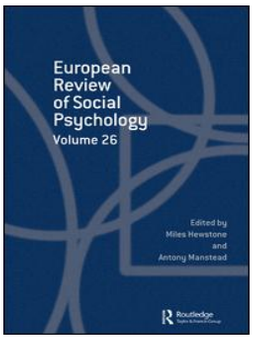

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European Review of Social Psychology

ISSN: (Print) (Online) Journal homepage: https://www.tandfonline.com/loi/pers20

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To cite this article: Mark Rubin, Chuma Kevin Owuamalam, Russell Spears & Luca Caricati (2023): Social identity explanations of system justification: Misconceptions, criticisms, and clarifications, European Review of Social Psychology, DOI: 10.1080/10463283.2023.2184578

To link to this article: https://doi.org/10.1080/10463283.2023.2184578

EUROPEAN REVIEW OF SOCIAL PSYCHOLOGY
https://doi.org/10.1080/10463283.2023.2184578

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Social identity explanations of system justification: Misconceptions, criticisms, and clarifications

Mark Rubin [a], Chuma Kevin Owuamalam [b], Russell Spears [c] and Luca Caricati [d]

[a]Department of Psychology, Durham University, Durham, UK; [b]Department of Psychology, Reed College, Portland, Oregon, USA; [c]Faculty of Behavioural and Social Science, University of Groningen, Groningen, The Netherlands; [d]Dipartimento di Discipline Umanistiche, Socali e delle Impresse Culturali, Università di Parma, Parma, Italy

ABSTRACT

In this article, we reply to Jost et al.'s (2023) rejoinder to our article reviewing evidence for the social identity model of system attitudes (SIMSA; Rubin et al., 2023). We argue that (1) SIMSA treats system justification as the outcome of an interaction between general social psychological process and specific historical, political, cultural, and ideological environments; (2) it does not conflate perceived intergroup status differences with the perceived stability and legitimacy of those differences, (3) it is not fatalistic, because it assumes that people may engage in social change when they perceive an opportunity to do so; (4) it adopts a non-reductionist, social psychological explanation of system justification, rather than an individualist explanation based on individual differences; (5) it presupposes "existing social arrangements", including their existing legitimacy and stability, and assumes that these social arrangements are either passively acknowledged or actively supported; and (6) it is not reliant on minimal group experiments in its evidence base.

ARTICLE HISTORY Received 8 December 2022; Accepted 21 February 2023

KEYWORDS Low-status groups; social identity theory; social identity model of system attitudes; system justification theory

We are grateful to Jost, Bertin, Javeed, Liaquat, and Rivera-Pichardo (2023) for taking the time to consider our initial article (Rubin et al., 2023) and for responding with a thoughtful and thought-provoking rejoinder. We reply to their substantive concerns here. We have also provided an online supplementary document in which we address some additional issues raised by Jost et al. The supplementary document can be accessed online at: https://doi.org/10.1080/10463283.2023.2184578

CONTACT Mark Rubin Mark-Rubin@outlook.com Department of Psychology, Durham University, South Road, Durham DH1 3LE, UK

Supplemental information for this article can be accessed online at https://doi.org/10.1080/10463283.2023.2184578

To recap, the basic argument in Rubin et al. (2023) and elsewhere (Owuamalam et al., 2018, 2019a, 2019b; Owuamalam, Rubin, & Issmer, 2016) is as follows: System justification theory (SJT; Jost & Banaji, 1994; Jost, 2020) posits a system justification motive that is separate from personal and group motives, and this system motive is assumed to explain system justification among members of low-status groups (i.e., the disadvantaged). In response, based on social identity theory (SIT; Tajfel & Turner, 1979), our social identity model of system attitudes (SIMSA) assumes that a separate system justification motive is not necessary to explain system justification by the disadvantaged, and that group-based social identity motives are sufficient (namely, the needs for social accuracy and positive ingroup distinctiveness).[1]

To be clear, SIMSA does not dispute that the phenomenon of system justification exists, and it does not dispute the wealth of evidence demonstrating the various mediators and moderators of system justification. It is only concerned with SJT's *explanation* for these effects. SJT uses *three* levels of motivation to explain system justification – ego, group, and system – that include numerous cognitive, existential, epistemic, and relational motives (for a list of 11 such motives, please see Owuamalam et al., 2019a, p. 404). In contrast, SIMSA limits itself to the group level of motivation, within which it posits two motives (the needs for social accuracy and positive ingroup distinctiveness). Hence, SIMSA's explanation is more parsimonious than that of SJT.

Although it is not parsimonious to propose an additional system justification motive, SJT theorists have argued that it is necessary. In particular, Jost and colleagues have argued that group-based motives alone cannot explain system justification by the disadvantaged and that, consequently, a separate system justification motive is required (e.g., Jost & Banaji, 1994; Jost et al., 2003, 2004). Importantly, at times in their rejoinder, Jost et al. (2023) concede that group-based motives can explain "some" cases of system justification by the disadvantaged. However, they deny that group-based motives can explain *all* such cases. Hence, moving forward, a key challenge in this area will be to clearly identify those cases of system justification by the disadvantaged that are better explained by SJT than SIMSA.

Our reply to Jost et al. (2023) is divided into two main sections. In the first section, we respond to some of Jost et al.'s general criticisms of SIMSA. In the second section, we address their more specific criticisms of each of SIMSA's eight explanations of system justification. We conclude by reflecting on the benefits of discussions between SJT and SIMSA researchers and

[1] Jost et al. (2023) refer to SIMSA as a "social identity model of *social* attitudes" (our emphasis). This wording is incorrect. SIMSA stands for a social identity model of *system* attitudes. The difference is importance because SIMSA aims to explain people's attitudes and behaviours towards social *systems*, rather than their social attitudes and behaviour in general.

considering some areas of agreement in relation to future research directions.

General criticisms

SIMSA takes ideology into account

Jost et al. (2023) argue that "one of the biggest shortcomings of the SIMSA model is that it treats system justification as the outcome of a value-neutral, purely non-ideological process." According to Jost et al., SIMSA assumes "that all social attitudes and behaviours can be explained purely in terms of the group-level motive for positive distinctiveness, without any recourse to ideological and other system-level variables." This is a mischaracterisation of SIMSA. SIMSA is a part of the social identity approach and, as such, it subscribes to an *interactionist* metatheory of social psychology (e.g., Billig, 1996, p. 347; Rubin & Hewstone, 2004, pp. 824–825; Tajfel, 1979, 1981, 1984; Turner & Oakes, 1986; Turner, 1996, p. 18). According to this metatheory, specific social attitudes and behaviours can only be predicted from an interaction between (a) *general* social psychological process (e.g., the need for positive ingroup distinctiveness) and (b) the historical, cultural, political, economic, and ideological contents of *specific* social situations (e.g., an understanding of what constitute "positive" dimensions for particular groups). Hence, general social psychological processes (e.g., the need for positive ingroup distinctiveness) can only be used to make predictions about specific cases of system justification *after* they have been interpreted in the context of the specific social situations under investigation, including the specific ideologies involved.

Consistent with its interactionist metatheory, SIMSA assumes that general social psychological processes are *necessary* but *not sufficient* to explain social attitudes and behaviour in specific situations (see also Tajfel, 1979, p. 187). SIMSA requires its general processes to be interpreted in the context of a specific "social reality" that includes the historical, cultural, political, economic, and ideological context that contains and defines its social groups and their intergroup status relations (Oakes et al., 1994; Reicher, 2004; Rubin & Hewstone, 2004, p. 825; Tajfel, 1979, p. 185, 1984, p. 713). From SIMSA's perspective, this social reality is generated within superordinate groups, which include "social norms, ideologies, and values that prescribe ingroup members' behaviour" (Owuamalam et al., 2019b, pp. 369–370). Hence, we agree with Jost et al. that identity "is not *everything*" (emphasis in original); it must be supplemented with the contents of specific social situations.

There are three points to note about our position here. First, it is not empty rhetoric. We practice what we preach. For example, Owuamalam et al. (2021, Study 3) included a measure of identification with feminist ideology as

a predictor, and Owuamalam, Caricati, et al. (2022) included measures of the cultural norm for harmony. In addition, SIMSA researchers usually consider the specific levels of system stability and legitimacy in any given social situation (e.g., see the "system conditions" column in Figure 1 of Rubin et al., 2023).

Second, SIMSA's interactionist approach is entirely consistent with Tajfel's views (e.g., Tajfel, 1979, pp. 183–185, 1984, p. 713), including his 1981 book (e.g., Tajfel, 1981, p. 7). For example, Tajfel (1981) explained that "the observed regularities [in an experiment] will result from the *interaction* between general processes and the social context in which they operate" (p. 21, our emphasis). In contrast, SJT is inconsistent with Tajfel's views because, as Jost (2020, p. 56) correctly noted, Tajfel (1981) "stopped short of recognising the system-justifying (as opposed to group-justifying) functions of stereotyping and prejudice."

Third, our claim that group-based motives (i.e., the needs for social accuracy and positive ingroup distinctiveness) are "sufficient" to explain system justification by the disadvantaged (Rubin et al., 2023) is not intended to "psychologise" SIMSA by ignoring its interactionist perspective and the critical role of ideology (Turner & Oakes, 1986, p. 239). Instead, it is intended to imply that a separate system justification motive is not necessary to explain system justification.

It is also important to appreciate that SIMSA's characterisation of ideology is quite different from that of Jost et al. (2023), which appears to conceive of ideology as free-floating beliefs that exist within individuals rather than groups. In contrast, like other social identity analyses, SIMSA ties social norms and ideologies to particular social groups and assumes that stronger identification with those groups leads to a greater adherence to the associated norms and ideologies (see also Hogg, 2005, p. 218; Spears, 2021, p. 378). Of course, group-based ideologies can be categorised under broader labels, such as "Protestant work ethic," "meritocracy," and "political conservatism." However, from the perspective of group members, ideologies are group-specific ideas about particular socially shared realities. Hence, SIMSA is more consistent with Jost et al.'s (2008) earlier group-based view that "ideological convictions are influenced by a motive to establish and maintain a shared view of the world with other people" (p. 175), and that "motives to bring one's attitudes into alignment with those held by others (especially in-group members) can play a key role in the formation and maintenance of stereotypes and other social and political attitudes" (p. 177; for a discussion, see Owuamalam et al., 2018, p. 9). We believe that Tajfel would be more satisfied with this group-based conceptualisation of ideology than with Jost et al.'s (2023) current, more asocial and individualistic conceptualisation (e.g., Tajfel, 1981, pp. 33–34, 1984; see also Hogg, 2005, p. 221).

Relatedly, Jost et al. (2023) claim that SIMSA theorists "rule out the possibility of ideological indoctrination or *false consciousness*" (emphasis in original). There are two issues to consider here. First, the false consciousness account of ideology is only one reading (introduced by Lukács, 1922/1979, not Marx), and it has been disputed by many critical theorists who take a more realist and positional approach to ideology that critiques the "disadvantaged as dupes" account (SJT seems to go even further in arguing the self-deception is motivated; e.g., Abercrombie et al., 1980; Eagleton, 1991; Larrain, 1979).

Second, as Spears et al. (2001) have pointed out, SJT's approach of grounding ideology in false consciousness overplays the influence of psychological bias (motivated bias and illusion) and underestimates the degree to which ideology reflects real social contexts and social positions (see also Oakes et al., 1994). Ironically then, Jost et al.'s (2023) criticism that SIMSA overstates the psychological and understates the ideological is more applicable to SJT's false consciousness approach to ideology than it is to SIMSA's group-based approach. In addition, SJT's associated concept of "internalised inferiority" implies a fixed, reified self to which inferiority can be internalised and carried from one social context to the next (for critiques based on the social identity approach, see Onorato & Turner, 2002; Wang et al., 2022). In contrast, as Spears et al. explained, a social identity account implies that group inferiority is based in social realities rather than motivated psychological biases, and it is tied to salient social identities rather than to a fixed and immutable self.

SIMSA does not imply moral relativism

Jost et al. (2023) argue that SIMSA's approach represents "moral relativism" and that it is "non-judgemental," "neutral," "non-ideological," "relativistic," and "value free." However, at one point in their rejoinder, they also suggest that SIMSA's "interpretations resemble right-wing talking points rather than a serious social scientific analysis," and that SIMSA's analysis is "perfectly consistent with [right-wing] ideology." Hence, their argument is inconsistent on this issue: Do Jost et al. believe that SIMSA (a) "treats system justification as the outcome of neutral, non-ideological processes" or (b) that its "interpretations resemble right-wing talking points?" In our view, neither characterisation is correct.

In pursuing their "moral relativism" critique, Jost et al. (2023) argue that SIMSA rules out the "possibility that system-justifying beliefs can be false or inaccurate in any meaningful, pejorative sense, as well as the empirical possibility that system-justifying beliefs could be harmful or deleterious to the social identity of someone who endorses such beliefs." SIMSA does not rule out either of these possibilities.

First, system justifying beliefs can be inaccurate. As we explained in our initial article (Rubin et al., 2023), when subordinate ingroup identification is high and existing social arrangements are perceived to be stable and legitimate, the need for a positive social identity may motivate members of low-status groups to actively defend, maintain, and bolster a disadvantageous intergroup status hierarchy (see SIMSA hypotheses H2-H8). This system justification includes a biased and inaccurate perception of social reality. For example, when a low-status group's reputation is at stake, group members may perceive a disadvantageous status hierarchy to be fairer and more legitimate than it is perceived to be by the broader social consensus in order to avoid being perceived as resentful and bitter about their social position (see SIMSA's H2). In this case, group members are not passively reflecting social reality in an accurate manner (SIMSA's H1); they are actively supporting it in a way that is biased and socially inaccurate but favourable to their social identity.

Second, SIMSA assumes that system justification can be "harmful or deleterious" to members of low-status groups, because their need for an accurate perception of social reality within a superordinate group (e.g., our group has relatively low status) conflicts with their need for a positive ingroup distinctiveness at the subgroup level (e.g., we want to have a relatively high status). Hence, contrary to Jost et al. (2023), SIMSA can also explain (a) low-income ethnic minority adolescents who exhibit poor academic performance and self-esteem in the context of the American dream, (b) gay men and lesbians who experience anxiety and depression after engaging in system justification, (c) the "group self-hatred" of some Jewish people (although the evidence for group self-hatred is unclear; Calanchini et al., 2022), and (d) African American children who report that Black dolls are ugly and White dolls are pretty (e.g., Milner, 1996; see also Spears et al., 2001). In all of these cases, SIMSA's social reality constraints explanation (H1) assumes that a collective, group-based need for social accuracy motivates members of disadvantaged groups to acknowledge their group's low status within a salient superordinate group, thereby frustrating their need for a positive social identity at the subgroup level and creating potential psychological harm vis-à-vis their subordinate group identity.

More generally, in their rejection of moral and cultural relativism, Jost et al. (2023) appear to adopt a positivist, naïve realist stance when they talk about "truth," "justice," "ethics," "false beliefs," and "falsehoods." They discuss these concepts as if they are a fixed, external, objectively knowable absolutes that are somehow divorced from the social groups within which they are created (for a similar view, see Jost, 2020, p. 15; for alternative, social identity-based views, see Spears et al., 2001; Wang et al., 2022). Contrary to this view, as Tajfel (1984, p. 696) explained, "the nature and contents of the

myths accepted as 'true' or 'valid' by people belonging, or seeing themselves as belonging, to different social categories are strongly affected by the individual's location ('objective' and 'perceived') within the wider social system" (see also Spears, 1995). Hence, what is "true" for one group (e.g., Conservatives) may be "false" for another (e.g., Liberals; Wang et al., 2022).

We agree that a broader social consensus can adjudicate between discrepant intersubgroup views in order to determine what is "true" and "false." Hence, contrary to Jost et al., SIMSA does not imply that "we should merely 'respect' everyone's choices," because "we" (i.e., members of the broader social consensus) are not "ideologically neutral." Instead, "we" have developed ideologically based status hierarchies within which "we" can deplore the anti-Semite, the racist, the misogynist, the homophobe, and the fascist. However, and this point is key, "we" are also a (superordinate) social group! Consequently, it is also unrealistic to assume that "our" ideology will remain fixed and stable over time. Instead, our ideology changes and, with it, our perceptions about what is "true," "false," "just," and "ethical." If this is a form of moral or cultural relativism, then it is one with which we think Tajfel would agree. As he explained, "the power of deeply entrenched cultural myths is their ability to determine views of the world, social and physical, which are conceived to be objectively 'true'" (Tajfel, 1984, p. 709). Consistent with Tajfel, we regard social reality as no less "real" or "true" than physical reality but, in contrast to Jost et al., we regard social reality to be group-based and mutable (see also Spears, 1995; Wang et al., 2022). As we explained in our initial article, "we are not arguing that this social reality is either external or fixed (Spears et al., 2001). Instead, it is a social construction by members of a superordinate group, and it can change" (Rubin et al., 2023).

SIMSA does not presuppose system justification in its explanations

Jost et al. (2023) argue that "SIMSA does not explain system justification, it presupposes it," and they claim that SIMSA's hypotheses H1-H5 are "tautological" because the associated predictions are limited to situations in which the relevant intergroup status hierarchy is perceived to be stable and legitimate. As Jost et al. (2023) put it, "in their first 5 hypotheses Rubin et al. do not even attempt to explain *why* people would perceive the status quo as legitimate and stable; they merely *assume* that they do" (emphasis in original).

We address Jost et al.'s (2023) concern in our initial article (Rubin et al., 2023), where we explain that SIMSA follows SJT in assuming that people justify "existing social arrangements" (Jost & Banaji, 1994, p. 1; Jost et al., 2003, p. 13, 2004; Jost, 2020, p. 317), which represent "the way things are" (Jost & Hunyady, 2003, p. 119). For example, Jost and Banaji (1994, p. 1) explained that system justification "refers to psychological processes

contributing to the preservation of *existing social arrangements* even at the expense of personal and group interest" (our emphasis).

Critically, neither SIMSA nor SJT explain how or why these "existing social arrangements" came to be, and nor should they try, because such explanations are the rightful province of sociology, history, economics, and political theory; not social psychology. Furthermore, these "existing social arrangements" include consensual views about the legitimacy and stability of intergroup status hierarchies (i.e., stable or unstable; legitimate or illegitimate). Again, Tajfel (1979, p. 187; Tajfel, 1981, p. 48) concurs with our view:

> 'Social reality' can be described or analysed in terms of socio-economic, historical or political structures. Such descriptions or analyses are not within the competence of the social psychologist. But he *can* ascertain that, for whatever reasons, the system of the relations between social groups is perceived by the individuals located in the various parts of the system as being capable or incapable of change, as being based on legitimate or illegitimate principles of social organization (emphasis in original).

Hence, SIMSA does not presuppose system justification. Instead, and like SJT, it presupposes "existing social arrangements" (social systems), including existing social consensus regarding system stability and legitimacy. SIMSA then explains when and why members of low-status groups either passively acknowledge or actively support these social arrangements.

SJT does not make the same predictions as SIMSA

Jost et al. (2023) argue that SJT makes many of the same predictions as SIMSA. For example, Jost et al. claim that:

(a) evidence that members of a disadvantaged group accurately perceive the relevant intergroup status hierarchy (SIMSA's H1) is "more consistent with system justification theory than with any identity-based theory;"
(b) a positive association between concern for ingroup reputation and system justification by the disadvantaged (SIMSA's H2) is "consistent with system justification theory;"
(c) evidence that system justification increases when members of a low-status group can achieve positive distinctiveness by comparing themselves with an even lower status group (SIMSA's H3) is not "inconsistent with system justification theory in any way;"
(d) a positive association between hope for future ingroup status and system justification by the disadvantaged (SIMSA's H6) is "neither surprising nor at odds with system justification theory;" and

(e) a positive association between superordinate ingroup identification and system justification by the disadvantaged (SIMSA's H7) is "not at odds with system justification theory at all."

To our knowledge, SJT's formal statements have never made any of the above predictions. Furthermore, Jost et al. (2023) rarely explain how or why SJT makes these predictions, and when they do, their explanation sounds like a SIMSA explanation (e.g., see below for Jost et al.'s account of SIMSA's H7),

Interestingly, Jost et al. (2023) now concede that the need for positive ingroup distinctiveness (SJT's group justification motive) can explain *some* (but not all) cases of system justification by the disadvantaged (e.g., H3). However, this concession is inconsistent with the previous SJT assertion that "for members of disadvantaged groups . . . system justification conflicts with self and group justification motives" (Jost, 2020, p. 66; see also Jost & Banaji, 1994; Jost et al., 2003, 2004). Jost et al.'s (2023) new position seems to be that system justification only conflicts with group justification among disadvantaged groups in *some* cases. This concession weakens the rationale for introducing a separate system justification motive to explain system justification by the disadvantaged and, with it, SJT's raison d'être. If SJT theorists wish to maintain this new position, then they need to clearly identify those cases of system justification by the disadvantaged that *cannot* be explained by SJT's group justification motive. Otherwise, their use of SJT's group justification motive to accommodate SIMSA's evidence only serves to weaken the case for SJT, rather than strengthen it.

SIMSA does not trivialize prejudice

Jost et al. (2023) argue that "SIMSA interpretations trivialise the problem of prejudice," and that we "steer clear of dramatic, real-world examples of the internalisation of inferiority" (for similar criticisms, see Jost, 2019, 2020; Jost et al., 2019; for our previous responses, see Owuamalam et al., 2019a, p. 394; 401; Rubin et al., 2023). We disagree with this criticism for three reasons.

First, in our initial article, we use SIMSA to explain cases of system justification that have been reported among Kurds in Turkey, women, gay and lesbian people, African Americans, overweight people, ethnic minority Malaysians, poor people, and people from lower social class backgrounds (Akdoğan & Alparslan, 2020; Bahamondes et al., 2019; Bonetti et al., 2021; Caricati, 2017; Degner et al., 2021; Owuamalam & Spears, 2020; Owuamalam et al., 2021; Owuamalam, Rubin, & Issmer, 2016; Shayo, 2009; Suppes et al., 2019). We do not regard these real-world cases of system justification as being "trivial."

Second, Jost et al. do not explain why so-called "trivial" cases of system justification, such as secretaries who acknowledge their low status in

a company or football teams who acknowledge their low-status position in a football league, do not represent system justification proper. The argument that these examples lack an ideological component ignores the meritocratic ideology that underpins the associated intergroup comparisons. And the argument that merely acknowledging or "recognising" one's disadvantaged position within such systems is insufficient to cause "serious harm" ignores the mental health repercussions of the perceived discrimination that is experienced by members of low-status groups (Pascoe & Smart Richman, 2009; Schmitt et al., 2014; see also Haslam et al., 2018; Jetten et al., 2012).

Finally, and more generally, if Jost et al. (2023) wish to limit the concept of system justification to "non-trivial" social groups, then they need to explain (a) why the concept of system justification does not apply to trivial groups and (b) what criteria they use to distinguish "trivial" groups from "important" groups. Regarding this latter point, as social identity theorists, we believe that it is more appropriate to assess the *subjective* importance of social groups via measures of social identification than it is to refer to some sort of objective measure.

The need for social accuracy is a collective need, and it only explains some cases of system justification

According to Jost et al. (2023), we are unclear about how social accuracy is a "collective, group-based need." To clarify, like *social* self-esteem (Martiny & Rubin, 2016), we conceptualise *social* accuracy as a collective motive that is tied to social identity rather than personal identity. However, in contrast to social self-esteem, social accuracy is satisfied by aligning with a perception of inter-subgroup relations that matches a broader superordinate group's social consensus, rather than a perception that deviates from this consensual view in a direction that favours one's ingroup. Hence, the need for social accuracy motivates the accurate perception of the status relations between subgroups within a superordinate group (SIMSA's H1 – social reality constraints explanation), and the need for social self-esteem motivates the appraisal of the superordinate group's status systems as being better than those of other superordinate groups (SIMSA's H7 – superordinate ingroup bias explanation).

As Jost et al. (2023) explain, in the case of SJT, an "epistemic motive" is an "individual need" (see also Owuamalam, Rubin, & Issmer, 2016, p. 21). In contrast, in the case of SIMSA, the need for social accuracy is a *collective*, *group-based* motive that is tied to social identity and cannot be reduced to a personal, individual need. This point is apparent in SIMSA's prediction that the influence of the social accuracy motive increases as a positive function of social identification with the superordinate group. For example, the more that people identify with "America," the more the collective need for social accuracy should motivate them to accurately perceive the consensually

agreed intersubgroup status hierarchies that exist within America (e.g., between African, Asian, Latino, and White Americans). Importantly, SIMSA's social accuracy explanation does not imply that people *personally endorse* or *actively justify* this intersubgroup status hierarchy. It only implies that they are motivated to *accurately perceive* this hierarchy.

Jost et al. (2023) are incorrect that we want to claim that the need for social accuracy is sufficient to explain system justification "in *all* cases" (emphasis in original). As we explained in our initial article (Rubin et al., 2023) and in a previous debate with Jost et al. (2019; Owuamalam et al., 2019b, p. 369), social reality constraints represent only *one* of *eight* potential reasons why people may exhibit system justification, with the other seven reasons relating to the need for positive distinctiveness. Hence, we reject Jost et al.'s mischaracterisation of our position that "*every case* of putative exploitation or injustice is an example of 'low status' people taking one for the team, acknowledging that 'high status' people are 'better' than 'low status' people" (our emphasis). As we explained in our initial article:

> Critics might be concerned that we are claiming that particular SIMSA explanations represented the "only" or "entire" reason for system justification. This is not our view at all. As we hope we have made clear in the title and body of the current article, SIMSA does not provide a single explanation for system justification. Instead, it proposes multiple (eight) explanations, underpinned by the needs for social accuracy and positive ingroup distinctiveness.

Jost et al. (2023) also misinterpret SIMSA's social accuracy motive as explaining system *change* as well as system *justification*. Hence, they incorrectly assume that, according to SIMSA, a person who rejects the legitimacy of the traditional gender hierarchy and a person who justifies traditional gender roles are both motivated by the need for social accuracy. To be clear, SIMSA's social accuracy motive only explains system justification. It does not explain social change. We hope that most SJT researchers would agree with us that the need for a positively distinct social identity may motivate the rejection of the status quo and lead to social change, especially when the status system is perceived to be unstable and illegitimate.

Finally, Jost et al. (2023) are correct on three points regarding our discussion of social accuracy: (a) although the need for accuracy is well-established in the social psychology literature, it has rarely been considered as a collective, group-based motive; (b) we have not yet measured the need for social accuracy in SIMSA-related work; and consequently (c) there is currently no direct evidence for our predictions regarding social accuracy. Clearly, there is a need for research in this area, which we have begun to address (e.g., Owuamalam, Caricati, et al., 2022).

SIMSA explains when each of its proposed routes to system justification occurs

Jost et al. (2023) claim that, "at the present time, SIMSA theorists have no way of specifying which of the 8 identity management strategies members of disadvantaged groups are likely to follow in any given situation." This is incorrect. As indicated in Figure 1 of our initial article (Rubin et al., 2023), we specify several system- and group-level moderator variables that predict when each of our eight proposed SIMSA routes to system justification is most likely to occur. For example, downwards comparisons on a compensatory dimension (H3) should only predict system justification among members of low-status groups when the associated system is perceived to be stable and legitimate in the short- and long-term and when a compensatory comparison dimension is salient.

Methodological criticisms

Jost et al. (2023) also criticise the methodology that our research team have used to test SIMSA. We respond to related criticisms in our initial article (Rubin et al., 2023), and we respond to some specific issues regarding Owuamalam, Rubin, and Issmer (2016) work in our supplementary document. Below, we provide some responses to Jost et al.'s more general concerns.

Jost et al. (2023) claim that "most if not all the experiments SIMSA researchers have conducted thus far are based on minimal groups." This is incorrect. The SIMSA research team (Owuamalam, Rubin, Spears, Caricati) has published more than 20 studies in this area, and none of them are based on minimal groups. It is true that, 6 of the 40 or so studies that we reviewed in our initial article used minimal groups (Carvalho et al., 2021; Crandall et al., 2002; Study 1; Iacoviello & Lorenzi-Cioldi, 2018; Iacoviello & Spears, 2018; Rubin, 2012; Wetherell, 1982). However, (a) these six studies do not represent "most if not all" of the ~40 studies that support SIMSA, and (b) only 2 of these 6 studies included members from the SIMSA research team (Iacoviello & Spears, 2018; Rubin, 2012).

More generally, it is unclear why Jost et al. (2023) object to the use of minimal group studies in this research area. They claim that minimal group studies suffer from "interpretational ambiguities," and that they "are not especially useful for understanding dynamics of exploitation, oppression, and ideological domination." But these concerns require some elaboration. What are the "interpretational ambiguities" that Jost et al. are concerned about, and why do they believe that minimal group studies are "not especially useful" for understanding the basic social psychological processes behind exploitation, oppression, and

domination? As we pointed out in a previous discussion with SJT researchers, "generalisations from simple situations to more complex, serious situations are commonplace in the conduct of psychological science, and system justification theory itself is grounded on the minimal group examples of outgroup favouritism that Jost (2019) now criticises as being 'trivial'" (Owuamalam et al., 2019a, p. 401).

Jost et al. (2023) claim that our "experiments are also extremely complicated and statistically underpowered, but this has not prevented them from reporting the results of several higher-order interactions – with different interaction tests in different studies conducted in different countries." First, the issue of statistically underpowered studies is not restricted to SIMSA researchers. For example, a recent review of SJT studies found that "there are examples of three-way interactions being tested with sample sizes of $N = 44$ (Kay & Jost, 2003, Study 4), $N = 59$ (Laurin et al., 2010, Study 2), and $N = 49$ (Liviatan & Jost, 2014, Experiment 3)" (Sotola & Credé, 2022, p. 13). Of course, two wrongs don't make a right. We accept that some of our own work is underpowered, and we have taken steps to address this issue in some of our subsequent work (e.g., Caricati, 2017, $N = 38{,}967$; Caricati et al., 2021, $N = 55{,}721$; Caricati & Owuamalam, 2020, $N = 27{,}970$; Owuamalam et al., 2023, Study 1, $N = 181{,}057$; Study 2, $N = 39{,}098$). Our point is that *both* SIMSA *and* SJT researchers need to do better in this respect.

Second, we undertook tests of different interactions in different studies because we were testing different hypotheses in these studies. In addition, we do not view it as problematic that we have tested SIMSA's predictions in different countries (e.g., Malaysia, Australia, Germany). Indeed, we believe that this aspect of our research is a strength rather than a weakness because it demonstrates cross-cultural generalisability.

Jost et al. (2023) go on to dismiss SIMSA work as suffering from what they claim to be "conceptual, theoretical, methodological, or empirical problems." We understand that Jost et al. are not persuaded by our own work in this area. However, in our initial article (Rubin et al., 2023), we reviewed over 40 empirical studies from independent researchers and, although no single study is ever without its problems, we believe that the overall pattern of evidence warrants a serious consideration of SIMSA's explanations of system justification. We now turn to Jost et al.'s more specific criticisms of each of these explanations.

Criticisms of SIMSA's specific hypotheses

(H1) Social reality constraints

According to SIMSA's social reality constraints hypothesis (H1), "members of low status groups will accurately perceive and acknowledge the

relevant intergroup status hierarchy as being stable and legitimate when there is a consensual agreement within the broader superordinate group that the hierarchy is stable and legitimate" (Rubin et al., 2023). Jost et al. (2023) argue that this statement is tautological because "the first part of this hypothesis states merely that people are 'accurate' when they perceive things accurately (i.e., in accordance with the consensus)." Contrary to Jost et al., this statement is not tautological, because the first part does not refer to the accuracy of "people" in general; it refers to the accuracy of "members of low status groups." Only the second part of the hypothesis refers to the broader superordinate group, "the consensus," or more generally "people." Hence, H1 does not boil down to the tautology that "people are 'accurate' when they perceive things accurately (i.e., in accordance with the consensus)" (Jost et al., 2023). Instead, H1 assumes that *members of low-status groups* are accurate when their perceptions and attitudes align with those of *the broader superordinate group*. Clearly, this statement is not a tautology. More generally, our point is that members of subgroups will tend to conform to the social reality represented by the social consensus within a broader superordinate ingroup. Again, this is not a tautology.

In further considering H1, Jost et al. (2023) provide an example in which Black Americans who identify as Americans perceive the racial hierarchy in the USA as stable and legitimate to the extent that Americans (as a whole) perceive the hierarchy as stable and legitimate. They argue that this hypothesis is "more consistent with system justification theory than with any identity-based theory." However, they do not explain why they believe this to be the case, and they fail to consider SIMSA's proposed predictors of these effects: (a) "concerns about social accuracy will be positively associated with system justification," and (b) "superordinate ingroup identification should increase the need to accurately perceive and acknowledge the subgroup status hierarchies that exist within the superordinate group" (Rubin et al., 2023). These group-based social identity explanations are clearly inconsistent with SJT's claim that system justification by the disadvantaged is driven by a separate system justification motive.

Jost et al. (2023) are unclear about what we mean when we claim that outgroup favouritism on the part of the disadvantaged is "motivated by a need to accurately reflect social reality because it would be dysfunctional and maladaptive for members of a low status group to believe that they belonged to a high-status group." To clarify, we do not mean that members of a low-status group (e.g., African Americans) might believe that they are actually members of a *different*, higher status group (e.g., White Americans; i.e., "for a Black person to believe that their skin was white"; Jost et al., 2023). In this case, their "outgroup favouritism" would actually be *ingroup favouritism* from an SIT perspective, and it could be explained as such. Instead, as per

Jost et al.'s second, group-level interpretation, we mean that it would be delusional and dysfunctional for members of a low-status group (e.g., African Americans) to believe that their group had higher status than another group that is consensually agreed to be of higher status (e.g., White people in America).

Following this second interpretation, Jost et al. (2023) go on to argue that we conflate (a) the existence of widely perceived status differences in society with (b) beliefs about whether those status differences are legitimate and justified. We do not conflate these two issues. Social identity theorists, including ourselves, have often highlighted the distinction between (a) recognising that two groups differ in status and (b) recognising that this status difference is either legitimate or illegitimate (Rubin & Hewstone, 2004, p. 824; Spears et al., 2001; Tajfel & Turner, 1979, p. 45). We merely argue that, when intergroup status differences are perceived to be stable and legitimate, it is delusional and dysfunctional for people to believe that their low-status group is actually a low-status group.

Consistent with both SJT and SIT, SIMSA predicts that system justification will *not* occur when intergroup status differences are perceived to be *unstable* and *illegitimate* (e.g., Jost & Hunyady, 2003, Hypothesis 7; Tajfel & Turner, 1979, p. 45). Instead, in this case, members of low-status groups are expected to *challenge* the systems that disadvantage them in order to seek positive distinctiveness for their ingroup. Jost et al. (2023) appear to ignore this well-accepted point, arguing that "there is nothing in SIMSA to explain why some people bend to the system-justifying demands of 'social reality,' while others resist or refuse" and that, consequently, SIMSA represents a "radical departure from Tajfel's (1981) theory." Jost et al.'s incorrect characterisation of SIMSA may have arisen because SIMSA focuses on explaining system justification rather than social change, and so, as indicated in many of its hypotheses, it limits its critical predictions to conditions of system stability and legitimacy. However, consistent with Tajfel and SIT, SIMSA also proposes that members of low-status groups will challenge status hierarchies when they perceive those hierarchies to be unstable and illegitimate. Importantly, SIMSA conceives system stability and legitimacy as group-level variables rather than as individual difference variables. We agree with Tajfel (1977, as cited in Tajfel, 1981, pp. 14–15) that "it will always be interesting to find out why some people are behaving exceptionally. But it is even more important for a social psychologist to find out why people behave in unison – which they often do."

(H2) The ingroup's reputation

According to SIMSA's ingroup reputation hypothesis (H2), members of low-status groups engage in system justification because they do not want to be

seen as being resentful about their low-status position. Jost et al. (2023) argue that Owuamalam, Rubin, and Issmer (2016, Study 1) evidence for this hypothesis is consistent with SJT because "it stands to reason that racial/ethnic minorities who care more (vs. less) about what White people think of their group would be more system-justifying." Again, it is unclear which part of SJT makes this prediction, and Jost et al. do not elaborate on their claim. In contrast, SIMSA is clear that group-based identity motives (a) underlie racial/ethnic minorities' concern about their ingroup reputation and (b) cause system justification as a strategic response to this concern. Furthermore, Spears et al. (2001) have explained how this strategic, identity-based explanation of system justification contrasts with SJT's concept of internalised inferiority.

Jost et al. (2023) argue that "what SIMSA does not tell us is why members of disadvantaged groups would care more about 'preventing further damage to the ingroup's reputation in the eyes of relevant outgroups' than about challenging an unjust status quo." Contrary to Jost et al., SIMSA does provide this explanation. In particular, H2 states that members of disadvantaged groups should care more about damaging the ingroup's reputation than about challenging the system "when the relevant intergroup status hierarchy is perceived to be stable and legitimate and when the ingroup's reputation in relation to other relevant groups is salient." Hence, concerns about ingroup reputation should only promote system justification among members of low-status groups when they perceive the possibility of social change to be unrealistic.

(H3) Downward comparison with a lower status outgroup

According to SIMSA's downward comparison with a lower status outgroup hypothesis (H3), members of low-status groups engage in system justification because the system allows them to derive positive distinctiveness for their ingroup by comparing themselves with lower status groups within the system. Again, Jost et al. (2023) regard the evidence that we present in support of H3 as being consistent with SJT, but they do not explain why.

More generally, Jost et al. (2023) argue that we make an "illogical inference" when considering the evidence for SIMSA because, although they accept that our evidence demonstrates that group-based motives can explain *some* cases of system justification, they argue that it does not follow that these motives can explain *all* cases of system justification. We agree this type of inductive inference is fallible, but it is not inappropriate in scientific reasoning (Rubin, 2021, p. 5826). What is inappropriate is to posit a new, additional system motive to explain system justification without clearly ruling out the operation of previously established group motives.

Finally, Jost et al. (2023) note that Caricati and Sollami's (2018) evidence for H3 does not include the predicted positive correlation between ingroup identification and system justification. Hence, they conclude that Carticati and Sollami "did not actually test (H3) at all." It is true that Caricati and Sollami did not report this correlation. However, their results do inform a test of H3 because, as we point out in our initial article, they suggest that the need for a positively distinct social identity motivated perceptions of system legitimacy when a lower status outgroup was made salient.

(H4) Downward comparison on a compensatory dimension

According to SIMSA's downward comparison on a compensatory dimension hypothesis (H4), members of low-status groups engage in system justification because the system allows them to make favourable comparisons with higher status groups on compensatory dimensions within the system. In considering H4, Jost et al. note that "the positive attributes ascribed to members of disadvantaged groups are often not as highly valued as those ascribed to members of advantaged groups." We accept this point. However, it is a separate issue that does not impinge on H4's assumption that members of low-status groups show system justification because the system provides compensatory positive attributes that allow them to claim an advantage over the outgroup. In addition, as we explain in our initial article, members of low-status groups are likely to emphasise the importance of compensatory attributes in order to strive for a positively distinct social identity (e.g., Ellemers et al., 1997; Spears & Manstead, 1989; Tajfel, 1984, p. 702). Hence, although the positive attributes that are ascribed to disadvantaged groups may not be as highly valued in general as those that are ascribed to advantaged groups, they may still be (a) more highly valued by members of the disadvantaged groups and (b) used to claim positive distinctiveness over otherwise advantaged groups.

Jost et al. (2023) also claim that evidence of complementary stereotypes is consistent with SJT. Unlike Jost et al.'s other claims that SJT accommodates SIMSA's evidence, we agree that evidence of complementary stereotyping evidence is consistent with both theories, and we acknowledge this point in our initial article. What is missing here is a competitive test between SJT and SIMSA that examines SIMSA's claim that downward social comparisons on compensatory dimensions (which Jost et al. agree help to support social identity) also help to explain system justification on noncompensatory dimensions.

(H5) Cognitive dissonance reduction

According to SIMSA's cognitive dissonance reduction hypothesis (H5), members of low-status groups engage in system justification because it reduces the uncomfortable feeling that they have about identifying with their low-status group. Commenting on H5, Jost et al. (2023) argue that "Rubin et al. (2023) nonchalantly claim Festinger's (1957) cognitive dissonance theory for themselves under the rubric of SIMSA." This is incorrect. We do not claim cognitive dissonance theory for ourselves. We clearly attributed cognitive dissonance theory to Festinger (1962) when we combined it with SIT to arrive at SIMSA's H5 (Owuamalam, Rubin, & Spears, 2016). We would note that Jost et al. (2003) followed a similar approach when they created "a hybrid of dissonance theory and system justification theory" (p. 16) in order to develop a "strong form of the system justification hypothesis" (p. 18).

In contrast to SJT, H5 predicts that dissonance-induced system justification should be most apparent when ingroup identification is *strong*, rather than *weak*, because strong identifiers place more importance and value on their group than weak identifiers, which makes their failure to defend their low-status group less acceptable, creating more dissonance. Jost et al. (2023) agree with our analysis, commenting "that there would be no experience of cognitive dissonance if people simply *do not care* about their group membership or about the social system" (emphasis in original). However, Jost et al.'s view is inconsistent with earlier statements by Jost et al. (2003, 2004), who proposed that dissonance-induced system justification should be most apparent when ingroup identification is *weak*, not *strong*. Jost et al. (2023) claim that "this is not what Jost et al. (2003, 2004) were suggesting." We disagree. The following two quotes from Jost et al. (2003, 2004) support our view:

> Dissonance-based forms of system justification among the disadvantaged are most likely to occur (a) *when subordinate group identification is relatively low in salience* (Jost et al., 2003, p. 17, our emphasis)

> The strongest, most paradoxical form of the system justification hypothesis, which draws also on the logic of cognitive dissonance theory, is that members of disadvantaged groups would be *even more likely* than members of advantaged groups to support the status quo, at least *when personal and group interests are low in salience* (Jost et al., 2004, p. 909, our emphasis).

In both quotes, Jost et al. (2003, 2004) predict that dissonance-based system justification is most likely to occur when people are *not* thinking about their group identification and group interests (i.e., they are "low in salience"). The question then becomes: Why should members of low-status groups experience cognitive dissonance about their group membership when

they do not value or care about their group enough to identify with it or its interests (Owuamalam, Rubin, & Spears, 2016)? In response, Jost et al. (2023) claim that Jost et al. (2003, 2004) were arguing that, *once cognitive dissonance has developed*, the decision about which cognition is to be abandoned (i.e., that the ingroup has low status or that the system is fair) depends on which cognition has the least importance.[2] However, this response refers to the *outcomes* of cognitive dissonance (i.e., whether it results in giving up a positive image of the group or of the system). In contrast, Owuamalam, Rubin, and Spears (2016) critique refers to the *predictors* of cognitive dissonance (i.e., what causes the cognitive dissonance in the first place). Specifically, consistent with cognitive dissonance theory, Owuamalam et al. argued that ingroup identification needs to be *strong* in order for cognitive dissonance to occur. In contrast, and contrary to cognitive dissonance theory, Jost et al. (2003, 2004) assume that ingroup identification and interests should be weak ("low in salience"), an assumption that Jost et al. (2023) now appear to reject. Jost et al.'s (2023) current position seems to concede that social identity must be salient in order for dissonance-based system justification to occur. If this is the case, then it is unclear how this part of SJT is different from SIMSA's group-based explanation of system justification.

Finally, Jost et al. (2023) are concerned that a test of SIMSA's cognitive dissonance hypothesis requires "at least a 4-way, if not a 5-way, interaction," because we need to experimentally manipulate (1) system importance, (2) system stability, (3) system legitimacy, (4) the salience of cognitive dissonance and, potentially, (5) group status. However, this rather ambitious experimental test is not necessary. It is sufficient to hold some of the less contentious factors constant across an experimental test of H5. For example, it would be possible to ensure that all research participants were members of a low-status group and that they perceived the relevant intergroup status hierarchy to be stable and legitimate. Researchers could then manipulate participants' (a) perceived importance of the system and (b) the salience of cognitive dissonance in a 2 (importance: high/low) x 2 (dissonance salience: high/low) between-subjects design in order to test the most diagnostic and distinctive aspects of H5.

(H6) Hope for future ingroup status

According to SIMSA's hope for future ingroup status hypothesis (H6), members of low-status groups engage in system justification because they

[2]As an aside, Jost et al. (2003, p. 31) do not arrive at the same conclusion as Jost et al. (2023). Jost et al. (2003) argue that people are likely resolve cognitive dissonance by "keep[ing] a positive image of that system" and giving up their commitment to their self and group. In contrast, Jost et al. (2023) argue that people "are likely to resolve it [cognitive dissonance] by giving up whichever commitment is held less strongly."

believe that a fair and just system may one day allow them to improve their ingroup's status. In considering H6, Jost et al. (2023) ask what leads members of low-status groups to believe that they will improve their ingroup status in the future. There are two reasons that group members may be optimistic. First, although the system may be perceived to be relatively stable and legitimate in the present, longer-term historical trends in intergroup status differences may provide hope that the ingroup's status will be higher in the future (Owuamalam et al., 2021). Second, by evaluating a hierarchical status system as fair and just, members of low-status groups can be realistic in believing that their group may one day ascend the status hierarchy and achieve a higher social status, because a fair system should elevate the status of worthy groups. Note that this second reason is not tautological. Instead, it assumes that the need for a positively distinct ingroup *in the future* motivates system justification *in the present*. In summary, Jost et al. are incorrect that SIMSA's hope explanation refers to "unrealistic optimism." Both (a) historical trends in intergroup status differences and (b) system justification in the present explain why members of low-status group may be realistically optimistic about their group's status in the future.

Jost et al. (2023) also ask how the hope for better ingroup status in the future serves the need for positive distinctiveness in the here and now. The answer is that social identity concerns are not tied solely to the here and now. People are motivated to perceive their groups in a positive light in the past, present, *and* future (Spears et al., 2001). Our hope explanation assumes that members of low-status groups engage in system justification in order to realistically anticipate a positively distinct ingroup *in the future*. As we explained in our initial article, they are "investing in a positively distinct future social identity" (Rubin et al., 2023).

SIMSA's H6 assumes that the hope for future ingroup status is most likely to result in system justification when the system is perceived to be *stable* in the *short term* but *unstable* in the *long term*. Under these conditions, members of low-status groups are likely to view collective action as being futile in the present, but potentially effective in the longer term. Jost et al. (2023) ask: "Isn't the subjective assessment of futility itself subject to ideological motives and, indeed, the possibility of false consciousness (see Jost et al., 1995)?" We agree that, like all social perceptions and evaluations, the perception of short-term stability and the associated futility of collective action are subject to ideological influences. However, this point does not affect H6's prediction, which refers to *when* systems are perceived to be stable or unstable; not *why* they are perceived to be stable or unstable.

Jost et al. (2023) also claim that "there is no temporal dimension specified by social identity theory nor any clear way to demarcate temporal boundaries between 'short-term' and 'long-term'." We disagree with both claims. First, Tajfel and Turner (1979, p. 45) couched system stability in temporal terms.

For example, they offered the following illustration, using the sort of "trivial" football metaphor that Jost et al. claim Tajfel rejected. In the following quote, our emphasis is in italics and our additions are in brackets:

> Let us consider a comparison between two football teams that have come first and second in their league, respectively. *There is no argument about which has the higher status* [hence, the system is stable in the short-term], but alternative comparative outcomes were and, *in the future*, still will be possible [hence, the system is unstable in the longer term]. When the new season begins, the teams will be as comparable and competitive as they had been before. In this instance, the status difference does not reduce the meaningfulness of comparisons because *it can be changed* [unstable in the longer term].

Hence, the distinction between short- and long-term system stability represents an organic extension of Tajfel and Turner (1979), who conceived intergroup relations and system-level variables (e.g., system stability and legitimacy) in dynamic terms. Readers are also directed to Spears et al. (2001) for a broader discussion about how social identity is conceived not only as "being" in the present but also "becoming" in the future.

Second, contrary to Jost et al. (2023), there *is* a clear way to demarcate the temporal boundaries between "short-term" and "long-term." As we have described elsewhere (Owuamalam et al., 2017, p. 83), short-term stability depends on whether the system can be altered through group members' *current* actions. In contrast, long-term stability depends on whether the system can be altered at some point in the foreseeable future. We would also note here that Owuamalam et al. (2021, Studies 2 & 3) have recently provided evidence supporting the psychological distinction between short- and long-term stability.

Jost et al. (2023) also criticise some of the evidence that we report in support of H6. Specifically, they note that "the studies by Caricati and Sollami (2017) and Sollami and Caricati (2018) . . . did not manipulate short-term vs. long-term stability at all." This is correct. Nonetheless, the evidence from these two studies supports H6 because it shows that hope for future ingroup improvement is positively associated with system justification. In addition, Jost et al. fail to acknowledge that Owuamalam et al. (2021) measured both short- and long-term stability and found supportive evidence for H6.

Finally, Jost et al. (2023) claim that Caricati and Sollami's (2017, 2018) evidence "is neither surprising nor at odds with system justification theory." As in our initial article, we acknowledge that Jost and colleagues (Jost & Hunyady, 2003; Jost, 2019) have also considered hope as an explanation for system justification. However, the "hope" to which they refer is supposed "to be driven more by *system-serving* than *group-serving* motives" (Jost et al., 2023, our emphasis). Hence, SJT's conceptualisation of hope is different from SIMSA's hope for the *collective* upward mobility of the *ingroup* (i.e., social

change). Importantly, Caricati and Sollami's evidence refers to the *collective* upward mobility of the *ingroup*. Hence, it is clearly at odds with SJT because it can only be explained in terms of *group-serving* motives. Similar evidence comes from Bonetti et al. (2021), Owuamalam, Rubin, and Issmer (2016, Study 2), and Owuamalam et al. (2021), who all find that ingroup identification predicts hope for future ingroup status and system justification among members of low-status groups. Again, SJT can only accommodate this evidence by referring to its group justification motive and doing so effectively reduces its explanation to a social identity account.

(H7) Superordinate ingroup bias

According to SIMSA's superordinate ingroup bias hypothesis (H7), members of low-status groups engage in system justification because the system comprises a valued ingroup, and they are motivated to achieve positive distinctiveness for this ingroup. H7 predicts that members of low-status subordinate groups will show a positive association between their superordinate ingroup identification and system justification. Again, Jost et al. (2023) claim that this prediction "is not at odds with system justification theory at all," and that "it makes perfect sense to us that system justification among the disadvantaged would be positively associated with . . . national identification." For example, they explain that, "all other things being equal, African Americans who identify more strongly with the U.S. (and less strongly with the group of Blacks) would be more politically conservative, more system-justifying, and more likely to exhibit out-group favouritism." However, if SJT predicts a positive association between superordinate ingroup identification and system justification, then it is unclear how it rules out a group-based explanation for system justification. Jost et al. appear to cast superordinate ingroup identification as an extraneous third variable that is coincidentally associated with conservatism and system justification. But it is also possible that conservatism is the extraneous third variable, and that the association between superordinate ingroup identification and system justification is primary, as per SIMSA's H7. Consistent with this latter view, Van der Toorn et al. (2014) found no difference in national identification between liberals and conservatives when their country was criticised or challenged.

Jost et al. (2023) go on to explain that "identification with the superordinate group is *not* an ideologically *neutral* process" (emphasis in original). We agree. As we explained in our initial article, "the stronger group members' identification with their group, the more likely they are to adhere to their group's social norms (Reynolds et al., 2015; Spears, 2021)," including their group's ideology (Rubin et al., 2023). Hence, from an interactionist perspective, it is essential to consider the norms and ideologies of the specific

groups in question when making predictions about the association between superordinate identification and system justification. We make this point clear when we explain SIMSA's ingroup norm conformity explanation of system justification (H8).

(H8) Ingroup norm conformity

According to SIMSA's ingroup norm conformity hypothesis (H8), members of low-status groups engage in system justification because their ingroup norm prescribes support for the system. In our initial article, we illustrate H8 with an example about a USA police department and conclude that "African American police officers who conform to a police department's social norm of racial discrimination may engage in behaviours that support a racist status hierarchy (e.g., stopping and searching more African Americans than White Americans)" (Rubin et al., 2023). Note that H8 represents the clearest example of SIMSA's interactionist approach because it posits that the general process of social identification interacts with the ideological and normative content of specific social groups (in this case a racist USA police department) to predict specific cases of system justification by the disadvantaged (i.e., racism by African American police officers).

Instead of acknowledging that H8 addresses their criticism that SIMSA "frames system justification as an ideologically neutral process," Jost et al. turn to a new criticism: that SIMSA does not account for *individual differences* in ideology that result in self-selection into ideological groups. As they explain, "African Americans who join the police force knowing that anti-Black racial discrimination is highly normative among police officers differ in terms of ethical values, ideological beliefs, system justification tendencies, and social dominance orientation, in comparison with African Americans who choose a different career." We do not dispute this point, and we agree that it is important to consider individual differences and self-selection processes. However, Jost et al.'s explanation is *individualistic* because it explains system justification in terms of the personality dispositions and "individual autonomy" (Tajfel, 1981, pp. 14–15) of individuals who are attracted to join certain (permeable) groups rather than an interaction between general social psychological processes and the normative content of those groups (Tajfel, 1979, p. 187, 1984, p. 711). Consequently, Jost et al.'s explanation suffers from the same problems that are associated with reductionist explanations of group processes (e.g., Rubin & Hewstone, 2004, p. 837; Tajfel, 1978, p. 50, 1979, 1981, p. 16, pp. 33–34; Turner & Oakes, 1986). For example, a change in the police department's group norms (e.g., to become less racist) may bring about a change in the intergroup behaviour of its African American police officers as a function of their social identification with the department without necessarily affecting their personal values and

beliefs. In contrast to Jost et al.'s individualistic explanation, SIMSA offers a non-reductionist explanation that considers the group within the individual, rather than the individual within the group.

Consistent with H8, Owuamalam, Caricati, et al. (2022) found that disadvantaged people in Asian nations were most likely to trust their systems of governance when they (a) identified strongly with their nation and (b) subscribed to a cultural ingroup norm of harmony. Note that the consideration of cultural norms and ideologies in this work was intended to address Jost's (2019, p. 384; Jost, 2020, p. 286) previous criticism that "theoretical hand-waving about 'superordinate group identification' brings us no closer to answering these important questions about the specific contents of ideologies and identities." However, Jost et al. (2023) do not acknowledge our response to Jost (2019, 2020). Instead, they claim that Owuamalam et al.'s findings are "not at odds" with SJT, and that "it makes perfect sense to us that system justification among the disadvantaged would be positively associated with collectivism, uncertainty avoidance, national identification, and the pursuit of social harmony." Again, they do not explain which parts of SJT make these predictions or why.

The formal statements of SJT make it clear that system justification is expected to be strongest among the disadvantaged when their group interests are *low* in salience and/or strength (Jost & Hunyady, 2003; Jost et al., 2003, 2004; Jost, 2020). For example, according to Jost (2020, p. 89), "ensuring that group identification is low may increase levels of system justification" among the disadvantaged. Owuamalam, Caricati, et al. (2022) find exactly the *opposite* pattern of results: System justification is high when group identification is high, not low. Hence, notwithstanding Jost et al.'s (2023) claims to the contrary, Owuamalam et al.'s findings are clearly at odds with SJT's predictions. This is not to say that SIMSA cannot also predict a negative association between ingroup identification and system justification. According to H8, a negative association would occur when the ingroup norm prescribes social change or when it is seen as detrimental to the group's interests (Spears, 2021, p. 380).

Conclusion and future research directions

We hope that we have been able to persuade at least some researchers that it is worthwhile to measure participants' social accuracy concerns and subordinate and superordinate ingroup identification in order to test SIMSA's core predictions that the associated motives cause system justification among the disadvantaged. Jost et al. (2023, Footnote 3) note that "all of the SIMSA hypotheses are about the direction of the correlation between ingroup identification and system justification for members of low status groups, which is far from a central concern of system justification theory." However,

even they agree with us "that a more systematic examination of when ingroup identification is positively vs. negatively correlated with system justification for members of low status groups would be interesting and useful." We hope that our work encourages a more nuanced consideration of this key issue.

Despite our disagreement with their views, we are grateful to Jost et al. (2023) for engaging with us on these issues. We appreciate that they are not yet persuaded by SIMSA's eight identity-based explanations for system justification, our own supportive evidence, or the evidence that has been provided by independent researchers. Nonetheless, we feel that the current discussion is a useful one, as has been the case in our previous discussions with SJT researchers in the *British Journal of Social Psychology* (Jost et al., 2019; Jost, 2019; Owuamalam et al., 2019a, 2019b), *Political Psychology* (Jost et al., 2004; Rubin & Hewstone, 2004), and Jost and Major's (2001) edited volume (Spears et al., 2001). In particular, although we disagree with many of Jost et al.'s views, we will endeavour to take account of their questions and concerns in our future explanations and tests of SIMSA, as we have done in the past (e.g., Owuamalam, Tan, et al.'s, 2022, work responding to Jost, 2019). We also hope that we have been able to clarify some of the misunderstandings that have arisen from our initial article, and we look forward to further discussions on these matters because, like Jost et al., we feel that these issues are important both in theory and in the real world.

Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the authors.

ORCID

Mark Rubin http://orcid.org/0000-0002-6483-8561
Chuma Kevin Owuamalam http://orcid.org/0000-0001-8219-7975
Russell Spears http://orcid.org/0000-0001-5244-0575
Luca Caricati http://orcid.org/0000-0001-5456-2621

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