
Review Essay

Legitimizing Legitimacy: Shaping a New Frontier of Research

The Psychology of Legitimacy: Emerging Perspectives on Ideology, Justice, and Intergroup Relations. John T. Jost and Brenda Major (eds.). Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001.

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There is no reason to accept the doctrines crafted to sustain power and privilege, or to believe that we are constrained by mysterious and unknown social laws. These are simply decisions made within institutions that are subject to human will and that must face the test of legitimacy. And if they do not meet the test, they can be replaced by other institutions that are more free and more just, as has happened often in the past.

—Noam Chomsky² (emphasis added)

The chapters in the volume edited by John T. Jost and Brenda Major capture this essence of legitimacy as a social process embedded in social organization and politics generally, but also underlying the dynamics of various forms of interpersonal interaction. Legitimacy is certainly a stalwart of social order—of small groups as well as large ones—whereas illegitimacy or the delegitimation of a person, a structure, or a policy signals the potential for social change. Philosophers, sociologists, and political scientists have long recognized the complementary functions of legitimacy processes as the key to understanding the very nature of social life. Yet, as Jost and Major point out in their introductory chapter, psychologists have not generally addressed the conceptual relevance of legitimacy to social, organizational, and political psychology. Their volume seeks to rectify that oversight and, to anticipate the punch line of this essay, does so admirably.

Moreover, by drawing attention to this edited volume, this essay enhances the legitimacy of the endeavor and the future of research in the area. Bourdieu (1983), in reference to literary texts, notes “Every critical affirmation contains, on the one hand, a recognition of the value of the work which occasions it, which is thus

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²From “The World Traveler,” <http://www.thirdworldtraveler.com/Chomsky/>

designated as a worthy object of legitimate discourse . . . and, on the other hand, an affirmation of its own legitimacy” (p. 317). Bourdieu’s statement implies that the literary status of writers depends upon the critical attention given to their texts—an observation confirmed in empirical work (see Janssen, 1998). Extrapolating to the review of an academic book such as *The Psychology of Legitimacy*, the critical attention Jost and Major receive for their volume enhances its legitimacy—regardless of the degree to which the reviews are favorable.³

Bourdieu’s second point reflects on the reviewer: The status of critics themselves are at stake in any review. In the absence of objective guidelines to prove assessments as true or false, literary critics often rely on a comparison of comments with other reviewers to assess the accuracy of their own (Janssen, 1997). Although doing so reduces uncertainty in one’s own evaluations, I did not pursue this strategy in writing this essay. (I cite the other reviews, but have yet to read them.) I do, however, admit that my willingness to review Jost and Major’s volume stems from the fact of its central relevance to my own work on legitimacy and justice. Thus the review serves not only to legitimate the potentially far-reaching work of the many authors in the volume but my own endeavors as well (e.g., Hegtvedt and Johnson, 2000). In this, my behavior is consistent with a trend illustrated in a number of the volume’s chapters: It is not surprising to find that those who benefit from a given system are more likely to see it as legitimate. What is far more curious is why those disadvantaged by a system continue to support it as legitimate. Indeed, understanding the psychology behind such an assessment constitutes one of the major contributions of this volume.

Given that the volume consists of 18 chapters, it is impossible to show due appreciation for (i.e., “do justice to”) the intricacies of each. The intent of this review essay, thus, is to introduce the reader to the contents of the volume and then to identify key themes and to analyze critically issues that have bearing on future research directions. The review, moreover, highlights those concerns most likely to captivate the readers of *Social Justice Research*: the parallels and intersection between legitimacy and justice processes.

WHAT THE CHAPTERS DO: RENDERING THE CONTENTS OF THE VOLUME

As is true with most thematic edited volumes, the introductory chapter by the editors contextualizes the endeavor and provides a road map to the contents of the compiled chapters. Jost and Major (2001, pp. 3–30) make a convincing case for why the issues to be addressed are important. The overarching concern that underlies the variety of perspectives captured in the chapters pertains to the psychological basis of social inequality. Although the editors do not provide a specific definition, they seem to conceptualize legitimacy as “the ways in which people construct

³See Kim and Mauborgne (2002) and Walker (2003).

ideological rationalizations for their own actions and actions of others taken on behalf of valued groups and systems” (Jost and Major, 2001, p. 3). Such rationalizations may take the form of attitudes, beliefs, and stereotypes—i.e., individually held notions—that provide the basis of ideological support for a particular person, structure, or policy. With the exception of chapters by Zelditch and Kelman that put the study of legitimacy into perspective, the remaining chapters examine psychological processes underlying the formation of rationalizations by individuals disadvantaged or advantaged by the system or the consequences of those rationalizations for upholding or changing the status quo. In doing so, several tackle the relationship between legitimacy and justice—some more successfully than others.

Zelditch’s chapter (pp. 33–53) traces the study of legitimacy historically, whereas that by Kelman provides a personal reflection on a decades-spanning career of studying legitimacy processes. Zelditch (in Jost and Major, 2001) starts his review of 24 centuries of analyzing legitimacy with a specific definition “. . . something is legitimate if it is in accord with the norms, values, beliefs, practices, and procedures accepted by a group” (p. 33). Moreover, he notes that what is legitimated includes a variety of things: a polity, power or authority, rewards, status, inequality, etc. The processes surrounding the legitimation of each entity may be distinct. For example, the legitimation of a reward distribution focuses on the conditions under which actors employ comparisons to determine whether the rewards are just, whereas the legitimation of power pertains to conditions facilitating the moral obligation to obey a set of rules. Thus, although processes surrounding each entity may be distinct, the end result of legitimation is the voluntary acceptance of something as right and the stability of the structure that supports it. Zelditch contrasts consensus and conflict approaches to legitimacy to pave the way for a Weberian formulation that rests upon a combination of instrumental and normative orientations that highlight the important role of support—from various sources—for whatever is to be legitimated. Zelditch concludes his historical survey by recognizing that legitimation is a mechanism that reciprocally mediates between individual actions and the structure of groups.

The consequences of legitimacy on a variety of things constitutes the focus of Kelman’s retrospective on issues arising during his career. Starting with the claim that legitimacy is the moral basis of social interaction—determined by rights and obligations, not simply by preferences—he also raises the specter of the normative character of legitimacy. He defines legitimation as “the process of recategorizing an action, policy or claim—or a system, group, or person—such that what was previously illegitimate now becomes legitimate, or what was previously optional now becomes obligatory” (Kelman in Jost and Major, 2001 p. 57), and recognizes delegitimation as the reverse process. Employing a variety of examples (e.g., desegregation, negotiation with previously labeled terrorist groups, the acceptability of smoking), he shows the pivotal role of authorities—as a potential source of support—in the recategorization processes as well as the importance of identifying legitimacy criteria that reflect the identity and needs of groups affected by

whatever is legitimated. He warns, however, of the double-edged nature of legitimacy; it may serve the cause of justice and positive social change or it may provide the moral justifications necessary to oppress and exploit.

The historical chapters foreshadow what other chapters do in more detail. The first set of substantive chapters on cognitive and perceptual processes offer insight into mechanisms underlying individuals' appraisals of legitimacy, i.e., potential causes. The ordering of the three chapters in this section expands from an emphasis on narrowly construed individual-level attributions, to concerns with social attribution, and ultimately to the influence of the group context on social perceptions. Crandall and Beasley (pp. 77–102) combine Heider's ideas about the structure of social perception (i.e., rules of causality, balance or affective consistency, controllability) with simple justification ideology, which indicates that people should be treated in a manner correspondent with their moral value. Their resulting naive theory of justice assumes a unit relationship between the person and the action, which is presumably under the person's control; if the action is negative, then the conclusion is that the person is bad and bad people deserve bad treatment. They extrapolate these ideas to the legitimacy of government, of leaders, of prejudice, of the justice system, etc. Their application of the principles of social perception and justification ideology reveals how far some simple principles can take the analysis of the development of legitimacy perceptions.

Yzerbyt and Rogier (pp. 135–154), in fact, introduce a complexity that arises simply by taking an alternative tack to social perception. Their chapter notes how perceivers are likely to invoke the group to explain individual behavior, thereby making a social attribution. To the extent that individuals perceive a group to be a tight, cohesive unit with essential characteristics (i.e., entitative), individuals are more likely to assign dispositional characteristics to the entire group and overlook situational forces. Such social attributions fuel stereotypes and ultimately legitimize social arrangements that distinguish groups. By identifying the processes that fortify stereotypes, these authors lay the basis for processes discussed in later chapters regarding social dominance and system justification.

Likewise, Robinson and Kray (pp. 135–154) demonstrate how cognitive biases favor maintenance of the status quo by emphasizing the context of intergroup conflict. Their theoretical analysis suggests, and data from a study of traditionalists and revisionist perceptions of the Western canon confirm, that defenders of the status quo are more likely to misperceive ideological opponents than the opponents are to misperceive the defenders. They link these differential patterns of perception to the relative structural positions of the groups in a debate. Those who are power-advantaged spend less time understanding their power-disadvantaged opponents' ideas, whereas the reverse is true for the disadvantaged. The stress on power positions here extends to other chapters and emerges as important in shaping the dynamics of legitimation.

The collection of entries on the tolerance of injustice attempts to explain the unexpected similarity of the perceptions of structurally advantaged and

disadvantaged actors. As Olson and Hafer (pp. 157–175) point out, the legitimacy of the system must come from both those who benefit from it and those who do not (otherwise members of both groups would be likely to foment social change). They offer three processes to account for the tolerance of personal deprivation. First, by believing in a just world, individuals are more likely to accept their plight owing to internal attributions for negative outcomes that deflect feelings of injustice. Second, people are likely to minimize the extent to which they believe that they have suffered discrimination, which also decreases felt injustice. And, third, to the extent that there are cultural norms dictating the suppression of resentment over deprivation, the negative emotional arousal associated with deprivation decreases. These three processes are internal to the individual; the authors overlook situational factors that may play a role in either further mitigating perceptions of deprivation or in actually facilitating recognition of unfair deprivation and consequent responses to it.

Major and Schmader offer an alternative approach to how individuals interpret their disadvantage. They argue that “appraisals of legitimacy are a key determinant of how members of socially disadvantaged groups construe their social outcomes” (Major and Schmader, in Jost and Major, 2001, pp. 176–204). Insofar as they define legitimacy appraisals as “subjective perceptions of the fairness or justice of the distribution of socially distributed outcomes” (p. 180), they confound legitimacy and justice. The value of their chapter lies in their distinctions between construal processes stemming from ego-defensive attributions or from system justification attributions. The two are consonant for socially advantaged individuals but are at odds for socially disadvantaged ones. For the disadvantaged, the ego-defensive approach predicts attributions to external factors (e.g., discrimination) as a means to protect self-esteem, while system justifying attributions disallow such external attributions owing to the assumption that the system is just, thereby necessitating internal attributions (e.g., lower inputs). Empirical results suggest that conditions of legitimacy (justice) affect the nature of the construal system: appraising a distribution as legitimate (fair) inspires system justification attributions and appraising it as illegitimate results in ego-defensive attributions. They caution, however, that long-term perception of the illegitimacy of the system may negatively affect self-esteem.

The two remaining chapters in this section focus on structural conditions, rather than attribution or other beliefs, that facilitate the tolerance of injustice. Central to both are assumptions about the role of social identity and social mobility. Ellemers (pp. 205–222) examines the case of women who penetrate male-dominated work organizations. By focusing on one’s own social mobility or redefining the attractiveness of one’s own group (social creativity), members of low status groups cope with their position. Social mobility, in particular, allows individuals to believe that status differences between groups are legitimate so long as the boundaries are permeable. With the experience of mobility, people’s group allegiances shift, facilitating the perception of oneself as somehow different

from others and perpetuating beliefs in intergroup differences in social standing. Thus, for example, when women move up in their careers, they adopt the beliefs of the higher status male group, differentiating them from other women. Wright's (pp. 223–254) emphasis on tokenism also stresses permeable, but highly restricted, group boundaries and the impact of social mobility in terms of a shift in identification with a low status group to a high status one. The existence of a few tokens creates uncertainty among members of the disadvantaged group, which undermines interest in collective action to rectify the injustices. In this context, there is no impetus for members of the advantaged group to take steps to broaden the opportunities for socially disadvantaged group members. Wright concludes that tokenism is a structural condition that legitimizes intergroup inequalities.

Chapters on legitimation of inequalities stemming from stereotyping and ideology make up the book's fourth section. Unlike discussions of stereotyping in earlier sections, here the focus is on its consequences for intergroup dynamics and the legitimation of the status quo. Ridgeway examines the development of status beliefs, defined as consensual "cultural schemas for organizing interdependent, cooperative social relations across boundaries of social difference in a society" (Ridgeway in Jost and Major, 2001, p. 257). Like stereotypes, such beliefs are a form of legitimizing ideology insofar as all people agree that one group is better than another even if the lower status group has appealing but less important characteristics. Her status construction theory identifies structural preconditions to the emergence of status beliefs (e.g., structural resource inequality associated with recognizable groups, cooperative interdependence) and the processes of interaction that fortify the beliefs (e.g., forming expectations of competence based on actors' distinguishing characteristics and behaviors, repeated encounters between the doubly dissimilar who differ in terms of resources and recognizable characteristics, developing influence hierarchies that reflect the dissimilarity, transferring beliefs associated with characteristics to new relationships). Empirical results from several experiments confirm that these processes work to reinforce the status order, like system justifying ideologies.

Recognition that groups of lower status, which are often negatively evaluated, may also have some positive characteristics is key to Glick and Fiske's chapter (pp. 278–306). The authors describe how ambivalent stereotypes combining both hostile and subjectively favorable beliefs about outgroups legitimate the status quo. From the perspective of the dominant group, outgroups may be characterized in term of their socioeconomic status and their type of interaction with the dominant group (cooperative or competitive). The combination produces two types of ambivalent prejudice: paternalistic (toward socioeconomically unsuccessful groups who are noncompetitive but seen as warm, e.g., housewives, the disabled) or envious (toward socioeconomically successful groups who are competitive and not seen as warm, e.g., Jews, black professionals). Glick and Fiske stress that positive aspects of outgroup stereotypes undermine hostile attitudes, thereby inhibiting

lower status groups from challenging the status quo because they no longer face wholly negative evaluations. They note that strategies to combat prejudice depend on the type, but that structural relations ultimately underlie their effectiveness.

Each of the next three chapters in this section offers different theoretical perspectives to address the legitimation of inequalities: Sidanius, Levin, Federico, and Pratto focus on social dominance theory (pp. 307–331); Spears, Jetten, and Doosje examine social identity theory (pp. 332–362); and Jost, Burgess, and Mosso offer system justification theory (pp. 363–368). Complementary elements across chapters emerge and Jost *et al.* suggest the possibility of integrating the theories, although with the recognition of different levels of concerns—individual, group, and system. For the sake of parsimony, such integration is laudable. Any attempt to achieve a more formal integration, however, must consider a careful comparison of the assumptions, conceptual definitions, and derivations of each theory (see Jasso, 2001).

To a varying extent, social identity theory underlies all of the approaches to inequality legitimation. The core of social identity theory suggests that people are likely to favor their own group and to derogate outgroups and that legitimacy can be conceived “in terms of the ‘internal’ psychological justification of the status quo” to the self or to some other audience (Spears *et al.*, p. 340). One important caveat to the trend of favoring own group and disfavoring outgroups, which has implications for legitimacy, is that such biases depend upon social conditions. Spears *et al.* examine the conditions under which expression of ingroup bias in low status groups is a sign of social resistance. In a series of experiments that manipulated consensus regarding unfavorable information about status-differentiated groups, they find that when the information is unreliable, low status actors are more likely to assert the value of their group and express ingroup bias. In contrast, when information is clear and stable, low status group members are likely to accept their own inferiority and display outgroup favoritism. Other conditions (e.g., group heterogeneity, coupled with high group identification) also evoke this pattern. The authors stress that, in effect, conditions of social reality facilitate the legitimacy of claims of ingroup value.

Although not phrased in terms of social reality constraints, Jost *et al.* complement Spears *et al.*'s argument by examining the conditions under which low status groups express outgroup favoritism. Such favoritism underlies the emergence of “false consciousness” when deprived groups engage in the ideological justification of the system that leaves them disadvantaged. Like the attributions discussed by Major and Schmader, motives for ego justification, group justification, and system justification are consistent for high status groups, but at odds for members of low status groups. Conditions of the perceived legitimacy of group differences tend to enhance the expression of outgroup favoritism in members of low status groups but the illegitimacy of such a system of difference suppresses it.

In both chapters on ingroup and outgroup biases, the authors note social dominance theory, which deals with the establishment and maintenance of a group-based

social hierarchy. Focusing on maintenance through ideological control, Sidanius *et al.* describe types of legitimizing ideologies and embed them in a model in which they mediate between individual social dominance orientations and support for social policies that either attenuate or enhance the hierarchy. In addition, they offer a mathematical model to illustrate the relative effects of consensual and dis-sensual legitimizing ideologies. Finally, the authors highlight the importance of conditions varying the degree of status differences and power differentials between groups. For example, they argue that as one moves up the social status/social power continuum, the relationship between legitimizing ideologies and social dominance orientation increases, implying that the dominant group has a greater interest in establishing and maintaining the hierarchy than do subordinate groups (the so-called ideological asymmetry hypothesis). Thus this chapter, like others in this section, draws attention to the social context.

The last three chapters of the book address institutional and organizational processes of legitimation from quite distinct perspectives and based on different types of data. Chapters by both Elsbach (pp. 391–445) and Tyler (pp. 416–436) examine organizational processes that are likely to enhance or reduce individuals' perceptions of the organizations themselves or of the authorities in them. Elsbach draws from Suchman (1995) to define organizational legitimacy as perceptual evaluations of the actions of an entity in terms of their desirability and appropriateness within a socially constructed system of norms and values. The legitimacy of an organization is not simply an attribute but a resource that can be used to improve a firm's performance or to attract employees or the public. Elsbach describes how a firm can successfully protect itself from threats to its legitimacy, as was the case for Sears, Roebuck & Co. when the public learned of consumer fraud in its auto departments. To defend an organization's legitimacy, Elsbach argues that tenets of impression management and procedural justice theory combine to identify the conditions under which particular types of explanations or accounts are likely to be successful. Accounts that communicate rationality (i.e., procedurally fair ideas of consistency, neutrality coupled with logicity and technical jargon) are most useful when threats to organizational legitimacy stem from unforeseeable controversies. In contrast, messages that communicate understanding (i.e., procedurally fair concerns with respect for clients, common language, bilateral communication) are most successful following predictable and foreseeable controversies. The success of these forms of accounts, however, may also depend upon the severity of what the public has suffered. Thus Elsbach highlights how the context plays a pivotal role in determining the appropriate ways to ensure organizational legitimacy.

Tyler looks at how procedural justice in decision making ensures the perception of the legitimacy of authorities within an organization or institution. He argues that as a social value, legitimacy constitutes a means to regulate groups and society without recourse to "command and control" strategies, which are often costly and

inefficient. Moreover, he states, “Legitimacy exists to the degree that people feel a personal obligation to follow social rules and to obey social authorities” (Tyler in Jost and Major, 2001, p. 419). Thus it is in the interests of authorities to foster legitimacy. They may achieve this end, according to Tyler, by acting in a procedurally fair manner toward their subordinates. Procedural justice secures legitimacy because people’s identity rests, in part, on their membership in valued groups. Authorities who treat their subordinates politely and with dignity increase their workers’ feelings that they are respected and valued, which results in pride in one’s group and augmentation of one’s own self-esteem. Tyler further argues that this identity-based model of legitimacy offers an alternative to models that emphasize resources in explaining why advantaged and disadvantaged actors accept a system as legitimate. The identity model allows for the acceptance of lower outcomes if procedures are fair and enhance one’s identity. Identity concerns are likely to be particularly strong when individuals are dealing with ingroup authorities or authorities of groups with which they strongly identify.

Quite distinct from Tyler’s emphasis on dignified treatment, Jackman’s chapter (pp. 437–467) on the role of violence in the maintenance of legitimacy concludes the book. Jackman calls for the redefinition of violence to include all injurious actions without requiring the willful intent to cause injury. By doing so, she introduces attention to less obtrusive forms of violence used to manage exploitive relations. She also argues that dominant groups who opt for this strategy may also be more likely to repudiate violence by subordinates. She concludes that a system of morality develops to deplore visible, socially disruptive violence but to condone violence that derives from the organization of expropriation. Thus certain acts of violence (subtle ones by dominant groups) are legitimated—supported by ideological rationalizations—while others (obvious ones by subordinate groups) are delegitimated.

Even though the chapters in this edited volume differ (for example, compare Jackman’s to that of Crandall and Beasley), together they address the multifaceted processes inherent in forging legitimacy or in dealing with its consequences. Kelman warns that the concept of legitimacy may be too broad, and, like the concept of culture, it indeed may be. The extent to which it can be embedded in systematic theoretical paradigms, however, ensures its usefulness.

WHAT THE VOLUME HIGHLIGHTS: IDENTIFYING CENTRAL THEMES

The editors cast the book as an inquiry into the psychological basis of social inequality. And, as the contents illustrate, this domain is quite expansive and perhaps in need of some general organizing questions that would facilitate paradigm development. Here, I use questions paralleling those that capture the major ideas

guiding distributive justice research (i.e., What is justice? How do people perceive (in)justice? How do people respond to perceived injustice? (e.g., Hegtvedt, in press; Jasso and Wegener, 1997)), to highlight central themes addressed in the volume. By doing so, I hope to reveal conceptual issues as well as suggest a model of legitimacy processes that brings together the diverse chapters in the *Psychology of Legitimacy*.

First, what is legitimacy? Like justice, it seems there is no singular, widely accepted definition. As the overview above shows, only several contributors offer definitions involving conceptually abstract ideas and one must be dismissed because it confounds legitimacy with the equally elusive—yet presumed to be commonly understood—term justice. Jost and Major and Spears *et al.* emphasize ideological rationalizations for actions on behalf of valued groups and systems. Zelditch and Elsbach share the notion that something is legitimate if it is in accord with socially constructed values and norms; as such, whatever is legitimated is deemed desirable or appropriate. Tyler's classification of legitimacy as a social value echos Kelman's labeling of legitimacy as the moral basis of social interaction. Kelman also contends that legitimacy involves a process of recategorizing a phenomenon to construct an obligation.

Although these definitions vary, they imply several criteria for judging what is legitimate (the "test" of legitimacy) and, by implication, what effect legitimacy may have on the dynamics of interaction. First, legitimacy seems to be consensual. But, second, it is highly embedded in the beliefs and values of a group, which are the basis for judging what is appropriate or normative. And third, legitimacy seems to evoke the expectation of voluntary acceptance or compliance. Together these criteria may be useful for distinguishing why there is potential variation across individuals or groups in terms of perceptions of legitimacy or reactions to illegitimacy.

Second, what factors influence the perception of (il)legitimacy? This question might be phrased in two alternative ways. The first alternative, "Why do disadvantaged actors accept a system of inequality?," is at the core of most of the chapters in the book. The second alternative is hardly addressed in the book, "When do advantaged actors attempt to change the system from which they benefit?" Most factors affecting legitimacy perceptions can be cataloged in terms of the means by which or the conditions under which either or both the disadvantaged or advantaged legitimize an existing structure.

The chapters on cognitive and perceptual processes offer an indirect response to why actors accept a system. Those chapters reveal mechanisms underlying people's appraisals of legitimacy—rules of causality, consistency, justifications (Crandall and Beasley), social attributions (Yzerbyt and Rogier), and perceptual biases stemming from structural positions (Robinson and Kray). Such information processing mechanisms potentially facilitate the acceptance of inequality by the disadvantaged by shaping the content of images (stereotypes) of groups or the creation of justifications or by the advantaged by fueling distortions of information.

Other chapters more directly examining factors that affect perceptions of legitimacy emphasize motivations—of both disadvantaged and advantaged actors—and situational conditions, sometimes both and sometimes with a nod to the perceptual mechanisms. A laundry list emerges of what factors internal to an individual influence perceptions of legitimacy: belief in a just world, minimization of personal suffering or discrimination, and adherence to norms against expressing resentment over deprivation (Olson and Hafer); construal processes involving ego-defensive or system justification attributions (Major and Schmader); ambivalent stereotypes (Glick and Fiske); and social dominance orientation (Sidanius *et al.*). At the situational level, various factors that affect perceptions of legitimacy range from Spears *et al.*'s emphasis on the nature and reliability of information about groups to characteristics of the relationships between individuals to the interrelationships between groups. Interaction factors include the structural positions of perceivers (Robinson and Kray; Sidanius *et al.*), the dynamics of interaction between people belonging to recognizable groups that vary in terms of resources (Ridgeway), and the procedural fairness of interaction between authorities and subordinates (Tyler). Finally, Ellemers and Wright highlight the impact of characteristics of the interrelationships between groups themselves by examining the impact of the permeability of group boundaries, which raises the possibility of social mobility.

The volume highlights many factors in an attempt to account for the counterintuitive observation that appraisals of legitimacy do not vary to the extent one might expect. Although a number of the chapters employ social identity theory or its offshoots, systematic connections between abstract principles to account for even the restricted variation are not consistently explicit. Generally, the principles might include an explicit statement of what motivates individuals (in terms of goals and perceptions), and may go beyond the premises of social identity theory. With regard to goals, is it self-interest or concern for group welfare or group value that guides assessments? Material self-interest as an underlying motivation seems inappropriate precisely because the socially disadvantaged appear to accept systems in which they are embedded as legitimate. But the seeking of a balance of material and social outcomes may allow the pursuit of self-interest in terms of securing higher benefits than costs. Indeed the disadvantaged may simply want to avoid the costs associated with challenging the status quo or, like the group-value model implies, they might want to achieve the favor of others. An assumption about motivations should also pertain to those advantaged by the system. Although maintaining the status quo is in the material interest of the advantaged, examples offered by Kelman suggest the pivotal role that the advantaged may play to enhance the outcomes of the disadvantaged. Yet, little of the volume is specifically directed to understanding the perceptions and behaviors of the advantaged—especially as they impinge on those of the disadvantaged (exceptions might include Jackman, Ridgeway, and Robinson and Kray). The dynamics between groups or between individuals associated with groups (as

suggested by Ridgeway) could be pivotal for maintaining or changing the status quo.

In addition, in terms of individuals' perceptions, are actors likely to opt for cognitive simplicity (like that suggested in the cognitive miser notion) in interpreting the situation, or are they more likely to fully assess information in a situation? The former augments the clout of stereotypes while the latter may undermine simplistic explanations. Generally, with spelled out assumptions about motives and information processing, logically derived predictions about how situational conditions are likely to affect whether a person, structure, or system will be seen as legitimate may emerge. Such principles may also be useful in predicting responses to perceived illegitimacy.

The third question asks, how do people respond to perceptions of (il)legitimacy? The nature of legitimacy itself implies that such a condition is likely to stimulate voluntary acceptance of or compliance with whatever entity is legitimized. Such a response is evident in a number of chapters: Major and Schmader indicate that legitimacy results in system justification attributions; Ridgeway notes the acceptance of status orders; Elsbach suggests organizational legitimacy attracts workers and clients; Tyler emphasizes compliance to requests of authorities; Sidanius *et al.* identify how legitimating ideologies affect the support for various policies; and Jackman implies that legitimacy of the nature of violence used by authorities reigns in responses of the exploited. Perceptions of illegitimacy might suggest the opposite. And, as illustrated by the examples offered by Kelman and implied by the Chomsky quote, appraisals of illegitimacy may stimulate collective responses. Yet the impact of (il)legitimacy may depend upon other factors as well. As Jost *et al.* demonstrate, when low status actors perceive a situation to be legitimate, they are more likely to express outgroup favoritism.

In effect, the work by Major and Schmader and Jost *et al.* identifies cognitive responses to legitimacy conditions whereas other works imply behavioral responses. Thinking in terms of the theoretical and empirical developments in distributive justice research reveals three gaps in the volume's coverage of responses to (il)legitimacy. First, little attention focuses on emotional responses to legitimacy conditions. Feelings of anger by the disadvantaged might evoke a different type of response than those of resignation. True feelings of guilt on the part of the advantaged may stimulate social change, even at the risk of loss of some material benefits. In addition, to what extent are individuals' experiences of emotions similar to or different from their expressions of emotions? Second, "why" people should respond to illegitimacy seems overlooked or remains only implicit. Is distress a motivating factor to stimulate a response? Do outcomes have to become particularly disadvantageous before people voice cries of illegitimacy? Does a moral imperative to enhance collective welfare need to emerge before the advantaged act to legislate system change? And, third, there seems to be little discussion of factors that affect choices among types of reactions. In other words, situational conditions

may inhibit or may augment emotional responses and behavioral resistance to illegitimacy on the part of both the disadvantaged and advantaged.

Research on legitimacy is far broader than research on distributive justice because, as Zelditch notes, many things can be legitimated (and a reward distribution is just one among them). By structuring this section around questions that parallel those often asked in the distributive justice literature, a general model emerges in terms of conceptualizing studies of legitimacy. Recognizing common elements of what constitutes legitimacy, relational elements of the model include the antecedents to legitimacy appraisals and the consequences of such appraisals. Legitimacy is thus a consequence, such as when psychological processes (perceptions, attributions, social dominance orientation) and interactional dynamics influence appraisals. Such processes and dynamics, however, may be conditioned by various situational conditions (permeability of boundaries between groups, foreseen threats, structural positions). Legitimacy is also a cause or moderating cause of various attributions and behavioral responses. Finally, legitimacy is a mediator, although this role is the least covered in the volume (see Sidanius *et al.* as an exception). The implied “arrows” in this generic model represent the underlying theoretical rationale for the relationships. The model, plus the implied reasoning, provide a basis for future research directions.

WHAT THE FUTURE HOLDS: DISCUSSING DIRECTIONS

Each contributor to the volume sets his or her own course for future research, the compilation of which will contribute to understanding the various relationships embedded in the general model noted above. Here I would like to suggest several generic courses that emerge from the volume. Some of these suggestions stem from the attention they received and others from the attention they did not receive.

As noted several times above, a number of contributors analyze why disadvantaged actors surprisingly support the legitimacy of inequalities. Far less attention is given to the equally curious observation that the advantaged sometimes question the legitimacy of the system from which they benefit. Indeed, reflection on legislative changes over the years that have led to desegregation, broadening civil rights, equal pay, etc. indicate that whites have relinquished some of their privilege, that men have supported women’s causes, etc. Such patterns, as indicated in the discussion of motivations, are contrary to the assumption that individuals simply pursue their material self-interest and thus raise the need to consider more complex motivations. Robinson and Kray and Glick and Fiske illustrate how the powerful distort images to maintain the status quo yet Kelman recognizes the pivotal role of authorities in initiating system change. Previous work by Montada and his colleagues (e.g., Montada *et al.*, 1986; Schmitt *et al.*, 2000) provide some direction in understanding the conditions under which the privileged are likely to experience

existential guilt regarding the differences between one's own favorable position and the unfavorable position of others. And Hoffman (2000) discusses the development of empathy leading to compassion for others whose conditions are more disadvantaged than one's own. These emotional responses or motivations may help to understand when the advantaged are likely to play the pivotal role Kelman describes. Examining factors and processes affecting the perceptions and behaviors of the advantaged, especially as intertwined with those of the disadvantaged, is a first topic to require further investigation.

A second direction is to develop more extensively and systematically the attention that many chapters drew to situational factors that might influence perceptions of legitimacy and reactions to illegitimacy. For example, how do situational conditions affect the underlying processing of information? Certainly Spears *et al.* take on this issue, but it seems missing from the chapters on cognitive and perceptual processes, even though the context provides the information inherent in such processes (see Howard, 1995). In addition, investigation of situational conditions will contribute to a more precise response to the complementary questions, "When will the disadvantaged accept the status quo?" and "When will the advantaged challenge the status quo?"

A third path for future research, and one that may help to distinguish between legitimacy and justice research, stems from Zelditch's chapter. He emphasizes that many things can be legitimated—a reward distribution (at the heart of distributive justice approaches) is only one among many. He notes, however, that the processes may be different depending upon whether it is power, rewards, a person, a system, etc., that is legitimated or perceived as illegitimate. It seems that for most chapters in the volume, what is being legitimated is inequality, broadly defined. How would the processing of information or the reactions be different, depending upon the entity at issue? For example, contrast the perceptions and behaviors of disaffected workers if it is their manager that they perceive to be illegitimate or if it is the system of promotion and pay. Variation in what is being legitimated may simply constitute another situational factor, but addressing it more systematically may require significant alteration in assumptions and propositions about processes underlying legitimacy.

The interrelated fourth and fifth suggested directions seem hardly addressed in the book, yet are common in more sociological traditions of legitimacy research (see Walker and Zelditch, 1993). The fourth possible avenue for future research focuses on the dynamics between individuals or between groups in securing or undermining legitimacy. Ridgeway's chapter notes how status beliefs emerge, which in turn legitimizes the status order. By implication, her theoretical perspective may suggest conditions under which interaction patterns may lead to change, rather than stability. Tyler also discusses how authorities treat subordinates, which has implications for the extent to which subordinates perceive the authorities to be legitimate. Beyond these obvious chapters on interactional dynamics, how do the ingroup and outgroup biases of members of advantaged and disadvantaged groups play out?

To the extent that other research in social identity theory already addresses this issue, it may be extended to understanding legitimacy. More generally, interaction is an arena that shapes meanings for individuals and thus potentially underlies development of the rationalizations for inequalities. Exploring how the daily lives of the disadvantaged create a tolerance for deprivation or may inspire advantaged actors to question the legitimacy of a system may be informative.

Insofar as the dynamics of individuals or of groups creates interdependence that affects legitimacy, a fifth consideration is the potential sanctioning that occurs between groups or between actors. Although Spears *et al.* mention the sanctioning potential of powerful groups, few other contributors address the potential threat to well-being that sanctions may hold. Walker and Zelditch (1993) specifically identify legitimacy as a collective process involving support from superiors/authorities or peers as central to eliciting compliance with a given structure (or person). Why individuals comply has less to do with cognitive processes than the anticipation of formal or informal sanctions. Such anticipation may suppress reactions by individuals who personally feel improperly treated or that the system is improper. The perception of support from differentially placed others provides more information about the context, which may ultimately shape some of the cognitive and perceptual processes described in this volume. Also, such support may raise concerns about the costs of overt actions to rectify what one personally believes to be an illegitimate or unfair situation.⁴ Thus rather than the array of internal factors described by contributors here, disadvantaged actors may fail to challenge a system because of fears of reprimand or worse. Although concerns about sanctioning may go beyond the psychological emphasis of this volume, any explanation for the lack of response to illegitimacy must explore all possible causes.

Jost *et al.* call for the need to integrate theories and research in terms of the individual, group, and system levels. Such a call constitutes a final direction for research, and one that also finds parallels in both past (e.g., Törnblom, 1977) and recent developments in work on distributive justice (Wenzel, 2000). One may base a perception of injustice on comparisons to past experience, a local other, a referential group, or on a combination of comparisons; similarly, judgements of justice may depend upon one's identification with a group, a collection of groups, or one's society. Situational conditions may highlight a particular comparison or type of judgment. In terms of legitimacy, it might prove productive to recognize when people are likely to focus on the legitimacy of some entity with regard to themselves, other group members, or the consequences for all groups (i.e., society). By doing so it may be possible to explicate differences between the disadvantaged and the advantaged, and the roles each play, especially in disrupting the status quo.

⁴Work that my colleagues and I are now pursuing examines the direct and moderating effect of collective sources of legitimacy on attributions for the unfair behavior of an allocator (Hegtvéd *et al.*, 2003) and on the emotional, cognitive, and behavioral reactions to an unfair distribution (Hegtvéd and Johnson, 2000).

Psychological approaches to legitimacy ultimately address—as do political and sociological perspectives—stability and change in society. The edited volume by Jost and Major introduces psychologists and social psychologists to exciting work in the area of legitimacy from the perspective of the individual. Avenues for future research exist within paradigms as well as by going beyond the confines of existing perspectives. For heuristic purposes, I illustrated here issues of legitimacy research by invoking the domain I know best: distributive justice. In doing so, I hoped to highlight possible concerns that legitimacy researchers might investigate. In addition, what we know of legitimacy processes may also inform justice perspectives. But, like most of the contributors to the volume whose arguments contain both legitimacy and justice rhetoric, I avoided systematically addressing the similarities and differences in the theories and research of each. That the two are intricately related grows obvious in this volume. Whether it is a test of legitimacy that leads to more just institutions or a test of justice that undermines legitimacy will have to await a different essay. Meanwhile, let this essay suffice to further legitimize the study of legitimacy in its various guises.

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