

System-Justifying Functions of Complementary Regional and Ethnic Stereotypes: Cross-National Evidence

John T. Jost,^{1,4} Yifat Kivetz,¹ Monica Rubini,²
Grazia Guermandi,² and Cristina Mosso³

According to system justification theory, stereotyping is an ideological process that serves to justify the status quo and bolster the legitimacy of the existing social order. The present research investigates the system-justifying role of complementary stereotypes in which high-status groups are represented as agentic and achievement-oriented and low-status groups as communal and interpersonally oriented. We demonstrate that such complementary stereotypes: (a) reflect a high degree of consensus across high- and low-status perceiver groups; (b) are endorsed more strongly to the extent that system justification motives are chronically or temporarily activated; and (c) serve an ideological function by enhancing the perceived legitimacy of the existing social system. Evidence concerning regional and ethnic stereotypes in Italy, England, and Israel provides converging evidence for the system-justifying function of complementary stereotypes and reveals remarkable similarity in the contents of stereotypes of different groups that happen to occupy similar status positions in their respective societies.

KEY WORDS: stereotyping; prejudice; intergroup relations; regional, ethnic, and social status; ideology; system justification.

The sheer pervasiveness of social stereotyping has led generations of social psychologists to postulate a long list of cognitive, motivational, and societal functions that are presumably served by prejudice and discrimination. Allport (1958) famously codified the first entries, including the categorization function,

¹Department of Psychology, New York University, New York.

²University of Bologna, Italy.

³University of Turin, Italy.

⁴All correspondence should be addressed to John T. Jost, Department of Psychology, New York University, 6 Washington Place, 5th Floor, New York, New York 10003; e-mail: john.jost@nyu.edu.

the affiliative function, and the rationalization function. Tajfel (1969) stressed cognitive rather than motivational causes of stereotypes and prejudice, and this position coincided well with the application of information processing models to social stereotyping (e.g., Hamilton, 1981). A good deal of empirical research has supported the “cognitive miser” notion that a primary function of stereotyping is to conserve mental resources (e.g., Fiske and Taylor, 1991; Macrae *et al.*, 1994; Stangor and Lange, 1994). The discovery that stereotypes are often reflected in automatic, uncontrollable judgments provided further evidence that stereotypes serve to simplify social reality and minimize effortful thought processes (e.g., Banaji *et al.*, 1993; Devine, 1989; Dovidio *et al.*, 1986; Gilbert and Hixon, 1989; Wittenbrink *et al.*, 1997).

Without disputing the functional significance of cognitive economy, other researchers have drawn their inspiration from Allport’s (1958) observation that the “rationalizing and justifying function of a stereotype exceeds its function as a reflector of group attributes” (p. 192; see Jost and Hamilton, 2005). Such theories may be classified according to a taxonomy in which *ego justification*, *group justification*, or *system justification* needs are seen as driving the stereotyping process (Jost and Banaji, 1994). In support of the first type of theory, it has been shown that threats to self-esteem stimulate enhanced levels of stereotyping and discrimination (Fein and Spencer, 1997; Oakes and Turner, 1980), suggesting that ego-defensive functions are indeed involved (e.g., Katz and Braly, 1933). Concerning the second type of approach, Tajfel (1981) proposed that in addition to facilitating causal attribution, stereotypes serve to justify “actions, committed or planned, against outgroups” and to increase “positive differentiation of the ingroup from selected outgroups” (p. 156). These functions have been emphasized in social identity approaches to stereotyping and prejudice (e.g., Hogg and Abrams, 1988; Tajfel and Turner, 1979). Jost and Banaji (1994) argued that, in addition to serving ego-justifying and group-justifying functions, stereotypes serve the system-justifying function of rationalizing the status quo, regardless of one’s individual or group status or position.

From a system justification perspective (see Jost *et al.*, 2004), stereotypes and other social judgments serve to maintain ideological support for the prevailing social system by justifying and rationalizing inequality (Glick and Fiske, 2001a; Hoffman and Hurst, 1990; Jackman and Senter, 1983; Major, 1994; Sidanius and Pratto, 1999). One way in which stereotypes function to legitimize the system in the context of inequality is by ascribing to members of advantaged and disadvantaged groups distinctive, offsetting strengths and weaknesses (Kay and Jost, 2003). In the present research, we investigate the system-justifying role of *complementary* stereotypes in which high-status groups are perceived as agentic, competent, and achievement-oriented, whereas low-status groups are perceived as communal, warm, and interpersonally oriented. We demonstrate that such complementary stereotypes (a) reflect a high degree of consensus across high- and low-status

perceiver groups, (b) are endorsed to a stronger extent when system justification motives are chronically or temporarily activated, and (c) serve an ideological function by enhancing the perceived legitimacy of the existing social system.

Status Differences and Complementary Stereotypes

Several independent lines of research suggest that high- and low-status individuals and groups are frequently assumed to have different but complementary characteristics. This conclusion follows from work on person perception, gender stereotyping, status attribution, social identification, and national stereotyping. Different authors have favored different labels for the two major dimensions by which individuals and groups are typically distinguished, but they are semantically convergent. Distinctions include agency versus communality (Conway *et al.*, 1996; Eagly and Steffen, 1984; Hoffman and Hurst, 1990; Jost and Kay, 2005; Locke, 2003), competence versus morality (Poppe and Linssen, 1999; Rosenberg and Sedlak, 1972), competence versus warmth (Glick and Fiske, 2001b), competence versus likeability (Ridgeway, 2001), self-profitability versus other-profitability (Peeters and Czapinski, 1990), achievement-related versus socioemotional characteristics (Jost *et al.*, 2001), and status-relevant versus status-irrelevant dimensions (Bettencourt *et al.*, 2001; Mullen *et al.*, 1992).⁵

Agentic Versus Communal Traits

Research on gender stereotyping demonstrates that men and women as target groups are consistently differentiated along these dimensions. Eagly and Steffen (1984), for example, found that in the absence of counter-stereotypical occupational information women were generally perceived to be more communal and men were generally perceived to be more agentic. These stereotypical characteristics were inferred from assumptions concerning social and occupational roles typically held by men and women. Hoffman and Hurst (1990) elaborated on the notion that stereotypes emerge (at least in part) to justify and rationalize the unequal division of labor in the family and in society. In two experiments, they demonstrated that hypothetical groups of “city workers” were stereotyped in agentic terms and that “child raisers” were stereotyped in communal terms.

Conway *et al.* (1996) argued that ascriptions of agency and communality are not unique to the context of gender but apply well to high- and low-status groups in general. In a variety of occupational and nonoccupational settings, they

⁵There seems to be more variation in the dimensions of noncompetence (as compared with the dimensions of competence), but virtually all of them (communality, morality, warmth, likeability, other-profitability, socioemotionality) have something to do with having an interpersonal orientation that involves caring and responsibility for others (Conway *et al.*, 1996; Eagly and Steffen, 1984; Glick and Fiske, 2001b).

found that low-status groups were consistently stereotyped in more communal, socioemotional terms, whereas high-status groups were stereotyped in agentic, achievement-oriented terms. Ridgeway (2001), too, summarized evidence linking social status, interaction style, and ascriptions of competence and considerateness toward others. In general, people seem to believe (and also believe that others believe) that high-status actors are competent but not considerate and that low-status actors are considerate but not competent.

System-Justifying Functions of Complementary Status Stereotypes

According to system justification theory, there is a general ideological motive to justify the status quo and bolster the legitimacy of the existing social order. People want to believe that the social system affecting them is fair and legitimate and they are willing to sacrifice personal or group interests to bolster such beliefs. The operation of a system justification motive is consistent with the psychological assumption that people want to believe in a *just world* (e.g., Hafer and Begué, 2005; Kluegel and Smith, 1986; Lerner and Miller, 1978; Major, 1994). Such a motive helps account for the prevalence of negative self-stereotyping, ingroup ambivalence, and out-group favoritism among members of low-status groups on both implicit and explicit attitudinal measures (e.g., Dasgupta, 2004; Jost *et al.*, 2004; Jost and Burgess, 2000; Jost and Hunyady, 2002; Rudman *et al.*, 2002).

Whereas just world theory focuses on the expression of *victim-blaming* patterns as a means of restoring the belief in a just world and maintaining a sense of personal control (e.g., Lerner, 1980), system justification theory investigates a wider range of stereotypes and ideological beliefs that people hold for the sake of rationalizing the status quo. Work by Kay and Jost (2003), for example, shows that people use *victim-enhancing* stereotypes as a way of preserving the legitimacy of the status quo. More specifically, they find that exposure to complementary stereotypes in which advantaged and disadvantaged group members are seen as possessing distinctive, offsetting strengths and weaknesses enhances the perceived fairness and legitimacy of the social system by supporting the desired conclusion that, as Lane (1959) put it, “everyone gets his share.”

Studies by Kay *et al.* (2005) demonstrate further that victim-blaming and victim-enhancing stereotypes provide two alternative routes for satisfying system justification needs. The choice of the specific route depends on its system justification potential. When a trait is causally related to the outcome (e.g., intelligence and wealth/poverty), victim-blaming stereotypes possess the most system justifying potential. However, when the trait is seen as causally irrelevant to the outcome (e.g., physical attractiveness and wealth/poverty), complementary, victim-enhancing stereotypes possess greater system-justifying potential. Thus, Kay *et al.* (2005) found that people scored higher on system justification following exposure to rich + intelligent (or poor + unintelligent) and poor + attractive (or

rich + unattractive) complementary stereotype exemplars than following exposure to rich + unintelligent (or poor + intelligent) and poor + unattractive (or rich + attractive) noncomplementary exemplars.

The research literature on gender stereotyping provides further support for the notion that complementary stereotypes are highly effective at maintaining support for the status quo. Work by Glick and Fiske (2001a,b) suggests that ambivalent (i.e., simultaneously hostile and benevolent) forms of sexism provide a compelling justification for the system of gender inequality. Specifically, they argue that stereotyping women as warm, sweet, and dependent and men as assertive, competent, and independent not only justifies the division of labor within the family and necessitates protective paternalism, but it also makes women more tolerant of sexism in society. In a study of gender attitudes in 19 different countries, Glick *et al.* (2000) found that women were at least as likely as men to endorse benevolent forms of sexism. They also found that hostile and benevolent sexism scores (at the country level) were positively inter-correlated, that the scores of men and women were positively inter-correlated, and that ambivalent sexism was correlated negatively with the overall degree of gender equality and empowerment in each society. Studies by Jost and Kay (2005) demonstrated that exposure to benevolent and complementary gender stereotypes led people to score higher on both gender-specific and more general or diffuse forms of system justification.

Research on system justification processes therefore suggests that attitudes toward members of low-status groups can be highly favorable and at the same time contribute to ideological support for the system (Glick and Fiske, 2001a,b; Jost and Kay, 2005; Kay and Jost, 2003). In this article, we examine the ideological function of complementary status stereotypes in which high-status groups are perceived as agentic and achievement-oriented whereas low-status groups are perceived as communal and interpersonally oriented. Building on earlier work, we suggest that such complementary status stereotypes are especially potent as system-justifying devices. Furthermore, on the assumption that stereotypic differentiation along dimensions of agency and communality satisfies a system justification need, we hypothesize that members of high- and low-status groups will express similar patterns of stereotypic differentiation. That is, complementary status stereotypes are expected to be relatively independent of the perceiver's group membership (see also Brauer, 2001). This prediction cannot be derived from ego- or group-justification perspectives, according to which members of high- vs. low-status groups are expected to express ingroup favoring biases in order to defend and bolster their own personal and social identities.

System Justification Variables Affecting the Endorsement of Complementary Stereotypes

From the standpoint of system justification theory, stereotyping reflects an ideological process that serves to satisfy a general tendency to justify the system

and accept existing inequality as fair and legitimate. Complementary status stereotypes are especially effective system justification mechanisms because they allow people to justify inequality (i.e., “people deserve what they get and get what they deserve”) and at the same time to create a psychological sense of equality (e.g., “everyone gets his share”). If indeed complementary status stereotypes are motivated by needs to justify the system, then it follows that such forms of stereotyping would be especially pronounced when the motivation to protect the system is either chronically accessible because of dispositional factors or situationally activated by circumstances such as system threat.

Jost and Thompson (2000) developed the *Economic System Justification* scale to gauge individual differences in the propensity to defend and justify the existing economic system. In the first study, we used this scale to assess the proposition that stronger motivational tendencies to justify the system would be associated with the increased endorsement of complementary status stereotypes. In particular, we hypothesized that stronger endorsement of Economic System Justification would be associated with increased ingroup favoritism among high-status group members and increased outgroup favoritism among low-status group members on agentic (but not communal) stereotypes.

In addition to Economic System Justification, there are other individual differences and ideological beliefs that should affect the need to justify the system. Such factors may be related to differences in life circumstances and perceptions of social reality. For example, members of socially or economically disadvantaged groups may, at least under some circumstances, possess stronger needs to reduce ideological dissonance by justifying inequality relative to members of advantaged groups. Research by Jost, Pelham, *et al.* (2003), for example, shows that low-income respondents are more likely than high-income respondents to believe that large differences in pay are necessary to “get people to work hard” and “as an incentive for individual effort.” In the present research, we examine the association between the perceived *magnitude* of inequality and the endorsement of complementary stereotypes (cf. Federico and Levin, 2004; Overbeck *et al.*, 2004). In particular, we hypothesize that by evoking a stronger need to justify inequality, the perceived magnitude of status differences between groups will be associated with increased reliance on complementary status stereotypes. Based on the notion that complementary status stereotyping serves a system-justifying function, we expected that the increased use of complementary stereotypes would be associated with increased perceptions of the legitimacy and stability of the system. This hypothetical pattern, which we assessed using path modeling, is illustrated in Fig. 1, with the addition of a feedback loop in which increased perceptions of legitimacy and stability contribute to increased perceptions of the magnitude of status differences, thereby initiating a self-perpetuating process.

In addition to measuring the chronically accessible tendency to justify the system, we also experimentally manipulated system justification needs by threatening

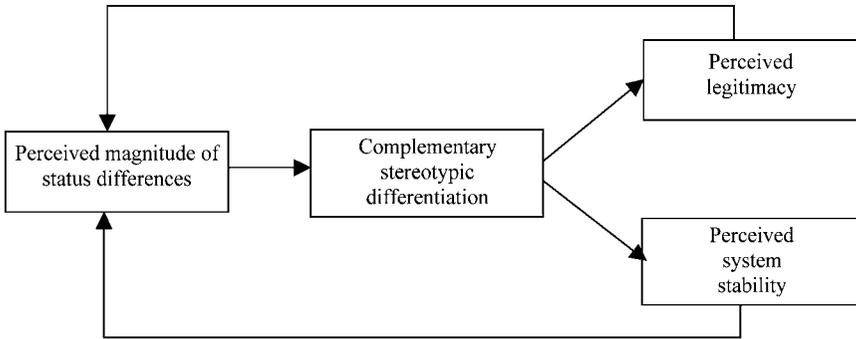


Fig. 1. Theoretical model illustrating hypothesized relations among variables.

the social system. Research shows that threats to the social order tend to evoke conservative, system-justifying responses (e.g., Jost, Glaser, *et al.*, 2003; Landau *et al.*, 2004; Rucker *et al.*, 2004). To the extent that complementary stereotypes serve to justify the system and bolster the legitimacy of the status quo, then it follows that such forms of stereotyping would be especially pronounced following a system threat manipulation (see also Kay *et al.*, 2005). In particular, we hypothesize that threatening the social system would lead to increased endorsement of complementary stereotypes in which high-status group members are seen as relatively agentic and achievement oriented and low-status group members as communal and interpersonally oriented. Once again, we hypothesize that the increased endorsement of complementary stereotypes would be associated with a subsequent increase in the perceived legitimacy and stability of the social system.

Overview of Research and Summary of Hypotheses

In three studies, we investigated real-world status differences arising from regional and ethnic distinctions. One example of regional inequality exists in Italy, where for more than a century Southern Italians have occupied a position that is lower in social and economic status than that of Northern Italians (e.g., Capozza *et al.*, 1982). The status gap between the North and South is reflected in the prejudicial slogan “Africa begins in Rome.” Because of the rich historical and cultural significance of regional distinctions, Italy was chosen as the research context for Study 1.

Study 2 was designed to further support the argument that complementary stereotypes are directly related to status differences rather than to other differences, such as climate and geographical factors (cf. Pennebaker *et al.*, 1996). To separate socioeconomic status (SES) from climate and geographical factors, we conducted Study 2 in England, where the direction of the North-South status differences

is reversed (i.e., Southerners enjoy a higher status than do Northerners). Finally, Study 3 was conducted in Israel, where the variable distinguishing status is ethnicity (Ashkenazi vs. Sephardic Jews) rather than geography (Levin and Sidanius, 1999; Tyree *et al.*, 1987).

The most basic hypothesis—assessed in all three studies—was that people are motivated to justify the system by using complementary stereotypes in which high-status groups are stereotyped in *agentive* terms, whereas low-status groups are stereotyped in *communal* terms. Based on the notion that such stereotypic differentiation serves a system (rather than ego or group) justification need, we expected a similar pattern of stereotypic differentiation across high- and low-status group members. Such *consensus* between high- and low-status groups arises out of a shared motivation to justify the system, regardless of one's own group membership.

In addition, we hypothesized that a higher need to justify the system will give rise to increased use of complementary status stereotypes. To test this proposition we measured as well as manipulated the need to justify the system. In all three studies we employed the perceived magnitude of status differences as a measure of the need to justify the system; we examined the association between this measure and the endorsement of complementary stereotypes. In Study 1, we also assessed the association between economic system justification and stereotypic differentiation between groups. In Study 3, we experimentally manipulated the need to justify the system by threatening the social system and examining the impact of such a threat on the reliance on complementary status stereotypes.

Finally, to bolster the argument that complementary status stereotypes serve a system-justifying function, we employ path analysis to test our conceptual model depicted in Fig. 1. Such path modeling allows (to some degree) for the estimation of directional effects using simultaneous data (Browne and Cudeck, 1993; Kline, 1998; MacCallum and Austin, 2000). Thus, we investigate the extent to which variations in the need to justify the system (i.e., perceived magnitude of status difference, system threat) predict increased stereotypic differentiation, which in turn predicts increased perceptions of the legitimacy and stability of the system. MacCallum and Austin (2000) noted that a shortcoming of many studies using structural equation approaches is the failure to replicate the same hypothesized model with different samples in different contexts at different occasions. The present research enables us to test the same path model in Italy (Study 1), England (Study 2), and Israel (Study 3).

STUDY 1

Overview

The first study was conducted in Italy, where we anticipated that status differences between the North and South would reflect complementary stereotyping

of Northerners as agentic and Southerners as communal. To this end, we administered a fairly lengthy questionnaire to participants in Northern and Southern Italy. The questionnaire also included items assessing individual differences in economic system justification as well as stereotype ratings of Northerners and Southerners and perceptions of the magnitude, legitimacy, and stability of the status differences.

Method

Participants

A total of 160 students participated in the study voluntarily, during class sessions in psychology. Data were collected at three locations: the Cesena campus of the University of Bologna (in the North of Italy), the University of Macerata (in Central Italy), and the University of Catania (in the South of Italy). These efforts yielded questionnaires from 75 people who identified themselves as Northerners and 85 who identified themselves as Southerners.

Materials and Procedure

Participants received a questionnaire (translated and back-translated by native Italian speakers) that was entitled “Beliefs about Northerners and Southerners.” The questionnaire contained three sections: trait ratings, perceptions of the system, and an individual difference measure of economic system justification. The order in which the first two sections were administered was counterbalanced across participants; the economic system justification scale was always administered last.

In the trait-rating section, participants rated both Northern and Southern Italians separately on a series of agentic and communal traits (mixed together). The agentic (achievement-related) traits were: efficient, responsible, productive, active, dominant, educated, ambitious, and intelligent. The communal (socioemotional) traits were emotional, honest, friendly, extraverted, religious, and happy. Ratings were made on 9-point semantic differential scales ranging from 1 (e.g., *extremely unintelligent*) to 9 (e.g., *extremely intelligent*). Agentic and communal traits were combined into subscales that exhibited satisfactory levels of reliability (α s = 0.77 and 0.65, respectively).

In the system rating section participants were first asked to rate the perceived magnitude of differences in socioeconomic status between the two groups. On a 15-point scale ranging from *Much less* (1–3) to *Somewhat less* (4–6) to *Neither greater nor less* (7–9) to *Somewhat greater* (10–12) to *Much greater* (13–15), respondents indicated their perception of the relative social and economic status of Southern Italians compared with Northern Italians. Thus, lower scores indicated a greater perceived status difference favoring Northerners relative

to Southerners. This variable was recoded prior to conducting path models, so that higher numbers indicated a larger perceived magnitude of the status gap.

Participants were also asked how legitimate and stable they perceived the social and economic status differences to be. On a 15-point scale labeled from *Extremely illegitimate* (1–3) to *Extremely legitimate* (13–15), they answered the question: “How legitimate or illegitimate do you think that the socioeconomic status differences are between Northerners and Southerners?” On a 15-point scale, labeled from *Extremely unlikely to change* (1–3) to *Extremely likely to change* (13–15), the respondents also marked how stable they perceived the status differences between the two groups to be.

Finally, the last section contained an Italian translation of the 17-item economic system justification scale published by Jost and Thompson (2000, p. 225). This scale measures participant’s ideological beliefs concerning the fairness, legitimacy, and necessity of economic inequality. Sample items include “Laws of nature are responsible for differences in wealth in society,” “Economic positions are legitimate reflections of people’s achievements,” and “It is unfair to have an economic system which produces extreme wealth and extreme poverty at the same time” (reverse-scored). Participants indicated their level of agreement with each statement on 9-point Likert-type scales anchored by *strongly disagree* and *strongly agree*. Reliability for the Italian version of the scale was lower ($\alpha = 0.63$) than that reported by Jost and Thompson ($\alpha = 0.73$).

Results

To confirm that naturally occurring differences in socioeconomic status fit our a priori designations, we examined participants’ ratings of the socioeconomic status of Southerners relative to Northerners. These ratings were recentered so that a score of 0 would indicate that the two groups had equivalent SES; we then examined participants’ average ratings of the groups to see if they differed from zero. In fact, they did, and in the expected direction: the SES of Southerners was perceived as significantly lower than that of Northerners, $t(159) = -16.10$, $p < 0.001$.

To test the proposition that complementary status stereotypes serve a system-justifying function (as distinct from ego- and group-justifying functions), we conducted a 2 (trait type: agentic vs. communal) \times 2 (target group: Northern vs. Southern Italians) \times 2 (perceiver group: Northern vs. Southern Italians) mixed ANOVA with repeated measures on the first two factors. This analysis allows the researcher to distinguish target effects from effects of ingroup and outgroup favoritism (Brauer, 2001), and it yielded several main and interaction effects. First, a main effect of perceiver group was observed, such that Northern Italians made higher ratings overall, across trait type and target group, $F(1, 158) = 12.61$,

$p = 0.001$. A main effect of trait type indicated that higher ratings were made on agentic than communal traits, across both perceiver and target groups, $F(1, 158) = 11.90, p < 0.001$.

All the two-way interactions in the model were also significant. The perceiver group \times target group interaction indicated that each group judged the ingroup to be higher across trait type, $F(1, 158) = 52.81, p < 0.001$. The perceiver group \times trait type interaction revealed that Northern Italians made higher ratings on agentic traits across both target groups, while Southern Italians made higher ratings on communal traits, $F(1, 158) = 20.29, p < 0.001$. More importantly, a trait type \times target group interaction showed that Northern Italians were seen as possessing more agentic than communal traits, while Southern Italians were seen as possessing more communal than agentic traits, $F(1, 158) = 632.02, p < 0.001$. This finding supports the complementarity hypothesis.

These effects were qualified by a significant three-way interaction of trait type \times target group \times perceiver group, $F(1, 158) = 7.59, p = 0.007$. While this interaction suggests that stereotypic differentiation depends on the group to which one belongs, inspection of means reveals that both groups rated Northern Italians as higher on agentic traits and Southern Italians as higher on communal traits (see Table I). This pattern indicates that there is a relatively high degree of consensus across perceiver groups, but that each group makes slight adjustments in the ingroup-favoring direction.

To explore the notion that higher needs to justify the system would be related to stronger endorsement of complementary status stereotypes, we constructed a General Linear Model in which ingroup favoritism was predicted by the (categorical) variables of perceiver group and trait type, as well as by

Table I. Mean Stereotype Ratings as a Function of Perceiver Group, Target Group, and Trait Type (Studies 1–3)

Perceiver group	Target group			
	Low status		High status	
	Communal	Agentic	Communal	Agentic
Study 1 (Italy)				
Low status	6.32	5.02	4.09	6.20
High status	5.88	3.70	4.37	6.44
Total	6.11	4.40	4.22	6.31
Study 2 (England)				
Low status	5.66	5.02	4.79	5.56
High status	5.78	5.41	4.57	5.39
Total	5.70	5.15	4.75	5.52
Study 3 (Israel)				
Low status	7.40	6.02	5.53	6.49
High status	6.82	4.97	5.76	6.24
Total	7.07	5.42	5.65	6.35

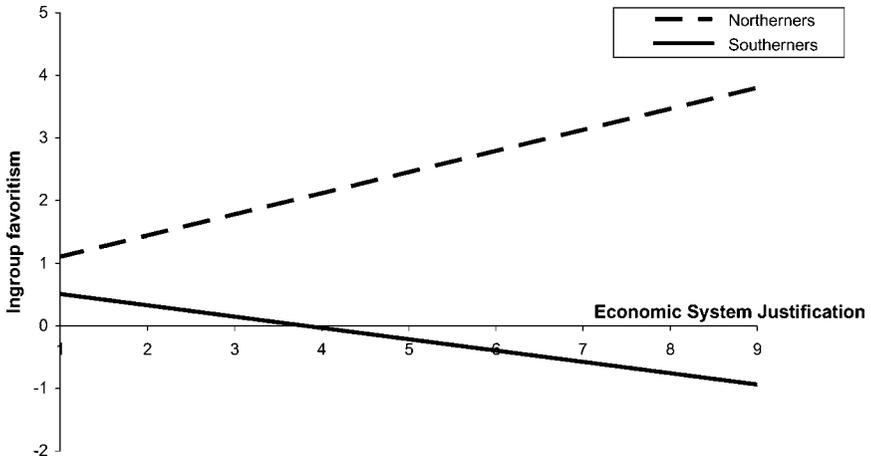


Fig. 2. Effects of economic system justification on ingroup and outgroup favoritism in Italy (Study 1). *Note.* Positive values on the vertical axis indicate ingroup favoritism, and negative values indicate outgroup favoritism.

ratings on the (continuous) economic system justification scale, adjusting for continuous ratings of legitimacy and stability (all continuous measures were centered at 0). This analysis revealed a significant two-way interaction of perceiver group and economic system justification, such that Northerners' degree of ingroup favoritism increased, and Southerners' ingroup favoritism decreased, as economic system justification increased, $F(1, 154) = 13.47$, $p < 0.001$ (see Fig. 2). This supports our hypothesis that individual differences in the tendency to justify the system are associated with an increase in stereotypic differentiation between high and low-status groups (in this study, Northern and Southern Italians, respectively).

Finally, to examine the hypothesis that complementary stereotypes serve a system-justifying function and are influenced by the need to justify the system, we estimated a path model in which the exogenous variable capturing the perceived magnitude of status differences predicted complementary stereotyping, which in turn predicted system legitimacy and stability. In this and all subsequent studies, the complementary stereotyping variable was a contrast-coded within-subjects variable in which agentic ratings of the high-status target group (Northern Italians) and communal ratings of the low-status target group (Southern Italians) were assigned contrast weights of +1, and communal ratings of the high-status group and agentic ratings of the low-status group were assigned weights of -1. The model was overidentified according to the definitions by Kline (1998) and Kenny *et al.* (1998). Maximum likelihood estimates were generated by the AMOS program. Because perceptions of legitimacy and stability tend to be intercorrelated (Bettencourt *et al.*, 2001), the model assumed correlated measurement error between these two

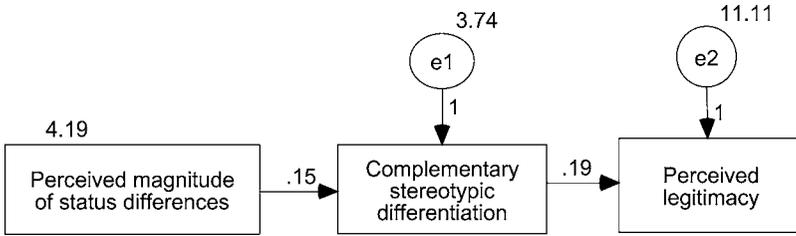


Fig. 3. Resulting path model assessing relations among magnitude, stereotyping, and legitimacy in Italy (Study 1). *Note.* Illustration of nested path model ($N = 160$) that resulted from the removal of perceived stability from the model. Entries above the arrows are unstandardized maximum likelihood parameter estimates, as recommended by Kline (1998). The analysis was conducted using Amos structural equation modeling software. Overall model fit was good, $\chi^2(1) = 0.59, p = 0.443$; NFI = 0.91, CFI = 1.00, RMSEA = 0.00, pclose = 0.526.

variables. Unfortunately, the original model did not provide a good fit to the data, $\chi^2(2) = 8.247, p = 0.016$; NFI = 0.485, CFI = 0.376, RMSEA = 0.140 (see Kline, 1998, for a discussion of fit indicators and desirable values; see Browne and Cudeck, 1993, for a discussion of RMSEA). However, the nested model shown in Fig. 3, which resulted from deleting the stability variable from the original model, performed much better, $\chi^2(1) = 0.59, p = 0.443$; NFI = 0.91, CFI = 1.00, RMSEA = 0.00, pclose = 0.526 (see Arbuckle and Wothke, 1999, for a discussion of the pclose inferential test of RMSEA). This model indicates that the perception of large SES differences between Northern and Southern Italians was associated with increased stereotyping of Northerners as more agentic than Southerners and Southerners as more communal than Northerners, which was in turn associated with increased perceptions of the legitimacy (but not stability) of the socioeconomic system.⁶

Discussion

Study 1 provided support for the notion that complementary stereotyping is associated with system-justifying functions. Both high- and low-status group members perceived the high-status Northerners as higher on agentic traits and the low-status Southerners as higher on communal traits. Stronger needs to justify the system (as measured in terms of scores on the economic system justification scale) also predicted stronger stereotypic differentiation between the two

⁶In addition to estimating this overall path model, we conducted a multiple-groups analysis to test for equivalence of the models for participants who completed stereotyping measures first and those who made system ratings first. This analysis—equivalent to testing the null hypothesis that all paths are equal between models for the two counterbalanced orders—indicated that there was no difference between the models, $\chi^2_{diff}(3) = 2.53, ns$. We therefore present details of the model (and all subsequent path models) collapsing across order.

groups. Furthermore, the perceived magnitude of status differences was associated with increased stereotyping of Northerners as more agentic than Southerners and Southerners as more communal than Northerners. Such stereotypic differentiation led to increased perceptions of system legitimacy.

STUDY 2

Study 2 was designed to further investigate the general hypothesis that complementary status stereotypes serve a system-justifying function. Although our theory concerning the system-justifying functions of stereotypes does not depend on those stereotypes being factually incorrect, it is central to our argument that the stereotypes are related to status differences (as distinguishable from other types of differences) between groups. In the contexts of Italy, socioeconomic status is confounded with geographical climate and other local differences between the North and the South. It has been suggested that there are actual and perceived differences between Northerners and Southerners in general (Linssen and Hagendoorn, 1994; Peabody, 1985; Pennebaker *et al.*, 1996; Poppe and Linssen, 1999; Zebrowitz, 1996), and it is plausible that some of these differences could be tied to the climate of the region. For example, hot weather could be associated, either in reality or in the popular imagination, with lower achievement and productivity or with greater affiliativeness and interpersonal warmth. To discern socioeconomic status from geographical region and climate, we conducted the second study in England, where status differences between North and South are reversed. Because of increased industrialism in and around the city of London, Southerners in England are generally assumed to be higher in social and economic status; Northerners in England are disadvantaged in terms of both perceived status and the severity of the climate.

Method

Overview

The design of Study 2 was similar to that of Study 1. Participants were asked to complete questionnaires in which they provided their stereotypes of people from the lower-status North and the higher-status South of England. They also rated the magnitude, legitimacy, and stability of socioeconomic differences between the two regional groups. We were therefore able to assess the extent to which members of high- and low-status groups reveal a similar pattern of stereotypic differentiation and to replicate the path model in the British context.

Participants

A total of 94 students from the North ($n = 28$) and South ($n = 66$) completed study materials during class sessions. Data were collected at Manchester

Polytechnic (in the North of England) and at the University of Surrey (in the South of England).

Dependent Measures

Stereotypes of Northerners and Southerners were assessed using the methodology employed by Jost and Burgess (2000), which was slightly different from that used in Study 1. Specifically, participants completed a series of 9-point unipolar scales in which each target group was rated separately on positive (e.g., “productive”) and negative (e.g., “unproductive”) wordings for the same trait dimension (1: *not at all* and 9: *extremely*). The agentic traits were as follows: efficient/inefficient, responsible/irresponsible, productive/unproductive, active/passive, dominant/subordinate, competitive/cooperative, selfish/unselfish, hard-working/lazy, cultured/uncultured, ambitious/unambitious, and intelligent/unintelligent. Ratings for negatively worded traits were subtracted from those for positive wordings, and a subscale was created by averaging the differences across all agentic traits ($\alpha = 0.82$). The communal traits were emotional/unemotional, honest/dishonest, friendly/unfriendly, extraverted/introverted, traditional/non-traditional, religious/irreligious and happy/unhappy. These trait ratings were also combined to form a communal subscale ($\alpha = 0.74$).

Participants rated the socioeconomic status of Southerners compared to Northerners on a 15-point scale ranging from 1 (*Much less*) to 8 (*Neither greater nor less*) to 15 (*Much greater*). Thus, higher ratings indicated a larger perceived status gap favoring high-status Southerners relative to low-status Northerners. Participants also reported their perceptions of system legitimacy (1: *Extremely illegitimate*, 15: *Extremely legitimate*) and stability (1: *Extremely unlikely to change*, 15: *Extremely likely to change*).

Results

As expected, participants’ ratings of the relative socioeconomic status of the two regions in England confirmed that Southerners were indeed perceived as significantly higher in status than were Northerners, $t(94) = 18.22$, $p < 0.001$.

Similar to Study 1, we first examined whether stereotypes of Northerners and Southerners would differ along communal and agentic dimensions. Participants’ stereotype ratings were submitted to a 2 (trait type: agentic vs. communal) \times 2 (target group: Northern vs. Southern Englanders) \times 2 (perceiver group: Northern vs. Southern Englanders) mixed ANOVA with repeated measures on the first two factors (see means in Table I). A main effect of target group indicated that low-status Northerners were rated higher overall, across traits, than high-status Southerners, $F(1, 93) = 14.29$, $p < 0.001$. A main effect of trait type showed that, across perceiver group and target group, higher ratings were made on agentic

than communal traits, $F(1, 93) = 7.02, p = 0.009$. Both of these effects were also obtained in the Italian contexts.

The two-way interaction of perceiver group and target group indicated, somewhat surprisingly, that the higher ratings for Northerners than Southerners were especially found among *Southern* perceivers, $F(1, 93) = 4.66, p = 0.033$. This finding provides rare evidence for the *noblesse oblige* hypothesis that higher status groups might show magnanimous outgroup favoritism (e.g., van Knippenberg, 1978).

A significant trait type \times target group interaction revealed that, as predicted, complementary stereotypes existed, $F(1, 93) = 57.15, p < 0.001$. Simple contrast tests confirmed that high-status Southerners were rated as higher than low-status Northerners on agentic traits, $t(93) = 3.22, p = 0.002$, whereas Northerners were rated as higher than Southerners on communal traits, $t(93) = -7.31, p < 0.001$. The three-way interaction involving perceiver group was nonsignificant, demonstrating that consensus did indeed characterize complementary stereotypes of Northerners and Southerners in England.

To examine the hypothesis that complementary status stereotypes serve a system-justifying function, we again estimated a path model in which the exogenous variable capturing perceived magnitude of status differences predicted complementary stereotyping, which in turn predicted perceptions of legitimacy and stability. The model was overidentified and maximum likelihood estimates were generated by the AMOS program. The model fit the data well, $\chi^2(2) = 1.584, p = 0.453$; NFI = 0.922, CFI = 1.00, RMSEA = 0.000, pclose = 0.633. The model, which is illustrated in Fig. 4, corroborates predictions. Participants who perceived a larger status difference were more likely to exhibit a complementary stereotyping pattern in which Southerners were rated as higher than Northerners on agentic traits and Northerners were rated as higher than Southerners on communal traits. This pattern of stereotyping was associated with increases in judgments of the legitimacy and stability of the social system.

Discussion

The results of Study 2, conducted in England, suggest that status differences—rather than climate or geographical differences—account for observed patterns in regional stereotyping and ingroup versus outgroup favoritism. Low-status targets were stereotyped as higher on communal and lower on agentic traits in comparison with high-status targets, as in Study 1. This pattern of stereotyping occurred regardless of whether the perceivers themselves belonged to the high- or low-status group. The system-justifying potential of complementary status stereotypes was also illustrated by the path model, which showed that complementary

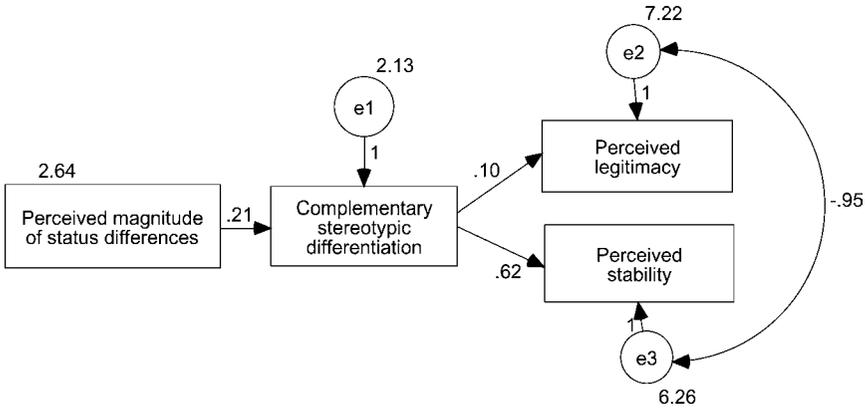


Fig. 4. Path model assessing relations among magnitude, stereotyping, legitimacy, and stability in England (Study 2). *Note.* Illustration of path model ($N = 94$) in which the variable of perceived magnitude of socioeconomic status differences was used to predict complementary stereotypic differentiation, which was used to predict perceived legitimacy and stability. Entries above the arrows are unstandardized maximum likelihood parameter estimates. The analysis was conducted using Amos structural equation modeling software. Correlated measurement error was permitted between perceived legitimacy and stability. Overall model fit was very good, $\chi^2(2) = 1.584, p = 0.453$; NFI = 0.922, CFI = 1.00, RMSEA = 0.000, pclose = 0.633.

stereotyping was associated with stronger perceptions of legitimacy and stability.

The first two studies support the notion that stereotypic differentiation occurs along regional status lines, without regard to specific geographical locations. These studies suggest that stereotypic differentiation is relatively independent of the perceiver's identity; that is, there is strong consensus among low- and high-status perceivers regarding complementary status stereotypes (Jost and Banaji, 1994). Results indicated that (a) needs to justify the system motivate the endorsement of complementary stereotypes and (b) the endorsement of complementary stereotypes is associated with enhanced perceptions of the legitimacy and stability of the social system that produces the status disparities in the first place.

The third and final study seeks to build on the argument that complementary status stereotypes serve a system-justifying function. Rather than measuring individual differences in the tendency to justify the system, we manipulated system justification needs by threatening the social system. To the extent that complementary status stereotypes serve to defend and maintain the legitimacy of the status quo, we hypothesized that people would show an increase in complementary stereotypic differentiation in response to an ideological threat directed at the national system. This possibility was investigated in Israel, where status differences between Ashkenazi and Sephardic Jews parallel the status differences between the regional groups examined in Studies 1 and 2.

STUDY 3

Overview

In Study 3, we investigated the system-justifying function of complementary stereotypes in Israel. These stereotypes concerned Ashkenazi Jews of European descent, who enjoy relatively high social and economic status, and Sephardic Jews, who occupy a lower-status position (see also Levin and Sidanius, 1999; Tyree *et al.*, 1987). We explored the effects of system threat on endorsement of complementary status stereotypes (see also Kay *et al.*, 2005). Following the manipulation of high versus low system threat, participants completed stereotype ratings of Ashkenazim and Sephardim and judged the magnitude, legitimacy, and stability of status differences between the two groups.

Method

Participants

Research participants (aged 18–78) completed questionnaires on public trains in and around Tel-Aviv, Israel. Of the 154 participants who disclosed information about ethnicity, 75 were Ashkenazi, 60 were Sephardic, and 19 were of other ethnicities. Only the Ashkenazi and Sephardic respondents were selected for analyses reported below, resulting in a total of 135 participants. Participants completed the questionnaires individually while traveling to their destinations.

Materials and Procedure

The survey was translated from English to Hebrew by a native Hebrew speaker, then back translated by a native English speaker and compared with the original version to correct any errors in translation.

To manipulate system threat we constructed two statements that were both presented as describing how Israelis felt about the state of Israel. In the “high system threat” condition, respondents read the following statement:

These days, many people in Israel feel disappointed with the nation’s condition. Many citizens feel that the country has reached a low point in terms of social, economic, and political factors. People do not feel as safe and secure as they used to, and there is a sense of uncertainty regarding the country’s future. It seems that many countries in the world . . . are enjoying better social, economic, and political conditions than Israel. More and more Israelis express a willingness to leave Israel and emigrate to other nations.

In the “low system threat” condition, participants were instead exposed to the following statement:

These days, despite the difficulties the nation is facing, many people in Israel feel safer and more secure relative to the past. Many citizens feel that the country is relatively stable

in terms of social, economic, and security factors. There is a sense of optimism regarding Israel's future and an understanding that this is the only place where Israeli people can feel secure. It seems that compared with many countries in the world . . . the social, economic and political conditions in Israel are relatively good. Very few Israelis express a willingness to leave Israel and emigrate to other nations.

The stereotype trait rating section was similar to that used in Studies 1 and 2, but the trait list was altered slightly by an Israeli researcher to ensure that specific characteristics would reflect agentic and communal dimensions relevant to Israeli society. Participants used 10-point Likert-type scales to rate both groups on the agentic traits of responsible, intelligent, ambitious, hard-working, and valuing of education ($\alpha = 0.92$) and also on the communal traits of emotional, traditional, open, friendly, happy, calm, and valuing of family ($\alpha = 0.76$).

The system perception section (magnitude, legitimacy, and stability of SES differences) was identical to that used in Studies 1 and 2. Scores on the magnitude item were recoded prior to conducting path models, so that higher numbers would indicate a larger perceived status gap favoring Ashkenazim relative to Sephardim. Ethnicity information (Ashkenazi vs. Sephardic) was requested at the end of the questionnaire, so that it would not unduly influence other responses.

Results

As expected, participant ratings confirmed that Ashkenazim were perceived as having higher socioeconomic status than Sephardim in general, $t(134) = 11.23$, $p < 0.001$.

To test the proposition that complementary status stereotypes of Ashkenazim as agentic (but not communal) and Sephardim as communal (but not agentic), serve a system- (rather than ego- or group-) justifying function, we conducted a 2 (trait type: agentic vs. communal) \times 2 (target group: Ashkenazim vs. Sephardim) \times 2 (perceiver group: Ashkenazim vs. Sephardim) mixed-model ANOVA with repeated measures on the first two factors. Means are presented in the bottom panel of Table I. A perceiver group main effect showed that Sephardic respondents made higher ratings overall than did Ashkenazi respondents, $F(1, 133) = 13.52$, $p < 0.001$. A target main effect indicated that Sephardim also received higher ratings overall than did Ashkenazim, $F(1, 133) = 2973.52$, $p < 0.001$. These two effects were qualified by a significant perceiver \times target interaction, which suggested that the effects were largely driven by Sephardic respondents' particularly high ratings of themselves, $F(1, 133) = 6.84$, $p = 0.01$. A trait-type main effect also showed that particularly high ratings were made on agentic traits, $F(1, 133) = 295.84$, $p < 0.001$, and a Perceiver \times Trait interaction suggested that this was particularly true for Sephardic perceivers, $F(1, 133) = 22.32$, $p < 0.001$.

Importantly, a significant trait type \times target group interaction showed that Ashkenazim were rated higher than Sephardim on agentic, achievement-related traits, whereas Sephardim were rated higher than Ashkenazim on communal, socioemotional traits, $F(1, 133) = 176.36, p < 0.001$. This effect did not depend on perceiver group, $F(1, 133) = 1.14, p = 0.29$ for the three-way interaction, confirming that consensus surrounded the status-linked stereotypes.

A primary goal of this study was to experimentally manipulate the need to justify the system. We expected that, by evoking a stronger need to restore the legitimacy of the system, a threat to the system would enhance the endorsement of complementary stereotypes. With regard to agentic attributes, this prediction entails an increase in *ingroup* favoritism on the part of high-status group members and an increase in *outgroup* favoritism on the part of low-status group members. Conversely, for communal traits, this prediction entails an increase in *outgroup* favoritism on the part of high-status group members and an increase in *ingroup* favoritism on the part of low-status group members. Using the dependent variable of ingroup/outgroup favoritism, we conducted a 2 (system threat condition: high vs. low) \times 2 (perceiver group: Ashkenazi vs. Sephardic) \times 2 (trait type: achievement-related vs. socioemotional) mixed-model ANOVA with repeated measures on the last factor. In addition to a main effect of perceiver group and a perceiver group \times trait type interaction, both comparable to those discussed above, a significant three-way interaction of perceiver group \times system threat condition \times trait type emerged, $F(1, 128) = 4.84, p = 0.03$. The pattern of results supported our predictions.

As illustrated in Fig. 5, complementary stereotypic differentiation was more pronounced in the high system threat condition. That is, a threat to the system led Ashkenazim to show increased *ingroup* favoritism on agentic traits and increased *outgroup* favoritism on communal traits, and it led Sephardim to show increased *ingroup* favoritism on communal traits and increased *outgroup* favoritism on agentic traits. Consistent with a system justification perspective (e.g., Jost *et al.*, 2004), it appears that members of both high- and low-status groups collaborated to support the system when it was under threat by endorsing complementary status stereotypes.

To test the hypothesis that complementary stereotypes serve a system-justifying function and are influenced by the need to justify the system, we constructed a path model that was comparable to the model assessed in the previous studies but that also took into account differences between high and low system threat conditions. Specifically, we constructed a multiple-groups model in which the same model was estimated simultaneously for high and low system threat groups, with values for paths allowed to vary between the two groups' models. This model was overidentified and provided an excellent fit to the data, $\chi^2(4) = 3.492, p = 0.479, NFI = 0.967, CFI = 1.00, RMSEA = 0.000, pclose = 0.633$. As shown in Fig. 6, the multiple-groups model indicates that, for participants

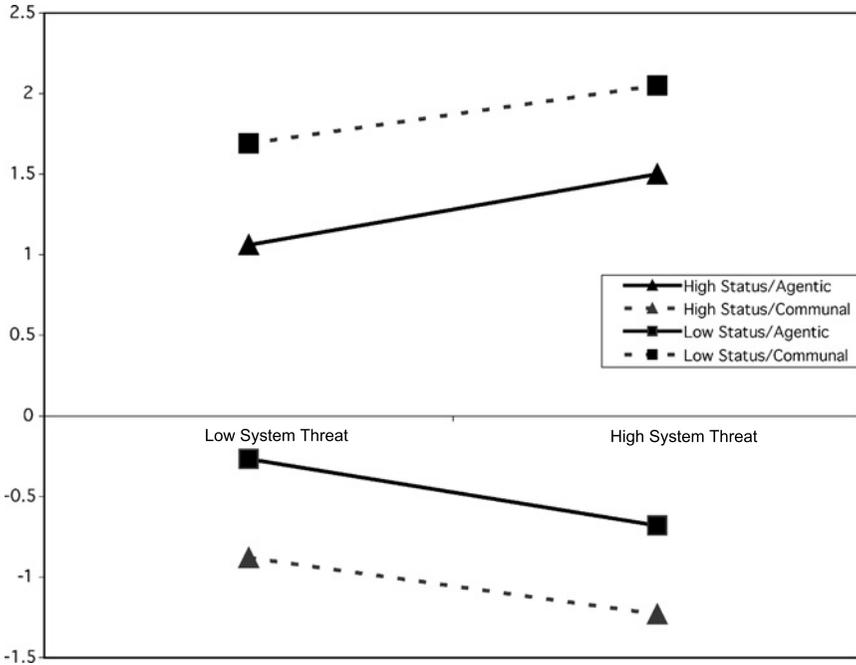


Fig. 5. Effects of system threat manipulation on ingroup and outgroup favoritism in Israel (Study 3). Note. Positive values on the vertical axis indicate ingroup favoritism, and negative values indicate outgroup favoritism.

assigned to the low system threat condition, perceptions of larger status differences led to (slightly) greater stereotypic differentiation, and subsequently to stronger perceptions of system legitimacy and stability, as in the previous studies. For participants assigned to the high system threat condition, *smaller* perceived status differences were associated with increased stereotypic differentiation, which was in turn associated with increased legitimacy but *decreased* stability. That is, high system threat led people to exaggerate and bolster status differences between groups with the use of stereotypes (see also Overbeck *et al.*, 2004, for a similar result).

Discussion

Study 3 replicates and extends the findings of Studies 1 and 2. Once again, high-status group members were rated by members of both groups as higher on agentic than communal traits, whereas low-status group members were rated as higher on communal than agentic traits. This study generalizes our previous findings by replacing the North/South SES differences with perceived status

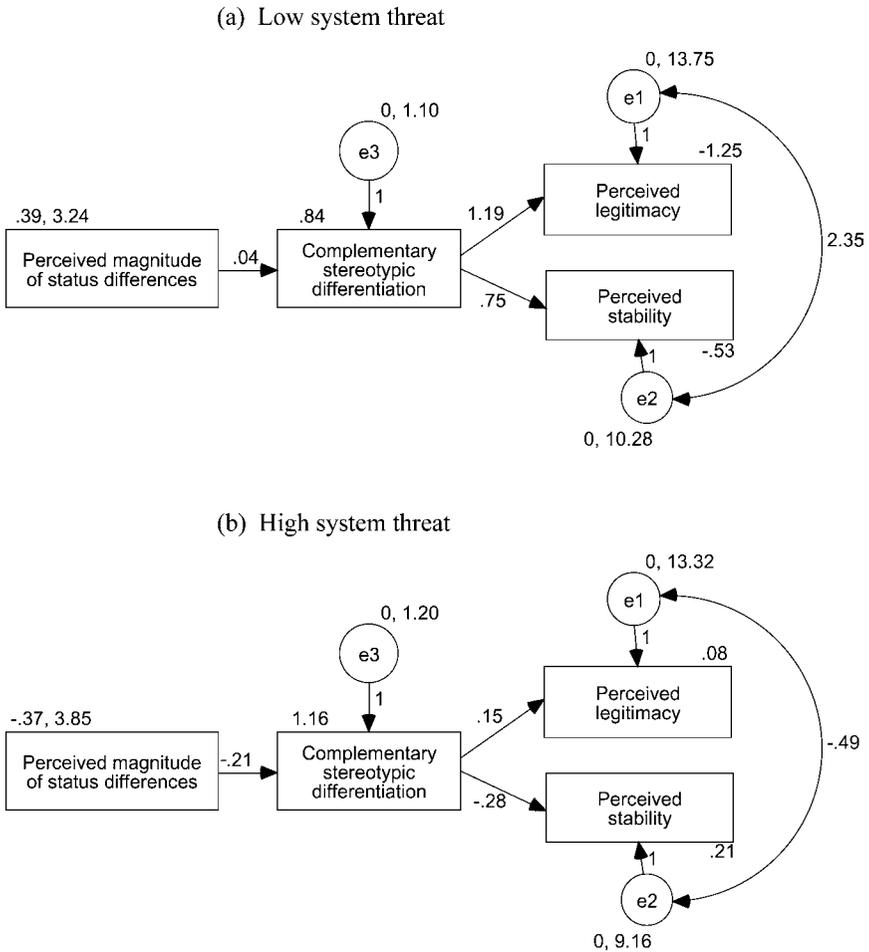


Fig. 6. Path model assessing relations among magnitude, stereotyping, legitimacy, and stability in Israel under low (top) and high (bottom) system threat (Study 3). (a) Low system threat. (b) High-system threat. *Note.* Illustration of multiple-groups path model ($N = 135$) in which the same model was estimated simultaneously for high-threat and low-threat groups, with values for paths allowed to vary between the two groups' models. Entries above the arrows are unstandardized maximum likelihood parameter estimates. The analysis was conducted using Amos structural equation modeling software. Correlated measurement error was permitted between perceived legitimacy and stability. Overall model fit was excellent, $\chi^2(4) = 3.492$, $p = 0.479$, NFI = 0.967, CFI = 1.00, RMSEA = 0.000, $pclose = 0.633$.

differences between two ethnic groups in Israel. Study 3 also provided additional support for the notion that stereotyping serves a system-justifying function. An experimental manipulation of system threat, which was designed to increase the need to justify the system, was found to enhance complementary stereotypic differentiation.

GENERAL DISCUSSION

Three studies provide convergent evidence from three different cultures that complementary regional and ethnic stereotypes serve a system-justifying function. High-status group members are generally stereotyped as agentic and achievement-oriented, whereas low-status group members are stereotyped as communal and interpersonally oriented. We demonstrated that these complementary stereotypes reflect a high degree of consensus across high and low-status perceiver groups, supporting Jost and Banaji's (1994) hypothesis that "different groups across cultures should share essentially the same stereotype contents if they share the same relative status in their respective societies" (p. 18). It appears, then, that the perceived attributes of high versus low-status groups and individuals are not necessarily dependent on the specific social identities or their geographical locations or climates. Rather, the contents of these stereotypes seem to follow from perceptions of the group's relative position in a hierarchical social system (e.g., Jost, 2001). From a system justification perspective, consensually held complementary stereotypes create the impression that "everyone gets his share" while maintaining support for the status quo, which in fact contains a great deal of inequality (see also Jost and Kay, 2005; Kay and Jost, 2003).

Our studies indicate that complementary stereotypic differentiation is affected by chronic and temporary activation of social psychological needs to justify the system. In Study 1, we demonstrated that stronger needs to justify the system are associated with greater stereotypic differentiation between groups. Specifically, people who scored high on economic system justification were more likely than people who scored low to differentiate between high-status Northern Italians and low-status Southern Italians, resulting in increased ingroup favoritism on the part of Northerners and increased *outgroup* favoritism on the part of Southerners overall. The relation between economic system justification and stereotypic differentiation is also consistent with the notion that ideology is an important determinant of stereotyping and other system-justifying attitudes (e.g., Crandall, 1994; Federico and Levin, 2004; Jost *et al.*, 2001, 2004; Major *et al.*, 2002; Overbeck *et al.*, 2004; Quinn and Crocker, 1999; Sidanius and Pratto, 1999).

The finding in our third study that people responded defensively on behalf of the system is consistent with the notion that there is a motive to justify the status quo (see also Jost *et al.*, 2001, 2004; Kluegel and Smith, 1986; Lerner and Miller, 1978; Major, 1994). Whereas ego- and group-related threats have been shown to increase ingroup bias (Branscombe and Wann, 1994; Fein and Spencer, 1997; Grant and Brown, 1995; Oakes and Turner, 1980), we found that a system threat increases consensual stereotypic differentiation between high- and low-status target groups. Importantly, and in contrast to what ego- and group-justification approaches would predict, complementary stereotypic differentiation leads to *outgroup* favoritism between both high- and low-status groups (with respect to communal and agentic traits, respectively).

Path models provide additional support for the hypothesis that stereotyping serves a system-justifying function and is influenced by the need to justify the system. We conjectured that people who perceive social and economic status differences to be larger would feel a greater need to justify the inequality, leading to stronger endorsement of complementary status stereotypes (see also Federico and Levin, 2004; Overbeck *et al.*, 2004). We found that the perceived magnitude of socioeconomic status differences was indeed associated with enhanced complementary stereotypic differentiation, which was in turn associated with enhanced perceptions of system legitimacy in all three countries.

One issue that we have not yet addressed is whether the communal and agentic stereotypes of low- and high-status groups are objectively accurate or inaccurate (e.g., Judd and Park, 1993; Jussim, 2005; Stangor, 1995). Given that we have chosen to study real world groups, it seems likely that these groups do differ from one another in some respects. We do not dispute the possibility that the stereotypes we have investigated possess a “kernel of truth” (e.g., Allport, 1958), but we follow Hoffman and Hurst (1990) and others in assuming that stereotypes are more akin to rationalizations than accurate perceptions. This theoretical interpretation is supported by our findings that stereotypical differentiation was associated with specific ideological orientations and that it was increased in response to system threat. In addition, experimental studies summarized by Jost (2001) demonstrated that the *same* target group is (a) stereotyped in achievement-oriented terms when perceivers believe that the group is relatively high in socioeconomic status and (b) stereotyped in socioemotional terms when perceivers believe that the group is relatively low in socioeconomic status. Thus, it appears that stereotypical perceptions are (to say the least) *underdetermined* by actual differences between high- and low-status groups. Nevertheless, the self-fulfilling nature of social stereotypes may lead group members to take on characteristics that may be initially ascribed to them erroneously (e.g., Jost and Banaji, 1994).

Once applied, stereotypes may contribute to a dialectical process whereby members of low-status groups are refused opportunities out of a desire to exclude them from higher status positions, allegedly because of their assumed incompetence. This refusal may then prevent them from developing competencies and gaining relevant experiences that would improve their chances of occupying better positions. Under such conditions, the stereotype would be “fulfilled,” and the cycle would continue. This process, which we suspect captures the way in which system justification and stereotyping are mutually reinforcing, would lead to a state in which status-related stereotypes may be “accurate” in describing groups, at least within a single iteration. We suggest, therefore, that greater utility may come from investigating how stereotypes *function* in relation to ideologies and system-related beliefs than from determining whether or not they are true in any individual case.

CONCLUSION

In three studies conducted in three different national contexts, we have found converging evidence that complementary stereotypes serve the ideological function of justifying socioeconomic status differences between groups and contributing to the perceived legitimacy and (less consistently) stability of the existing social system. This work extends prior research on the ascription of agentic and communal traits to high- and low-status groups, especially gender groups (Conway *et al.*, 1996; Hoffman and Hurst, 1990; Jost and Kay, 2005; Ridgeway, 2001). It also builds on the arguments of Glick and Fiske (2001a,b; Glick *et al.*, 2000) that ambivalent and complementary gender stereotypes serve to maintain consensual and ideological support by men and women for patriarchal society. Our research suggests that similar social and psychological processes underlie the endorsement of complementary stereotypes of high- and low-status groups in general (see also Kay and Jost, 2003; Kay *et al.*, 2005).

It appears that stereotypes, like attitudes and belief systems more generally, serve many different, possibly interrelated functions. We have known for some time that stereotypes serve to conserve mental resources, protect self-esteem, and defend the interests and esteem of fellow ingroup members. To this list we might add the system-justifying function: Stereotyping bolsters the legitimacy and stability of the status quo, especially for those who perceive status differences between groups to be large in magnitude, those who are ideologically inclined to preserve the existing social system, and for those who perceive that the system is under threat and therefore in need of defense. It follows from our analysis that a most expedient way of reducing stereotypic differentiation between groups would be to minimize the degree of inequality that separates them in society (see also Jost and Hamilton, 2005). This structural or systemic solution would usefully supplement individual approaches to the problem of stereotyping and prejudice.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

We thank several colleagues for their assistance with data collection, analysis, and interpretation: Diana Burgess, Erika Burman, Nicoletta Cavazza, Xenia Chrysochoou, Jennifer Overbeck, Augusto Palmonari, and Ian Parker. We would also like to thank Deborah Gruenfeld, Chip Heath, Maria Cristina Jimenez, Aaron Kay, and Pamela K. Smith for helpful comments on previous versions of this manuscript.

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