

4 Group-Based Behavior

4.1 Minimal Group Paradigm

The formation of in-group and out-group distinctions represents a pivotal area of investigation within the social sciences, with scholars employing a multitude of disciplinary approaches to examine these concepts. Within this interdisciplinary framework, the theory of social identity, significantly shaped by Henri Tajfel and his colleagues in the 1970s (Tajfel et al. 1971; Tajfel 1978; Tajfel 1982a; Tajfel 1982b), occupies a prominent position. This theory postulates that the aspiration for a favorable self-perception motivates individuals to favor members of their own group and devalue members of other groups. A central concept within this theory is the minimal group paradigm, which illustrates the intrinsic tendency of individuals to differentiate between ingroups and outgroups, even when the distinctions are inconsequential. This paradigm has been subjected to considerable scrutiny, particularly with regard to the question of whether the predominantly economic experimental approaches are capable of adequately capturing the complexity of social identification processes. The utilization of particular distribution matrices in these studies has been subjected to criticism for its potential for oversimplification. Nevertheless, the fundamental observation that people inherently tend to form and maintain social categories remains highly relevant (Tajfel et al. 1971). Tajfel's research findings evidence an inherent human tendency to categorize the social world, which gives rise to the formation of in-groups and out-groups. A review of the literature on in-groups and out-groups reveals a consistent finding: individuals tend to favor their own group. This proclivity has been documented even in laboratory settings where group affiliation was randomly assigned, without any prior relationships or shared characteristics among the members. This proclivity persisted even when participants were aware that their group assignment was arbitrary. The aforementioned studies were based on such experiments (Platow and van Knippenberg 2001) which have deepened understanding by demonstrating that people not only prefer their own group but also perceive this preference as fair and just, particularly when favoring members of their own group over those of the out-group. This insight delineates that identification with the in-group

and the resulting preference are deeply embedded in our cognitive and affective patterns of perception and behavior. These dynamics will be further elucidated in the context of “schemata” (see Chapter 6). Therefore, the inclination towards social categorization is not merely a process of division; rather, it encompasses a range of judgmental behaviors that significantly impact how individuals interact with and evaluate others within the constructed categories (Harmon-Jones et al. 2003; Baron and Banaji 2006; Hertel and Kerr 2001; Stanley et al. 2011). The inclination to accentuate contrasts between categories while attenuating contrasts within categories engenders a prosocial disposition toward one’s own group and a concomitant devaluation of other groups. Prosocial behavior within groups is notably evident in the pronounced willingness to make amends for offenses committed by group members. In contrast, this tendency is significantly diminished when the reference group is an outgroup. Individuals are more likely to provide compensation to those within their own group who have been wronged, whereas they exhibit a greater propensity for antisocial and discriminatory behaviors towards members of outgroups. This dichotomy represents a fundamental aspect of group dynamics, whereby members of the in-group typically receive empathy and solidarity, whereas those in the out-group are often subjected to indifference or hostility (Wildschut, Insko, and Gaertner 2002; Gaertner and Insko 2001, 2000).

The categorization of individuals into groups has been demonstrated to result in the expression of a preference for the group to which one belongs. This preference frequently manifests as a bias in the distribution of resources, whereby members of a given group tend to receive a greater allocation of resources than those in a different group (Hertel and Kerr 2001). This preference is frequently attributed to the influence of underlying sociomotor dynamics, whereby individuals tend to favor their own group as a means of enhancing their social self-esteem. However, within the minimal group paradigm, this in-group preference can also be understood through the lens of social norms or scripts that provide behavioral guidelines specific to the context in question (*ibid.*). The reinforcement of loyalty and conformity within a group not only fosters a preference for and identification with the group itself but also solidifies the norms and expectations that govern the group’s behavior. This dynamic contributes to the maintenance of social cohesion within the group; however, it can also result in the exclusion of individuals and a resistance to change. The adherence to and fortification of these social norms sustain a cycle of preference that supports the status quo within the group, frequently at the expense of fairness and equality towards those outside the group. This mechanism plays an important role in the formation and maintenance of social hierarchies, fostering the persistence of social and cultural divides (Piff, Martinez, and Keltner 2012; Cichocka et al. 2022; Chayinska and Minescu 2018).

Furthermore, empathic responses are subject to profound influence from group affiliations (Golec De Zavala 2023). When individuals from one’s own group

encounter adversity, empathic reactions are intensified, a phenomenon that is evidenced by increased amygdala activity (see Chapter 5). In stark contrast, empathy is significantly diminished when out-group members encounter similar challenges (Sirin, Valentino, and Villalobos 2021, 24). Consequently, empathy—a fundamental human capacity for resonating with the emotional and motivational states of others—is predominantly limited to those identified as belonging to one's in-group. This selective distribution of empathy has significant implications for the dynamics of shame and punishment within the in-group. The reservation of empathy for in-group members not only fosters understanding and forgiveness but may also result in more lenient reactions to infractions. The encouragement of internal group solidarity cements positive social behaviors and mutual support yet simultaneously introduces the potential for bias in judicial responses. In contrast, diminished empathy towards out-group members frequently results in harsher judgments and punitive measures against them, bolstering group boundaries and intensifying social stratifications. This differential empathetic engagement thus demonstrates the dual role of empathy in both the promotion of in-group cohesion and the maintenance of intergroup disparities.

4.2 Group-Based Identifications and Collective Identity Formation

Collective emotions represent a significant social phenomenon in this context. Individuals with a strong identification with their group often experience emotions such as guilt, shame, or pride in response to the actions of a fellow group member, as though they themselves had undertaken the action. These powerful emotions are essential elements of the profound interconnectivity within the group, illustrating how individual identities are influenced by group affiliation (Gutsell and Inzlicht 2012; Sirin, Valentino, and Villalobos 2021, 28; Bennett and Sani 2008, 69). These instances of collective emotion are of paramount importance for comprehending the dynamics that shape group behavior, as well as for elucidating their role in uniting groups around shared objectives or in confronting collective challenges. These findings demonstrate the significant influence of group identification on individual behavior and perception, providing insight into the mechanisms underlying social cohesion and influence. This type of emotion, which is engendered through group identification and manifests a profound sense of unity and shared responsibility, is distinctively absent among our closest animal relatives, the apes. This absence emphasizes the unique role of this emotion in human social structures (Tomasello 2020, 129). The mechanisms of group identification will be a central focus of the subsequent discussions and arguments presented in this book, particularly in relation to the exploitation of cultural codings of security and protection for political ends. This exploration includes the identification and implementation of suitable

objectives for the externalization of the aforementioned needs and emotions, primarily through the construction of enemy images, as exemplified by those seen in the realm of penal populism (see Chapter 9). Additionally, the theory of *terror management* should be mentioned here (Greenberg et al. 1990; Pyszczynski, Greenberg, and Solomon 1999). This theory elucidates how individuals confront the existential dread of mortality by adhering to cultural beliefs and values that impart a sense of continuity and significance. This framework provides an explanation for the profound psychological foundations that drive humans to align with cultural norms and practices that mitigate their most profound fears and anxieties (Arrowood and Cox 2020; Routledge and Vess 2019). From this perspective, the emphasis on security and defense against external threats contributes to assuaging fundamental, existential anxieties for both broad collectives and more defined national or supranational entities. These existential sentiments are closely associated with the concept of mortality salience. The recognition of one's own mortality intensifies the aspiration for cultural paradigms that provide a shield against the inevitability of death. This impulse is also evident in what are termed *realistic group conflicts*. The theory of realistic group conflicts posits that tensions between groups may have their origins in genuine competitive scenarios. Realistic group conflicts emerge from competition for scarce resources, such as employment opportunities or housing. These conflicts manifest when groups, whether defined by social, ethnic, or national characteristics, perceive that the gain of one group will result in a loss for another, potentially exacerbating existing tensions and heightening hostilities. Such conflicts frequently arise from the incompatibility between disparate systemic operations, leading to heightened demarcation processes, particularly during periods of crisis. In such periods, political and social leaders frequently utilize terror management strategies, which may include framing external threats to stress the necessity for security and a sense of belonging within one's own group. This emphasis on external threats can entrench the cohesion of the in-group, yet it frequently results in the intensification of nationalistic sentiments. The concentration of attention on external threats can be an effective strategy for deflecting scrutiny from internal issues and forging a collective identity by establishing clear boundaries between insiders and outsiders. In this context, cultural worldviews and identities are employed as defensive mechanisms against the existential dread of mortality, thereby reinforcing the cohesion of the in-group while amplifying divisions between distinct groups.

4.3 In-groups and Out-groups: Dynamics of Appreciation and Depreciation

It is particularly noteworthy that even social categories that are perceived as neutral can be imbued with evaluative dimensions that give rise to social stereotypes.

For instance, diligence may be associated with one's own social group, whereas laziness may be attributed to an outgroup (Gutsell and Inzlicht 2012; Dunham, Baron, and Banaji 2006). These constructed associations, which are flawed in terms of both their content and their epistemological and logical validity, foster moral judgments that have a significant influence on the way individuals perceive their own group and may potentially lead to a distortion of their perceptions. An additional phenomenon worthy of consideration in this discourse is the enhancement of self-esteem, which is closely associated with the process of social comparison. This mechanism enables individuals to assess and categorize their own social identity as well as that of others. Favorable social comparisons that benefit one's own group solidify the positive attributes of the in-group, thereby increasing self-esteem. This dynamic, known as the *positive distinctiveness of the in-group*, results in a systematic inflation of the positive representation of the in-group's achievements, while the accomplishments of out-groups are often minimized. The concept of *social identity* was developed within this theoretical context. The concept of social identity encompasses all aspects of an individual's affiliation to various social categories, including associated traits and value judgments. In the context of social psychological research, the term is defined as a constellation of affiliations shaped by the totality of ascribed character traits and the consequent evaluations. Consequently, the presentation of a positive image of one's own group in conjunction with a negative portrayal of external groups often results in a sense of satisfaction, which bolsters solidarity within the in-group while simultaneously exacerbating divisions with the out-group. This phenomenon is particularly evident among those who follow sports (Cikara, Botvinick, and Fiske 2011; de Bruijn et al. 2009; Van Bavel, Packer, and Cunningham 2011; Carvalho et al. 2022). Even when their own team is not involved in the competition, sport fans experience *schadenfreude* when a rival team loses. Such reactions are regulated at the neurochemical level by the mesolimbic dopamine system, a topic explored in greater detail in Chapter 5. This system plays a pivotal role in the "schemas" that govern the intricate interplay between affective, cognitive, and physical dimensions, which will be elaborated upon in Chapter 6. When a rival loses or one's own group wins, dopamine is released, amplifying the emotional response and enhancing the development of the associated feelings.

This form of self-assessment is not merely a matter of making factual comparisons; rather, it is a process that requires a more nuanced view of the subject matter. In the event that the performance of one's own group is deemed to be inadequate, the dimensions of comparison can be adjusted in a manner that still presents the own group in a relatively more favorable light. This strategy, which is known as *social creativity*, enables individuals to maintain a positive social identity even when circumstances are less favorable. This adaptive mechanism reflects a fundamental psychological need to maintain and enhance one's self-esteem through affiliation with groups that are perceived as successful or superior. It demonstrates the com-

plex psychological mechanisms that govern group loyalty and competition (Wenzel, Mummendey, and Waldzus 2007). The malleability and capacity for modification of the human self-concept, particularly in relation to the formation and reinforcement of evaluative standards, serve to protect or enhance the self-image and social identity. This underscores the intricate and multifaceted nature of the human psyche (Mazziotta, Mummendey, and Wright 2011). This adaptability exemplifies our deeply ingrained proclivity to favor individuals who are perceived as similar or as belonging to one's own group. Such preferences may manifest in a number of ways, from a sense of solidarity within one's own group to discriminatory attitudes towards those outside of it. The minimal group paradigm indicates that even the most basic and seemingly inconsequential group categorizations are sufficient to engender loyalty and a preference for one's own group.

This psychological inclination to favor one's own group provides the foundation for more profound social dynamics, such as *group-based narcissism* (Eker, Cichocka, and Cislak 2022, 215). This phenomenon discloses not only the intrinsic human aspiration for affiliation and validation but also the capacity for these aspirations to engender exclusionary or even antagonistic conduct toward those identified as outsiders. This interplay between group allegiance and social identity profoundly impacts interpersonal and intergroup relations, influencing social cohesion and conflict. In political psychology, the concept of group-based narcissism is frequently utilized to elucidate in-group dynamics marked by *exaggerated self-love and self-esteem* (Golec de Zavala 2024, 19). This phenomenon is closely linked to an ideology of superiority, whereby members of a specific group—defined by factors such as nationality, ethnicity, religion, or other social categories—hold the belief that their group is inherently superior in value and virtue compared to others (Bizumic and Sheppard 2022, 199). Group-based narcissism is typified by a tendency towards collective overconfidence, which is sustained through a process of internal affirmations and selective perception of the external world. Members of such groups are inclined to accept information that reinforces the group's exaggerated self-image while disregarding or undervaluing evidence that contradicts this image. This selective acknowledgment and rejection fortify the ideology of superiority, thereby providing group-based narcissism with a *narrative structure* (Golec de Zavala and Federico 2018). This narrative historically and culturally legitimizes the perceived exclusivity and superiority of the ingroup, thereby heightening sensitivity to any perceived threats that could tarnish the reputation of one's own group (ibid.). Such heightened sensitivity frequently gives rise to unfavorable responses to external criticism or perceived conspiracies directed against the ingroup. For example, the negative responses of Chinese participants towards the United States triggered by the appearance of US celebrities on Chinese magazine covers illustrate this phenomenon (Gries et al. 2015). Such reactions illustrate the defensive stance that group-based narcissism can foster, influencing intergroup relations and potentially intensify-

ing conflicts based on perceived affronts or challenges to the group's esteemed status (ibid.). Collective narcissism functions as mechanism to amplify internal beliefs and to shape, in a selective manner, a perception of reality within a given group. In many cases, this process fosters a defensive and hostile stance toward any external influences that may potentially lead to a weakening of the fragile self-image of the aforementioned group. This attitude is cultivated through the use of *narrative strategies, including the creation of myths, selective interpretation of historical events, and the glorification of the group's distinctive accomplishments*. These tactics deepen internal cohesion and solidarity, while simultaneously fostering a sense of differentiation from other groups that are perceived as inferior or threatening (Eker, Cichocka, and Cislak 2022, 217). A review of the literature on the relationship between collective narcissism and political preferences suggests that collective narcissism is a significant predictor of support for parties or candidates perceived as populist. A notable illustration of this phenomenon is the narcissistic national narrative encapsulated in Donald Trump's campaign slogan, "Make America Great Again." The analysis revealed that individuals exhibiting pronounced national narcissism tendencies were disproportionately likely to support Trump in the 2016 US election, even when controlling for factors such as ideology, authoritarianism, and ethnicity (Golec de Zavala and Federico 2018; Bocian, Cichocka, and Wojciszke 2021). A comparable phenomenon can be observed in Eastern Europe, where a correlation has been identified between national narcissism and the electoral success of national-populist parties. This includes the Polish Law and Justice party and the Hungarian Fidesz party (Lantos and Forgas 2021, 78). The strong inclination to maintain a favorable and independent image of one's national group frequently results in political decisions that may ultimately prove disadvantageous to the group in the medium to long term. For example, research has demonstrated a correlation between national narcissism and reduced support for environmentally friendly initiatives. Concurrently, there is an observed tendency toward greenwashing, whereby actions are taken to project an environmentally responsible image rather than implementing genuinely sustainable practices (Eker, Cichocka, and Cislak 2022, 222). Furthermore, national narcissism has been identified as a predictor of support for environmentally harmful policies, such as intensive coal mining and the deforestation of the UNESCO-protected Białowieża Forest in Poland. These policies have been shown to have severe environmental and social ramifications (Cislak, Wojcik, and Cichocka 2018). The 2016 Brexit referendum saw a significant influence of national narcissism on the decision to leave the European Union. This was driven by a desire for autonomous political decision-making at the national level. This emphasis on sovereignty directly resulted in the profound economic and social consequences of Brexit, thereby demonstrating the complex interrelationship between a nation's self-image and its political decisions (Eker, Cichocka, and Cislak 2022, 222). In the context of German politics, the rhetoric and policies of the Alternative for Germany (AfD) party exemplify a promi-

nent manifestation of collective narcissism, characterized by a far-right and nationalist-populist stance. The Alternative for Germany (AfD) espouses a highly narcissistic narrative that glorifies the restoration of a supposedly lost national greatness and purity in Germany. A notable illustration of this phenomenon is the party's endorsement of a "re-migration policy," which is intended to reverse the integration of immigrants and reinforce the "German identity." This stance represents a regressive and somewhat infantile yearning for a return to an idealized past, untainted by the complexities and challenges of today's world. Additionally, it employs rhetoric and allusions to National Socialism in its symbolism and word choice, thus making it evident that it is drawing upon and aligning itself with that ideology. Such aspirations are firmly embedded in collective narcissism, emerging from the conviction that one's own group possesses a distinctive status and must be safeguarded from external influences. This phenomenon is not exclusive to Germany. For example, the construction of the United States' border wall along the Mexican border, Hungary's immigration policies, and the "security policies" of the Turkish government can be seen as manifestations of ethno-nationally coded self-aggrandizement. These measures provide evidence of the effective use of populism, fear-mongering, and self-glorification by governments to influence public opinion and policy. The intimate link between group-based narcissism and ideologies of superiority gives rise to a self-perpetuating cycle in which ideological beliefs magnify the narcissistic exaltation of one's own group, thereby creating a self-reinforcing feedback loop. This dynamic intensifies animosity towards groups that are perceived as foreign or different. In this context, any challenge to the group's ideology is perceived as a direct assault on its collective identity, which heightens tensions and deepens divisions.

4.4 Critical Perspectives and Limits on Theories of Group Bias

The phenomena described in the minimal group paradigm have been observed to persistently manifest within human societies. The specific meanings attributed to different social stratifications can vary significantly across cultural contexts, exemplifying the critical role of social and cultural interpretation in the formation of "us-versus-them" constructions. However, the explanatory scope of the minimal group paradigm, as well as the analytical framework it provides for describing and investigating group formation processes and social discrimination, is constrained by significant limitations. While the paradigm offers valuable insights, its epistemological scope is limited; it does not account for the totality of social group phenomena. First and foremost, the paradigm places an undue emphasis on the role of categorization in group formation, frequently neglecting other pertinent factors such as shared objectives or external threats. Furthermore, the paradigm typically fails to consider the profound social and historical contexts that shape group interactions, thereby

failing to adequately address the intricate realities that underpin these dynamics. A further area of concern is the minimal consideration given to individual differences. The paradigm tends to overlook the influence of personal beliefs and experiences, which can have a significant impact on behavior within and between groups. Furthermore, the complex ways in which individuals construct their identities from a multitude of sources are oversimplified, resulting in an inadequate understanding of the multifaceted nature of social identities. The experimental conditions that underpin the paradigm's studies are often contrived and lack the complexity that would be present in real-world social situations. This limits the applicability of the findings to authentic contexts. Furthermore, the paradigm offers only partial explanations for phenomena of cooperation and solidarity across group boundaries and neglects to address the pivotal role of power relations and inequalities, which significantly influence group members' behavior and attitudes. It is therefore essential to complement the individual and collective group dynamics that are rooted in the theoretical approaches of social identity and the minimal group paradigm with insights on system justification and anthropological understandings of schemas and cultural codings. These issues will be discussed in greater detail later in this book; however, it is beneficial to present an overview of the primary critiques at this stage. The minimal group paradigm is insufficient for explaining phenomena such as the occasional preference for foreign groups. Furthermore, the minimal group paradigm is insufficient for elucidating the self-reinforcing and self-confirming nature of negative stereotyping of marginalized groups, such as non-white minorities in Germany, which can persistently perpetuate themselves. Such behavior, which confirms negative stereotypes within oneself, cannot be explained solely by the desire to defend one's own interests or those of one's group, as suggested by the minimal group paradigm. Instead, it indicates the presence of profound psychological proclivities to regard extant social, economic, and political structures as immutable and justified, as discussed in Section 4.5. This insight elucidates the manner in which stereotypes and other ideological instruments can be utilized to justify the oppression of particular groups. This perspective is further supported by the theories of social dominance, which posit that hierarchy and oppression are, to some extent, inevitable. This work rejects the notion of an absolute inevitability of so-called "naturalized" social orders. However, it does acknowledge tendencies that are universally rooted in the human organism and in social behavior. The process of naturalization of social orders refers to the way socially constructed differences and hierarchies are presented as immutable and inherent, rather than as the product of social construction and practice. This portrayal supports existing power relations and mechanisms of oppression by depicting social inequalities as natural occurrences, despite the fact that they are, in fact, the result of social constructions and practices. In particular, populist and radical groups and ideologies are responsible for the promotion, dissemination, and reinforcement of naturalized social orders. This topic will be fur-

ther elaborated upon in subsequent discussions on schemata. The critical examination of such constructions and the open discussion of specific human behaviors that contribute to the differentiation and categorization of humanity—a central focus of this book—are intended to facilitate the deconstruction of such naturalized orders. It can be reasonably argued that human tendencies do not inevitably result in specific behaviors. Indeed, such behaviors can be modified through sustained interventions.

4.5 The Theory of System Justification

Developed over several decades, the theory of system justification addresses critical limitations in both the minimal group paradigm and social identity theory. John T. Jost's framework delves into the psychological processes by which individuals support and sustain existing social, economic, and political systems, even those that disadvantage them. This theory is particularly significant to our examination of political psychology, aiming to unpack the motivations and consequences associated with upholding the status quo. According to Jost, people often unconsciously defend, rationalize, and reinforce prevailing social, economic, and political institutions and structures, without deliberate intention or awareness (Jost 2020, 61). A core tenet of system justification theory is the proposition that individuals are driven by an intrinsic desire to perceive their social environment as just and legitimate. This need often takes precedence over their aspirations for personal autonomy or a keen sense of justice (*ibid.*). This reflects a profound psychological impulse to conform to prevailing normative orders, which frequently results in the internalization of norms and values that entrench and reinforce existing inequalities. This inclination to justify the system is evidenced by a multitude of behaviors, including the endorsement of social hierarchies and the tacit acceptance of injustices. These actions are of great consequence in the maintenance of social cohesion, serving to mitigate conflict and promote group consensus. It is notable that the cognitive and motivational processes associated with system justification are similar across various demographic groups, including those who are privileged and those who are disadvantaged, and across different socio-economic statuses, genders, ages, sexual orientations, and ethnic, national, or ethnolinguistic identities (*ibid.*, 62). This widespread acceptance of the status quo illustrates the pervasive influence of system justification across diverse segments of society. Members of both advantaged and disadvantaged groups frequently internalize existing hierarchies rather than challenge them, thereby implicitly or explicitly favoring those at the top over those at the bottom. John T. Jost's theory postulates that an intrinsic inclination towards maintaining the status quo compels individuals to preserve existing conditions, even if doing so could theoretically result in a more equitable system (Jost 2020, 62). This proclivity is driven by the

human desire for stability and the comfort of a predictable environment. The resulting behavior reflects the profound need for a stable and reliable social framework, which frequently occurs at the expense of potential advancements and progress. This aspect of system justification theory indicates that psychological needs for security and continuity play a significant role in shaping social dynamics and addressing social inequalities. As with all motivational forces in human psychology, the strength of the motivation to justify the system and its manifestations can vary based on situational (contextual) and dispositional (individual differences) factors. The motivation for system justification is activated or reinforced through a number of mechanisms. Firstly, the motivation to justify the existing social order is activated when the social order is criticized, challenged, or perceived as threatened. Secondly, the motivation for system justification is activated when the social order is perceived as inevitable or unavoidable. Thirdly, the motivation for system justification is activated when the social order is considered traditional or long-standing. In addition, the motivation to justify the system is activated when individuals feel powerless or believe that they are dependent on the social order and its authorities (Laurin 2018, 483).

System justification theory effectively addresses three fundamental human needs: reducing uncertainty through epistemic motives, mitigating threats via existential motives, and alleviating social discord through relational motives. The impact of these needs exhibits variability contingent on both situational contexts and individual differences, which, in turn, serve to modulate the strength of system-justifying motivations (Jost 2020, 64). This theoretical framework has been empirically validated by a series of meta-analyses that have identified specific triggers for system justification processes. These findings are of critical importance for an understanding of the subsequent discussion of the dynamics in question. It is worthy of note that a significant trigger is the human response to perceived threats to the social system. This is discussed in detail in a comprehensive evaluation of 38 studies conducted between 2005 and 2017 (Jost 2020, 320–326). The findings of this study support the hypothesis whereby individuals who perceive a threat to their social system are more likely to engage in system-justifying behaviors, which often manifest as an increased reliance on stereotypes to rationalize existing social, gender, and economic inequalities (van der Toorn, Jost, and Loffredo 2017; Jolley, Douglas, and Sutton 2018). Such behavioral shifts in response to systemic threats can help elucidate phenomena like the pronounced increase in nationalism and support for state institutions observed in the United States after the terrorist attacks on September 11, 2001. Moreover, further factors influencing system justification become evident. In the context of unfavorable social and political developments, such as restrictions on freedoms and the preservation of inequalities, individuals are more likely to accept these circumstances if they perceive them as unavoidable or inevitable. For instance, irrespective of their political persuasion, US citizens demonstrated heightened ap-

proval of Donald Trump's presidency one week following his inauguration, relative to the week preceding it. Moreover, individuals are more likely to accept existing inequalities within their country when restrictive emigration policies preclude the possibility of departure. A further significant factor is the perceived stability of the social system. A number of studies have indicated that people are more inclined to support enduring structures such as the Indian caste system or the capitalist systems in the United States and the United Kingdom. This is because such structures are perceived as long-established and traditional, in contrast to newer social phenomena. Given the variability in the motivation for system justification, influenced by various situational and dispositional factors, it is of the utmost importance to gain a deeper understanding of the specific mechanisms and beliefs that sustain this psychological phenomenon (van der Toorn, Jost, and Loffredo 2017; Jolley, Douglas, and Sutton 2018). Ideologies and collective beliefs play a pivotal role in the justification of existing social arrangements. For example, conservative and meritocratic ideologies are employed to justify social and economic inequalities by portraying the existing social order as just and appropriate. The endorsement of such ideologies may result in individuals supporting systems and structures that are not aligned with their interests, on the basis that these arrangements serve the greater good. Moreover, it is imperative to examine how individuals cope with the emotional and cognitive challenges that arise when they encounter information that conflicts with their beliefs, as well as to investigate the role of ideologies. This introduces another significant concept in system justification theory, namely that of *dissonance reduction*. A significant factor influencing the maintenance of existing social arrangements is the reduction of cognitive dissonance. Such dissonance arises when individuals encounter injustices or inequalities that are incongruent with their belief in a just world. To mitigate this emotional and cognitive burden, individuals frequently modify their perceptions and beliefs in a manner that aligns more closely with the observed realities. Such adjustments may entail rationalizing the existence of inequalities or minimizing their impact. By employing dissonance reduction, individuals can maintain a sense of contentment and coherence within their social environment, even when confronted with overt social and economic injustices. Individuals belonging to disadvantaged groups often find themselves in a state of internal conflict, torn between the urge to justify the social system in which they are embedded and the desire to enhance their self-esteem and that of their group. This conflict frequently results in system justification that is incompatible with efforts to enhance self- and group esteem, which in turn has a detrimental impact on factors such as self-esteem, group favoritism, and long-term psychological well-being (Bahamondes-Correa 2016; Kugler, Cooper, and Nosek 2010; Jost and Thompson 2000). Individuals who are disadvantaged and who firmly believe in the legitimacy of the prevailing system often experience ambivalence toward their own group and may favor the outgroup. This conviction is linked to a reduction in subjective well-being,

as evidenced by diminished self-esteem, heightened neuroticism, depression, and generalized anxiety (Jost and Thompson 2000, 229).

Another critical principle in system justification theory is its short-term palliative¹ role, benefiting members of both privileged and disadvantaged groups (Jost 2020, 67). The embrace of ideologies that reinforce the prevailing social order, such as the ideology of meritocracy, frequently results in individuals experiencing a transient increase in positive affect and a concomitant decrease in negative affect. Such emotional shifts result in an increased sense of satisfaction with societal conditions, which is not contingent on socio-economic status. This psychological comfort functions as a palliative, enabling individuals to reconcile with and accept social structures, thus temporarily alleviating personal discontent and criticism of the system. As a result, an enhanced sense of life satisfaction and short-term contentment is observed, affecting individuals from diverse socio-economic backgrounds and levels of privilege (Jost, Federico, and Napier 2009; Wakslak et al. 2007).

System justification frequently functions as mechanism that bolsters individuals' favorable appraisals of the status quo, thereby curbing their motivation for change and dampening their predisposition to engage in collective actions aimed at societal enhancement (Jost 2020, 67). This motivation to maintain the status quo tends to result in individuals' resistance to social change, particularly when such change threatens the established social order. This resistance is partly attributable to the uncertainty that change introduces, which has the potential to erode the privileges and benefits that are primarily enjoyed by advantaged groups. Nevertheless, the willingness to accept social change under specific circumstances reveals a complex and nuanced dynamic. When changes are perceived as inevitable or are deemed highly likely, there is a tendency to accept the existing system. This adjustment is regarded as a pragmatic response to imminent changes, as opposing what seems inevitable may appear futile (*ibid.*). The acceptance of change is further reinforced when individuals believe that these changes will preserve certain aspects of the existing social system or its core values. Such partial changes are perceived as less disruptive to the system and its foundational principles, enabling individuals

1 In the context of System Justification Theory, the term "palliative" is used to describe the psychological mechanism that temporarily alleviates emotional discomfort and cognitive dissonance experienced by individuals when confronted with social injustices or inequalities. This palliative effect occurs when individuals espouse beliefs and ideologies that justify the existing social order, thereby reducing feelings of unrest or dissatisfaction with societal structures. This mechanism functions as a psychological buffer, enabling individuals to maintain emotional equilibrium by aligning their perceptions and beliefs with the perceived legitimacy of the system, despite any evident social disparities. This temporary alleviation of distress engenders a transient increase in positive affect and satisfaction with the status quo, providing a psychological reprieve that renders the prevailing social circumstances more tolerable, irrespective of an individual's socio-economic standing.

to reconcile the impulse to justify the system with the necessity to adapt or improve it. This indicates that people are more amenable to change when they perceive it as non-threatening to the essential aspects of their social environment. Regarding human differentiation, the manner in which social alterations are conveyed and contextualized is of paramount importance for surmounting opposition to these modifications. Demonstrating that social change is either inevitable or that it will maintain the fundamental values and structures of the existing system can significantly enhance the willingness to accept the necessary measures to address social inequalities and promote a more inclusive and equitable social system. The efficacy of this communication hinges on its capacity to reconcile the perceived inevitability of change with the maintenance of foundational elements of the extant social order. This mitigates the perceived threat to the system and enhances acceptance of progressive reforms.

Another intriguing aspect of the theory of system justification involves *stereotypes* (Jost 2020, 72). The inclination to affiliate with social communities and espouse shared patterns of behavior and meaning is reinforced by the tendency to utilize stereotypes as a means of legitimizing one's own group identity. The persistence of stereotypical patterns of thought, speech, and action, when practiced regularly, contributes to maintain existing social, economic, and political power imbalances and protect the status quo. Integrating these concepts with the desire for social belonging and the formation of shared ideas within groups demonstrates that social cognition and stereotyping are deeply embedded in the processes of system justification. These mechanisms enable individuals and groups to not only maintain and reinforce their social identities but also to legitimize and reproduce existing social systems (ibid., 75). Social cognition, therefore, plays a pivotal role in both the reinforcement and the subversion of social structures. Stereotypes function as instruments for the advancement of social cohesion and differentiation. At this juncture, the binary-coded attribution logic of schemata (BCAS), discussed in detail in Chapter 6.4, becomes particularly pertinent. The role of stereotypes in system justification not only complements the roles of self- and group-justification but also expands them to include previously unnoticed or unexplained phenomena. Stereotypes serve ideological purposes, particularly in the legitimization of the disadvantages experienced by certain groups and the framing of the poverty or powerlessness of some in comparison to the success of others as justified and even natural (Jost 2020, 81). A substantial body of sociopsychological research has demonstrated that individuals frequently ascribe a normative quality to social conditions, which is regarded as one of the most salient characteristics of social coexistence (Kay et al. 2009). The argument presented is that social stereotypes function as a means of legitimizing current social systems and the positions and actions of both individuals and groups. This is achieved by drawing upon theories and findings related to self-perception, attribution, cognitive conservatism, social role allocation, behavioral confirmation, and

belief in a just world. This concept helps elucidate why individuals occasionally espouse attitudes, beliefs, and mindsets that bolster the prevailing social, economic, or political system and its status quo, even when this gives rise to ostensibly contradictory behaviors such as out-group favoritism or negative self-stereotyping and high levels of stereotype conformity. These phenomena cannot be fully explained by the tendency toward self- or group-justification alone, as they often appear contrary to the immediate interests of the individual or group. Instead, they legitimize and maintain the existing system as a whole. This suggests that system justification is a powerful phenomenon that can profoundly influence social conduct and attitudes, even when they may not align with immediate personal or group interests (Jost 2020, 79).

Although system justification theory provides a comprehensive framework for understanding why people often support and justify existing social systems, it also has its limitations and weaknesses. It offers insight into the complex psychological processes underlying this support. A noteworthy limitation is the potential for oversimplification with regard to the diversity of human motivations and behaviors. By focusing predominantly on the proclivity for system justification, the theory may inadvertently diminish the significance of other pivotal factors that shape individual and collective actions, including personal experiences, cultural divergences, and situational variables. Furthermore, the theory may encounter challenges in explaining changes within systems that emerge as a result of resistance or revolutionary movements. The dynamics of social change are frequently intricate and driven by a multitude of factors that extend beyond the propensity to justify systems. Therefore, the theory is unable to fully account for the mechanisms that give rise to system-critical attitudes and behaviors. The theory of system justification may also contribute to the depoliticization of social inequalities. This is because it presents the perception of these inequalities as a mere consequence of psychological justification processes, without sufficiently considering the structural and material conditions that produce these inequalities. This perspective may result in a diminished perception of the importance of political and social interventions aimed at combating these inequalities.

The application of system justification theory in the context of human differentiation may also vary across different cultural and social contexts. The efficacy of system justification in a specific context may be perceived differently in another. Although the theory is firmly rooted in decades of rigorous research, further empirical verification is still required to substantiate its universality across diverse cultural boundaries. Despite its limitations and weaknesses, the theory of system justification is an integral part of the theoretical framework of this book, particularly in terms of sociocybernetics and social cognition related to affective-cognitive-bodily schemas. The relationship between the inclination towards systems justification and these theoretical perspectives facilitates our comprehension of the processes through which social systems are sustained and transformed, as a result of the inter-

play between individual psychological processes and collective structures. The systems theory perspective, which emphasizes the complexity and dynamics of social systems, is enhanced by the insights from systems justification theory. This integration demonstrates the manner in which individual propensities to preserve the status quo interact with the structural and functional elements of social systems. Consequently, the theory enhances the systems theory perspective by elucidating the function of psychological mechanisms in maintaining and, on occasion, challenging systemic structures. Concurrently, the theory of system justification functions as a conduit between the realms of social cognition and social systems. It illuminates not only the way affective-cognitive-bodily schemas influence individual perceptions and behaviors but also the extent to which they facilitate the legitimization of social systems. These schemas, which are deeply ingrained in human experience, play a pivotal role in the processing of information and the guidance of behavior, often reinforcing existing social structures. The integration of system justification theory permits a more profound examination of the interactions between affective, cognitive, and bodily processes and their impact on social order. By synthesizing these theories, the book reveals novel insights into the mechanisms through which social cognition, shaped by affective-cognitive-bodily schemas, is mobilized to maintain systems. Furthermore, it illuminates the potential for social change. This approach extends our comprehension of the formation and sustenance of social orders through both individual and collective psychological processes, as well as the profound social and cultural contexts in which they function.