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Outgroup Favoritism and the Theory of System Justification: A Paradigm for Investigating the Effects of Socioeconomic Success on Stereotype Content

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And in the moment you are born since you don't know any better, every stick and stone and every face is white, and since you have not yet seen a mirror, you suppose that you are, too. It comes as a great shock around the age of 5 or 6 or 7 to discover that the flag to which you have pledged allegiance, along with everybody else, has not pledged allegiance to you. It comes as a great surprise that Gary Cooper killing off the Indians, when you were rooting for Gary Cooper...that the Indians were you.   (Interview with James Baldwin, *The Price of the Ticket*)

It is not only the discipline of psychology that has undergone a cognitive revolution in the latter half of the 20th century. Social science in general has shifted toward an increased reliance on mental states and processes in explaining the behaviors of individuals and groups. Sociologists and political scientists, for example, have focused more and more on expectations, attitudes, beliefs, perceptions, decisions, and judgments in explaining such diverse phenomena as political socialization, group dynamics, voting behavior, and other responses to structures of status, power, and prestige (e.g., Berger & Zelditch, 1998; Howard, 1994; Iyengar & McGuire, 1993; Ridgeway, 2001). Anthropologists, too, have moved increasingly toward beliefs, construals, interpretations, and other intentional states in their descriptions of cultural systems and practices (e.g., Geertz, 1983; Shweder & LeVine, 1984; Sperber, 1990). Even philosophers have adopted the language of cognitive science to the point where traditional metaphysical and epistemological approaches have almost disappeared (e.g., Goldman, 1988; Kornblith, 1994; Solomon, 1992).

In the field of organizational behavior, social-cognitive constructs such as attributions, accounts, scripts, and justifications have been used to shed light on such applied topics as job satisfaction, division of labor, employee relations, task design, and corporate strategy (e.g., Baron & Pfeffer, 1994; Martin, 1982; Salancik & Pfeffer, 1978; Weick, 1993). Neo-institutionalist theories of organizations have further analyzed the ways in which ideas and symbols are used to structure and legitimate business cultures and spread influence (e.g., Powell & DiMaggio, 1990). Somewhat improbably given the subject matter, cognitive theories of social movements and revolutions have become paradigmatic (e.g., Eyerman & Jamison, 1991; Moore, 1978; Snow & Oliver, 1995), even among Marxist scholars, who are traditionally among the least individualistic of social theorists (e.g., Elster, 1985). These intellectual developments, spread as they are across a variety of disciplines, mean that constructs such as attitudes, thoughts, and beliefs have proved useful indeed for explaining behavior that clearly falls outside of the original domain of cognitive psychology – in this case, behavior that is collective, coordinated, and downright political.

More precisely, one might say that in the post-cognitive revolution world, sociologists, psychologists, anthropologists, political scientists, and organizational theorists all accept the fundamental assumption that social systems are maintained at least in part through attitudes and beliefs that support them. In the language of social cognition, researchers would say that conscious and unconscious thought processes play a pivotal role in the acceptance or rejection of particular social and political forms (Jost, 1995). One variable in particular, the *appraisal of legitimacy*, has emerged as an important social-psychological predictor of responses to inequality (e.g., Major, 1994; J. Martin, 1993; Tajfel & Turner, 1986; Tyler, 1997). Historical and ethnographic studies make abundantly clear that, in the absence of militant or totalitarian rule, authorities, procedures, and social arrangements are stable and enduring to the extent that they are perceived as having legitimacy (e.g., Gurr, 1970; Moore, 1978). Inequality among groups and individuals is accepted and perpetuated, even by those who stand to lose the most from it, so long as it is perceived as fair and legitimate. This is one of the starting points of the theory

of system justification (e.g., Jost & Banaji, 1994), which is intended as a social-cognitive theory of intergroup relations and political behavior, and it is also one of the central contentions of this chapter.

THE JUSTIFICATION PRINCIPLE IN SOCIAL PSYCHOLOGY

In their ground-breaking work on *The Social Construction of Reality*, Berger and Luckmann (1967) observed that "the institutional world requires legitimation, that is, ways by which it can be 'explained' and 'justified'" (p. 61). In other words, we do not support social structures unless they satisfy our cognitive needs for validity and rationality. Sociologists and organizational theorists have described the excuses, accounts, and explanations we use to smooth over social interaction (e.g., Scott & Lyman, 1968), spread organizational influence (e.g., Powell & DiMaggio, 1990), and preserve public reputations (e.g., Elsbach & Sutton, 1992). However, it is the discipline of psychology that reminds us of the fact that people must generate reasons and justifications privately, for themselves, as well as for others (e.g., Aronson, 1992; Festinger, 1957; Tetlock & Manstead, 1985; Weick, 1993).

Psychologists know better than anyone else that we are cognitive creatures; we need reasons and arguments to justify both action and inaction. If we behave in an inconsistent or counterattitudinal way, we must come up with rationalizations for the departure. If we do something that causes social disapproval, we must defend ourselves with ideas. And sometimes, we just want to know that there are reasons and explanations for the actions of others and the way things are. These principles are assumed by such diverse theories and research programs in social psychology as balance theory, cognitive dissonance theory, equity theory, attribution theory, and social cognition. In other words, one of the central contentions of social psychology from the 1950s to the present has been that people justify themselves, their associates, and the world around them in the sense that they use ideas to provide validation and legitimacy for all of these things (Jost & Banaji, 1994).

Justifications differ from explanations, in that the former (but not necessarily the latter) render social events right and appropriate. It is no accident that *justice* and *justification* derive from the same Latin root. The existence of class systems may be justified – that is, made legitimate – by postulating wide individual differences in effort or motivation; patriarchal systems may be justified by asserting insurmountable gender differences in achievement or ability; and systems of ethnic or racial segregation may be justified by claiming incommensura-

ble group differences in intelligence or morality. In this way, people use ideas about groups and individuals to reinforce existing social systems and preserve the sense that those systems are fair, legitimate, and justifiable (Jost & Banaji, 1994). This need not be a conscious process, as Bem and Bem (1970) pointed out in their analysis of gender socialization and the subtle, non-conscious ways in which girls are taught to "know their place" and to participate in a sexist world.

Yet why would people perceive the world around them to be justified and legitimate when so many features of their environment seem unfair and illegitimate? One answer that social psychologists have given is that there is a general motivation to "believe in a just world" (e.g., Lerner, 1980; Olson & Hafer, 2001). The guiding thesis is that living in circumstances that are unpredictable, uncontrollable, and capriciously unjust would be too psychologically threatening, and so we cling to the illusion that people get what they deserve and deserve what they get. The theory of system justification builds on this essential insight (Jost & Banaji, 1994), de-emphasizing somewhat the universal, psychodynamic aspects of the process and stressing instead the impact of social learning, institutionalized norms, and the power of ideology (cf. Bem & Bem, 1970; Berger & Luckmann, 1967; Major, 1994; Tyler & McGraw, 1986).

Stereotypes as Ideological Justifications

One of the most common ways in which people use ideas and beliefs to justify the social world around them is by stereotyping members of disadvantaged groups in ways that rationalize the inequality. The stereotype that African Americans (or Hispanic Americans or blue-collar workers) are not as intelligent or hard working as other, more successful groups, according to this perspective, serves as an ideological justification for the substantial socioeconomic differences between these groups and others. This justification or rationalization function was recognized by Katz and Braly (1933) and Allport (1954), but it was not studied directly until relatively recently, when cognitive and ideological analyses were again combined.

In sociology, Jackman and Senter (1983) provided survey data leading to the conclusion that ideological values and stereotypes were relatively consensual and favoring of dominant groups' interests across racial and gender contexts. C. Hoffman and Hurst (1990) conducted experimental research in which people formed stereotypes of fictional groups as a way of rationalizing unequal divisions of labor and social roles; the authors explicitly called into question the *kernel of truth* view of

stereotypes, arguing that stereotype contents reflect rationalization rather than perceptual processes. Ridgeway (2001), too, has summarized field and experimental studies, leading to the conclusion that people form status beliefs in the course of face to face interaction in such a way that structural inequalities tend to be legitimized and perpetuated. In all of these research programs, we see that stereotypes operate as ideological devices to justify or rationalize inequality between groups.

The most surprising and powerful cases of system-justifying stereotypes arise when members of low-status groups internalize unfavorable stereotypes of themselves and favorable stereotypes of others as a way to justify the existing hierarchy (Jost & Banaji, 1994). This process may give rise to the attitudes and beliefs that are outgroup favoring. Such ideas and justifications are taught to us as children until they begin to operate non-consciously (Bem & Bem, 1970). Ultimately, system-justifying ideologies and stereotypes become imperceptible – like water to the fish.

Outgroup-Favoring Stereotypes Under Extreme and Ordinary Circumstances

From a psychological standpoint, it is especially striking that disadvantaged people would justify the very social system that places them at a disadvantage. Nevertheless, it seems that people sometimes do favor the preservation of the social order even over their own personal and collective interests, as the opening quote from James Baldwin attests. Familiar examples in the domain of public opinion include women's widespread failure to support the Equal Rights' Amendment (Gurin, 1985; Mansbridge, 1986) and the significant lack of support among the American working class for policies of economic redistribution (Kluegel & Smith, 1986; Piven & Cloward, 1977).

Even more dramatic examples are found in historical and journalistic accounts of war camps and slavery. Psychoanalytically inspired work by Anna Freud, Bruno Bettelheim, and others on the phenomenon of "identification with the aggressor" suggested that, among victims of extreme injustice and deprivation, there was an implicit rejection of the ingroup and a preference for the outgroup. A historical novel set during the Holocaust provides a stirring literary example in which a young Gypsy boy encounters his first Nazi officer. In *The Painted Bird*, Jerzy Kosinski (1966) writes:

> His entire person seemed to have something utterly superhuman about it... he seemed an example of neat perfection that could not be sullied: the smooth, polished skin of his face, the bright golden hair showing

under his peaked cap, his pure metal eyes...I thought how good it would be to have such a gleaming and hairless skull instead of my Gypsy face which was so feared and disliked by decent people (p. 100).

Similarly disturbing cases of system justification exist in contemporary accounts of the ongoing slave trade in Africa and Latin America. A 1992 article published in *Newsweek* magazine (Masland, Nordland, Liu, & Contreras, 1992), for example, quoted a 25-year-old Mauritanian slave as follows:

> I am a slave, my whole family are slaves... Sometimes they treat us well, sometimes they treat us badly, but only the children get beaten... A master is a master and a slave is a slave. Masters are white, slaves are black... Naturally, we blacks should be the slaves of the whites (p. 32).

These anecdotal examples are of rare and extraordinary circumstances. They are relayed to suggest that psychological investment in the status quo may occur even under the most horrific systems of inequality and exploitation. If some degree of system justification arises under such dramatic conditions, system-justifying impulses should be even more likely to arise in ordinary life.

It was a widespread assumption, in fact, of early researchers of intergroup relations that members of disadvantaged groups such as Jews and Blacks could not help but internalize society's biases against them and exhibit a kind of inferiority complex at the group level (e.g., Allport, 1954; Bettelheim, 1960; Lewin, 1941). This was also the conclusion reached by Clark and Clark (1947) in their famous studies of African-American children's preferences for White dolls. A series of laboratory studies conducted by Sachdev and Bourhis (1985, 1987, 1991) demonstrated convincingly that assignment to high-status or powerful groups leads people to display ingroup favoritism, whereas assignment to low-status or powerless groups produces outgroup favoritism.

Because evidence of outgroup favoritism is often deemphasized in the literature on intergroup relations, the data from tables reported in an influential meta-analytic study conducted by Mullen, Brown, and Smith (1992) are rearranged and presented in Table 6.1 according to the percentage of experimental groups showing ingroup favoritism, outgroup favoritism, and exact equality – broken down according to relative status of the ingroup. What this reveals is that members of high-status and equal-status groups are indeed going overwhelmingly with ingroup favoritism, but 85% of the low-status groups are displaying outgroup favoritism. That is, they

TABLE 6.1: Number and percentage of experimental groups showing ingroup favoritism, exact equality, and outgroup favoritism by relative status of the ingroup.

	Status		
	High	Equal	Low
Ingroup favoritism			
Number	20	27	3
Percentage	100%	73%	15%
Exact equality			
Number	0	2	0
Percentage	0%	5%	0%
Outgroup favoritism			
Number	0	8	17
Percentage	0%	22%	85%

Note. Table adapted from a meta-analysis reported by Mullen, Brown, and Smith (1992). Ingroup favoritism indicates a positive Z-score reported by Mullen et al., exact equality indicates a Z-score of zero, outgroup favoritism indicates a negative Z-score.

are saying that members of the other group are more intelligent, more industrious, and so on, than are members of their own group. This type of evidence led Jost and Banaji (1994) to argue that many low-status groups accept as legitimate their alleged inferiority. Rather than attempting to raise self-esteem or enhance ingroup solidarity, they use their evaluations and judgments to reinforce and justify the existing system of inequality. In some ways, this interpretation implies a rediscovery of the Marxian concept of false consciousness (Jost, 1995; Jost & Banaji, 1994).

Contrary to some claims (e.g., Mullen et al., 1992), systematic evidence of outgroup favoritism does not seem to be restricted to laboratory groups. Field studies conducted by, among others, R. Brown (1978), Hewstone and Ward (1985), Jost, Burgess, and Mosso (2001), Mlicki and Ellemers (1996), Skevington (1981), and Spears and Manstead (1989) have turned up strong evidence of outgroup favoritism among members of various low-status groups. In fact, evidence coming from many real-world groups supports Roger Brown's (1986) observation that:

> Subordinate groups like black Americans, South African Bantus, the Mayans of Guatemala, and the lower castes of India either do, or until recently did, derogate or look down on the in-group and show positive attitudes toward the depriving out-group (p. 558).

It has often been suggested that the prevailing theory of intergroup relations, social identity theory, is not well-equipped to handle the phenomenon of outgroup favoritism (e.g., Hewstone & Ward, 1985; Hinkle & Brown, 1990; Jost & Banaji, 1994; Sidanius, 1993), although it is true that the subject has been addressed in some detail by social identity theorists such as Turner and Brown (1978), Tajfel and Turner (1986), Spears and Manstead (1989), and others. In many ways, system justification theory seeks to build on the foundation laid by social identity theory, much as social identity theorists sought to build on theories of social comparison and realistic conflict (Tajfel & Turner, 1986).

Outgroup Favoritism and Social Identity Theory

Social identity theory was developed to account for the initially unexpected finding that minimal laboratory groups with no history of interaction displayed ingroup favoritism with regard to social stereotyping, performance evaluation, and resource allocation (Tajfel & Turner, 1986). Drawing extensively on Festinger's social comparison theory, it was argued that because people need to evaluate themselves favorably and because group membership is an important constituent of the self-concept, people tend to evaluate their ingroups more favorably than they evaluate other groups (e.g., Tajfel & Turner, 1986; Turner, 1975). Thus, according to social identity theory, there is a general drive to enhance individual and collective self-esteem by making favorable comparisons between the ingroup and relevant outgroups (e.g., Hogg & Abrams, 1988; Tajfel & Turner, 1986).

Although it is true that social identity theory emphasizes the generalizability of ingroup favoritism among members of many different types of social groups (Hogg & Abrams, 1988; Mullen et al., 1992; Tajfel & Turner, 1986), it has also done much to frame the social-psychological understanding of how and when groups that are low in social standing will accept their alleged inferiority and when they will attempt to challenge it (e.g., Ellemers, Wilke, & van Knippenberg, 1993; Mummendey & Schreiber, 1984; Spears & Manstead, 1989; Turner & Brown, 1978; van Knippenberg, 1978; Wright, Taylor, & Moghaddam, 1990). From this body of literature, it is possible to discern three distinct explanations for the phenomenon of outgroup favoritism among low-status groups. One account has to do with self-categorization processes of identification and dis-identification (Tajfel & Turner, 1986), another account distinguishes between comparative dimensions that are relevant and irrelevant to the status differences (van Knippenberg, 1978), and a third account is related to perceptions of the legitimacy

and stability of status differences (Turner & Brown, 1978).

According to the first type of explanation, members of low-status groups exhibit outgroup favoritism to the extent that they shun identification with their own negatively valued group and identify instead with members of a positively valued outgroup (Tajfel & Turner, 1986). It has been argued that disidentification is the preferred choice among low-status group members in general (e.g., Ellemers, van Knippenberg, de Vries, & Wilke, 1988; Lewin, 1941; Tajfel, 1978), and research suggests that when the option of individual mobility or exit is available, low-status group members tend to take it (Lalonde & Silverman, 1994; Wright et al., 1990). Research has also demonstrated that people who are made to identify only weakly with a low-status ingroup are less committed to the group and more likely to express a desire for individual mobility to another group than are people who are made to identify strongly with the ingroup (Ellemers, Spears, & Doosje, 1997).

Although it seems plausible that levels of ingroup identification would predict the direction and magnitude of ingroup versus outgroup favoritism among members of low-status groups, there are reasons to think that ideological factors such as the perception of system legitimacy play a more determining role. For instance, group consciousness-raising among women and minority groups requires not merely an identification with one's group, but a perception that the group's low status is illegitimate and unfair (e.g., Gurin, 1985; Kluegel & Smith, 1986). Thus, from our perspective, group identification is probably a necessary but not sufficient condition for the rejection of outgroup favoritism.

According to the second type of explanation, members of low-status groups may accept their inferiority and engage in outgroup favoritism on dimensions that are highly relevant to the status differences, but they may exhibit ingroup favoritism on irrelevant dimensions as a way to compensate for an otherwise negative social identity (e.g., van Knippenberg, 1978). In fact, there is a wealth of evidence to support the notion that members of low-status groups accept their inferiority and exhibit outgroup favoritism on dimensions that are highly relevant to the status differences, but they exhibit ingroup favoritism on irrelevant dimensions as a way to compensate for an otherwise negative social identity (e.g., Mullen et al., 1992; Mummendey & Schreiber, 1984; van Knippenberg, 1978). For instance, Skevington (1981) examined intergroup relations among professional nursing groups that differed in status and found that low-status group members judged the other group to be more intelligent, ambitious, responsible, organized, and

confident than their own group, but they saw themselves as more cheerful, thoughtful, happy, and practical than the outgroup. The strategy of compensating for the effects of a low-status position by displaying strong ingroup favoritism on dimensions that are unrelated to the status difference has been referred to as *social creativity* (Tajfel & Turner, 1986).

A third account – one that is most closely related to the concerns of system justification theory – has to do with perceptions of the legitimacy and stability of the social system (e.g., Tajfel & Turner, 1986). Specifically, it has been found that members of a low-status group accept their inferiority on dimensions related to the status differences and display outgroup favoritism unless they perceive the status differences to be both illegitimate and likely to change (Turner & Brown, 1978). Thus, whether low-status group members accept or reject their alleged inferiority is hypothesized to depend on whether they perceive "cognitive alternatives" to the social system, which are said to be brought on by appraisals of illegitimacy and instability. Although there is no published research to date linking perceptions of legitimacy and stability to counterfactual thinking with regard to social systems, research in social identity theory has highlighted these variables as important predictors of group identification and intergroup behavior (e.g., Caddick, 1982; Ellemers et al., 1993; Turner & Brown, 1978).

The Influence of Social Identity Theory on the System Justification Perspective

Social identity theory is an important precursor to the theory of system justification in at least three ways. First, it brings a social-psychological perspective to bear on intergroup relations. Differences in status or success between groups are predicted to affect group members' perceptions of their own group and other groups, and these perceptions are theorized to affect the future course of relations between the groups as well as the viability of the social system (e.g., Tajfel & Turner, 1986; Wright et al., 1990). Second, the theory introduces ideological factors such as perceptions of the legitimacy and stability of the status system as relevant to ingroup and outgroup favoritism (e.g., Ellemers et al., 1993; Tajfel & Turner, 1986; Turner & Brown, 1978). Third, the notion that social groups invent ideologies that justify their competition against other groups, when combined with perspectives emphasizing the persuasive power of dominant groups' ideologies, helps explain why stereotypes and other ideas justifying social and material inequalities eventually come to be endorsed even by members of subordinate groups (e.g., Hogg & Abrams, 1988; Jost &

Banaji, 1994).

Nevertheless, there are some limitations of the social identity perspective that make it more of a jumping off point than a *terminus* for the theory of system justification (cf. Jost & Banaji, 1994). Most important, theorizing about when low-status groups accept the status quo and when they reject it has tended to be relatively undeveloped in the social identity tradition. Turner and Brown (1978) argued that "subordinate groups will seek positive distinctiveness from dominant groups to the degree that their inferiority is not perceived as inherent, immutable or fully legitimate" (p. 207), but the theory fails to specify when the system is perceived as "inherent, immutable, or fully legitimate" and when it is not. Perceptions of legitimacy and stability have been addressed by social identity researchers, but they have entered into the theory as independent variables (e.g., Caddick, 1982; Ellemers et al., 1993; Turner & Brown, 1978). As a result, not much is known from social identity theory about the causes of perceived legitimacy or about why members of low status groups would ever find the system to be legitimate, when such a perception clearly conflicts with group-serving motivations. The guiding assumption of social identity theory is that people are motivated to favor their own group over other groups, but this motivation seems conspicuously lacking in any display of outgroup favoritism, even outgroup favoritism under conditions of legitimacy and stability (Hinkle & Brown, 1990).

System justification theory, by contrast, draws on the vast literature on the tolerance of injustice (see Jost, 1995) and posits a motive to invest in and rationalize the status quo, and this motive is thought to be present even among members of disadvantaged groups, although typically to a lesser degree. Furthermore, research on system justification theory has begun to treat legitimacy and stability as moderating and dependent variables, demonstrating, for instance, that the act of stereotyping increases perceptions of the magnitude, legitimacy, and stability of status differences (see Jost, Burgess, & Mosso, in press). Thus, system justification theory seeks to elaborate further some of the sociostructural variables identified by social identity theorists.

In fact, Tajfel (1984) seemed to realize some of the limitations of social identity theory when he wrote that:

> This disymmetry between the 'superior' and 'inferior' groups has been recognized to some extent in the social identity approach to intergroup relations which has specified the different strategies for achieving distinctiveness that can be adopted by members of groups which differ in status... But this is not enough (p. 700).

Elsewhere, he noted the importance of justice perceptions in particular for an understanding of when group members will accept and when they will reject the social system:

> [an] important requirement of research on social justice would consist of establishing in detail the links between social myths and the general *acceptance* of injustice, and research which would attempt to specify the sociopsychological conditions which could be expected to contribute to the dissolution of these patterns of acceptance (1982, p. 164).

Here, Tajfel seemed to be appealing to justice researchers to determine when people will engage in system justification and when they will not. He alluded, it seems, to the need for a theory of false consciousness (Jost, 1995). Obviously, these are top priorities of the system justification approach, the implications of which are still being developed and tested in emerging research paradigms. After a brief overview of the theory, we describe an experimental paradigm that has been used to shed further light on the dynamics of ingroup and outgroup favoritism and the role of several variables identified by social identity theory, including group identification, attribute relevance, and perceived legitimacy.

THE THEORY OF SYSTEM JUSTIFICATION

Although phenomena such as outgroup favoritism and internalization of inferiority may be puzzling to social, political, and psychological theorists, who assume that attitudes and behaviors are driven largely by self-interest, group-interest, or needs for personal or collective self-esteem, there is a rich tradition of Marxist and feminist scholarship on the problem of false consciousness (see Jost, 1995, for a review). This work especially emphasizes the *cognitive* dimensions of oppression and system preservation, building on Marx and Engels' (1846/1970) 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*" (p. 64; emphasis added). This theme is carried on in 20th century Marxism, most especially in György Lukács' historical analysis of class consciousness and Antonio Gramsci's cultural theory of hegemony and consent. Contemporary sociologists working under the banner of dominant ideology theory have continued to explore the extent to which subordinate groups are persuaded to hold beliefs that are at odds with their objective social interests (Abercrombie, Hill, & Turner, 1990; Kluegel & Smith, 1986).

System justification theory, then, is a theory of social cognition that takes its impetus from the Marxian ideological tradition, with its focus on the justification of inequality and exploitation (Jost & Banaji, 1994). One of the main theoretical assumptions of this perspective is that, all other things being equal, *people tend to use ideas about groups and individuals to justify the way things are, so that existing social arrangements are perceived as fair and legitimate, perhaps even natural and inevitable*. There are at least seven established social-psychological phenomena that we draw on and take to support the general system justification perspective. They may be summarized as follows:

1. Members of groups low in social standing exhibit "outgroup favoritism" by internalizing unfavorable stereotypes of their own group and subscribing to favorable stereotypes of successful outgroups (Hinkle & Brown, 1990; Jost & Banaji, 1994; Sidanius, 1993).

2. People form stereotypes as a way of "rationalizing" unequal divisions of roles, especially in terms of essentialistic biological categories (Eagly & Steffen, 1984; Hoffman & Hurst, 1990; Jackman & Senter, 1983).

3. Members of disadvantaged groups tend to draw intrapersonal and intragroup social comparisons rather than intergroup comparisons, as when women judge the legitimacy of their own income against standards of the income of other women and of their own income in the past (Jost, 1997; Major, 1994).

4. People perceive existing institutions, procedures, and outcomes as fair and legitimate, even when there are reasons to suspect that they are not (Lerner, 1980; Martin, 1986; Tyler & McGraw, 1986).

5. People exhibit decision-making biases in favor of whatever option is perceived as the "status quo" and avoid choices that are perceived to entail change (Samuelson & Zeckhauser, 1988; Silver & Mitchell, 1990).

6. People stick disproportionately with past behavioral practices simply because they are familiar or habitual and fail to consider innovative alternatives (Hackman & Oldham, 1980; Silver & Mitchell, 1990).

7. People display "outcome biases" in their evaluations of groups and individuals, so that people described as "winners" are selectively perceived as possessing enduring attributes that are consistent with their success and people described as "losers" are seen as always having possessed attributes that are consistent with their failure (Allison, Mackie, & Messick, 1996).

What these distinct bodies of evidence have in common is the notion that *what is* tends to be experienced as *what ought to be*; Although some of these phenomena, most especially status quo and outcome biases, are usually explained in purely cognitive terms by social psychologists, there is an ideological tenor to them that adds a layer of political significance and motivation to the basic information processing functions. According to the present view, *cognition is deployed in the service of the social system*.

An Experimental Paradigm

On occasion, the phenomenon of outgroup favoritism has been dismissed as something of an experimental artifact that does not occur in real-world groups. For instance, Mullen et al. (1992) wrote that "a concentration on transitory, task-specific conceptualizations of status would lead to the misguided conclusion that ingroup bias occurs predominantly in higher status groups" (p. 118). One of the goals of the research paradigm summarized here is to examine ingroup and outgroup favoritism by using an experimental manipulation of status that is neither transitory nor task-specific. Instead, we sought to devise an experimental paradigm in which ingroup and outgroup favoritism could be investigated in the context of real-world group memberships, whereas relative social status could be manipulated experimentally so that differences due to social status of the ingroup could be attributed solely to variations in status and not to other factors associated with particular real-world groups.

Additionally, the manipulation of status was defined in terms of socioeconomic success. This was done to improve on the ecological validity of previous experimental manipulations of status in terms of performance feedback on tests of creativity (Sachdev & Bourhis, 1987, 1991), reasoning skills (Turner & Brown, 1978), or other "transitory, task-specific conceptualizations" (Mullen et al., 1992, p. 118). Because system justification theory is especially relevant for understanding cognitive responses to wealth and poverty (e.g., Jost, 1995; Lane, 1962; Major, 1994), status of the ingroup was operationalized as relative socioeconomic success.

The basic procedure for varying perceived socioeconomic success is as follows. Shortly after arriving for an experiment billed as "The Inter-Collegiate Study of Abstract Thought," university students are told that they are about to participate in a research project aimed at understanding "why differences in social and economic success exist between graduates of different colleges and universities." Half of the participants are presented with statistics indicating that alumni members of their own university group are significantly less successful in terms

of socioeconomic achievement than are members of a rival outgroup, and the other half are led to believe that the ingroup is more successful than the outgroup. These statistics include information concerning average financial income, career advancement and promotions, status of professions entered, rates of admission to graduate and professional schools, and years of postgraduate education completed. The materials used for a study involving University of Maryland students (low-success condition) are presented in Table 6.2 (see also Jost & Burgess, 2000, for more information).

This procedure has been used successfully in a series of experiments involving students at Yale University, the University of Maryland, and the University of California at Santa Barbara (U.C.S.B.), with comparison outgroups of Stanford University, the University of Virginia, and the University of California at Los Angeles (U.C.L.A.), respectively. These three experiments are described in abbreviated form in this chapter; two of them are presented more systematically elsewhere (see Jost, 1996; Jost & Burgess, 2000). Manipulation checks indicate that, in all studies conducted thus far, the statistics concerning socioeconomic success differences (ascribed to sources such as *U.S. News and World Report* and the *Chronicle of Higher Education*) were accepted as credible and convincing. These studies also demonstrate that relative socioeconomic success has a major impact on the stereotypes and evaluations that people have about ingroup and outgroup members. As a general rule, random assignment to the high-success condition leads people to display ingroup favoritism – that is, to express beliefs that their own group is superior on a number of stereotypical characteristics, whereas assignment to the low-success condition leads people to display outgroup favoritism – that is, to express beliefs that the more successful outgroup is superior.

This pattern has been observed on qualitative, open-ended measures of attribution in which respondents are not constrained by the expectancies or questions of the researchers. In the Yale study, following the experimental induction of relative success, participants were given the following instructions: "Think about the differences in social and economic success between Yale and Stanford alumni/ae. Can you think of any explanations or justifications for why Yale and Stanford graduates would have different rates of socioeconomic success?" Participants were then asked to spend 2 to 3 minutes listing up to five responses in clearly numbered spaces. Two independent judges coded the open-ended responses as focusing either on the ingroup (Yale) or the outgroup (Stanford) and as expressing something favorable, unfavorable, or neutral about that ingroup or outgroup.

TABLE 6.2: Sample materials for manipulating perceived socioeconomic success.

	Virginia Alumni	Maryland Alumni
Mean Financial Income		
after 5 years	$38,500	$24,700
after 10 years	$53,200	$39,500
after 20 years	$69,700	$54,100
at retirement	$78,300	$62,500
Career Advancement		
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 CEOs of major corporations	41	17
Postgraduate Education		
Mean years of postgraduate education	1.3	0.4
% of applicants admitted to medical school	44%	21%
% of applicants admitted to law school	43%	19%
% of applicants admitted to business school	57%	30%
% of applicants admitted to graduate school	60%	41%
% receiving post-baccalaureate degrees	49%	23%

Sources: U.S. News & World Report, 1993; The Chronicle of Higher Education, 1994

When Yale students were assigned to the high-success condition, explanations making reference to characteristics of the ingroup tended to be very favorable (e.g., "Maybe Yalies are smarter"; "Yale admits students with better records who are innately more driven"). According to the independent judges, 81.5% of ingroup-related statements were favorable in content, and only 2.4% of these were unfavorable. When members of high-success groups generated explanations pertaining to the outgroup, 42.1% of these were judged to be unfavorable (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"; "Stanford students are somehow superficial. They simply glide

on the surface without seeking the deep reasons"). Only 15.8% of the explanations having to do with features of the outgroup were favorable.

When Yale students were assigned to a position of low socioeconomic success, the results were very different. Under these conditions, only 12.3% of the explanations involving the ingroup were judged to be favorable in nature, whereas 42.5% were unfavorable (e.g., "Yale is full of your bookworms and your dorks"; "Yale students are too idealistic, and usually have impractical or false imaginations about real world life"). Of explanations involving the outgroup, 62.2% were judged as favorable (e.g., "Stanford offers a better education than Yale"; "Stanford is a more selective school, so it has smarter people"), and only 4.2% were unfavorable. Thus, members of low-success groups display outgroup favoritism in making open-ended attributions for the socioeconomic success differences.

As with stereotypes, evaluations, resource allocations, and other types of social judgments, the research literature on intergroup relations has stressed the ethnocentric nature of attributions about ingroup and outgroup members (Cooper & Fazio, 1986; Hewstone, 1990; Pettigrew, 1979). The notion that people generate group-serving attributions for outcomes is also highly consistent with social identity theory. Our research suggests, however, that low-status group members do not attribute their inferior position to situational factors or extenuating circumstances, but rather seem to internalize the inequality in the form of internal attributions about the unfavorable characteristics of the ingroup and the favorable characteristics of the outgroup.

According to a system justification analysis, members of groups that are low in social or material standing should exhibit ingroup derogation and outgroup favoritism to the extent that they perceive the overarching social system to be fair, legitimate, and justifiable. Thus, it is hypothesized that perceived legitimacy is negatively related to ingroup favoritism among members of low-status groups, insofar as people who accept ideological justifications for a status quo that places them at a disadvantage should be more likely to consent to their own inferiority. However, perceived legitimacy is hypothesized to relate positively to ingroup favoritism among high-status groups, insofar as they gain confidence and esteem from the sense that their advantage is legitimized; their sense of superiority is increased by the perception that the system is fair, legitimate, and justified.

This interaction hypothesis is slightly different from that which has been predicted by social identity theorists. Turner and Brown (1978) hypothesized that "[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. Their reasoning was that perceived illegitimacy should render the system of status differences unstable and insecure, leading both groups to vie for a position of superiority (see also Caddick, 1982). This implies a main effect hypothesis such that ingroup favoritism should be greater among people who perceive the status differences to be low in legitimacy than among people who perceive them to be high in legitimacy. Thus, although social identity and system justification theories make the same prediction with regard to the behavior of low-status group members, the two perspectives differ when it comes to predictions about high-status group members.

In an experiment involving students at the University of Maryland, the procedure described earlier was used to manipulate perceived socioeconomic success. Following this induction, participants were asked how fair or unfair, how justifiable or unjustifiable, and how legitimate or illegitimate the socioeconomic success differences were between the ingroup (University of Maryland) and the outgroup (University of Virginia), and their responses to these three items were averaged to create a general index of perceived legitimacy. Ingroup and outgroup ratings on status relevant (intelligent, hard working, and skilled at verbal reasoning) and status irrelevant (friendly, honest, and interesting) attributes were solicited.

As illustrated in Fig. 6.1, perceived legitimacy increased ingroup favoritism among members of high-success groups, but it decreased ingroup favoritism (and increased outgroup favoritism) among members of low-success groups. This interaction pattern was also observed in the Yale study (Jost, 1996), suggesting that the focus on legitimation in intergroup relations is well placed. *Perceived legitimacy seems to have opposite effects on high-status and low-status group members, as system justification theory predicts*, and not as Turner and Brown (1978) suggested.

In addition, Jost and Burgess (2000) found that Maryland students assigned to the position of low socioeconomic success showed significantly greater attitudinal ambivalence directed at their own group than did students assigned to the high-success condition. This was explained in terms of *a psychological conflict between opposing tendencies toward group justification and system justification* – a conflict that faces members of low-status but not high-status groups (see also Jost et al., 2001). We also reasoned that members of a psychologically meaningful group such as this (for whom at least moderate levels of group justification motives would be present), ambivalence toward the ingroup

Fig. 6.1. Means on ingroup favoritism (stereotyping) by ingroup success and perceived legitimacy

Perceived Legitimacy
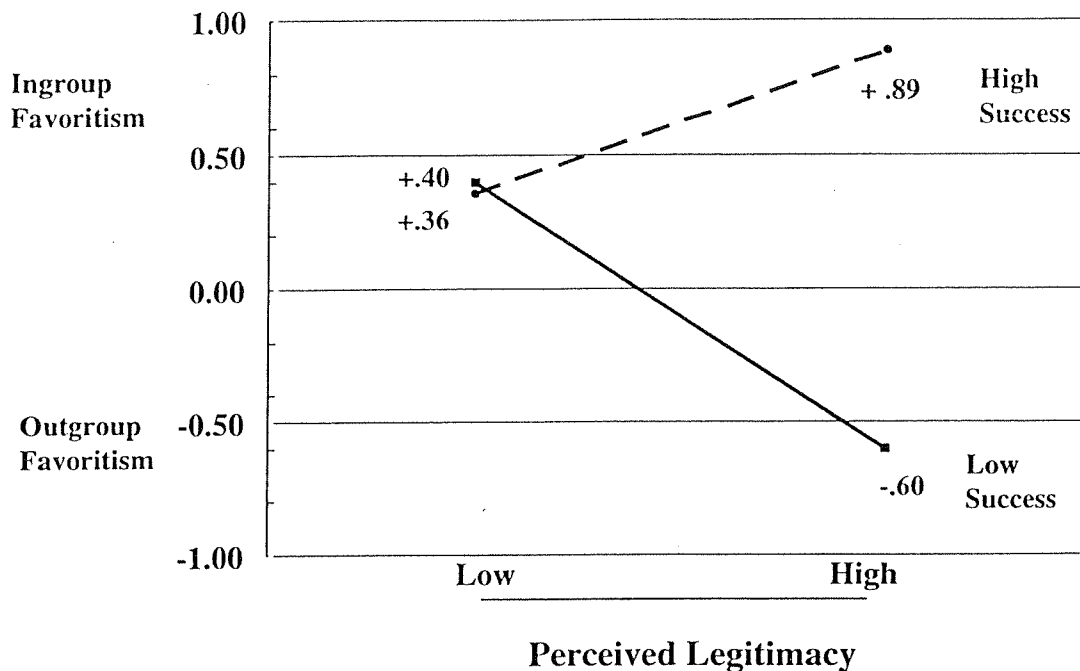
would be increased as levels of system justification were increased for members of the low-status group, but ambivalence would be decreased as levels of system justification were increased for people assigned to the high-status condition. And this is what we found. Perceptions of the legitimacy of the status differences were associated with i..creased ambivalence among low-status group members and decreased ambivalence among high-status group members (Jost & Burgess, 2000).

One potential limitation of the Maryland study is that perceived legitimacy was measured rather than manipulated, and so there was no random assignment to conditions of legitimacy or illegitimacy. A follow-up study involving students at U.C.S.B. did employ an experimental manipulation of perceived legitimacy. After learning that their own group was less socioeconomically successful than the comparison outgroup of U.C.L.A. students, participants were exposed to a pair of persuasive essays that were allegedly written by members of the ingroup (as part of a cover story concerning abstract verbal reasoning); these essays were in actuality designed to alter perceptions of the legitimacy of the socioeconomic differences. In the high-legitimacy condition, for example, one of the essays read:

> There are two good reasons why UCSB students are less economically successful than UCLA students: (1) UCLA admits students with more varied and more

experienced backgrounds, and these people have a better sense of what they want to do later in life; and (2) there is a perception out there (and it's probably right!) that UCSB students are partyers who do not take academics seriously enough. Both of these reasons would easily explain the disparities. With regard to the first, everyone knows that people who are ambitious and knowledgeable are in a better position to succeed economically, and they deserve that success. With regard to the second reason, potential employers are probably sensitive to legitimate differences in the qualifications of students at the two schools.

The corresponding essay for the low-legitimacy condition was as follows:

> There are two main reasons why UCSB students are less economically successful than UCLA students: (1) UCLA admits more students with privileged backgrounds, and these people have more advantages to begin with and more connections later in life; and (2) there is a misperception that UCSB students are just partyers who do not take academics seriously. Neither one of these reasons is fair. With regard to the first, everyone knows that 'wealth begets wealth' and that it is far easier for people of higher social classes to succeed economically, whether they deserve that success or not. With regard to the second reason, potential employers are probably relying on false perceptions, without paying enough attention to the merits of qualified individuals at UCSB.

Fig. 6.2. Effects of legitimacy manipulation on ingroup and outgroup favoritism on the part of low status group members
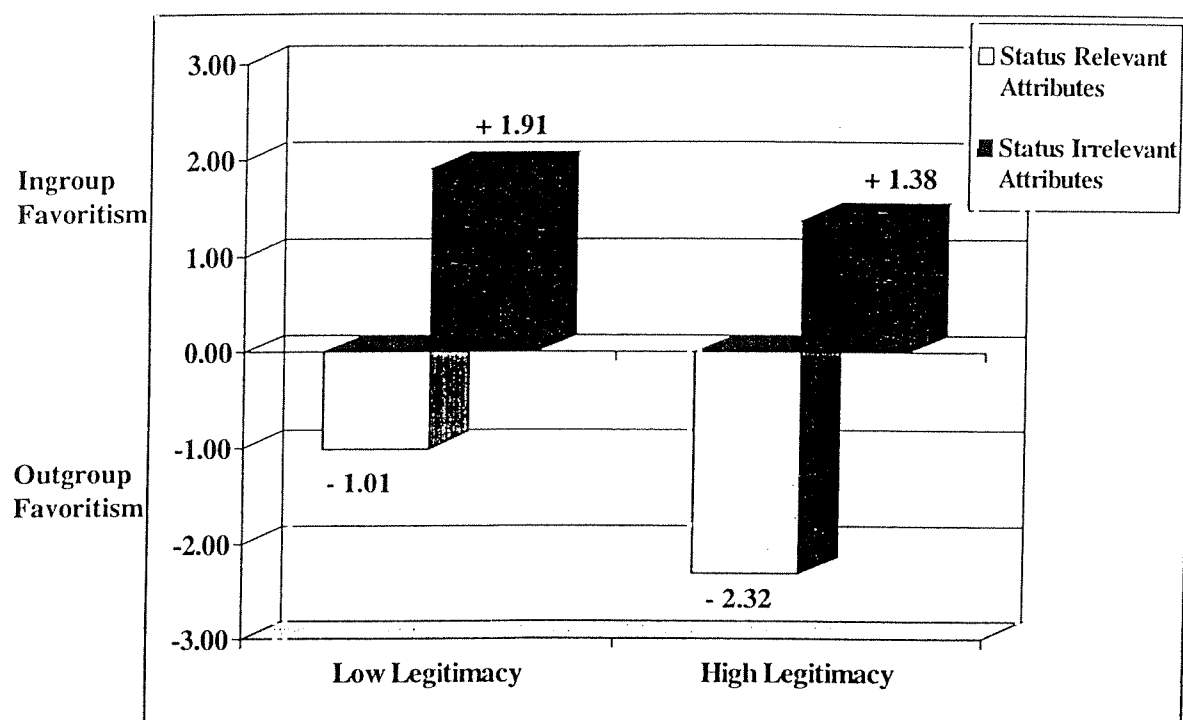
Although a subset of participants (12%) were not persuaded by the essays, those who were persuaded that the system was either legitimate or illegitimate showed changes in their stereotypes (see Fig. 6.2). Compared with students who were assigned to the low- legitimac ' condition, those who were assigned to the high-legitimacy condition exhibited stronger outgroup favoritism on status-relevant attributes (intelligent, hard working, skilled at verbal reasoning) and lesser ingroup favoritism on status-irrelevant attributes (honest, friendly, interesting). In addition to clarifying the important role of perceived legitimacy in determining the degree of ingroup or outgroup favoritism exhibited by low-status group members, the experimental paradigm we developed also provides us with some insight concerning the issues of disidentification and attribute relevance.

Does Disidentification Account for Outgroup Favoritism in Low-status Groups?

According to one prominent account derived from social identity theory, members of low-status groups exhibit outgroup favoritism to the extent that they disidentify with their own group. However, it may not always be feasible for people to avoid perceiving themselves in terms of ascribed group memberships and to persist in thinking of themselves as part of a group to which they do not belong. Research indicates, in fact, that ingroup identification tends to be stronger among members of some low-status groups (e.g., African Americans, Hispanic Americans) than among members of high-status groups (e.g., European Americans), insofar as the former group memberships are more numerically distinctive (rarer) than the latter (McGuire & McGuire, 1988). An even bigger challenge to the disidentification thesis is the fact that correlations between ingroup identification and ingroup favoritism are weak and inconsistent (Hinkle & Brown, 1990). A study by Mlicki and Ellemers (1996), for example, finds that Polish citizens identify especially strongly with their own national image, but the image that they hold is a predominantly negative one, presumably because of recent failures of their economic system. Therefore, it is doubtful that decreased ingroup identification among members of low-status groups, even if it can be demonstrated, would be sufficient to produce the extent of outgroup favoritism that has been observed.

Although ingroup identification has not been a focal point of the research program reported on here, it was included as a measured variable in the Yale study and as a manipulated variable in the U.C.S.B. study. In the Yale study, no evidence was obtained for the disidentification

Fig. 6.3. Stereotypic evaluations of high status and low status target groups by an observer group
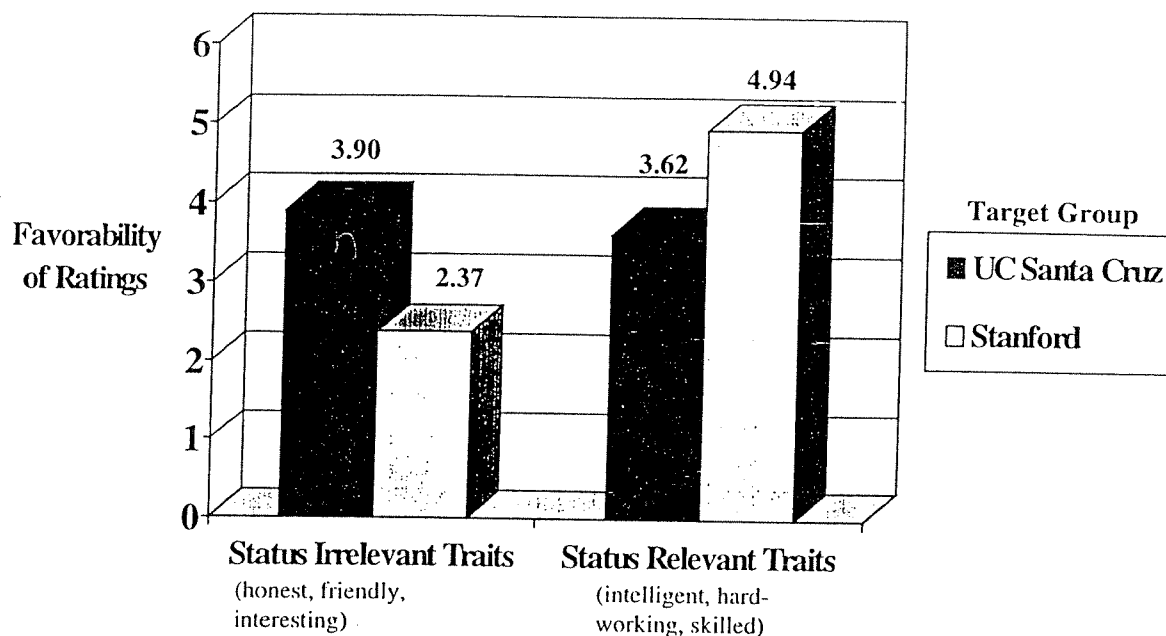
hypothesis that members of low-success groups would identify less with the ingroup than would members of high-success groups. Ingroup identification was in fact nonsignificantly higher among members of low-success groups than among members of high-success groups, possibly because cognitive dissonance is aroused by belonging to a group that is low in social standing, and this dissonance may be reduced by redoubling one's investment in the group (cf. Turner, Hogg, Oakes, & Smith, 1984). In the U.C.S.B. study, a *bogus pipeline* procedure was used to convince members of low-status groups they were either especially high or low in ingroup identification (cf. Doosje, Ellemers, & Spears, 1995). No significant main effect of ingroup identification on ingroup favoritism was obtained, although this should have been expected on the basis of social identity theory (Tajfel & Turner, 1986).

Taken as a whole, these findings deepen existing worries that social identity theory insufficiently explains status differences on ingroup favoritism (Hinkle & Brown, 1990; Jost & Banaji, 1994; Sidanius, 1993). None of this is to say that disidentification processes play no role in the phenomenon of outgroup favoritism or that issues of group justification are unrelated to intergroup evaluations. What our results suggest, however, is that *disidentification with the ingroup does not seem to be a*

necessary prerequisite for the sort of system justifying outgroup favoritism observed among members of low-status groups.

Does the Moderating Role of Attribute Relevance Support Social Identity Theory?

Studies employing our experimental paradigm for manipulating perceived socioeconomic success replicate the finding that attribute relevance moderates the display of ingroup and outgroup favoritism on the part of low-status group members (e.g., Mullen et al., 1992; Mummendey & Schreiber, 1984; Skevington, 1981; Spears & Manstead, 1989; van Knippenberg, 1978). In the Maryland study (Jost & Burgess, 2000), for example, members of low-status groups exhibited strong outgroup favoritism on status-relevant attributes of intelligence, industriousness, and verbal reasoning ability, but they exhibited strong ingroup favoritism on status-irrelevant attributes of honesty, friendliness, and interestingness, a finding that was replicated in the U.C.S.B. study. Members of high-status groups, by contrast, exhibited ingroup favoritism on relevant and irrelevant attributes.

Although we have replicated the pattern of results obtained by social identity theorists for relevant versus

irrelevant attributes, another one of our studies casts doubt on the theoretical interpretation that has been offered repeatedly for this pattern. U.C.S.B. students were asked to rate two outgroups – Stanford and U.C.-Santa Cruz – on exactly the same stereotyping measures used in all of the prior studies. Although U.C.S.B. students did not belong to either of the groups being rated, the stereotype pattern they showed was almost identical to other studies in which the ingroup was implicated in the comparison: The higher status group (Stanford) was rated as more intelligent, more hard working, and more skilled at verbal reasoning, whereas the lower status group (U.C.-Santa Cruz) was rated as more honest, friendly, and interesting (see Fig. 6.3). In fact, the mean differences corresponded almost exactly to mean levels of ingroup and outgroup favoritism in our other studies. This suggests that the tendency among members of low-status groups to favor the ingroup on status-irrelevant dimensions of comparison may not actually be driven by group-justifying needs to compensate for threatened social identification, as has always been assumed. The possibility that people subscribe generally to lay or folk theories in which a negative correlation exists between social or economic status and favorable socioemotional characteristics (such as honesty and friendliness) is being addressed in ongoing research. In fact, it may be that such beliefs serve system-justifying ends and that high- and low-status group members might all feel that the system is more legitimate if they can sustain stereotypes of the "poor but honest" or "poor but happy" variety.

FUTURE DIRECTIONS IN THE THEORY OF SYSTEM JUSTIFICATION

One question that has not been addressed sufficiently in the research reported herein is "*why* do people engage in system justification?" Our response is that it is probably overdetermined. There are many forces, internal and external to the individual, that pull for system justification sorts of attitudes and behaviors, and these should be investigated in future research.

There are cognitive factors, such as genuine attempts to explain and understand the world, as well as tendencies to preserve existing attitudes and beliefs and to achieve certainty and closure. Thus, we have argued that political conservatism and other system-justifying attitudes serve to reduce uncertainty and satisfy the "need for cognitive closure" (e.g., Jost, Kruglanski, & Simon, 1999). In addition, there are motivations to stave off existential terror by preserving the sense that the world is a fair and manageable place in which people "get what

they deserve and deserve what they get" (e.g., Lerner, 1980). Situational factors also determine the strength of system-justifying responses. In recent research with Yephat Kivetz, we have found that the presence of an ideological threat directed against the national system increases stereotypic differentiation between high-status Ahskenazi Jews and low-status Sepharadic Jews in Israel. In general, too, people face structural constraints, such as rewards for obeying authority and tolerating unequal outcomes, and punishments for challenging the legitimacy of the system.

Therefore, we argue that one major (and over-determined) function of attitudes, stereotypes, and social judgments is to justify existing social arrangements. System justification refers to a set of social, cognitive, and motivational tendencies to preserve the status quo through ideological means, especially when it involves rationalizing inequality among social groups. Our research (in collaboration with Grazia Guermandi, Monica Rubini, and Cristina Mosso) has begun to explore the ways in which people use stereotypes to justify socioeconomic differences between northerners and southerners in the United States, England, and Italy.

There are other issues, too, that future research would do well to address. For one thing, it would be important to know the extent to which system justification and outgroup favoritism are truly internalized on the part of low-status group members, as opposed to being strategic, self-presentations displays that do not reflect privately held beliefs and attitudes. Jost and Banaji (1994) argued that outgroup favoritism might be even stronger at an unconscious or unexamined level of awareness insofar as such impulses would be less subject to controlled processing and to conscious activation of ego and group justification motives. Our research has begun to explore these issues, using reaction time paradigms and other unobtrusive methodologies to estimate the extent of outgroup favoritism on non-conscious cognitive, affective, and behavioral measures (Jost, Pelham, & Carvallo, 2000).

Finally, the future of system-justification theory will have to accommodate exceptions to the rule by explaining when and why people fail to provide ideological support for the existing social system. In other words, the theory should be useful also for identifying opponent processes that govern group consciousness-raising and inspire social and organizational change. Some of these are likely to be associated with processes of ego justification and group justification, which are hypothesized to stand in an inverse relation to system justification processes for members of low-status groups (Jost et al., 2001). Individual difference variables might also identify

people who are especially likely or unlikely to engage in system-justifying outgroup favoritism. Candidates include the "belief in a just world" scale and the "social dominance orientation" scale (see Jost & Burgess, 2000; Jost & Thompson, 2000), as well as political orientation (Jost, Burgess, & Mosso, in press). In collaboration with Grazia Guermandi and Erik Thompson, we have also been developing a scale of "economic system justification" (see Jost & Thompson, 2000). Evidence presented here – that perceptions of illegitimacy are associated with the rejection of outgroup favoritism – is also a step in the right direction, but more research is needed to determine when and why people will shed the layers of false consciousness and begin to substantially challenge the existence of social inequality in all of its various guises.

ACKNOWLEDGMENT