicates that providing ideological support for inequality is associated with similar psychological disadvantages for members of low-status groups and advantages for members of high-status groups. A scale measuring general opposition to equality (see items in Table 1) was administered to European American and African American respondents, along with measures of well-being. Results from regression analyses are summarised in Table 9. The evidence to date generally supports hypotheses (H14)–(H16), which state that system justification has opposite effects for members of high- and low-status groups on variables of self-esteem, depression, and neuroticism (see also Jost et al., 2002; Jost & Thompson, 2000).

The reduction of ideological dissonance

Jost et al. (2003b) presented evidence from five US national surveys indicating that members of disadvantaged groups show *enhanced* levels of system justification (H17). In Study 1, for instance, low-income respondents and African Americans were more likely than others to support limitations on the rights of citizens and media representatives to criticise the government. In Study 2, low-income Latinos were more likely to trust in

TABLE 9
Standardised regression coefficients for the relation between opposition to equality and self-esteem, depression, and neuroticism as a function of group status

	<i>Low-status (African Americans)</i>	<i>High-status (European Americans)</i>
Self-esteem	-.21 + (<i>n</i> = 92) ^a -.14 (<i>n</i> = 93) ^b -.20* (<i>n</i> = 122) ^c	.14* (<i>n</i> = 334) ^a .06 (<i>n</i> = 335) ^b .11 (<i>n</i> = 364) ^a
Depression	.24* (<i>n</i> = 122) ^c	-.22** (<i>n</i> = 364) ^c
Neuroticism	.36** (<i>n</i> = 122) ^c	-.22** (<i>n</i> = 364) ^c

Data are adapted from Jost and Thompson (2000, Studies 1, 3, and 4). Values are standardised regression coefficients (β s). All analyses include group-based dominance as a control variable. + $p < .10$, * $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$

^aData are taken from Study 1. ^bData are taken from Study 3. ^cData are taken from Study 4.

government officials and to believe that “the government is run for the benefit of all” than were high-income Latinos. Results from Study 3, which are illustrated in Figure 8, indicated that low-income respondents were more likely than high-income respondents to believe that large differences in pay are necessary to “get people to work hard” and “as an incentive for individual effort”. In Study 4, African Americans living in the south (compared to African Americans living in the north) possessed lower income levels but endorsed meritocratic belief systems to a greater extent. And finally, in Study 5, low-income respondents and African Americans were more likely than others to believe that economic inequality is legitimate and necessary. In most cases, these effects retained significance even after controlling for education and other variables. Although future research is needed to measure the process of dissonance arousal directly, these results suggest that those who are most disadvantaged provide the strongest degree of ideological support for the system, at least under certain conditions.¹¹

Gender research summarised by Glick and Fiske (2001) similarly suggests that system justification may increase as objective circumstances worsen (H18). The ambivalent sexism inventory (which includes subscales of “hostile” and “benevolent” sexism) was administered to men and women in 19 different countries. Mean scores at the country level were found to be negatively correlated with indices of gender development (women’s education, longevity, and standard of living

¹¹ Hofstede (1997, p. 30) similarly found that people in low-status occupations and with lower educational levels scored higher in general on “power distance” than did people in high-status occupations and people with higher educational levels.

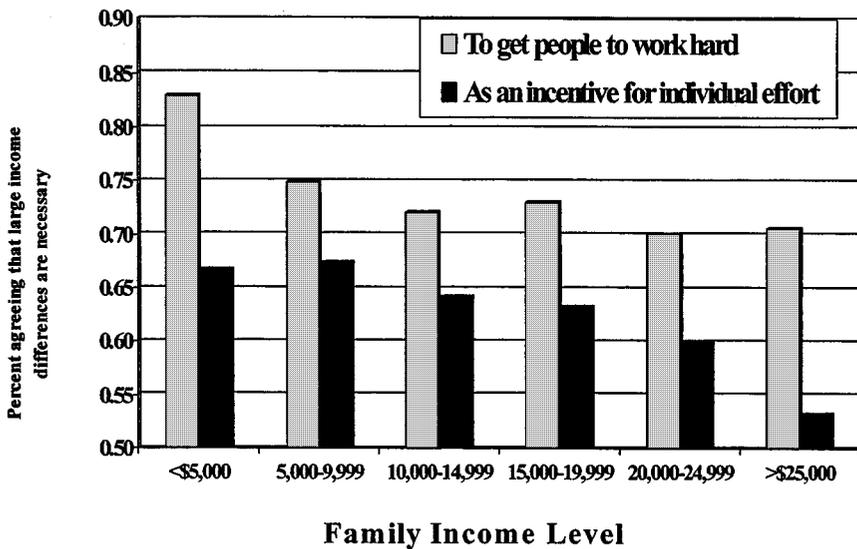


Figure 8. Agreement that large differences in income are necessary as a function of respondent income. Adapted from Jost et al. (2003b, Study 3). Values are combined percentages of respondents who believed that differences in pay were either “absolutely necessary” or “probably necessary” to “get people to work hard” and as “an incentive for individual effort”. For both items, regression analyses yielded negative linear effects of family income on the belief that income inequality is necessary ($p < .01$).

relative to that of men) and gender empowerment (women’s representation in business and government). Women were most likely to endorse sexism against women (especially “benevolent” forms of sexism) in those societies in which they were most disadvantaged, and in many cases, they were even more likely than men to endorse benevolent sexism. Glick and Fiske also found that “when men in a nation more strongly endorsed sexist ideologies, women followed suit, providing strong correlational evidence of system justification” (p. 114). Indeed, average within-country correlations between sexism scores of men and women exceeded .80, suggesting that consensual ideologies exist to rationalise gender inequality around the world.

THE PALLIATIVE FUNCTION OF SYSTEM JUSTIFYING IDEOLOGY

If system justification leads to outgroup favouritism, depressed entitlement, ingroup ambivalence, heightened neuroticism and depression, and lowered self-esteem on the part of low-status group members, why would they ever

engage in system justification? In the remainder of this chapter, we explore the possibility that, despite these disadvantages, endorsing system-justifying ideologies serves to make people feel better in other ways. Specifically, it has been suggested that ideology convinces people that the world is controllable, fair, and just (Lerner & Miller, 1978; Major, 1994; Olson & Hafer, 2001), and it allows people to be more satisfied with their own situation and with the system as a whole (Kluegel & Smith, 1986; Lane, 1962). As Havel (1991) puts it, ideology provides people “with the illusion that the system is in harmony with the human order and the order of the universe” (p. 134).

The power of meritocratic ideology

One type of ideology (meritocracy) is particularly effective in placating people in democratic, free market, post-totalitarian systems. Meritocratic ideology refers to the conviction that ability and hard work lead to success and, conversely, that if people are not successful or if they fail in some ways, it is because they have not worked hard enough or they do not have the necessary abilities. Subscribing to a meritocratic ideology serves to increase the confidence and the esteem of those who are privileged and to ease their consciences (Chen & Tyler, 2001; Montada, Schmitt, & Dalbert, 1986). At the same time, such an ideological rationalisation may also convince those who are unsuccessful that they have (or at least had) a fair chance to succeed, which may make it easier for them to accept inequality (cf. Lane, 1962). Consistent with this possibility, Kluegel and Smith (1986, pp. 280–283) found that poor people reported more positive emotion, less guilt, and greater satisfaction when they felt responsible for their situation than when they made external (system-blame) attributions for their poverty.

Research by Jost et al. (2003b, Study 5) further indicates that ideology is related to satisfaction in terms of one’s job, one’s financial situation, and life in general. We examined the effects of demographic status characteristics (socioeconomic status and race) and ideological beliefs concerning the *legitimacy* of economic inequality (e.g., “large differences in income are necessary for America’s prosperity”) and *meritocracy* (e.g., how important ambition, ability, and hard work are for “getting ahead in life”) on satisfaction. As mentioned above, African Americans and people who were lower in socioeconomic status were more likely than others to believe that socioeconomic differences were necessary and legitimate, although they were not more likely to endorse meritocracy in this study (see Table 10). The endorsement of meritocratic ideology was associated with greater economic satisfaction for all respondents. That is, the more people believed that hard work, ability, and motivation lead to success,

TABLE 10
Maximum likelihood estimates of regression coefficients for socioeconomic status,
meritocratic ideology, perception of inequality, and economic satisfaction

Independent variable	Unstandardised regression coefficients (standard error)		
	Meritocratic ideology	Legitimation of inequality	Economic satisfaction
Race	.01 (0.02)	-.25** (0.09)	.29** (0.06)
Socio-economic status	.01 (0.02)	-.34** (0.10)	
Meritocratic ideology		.54* (0.28)	.28* (0.16)
Legitimation of inequality			.02 (0.02)

Data are adapted from Jost et al. (2003b, Study 5). Entries are unstandardised regression coefficients arising from a model ($n = 788$) in which variables of socioeconomic status and race were used to predict legitimation of inequality, endorsement of meritocratic ideology, and economic satisfaction. Gender was entered as a control variable; no significant gender effects were obtained. Race was dummy-coded as follows: Black = 0, White = 1. Model fit statistics: $\chi^2(44) = 117.2$, RMSEA = 0.046, GFI = 0.98, AGFI = 0.96, IFI = 0.94.

* $p < .05$, ** $p < .005$ (both one-tailed)

the more they reported being satisfied with their own economic situation, regardless of whether they were rich or poor. Although this evidence is correlational, it suggests that meritocratic ideology serves a palliative function by making people feel better about their own situation, whatever that situation happens to be. Future research would do well to address this possibility more directly, especially with better measures of system-justifying ideologies and the use of experimental methods that afford causal inferences.

A coping perspective on the psychology of system justification

Why would system-justifying ideologies make people feel better and more satisfied with their situation? We believe that a *stress and coping perspective* helps to answer the complex question of why people would support and justify a system that keeps them in a state of disadvantage (see also Miller & Kaiser, 2001; Schmader, Major, & Gramzow, 2001). Specifically, we argue that people engage in system justification (and other forms of rationalisation) in order to cope with and adapt to unjust or unpleasant realities that appear to be inevitable (see also Dalbert, 1997; Kay et al., 2002; Kieselbach, 1997).

Although belief systems stand in a rather complicated relation to stress and coping in general (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984), we offer one attempt to describe this relationship in the specific case of system justification. We argue that in addition to *causing* certain kinds of stress for members of low-status or stigmatised groups (Jost & Thompson, 2000; Quinn & Crocker, 1999), system justification is related to stress and coping in at least three important ways. First, system justification, as a set of beliefs and assumptions about the existing social system, serves a *stress-preventing function* by allowing the individual to feel that the social context is stable, understandable, predictable, consistent, meaningful, and just (see also Janoff-Bulman, 1992; Kluegel & Smith, 1986; Lane, 1962; Lerner, 1980; Montada et al., 1986). Second, system justification may be considered as a *coping resource* in that it not only reduces stress via the primary appraisal process by preventing the individual from perceiving certain types of stress, but also via the secondary appraisal process by fostering a sense of control and hope, which facilitates decisions about how to cope once stress is detected (see Lazarus & Folkman, 1984). Third, system justification can be viewed as a kind of coping *activity* or *response* to the many different stressors that are experienced by members of both low- and high-status groups as a consequence of their unequal positions in society.

According to this analysis, system justification has the potential to be involved at any stage of the stress and coping process (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984), as a stressor, a perceptual factor in the primary appraisal process, a background coping resource affecting the secondary appraisal process, part of the coping activity itself, or an outcome of the coping process. It might seem paradoxical to suggest that system justification is both a cause of stress and an attempt to cope with stress, but this is not the case. We propose that in order to minimise or avoid certain kinds of stress, such as the stress that comes from perceiving that one is a victim of discrimination (e.g., Branscombe, Schmitt, & Harvey, 1999), people are willing to pay other psychological costs, such as those that follow from blaming themselves for their own misfortune (e.g., Janoff-Bulman, 1992; Miller & Porter, 1983), and these system-justifying responses may then lead to other kinds of stress (e.g., Jost & Thompson, 2000; Quinn & Crocker, 1999). By adopting a coping perspective, we do not necessarily assume that system justification provides an inherently adaptive coping strategy (see Jost, 1995), but it does seem to offer some measure of consolation to those who are disadvantaged as well as advantaged (see also Lane, 1962). The research summarised in this chapter has suggested some of the social psychological costs and benefits of engaging in system justification, but more work is needed to spell out these implications fully.

CONCLUDING REMARKS

What we have argued is that there is a socially acquired motive to justify and rationalise the existing social system. The operation of this motive has been demonstrated on measures of stereotyping, ideology, deservingness, desirability, and even memory. System justification occurs even on open-ended, nonreactive, qualitative measures and on implicit (as well as explicit) cognitive, affective, and behavioural measures. Paradoxically, the system justification motive is sometimes strongest among those who are the most disadvantaged, presumably because they have the most ideological dissonance to resolve.

System justification often has opposite social psychological effects on members of advantaged and disadvantaged groups. For members of high-status or advantaged groups, system justification is generally associated with ingroup favouritism, increased self-esteem, and decreased ambivalence, depression, and neuroticism. For members of low-status groups, by contrast, system justification is generally associated with outgroup favouritism, ingroup ambivalence, decreased self-esteem, increased depression, and increased neuroticism.

We have argued that, despite these potential costs, system-justifying ideologies serve a palliative function in that they make people feel better about their own situation. System justification may reduce dissonance and uncertainty especially (but not exclusively) among members of advantaged groups. From a coping perspective, there are many reasons why one might accept the potential costs that come from embracing system-justifying ideologies. These include the denial of discrimination, the perception of control, and the preservation of hope. We have argued that people engage in system justification in an attempt to cope with circumstances that they cannot change. It is an open question for future research as to whether this ideological resolution, which is no doubt adaptive in some respects, outweighs the personal, social, and political costs that are associated with it.

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