



Reports

The role of system-justification motivation, group status and system threat in directing support for hate crimes legislation

Robyn K. Mallett^{a,*}, Jeffrey R. Huntsinger^a, Janet K. Swim^b^a Loyola University Chicago, Department of Psychology, 1032 W. Sheridan Rd., Chicago, IL 60660–5385, USA^b The Pennsylvania State University, Department of Psychology, 515 Moore Building, University Park, PA 16802–3106, USA

ARTICLE INFO

Article history:

Received 11 August 2010

Revised 15 October 2010

Available online 21 October 2010

Keywords:

System-justification

Hate crimes

Group status

System threat

Race

Status quo

ABSTRACT

We examine factors that explain variability in attitudes toward hate crimes legislation. We find that one's posture toward the current social system directs the conditions under which characteristics of hate crimes exert the most influence. System-justification motivation is negatively related to support for hate crimes legislation (Studies 1–3). This relation is partially mediated by perceptions of harm from hate crimes. Specifically, when hate crimes target low-status groups, system-justification motivation is negatively related to perceived harm and support for hate crimes legislation. Attitudes are unaffected when high-status groups are targeted. The status of the group targeted, perceptions of hate crimes as representative of the status quo, and temporarily enhanced feelings of system threat moderate this relation (Studies 2–4).

© 2010 Published by Elsevier Inc.

On a June night in 1998, three men used a logging chain to tie another man to the back of their truck. They dragged him for three miles before he died. This man, James Byrd, was killed because he was Black. Eleven years later, hate crimes continue to target people based on characteristics such as race, ethnicity, sexual orientation, religion, gender and ability (Herek, Cogan, & Gillis, 2002). Finn and McNeil (1987) define hate crimes as, “words or actions intended to harm or intimidate an individual because of her or his membership in a minority group; they include violent assaults, murder, rape, and property crimes motivated by prejudice, as well as threats of violence or other acts of intimidation.” Events like the murder of James Byrd sparked a debate about whether laws should specifically address harmful acts based on actual or perceived group membership. In 2009, after a decade of debate, President Obama signed into law the Matthew Shepard and James Byrd, Jr. Hate Crimes Prevention Act. Passage of this act expanded the number of groups protected under law and increased funding and resources to monitor and address hate crimes. The length of time that it took to pass the bill reflects the controversy surrounding hate crimes legislation.

Past research examining attitudes toward hate crimes legislation has centered on several straightforward factors including group membership, prejudice, and features of the hate crime itself. Not surprisingly, members of low-status groups, such as African-American

icans, perceive more harm from hate crimes and are more supportive of hate crimes legislation than members of high-status groups (Craig & Waldo, 1996). In addition, people who report greater prejudice against groups targeted by a hate crime perceive less harm from such crimes and see little need for hate crimes legislation (Cowan, Heiple, Marquez, Khatchadourian, & McNevin, 2005). The nature of the hate crime itself also shapes reactions. People are more likely to blame the offender, as opposed to the victim, for the crime if the offender is from a high-status group (Lyons, 2006). The offender's group membership has a similar effect on sentencing such that high-status group offenders are given harsher sentences by mock juries than offenders from low-status groups (Marcus-Newhall, Blake, & Baumann, 2002). These factors are important predictors of reactions to hate crimes and attitudes toward hate crimes legislation. We suspect, however, that a key factor explaining variation in such reactions is differences in the motivation to maintain the current social system.

System-justification motivation and hate crimes

Many factors, including prejudice, motivate hate crimes (Green, McFalls, & Smith, 2001). Regardless of the motivation, a system-level impact of hate crimes is largely the same—they protect the current social, economic and political system against real or imagined threats (Sidanius & Pratto, 1999). It is well established that increases in intergroup violence, in particular hate crimes against minority groups, often accompany periods of political, economic or social change (Gerstenfeld, 2002). Hate crimes preserve the threatened status quo

* Corresponding author.

E-mail address: rmallett@luc.edu (R.K. Mallett).

via their indirect influence on the targeted group. Specifically, hate crimes strike terror in the targeted community. This terror reduces the target group's willingness to campaign for social, economic, or political change (Herek et al., 2002). Enacting legislation to address this type of intergroup violence is one method for undoing the harm of hate crimes and changing the status quo.

Given this link between hate crimes and defense of the status quo, individual differences in the motivation to maintain the status quo may direct support for hate crimes legislation (Kay et al., 2009). The greater the motivation to justify the current social system, the less a person should support hate crimes legislation that is designed to change that system. For many people the status quo is appealing and, consequently, they are motivated to maintain it, even when examples of injustice are common and when doing so works against self and group interests (Jost & Banaji, 1994). Though this is a general tendency, there is of course variation across individuals in their support for the current social system. Individual differences in a belief in a just world and opposition to equality, for example, are useful proxies for the degree to which people are motivated to uphold the current system (Jost & Hunyady, 2005).

We suspect that perceptions of the psychological and physical harm caused by hate crimes are biased by one's motivation to justify existing social arrangements; perceiving little harm from hate crimes signals there is no need for policies to address hate crimes. We predict that people who are motivated to justify the system will perceive hate crimes as less harmful than those not so motivated and these different perceptions of harm will then influence policy attitudes. Support for these predictions comes from research revealing that people are adept at justifying the social system in which they reside (Jost & Banaji, 1994; Lerner, 1980). People regularly deploy complementary stereotypes (poor but happy; rich but unhappy) that reduce the apparent discrepancy between egalitarian ideals and objective realities (Kay et al., 2007). In addition people frequently recruit beliefs in meritocracy and the Protestant work ethic to justify opposition to social, economic, and legal policies designed to reduce social inequalities (Jost, Banaji & Nosek, 2004; Sidanius & Pratto, 1999). More directly supporting this idea is research showing that people motivated to justify the current social system feel less morally outraged and guilty when confronted by instances of ongoing inequality in society (Wakslak, Jost, Tyler, & Chen, 2007).

We further suspect that the link between system-justification motivation, perceptions of harm from hate crimes, and support for hate crimes legislation may depend on whether members of low- or high-status group are targeted. Although members of low-status groups, such as African-Americans, are much more frequently targeted by hate crimes than members of high-status groups, such as White-Americans (Herek et al., 2002), there are cases in which high-status group members are the target of a hate crime. According to United States Federal Bureau of Investigation, approximately 9 percent of reported hate crimes in 2008 targeted White-Americans (http://www.fbi.gov/ucr/hc2008/data/table_01.html). Some of these crimes, which included vandalism, intimidation, and assault, were retaliatory acts committed after incidents of violence against African-Americans (Lickel, Miller, Stenstrom, Denson, & Schmader, 2006).

Despite the fact that hate crimes against low- and high-status groups both involve acts of intergroup violence, such attacks have different implications for the maintenance of the existing social, economic and political system. Attacks against low-status groups maintain the current system. Attacks against high-status groups, by contrast, disturb, or in extreme cases overturn, the current system (Sidanius & Pratto, 1999). Given these different implications for maintaining the status quo, the status of the group targeted by a hate crime should moderate the relation between system-justification motivation and attitudes toward hate crimes legislation. When hate crimes target low-status group members, system-justification motivation should be negatively related to support for hate crimes

legislation. When hate crimes target high-status group members, however, system-justification motivation should be positively related to support for hate crimes legislation. We expect a similar association between justification beliefs and perceived harm, moderated by the status of the targeted group, and that differences in perceived harm should then shape attitudes toward hate crime policies.

Finally, research shows that momentarily evoked feelings of system threat boost system-justification tendencies whereas feelings of system stability lessen such tendencies (Jost et al., 2007). For example, participants exposed to a passage that pointed out the flaws in the United States, as opposed to those who read a passage that praised the United States, displayed enhanced system-justification tendencies (Kay, Jost, & Young, 2005). Other manipulations of real or symbolic threats to the system have yielded similar effects on system-justifying tendencies (Jost et al., 2007). Thus we predict that feelings of system threat, as opposed to feelings of system stability, should strengthen the relation between system-justification motivation and attitudes toward hate crime legislation particularly for those individuals who are strongly motivated to maintain the status quo.

Overview of studies

We explore the influence of one's motivation to justify the social system on attitudes toward hate crimes legislation. First, we test whether system-justification motivation relates to support for social policies designed to ameliorate the consequences of hate crimes (Studies 1–4). Second, we test whether this relation is mediated by perceptions of harm to the targeted group—that is, whether people high in system-justification motivation perceive less harm to targets than those low in this motivation, which then shapes their policy attitudes (Studies 2–3). Third, we test whether this relation depends on the status of the group targeted by the hate crime (Study 2) and both perceptions of the status quo (Study 3) and temporarily evoked feelings of system threat (Study 4).

Study 1

Participants read about actual hate crimes directed at African-American students on their predominately White college campus and evaluated the University's plan to address these incidents. This plan included significant policy changes and the creation of an African-American student center on campus. We predicted that participants' degree of system-justification motivation would be negatively related to support for the aforementioned plan.

Method

Participants

Two-hundred sixty-six students (152 women, 114 men, 266 White, 28 Black) at a university in Pennsylvania participated for course credit or as part of an unrelated study for which they were paid \$20. There were no differences between White and Black respondents in any of the studies.

Procedure

Because these were actual hate crimes, to be eligible for the study participants must have been on campus when the hate crimes occurred. Participants read a description of several hate crimes perpetrated against African-American students. For example, approximately 100 African-American students received threatening racist emails, several students, parents of athletes and one member of the Board of Trustees received threatening racist letters, and the president of the Black Caucus received a death threat. Participants then completed the system-justification measure, the policy support measure, and demographic items.

Materials

All responses used a scale from 1 *strongly disagree* to 7 *strongly agree*.

System-justification motivation. Past research has demonstrated that the opposition to equality subscale of the Social Dominance Orientation scale (e.g., “It would be good if groups could be equal” reverse-scored) is a reliable and valid measure of system-justifying beliefs (Jost & Thompson, 2000; Pratto, Sidanius, Stallworth, & Malle, 1994; Wakslak et al., 2007). We averaged the eight items with higher scores indicating greater motivation to justify the system ($\alpha = .89$).

Attitudes toward hate crimes policy. Participants read and evaluated the University’s planned response. Policy attitudes were assessed via two questions: “I am in favor of implementing the plan as a whole” and “I think the money being spent on this plan could be better spent on other University issues.” The items were negatively correlated ($r = -.79, p < .001$). We averaged the items after reverse-coding the second item, with higher numbers indicating greater support.¹

Results and discussion

To examine whether system-justification motivation was related to policy support we simultaneously regressed the measure of system-justification motivation (centered) on the measure of policy support. Consistent with predictions, system-justification motivation was negatively related to support for the University’s policy, $b = -.99 (.09), t(264) = -11.13, p < .001$.

Study 2

Study 1 provided initial evidence for a link between system-justification motivation and attitudes toward policies designed address hate crimes. To explore this relation more fully and to examine a potential mediator, we conducted a second study in which we manipulated whether the hate crimes targeted a low- or high-status group. Participants read about hate crimes that targeted either Blacks or Whites (low- or high-status group). The hate crimes described actually occurred, but targeted Black students.

The target of a hate crime has implications for the status quo. Hate crimes that target low-status groups protect or maintain the status quo whereas hate crimes that target high-status groups threaten to overturn the status quo. This assertion has not yet been empirically tested, but if it is correct then the relation between system-justification motivation and support for hate crime legislation should depend on the target. That is, system-justification motivation should be negatively related to support for policies designed to address hate crimes against low-status groups. By contrast, when high-status groups are the target, then system-justification motivation should be positively related to policy support.

Study 2 also examines a possible mediator of the relation between system-justification motivation and support for hate crimes legislation. People who are motivated to justify the system respond to markers of ongoing social and economic inequality by rationalizing this inequality (Napier & Jost, 2008) and minimizing the harm from ongoing inequality (Wakslak et al., 2007). Thus we expected people’s motivation to justify the system would dictate the amount of harm they perceive from hate crimes, which would then be used to justify their attitudes toward hate crimes legislation. In other words, perceptions of harm should mediate the relation between system-justification motivation and attitudes toward hate crimes legislation.

¹ Support for each of the six parts of the plan yielded identical results. For the sake of simplicity, we report attitudes toward the entire plan.

Method

Participants

Eighty-two students (58 women, 24 men, 82 White, 24 Black) at a university in Virginia participated for course credit.

Procedure

Participants were told the study concerned perceptions of incidents that recently occurred on campus. They were given a written summary of five hate crimes that actually occurred on campus the previous semester. For example, a student was verbally assaulted on the way to class, racial slurs were written on apartment doors, and a student was mugged as the attackers shouted racial slurs. We randomly assigned participants to learn that the target of the hate crimes was Black or White. Participants wrote about their reactions to the events, completed the measure of system-justification motivation, the measure of perceived harm, and indicated their support for hate crimes legislation.

Materials

System-justification motivation. We used the same measure as in Study 1 ($\alpha = .73$).²

Perceived harm. Eight questions assessed perceived harm from the hate crimes (e.g., “The targeted students at the University feel less comfortable on campus,” “These incidents made the targeted students fearful for their personal safety on campus,” “Incidents like these are not fair to the targeted students.” Responses ranged from 1 *strongly disagree* to 7 *strongly agree*. These items were averaged to form the measure of perceived harm ($\alpha = .86$).

Attitudes toward hate crimes legislation. Participants used a scale from 1 *not at all* to 7 *very much* to answer the item, “How much are you in favor of hate crimes legislation that increases penalties for crimes motivated by a victim’s group membership?”

Results

All analyses were conducted via regression. The model included the measure of system-justification motivation (centered), target race (1 = Black, -1 = White), and the interaction product. Significant interactions were probed via creation of simple slopes as outlined by Cohen, Cohen, Aiken, and West (2002).

Attitudes toward hate crimes legislation

A main effect of system-justification motivation, $b = -.26 (.11), t(78) = 2.25, p < .05$ was qualified by an interaction between system-justification motivation and target race, $b = .46 (.11), t(78) = 4.06, p < .001$. Replicating the results of Study 1, when the target of the hate crime belonged to a low-status group (Blacks), system-justification motivation was negatively associated with support for hate crimes legislation, $b = -.72 (.16), t(78) = -4.55, p < .001$ (Fig. 1A). When the target belonged to a high-status group (Whites), by contrast, system-justification motivation was unrelated to support for hate crimes legislation, $b = .21 (.16), t(78) = 1.26, p = .21$.

Perceived harm

A main effect of the target of the hate crime, $b = -.69 (.08), t(78) = -8.16, p < .001$, was qualified by an interaction between system-justification motivation and target group status, $b = .32 (.09), t(78) = 3.72, p < .001$. As predicted, when the target belonged to a low-status group (Black), system-justification motivation was negatively

² There were no effects of condition on opposition to inequality in Studies 2 or 3, $t_s < -.20$.

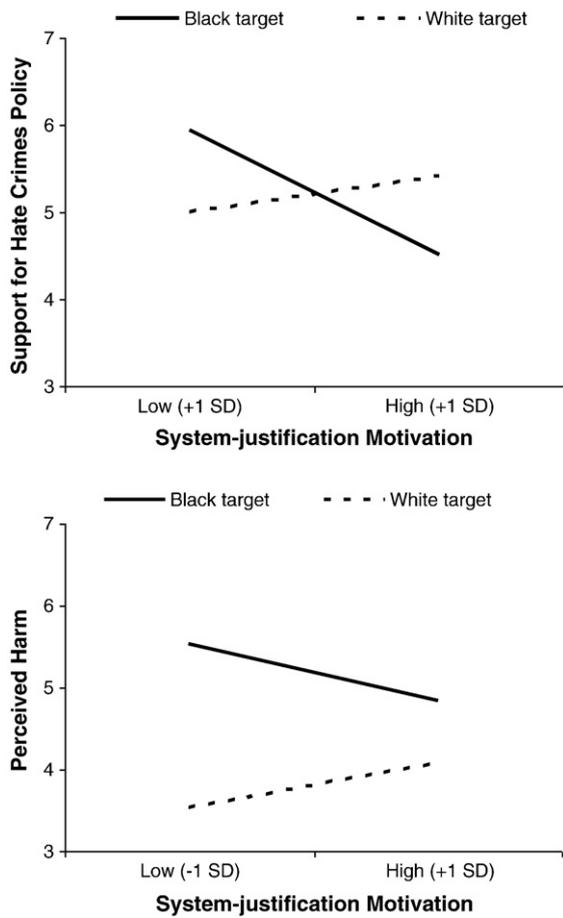


Fig. 1. A (top) and B (bottom). The interaction between policy attitudes and perceived harm as a function of system-justification motivation and targeted group (Study 2).

associated with perceptions of harm, $b = -.36$ (.12), $t(78) = -3.04$, $p < .01$ (Fig. 1B). When the target belonged to a high-status group (White), by contrast, system-justification motivation was positively associated with perceptions of harm, $b = .27$ (.12), $t(78) = 2.23$, $p = .03$.

Mediation analysis

We tested whether perceptions of harm are biased by one's motivation to justify existing social arrangements, and this in turn influences support for hate crimes legislation.³ Because this represents a case of mediated moderation, we followed guidelines outlined by Muller, Judd, and Yzerbyt (2005). The basic regression model includes the following predictors: system-justification motivation, target group and their interaction. Mediated moderation is demonstrated in three steps. The first two steps have been met above. Specifically, the system-justification by target group interaction predicted policy support, the dependent variable (step 1), and perceived harm, the mediator (step 2). In step 3, the same model is run with the addition of perceived harm, the mediator, and its interaction with target group as predictors of policy support. Mediated moderation is observed when the mediator (perceived

harm) significantly predicts the dependent variable (policy support) and the interaction term no longer significantly predicts the dependent variable.

Consistent with mediated moderation, in step 3, perceived harm, the mediator, was significantly associated with policy support, the dependent variable, $b = .36$ (.15), $t(78) = 2.35$, $p < .05$, and the ability of the system-justification motivation by target group interaction to predict policy support was reduced, $b = .35$ (.12), $t(78) = 2.89$, $p < .01$. A Sobel test confirmed the indirect effect of perceived harm on policy support was significant ($z = 1.99$, $p < .05$).

Discussion

The relation between system-justification motivation and support for hate crimes legislation depends on the status of the target group. Conceptually replicating the results of Study 1, when a low-status group was targeted, in this case African-Americans, system-justification motivation was negatively associated with support for hate crimes legislation. When a high-status group was targeted, by contrast, system-justification motivation was positively associated with support for such legislation, although the latter effect was not statistically significant. A similar pattern was found for perceptions of harm from hate crimes. Moreover, mediated moderation analyses confirmed that perceptions of harm were employed to justify opposition to or support for hate crimes legislation.

Study 3

The previous studies revealed that system-justification motivation was reliably associated with attitudes toward hate crimes policies and that this relation was moderated by the status of the group targeted by the hate crime and mediated by perceived harm. In Study 3, we test whether perceptions of the status quo regarding hate crimes similarly moderate the relation between system-justification motivation and attitudes toward hate crimes legislation. System-justification motivation increases support for the status quo (Kay et al., 2009). According to Kay et al. (2009) injunctification hypothesis, we expect that system-justification motivation will be an especially strong predictor of opposition to hate crimes legislation when people are informed that hate crimes are common and thus more representative of "the way things should be" than when people are informed that hate crimes are rare. If hate crimes represent the status quo then people who are high in system-justification motivation should not support policies that would alter the status quo. We manipulated perceptions of the status quo regarding hate crimes by presenting participants with evidence that hate crimes are common or rare in the United States.

Method

Participants

One hundred and thirty-one Whites (91 females, 40 males) at a university in Illinois participated for course credit.

Procedure

Participants were told the study concerned perceptions of incidents that occur on college campuses. Participants were told they would read one of several articles on topics from a national survey of campus climate. We randomly assigned participants to learn either that hate crimes were common or rare. This manipulation was loosely modeled after past research that manipulated perceptions of the status quo (Kay et al., 2009). In the "hate crimes are common" article, participants read that hate crimes against minorities occur on 80% of college campuses and are increasing on their campus. In the "hate crimes are rare" article, participants read that hate crimes against minorities were occurred on 8% of college campuses and are

³ We also tested a model where support for hate crimes legislation mediated the relation between system-justification motivation and perceived harm. This alternative model provided a poorer fit to the data and the Sobel test for an indirect effect was not significant in Study 3.

decreasing on their campus.⁴ Next, participants completed measures of system-justification motivation, perceived harm, and support for hate crimes legislation.

Materials

We used the same measure of system-justification motivation as in Studies 1 and 2 ($\alpha = .84$), and the same measures of perceived harm ($\alpha = .76$) and policy support as in Study 2. To test the efficacy of the status quo manipulation, participants were asked “How common are hate crimes on U.S. college campuses?” (1 = not at all common, 7 = very common).

Results

All analyses were conducted via regression. The model included the measure of system-justification motivation (centered), status quo (1 = common, -1 = rare), and their interaction. Significant interactions were probed via creation of simple slopes (Cohen et al., 2002).

Manipulation check

The manipulation of status quo was successful, $t(127) = 3.15$, $p = .002$. Participants perceived hate crimes as more common in the common condition ($M = 5.11$, $SD = 1.54$) than the rare condition ($M = 4.25$, $SD = 1.51$).

Hate crimes legislation

The main effect of system-justification, $b = -.50$ (.13), $t(127) = -3.97$, $p < .001$ was qualified by a marginally significant interaction between system-justification motivation and the status quo manipulation, $b = -.24$ (.13), $t(127) = -1.89$, $p = .06$. As expected, when hate crimes were common, system-justification motivation was negatively associated with support for hate crimes legislation, $b = -.74$ (.19), $t(127) = -3.85$, $p < .001$ (Fig. 2A). That is, when hate crimes were portrayed as common, those who believe the system is just did not support policies that would change the status quo whereas those who were low in system-justification supported the policy. When hate crimes were portrayed as rare, system-justification motivation was unrelated to support for hate crimes legislation, $b = -.26$ (.16), $t(127) = -1.61$, $p = .11$.

Perceived harm

A marginally significant main effect of system-justification motivation, $b = -.13$ (.07), $t(127) = -1.80$, $p = .07$, was qualified by the predicted interaction between system-justification motivation and status quo manipulation, $b = -.19$ (.07), $t(127) = 2.73$, $p < .01$. When hate crimes were common, system-justification motivation was negatively associated with perceived harm, $b = -.32$ (.11), $t(127) = -2.98$, $p < .005$ (Fig. 2B). The more that hate crimes were seen as representative of the status quo, the less they were perceived as harmful to their targets. This adds to the research of Kay et al. (2009) by showing that legitimizing myths regarding the harm of hate crimes can be used as support for justification of the status quo. When hate crimes were rare, system-justification motivation was unassociated with perceived harm, $b = .07$ (.09), $t(127) = .72$, ns .

Mediation analysis

Following the same analytic strategy as in Study 2, we tested for mediated moderation. Again steps 1 and 2 were met in the above analyses. In step 3, consistent with mediated moderation, perceived harm was significantly associated with policy support, $b = .44$ (.12), $t(125) = 3.57$, $p < .005$, and the system-justification motivation by status quo interaction no longer significantly predicted policy support,

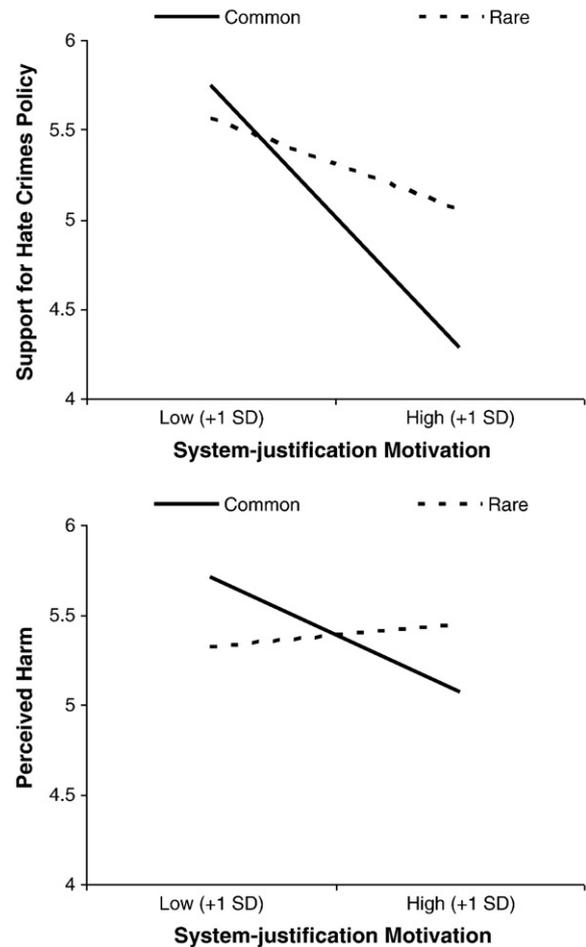


Fig. 2. A (top) and B (bottom). The interaction between policy attitudes and perceived harm as a function of system-justification motivation and the commonality of hate crimes (Study 3).

$b = -.14$ (.13), $t(125) = 1.10$, ns . A Sobel test confirmed the indirect effect of perceived harm on policy support was significant ($z = -2.18$, $p = .03$).

Study 4

Our final study addresses four limitations. First, we rule out the possibility that system-justification motivation was affected by exposure to information about hate crimes by collecting the individual difference measure before the manipulation. Second, we replicate the effects with a second operationalization of system-justification motivation. Third, we replicate the effects with a manipulation of system threat. Fourth, we test support for additional types of hate crimes legislation including additional penalties, providing compensation to targets, and mandatory diversity education.

Chronic or temporary feelings of system threat and instability affect a variety of outcomes, including attitudes toward redistributive social policies, the use of complementary stereotypes, and feelings of moral outrage and existential guilt after thinking about ongoing inequalities (Jost et al., 2007). For example, when the legitimacy of the social system is threatened, people rely more heavily on stereotypes to justify existing social inequality (Jost & Hunyady, 2002). Unlike past research that has manipulated system threat, we also include a measure of system-justification motivation which we expect to interact with the manipulation of system threat. Specifically, we

⁴ We also varied the severity of the hate crimes. As intended, verbal hate crimes were perceived as less harmful than physical hate crimes. This manipulation, however, did not moderate any of the analyses. The stimulus articles are available upon request.

anticipate that the system threat manipulation will have a bigger impact on, and be more motivationally relevant to, the attitudes of individuals who have chronically high concerns about protecting the status quo. Individuals who are less motivated to justify the system should be less affected by the threat manipulation. This prediction is derived not from the system-justification literature per se but rather from the larger body of research on motivation in which system justification is situated. As that literature shows, motivationally-relevant threats have a greater impact on those individuals who possess the motivation that is under threat (Gollwitzer & Moskowitz, 1996). Accordingly, we predict that feelings of system threat will augment (and feelings of system stability will weaken) the relation between system-justification motivation and policy attitudes.

Participants

Ninety-four students (19 male, 69 female, 6 unknown, 65 White, 29 Black) at a university in Illinois participated for course credit.

Procedure and materials

Participants completed an eight-item measure of system-justification motivation (Kay & Jost, 2003). Items including, “Everyone has a fair shot at wealth and happiness” were measured on a scale from 1 *strongly disagree* to 7 *strongly agree* ($\alpha = .77$). Approximately two weeks later, participants completed a second survey that included a manipulation of system threat based on past research (Jost, Kivetz, & Rubini, 2005). The high threat manipulation included statements such as, “These days, many people in the United States feel disappointed with the nation’s condition. Many citizens feel that the country has reached a low point in terms of social, economic, and political factors. People do not feel as safe and secure as they used to...” The low threat manipulation included statements such as, “These days, despite the difficulties the nation is facing, many people in the United States feel safer and more secure relative to the past. Many citizens feel that the country is relatively stable in terms of social, economic, and political factors...”

Finally, participants evaluated three policies: I would support a mandatory diversity education program for all incoming first year students, How much are you in favor of hate crimes legislation that... increases penalties for crimes motivated by a victim’s group membership? ...provides compensation for the victims? ($\alpha = .74$).

Results and discussion

Analyses were conducted via regression. The model included the measure of system-justification motivation (centered), system threat (1 = high, -1 = low) and their interaction.

Although there was no effect for system threat, there was a marginal main effect of system-justification motivation in the same direction as Studies 1–3, $b = -.24$ (.12), $t(94) = -1.91$, $p = .06$. The predicted interaction between system-justification motivation and system threat was significant, $b = -.26$ (.12), $t(94) = -2.05$, $p < .05$ (see Fig. 3). As in the previous studies, when system threat was high, system-justification motivation was negatively associated with support for hate crimes legislation, $b = -.49$ (.18), $t(94) = -2.78$, $p < .007$. When system threat was low, system-justification motivation was not associated with support for hate crimes legislation, $b = .02$ (.17), $t(94) = .10$, *ns*.

Thus we found the same pattern of effects with a different measure of system-justification motivation that was collected weeks before the manipulation. Support for hate crimes legislation was lowest when participants were under system threat and thus motivated to justify the system. Moreover we found the same pattern of results for three types of hate crimes policies, suggesting this effect could generalize to a variety of efforts.

General discussion

Although everyone was aware of the same facts surrounding James Byrd’s murder, there was significant variation in how people reacted to the event and variation in support for hate crimes legislation drafted in response to his murder. We show that system-justification motivation may explain these different reactions. Because hate crimes that target low-status groups are a way to keep such groups “in their place” (Sidanius & Pratto, 1999), people who are motivated to maintain the current social system, as opposed to those not so motivated, perceived little harm from hate crimes (Study 2) and, as a result, opposed policies designed to address hate crimes (Studies 1 and 2). By contrast, when hate crimes target high-status groups, people motivated to maintain the current social system perceived more harm, but their support for hate crimes legislation was unaffected (Study 2). When considering hate crimes directed at low-status groups the relation between system-justification and support for hate crimes legislation is enhanced when hate crimes are portrayed as representative of the status quo and when feelings of system threat are evoked (Studies 3 and 4).

The present research is the first to identify the important connection between system-justification motivation and attitudes toward hate crimes legislation and the role played by perceived harm in rationalizing support for or opposition to such legislation. We show that the exact same act of intergroup violence is perceived and responded to in a different manner when it has negative implications for those in power. When a hate crime targets a high-status group, those who are high in system-justification motivation perceive it as more harmful than when the same hate crime targets a low-status group member. Moreover the present research is the first to show the effects of portraying hate crimes as representative of the status quo (Study 3). For those who are high in system-justification motivation, perceiving hate crimes as representative of “the way things should be” is related to perceiving the same event as less harmful than if hate crimes are portrayed as rare.

Although we considered only target race, future research should examine the effect of varying perpetrator race. Hate crimes perpetrated by high-status group members are overwhelmingly more common than those perpetrated by low-status group members. Given this discrepancy in frequency, the status of the target should be more relevant to support for hate crimes legislation—at least when one is considering the motivation to maintain the status quo. Attitudes toward hate crimes legislation would not obviously relate to maintaining the status quo if two low-status groups were involved (e.g., a Mexican-American perpetrator and an African-American target).

Hate crimes are a unique form of intergroup violence because their injury extends beyond the original target, causing a ripple effect of

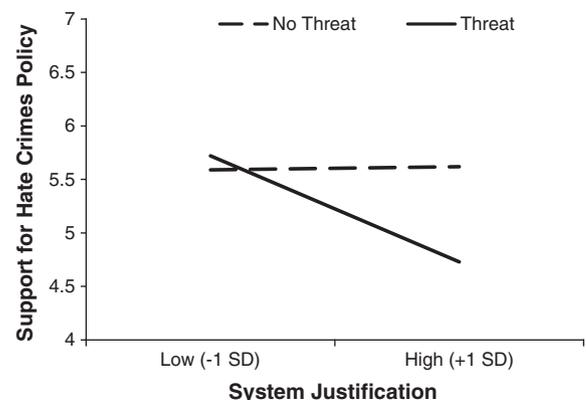


Fig. 3. The interaction between system-justification motivation and system threat on support for hate crimes legislation (Study 4).

harm throughout the entire community. Past research has uncovered several important predictors of people's support for or opposition to policies that seek to ameliorate the harm from this type of intergroup violence. The present research reveals that knowing people's preference for maintaining or attenuating the status quo tells us much about how people perceive such crimes, and their perceptions determine their attitudes toward hate crimes legislation.

References

- Cohen, J., Cohen, P., Aiken, L. S., & West, S. G. (2002). *Applied multiple regression—correlation analysis for the behavioral sciences* (3rd ed.). Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum.
- Cowan, G., Heiple, B., Marquez, C., Khatchadourian, D., & McNevin, M. (2005). Heterosexuals' attitudes toward hate crimes and hate speech against gays and lesbians: Old-fashioned and modern heterosexism. *Journal of Homosexuality, 49*, 67–82.
- Craig, K. M., & Waldo, C. R. (1996). So, what's a hate crime anyway? Young adults' perceptions of hate crimes, victims, and perpetrators. *Law and Human Behavior, 20*, 113–129.
- Finn, P., & McNeil, T. (1987). The response of the criminal justice system to bias crime: an exploratory review. *Contract Report submitted to the National Institute of Justice, U.S. Department of Justice* October 7, (Available from Abt Associates, Inc., 55 Wheeler St., Cambridge, MA 02138-1168).
- Gollwitzer, P. M., & Moskowitz, G. B. (1996). Goal effects on action and cognition. In E. T. Higgins, & A. Kruglanski (Eds.), *Social Psychology: Handbook of Basic Principles* (pp. 361–399). New York: Guilford.
- Green, D. P., McFalls, L. H., & Smith, J. K. (2001). Hate crime: an emergent research agenda. *Annual Review of Sociology, 27*, 479–504.
- Gerstenfeld, P. (2002). A time to hate: situational antecedents of intergroup bias. *Analysis of Social Issues and Public Policy, 2*, 61–67.
- Herek, G. M., Cogan, J. C., & Gillis, J. R. (2002). Victim experiences in hate crimes based on sexual orientation. *Journal of Social Issues, 58*, 319–339.
- Jost, J. T., & Banaji, M. R. (1994). The role of stereotyping in system-justification and the production of false consciousness. *British Journal of Social Psychology, 33*, 1–27.
- Jost, J. T., & Hunyady, O. (2002). The psychology of system justification and the palliative function of ideology. *European Review of Social Psychology, 13*, 111–153.
- Jost, J. T., Banaji, M. R., & Nosek, B. A. (2004). A decade of system justification theory: accumulated evidence of conscious and unconscious bolstering of the status quo. *Political Psychology, 25*, 881–919.
- Jost, J. T., & Hunyady, O. (2005). Antecedents and consequences of system-justifying ideologies. *Current Directions in Psychological Science, 14*, 260–265.
- Jost, J. T., Kivetz, Y., & Rubini, M. (2005). System-justifying functions of complementary regional and ethnic stereotypes: cross-national evidence. *Social Justice Research, 18*, 305–333.
- Jost, J. T., Napier, J. L., Thorisdottir, H., Gosling, S. D., Palfai, T. P., & Ostafin, B. (2007). Are needs to manage uncertainty and threat associated with political conservatism or ideological extremity? *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin, 33*, 989–1007.
- Jost, J. T., & Thompson, E. P. (2000). Group-based dominance and opposition to equality as independent predictors of self-esteem, ethnocentrism, and social policy attitudes among African Americans and European Americans. *Journal of Experimental Social Psychology, 36*, 209–232.
- Kay, A. C., Gaucher, D., Peach, J. M., Laurin, K., Friesen, J., Zanna, M. P., & Spencer, S. J. (2009). Inequality, discrimination, and the power of the status quo: direct evidence for a motivation to see the way things are as the way they should be. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 97*, 421–434.
- Kay, A. C., & Jost, J. T. (2003). Complementary justice: effects of “Poor but Happy” and “Poor but Honest” stereotype exemplars on system justification and implicit activation of the justice motive. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 85*, 823–837.
- Kay, A. C., Jost, J. T., Mandisodza, A. N., Sherman, S. J., Petrocelli, J. V., & Johnson, A. L. (2007). Panglossian ideology in the service of system-justification: how complementary stereotypes help us to rationalize inequality. In M. Zanna (Ed.), *Advances in Experimental Social Psychology, Vol. 39*. (pp. 305–358) San Diego, CA: Elsevier.
- Kay, A. C., Jost, J. T., & Young, S. (2005). Victim derogation and victim enhancement as alternate routes to system justification. *Psychological Science, 16*, 240–246.
- Lerner, M. J. (1980). *The Belief in a Just World: A Fundamental Delusion*. New York: Plenum Press.
- Lickel, B., Miller, N., Stenstrom, D. M., Denson, T. F., & Schmader, T. (2006). Vicarious retribution: The role of collective blame in intergroup aggression. *Personality and Social Psychology Review, 10*, 372–390.
- Lyons, C. J. (2006). Stigma or sympathy: attributions of fault to hate crime victims and offenders. *Social Psychology Quarterly, 69*, 39–59.
- Marcus-Newhall, A., Blake, L. P., & Baumann, J. (2002). Perceptions of hate crime perpetrators and victims as influenced by race, political orientation, and peer group. *American Behavioral Scientist, 46*, 108–135.
- Muller, D., Judd, C. M., & Yzerbyt, V. Y. (2005). When moderation is meditated and when mediation is moderated. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 89*, 852–863.
- Napier, J. L., & Jost, J. T. (2008). Why are conservatives happier than liberals? *Psychological Science, 19*, 565–572.
- Pratto, F., Sidanius, J., Stallworth, L. M., & Malle, B. F. (1994). Social dominance orientation: a personality variable predicting social and political attitudes. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 67*, 741–763.
- Sidanius, J., & Pratto, F. (1999). *Social Dominance: An Intergroup Theory of Social Hierarchy and Oppression*. New York: Cambridge University Press.
- Wakslak, C., Jost, J. T., Tyler, T. R., & Chen, E. (2007). Moral outrage mediates the dampening effect of system-justification on support for redistributive social policies. *Psychological Science, 18*, 267–274.