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## A social identity model of system attitudes (SIMSA): Multiple explanations of system justification by the disadvantaged that do not depend on a separate system justification motive

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### ABSTRACT

System justification theory (SJT) assumes that social identity theory (SIT) cannot fully account for system justification by members of low-status (disadvantaged) groups. Contrary to this claim, we provide several elaborations of SIT that explain when and why members of low-status groups show system justification independent from any separate system justification motive. According to the social identity model of system attitudes (SIMSA), the needs for social accuracy and a positively distinct social identity fully account for system justification by members of low-status groups. In the present article, we (a) explain SIMSA's accounts of system justification, (b) develop associated hypotheses, (c) summarise evidence that supports each hypothesis, and (d) highlight issues to be addressed in future research. We conclude that SIMSA provides a more parsimonious explanation of system justification by the disadvantaged than SJT, because it does not refer to an additional separate system justification motive.

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Why do members of low-status groups sometimes support the social systems that disadvantage them? For example, why would members of the working-class be opposed to income redistribution? System justification theory (SJT; Jost, 2020; Jost & Banaji, 1994) offers an answer to this question. According to SJT, group members are subject to three different motives. The *ego justification motive* refers to the desire to protect and enhance a positive personal identity by defending and improving one's individual self. Following social identity theory (SIT; Tajfel & Turner, 1979), the *group justification motive* is based on the desire to protect and enhance

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a positively distinct social identity by maintaining or improving the social status of one's group. Finally, SJT introduces a third motive called the *system justification motive*. Although this motive is related to a host of different cognitive, existential, epistemic, and relational motives (Owuamalam et al., 2019a), it is also supposed to be separate (independent, distinct) from the ego and group justification motives in the sense that it may sometimes conflict with these other two motives (Jost, 2020; Jost & Banaji, 1994; Jost et al., 2004). This system motive refers to the desire to defend, maintain, and bolster the status quo of social systems, including the legitimacy of intergroup hierarchies within those systems (Jost, 2019, 2020; Jost & Hunyady, 2003).

SJT assumes that the group and system motives are aligned with one another in the case of members of high-status groups because both motives positively predict system justification. Specifically, the group motive to protect the ingroup's high social status is consistent with the system motive to maintain the social system's intergroup hierarchy. However, the group and system motives conflict with one another in the case of low-status groups (Jost, 2019, 2020; Jost et al., 2015; Jost & Hunyady, 2003). Specifically, the group motive should cause members of low-status groups to change the system's intergroup hierarchy in order to improve their group's social status, whereas the system motive should cause members of low-status groups to maintain the system's status quo. Hence, SJT theorists have argued that members of disadvantaged groups may sometimes support the status quo when the system motive overrides the group motive, leading to system justification, such as working-class people's opposition to income redistribution.

According to SJT's explanation, system justification by the disadvantaged cannot be explained in terms of SIT's group motive and, consequently, a separate system justification motive is required (e.g., Jost & Banaji, 1994; Jost et al., 2004, 2003). For example, Jost et al. (2003, p. 15) explained that:

from a system justification perspective, members of disadvantaged groups should generally provide attitudinal support for the social order to a degree that (a) may conflict with group interests and motivations, and (b) is not readily predicted by other theories.

Recently, however, a new approach to system justification has emerged that challenges this claim. According to the social identity model of system attitudes (SIMSA; Owuamalam et al., 2016a, 2018b, 2019a, 2019b), system justification by members of low-status groups may be predicted by various elaborations of SIT's theoretical principles without invoking a separate system justification motive. In particular, SIMSA assumes that the needs for (a) social accuracy and (b) a positively distinct social identity are sufficient to explain system justification by members of low-status groups. In a nutshell,

SIMSA assumes that system justification represents (a) an accurate reflection of the existing status quo or (b) a means of maintaining or improving ingroup status and, consequently, the positivity of an associated social identity. SIMSA represents an important challenge to SJT because it provides a more theoretically parsimonious explanation of system justification in the sense that it does not require the consideration of an additional, specialised, system justification motive.

It is important to highlight the similarities between SIMSA and SJT. Both theories agree that system justification exists, and both theories assume that SIT's group motive may explain system justification in the case of high-status groups. The contrast between the two theories is most evident in the case of low-status groups. SJT assumes that system justification shown by low-status groups is caused by a system justification motive that promotes attitudes and behaviour opposite or antagonistic to the need for a positive social identity. In contrast, SIMSA assumes that system justification shown by low-status groups is motivated by the needs for (a) social accuracy and (b) a positively distinct social identity, and that it is not necessary to invoke an additional separate system justification motive. These contrasting views are most apparent in the predictions that the two theories make about the association between ingroup identification and system justification. SJT predicts that "for members of low-status or disadvantaged groups a negative relation generally holds between group identification (or group justification) and system justification" (Jost et al., 2003, p. 17). In contrast, as we explain below, most of SIMSA's explanations predict that, for members of low-status groups, there should be a *positive* association between ingroup identification and system justification (Owuamalam et al., 2016a).

Recent evidence has provided support for SIMSA's prediction of a positive association between ingroup identification and system justification among the disadvantaged. Indirect evidence comes from Blount-Hill (2019), who re-analysed data that was collected from 590 African Americans (a disadvantaged group in American society) who resided in Newark, New Jersey and Cleveland, Ohio and who had current or previous experience with a criminal justice case. The study assessed people's social cohesion in their neighbourhood, noting that social cohesion is closely associated with ingroup identification. The study also measured system justification in terms of the perceived legitimacy of the law, the police, the court system, and the correctional system. Contrary to SJT, but consistent with SIMSA, social cohesion was positively associated with the perceived legitimacy of the criminal justice system in this disadvantaged group ( $\beta = .22, p < .001$ ).

Brandt et al. (2020) found similar results using a more direct measure of ingroup identification in 66 samples from 30 countries ( $N = 12,788$ ). These researchers measured self-reported social status using the MacArthur Scale of Subjective Social Status (Adler et al., 2000) and social class identification

using three items (e.g., “I identify with people from my social class”). General system justification and perceived legitimacy were measured using four common scales (Brandt, 2013; Henry & Saul, 2006; Jost et al., 2003). Consistent with SIMSA, social class identification was positively associated with perceived system legitimacy among people who scored themselves low on the subjective social status scale (i.e., a disadvantaged group).

There have been several previous expositions of SIMSA (Owuamalam et al., 2016a, 2018a, 2018b). There has also been a recent debate between the main proponents of SJT (Jost, 2019; Jost et al., 2019) and SIMSA (Owuamalam et al., 2019a, 2019b). However, this previous work has tended to focus on only three of SIMSAs “routes” to system justification, and it has not thoroughly explored other potential routes. In the present article, (a) we provide more in-depth and elaborate explanations of eight SIMSA routes to system justification, (b) we deduce and develop precise hypotheses from these explanations, (c) we summarise the evidence from over 30 studies that supports these hypotheses, including recent evidence that we have not previously considered, and (d) we highlight gaps in this evidence base that need to be addressed in order to provide clearer support for SIMSA relative to SJT. Please note that SIMSA is a relatively young and developing theory (albeit grounded in an older and more established theory), and we concede that the older and more established SJT claims are consistent with a large body of supportive results. Our aim is not to challenge this consistency. Instead, our aim is to encourage readers to consider several alternative explanations for these results. In particular, SIMSA’s key aim is to demonstrate how many instances of system justification can be explained more parsimoniously without resorting to a system justification motive that is independent from group-based motives.

The eight SIMSA explanations refer to: (1) social reality constraints, (2) the ingroup’s reputation, (3) downward comparison with a lower status outgroup, (4) downward comparison on a compensatory dimension, (5) cognitive dissonance reduction, (6) hope for future ingroup status, (7) superordinate ingroup bias, and (8) ingroup norm conformity. The first five explanations apply when group members perceive the intergroup status hierarchy to be stable and legitimate in both the short- and long-term (Rubin & Hewstone, 2004; Tajfel & Turner, 1979). Consistent with SIT, SIMSA predicts that system justification will not occur when the intergroup status hierarchy is perceived to be *unstable* and *illegitimate*, at least in the short-term (e.g., Tajfel & Turner, 1979, p. 45). Instead, motivation and mobilisation for social change in disadvantaged groups is expected to occur under these conditions. Consequently, we limit our current predictions to conditions of system stability and legitimacy.

## (1) Social reality constraints

According to SIMSA's social reality constraints explanation, when an intergroup status hierarchy is perceived to be stable and legitimate, group members are motivated by a collective, group-based need for social accuracy to accurately perceive and passively accept the status quo (Owuamalam et al., 2019a, 2019b; see also, Ellemers et al., 1997; Rubin & Hewstone, 2004; Spears et al., 2001; Tajfel & Turner, 1979). The need for social accuracy is part of a broader need for accuracy that has been investigated in a variety of areas in social psychology, including attitudes (e.g., Petty & Cacioppo, 1986), social influence (e.g., Deutsch & Gerard, 1955; Sherif, 1936), the self (e.g., Trope, 1986), person perception (e.g., Swann, 1984), and social cognition (e.g., Kruglanski, 1999; Kunda, 1990). Although Tajfel and Turner did not discuss the need for social accuracy in their original statements of SIT, this motive has been considered by subsequent SIT researchers in the areas of stereotyping and intergroup relations (e.g., Doosje et al., 1999; Gómez et al., 2007; Jussim, 2017; Kunda, 1990; Stangor & Ford, 1992). For example, Stangor and Ford (1992, p. 365) found evidence that “the formation of social stereotypes is not always driven by cognitive errors, biases, and heuristics, but may at least in some cases be driven by a goal of accurately assessing real intergroup differences.”

Importantly, consistent with SIT's meta-theoretical approach, we do not intend the need for social accuracy to be considered in a reductionist manner (i.e., reducing to an individual need). Instead, similar to SIT's self-esteem hypothesis (Rubin & Hewstone, 1998), we conceptualise the need for social accuracy at the level of the superordinate ingroup or system, as a *collective* need for accuracy about the social system that is encompassed by this superordinate ingroup (i.e., “social reality”). For example, White and African Americans should feel the need to accurately reflect the social reality of the status differences between these two groups when they identify strongly as Americans. To be clear, 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. Our point is merely that people are motivated to accurately perceive this group construction to the extent that they identify with their superordinate group.

SIMSA's social reality explanation provides a different account to SJT. SJT proposes that members of low-status groups are motivated to actively defend, maintain, and bolster the status quo (Jost & Banaji, 1994; Jost et al., 2004, 2003), and that any passive, non-conscious system justification is also caused by a system motive (Jost, 2019). In contrast, SIMSA's social reality explanation proposes that a superordinate group motive for social accuracy causes members of low-status groups to passively perceive and acknowledge the status quo without motivating them to defend, maintain,

and bolster those social arrangements. Hence, SIMSA's social reality explanation assumes that system justification may sometimes represent an *unbiased description* of the existing status quo (e.g., an acknowledgement that high-status groups are better than low-status groups), whereas SJT assumes that system justification represents an *active bias* in support of the existing status quo (e.g., a determination to ensure that high-status groups remain higher status than low-status groups; Jost et al., 2015). For example, according to SIMSA's social reality account, members of a low-status work group (e.g., the secretaries in a business company) may acknowledge that they hold a lower status position within the organisation than a higher status work group (e.g., the board of directors of the company) when comparing themselves on the dimension of salary. Critically, they may make this acknowledgement without necessarily defending, maintaining, or bolstering this status difference, as SJT proposes. Note that, in this case, the salary differential is consensually perceived by members of both high and low-status groups to be stable (the low-status group will never be paid more than the higher status group) and legitimate (the salary differential is fair). Consequently, it would be socially inaccurate and maladaptive for members of the low-status group to believe that they hold a higher status position than the higher status group. In other words, the members of the lower status group are "constrained" by a superordinate group motive for social accuracy to correctly reflect the social reality that their group has a lower status than the outgroup.

Some SJT proponents dismiss SIMSA's social reality account as insufficient to explain perceptions of system legitimacy, and they argue that a system justification motive is necessary to provide an adequate account (e.g., Jost, 2019). However, from our perspective, even SJT acknowledges the sufficiency of social reality in its explanation. In particular, SJT assumes that people are motivated to defend, maintain, and bolster the legitimacy of "existing social arrangements" (Jost, 2020, p. 317; Jost & Banaji, 1994, p. 1; Jost et al., 2003, p. 13; see also, Jost, 2020; Jost et al., 2004), which represent "the way things are" (Jost & Hunyady, 2003, p. 119). From the perspective of SIMSA, these "existing social arrangements" represent social reality, and it is possible to perceive the legitimacy of these "existing social arrangements" in a relatively accurate and unbiased manner independent from any system justification motive.

It is important to distinguish SIMSA's social reality explanation from SJT's shared reality account (Jost et al., 2008), which assumes that the personal needs for affiliation and certainty motivate *active* support for not only close others and ingroups, but also the system as a whole. Again, SIMSA's social reality explanation refers to a *collective* need for accuracy

about the social system, rather than a personal need for affiliation and certainty, and this collective need is assumed to motivate an *accurate* perception of the existing status quo, rather than a *biased* perception.

Finally, it is important to appreciate that SIMSA's social reality explanation assumes that group members, and especially members of low-status groups, experience a conflict between the motive for an accurate representation of social reality and the motive for a positively distinct social identity. Specifically, the need for social accuracy should motivate group members to perceive their ingroup as having the *same* status as that which is consensually agreed within the system, whereas the need for a positively distinct social identity should motivate them to view their group as having a *higher* social status than that prescribed by social consensus. Most cases of intergroup judgement will be the result of a balance between these two opposing needs, with ingroup members (a) perceiving their group's status as being somewhat higher than that prescribed by the superordinate social consensus but (b) not denying their group's ordinal ranking within the status hierarchy (e.g., Spears et al., 2001; Spears & Manstead, 1989). For example, it would be unrealistic for a member of a low-status group to perceive their group as being a high-status group. Nonetheless, a highly identified member of this low-status group may perceive their group to be higher in status than a weakly identified member because the need for a positive social identity will be more influential in the case of the high identifier (e.g., Ellemers et al., 1997).

In summary, SIMSA predicts that group members (e.g., social scientists) will be most likely to view their group's status in accordance with its consensually agreed status within the broader superordinate group (e.g., scientists) when their identification with their subordinate group is low (see also, Ellemers et al., 1997) and their identification with the broader superordinate group is high. Hence, SIMSA predicts that group members' accurate representation of social reality (e.g., that social scientists have a lower status in science than physicists) should be negatively associated with their subordinate ingroup identification (e.g., identification as a social scientist) but positively associated with their superordinate identification (e.g., identification as a scientist).

The above reasoning leads to the first of our SIMSA hypotheses. Please note that these hypotheses include both moderator variables (in this case consensual agreement about the stability and legitimacy of the system) and mediator variables (in this case concern about social accuracy).

(H1) *The social reality hypothesis*: 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. In this



case, ingroup identification<sup>1</sup> with the low-status group will be negatively associated with system justification, and concerns about social accuracy will be positively associated with system justification.

Substantial evidence is consistent with the basic aspects of SIMSA's social reality hypothesis (e.g., Ellemers et al., 1997; Iacoviello & Lorenzi-Cioldi, 2018; Spears & Manstead, 1989; for meta-analytic evidence, see, Bettencourt et al., 2001; Mullen et al., 1992; for a narrative review, see, Spears et al., 2001). For example, Iacoviello and Lorenzi-Cioldi (2018) provided a recent demonstration of the influence of social reality on intergroup judgements. They conducted three minimal group studies ( $Ns = 72, 137, \& 160$ ) that investigated self-depersonalisation and ingroup favouritism. In these studies, university students were randomly assigned to minimal groups, ostensibly on the basis of their preference for abstract art by two painters. Participants were told that art experts had agreed that one of the painters was better than the other (i.e., there was a stable and legitimate intergroup status difference). Hence, participants who belonged to the group that preferred the better painter's work were in a high-status group, and participants who belonged to the group that preferred that other painter's work were in a low-status group. Participants then rated the prestige of the two groups on a 7-point scale (1 = *not at all prestigious*, 7 = *very prestigious*). The results showed that participants in the high-status group rated their ingroup as being *more* prestigious than the *low* status outgroup, and participants in the low-status group rated their ingroup as being *less* prestigious than the *high* status outgroup. In other words, all participants accurately reflected the social reality that people who preferred the better painter belonged to a more prestigious group than those who preferred the other painter. Consistent with SIMSA's social reality explanation, the researchers concluded that this pattern of results reflected "a 'consensual discrimination' (Rubin & Hewstone, 2004), in which members of both the high-status and the low-status groups acknowledge the superiority of the former on dimensions that are relevant to the status hierarchy (especially when the hierarchy is perceived as stable and legitimate)" (p. 12). Note that SJT theorists might interpret the outgroup favouritism shown by members of the low-status group as being motivated by a special need to actively justify and support the intergroup status hierarchy. In contrast, SIMSA interprets this outgroup favouritism as being 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

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<sup>1</sup>We refer to individual differences in ingroup identification throughout this article. However, the same predictions apply to the concept of social identity salience. For example, when social identity salience is low (i.e., when people are not thinking about themselves in terms of their group memberships), group members should accurately perceive and acknowledge intergroup status hierarchies that they consider to be stable and legitimate.

(Owuamalam et al., 2019a; Rubin & Hewstone, 2004; see also, Leach & Spears, 2008; Leach et al., 2003; Spears & Manstead, 1989). Nonetheless, more incisive and diagnostic research is required to provide evidence that distinguishes between these SJT and SIMSA interpretations.

Rubin (2012) demonstrated that social reality constraints occur independent of the need for a positively distinct social identity. University students ( $N = 139$ ) learned about six minimal groups that were named after different colours (Yellow, Blue, Red, White, Orange, and Green). Participants learned that these groups had been arranged in a status hierarchy based on a random allocation of points to groups, where the points were like “points in a game” (Rubin, 2012, p. 387). According to this status hierarchy, the Yellow group was the best (i.e., top of the hierarchy), and the Green group was the worst (i.e., bottom of the hierarchy). To invest these minimal groups with subjective importance, participants were told that they would eventually join one of the groups. Hence, participants had a reason to identify with the broader superordinate system (superordinate group identification), and they may have experienced a collective need for social accuracy as a result. However, they had no reason to identify differently with different groups in that system (subordinate group identification). Hence, and unlike in Iacoviello and Lorenzi-Cioldi’s (2018) study, the need for a positively distinct social identity was not active or relevant, and so it could not influence participants’ judgments. Participants then completed a 3-item measure of perceived group status (e.g., the extent of agreement that “the Yellow Group is the best group”; 1 = *strongly disagree*, 7 = *strongly agree*). Consistent with SIMSA’s social reality hypothesis, participants’ ratings indicated that they accepted the intergroup status hierarchy (i.e., that the Yellow group was better than the Green group;  $M = 4.45$ ,  $SD = 1.50$ ,  $t[138] = 3.55$ ,  $p < .001$ ), even though they themselves were unaffiliated with any of the groups in the hierarchy. Hence, the need for a positively distinct social identity does not appear to be necessary in order for people to merely acknowledge (rather than actively support) intergroup status hierarchies.

Ellemers et al. (1997) found evidence that suggests that the need for social accuracy and the need for a positively distinct social identity often act as countervailing forces. These researchers surveyed university students who were either members of one of two student associations (“Group A” or “Group B”;  $n = 103$ ) or not members of either association ( $n = 23$ ).<sup>2</sup> Consistent with Rubin (2012), non-members rated the higher status association more positively ( $M = 5.01$ ) than the lower status association ( $M = 3.71$ ,  $p < .001$ ) on a 9-point scale. In addition, members’ ingroup identification

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<sup>2</sup>We should note that some of the studies that we discuss have relatively small sample sizes and/or cell sizes, including some of the older studies. The conclusions from these studies should be viewed with a corresponding degree of caution.

(e.g., “To what extent do you feel involved with Group A/B?”) was negatively associated with accurate perceptions of social reality. As the researchers concluded, “participants are likely to hold biased perceptions of social reality insofar as they feel their identity as group members is at stake” (p. 194).

Finally, and most recently, Degner et al. (2021) provided evidence that members of disadvantaged groups passively reflect, rather than actively endorse, social reality. These researchers surveyed people from four disadvantaged groups (gay or lesbian,  $n = 205$ ; Black or African American,  $n = 209$ ; overweight,  $n = 200$ , and aged 60–75 years,  $n = 205$ ) and asked them to indicate the reasons for their low group status. A content analysis found that, among participants who mentioned stereotypic group characterisations, system legitimising characterisations were not more frequent than other characterisations. Instead, participants tended to refer to perceived stigmatisation and systemic aspects to explain their group’s disadvantage. Contrary to SJT and consistent with SIMSA, the researchers concluded that “realizing societal views about one’s ingroup and understanding these as reasons for the ingroup status does not necessarily imply endorsement of these views as personal beliefs (see also consideration on passive reflection of reality in Owuamalam et al., 2018b)” (p. 13).

According to SIMSA, the need for social accuracy motivates a *passive* acknowledgement of social reality when group members have low or no identification with their subordinate group (see also, Ellemers et al., 1997) but high identification with the superordinate group that subsumes their group. However, when subordinate ingroup identification is high, the need for a positively distinct social identity motivates a biased perception of social reality in favour of the subordinate ingroup, and SIMSA’s other seven routes to system justification are likely to operate. In this case, like SJT, SIMSA predicts that members of low-status groups may *actively* defend, maintain, and bolster existing social arrangements (i.e., social reality). The key difference between the two theories is that SIMSA explains this active system justification in terms of a need for positive ingroup distinctiveness rather than a system justification motive.

## (2) The ingroup’s reputation

Owuamalam et al. (2016a, p. 4) proposed that members of low-status groups may engage in system justification in order to avoid presenting their group to other groups as being resentful and bitter about their disadvantaged status position (see also, Spears et al., 2001). According to this ingroup reputation explanation, displays of system support by members of low-status groups address the group motive by preventing further damage to the ingroup’s reputation in the eyes of relevant outgroups and, consequently, to group members’ social identity. Hence, in contrast to the social reality explanation,

the ingroup reputation explanation assumes that ingroup identification will be *positively* associated with system justification, rather than *negatively* associated with it.

(H2) *The ingroup reputation hypothesis*: Members of low-status groups will show a positive association between ingroup identification and system justification 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. Concern about the ingroup's reputation will explain this association.

To test part of the ingroup reputation hypothesis, Owuamalam et al. (2016a, Study 1) experimentally manipulated group status by asking ethnic minority Chinese Malaysian university students ( $N = 116$ ) to take part in a word pairing activity in which they associated their ingroup with either high-status words (e.g., “elite,” “superior,” “noble”) or low-status words (e.g., “minor,” “subordinate,” “powerless,” “inferior”). In addition, the salience of group status was manipulated by asking participants to focus on either the positive or negative views of their Chinese Malaysian group that were held by the ethnic majority Malay Malaysian outgroup. Finally, audience group membership was manipulated by exposing participants to a research assistant who was either an ingroup member (i.e., Chinese Malaysian) or an outgroup member (i.e., Malay Malaysian). Ingroup identification was measured using a 6-item scale (e.g., “being a Malaysian Chinese is important to my sense of who I am”), and concern about ingroup reputation was then measured using a 3-item scale (e.g., “when I feel that someone has a negative view of Chinese Malaysians, I can get quite upset”). The results showed that highly identified group members were more concerned about their group's reputation when their group status was low and salient and when an outgroup audience was salient (interaction  $F[1, 100] = 4.40, p = .038$ ).<sup>3</sup> Furthermore, consistent with SIMSA's ingroup reputation hypothesis, this reputational concern positively predicted economic and political system justification when group status was low and an outgroup audience was salient,  $\beta = .78, SE = .33, p = .020$ .

Owuamalam et al. (2017, Studies 1a & 1b) found similar evidence. As in Owuamalam et al. (2016a), the subjective status of Malay Malaysians' ( $Ns = 116$  & 135) group identity was experimentally manipulated using a word pairing activity. Group disadvantage was then experimentally manipulated using false feedback about donations that had been made to an ingroup charity (disabled Malay children) and an outgroup charity (disabled Chinese children). Consistent with SIMSA's ingroup reputation hypothesis, Malay Malaysians who had been primed to consider their lower

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<sup>3</sup>These inferential statistics refer to the corresponding interaction effect. We use the same approach of reporting the results for the relevant interaction effects throughout.

class position and whose group had received less charity funding showed greater system justification when their concern about their ingroup reputation (Study 1a's "group interest") was high (interaction  $\beta = -0.94$ ,  $SE = 0.37$ ,  $p = .013$ ), and when their ingroup identification (Study 1b's "group interest") was high (interaction  $\beta = 1.11$ ,  $SE = 0.38$ ,  $p = .004$ ). Critically, however, Owuamalam et al. (2016a, 2017)) did not manipulate status stability and legitimacy in these studies. It is important for future studies to investigate the influence of these system-level variables in order to provide a more complete test of SIMSA's ingroup reputation hypothesis.

### (3) Downward comparison with a lower status outgroup

Caricati's (2018) triadic social stratification theory assumes that social status systems are stratified along a continuum. Consequently, a low-status group may not occupy the *lowest* status position in an intergroup hierarchy, and low-status groups may engage in downward social comparisons with groups that are *even lower* in social status (Caricati & Owuamalam, 2020; Spears & Manstead, 1989, Study 2; Tajfel & Turner, 1979). For example, the secretaries in a company may engage in downward comparisons with office cleaners (i.e., a less highly paid work group) when confronted with the more highly paid board of directors. SIMSA predicts that members of low-status groups will support the system to the extent that it allows them to satisfy their group motive via these downward social comparisons with lower status outgroups.

(H3) *The lower status outgroup hypothesis:* Members of low-status groups will show a positive association between ingroup identification and system justification when the relevant intergroup status hierarchy is perceived to be stable and legitimate and when a lower status outgroup in the hierarchy is salient. Downward social comparisons with the lower status outgroup will explain this association.

Caricati and Sollami (2018) found evidence in support of this lower status outgroup hypothesis across three studies. Study 1 ( $N = 79$ ) experimentally manipulated nursing students' perceptions of the Italian national health system. In a low-status condition, two groups were made salient – physicians and nurses – with nurses occupying the lowest status position in this hierarchy. In an intermediate status condition, the health system was described as being composed of three groups: physicians, nurses, and healthcare operators, with nurses occupying an intermediate status position in the hierarchy and health care operators occupying the lowest status position. Consistent with SIMSA's lower status outgroup hypothesis, nursing students rated the healthcare system as being more legitimate in the intermediate status condition, when they could engage in downward comparisons with healthcare operators ( $M = 53.45$ ,  $SD = 50.74$ ), than in the low-status

condition, when they were forced to engage in upward comparisons with physicians ( $M = 52.86$ ,  $SD = 50.88$ ; interaction  $F[1, 77] = 10.27$ ,  $p = .002$ ). Study 2 ( $N = 49$ ) replicated these results using psychology students and a system hierarchy that referred to psychiatrists, psychologists, and professional educators (interaction  $F[1, 47] = 9.31$ ,  $p = .011$ ). Finally, Study 3 ( $N = 101$ ) replicated Study 1's results using nursing students, and it identified ingroup threat as a mediator,  $B = 20.17$ ,  $SE = 0.08$ ,  $p = .044$ : Participants were more likely to justify the system to the extent that they perceived the hierarchy to be less threatening to the ingroup, and the hierarchy was perceived to be least threatening in the intermediate status condition. Consistent with SIMSA's lower status outgroup hypothesis, these results suggest that the need for a positively distinct social identity motivated perceptions of system legitimacy in the intermediate status condition. To be fair, this evidence may also be taken to be consistent with SJT insofar as it demonstrates the influence of the group justification motive. However, it also demonstrates how the ostensibly counterintuitive act of system justification by members of a low-status group may be reinterpreted as straightforward group justification by members of an intermediate status group. Hence, this evidence demonstrates the redundancy of a separate system justification motive.

#### **(4) Downward comparison on a compensatory dimension**

Tajfel and Turner (1979) proposed that when an ingroup has a lower status than an outgroup on a comparison dimension, and that status difference is perceived to be stable and legitimate, ingroup members may compare their group with the outgroup on an alternative comparison dimension on which their group has a higher status (i.e., a "social creativity" strategy). Following this account, SIMSA predicts that members of low-status groups will show system justification to the extent that the system provides a compensatory comparison dimension that allows the ingroup to engage in downward comparisons with the otherwise high-status outgroup. For example, women may compare themselves with men on the dimension of warmth (on which they are recognised as having higher status) rather than competence (on which they are recognised as having lower status). In this case, although system justification maintains the ingroup's disadvantage on one dimension (e.g., competence), it supports the ingroup's advantage on another dimension (e.g., warmth), and it is this latter compensatory dimension that ingroup members are likely to emphasise in order to strive for a positively distinct social identity (e.g., Ellemers et al., 1997; Spears & Manstead, 1989; cf., Hinkle et al., 1998). Hence, from this perspective, members of a low-status group may support a system that generally

disadvantages them providing that the system also contains a compensatory dimension that allows the group to achieve and emphasise a positively distinct social identity.

(H4) *The compensatory dimension hypothesis:* Members of low-status groups will show a positive association between ingroup identification and system justification when the relevant intergroup status hierarchy is perceived to be stable and legitimate and when an alternative comparison dimension is salient on which the ingroup has a higher status than the outgroup. Downward comparisons with the outgroup on this compensatory dimension will explain this association.

Consistent with the compensatory dimension hypothesis, there is substantial evidence for a compensation strategy in which group members accept their ingroup's low status on relevant dimensions but nonetheless highlight their group's higher status on other compensatory dimensions (e.g., Ellemers et al., 1997; Oldmeadow & Fiske, 2010; Van Knippenberg, 1978; for reviews, see, Hinkle & Brown, 1990; Hinkle et al., 1998; for a meta-analysis, see, Mullen et al., 1992). Cambon et al. (2015) provided a recent example. In Studies 1a and 1b ( $N_s = 166$  &  $164$ ), psychology students were randomly assigned to high and low-status groups, ostensibly on the basis of their scores on a (bogus) test of their competence (Study 1a) or warmth (Study 1b). They then rated the ingroup and outgroup on traits that were associated with competence and warmth. The compensation strategy was assessed by comparing the intergroup difference in trait ratings on the manipulated dimension (e.g., competence in Study 1a) with the intergroup difference in trait ratings on the non-manipulated dimension (e.g., warmth in Study 1a). The results showed that members of low-status groups (i.e., groups that scored low on competence or warmth) were more likely to engage in compensation when there was no conflict between the groups and when the status difference between the groups was sufficiently large as to be regarded as being stable and legitimate (Study 1a interaction,  $F[1, 158] = 8.43, p < .005$ ; Study 1b interaction,  $F[1, 156] = 17.07, p < .001$ ). Under these conditions, members of low-status groups rated their group as being more warm in relation to a high competence outgroup (Study 1a) and more competent in relation to a high warmth outgroup (Study 1b). These results are consistent with SIMSA's compensatory dimension hypothesis. However, evidence for the predictive role of ingroup identification remains lacking.

Relatedly, SJT researchers (e.g., Jost & Kay, 2005; Kay & Jost, 2003) have found that exposure to complementary stereotypes (e.g., poor but happy vs. rich but miserable; men are agentic not communal vs. women are communal not agentic) led to increased general system justification among members of lower status groups (i.e., the poor and women). Note that these SJT researchers have interpreted this evidence as providing support for SJT. However,

they did not test the alternative SIT-based proposition that system justification is motivated by a group motive rather than a system motive. For example, Jost and Kay (2005) did not test whether ingroup identification positively predicted women's downward social comparisons with men on the dimension of communality, and whether these downward comparisons then predicted system justification.

In summary, the evidence in this area shows that a system motive is not necessary to explain system justification, and that a motive for positive ingroup distinctiveness is sufficient. However, direct evidence of the association between ingroup identification and system justification is required in order to reach more decisive conclusions about the relative support for SIMSA and SJT's explanations.

### (5) Cognitive dissonance reduction

SJT assumes that one of several reasons that members of low-status groups show system justification is that they wish to reduce the cognitive dissonance that they experience when they consider (a) their ingroup's low status and (b) the fact that they have not attempted to change the system in their favour (Jost et al., 2003). In addition, SJT assumes that dissonance-induced system justification should be most apparent when ingroup identification is *weak* (Jost et al., 2003). Owuamalam et al. (2016b) pointed out an inconsistency between these two predictions: According to Festinger (1962), cognitive dissonance should be stronger when people place more importance and value on each of the inconsistent cognitions. Hence, cognitive dissonance should be stronger when ingroup identification is *strong*, rather than *weak*, because strong identifiers place more importance and value on their ingroup than weak identifiers, which makes their failure to defend their group less acceptable. Similarly, cognitive dissonance should be stronger when people depend more on their systems, because such systems should be more important and valuable to people.<sup>4</sup> Hence, from a SIMSA perspective, stronger ingroup identification should predict greater cognitive dissonance, which should predict greater system justification among members of low-status groups, especially when this dissonance is salient and when group members have a high dependence on the system.

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<sup>4</sup>Jost et al. (2003, p. 31) also proposed that, "when people reduce their dissonance, they defend the legitimacy of the system, and keep a positive image of that system, even at the expense of a positive self-image or a positive group image." This proposal refers to the *outcomes* of cognitive dissonance. In contrast, Owuamalam et al.'s (2016b) critique refers to the *predictors* of cognitive dissonance. Specifically, Owuamalam et al. argued that ingroup identification should be strong in order for cognitive dissonance to arise, whereas SJT assumes that ingroup identification should be weak.



(H5) *The cognitive dissonance hypothesis*: Members of low-status groups will show a positive association between ingroup identification and system justification when they perceive the system to be important, stable, and legitimate and when their cognitive dissonance is made salient. Cognitive dissonance will explain this association.

SJT's cognitive dissonance explanation predicts that members of low-status groups will show greater system justification than members of high-status groups when ego and group justification motives are low (Jost et al., 2004; Jost & Hunyady, 2003; Jost et al., 2003). Furthermore, Jost et al. (2003, p. 17) assumed that "self-interest and group interest are . . . relatively low in salience when people are responding to general public opinion surveys, which involve dozens and dozens of questions, only a few of which are relevant to their group memberships." Hence, we would expect to find supportive evidence for SJT's "strong," dissonance-based explanation in studies that have used general public opinion surveys. However, studies that have used this approach have produced only limited evidence (e.g., Henry & Saul, 2006; Jost et al., 2003; Sengupta et al., 2015). Indeed, the preponderance of the findings show the *opposite* pattern of effects to SJT's prediction. For example, Brandt (2013) conducted an archival study of three large-scale data sets (the American National Election Studies, General Social Surveys, and World Values Surveys;  $N = 151,794$ ) that sampled participants from 65 countries. The researchers examined the association between group status and perceived system legitimacy and found that "six effects out of 14 were significant and positive, directly contrary to the status-legitimacy hypothesis." Similar contradictory evidence has been found by Caricati (2017), Caricati and Lorenzi-Cioldi (2012), and Vargas-Salfate et al. (2018). For example, Caricati (2017) conducted a secondary data analysis of an archival data set that covered 36 countries (International Social Survey Programme;  $N = 38,967$ ). He found that social advantage (social class) and national social advantage (human freedom index and Gini index) interacted to predict system justification (perceived fairness of income distribution; interaction for human freedom index  $B = .15$ ,  $SE = 0.02$ ,  $t = 6.57$ ,  $p < .001$ ; interaction for Gini index  $B = -.11$ ,  $SE = 0.02$ ,  $t = 5.38$ ,  $p < .001$ ). Contrary to SJT's dissonance-based explanation, social advantage showed a positive association with system justification rather than a negative association, especially when people lived in nations that had a relatively high-income equality and greater human freedom. Contrary to SJT, this pattern of results suggests that social advantage at both the individual and national levels enhanced, rather than reduced, system justification.

It is possible that the negative results for SJT's cognitive dissonance hypothesis may have occurred because it was tested under the wrong conditions. However, contrary to this possibility, Brandt et al. (2020) found no evidence that theoretically relevant individual- and country-

level economic and political moderator variables affected the association between group status and system justification in a large-scale survey across 30 countries ( $N = 12,788$ ).

In contrast to these disappointing results, Owuamalam and Spears (2020) found evidence that is consistent with SIMSA's alternative and more theoretically consistent cognitive dissonance hypothesis across two experiments. In Experiment 1, 132 ethnic Chinese Malaysian students were randomly assigned to the conditions of a 2 (group status: advantaged/disadvantaged)  $\times$  2 (identity salience: salient/nonsalient) between-subjects design. Group status was manipulated by reminding participants about their ethnic group's relative economic success or political disadvantage in Malaysia. Identity salience was manipulated by asking participants to write about things that they liked about either their ethnic identity (salient) or their grandmother (nonsalient). Following these manipulations, participants viewed words indicating different social systems on a computer screen. These systems varied in the extent to which participants depended on them. Participants were highly dependent on two of the systems (healthcare and transportation) and low in dependence on the other two systems (irrelevant scholarships and an irrelevant political party). Participants' cognitive effort when viewing these systems was assessed via their pupil dilation, with larger dilation indicating greater cognitive effort. It was assumed that greater cognitive effort (larger pupil dilation) would occur when participants experienced greater cognitive dissonance. Consistent with SIMSA's cognitive dissonance hypothesis, greater cognitive effort (larger pupil dilation) occurred when (a) participants were reminded of their ingroup's disadvantage, (b) their social identity was salient, and (c) they considered systems on which they had a high dependence (interaction  $F[1, 124] = 9.71, p = .002$ ). Experiment 2 ( $N = 131$ ) provided a conceptual replication of these results: Cognitive effort was greater when participants were reminded of their group's disadvantage, when they identified strongly with their group, and when they considered systems on which they had a high dependence (interaction  $F[1, 125] = 5.36, p = .022$ ).

## (6) Hope for future ingroup status

According to SIMSA's hope for future ingroup status explanation, perceiving a social system to be fair and just allows members of low-status groups to be realistic in their hope that collective upward mobility will be possible at some point in the future and that, consequently, they may eventually improve their ingroup's currently low-status position. Hence, members of low-status groups may engage in system justification as a way of coping with their current disadvantage by investing in a positively distinct future social identity (Zhang et al., 2013).

Importantly, and unlike the previous SIMSA routes, the hope for future ingroup status route is most likely to operate when the system is perceived to be stable in the short term but *unstable in the long term* (Owuamalam et al., 2016a, 2019a, 2017). It is under these conditions that group members feel that collective action is futile in the present, but that collective upward mobility is nonetheless possible in the longer term.

Note that some SJT theorists have also considered hope as an explanation for system justification (Jost, 2019; Jost & Hunyady, 2003). For example, Jost (2019) recently explained that people may “perceive the social system as more legitimate to the extent that it allows for (some) people to improve upon their situation” (p. 280). However, it is unclear whether Jost is referring to individual improvement or collective improvement here. SIMSA’s hope explanation refers to hope for the *collective* upward mobility of the *ingroup*, not hope for the *individual* mobility of people. Hence, as Owuamalam et al. (2019a) noted, Jost’s (2019) statement is only consistent with SIMSA’s hope hypothesis if “their situation” refers to the ingroup’s status. However, in this case, system justification among the disadvantaged is driven by a group motive rather than a system justification motive (see also, Owuamalam et al., 2019b).

(H6) *The hope for ingroup status hypothesis*: Members of low-status groups will show a positive association between ingroup identification and system justification when they perceive the relevant intergroup status hierarchy to be stable in the short-term system but unstable in the long term. Hope for future ingroup status will explain this association.

Sollami and Caricati (2018) found evidence that is consistent with SIMSA’s hope for ingroup status hypothesis. In this study, 71 physicians, nurses and healthcare operators read a bogus newspaper article about potential organisational changes in the healthcare sector. In a measure of hope for future ingroup status, participants indicated whether their ingroup status would improve, worsen, or remain the same. They also indicated the extent to which they believed that the differences between physicians, nurses and healthcare operators would be fair if the changes described in the newspaper article were to be implemented. Consistent with SIMSA, the results showed that participants’ hope for future ingroup improvement was positively associated with the perceived legitimacy of the proposed interprofessional status differences ( $r = .53, p < .001$ ).

Caricati and Sollami (2017) found comparable results. In two studies ( $Ns = 101$  &  $68$ ), members of an intermediate status group (nursing students or nursing practitioners) read about potential government changes that would affect the status of physicians, nurses, and healthcare operators. Participants were randomly assigned to three conditions. In a stable condition, nurses’ intermediate status would remain unchanged; in an upward instability

condition, their status would improve in terms of their responsibilities and salary; and in a downward instability condition, their status would become lower. Participants then indicated the extent to which they perceived the proposed changes to be just. Consistent with the operation of a motive for positive ingroup distinctiveness, participants rated the future interprofessional status hierarchy to be more legitimate relative to the stability condition when they believed that their group's status would improve in the new system (Study 1  $B = 2.92$ ,  $SE = .62$ ,  $p < .001$ ) and less legitimate when they believed that their group's status would get worse (Study 1  $B = -1.81$ ,  $SE = .64$ ,  $p = .005$ ).

One ambiguity with the work of Caricati and Sollami (2017, 2018) is that their measure of perceived legitimacy referred to a *future* social system in which the ingroup's status had improved and not to the *current* social system in which the ingroup's status had not yet improved. SIMSA's hope for ingroup status hypothesis is clear that members of low-status groups will support the *current* social system, even if it currently disadvantages them, because they hope that a fair and legitimate system will one day result in an improved social status for the ingroup. Owuamalam et al. (2016a, Study 2) provided some direct evidence for this specific hypothesis. In this study, 375 psychology undergraduates from an Australian university considered the status of their university in the Australian University Ranking System. Participants were randomly assigned to the conditions of a 2 (ingroup status: high/low)  $\times$  2 (long-term status stability: stable/unstable) between-subjects design. In a high-status condition, participants compared their university with a lower status university, and in a low-status university, they compared their university with a higher status university. In addition, in a high stability condition, participants read that the university ranking system was stable in the long term (i.e., across several years), and in a low stability condition, they read that it was prone to change from year to year. University ingroup identification was measured using six items (e.g., "being a Newcastle University student is an important part of my self-image"). Hope for future ingroup status was measured using 9-items (e.g., "in the future, it is likely that the University of Newcastle will have a better status than it does now"). Finally, system justification was measured using a composite of four system justification scales that referred to the general fairness and legitimacy of Australia's current university status hierarchy (e.g., "differences in status between Australia's universities are fair"). Consistent with SIMSA, hope for future ingroup status mediated the positive association between ingroup identification and system justification when participants' ingroup status was low and the university hierarchy system was perceived to be unstable in the long term ( $B = .04$ ,  $SE = .02$ , 95% CI = [.007, .086]).

Owuamalam et al. (2021) tested SIMSA's hope hypothesis in the context of gender relations. In Study 1 ( $N = 200$ ), American women were randomly allocated to a 2 (hope for gender equality: high/low)  $\times$  3 (group satisfaction: absent/present for gender/present for country) design. In a high hope

condition, women read that gender equality was slowly increasing, whereas in a low hope condition, they read that it had not changed much over the last 30 years. Group satisfaction was manipulated by asking participants to complete items such as “being a woman is a positive experience.” Participants then completed an 8-item measure of gender identification (e.g., “In general, being a woman is an important part of my self-image”) and a 9-item measure of economic system justification (e.g., “I feel that different social groups earn the economic position they get”). Consistent with SIMSA’s hope explanation, when gender satisfaction was absent, strongly identified women supported the American economic system (which currently disadvantages them) to a greater extent in the hope condition than in the no hope condition (interaction  $F[2, 188] = 5.70, p = .004$ ). Study 2 ( $N = 200$ ) was similar to Study 1 except that group satisfaction was not manipulated and measures of both short- and long-term hope were included as putative mediators. Consistent with SIMSA, a moderated mediation analysis showed that long-term hope mediated the effect of the hope manipulation on both economic and gender system justification, but only among highly identified women (for economic system justification:  $B = .21, SE = .11, 95\% CI = [0.02, 0.44]$ ; for gender system justification:  $B = .24, SE = .11, 95\% CI = [0.04, 0.48]$ ). Finally, although a registered report (Study 3;  $N = 700$ ) failed to replicate this moderated mediation effect using the original measures of gender identification, the effect was apparent using a measure of feminist identification (e.g., “It is important to me to be a feminist”; economic system justification:  $B = .07, SE = .04, 95\% CI = [0.005, 0.15]$ ; gender system justification:  $B = .09, SE = .03, 95\% CI = [0.03, 0.16]$ ).

Carvalho et al. (2021) have complemented this work with evidence from minimal groups. First-year psychology students ( $N = 113$ ) from a Portuguese university completed a (bogus) cognitive inventory measure that supposedly measured their thinking style. They were then randomly assigned to “deductive thinkers” and “inductive thinkers” groups, ostensibly on the basis of their performance on the cognitive test. Participants were also randomly assigned to conditions in which they were led to believe that (a) their group was either high or low in status and (b) the intergroup status hierarchy was either stable or unstable in the long term. (In the unstable condition, participants were told that more research was required to establish the status characteristics of the two groups.) Group identification was then measured with six items (e.g., “In general, I identify with the Deductive Thinkers”), and system justification was measured in the form of social dominance orientation (SDO) using the 16-item SDO7 scale (e.g., “It is unjust to try to make groups equal”). Consistent with SIMSA’s hope for future ingroup status hypothesis, group identification positively predicted system justification (SDO) but only when the status system was unstable. The researchers concluded that “members of low-status groups may be motivated to support and preserve the existing hierarchical system, when they

believe there is sufficient malleability in the system to permit their ingroup to achieve a high status through such system in the future (i.e., Owuamalam et al., 2018)” (p. 20).

Finally, Bonetti et al. (2021) demonstrated a moderating effect of hope on the association between ingroup identification and system justification among 200 LGBTQIA+ people. Participants completed measures of perceived gender status (rated *very low prestige* to *very high prestige*), hope for future ingroup advancement (e.g., “I am hopeful that LGBTQIA+ groups will be treated fairly within a few years”), gender identification (e.g., “I like being a member of my gender group”), and general system justification (Kay & Jost, 2003). The results were consistent with SIMSA’s principles: When hope was high, ingroup identification was positively associated with system justification among people who perceived their gender to be low in status, but negatively associated for those who perceived their gender to be high in status,  $\Delta b = 0.37$ ,  $SE = 0.11$ ,  $p \leq .001$ .

## (7) Superordinate ingroup bias

SIMSA follows self-categorization theory (Turner et al., 1987) in assuming that all intergroup comparisons take place in the context of a higher order, culturally specific, social category (Owuamalam et al., 2019a). As Turner et al. (1987) explained, “the very perception of ‘difference’ (a comparative relation) implies a higher level identity in terms of which the comparison took place” (p. 48). Hence, if two groups are compared on Dimension X, then both groups must possess X-related characteristics and belong to a superordinate group that is defined on that basis. For example, in the case of a perceived difference in prestige between the University of Oxford and the University of Manchester, the intergroup comparison may take place along dimensions that apply to a broader group of British Universities (Spears & Manstead, 1989). In the case of a perceived status difference between men and women, the intergroup comparison may take place along dimensions that apply to people in a group of nations that value those dimensions (e.g., economic participation, educational attainment, health; World Economic Forum, 2018). Finally, in the case of a perceived status difference between White and African Americans, the intergroup comparisons may occur along socioeconomic dimensions that are contextualised within the American context.

SIMSA proposes that system justification may be conceived as ingroup bias at the level of a superordinate ingroup that subsumes subordinate ingroups and outgroups (Owuamalam et al., 2019b; Rubin & Hewstone, 2004; see also, Reynolds et al., 2013; Spears et al., 2001). For example, African Americans may engage in superordinate ingroup bias by increasing their positive evaluation of America(ns). This positive evaluation may extend

to the superordinate ingroup's ideologies, values, and inter-subgroup status systems (Owuamalam et al., 2019b; Vargas-Salfate & Ayala, 2020). Hence, superordinate ingroup bias may help to explain the system justification shown by members of low status subordinate groups. Finally, superordinate ingroup bias may include a preference towards subordinate groups (e.g., White Americans) that are perceived to be prototypical of the superordinate group (e.g., Americans; Owuamalam et al., 2019a; Rubin, 2012; Wenzel et al., 2008). Hence, it may result in subordinate outgroup favouritism (e.g., African Americans favouring White Americans) if the subordinate outgroup is perceived to be more prototypical than the subordinate ingroup of the more inclusive superordinate ingroup. However, please note that this process is separate from the process of ingroup projection, in which the subordinate ingroup's characteristics are projected onto the superordinate ingroup, thereby making the subordinate ingroup appear relatively more prototypical of the superordinate group.

To avoid any confusion, it is worth comparing and contrasting SIMSA's social reality and superordinate ingroup bias explanations. Both explanations assume that increased superordinate ingroup identification leads to greater system justification. However, they do so for different reasons. In the case of the social reality explanation, superordinate ingroup identification should increase the need to accurately perceive and acknowledge the subgroup status hierarchies that exist within the superordinate group. In contrast, in the case of the superordinate ingroup bias explanation, superordinate ingroup identification should increase the need to view the superordinate ingroup and its systems as positively distinct from other superordinate outgroups. So, for example, when an American identity is made salient, the need for social accuracy will motivate White and African Americans to acknowledge the social reality that White Americans are more privileged than African Americans, and the need for positive distinctiveness will motivate them to support the view that America is "the best country in the world!"

Importantly, two SJT predictions can be reinterpreted in terms of SIMSA's superordinate ingroup bias explanation. First, SJT predicts that system justification increases as people become more dependent on the system (Jost et al., 2015; Kay & Friesen, 2011). SIMSA assumes that this system dependence is positively associated with (but not identical to) ingroup identification at the level of the superordinate ingroup that represents the system (Owuamalam et al., 2016a, 2019a; Rubin, 2016). Hence, as people become more dependent on a social system (e.g., their nation), they should identify more strongly with the social group that encompasses that system (e.g., national identity), and they should show greater ingroup bias in favour of that system (e.g., nationalism). Consequently, both SJT and SIMSA predict that system dependency will be positively associated with system

justification. However, SIMSA predicts that the association between system dependency and system justification is explained by superordinate ingroup identification, whereas SJT predicts that the association between superordinate identification and system justification is mediated by system dependency (Feygina et al., 2010). Hence, a key test between SIMSA and SJT will be to determine whether system dependency or superordinate identification is the more proximal predictor of system justification.

Second, SJT predicts that system justification should be enhanced following a threat to the system (e.g., Jost & Hunyady, 2005, Table 2; Jost et al., 2015). Again, however, SIMSA theorists reinterpret this effect as a case of increased superordinate ingroup bias following a threat to the superordinate ingroup (Rubin & Hewstone, 2004). Hence, members of low status subordinate groups should show greater system justification when they perceive a threat to their superordinate ingroup.

(H7) *The superordinate ingroup bias hypothesis:* Members of low-status subordinate groups will show a positive association between their superordinate ingroup identification and system justification when their superordinate ingroup is salient. Superordinate ingroup bias will explain this association.

There is a substantial amount of evidence in support of SIMSA's superordinate ingroup bias hypothesis. To begin with, several studies have found the predicted positive association between national identification and national system justification. Gustavsson and Stendahl (2020) found that national identification (national attachment and pride) was positively associated with national system justification (confidence in political systems) in the Netherlands and the United States. Using a sample of Spanish participants, Moscato et al. (2020) found that national identification (e.g., agreeing that "I value being Spanish") was positively associated with both general system justification (e.g., agreeing that "in general, the Spanish political system operates as it should") and economic system justification (e.g., agreeing that "if people work hard, they almost always get what they want"). Similarly, Feygina et al. (2010, Study 2) found that national identification (e.g., "being an American is an important reflection of who I am") was associated with general and economic system justification. Across 19 nations, Vargas-Salfate et al. (2018, Table 2) found that national identification (e.g., agreeing that "being [Nationality] is very important to me") was positively associated with national system justification (e.g., agreeing that "in general, my country's political system operates as it should"). Vargas-Salfate and Ayala (2020) found that, among Chilean participants (Study 1) and Peruvian participants (Study 2), national identification (patriotism; e.g., agreeing that "the fact I am Chilean is an important part of my



identity”) and superordinate ingroup bias (nationalism; e.g., agreeing that “foreign nations have done some very fine things but it takes Chile to do things in a big way”) were both positively associated with system justification and/or meritocracy (a system justifying ideology). Most recently, Caricati et al. (2021) analysed the data of 55,721 participants from 40 different nations and found that national identification was an independent positive predictor of system justification. Chan (2019) complemented this correlational evidence with experimental work demonstrating that increased superordinate national identification causes increased system justification behaviours. Specifically, exposure to American, Australian, and British flags made corresponding national identities salient among the citizens of these countries and reduced their tax evasion behaviour (an index of system justification) during financially incentivised lab-based tasks.

There is also evidence that the positive association between national identification and national system justification occurs among members of low-status groups. In particular, Shayo (2009) found that national identification (e.g., “How proud are you to be [e.g., French]?”) among poor people increased their national system justification (reduced their support for economic redistribution). Similarly, Akdoğan and Alparslan (2020) found that Kurds in Turkey (a disadvantaged group) who identified at the superordinate national level (e.g., agreeing that “I consider myself as a citizen of the Republic of Turkey”) showed greater outgroup favouritism towards Turks. Experimental evidence comes from two studies by Jaško and Kossowska (2013). In Study 1, residents of a Polish city (Krakow) evaluated the financial system for distributing government funding to their city. Residents who believed that their city received less than average funding (i.e., membership in a low-status group) justified the financial system more when their superordinate national identity was salient than when their subordinate city identity was salient. In Study 2, Polish religious believers (a high-status group) and non-believers (a low-status group) evaluated a decision by the European Court of Human Rights to allow public schools to display crucifixes. Consistent with the superordinate ingroup bias hypothesis, national identification positively predicted the justification of this decision among the low-status religious non-believers.

Finally, consistent with evidence from the SIT-inspired social cure literature (e.g., Greenaway et al., 2016; Haslam et al., 2018; Rubin & Stuart, 2018), superordinate identification may also account for the palliative effects of system justification (Jost et al., 2004; Jost & Hunyady, 2003). Using longitudinal data from 18 countries/societies, Khan et al. (2020) found that national identification predicted lower anxiety and improved health. Similarly, members of low status subordinate groups who expressed support for superordinate ingroups (system justification) appeared to “re-establish a positive social identity” (Bahamondes et al., 2019, p. 14). Hence, Bahamondes et al. (2020) found that gay men and

lesbians who expressed support for their national system (e.g., agreeing that, “in general, the Chilean political system operates as it should”) experienced reduced perceptions of sexual stigma towards their low-status ingroup and associated reductions in psychological distress. Similarly, Bahamondes et al. (2019) found that women and members of ethnic minorities who expressed support for the national system that encompassed gender and ethnic systems (e.g., “In general, relations between men and women in New Zealand are fair”) experienced reduced perceived discrimination and improved well-being. Finally, Suppes et al. (2019, Study 1) found that members of sexual minority groups who showed support for their national system (e.g., agreeing that, “in America, everyone has a fair shot at wealth and happiness”) showed reduced perceived discrimination and increased subjective well-being. In summary, members of low-status groups appear to support their national system (i.e., engage in system justification) in order to affirm their identification with a positively valued superordinate national group. In turn, this superordinate ingroup identification appears to diminish concerns about perceived discrimination at the subordinate level and improve well-being.

### (8) Ingroup norm conformity

Social groups include social norms that are shared by group members and that prescribe members’ attitudes and behaviours (Iacoviello & Spears, 2021; Reynolds et al., 2015; Spears, 2021). For example, the members of a USA police department may share norms that prescribe prejudice against African Americans (Rubin & Hewstone, 2004). Importantly, SIT predicts a positive association between ingroup identification and conformity with ingroup norms: 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).

SIMSA predicts that, in some cases, conformity to ingroup norms may lead to system justification by members of low-status groups. For example, 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 & Hewstone, 2004).

(H8) *The ingroup norm hypothesis:* Members of low-status groups will show a positive association between ingroup identification and system justification when their ingroup’s social norms prescribe attitudes and behaviours that support the system. Conformity to ingroup norms will explain this association.

Consistent with the ingroup norm hypothesis, there is evidence that adherence to ingroup norms may decrease ingroup favouritism. In particular, Crandall et al. (2002) found that college students’ norms about the

acceptability of expressing prejudice predicted their expressions of prejudice. For example, Crandall et al. (2002, Study 7,  $N = 58$ ) randomly assigned participants to three conditions in which either participants were made to believe that previous participants had (a) condemned racism or (b) condoned racism or (c) no reference to previous participants was made (control condition). The results showed that participants in the condemn racism condition had lower racism scores ( $M = 2.75$ ) than those in the control condition ( $M = 4.04$ ) and condone racism condition ( $M = 6.04$ ),  $F(2, 55) = 29.78$ ,  $p = .001$ . Jetten et al. (1996) found congruent results across two studies. For example, in Study 1, university students ( $N = 75$ ) were assigned to minimal groups on the basis of a dot estimation task and then randomly allocated to the conditions of a 2 (ingroup norm: fairness/discrimination)  $\times$  2 (outgroup norm: fairness/discrimination) between-subjects design. In these conditions, participants were told that previous participants from either the ingroup or the outgroup had tended to allocate money between the groups either fairly or in favour of their own group. Participants then proceeded to allocate money between the groups themselves. The results showed that the ingroup norm influenced participants' money distribution strategies, with an ingroup norm for fairness leading to fairer money distribution (interaction  $F[1, 74] = 5.69$ ,  $p < .05$ ).

There is also evidence that ingroup identification moderates the influence of ingroup norms for fairness and anti-discrimination. Crandall et al. (2002, Study 4,  $N = 203$ ) found that students' level of identification with a USA college that included anti-racist norms was positively related to their internal motivation to suppress prejudice against African Americans ( $r = .25$ ,  $p < .001$ ). Similar evidence comes from Jetten et al. (1997). Psychology undergraduates ( $N = 191$ ) were randomly allocated to the conditions of a 2 (ingroup norm: fairness/differentiation)  $\times$  2 (level of identification: high/low) between-subjects design. They then allocated space in their university newspaper between themselves and business and physics students. The students allocated less space to themselves (i.e., they showed less ingroup favouritism) when their ingroup identification was high and an ingroup norm for fairness was made salient (interaction  $F[2, 186] = 3.99$ ,  $p < 0.05$ ).

In summary, there is evidence that conformity to anti-discrimination ingroup norms may reduce ingroup favouritism, especially when ingroup identification is high. However, to our knowledge, there is not yet any direct evidence in support of the prediction that system justification may occur among members of low-status groups who identify with a group that follows anti-discrimination norms.

It is worth noting that the ingroup norm hypothesis may refer to norms associated with superordinate ingroups as well as subordinate ingroups. For example, Wetherell (1982) found that Polynesian children in a minimal group study followed a cultural norm of generosity when faced with

a Pakeha (White European) experimenter. In addition, Iacoviello and Spears (2018) found that supraordinate ingroups (e.g., United Nations Organizations in the case of a national ingroup; social scientists in the case of minimal ingroups) are often associated with anti-discrimination norms. Finally, Essien et al. (2020) proposed that societal norms influence the degree to which members of different disadvantaged groups showed outgroup favouritism. Hence, it is conceivable that members of low-status groups may suppress prejudice against higher status outgroups and show system justification due to the influence of such superordinate ingroup norms. In this respect, we agree with Jaśko and Kossowska (2013) that “future research should investigate the possible role that norms of the common ingroup may play in predicting legitimacy” (p. 261).

### Responses to some potential criticisms

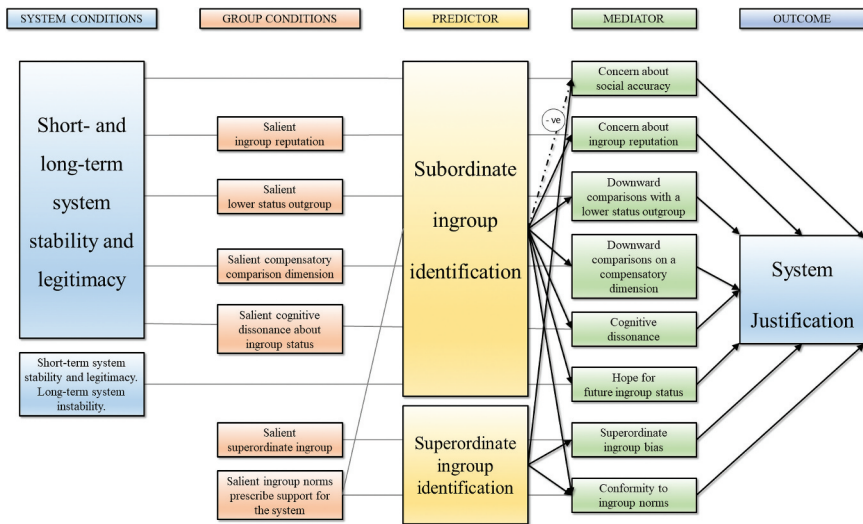
The theory and evidence for SIMSA is currently causing a bit of a stir in the field and, understandably, several critiques of SIMSA have now arisen. Here, we would like to respond to several potential criticisms that might arise from these critiques.

To begin with, one potential criticism is that we have ignored the considered responses of system justification theorists to SIMSA’s propositions. We would disagree. Again, we direct readers to the recent debate in the *British Journal of Social Psychology* for details of (a) SJT theorists’ criticisms of SIMSA (Jost, 2019; Jost et al., 2019) and (b) our responses to these criticisms (Owuamalam et al., 2019a, 2019b). In particular, please see Owuamalam et al. (2019a) for a response to Jost (2019) and Jost et al. (2019). Please note that Owuamalam et al.’s (2019a) response includes an extensive supplementary document, which provides further responses here: <https://bpspsychub.onlinelibrary.wiley.com/action/downloadSupplement?doi=10.1111%2Fbjso.12323&file=bjso12323-sup-0001-TableS1.docx>

Two further criticisms might relate to SIMSA’s social reality explanation. A first concern is that this explanation assumes that members of disadvantaged groups already perceive the status quo as legitimate and stable. Hence, one might ask: “Why would members of low status groups perceive the intergroup status hierarchy as stable and legitimate in the first place?” This is a fair question. However, it is one that neither SJT nor SIMSA address. Like SIMSA, SJT simply assumes that a social reality exists prior to any system justification, and it does not attempt to explain the causes of this social reality. For example, in their initial article, 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; see also, Jost et al., 2004, p. 887; Jost & Hunyady, 2003, p. 119; Jost et al., 2003, p. 13). Here, it is clear

that SJT assumes a social reality (viz., “existing social arrangements”) that exists independent of any system justification and that is then maintained, defended, and/or bolstered as a result of the system justification motive. Indeed, SJT sometimes treats these “existing social arrangements” as predictors of system justification rather than outcomes. For example, Jost and Hunyady (2003, Hypothesis 7) explained that the perceived legitimacy of a system predicts the system justification (outgroup favouritism) of members of low-status groups. SIMSA adopts a similar approach to SJT in this respect. Hence, we consider the pre-existing stability and legitimacy of social systems as moderator variables in our hypotheses (see also the “system conditions” column of Figure 1). Critically, neither SIMSA nor SJT explain how these “existing social arrangements” came to be, and nor can any purely psychology theory. To claim that SIMSA or SJT need to explain the causes of these existing social arrangements would be to psychologise social phenomena that require sociological, historical, economic, and political explanations (Rubin & Hewstone, 2004). In short, if this explanatory gap is a problem for SIMSA, then it is also a problem for SJT.

A second concern about SIMSA’s social reality explanation is that it trivialises the internalisation of inequality and oppression among disadvantaged social groups, such as poor people and women (see also, Jost, 2019, p. 279). This criticism tends to focus on the rather mundane examples that we have used to illustrate the social reality explanation. For example, earlier,



**Figure 1.** SIMSA Explanations of System Justification by Members of Low Status Groups. Note. System and group conditions represent moderator variables. All associations are positive apart from the association between subordinate ingroup identification and concern about social accuracy, which is negative.

we considered secretaries acknowledging their low status in a company, and in previous articles we have considered losing football teams acknowledging their resultant lower status position in a football league (Owuamalam et al., 2019b). Contrary to criticisms (e.g., Jost, 2019, p. 279), these examples are not intended to trivialise the serious social consequences of inequality or to disrespect the disadvantaged people involved. Instead, they were chosen due to their simplicity: A football league is an indisputable marker of rank based on performance. Of course, we agree that other forms of status hierarchy have more complex causes and more serious consequences. In addition, these examples are not intended to imply that social reality constraints are the *only* reason for specific real-world cases of system justification. As indicated in the present article, social reality constraints are only one of *eight* potential reasons why people may exhibit system justification. Instead, our examples are intended to illustrate a very basic principle that underlies SIMSA's social reality explanation: Some cases of system justification may represent the passive and unbiased acknowledgement of the status quo.

Turning to Owuamalam and Spears' (2020) cognitive dissonance study, a potential critic might argue that the results are consistent with SJT because members of disadvantaged groups are assumed to experience more cognitive dissonance when their social identity is salient and they feel dependent on the social system. However, this criticism contradicts SJT because it assumes that social identity salience must be relatively *high* in order for cognitive dissonance to occur. Previous statements of SJT have been clear that dissonance-based system justification is most likely to occur when social identity salience is *low*. For example, Jost et al. (2003, p. 17; see also, Jost et al., 2004, p. 909) stated that:

dissonance-based forms of system justification among the disadvantaged are most likely to occur (a) when subordinate group identification is relatively *low* in salience (our emphasis).

Hence, SJT's cognitive dissonance explanation is faced with a major logical difficulty because it requires that social identity salience is simultaneously *high* in order to evoke cognitive dissonance and *low* in order for system justification to be expressed. For a further discussion of this logical problem, please see Owuamalam et al. (2016b, 2018a).

With regards to SIMSA's hope for future ingroup status hypothesis, critics might query how perceiving a social system to be fair and just would allow members of disadvantaged groups to be realistic in their hope for collective upward mobility in the future. In particular, is it possible for members of disadvantaged groups to be both hopeful *and* realistic given their group's current predicament? In our view, there is no contradiction here because hope and realism represent two orthogonal dimensions. Hence, members of disadvantaged groups can possess a realistic hope for improved ingroup

status (e.g., that women will be paid as much as men on average) or an unrealistic hope (e.g., that women will become as physically strong as men on average). Moreover, the reality is just a (less palatable) starting point from which hope takes off (indeed it is the appraisal that motivates hope for a better tomorrow; see also, Spears et al.'s, 2001, distinction between “being” and “becoming”).

Concerns might also be raised about the methodological rigour of some of our studies. For example, Jost (2019) and Sutton (as cited in Jost, 2019) criticised Owuamalam et al.'s (2016a) study. Owuamalam et al. (2019a) and their supplementary document provide several clarifications and rebuttals in this respect. However, we would make several other points here. First, we concede that the statistical power of this study was not ideal. However, we would note that our more recent work has used much larger sample sizes (e.g., Caricati, 2017,  $N = 38,967$ ; Caricati et al., 2021,  $N = 55,721$ ; Caricati & Owuamalam, 2020,  $N = 27,970$ ). Second, we do not view it as problematic that Owuamalam et al.'s (2016a) study validated SIMSA's predictions in different countries (Malaysia, Australia, Germany). Instead, we view this aspect of our work as a strength because it demonstrates the cross-cultural generalisability of our evidence. Third, in terms of the validity of our concepts, Owuamalam et al. (2021, Studies 2 & 3) have recently provided evidence supporting Owuamalam et al.'s (2016a) distinction between long- and short-term stability. Fourth, in terms of the replicability of our work, as we noted above, Owuamalam et al. (2017, Studies 1a & 1b) found similar evidence to Owuamalam et al. (2016a, Study 1). Finally, to address concerns about potential bias in our work, we would note that our more recent work has used a registered report approach (e.g., Owuamalam et al., 2021, Study 3) and made its materials, data, and analysis scripts publicly available (e.g., Owuamalam & Spears, 2020). We would also note that we were not involved with many of the studies that we have reviewed in the current article that corroborate SIMSA's key claims.

Finally, 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, and many of these explanations may apply simultaneously to any single instance of system justification. For example, specific cases of system justification may occur not only because members of low-status groups are constrained by the social reality of their status position, but also because they do not want to be seen as resentful and/or because they hope to improve their group's status position one day.

We would like to end this section by thanking SJT researchers for engaging with us on these issues. We view the ongoing debate between SJT and SIT researchers as a healthy and beneficial activity for the field. It provides an opportunity for both sides to clarify their positions, strengthen their arguments, and undertake more incisive and diagnostic tests of theoretically competitive explanations. We are particularly appreciative of John Jost's engagement with us on these issues, and we look forward to his further thoughts. John's work has made a substantial and important contribution to this area, and it has had a huge influence on our own work in this area. Indeed, without SJT, there would be no SIMSA!

## Conclusion

System justification theory explains the system justification of members of low-status groups in terms of a system justification motive that operates separately from, and in opposition to, social identity theory's group motive. In the present article, we considered a set of explanations of this phenomenon that are more parsimonious because they do not posit an additional system justification motive that is independent from the group motive. Instead, SIMSA relies on two previously established motives to explain system justification by members of low-status groups: the need for (social) accuracy and the need for a positively distinct social identity.

In the present review, we derived eight SIMSA hypotheses that predict when and why members of low-status groups show system justification. [Table 1](#) summarises each SIMSA hypothesis in lay terms and from the perspective of the members of a low-status group. [Table 2](#) contrasts the key predictions of SJT and SIMSA for members of low-status groups. Finally, [Figure 1](#) provides a summary of the SIMSA hypotheses for members of low-status groups.

**Table 1.** SIMSA explanations in lay terms from the perspective of members of low-status groups.

No.	SIMSA Explanation	Reason for Supporting the System
1	Social reality constraints	We don't "support" the system, but we do want to acknowledge it (and the intergroup status hierarchy therein) as a fact of social reality.
2	The ingroup's reputation	We don't want to be seen as being resentful in the system.
3	Downward comparison with a lower status outgroup	The system allows us to compare ourselves with lower status groups.
4	Downward comparison on a compensatory dimension	We compare favourably with the outgroup on a different dimension in the system.
5	Cognitive dissonance reduction	Our support for important systems reduces the uncomfortable feeling that we have about identifying with our low status group.
6	Hope for future ingroup status	A fair and just system may one day allow us to improve our ingroup's status
7	Superordinate ingroup bias	The system comprises a valued ingroup
8	Ingroup norm conformity	Our group members usually support the system



**Table 2.** Contrasting SJT and SIMSA predictions for members of low-status groups.

No.	Explanation Name	Predicted Association between Subordinate Identification and System Justification		Predicted Association between Superordinate Identification and System Justification	
		SJT	SIMSA	SJT	SIMSA
1	Social reality constraints	Negative	Negative	-	Positive
2	The ingroup's reputation	Negative	Positive	-	-
3	Downward comparison with a lower status outgroup	Negative	Positive	-	-
4	Downward comparison on a compensatory dimension	Negative	Positive	-	-
5	Cognitive dissonance reduction	Negative	Positive	-	-
6	Hope for future ingroup status	Negative	Positive	-	-
7	Superordinate ingroup bias	Negative	-	-	Positive
8	Ingroup norm conformity	Negative	Positive	-	Positive

Note. “-” indicates that the theory does not make a prediction.

### ***SIMSA explanations of system justification by members of low status groups***

SIMSA poses a new challenge for SJT researchers: In order to claim that the needs for social accuracy or a positively distinct social identity are *not* responsible for system justification by low-status groups, researchers first need to rule out the potential operation of each of the eight SIMSA explanations. Only then, we argue, are researchers warranted in claiming that an additional independent system justification motive may explain the system justification effect. In future work, we recommend that SJT researchers measure participants' concerns about social accuracy as well as their subordinate and superordinate ingroup identification in order to demonstrate that the accuracy and group motives are not positively associated with system justification among members of low-status groups.

It is important to note that SIMSA focuses on system justification by members of low-status groups because SJT theorists have argued that SIT is unable to fully account for this phenomenon and that it is therefore necessary to invoke a separate system justification motive (e.g., Jost & Banaji, 1994; Jost et al., 2004, 2003). However, several of SIMSA's system justification routes may also apply to members of high-status groups. In particular, members of high-status groups may favour the intergroup status hierarchy not only because it supports their social identity by facilitating downward social comparisons with the low-status outgroup, but also because (a) it forms part of their social reality, (b) it may allow them to consolidate or even improve their ingroup status further in the future, (c) the system represents a superordinate ingroup, and/or (d) for normative reasons.

Our review highlights areas where the evidence for SIMSA is relatively strong and areas where further evidence is required. We noted that a substantial amount of evidence is consistent with SIMSA's social reality hypothesis (e.g., Degner et al., 2021; Ellemers et al., 1997; Iacoviello & Lorenzi-Cioldi, 2018; Rubin, 2012; Spears & Manstead, 1989; for reviews, see, Bettencourt et al., 2001; Mullen et al., 1992; Spears et al., 2001). However, researchers need to provide evidence that concerns about social accuracy underpin the acknowledgement of social reality.

There is also substantial evidence for SIMSA's superordinate ingroup bias hypothesis. In particular, there is evidence of a positive association between national identification and national system justification (Chan, 2019; Feygina et al., 2010, Study 2; Gustavsson & Stendahl, 2020; Moscato et al., 2020; Vargas-Salfate & Ayala, 2020; Vargas-Salfate et al., 2018, Table 2), including among members of low-status groups (Akdoğan & Alparslan, 2020; Jaško & Kossowska, 2013; Shayo, 2009), and superordinate identification appears to account for the palliative effects of system justification (Bahamondes et al., 2020, 2019; Khan et al., 2020; Suppes et al., 2019, Study 1).

There is also substantial evidence for the basic assumptions of the compensatory dimension hypothesis (Cambon et al., 2015; Ellemers et al., 1997; Jost & Kay, 2005; Kay & Jost, 2003; Oldmeadow & Fiske, 2010; for reviews, see, Hinkle & Brown, 1990; Hinkle et al., 1998). However, the critical test here is to show that the predicted positive association between subordinate ingroup identification and system justification is explained by downward comparisons with the outgroup on the compensatory comparison dimension.

There is a moderate amount of evidence for the ingroup reputation hypothesis (Owuamalam et al., 2016a, Study 1; Owuamalam et al., 2017, Studies 1a & 1b) and the hope for ingroup status hypothesis (Bonetti et al., 2021; Caricati & Sollami, 2017; Carvalho et al., 2021; Owuamalam et al., 2021, 2016a, Study 2; Sollami & Caricati, 2018, Table 2). However, there is less evidence for the lower status outgroup hypothesis (Caricati & Sollami, 2018) and the cognitive dissonance hypothesis (Owuamalam & Spears, 2020). Finally, although there is evidence that ingroup norms may lead to a reduction in discrimination (Crandall et al., 2002; Jetten et al., 1996, 1997), there is currently no evidence that this effect operates among members of low-status groups to result in system justification.

In their seminal article, Jost and Banaji (1994) proposed a system justification motive because SIT did not seem to fully account for outgroup favouritism and other ostensibly system justifying attitudes and behaviours. Over 25 years later, social identity researchers continue to question whether a separate system motive is necessary in order to explain system justification effects (Owuamalam et al., 2019a, 2019b). We cannot provide a definitive answer to

this question here. However, we hope that we have demonstrated via SIMSA that the principles of SIT can be used to account for system justification.

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