

NOT ALL IDEOLOGIES ARE CREATED EQUAL: EPISTEMIC, EXISTENTIAL, AND RELATIONAL NEEDS PREDICT SYSTEM-JUSTIFYING ATTITUDES

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Whereas most social psychological perspectives assume that needs to manage uncertainty, existential anxiety, and social cohesion should motivate any form of ideological zeal, System Justification Theory predicts that these needs are *positively* associated with the endorsement of system-justifying beliefs, opinions, and values but *negatively* associated with the endorsement of system-challenging ideological outcomes. For the first time we test a full theoretical model in which system justification mediates the effects of individual differences in epistemic, existential, and relational needs on attitudes toward public policy issues and social movements. Specifically, we conducted a national survey of 182 Americans and found that, as hypothesized, lower need for cognition, greater death anxiety, and a stronger desire to share reality each contributed significantly and independently to economic system justification, which, in turn, contributed to support for the Tea Party (a movement aimed at restoring America's "traditional values") and opposition to Occupy Wall Street (a movement seeking to reduce social and economic inequality and minimize corporate influence on government). Economic system justification also mediated the effects of these needs on the endorsement of status quo positions with respect to health care, immigration, global climate change, and the "Ground Zero mosque." These findings suggest that epistemic, existential, and relational needs lead disproportionately to support for system-justifying, rather than system-challenging, policies and movements.

[A]s a prominent ultra-conservative radio commentator observed recently: "There is nothing wrong with our American system. It is as good as it ever was, but we must

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do all we can in the New Year to get rid of the charlatans, fakers, and agitators who are responsible for so many problems." It is clear from the other speeches of this commentator that his "charlatans" are for the most part leaders of the labor movement or of liberal political groupings—men who, in his eyes, threaten the existing order.

(Adorno, Frenkel-Brunswik, Levinson, & Sanford, 1950, p. 154)

In the sinister shadow of the Nazi Holocaust and the fascist movements throughout Europe that preceded it, Theodor Adorno and his collaborators (1950) conducted scientific research in order to understand the social and psychological causes of right-wing extremism. This was the motivation behind the famous "Berkeley studies," in which Adorno and his colleagues identified a set of characteristics associated with what they designated the *authoritarian personality*, such as aggression, submission to authority, conventionalism, cognitive rigidity, stereotypical thinking, and contempt for members of minority and deviant groups. Though the work of Adorno et al. (1950) has since received much criticism on both methodological and ideological grounds, the ideas of *The Authoritarian Personality* continue to inform the scientific understanding of the relationship between personal psychological needs and ideological outcomes (e.g., Altemeyer, 2003; Block & Block, 2006; Caprara & Zimbardo, 2004; Carney, Jost, Gosling, & Potter, 2008; Jost, 2006; Jost, Glaser, Kruglanski, & Sulloway, 2003; Jost, Nilsson, & Shipley, in press; Sidanius & Pratto, 1999).

A crucial conclusion drawn by Adorno et al. (1950)—and one that has proven extraordinarily influential in contemporary research—is that "ideologies have for different individuals, different degrees of appeal, a matter that depends upon the individual's needs and the degree to which these needs are being satisfied or frustrated" (p. 2). That is, people are drawn to those belief systems that best resonate with their chronic or temporary psychological needs and motives (see e.g., Jost, 2009; Jost, Federico, & Napier, 2009). In the present research, we draw from theory and research pertaining to the phenomenon of system justification (Jost & Banaji, 1994), which posits that situational and dispositional needs to reduce uncertainty and existential anxiety and to attain a sense of shared reality help to explain why some individuals are staunch supporters of the status quo (and the "American system") and are deeply suspicious of "charlatans" and agitators who threaten the existing order, whereas others are not (e.g., see Jost, Ledgerwood, & Hardin, 2008; Jost, Nosek, & Gosling, 2008). The epigraph that begins this article was written over 70 years ago, but it may as well have been written today. *Plus ça change, plus c'est la même chose* (Karr, 1849).

ARE ALL IDEOLOGIES CREATED EQUAL?

Most social psychological theories—including Terror Management Theory (Anson, Pyszczynski, Solomon, & Greenberg, 2009; Greenberg & Jonas, 2003; Greenberg, Pyszczynski, & Solomon, 1986), the Meaning Maintenance Model (Heine, Proulx, & Vohs, 2006), Uncertainty-Identity Theory (Hogg, 2005, 2007), perspectives on defensive conviction and reactive approach motivation (McGregor & Marigold, 2003; McGregor, Nash, & Prentice, 2010), and, more recently, an integrated model of threat compensation (Proulx & Heine, 2010; Proulx, Inzlicht, & Harmon-Jones, 2012)—suggest that adherence to *any* political or religious belief system is moti-

vated, more or less equivalently, by psychological needs to manage uncertainty, threat, and social belongingness.

According to Terror Management Theory (TMT), for instance, individuals experiencing heightened mortality salience (e.g., immediately after the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001) should cling tightly to “personalized” versions of the cultural worldview, because doing so conveys an enduring sense of meaning and value to the individual (e.g., Anson et al., 2009). Such reasoning led Greenberg and Jonas (2003) to hypothesize that “if an individual has particularly strong needs to reduce fear and uncertainty, she or he would most likely grab on tightly to the prevailing ideology—whether oriented toward the right or the left” (p. 381). In practice, however, much of the research on TMT has demonstrated that mortality salience leads individuals to express sentiments that could be characterized as authoritarian and defensive of the status quo, such as derogating critics of the United States and advocating harsh penalties for criminals and other social deviants (e.g., Greenberg, Pyszczynski, Solomon et al., 1990; see also Jost, Fitzsimons, & Kay, 2004; Wicklund, 1997).

More recently, TMT scholars have investigated instances in which mortality salience increases support for tolerant and seemingly progressive values, such as acceptance of immigrants (Weise, Arciszewski, Verliac, Pyszczynski, & Greenberg, 2012), forgiveness of moral transgressors (Schimel, Wohl, & Williams, 2006; Williams, Schimel, Hayes, & Martens, 2009), rejection of extreme military force (Rothschild, Abdollahi, & Pyszczynski, 2009; Weise, Pyszczynski, Cox, et al., 2008), and approval of liberal opinions and candidates (Castano, Leidner, Bonacossa, et al., 2011; Vail, Arndt, Motyl, & Pyszczynski, 2009). However, the effect of mortality salience in virtually all of these cases is moderated by some other dispositional variable, such as right-wing authoritarianism, attachment security, empathy, or the situational priming of compassion or secure relationships. In the absence of mitigating factors such as these, death anxiety tends to produce system-defensive outcomes (e.g., see Jost et al., 2003; Jost, Fitzsimons, & Kay, 2004; Jost, 2006; Thórisdóttir & Jost, 2011; Ullrich & Cohrs, 2007). Although mortality salience produces myriad (and sometimes conflicting) ideological and behavioral outcomes under various conditions, it is far from clear that those who are existentially anxious are just as likely to embrace progressive belief systems as they are to embrace belief systems that justify the societal status quo.

Similarly, the Meaning Maintenance Model (MMM) holds that people are motivated to organize their internal and external experiences into frameworks that provide meaning to their lives, but the assumption is that any belief system to which the individual is strongly committed is capable of serving this purpose (Heine et al., 2006; Proulx & Heine, 2010). The idea is that unpredictability is inherently unsettling and that individuals therefore seek to impose meaning and structure on their experiences (see also Whitson & Galinsky, 2008). Along these lines, Proulx et al. (2012) have proposed a general theory of threat compensation, which predicts that exposure to information contradicting any expected association or meaning network will lead individuals to experience arousal. This arousal, in turn, motivates people to affirm other belief systems to which they are committed, regardless of their ideological content, which allows them to regain a sense of meaning. Epistemic threats of this kind can produce behavioral outcomes that are devoid of ideological content, such as increased learning on a grammatical task (Proulx & Heine, 2009). At the same time, the dependent variables chosen to demonstrate

“meaning maintenance” often turn out to be authoritarian and system-justifying (rather than system-challenging) in nature. For instance, exposure to a perceptual anomaly—such as an unobtrusive switch of experimenters during the middle of a study (Proulx & Heine, 2008) or exposure to an absurd Monty Python parody in the absence of forewarning (Proulx, Heine, & Vohs, 2010)—causes participants to set higher bonds for prostitutes.

Other studies suggest that exposure to uncertainty and threat increases religious conviction (e.g., McGregor et al., 2010). Perhaps this is because religion compensates for the loss of control that results from epistemic uncertainty (Kay, Gaucher, Napier, Callan, & Laurin, 2008; Kay, Moscovitch, & Laurin, 2010; Kay, Shepherd, Blatz, Chua, & Galinsky, 2010). However, the possibility remains that religious belief systems are especially appealing under circumstances of uncertainty and threat because of the fact that they contain a great deal of system-justifying content, such as the belief that God is fair and that people will receive their just deserts in the afterlife (e.g., see Lerner, 1980; Weber, 1922/1963).

In light of these observations, we challenge the prevailing wisdom in social psychology that all ideologies are created equal when it comes to addressing psychological needs for certainty, security, and solidarity. Indeed, it seems likely that some ideologies—such as the “new left” movement of the 1960s, which inspired student activism, civil rights demonstrations, and anti-war protests in the U.S. and elsewhere—generally *increased* rather than decreased feelings of uncertainty, danger, and social conflict (see also Jost & Napier, 2012). From a historical perspective, the instability brought on by each wave of leftist “agitation” may have provoked the corresponding conservative, system-justifying backlash designed to return America to the “good old days” (e.g., see Eibach & Libby, 2009; Frank, 2004; Jost, 2009). Indeed, conservative opposition to liberal reform has continued unabated to the present day, with the Tea Party Movement offering the most vivid example in recent years.

SYSTEM JUSTIFICATION THEORY

The above empirical and anecdotal observations are consistent with System Justification Theory, which suggests that people are motivated (often at a nonconscious level) to defend, bolster, and justify existing social, economic, and political arrangements (Jost & Banaji, 1994; Jost, Banaji, & Nosek, 2004; Jost & van der Toorn, 2012). Importantly, this motivation varies as a function of both dispositional and situational factors (Jost & Hunyady, 2005; Jost & van der Toorn, 2012). It is hypothesized that system justification tendencies are psychologically appealing because they address fundamental needs and motives that all humans possess to varying degrees—namely *epistemic* needs to attain certainty, consistency, and meaning, *existential* needs to reduce threat and distress, and *relational* needs to manage social relationships and achieve shared reality with others (Jost, Ledgerwood, & Hardin, 2008). In contrast to other social psychological perspectives, System Justification Theory predicts that *both* chronic and temporary elevations in epistemic, existential, and relational needs will be associated with stronger preferences for system-justifying ideologies and outcomes (and stronger rejection of system-challenging ideologies and outcomes).

Research conducted over the last decade or so has provided support for the notion that epistemic, existential, and relational needs are all disproportionately associated with the endorsement of inherently conservative, system-justifying beliefs, opinions, and values. For instance, individual differences in the need for cognitive closure (i.e., the desire to “seize and freeze” on a given conclusion rather than tolerating or prolonging uncertainty; Kruglanski, Webster, & Klem, 1993; Webster & Kruglanski, 1994) predict anchoring on the status quo, political conservatism, authoritarianism, stereotyping, and rejection of opinion deviates (Federico & Goren, 2009; Jost et al., 2003; Kimmelmeier, 1997; Shah, Kruglanski, & Thompson, 1998). Similarly, low need for cognition (i.e., possessing a low level of motivation to engage in cognitive activity; Cacioppo & Petty, 1982; Cacioppo, Petty, & Kao, 1984) is correlated with political conservatism and harsh punishment of those who threaten the social order (e.g., Federico & Schneider, 2007; Sargent, 2004).

With respect to existential motives, the fear of death and perceptions of a dangerous world are associated with political conservatism, right-wing authoritarianism, stereotyping, and support for discrimination against same-sex couples (Altemeyer, 1998; Duckitt, 2001; Jost et al., 2003; Jost, Napier, Thórisdóttir, Gosling, Palfai, & Ostafin, 2007; Nail, McGregor, Drinkwater, Steele, & Thompson, 2009). Furthermore, situational manipulations of existential threat, such as making terrorism salient, cause participants to identify themselves as more politically conservative and to score higher on various indicators of system justification (Schimel, Simon, Greenberg, et al., 1999; Thórisdóttir & Jost, 2011; Ullrich & Cohrs, 2007).

There is also some evidence to suggest that relational motives lead disproportionately to system-justifying outcomes (see Jost, Ledgerwood, & Hardin, 2008), although this relationship is less clearly established. For example, people who value conformity are more conservative, traditional, and authoritarian than are those who do not (Cavazza & Mucchi-Faina, 2008; Feldman, 2003; Schwartz, Melech, Lehmann, Burgess, Harris, & Owens, 2001). Similarly, individuals who feel that it is especially important to “see the world as others who share their beliefs generally do” tend to score higher on measures of system justification and political conservatism (Stern, West, Jost, & Rule, 2012). Experimental evidence also reveals that relational motives to share reality can lead to the adoption of system-justifying beliefs. Jost, Ledgerwood, and Hardin (2008) found that students who wrote an essay about interacting with their more conservative parent subsequently endorsed system-justifying beliefs more strongly than students who wrote about an interaction with their more liberal parent. These findings are consistent with the notion that psychological needs to manage uncertainty, threat, and a shared sense of social reality with others are associated with the adoption of system-justifying ideologies (see also Jost & Napier, 2012).

OVERVIEW OF THE CURRENT RESEARCH PROGRAM

System Justification Theory posits that basic epistemic, existential, and relational needs give rise to the motivation to defend the system, which in turn shapes attitudes (such as those toward public policy and social movements) in a generally status quo-maintaining direction that upholds rather than supplants traditional authority and social order (e.g., see Jost & Hunyady, 2005; Jost & van der Toorn,

2012). Several previous studies have linked epistemic, existential, or relational needs individually (but not simultaneously) to the endorsement of system-justifying beliefs, opinions, and values. However, the full theoretical model has never been empirically tested. In keeping with the predictions of System Justification Theory—and in contrast to several other theoretical perspectives—we propose that the same underlying psychological needs will exert different (and, indeed, opposite) effects on support for social movements and ideologies, depending on whether they are perceived as system-justifying or system-challenging.

Given the contemporary social and political landscape in the U.S., we hypothesized that heightened needs for certainty, security, and conformity would be associated with (a) less support for the Occupy Wall Street (OWS) Movement (see also Jost, Chaikalis-Petritsis, Abrams, Sidanius, van der Toorn, & Bratt, 2012), and (b) greater support for the Tea Party. The first prediction was generated because the goals of the OWS movement include the attainment of greater social and economic equality by protesting the political power that multinational corporations wield. Occupy Wall Street thus challenges the capitalist order as well as the political system that (according to OWS protestors) prioritizes corporate over social welfare. By contrast, the Tea Party movement ardently defends free market ideology and corporate power (the economic status quo). Although supporters of the Tea Party are highly critical of President Barack Obama, we believe it would be misleading to characterize the movement as system-challenging rather than system-justifying, especially given that the Tea Party's proclaimed *raison d'être* is to "restore America's founding principles of fiscal responsibility, constitutionally limited government, and free markets" (www.teapartypatriots.org/about). In a number of ways, the Tea Party represents an attempt to defend "the American system" against a threat to the prevailing social order perceived as stemming from liberal governance (e.g., see Campo-Flores, 2010; Montopoli, 2010; Zernike & Thee-Brenan, 2010). Thus, we hypothesized that individuals who possess stronger epistemic, existential, and relational needs would reject the Occupy Wall Street movement but support the Tea Party movement, and that the endorsement of system-justifying beliefs would mediate these relationships. We also investigated the effects of underlying psychological needs and system justification on public opinion concerning a number of other contemporary political issues, including health care reform, immigration policy, global warming, and the "Ground Zero mosque," a proposed Islamic community center in lower Manhattan.

METHOD

We recruited 182 American-born research participants (57% female), ostensibly for a study of attitudes toward "social concepts, groups, and behaviors," through Amazon's Mechanical Turk (see Buhrmester, Kwang, & Gosling, 2011, for discussion of this platform as a research tool). Participants ranged in age from 18 to 68 ($M = 33$, $SD = 13$); most (84%) identified themselves as White or European American, and the modal household income was \$25,000–\$50,000. On average, participants were slightly liberal ($M = 3.94$, $SD = 2.09$), as reported on a 9-point scale ranging from 1 (*extremely liberal*) to 9 (*extremely conservative*). In terms of political partisanship, 42% were Democrats, 34% were Independent, 14% were Republicans, and 10% selected "Other" or "None." All participants completed the series of question-

naires in the order listed below, but items within each questionnaire were randomized across participants.

EPISTEMIC NEEDS

To assess individual variability in chronic epistemic needs, we administered the *Need for Cognition* scale (Cacioppo et al., 1984), which measures the tendency to engage in and enjoy effortful cognitive activity. Participants used a 5-point scale ranging from 1 (*extremely uncharacteristic*) to 5 (*extremely characteristic*) to indicate how much they agreed with each of 18 statements, such as: "I really enjoy a task that involves coming up with new solutions to problems," and "I only think as hard as I have to" (reverse-scored). Because our sample was relatively small and scale reliability was high ($\alpha = .92$), we maximized statistical power by treating the average score of all 18 items as a single observed index of epistemic needs (see Ledgerwood & Shrout, 2011). Consistent with previous research (Sargent, 2004), we hypothesized that individuals who were lower in *Need for Cognition* would exhibit stronger system justification tendencies.

EXISTENTIAL NEEDS

To assess individual variability in chronic existential needs, we administered the *Externally Generated Death Anxiety* subscale of the *Death Anxiety Inventory* (English version; Tomás-Sábado & Gómez-Benito, 2005). Participants indicated their level of agreement or disagreement with each of five statements on a 6-point scale ranging from 1 (*totally disagree*) to 6 (*totally agree*). Sample items included "It annoys me to hear about death" and "I get upset when I am in a cemetery." Scores on all five items were averaged into a single index of existential needs ($\alpha = .89$). Consistent with previous research (Jost et al., 2007), we hypothesized that individuals who scored higher in *Death Anxiety* would display stronger system justification motivation.

RELATIONAL NEEDS

To assess individual variability in chronic relational needs, we administered a *Need to Share Reality* scale (Stern et al., 2012). This three-item scale, which is loosely adapted from prior work by Pinel, Long, Johnson, Murdoch, and Huneke (2012), measures the desire to share (vs. eschew) similar perceptions of the world with others. Participants were asked to indicate their levels of agreement or disagreement with each of three statements on a 7-point scale ranging from 1 (*completely disagree*) to 7 (*completely agree*). Items were: "I prefer to have my own unique understanding of the world," "I don't like viewing the world in the same way as everyone around me does," and "I do not find it necessary to agree about how the world works with others who generally have similar beliefs as me" (all reverse-scored). Scores on all three items were averaged into a single index of relational needs ($\alpha = .67$). Consis-

tent with Stern et al. (2012), we hypothesized that individuals who score higher on the *Need to Share Reality* would exhibit stronger system justification.

SYSTEM JUSTIFICATION

To assess individual variability in the chronic tendency to justify the extant American economic system, we administered the *Economic System Justification Scale* (Jost & Thompson, 2000). Participants were asked to indicate their levels of agreement or disagreement with each of 17 statements on a 9-point scale ranging from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 9 (*strongly agree*). Sample items include: "Most people who don't get ahead in our society should not blame the system; they have only themselves to blame" and "There are many reasons to think that the economic system is unfair" (reverse-scored; $\alpha = .87$).¹

SOCIAL AND POLITICAL ATTITUDES

Participants reported their attitudes concerning a number of social and political issues and movements, including health care policy, the "Ground Zero mosque," the detention of illegal immigrants, the Occupy Wall Street and Tea Party movements, and global climate change. For the first five questions, participants indicated their degree of approval or disapproval of the social movement or policy on 7-point scales ranging from 1 (*strongly disapprove*) to 7 (*strongly approve*). These questions, which were adapted from recent Gallup and Pew polls (pollingreport.com, 2012), are listed in the Appendix. For the climate change questions, participants were asked to respond based on how they felt "right now" on a 7-point scale ranging from 1 (*definitely not*) to 7 (*definitely*) to each of three items: "Do you believe that global warming is occurring?"; "Do you believe that global warming is anthropogenic (caused by human behavior)?"; and "Do you believe that there is strong scientific evidence that global warming is occurring and man-made?" ($\alpha = .90$). Descriptive statistics for all study variables, including intercorrelations, are summarized in Table 1.

RESULTS

To investigate the hypothesis that basic psychological needs are associated with system-justifying social and political attitudes, we conducted several path analyses in MPlus 6 (Muthén & Muthén, 1998-2010). In the first model, we tested whether direct associations between (a) epistemic, existential, and relational needs, and (b) attitudes toward the Tea Party and Occupy movements were mediated by (c) system justification. We also estimated six individual indirect paths (see Figure 1) using the bootstrapping technique outlined by Preacher and Hayes (2008; see also

1. We also administered the *General System Justification* scale ($\alpha = .86$; Kay & Jost, 2003) and include its mean, standard deviation, and intercorrelations in Table 1. Because the public policies and social movements in which we were interested were most relevant to the American economic system, we focused on economic system justification in our structural model.

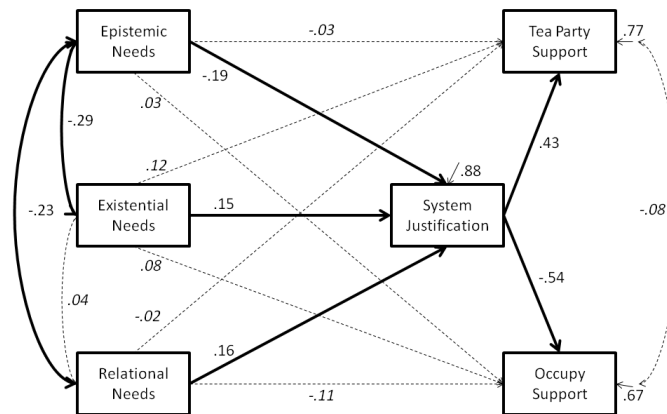


FIGURE 1. Path model illustrating the mediation by economic system justification of epistemic, existential, and relational needs on attitudes toward the Tea Party and Occupy Wall Street movements. Note. Numerical entries are standardized regression coefficients for the full model. Broken lines indicate nonsignificant paths ($p > .05$). The effects of epistemic needs are opposite in sign to the effects of existential and relational needs because we operationalized the former in terms of the *Need for Cognition* scale, which means that lower scores indicate greater motivation for certainty and simplicity.

Shrout & Bolger, 2002). We requested 95% confidence intervals using 5,000 resamples. We estimated a saturated, manifest variable model; therefore, χ^2 , RMSEA, and SRMR values were all 0, and CFI and TLI values were 1. This analysis was repeated for the other sociopolitical outcomes.

Results revealed that epistemic needs were significantly associated with system justification, $b = -.35$, $SE = .17$, $\beta = -.19$, $z = -2.03$, $p < .05$, such that lower scores on *Need for Cognition* were associated with higher scores on *Economic System Justification*. Existential needs were also significantly associated with system justification, $b = .15$, $SE = .07$, $\beta = .15$, $z = 2.09$, $p < .05$, such that higher scores on *Death Anxiety* were associated with higher scores on *Economic System Justification*. Finally, relational needs were also significantly associated with system justification, $b = .19$, $SE = .09$, $\beta = .16$, $z = 2.07$, $p < .05$, such that higher scores on the *Need to Share Reality* were associated with higher scores on *Economic System Justification*. In conjunction, epistemic, existential, and relational needs explained 12.3% of the variance in *Economic System Justification*.

As predicted, *Economic System Justification* was positively associated with support for the Tea Party movement, $b = .73$, $SE = .12$, $\beta = .43$, $z = 6.06$, $p < .001$, and negatively associated with support for the Occupy Wall Street movement, $b = -.78$, $SE = .10$, $\beta = -.54$, $z = -7.94$, $p < .001$. After adjusting for the other variables in the model, the residual variances of support for the Tea Party and Occupy movements were no longer significantly correlated, $r = -.08$, ns . The model explained 23% of the variance in Tea Party support and 33% of the variance in support for the Occupy movement.

When system justification was included in the model, the direct effects of epistemic needs on support for the Tea Party and the Occupy movement were nonsignificant, $b = -.07$, $SE = .22$, $\beta = -.03$, $z = -.34$, ns , and $b = .07$, $SE = .21$, $\beta = .03$, $z = .32$, ns , respectively. The same was true with respect to existential needs (Tea Party: $b =$

TABLE 1. Descriptive Statistics, Including Intercorrelations, of Study Variables

| | M | SD | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | 8 | 9 | 10 | 11 | 12 | 13 | 14 |
|----------------------------------|------|------|---------|--------|---------|---------|---------|---------|---------|---------|---------|---------|---------|---------|------|-----|
| 1. Need for Cognition | 3.53 | .71 | — | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| 2. Death Anxiety | 2.99 | 1.27 | -.33*** | — | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| 3. Need to Share Reality | 3.36 | 1.09 | -.30*** | .03 | — | | | | | | | | | | | |
| 4. Economic System Justification | 4.29 | 1.28 | -.29*** | .22** | .22*** | — | | | | | | | | | | |
| 5. General System Justification | 4.49 | 1.57 | -.12† | .18** | .19** | .62*** | — | | | | | | | | | |
| 6. Tea Party | 3.54 | 2.14 | -.18* | .22** | .09 | .46*** | .30*** | — | | | | | | | | |
| 7. Occupy Wall Street | 4.80 | 1.84 | .19** | -.05 | -.24*** | -.56*** | -.42*** | -.30*** | — | | | | | | | |
| 8. Immigration Law | 3.80 | 2.34 | -.17* | .18* | .11 | .53*** | .29*** | .58*** | -.29*** | — | | | | | | |
| 9. Healthcare (item 1) | 4.31 | 2.06 | .20** | -.01 | -.18* | -.42*** | -.17* | -.49*** | .46*** | -.46*** | — | | | | | |
| 10. Healthcare (item 2) | 3.80 | 2.19 | .17* | .05 | -.12† | -.35*** | -.13† | -.37*** | .33*** | -.38*** | .76*** | — | | | | |
| 11. Ground Zero Mosque | 4.42 | 2.02 | .11 | -.19** | -.14* | -.34*** | -.14* | -.37*** | .22** | -.52*** | .35*** | .37*** | — | | | |
| 12. Global Warming | 5.42 | 1.44 | .21** | -.18* | -.25*** | -.57*** | -.31*** | -.38*** | .56*** | -.41*** | .50*** | .40*** | .38*** | — | | |
| 13. Political Ideology | 3.96 | 2.08 | -.24*** | .09 | .13† | .60*** | .36*** | .56*** | -.49*** | .55*** | -.60*** | -.50*** | -.44*** | -.50*** | — | |
| 14. Age | 32.6 | 12.9 | .18* | -.06 | .01 | .03 | .15* | -.04 | -.04 | .16* | -.17* | -.18* | -.27*** | -.07 | .16* | — |
| 15. Gender (Male = 0) | — | — | .05 | -.04 | .04 | -.07 | -.02 | .00 | .02 | -.04 | -.01 | -.06 | .01 | .15* | -.04 | .08 |

† $p < .10$, * $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$, *** $p < .001$

TABLE 2. Direct and Indirect Effects of Epistemic, Existential, and Relational Needs on Economic System Justification and Attitudes Concerning Five Public Policy Issues

| Direct Effects | Global Warming | | Healthcare Reform | | Healthcare Penalties | | Ground Zero Mosque | | Immigration Law | |
|--|----------------|---------|-------------------|---------|----------------------|---------|--------------------|---------|-----------------|---------|
| | <i>b</i> | β | <i>b</i> | β | <i>b</i> | β | <i>b</i> | β | <i>b</i> | β |
| Epistemic → System Justification | -.35* | -.19 | -.35* | -.19 | -.35* | -.19 | -.35* | -.19 | -.35* | -.19 |
| Existential → System Justification | .15* | .15 | .15* | .15 | .15* | .15 | .15* | .15 | .15* | .15 |
| Relational → System Justification | .19* | .16 | .19* | .16 | .19* | .16 | .19* | .16 | .19* | .16 |
| System Justification → Policy Attitude | -.59*** | -.52 | -.65*** | -.40 | -.61*** | -.35 | -.47*** | -.30 | .94*** | .51 |
| Epistemic → Policy Attitude | .00 | .00 | .31 | .11 | .38 | .12 | -.14 | -.05 | .00 | .00 |
| Existential → Policy Attitude | -.07 | -.06 | .19 | .12 | .29* | .17 | -.23† | -.14 | .13 | .07 |
| Relational → Policy Attitude | -.18† | -.13 | -.12 | -.06 | -.02 | -.01 | -.15 | -.08 | -.02 | -.01 |
| Indirect Effects | | | | | | | | | | |
| Epistemic → System Justification → Policy Attitude | {.01, .41} | | {.01, .44} | | {.01, .43} | | {.01, .39} | | {-.65, -.02} | |
| Existential → System Justification → Policy Attitude | {-.18, -.01} | | {-.21, -.01} | | {-.20, -.01} | | {-.14, .00} | | {.01, .27} | |
| Relational → System Justification → Policy Attitude | {-.24, -.01} | | {-.27, -.01} | | {-.26, .00} | | {-.20, .00} | | {.01, .36} | |
| <i>R</i> ² | 34.3% | | 20.4% | | 15.6% | | 13.5% | | 28.3% | |

Note. *R*² signifies the proportion of variance in public policy attitudes explained by the full model. †*p* < .10, **p* < .05, ***p* < .01, ****p* < .001

.21, $SE = .12$, $\beta = .12$, $z = 1.74$, *ns*; Occupy: $b = .12$, $SE = .10$, $\beta = .08$, $z = 1.16$, *ns*) and relational needs (Tea Party: $b = -.05$, $SE = .13$, $\beta = -.02$, $z = -.35$, *ns*; Occupy: $b = -.19$, $SE = .12$, $\beta = -.11$, $z = -1.56$, *ns*).

Finally, we tested indirect effects using a bootstrapping analysis and found that economic system justification mediated the effect of epistemic needs on support for both the Tea Party $\{-.51, -.01\}$ and the Occupy movements $\{.01, .52\}$. Because 0 was not included in these unstandardized 95% confidence intervals, we considered the indirect effects to be significant. For existential needs, the confidence interval was $\{.01, .22\}$ for Tea Party support and $\{-.24, -.01\}$ for Occupy support. Finally, for relational needs, a confidence interval of $\{.01, .29\}$ was obtained for Tea Party support and $\{-.30, -.01\}$ was obtained for support for the Occupy movement. These results indicate that economic system justification significantly mediated all six associations between psychological needs and support for the Tea Party and Occupy movements. The results for the other dependent variables are presented in Table 2. As the table shows, all indirect paths were significant for all dependent variables.

GENERAL DISCUSSION

Our results corroborate a theoretical model which posits that heightened epistemic, existential, and relational needs lead individuals to support more system-justifying ideologies and movements and to reject system-challenging ideologies and movements. Specifically, lower need for cognition, greater death anxiety, and a stronger desire to share reality each contributed significantly and independently to economic system justification. Stronger system justification motivation, in turn, contributed to support for the Tea Party (a pro-business movement aimed at restoring America's "traditional values") and to a lack of support for Occupy Wall Street (a movement dedicated to shifting the balance of political and economic power in a more egalitarian direction). Mediation analyses revealed that economic system justification was the intervening variable between epistemic, existential, and relational needs and attitudes toward the Tea Party and Occupy Wall Street as well as several other public policy issues, such as rejection of health care and immigration reform, the building of a mosque near Ground Zero, and the notion that global warming is occurring and caused by human activity.

These findings challenge the common social psychological assumption that stronger psychological needs to manage uncertainty and threat motivate individuals to show more extreme support for *any* ideology or social movement (whether left, right, or center) to which they subscribe or are otherwise frequently exposed (e.g., see Anson et al., 2009; Castano et al., 2011; Greenberg et al., 1986, 1990; Greenberg & Jonas, 2003; Heine et al., 2006; Hogg, 2005, 2007; McGregor & Marigold, 2003; McGregor, Zanna, Holmes, & Spencer, 2001; McGregor et al., 2010; Proulx et al., 2012). Indeed, we found that the same set of epistemic, existential, and relational needs exerted *opposite* effects on system-justifying and system-challenging ideological outcomes (i.e., support for the Tea Party vs. Occupy Wall Street, respectively). Thus, it appears that not all belief systems are "created equal" when it comes to addressing these underlying needs (see also Jost & Napier, 2012; Thórisdóttir & Jost, 2011). In this respect, we have returned to the original insight of Adorno et al. (1950), who wrote that the "individual's pattern of thought . . . reflects his person-

ality and is not merely an aggregate of opinions picked up helter-skelter from the ideological environment" (p. 176).

It is *not* our view that high system-justifiers *always* oppose social change (see also Kay & Friesen, 2011). On the contrary, they frequently embrace forms of change that are either incremental—and therefore designed to forestall the demand for more radical changes to the status quo—or retrograde or restorative in nature, that is, designed to return the country to some prior idealized state of affairs (e.g., see Eibach & Libby, 2009; Jost, 2009; Lipset & Raab, 1978). In addition, high system-justifiers might be moved to "agitate" when they perceive that a passionate defense of the status quo is required. This, we believe, explains why system justification was *positively* rather than negatively related to support for the Tea Party movement in our study. It also seems likely that the kinds of changes advocated by members of the Tea Party are regarded as "system-sanctioned," that is, congruent rather than incongruent with the origins and ideals of the American system (see Feygina, Jost, & Goldsmith, 2010). This is clearly consistent with one of the movement's stated goals, namely to "restore America's founding principles of fiscal responsibility, constitutionally limited government, and free markets" (emphasis added).

By highlighting the fact that the same epistemic, existential, and relational needs exert *opposite* effects on support for system-justifying and system-challenging ideologies, social movements, and policies, we are in some ways bucking the recent trend of pursuing higher-order unification of theoretical perspectives in social psychology. Most ambitiously, Proulx et al. (2012) have proposed that ten prominent models of belief formation and change—including theories of system justification, terror management, meaning maintenance, and reactive approach motivation—"are in fact describing the same general phenomenon" (p. 287). According to these authors, "all of these theories share a common instigator (inconsistency), a common motivator (drive to reduce aversive arousal) and a common set of behavioral outcomes (assimilation, accommodation, affirmation)" (p. 287). Although we agree that there are some useful similarities among the theoretical perspectives assembled by Proulx et al. (2012), we also feel that there are some important differences. To begin with, system-justifying outcomes are not assumed to arise from a process of consistency maintenance but rather a desire to see the status quo as fair, legitimate, and just—even if this conflicts with one's expectations or past experience. Indeed, even individuals who explicitly *disavow* the belief that the U.S. is a truly meritocratic society in practice are motivated to defend and justify the system as meritocratic when it is criticized or threatened (Ledgerwood, Mandisodza, Jost, & Pohl, 2011).

LIMITATIONS AND FUTURE DIRECTIONS

Although we find clear support for several hypotheses derived from System Justification Theory in the present study, questions remain that should be addressed in future research. First, it would be useful if researchers were to develop standard individual difference measures of epistemic, existential, and relational needs. Stern et al. (2012) have developed a measure of chronic needs to share reality, which we used in the present study. To our knowledge, however, researchers have yet to develop an individual difference measure of (nonconscious) death anxiety, as conceptualized by Terror Management theorists (Burke, Martens, & Faucher,

2010; Greenberg et al., 1986). It is conceivable that distinctive operationalizations of epistemic, existential, and relational needs—such as needs for certainty vs. control, fear vs. anxiety (or even conscious vs. nonconscious sources of anxiety), and belongingness vs. shared reality—may produce different effects on ideological endorsement. More generally, we suggest that many of the social psychological theories discussed in this article would do well to consider the consequences of chronically—as well as temporarily—activated needs, motives, and threats.

At the same time, System Justification Theory assumes that both chronically and temporarily accessible needs will produce similar ideological consequences (Jost & van der Toorn, 2012). Some evidence exists to support this assumption (e.g., Jost et al., 2003, 2007, 2008, 2009; Rutjens & Loseman, 2010; Thórisdóttir & Jost, 2011; Ullrich & Cohrs, 2007). However, more research is needed to clarify the extent to which dispositional and situational variables produce the same effects, as well as potential interactions between chronic dispositions and situational manipulations. In addition, future research would do well to identify precise boundary conditions on the effects we have obtained here, that is, to determine when epistemic, existential, and relational needs are more (vs. less) likely to motivate the ideological defense of the status quo.

The model we have tested assumes that epistemic, existential, and relational needs are more or less equally potent when it comes to encouraging system justification tendencies. However, it is possible that one type of need is more strongly related to system justification than the others (e.g., see Rutjens & Loseman, 2010) or that the effects of certain needs on system justification are mediated by others (e.g., see Thórisdóttir & Jost, 2011). Similarly, it is unclear whether epistemic, existential, and relational needs operate in a compensatory or combinatory (i.e., additive) manner. Must an individual be relatively high in all three needs to justify the system enthusiastically, or is one type of need sufficient?

In this study we focused on the effects of chronic individual differences in epistemic, existential, and relational needs on support for various social movements and policies. However, because none of these variables was experimentally manipulated, our ability to draw causal and mediational conclusions is limited. At the same time, we believe that our theoretical model captures the most plausible directions of association and that laboratory manipulations of epistemic, existential, and relational needs would produce similar effects. As noted above, several previous studies support these assumptions.

Finally, it would be useful to know more about the psychological antecedents of system rejection. In the present research, we observed that weaker desires to satisfy epistemic, existential, and relational needs were associated with lower system justification motivation and greater support for the Occupy Wall Street movement. However, it is not entirely clear that those who fail to justify the status quo necessarily lack system justification motivation. For instance, Johnson and Fujita (2012) suggest that such individuals might simply possess a stronger competing motive in favor of system diagnosis, improvement, or change. Thus, it is possible that those who are chronically low with respect to epistemic, existential, and relational needs might be especially high when it comes to the motivation to *change* the system, and this could explain both their rejection of the status quo and their support for the Occupy Wall Street movement.

CONCLUSION

Although there remains much to learn about the motivational antecedents of ideological endorsement, the results of this study suggest that any theory (or meta-theory) which assumes that the same psychological needs can explain commitment to *any* belief system is incomplete. Needs to manage uncertainty, threat, and solidarity do indeed motivate individuals to support the Tea Party movement and a variety of system-justifying social and economic policies. However, these same needs do not motivate support for Occupy Wall Street; if anything, this movement seems to gain strength from the opposite motivational concerns. It would appear that, psychologically speaking, not all ideologies are created equal: epistemic, existential, and relational needs seem to privilege system-justifying over system-challenging outcomes.

**APPENDIX:
ITEMS USED TO MEASURE SOCIAL AND POLITICAL ATTITUDES**

TEA PARTY MOVEMENT

The Tea Party movement is a populist movement that endorses reduced government spending, opposition to taxation in varying degrees, reduction of the national debt and federal budget deficit, and which tries to adhere to the original meaning and intent of the Constitution. Do you generally approve or generally disapprove of the Tea Party political movement?

OCCUPY WALL STREET MOVEMENT

Occupy Wall Street is a protest movement against social and economic inequality, greed, corruption, and the undue influence of corporations on government—particularly from the financial services sector. Do you generally approve or generally disapprove of Occupy Wall Street and occupy movements in other cities?

IMMIGRATION POLICY

In 2010, the state of Arizona passed a law dealing with illegal immigration. Do you approve or disapprove of the part of the law which allows police to detain anyone who cannot verify their legal status?

HEALTH CARE REFORM

As you may know, in 2010 Barack Obama and Congress passed a law that restructures the nation's healthcare system. All in all, do you approve or disapprove of this law?

As you may know, by 2014 nearly all Americans will be required to have health insurance. People who cannot afford insurance will receive financial help from the government while people who do not buy insurance will pay a penalty. Do you approve or disapprove of this policy?

"GROUND ZERO MOSQUE"

Recently, there was a debate in America regarding the construction of a mosque or Islamic center a couple of blocks from the site of the World Trade Center. Would you approve or disapprove of this center being built?

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