8 Legitimacy and the Construal of Social Disadvantage

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Social inequality is a pervasive aspect of human societies. In all known cultures, some individuals and groups are socially devalued, materially disadvantaged, and accorded lower social status compared to other individuals and groups (Sidanius & Pratto, 1999). Individuals who are members of socially disadvantaged groups also must frequently contend with negative stereotypes, prejudice, and overt discrimination. This predicament not only imperils their physical and material well-being, but also poses a threat to their personal and social self-esteem (Crocker, Major, & Steele, 1998). It is not surprising, then, that observers and scholars of human nature have long been fascinated and perplexed by the finding that members of disadvantaged groups often fail to express discontent with their situation (see Olson & Hafer, this volume), appear reluctant to challenge the system that oppresses them (see Wright, this volume), and frequently report levels of personal and collective self-esteem equal to or greater than those reported by members of socially advantaged groups (e.g., Crocker & Major, 1989).

Attempts to understand these paradoxical reactions to disadvantage have led scholars to focus on construal processes – cognitive processes that mediate the relationship between objective circumstances and affective and behavioral reactions to those circumstances (e.g., Crocker & Major, 1989; Crosby, 1982; Major, 1994; Pettigrew, 1967; Rosenberg & Simmons, 1972; Tajfel & Turner, 1986), as well as on different motives that underlie these construal processes (e.g., Jost & Banaji, 1994; Lerner, 1981). In this chapter we examine the impact of perceived legitimacy on these construal processes. Our central thesis is that appraisals of legitimacy are a key determinant of how members of socially disadvantaged groups construe their social outcomes. In delineating this thesis, we begin by outlining two perspectives on construing social disadvantage. We then define our use of
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In this chapter we focus on two construal processes — attributions for social outcomes and valuing of domains in which those outcomes are received. Attributions and valuing processes play a central role in a number of theories seeking to explain the paradoxical reactions displayed by members of disadvantaged groups. Theories of relative deprivation, for example, assert that whether or not individuals deprived of certain outcomes feel resentment depends, in part, on whether they blame themselves or others for not having those outcomes, and on whether or not they value those outcomes (e.g., Crosby, 1982; see also Olson & Hafer, this volume).

In a similar vein, theories of reactions to stigma propose that whether or not members of stigmatized groups have low self-esteem depends, in part, upon the extent to which they attribute negative outcomes internally, to deficits of self or group, or externally, to the prejudice of others, and whether or not they value or regard as self-relevant domains in which their group is disadvantaged (e.g., Crocker & Major, 1989; Steele, 1997; Tajfel & Turner, 1986). With respect to both of these construal processes — attributions for potentially discriminatory outcomes and valuing of domains in which those outcomes are received — we can identify two different perspectives that theories have taken on how members of disadvantaged groups construe their social outcomes.

The Ego-Defense Perspective

One set of theories adopts what we call an ego-defense perspective (and what Jost & Banaji, 1994, call ego-justification perspectives). These theories evolved to explain the high levels of personal and collective self-esteem frequently observed among members of socially disadvantaged groups (e.g., Crocker & Major, 1989; Rosenberg & Simmons, 1972; Tajfel & Turner, 1986). The ego-defense perspective emphasizes the impact of motives to protect and enhance personal and/or collective self-esteem on individuals' construal of their social worlds. According to this perspective, individuals are highly motivated to enhance and protect their personal (individual)
and social (collective) self-esteem and engage in a wide variety of "self-serving" and "group-serving" cognitive and behavioral strategies in the service of these goals (see also Jost et al., this volume). Ego-defense theories predict that members of disadvantaged groups will construe their social outcomes in ways that will enable them to buffer their personal or social self-esteem from threat (e.g., Crocker & Major, 1989; Rosenberg & Simmons, 1972).

Ego-defense theories predict, for example, that when it is plausible to do so, members of socially disadvantaged groups will attribute their poor outcomes to external factors, such as prejudice and discrimination, rather than to internal factors, because of the self-esteem protection external attributions afford (Allport, 1954/1979; Goffman, 1963). Crocker and Major (1989; Major & Crocker, 1993), for example, proposed that because members of stigmatized groups are aware that they are potential targets of prejudice, they have an extra attributional option available to explain negative outcomes or poor treatment – prejudice based on their stigmatized group membership. They further argued that attributing negative outcomes externally, to the prejudice of others, rather than internally, to deficits of self, enables the stigmatized to buffer their self-esteem from negative treatment. Ego-defense perspectives also lead to the prediction that members of socially disadvantaged groups will devalue domains in which they are disadvantaged as a way of buffering their self-esteem (e.g., James, 1890/1950). For example, Crocker and Major (1989) hypothesized that members of disadvantaged groups might protect their self-esteem by selectively devaluing domains in which they or their group are disadvantaged relative to others. Tajfel and Turner (1986) similarly proposed that devaluing domains in which one's group compares unfavorably to other groups can protect one's social identity. Likewise, Steele (1997) proposed that individuals might eventually dis-identify with domains in which they face negative stereotypes that inhibit success (see also Ogbu, 1991). In short, ego-defense theories lead to the prediction that in order to protect their self-esteem from threat, members of socially disadvantaged groups will tend to discount the personal diagnosticity of negative outcomes by attributing them to prejudice, and devalue domains in which negative outcomes are received.

The System Justification Perspective
A second set of theories takes a system justification perspective on construal processes (e.g., Crosby, 1982, 1984; Jost & Banaji, 1994; Major, 1994; Sidanius & Pratto, 1993). These theories evolved to account for the paradoxical contentment, tolerance of injustice, and political acquiescence fre-
self-esteem and engage in a wide variety of "self-serv ing" cognitive and behavioral strategies in the sense also Jost et al., this volume). Ego-defense theories of disadvantaged groups will construe their social ill enable them to buffer their personal or social (e.g., Crocker & Major, 1989; Rosenberg & Sim predict, for example, that when it is plausible to disadvantaged groups will attribute their poor others, such as prejudice and discrimination, rather because of the self-esteem protection external factors. Goffman, 1963). Crocker and Major (1993), for example, proposed that because members are aware that they are potential targets of an attributional option available to explain neg cognizant of others, rather than internally, to define to buffer their self-esteem from negative consequences also lead to the prediction that members will devalue domains in which they suffering their self-esteem (e.g., James, 1962; and Major (1989) hypothesized that protect their self-esteem by selecting or their group are disadvantaged (Major, 1989) similarly proposed that devaluation will be favorably to other groups (Steele, 1997) proposed that will domains in which they face Ogbu, 1991). In short, order to protect their disadvantaged groups will outcomes by attributing negative outcomes con- stance, Major, 1994: in the parameter vice the Construal of Social Disadvantage 179 et al. observed among members of disadvantaged groups. Theories theater emphasize the impact of tendencies to justify the construction of social hierarchy on individuals' construal of their social status quo as legitimate or just (see Jost et al., this volume; Olson & Hafer, this volume), a tendency that is believed by some scholars to result from a fundamental motive to perceive the system to which they belong, or the world more generally, as a place in which people's outcomes reflect what they deserve (Jost & Banaji, 1994; Lerner, 1982). System justification theories predict that this tendency will lead members of disadvantaged groups to construe their social outcome in ways that justify and legitimize their disadvantaged position.

Theories emphasizing a system justification perspective predict that because of the tendency to perceive the system (or world) as just, members of disadvantaged groups are unlikely to attribute their outcomes to discrimination. Rather, they are more likely to blame their poor outcomes on their own lesser inputs (Major, 1994) and minimize the extent to which they are victims of discrimination (Crosby, 1984; Olson & Hafer, this volume; Taylor, Wright, Moghaddam & Lalonde, 1990), thereby legitimizing their own state of disadvantage. Furthermore, according to system justification theories, individuals will attach value to domains, attributes, and outcomes in ways that justify the prevailing status hierarchy. Thus, domains in which higher status groups excel will be regarded as more important and more valuable than domains in which lower status groups excel. This perspective is compatible with status-value theory, which asserts that nominal characteristics like gender or skin color can accrue value when they are observed to correlate with resources (Ridgeway, 1991, this volume). Thus, the system justification perspective leads to the predictions that rather than blame negative outcomes on prejudice and discrimination (attributions that challenge the justice of the system), members of disadvantaged groups will view negative outcomes as diagnostic of personal inputs and will blame themselves or blame factors for which they are responsible; furthermore, they will value domains in which their group is disadvantaged relative to higher status groups.

A substantial amount of evidence exists in support of both of these perspectives. Rather than arguing that only one of these sets of theories is correct, our research has attempted to identify factors that moderate how members of advantaged and disadvantaged groups construe their social outcomes. We believe, as do Jost et al. (this volume), that ego-defense and system justification motives work in concert for members of high status groups, but often conflict for members of low status groups. For example,
when members of high status groups find themselves personally disadvantaged, strategies for defending their self-esteem (e.g., attributing negative outcomes to reverse discrimination) also defend the existing status hierarchy in which their group is dominant. In contrast, when members of a low status group find themselves personally disadvantaged, strategies for defending their self-esteem (e.g., attributing negative outcomes to discrimination) involve an implicit rejection of the existing status hierarchy in which their group possesses lower status. Thus, a key question is what moderates whether ego-defense or system justification motives will prevail among members of socially disadvantaged or low status groups. We argue that legitimacy appraisals are a crucial moderator of construal processes among disadvantaged groups. We turn now to a discussion of our definition of legitimacy appraisals and the factors that influence them.

Appraisals of Legitimacy and Illegitimacy

**Legitimacy Appraisals**

We define legitimacy appraisals as subjective perceptions of the fairness or justice of the distribution of socially distributed outcomes, including status, power, or any other differential, among individuals or groups (e.g., Tajfel, 1982). Our analysis of perceived legitimacy applies in particular to the extent to which outcomes of individuals or groups are believed to be based on factors such as actual differences between groups or individuals in inputs (e.g., abilities, traits, qualifications) or on factors for which people are responsible, such as their effort.

Legitimacy appraisals can occur at several levels of analysis (cf. Ellemers, Wilke, & van Knippenberg, 1993; Jost & Banaji, 1994). At the broadest level are appraisals of the fairness of the existing status hierarchy in society and of the system that produced it (see Jost et al., this volume; Sidanius, Levin, Federico & Pratto, this volume). Legitimacy appraisals also occur at the level of the group, where they pertain to the perception that the position or behavior of one's ingroup relative to other groups within a given system is fair and just (see Spears, Jetten, & Doosje, this volume). Finally, at the level of the individual, legitimacy appraisals pertain to whether an individual perceives his or her own outcomes as just or unjust (see Olson & Hafer, this volume). Although legitimacy appraisals at different levels can be quite distinct, appraisals of legitimacy at one level can color appraisals of legitimacy at other levels. Thus, for example, people who reject the idea that the existing social system is just and fair might also be more likely to believe that the social position of their own group is unfair, especially if their group is disadvantaged. They might also be more likely
high status groups find themselves personally disadvantaged and therefore have a greater incentive to defend their self-esteem (e.g., attributing negative discrimination) than do disadvantaged groups. In contrast, when members of a lower status group find themselves personally disadvantaged, strategies for defense (e.g., attributing negative outcomes to discrimination) are less necessary as they are already living on the periphery of the status hierarchy. Thus, a key question is whether the defense or system justification motives will prevail among disadvantaged or lower status groups. We argue that these are two crucial factors that influence these processes.

Impact of Ideology on Legitimacy Appraisals

Political sociologists and psychologists have long argued that social ideologies—attitudes, beliefs, and values that are held consensually within society—often help to sustain the social system as just and fair and justify the hierarchical and unequal relationships among groups in society (e.g., Jost & Banaji, 1994; Kluegel & Smith, 1986; Marx & Engels, 1846/1970; Sidanius & Pratto, 1993; Sidanius et al., this volume). Examples of these legitimizing ideologies (which Sidanius et al. call “hierarchy-enhancing myths”) include beliefs in a just world (Lerner, 1981), in personal causation (Nisbett & Ross, 1980), in personal control (Langer, 1977), in a meritocratic society (Sidanius & Pratto, 1999), and in the Protestant work ethic (Merilis & Garrett, 1971). These beliefs and values legitimate the status quo by holding individuals and groups responsible for their outcomes and by locating the cause of good or poor outcomes within attributes or inputs of that person or group. Indeed, the bias to locate the cause of behaviors or outcomes within individuals, rather than within situations or systems, is so pervasive in Western societies that is has been dubbed the “fundamental attribution error” (Nisbett & Ross, 1980). Pettigrew (1979) observed that this bias also extends to the group level, such that entire groups of people are held responsible for their position of advantage or disadvantage, a bias that he called the “ultimate attribution error” (see also Jost & Banaji, this volume). This bias to make internal attributions contributes to the tendency to legitimize current status arrangements and outcomes. In addition, Jost and Banaji (1994) argue that stereotypes also function to justify the existing system of status hierarchies (see also chapters in this volume by Glick & Fiske and by Jost & Banaji).

Although ideologies and stereotypes are held individually, they gain their power to legitimize social and personal inequality through their collective endorsement within a culture (Major, 1994; Sidanius et al., this
volume). Thus, legitimizing ideologies can be thought of as collective representations – beliefs, values, and habits of mind that are socially shared within a society or culture (Moscovici, 1988; Prentice & Miller, 1999). Three beliefs – (a) that opportunity for personal advancement is widespread, (b) that individuals are personally responsible for their positions in society, and (c) that the overall system of equality is equitable and fair – are so widely held in the United States that they have been labeled its “dominant ideology” (see Kluegel & Smith, 1986). Importantly, even those who are most disadvantaged in society endorse system justifying ideologies (Jost & Banaji, 1994; Kluegel & Smith, 1986; Sidanius & Pratto, 1993). Indeed, it is endorsement of these beliefs by individuals who are disadvantaged that makes them so powerful in sustaining the status quo.

Because of the dominant and consensual nature of legitimizing ideologies, we believe that they create the default perception, even among those who are disadvantaged, that there is legitimacy at the system, group, and individual levels. Nonetheless, it is important to point out that legitimizing ideologies are not endorsed equally by all individuals, or by all groups within society. For example, the dominant ideology tends to be more strongly endorsed by individuals higher in the social hierarchy than by those lower in the hierarchy (Kluegel & Smith, 1986). Individuals can also hold beliefs that contest the legitimacy of the prevailing status-hierarchy, beliefs that Sidanius et al. (this volume) refer to as “hierarchy-attenuating” myths. Furthermore, the same individual may simultaneously endorse some ideologies that legitimize and others that delegitimize the status quo (Katz & Hass, 1988). Which ideology is cognitively accessible at any given moment can affect the amount of prejudice expressed toward disadvantaged groups (Katz & Hass, 1988). We might also suppose that endorsing hierarchy attenuating beliefs, or having such beliefs temporarily accessible, would also affect how members of socially disadvantaged groups perceive prejudice directed against them.

**Impact of Context on Legitimacy Appraisals**

Appraisals of the legitimacy or illegitimacy of specific outcomes are shaped not only by ideology, but also by contextual cues that convey information about distributive and procedural justice within the situation. These contextual cues may prime or activate chronically held ideologies relevant to legitimacy or illegitimacy, as noted above, or they may directly shape appraisals of legitimacy within a specific situation.

Specific outcomes are appraised as legitimate to the extent that they are believed to conform to accepted rules of distributive justice. Equity theory predicts that distributions are appraised as fair when relative outcomes are
ologies can be thought of as collective rep-nd habits of mind that are socially shared.

(b) personal advancement is widespread, (b) responsible for their positions in society, of equality is equitable and fair – are so that they have been labeled its “dominant, 1, 1986). Importantly, even those who are endorse system justifying ideologies (Jost & Sidanius & Pratto, 1993). Indeed, it is individuals who are disadvantaged that nining the status quo.

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Appraisals of legitimacy are also affected by the extent to which outcome distributions are believed to have resulted from fair procedures (see Tyler, this volume). Contextual cues that indicate that procedural justice has been violated, such as evidence that the procedures used in distributing outcomes were biased, prejudiced, applied inconsistently, or based on inadequate information, can lead to appraisals of illegitimacy (Leventhal, 1976). Contextual cues that suggest that fair procedures have been followed, in contrast, can lead individuals to appraise their outcomes as legitimate, even if those outcomes are personally disadvantageous (Tyler & Lind, 1992). One such cue is the extent to which people feel treated with dignity and respect (Tyler, this volume). Being given “voice” (i.e., the opportunity to state one’s case) also leads people to regard their outcomes as fair, even if those outcomes are negative (Lind & Tyler, 1988).

A third procedural cue that increases legitimacy appraisals is when the situation provides people with a sense of control over their outcomes (Leventhal, 1976). For example, Ruggiero and Taylor (1997) found that women given a choice over which of several potentially discriminatory evaluators would grade their work were less likely to attribute a negative grade to discrimination than were women who were given no choice. This
was true even though the choice was illusory (no meaningful information was provided to allow an informed choice) and the women had been informed that there was a high probability that the evaluator chosen would discriminate against their group.

Yet another contextual cue to legitimacy is the extent to which situations lead individuals to believe that individual advancement within the status hierarchy is possible (i.e., to perceive the status hierarchy as permeable). Even small evidence of permeability may increase legitimacy appraisals. For example, among people who are denied access to a higher status group despite meeting the criteria for access to that group, the belief that even a few members (2%) of their group can gain access to the higher status group diminishes appraisals of injustice and collective attempts to rectify injustice (see Wright, this volume). Taken together, evidence suggests that the perception of legitimacy can be maintained even in the face of blatant discrimination if people are given even a minor, or illusory, sense that they have some control over, or voice in, their outcomes, or if even the slightest hint of permeability is perceived within the system.

To summarize, appraisals of legitimacy are shaped by chronic ideologies that people bring with them to specific situations, as well as by contextual cues that they encounter within a given situation. Chronic endorsement or temporary accessibility of system legitimizing ideologies will lead people to appraise specific outcomes that are consistent with the status quo as legitimate, whereas chronic endorsement or temporary accessibility of ideologies that delegitimize the system will lead to appraisals of those outcomes as illegitimate. Situational cues can reinforce the legitimacy of current arrangements by providing evidence that distributive or procedural justice was followed. These cues can also lead outcomes to be appraised as illegitimate, as when clear evidence is provided that procedural or distributive justice has been violated. In general, however, evidence suggests that the default tendency may be for people to appraise existing systems, group status hierarchies, and personal outcomes as just and legitimate. Importantly, this appears to be true even among those who are disadvantaged.

**Legitimacy Appraisals and Construal Processes**

Having outlined our view of legitimacy appraisals, we next turn to the impact of these appraisals on how individuals construe their social outcomes, particularly when those outcomes are potentially discriminatory. We hypothesize that when outcomes are appraised as legitimate, construal processes follow system justification predictions. That is, **under conditions of perceived legitimacy, members of disadvantaged groups will be less likely to**
legitimacy is the extent to which situations are perceived to be that individual advancement within the status hierarchy, as permeable, may increase legitimacy appraisals. When access to a higher status group is denied, the belief that even a group can gain access to the higher status of justice and collective attempts to rectify it. Taken together, evidence suggests that can be maintained even in the face of blatant or illusory, sense that they in, their outcomes, or if even the slightest within the system. of legitimacy are shaped by chronic ideologies to specific situations, as well as by within a given situation. Chronic variability of system legitimizing ideologies will lead to appraisals of outcomes that are consistent with the endorsement or temporary assessment of situational cues can reinforce the legitimacy evidence that distributive or procedural cues can also lead outcomes to be apparent evidence is provided that procedural attainment. In general, however, evidence may be for people to appraise existing personal outcomes as just and legitimacy even among those who are processes, we next turn to the construe their social outcomes potentially discriminatory. In this legitimate, construal is, under conditions will be less likely to

Legitimacy Appraisals and Attributions to Discrimination

Our research related to attribution processes has focused on the conditions under which people believe that they are targets of discrimination, and the role of legitimacy appraisals in moderating this construal. We have examined the link between chronic ideologies and attributions to discrimination, as well as the impact of contextual cues on attributions to discrimination.

Legitimizing Ideologies and Attributions to Discrimination

One series of studies explored the impact of individual differences in endorsement of legitimizing ideologies on attributions to discrimination among low status and high status groups (Major et al., 2000). System legitimizing ideologies (such as the belief that the status system is permeable) substantiate the inferiority of low status groups and the superiority of high status groups. Accordingly, we hypothesized that the more members of low status groups chronically endorse system legitimizing ideologies, the less likely they would be to explain potentially biased events (e.g., being rejected by or passed over in favor of a member of a higher status group) as due to unfair discrimination. In contrast, we hypothesized that the more members of high status groups endorse system legitimizing ideologies, the more likely they would be to view potentially biased events (e.g., being rejected by or passed over in favor of a member of a lower status group) as a violation of distributive justice and as unfair discrimination. We tested this status × legitimacy interaction hypothesis in four studies.

In our first study we operationalized high status as being a member of the dominant ethnic group in the United States (European-American) and low status as being a member of an ethnic minority group (Latino/a, African-American, or Asian-American). Within these two groups, we ex-
Figure 8.1. Perceived personal discrimination among high status (European-American) and low status (ethnic minority) group members as a function of endorsement of legitimizing ideology. Source: Major et al., in press, Study 1.

Amined legitimizing (or system justifying) ideology as a predictor of perceiving oneself as a target of discrimination based on ethnicity. Legitimizing ideology was assessed as a combination of three beliefs: the belief that people can get ahead in American society based on hard work and individual merit, the belief that the American system is open to advancement of individuals from all ethnic backgrounds, and the belief that the current American structure is fair and legitimate. As shown in Figure 8.1, our predictions were confirmed. Among low status (ethnic minority) students, greater endorsement of these system justifying ideologies was associated with significantly less perceived personal discrimination. In contrast, among high status (European-American) students, greater endorsement of system justifying ideologies was associated with significantly greater perceived discrimination.

This first study provides support for our argument that chronic ideologies moderate perceptions of discrimination and that they do so differently for high and low status groups. In our second study we addressed limitations of the correlational design in Study 1 by exposing members of high and low status ethnic groups to the same attributionally ambiguous event (Major et al., 2000, Experiment 2). In this study, European-American and Latino/a students completed measures of legitimizing ideologies similar to those used in our first study. Several months later they were called back to participate in a study ostensibly concerning “workgroup development.” All were led to believe that they were participating in the study with two other same-sex students (these students were actually fictitious). One stu-
Legitimizing Ideology

Figure 8.2. Attributions to discrimination among European-American and Latino/a participants following rejection by an outgroup member as a function of endorsement of legitimizing ideology. Note: ** p < .01. Source: Major et al., 2000, Study 2.

The participants were told that chronic ideolog-
ically as a predictor of discrimination based on ethnicity. Legiti-
mizing ideology is divided into three beliefs: the belief that society is based on hard work and ethnicity; the belief that the system is open to advancement based on hard work and ethnicity; and the belief that the system is open to advancement based on hard work and ethnicity. As shown in Figure 8.1, the status (minority status) students' endorsement of legitimizing ideologies was associated with significantly fewer reports of discrimination. In contrast, students, greater endorsement of legitimizing ideologies was associated with significantly more reports of discrimination.

In one condition, students were asked to imagine that they were told, had already been assigned to act as a Manager and would be deciding which of the remaining participants would be assigned to the desirable (and higher paying) role of Co-manager or to the less desirable role of Clerk. By means of digital photographs, participants were told to believe that the Manager was either a member of their own ethnic group or a member of the other ethnic group. All were led to believe that the “other student” was a member of the other ethnic group. All participants were subsequently rejected for the desirable role in favor of the “other student.”

Our specific predictions concerned conditions in which individuals were rejected by an outgroup member. We hypothesized that the more strongly Latino/a students endorsed system justifying ideologies, the less likely they would be to attribute their rejection by a European-American student (in favor of another European-American student) to discrimination. In contrast, we predicted that the more European-American students endorsed system justifying ideologies, the more likely they would be to attribute rejection by a Latino/American student (in favor of another Latino/American student) to discrimination. As predicted, there was a significant interaction between ideology and group status predicting attributions to ethnic discrimination when the manager was an outgroup member (see Figure 8.2). This interaction was not present when the manager was an ingroup member.

This interaction illustrates that members of socially disadvantaged
groups are sometimes more and sometimes less likely to attribute negative outcomes to prejudice and discrimination than are members of socially advantaged groups. Ideologies that are relevant to the legitimacy of status differences between groups moderate which pattern occurs. Only when members of socially disadvantaged groups reject ideologies that legitimize their lower status are they likely to interpret rejection by a member of a higher status group as due to discrimination, as would be predicted by ego-defense theories (e.g., Crocker & Major, 1989). When members of socially disadvantaged groups endorse legitimizing ideologies, a pattern more consistent with system justification theories is observed. The absence of an interaction between ideology and group status in the ingroup evaluator condition is important because it illustrates that endorsing or rejecting system legitimizing ideologies does not predispose individuals to perceive (or fail to perceive) prejudice in all contexts, but only those contexts in which the ideologies are relevant.

We conducted two additional studies using gender, rather than ethnicity, as a proxy for group status (Major et al., 2000, Studies 3 & 4). One study employed the same methodology described above, and the second investigated our status × legitimacy interaction hypothesis using a methodology designed by Ruggiero and Taylor (1997). Both of these studies replicated the ideology × group status interactions observed in our first two studies. Among women who received a negative evaluation from a man, endorsing system justifying ideologies was associated with a decreased tendency to attribute their failure feedback to discrimination. But among men who received a negative evaluation from a woman, endorsing system justifying ideologies was associated with an increased tendency to attribute their failure feedback to discrimination. Thus, legitimizing ideologies provide a powerful framework that shapes the ways in which intergroup encounters between groups of differing social status are explained.

The belief that one has control over, or can change, the attribute that defines one's membership in a disadvantaged group is another type of legitimizing belief that can influence the extent to which negative outcomes linked to group membership will be attributed to discrimination (Major & Crocker, 1993). Some attributes (such as weight and poverty) are perceived to be more controllable and changeable than others (such as ethnicity and gender). People who are perceived to have control over their stigma (either its onset or its offset) are held to be more responsible for their stigma, and are more likely to be targets of overt prejudice than are those who are perceived not to have control over their stigma (e.g., Weiner, Perry, & Magnusson, 1988). The belief that weight is controllable has been shown to be associated with negative attitudes toward the overweight, including
and sometimes less likely to attribute nega-
tive outcomes to discrimination than are members of social groups that are relevant to the legitimacy of status moderate which pattern occurs. Only when advantaged groups reject ideologies that legitimate "outgroup" status, we have found, the belief that one can control or can change one's stigmatizing attribute might lead overweight women who are rejected as dating partners blamed the rejection on their weight, but they did not blame their partners. Amato, Crocker, and Major (1995) further demonstrated that priming the belief that weight is uncontrollable, as compared with priming the belief that it is controllable, increased the extent to which overweight women attributed negative outcomes to discrimination.

In sum, the above studies illustrate that legitimizing ideologies, including beliefs about the controllability of one's stigma, influence the attributions that members of disadvantaged groups make for their social outcomes when those ideologies are relevant to the situation.

**Contextual Cues and Attributions to Discrimination**

In addition to examining the effects of chronic ideological beliefs about legitimacy, we have also shown that contextual cues indicating that outcomes are procedurally unfair (i.e., result from prejudicial or biased treatment) can lead members of socially disadvantaged groups to attribute negative outcomes to discrimination. In an initial study we manipulated perceptions of illegitimacy by raising suspicions that an evaluator was biased against women (Crocker, Voelkl, Testa, & Major, 1991, Experiment 1). Women in this study wrote an essay that subsequently was evaluated either positively or negatively by a male peer. Prior to writing the essay, the women had exchanged information with the evaluator that revealed that he held either traditional or liberal attitudes toward women's roles. As predicted, women were more likely to attribute negative essay evaluations to prejudice when they believed that the evaluator held unfavorable rather than favorable views toward women. This study indicates that direct evidence of the biased attitudes of a male evaluator can prompt women to blame negative feedback on discrimination.

We suspect that groups differ, however, in their sensitivity to situational cues to prejudice and illegitimacy (Major, 1994). Because women have a particularly poorly developed sense of themselves as members of an oppressed group (Gurin, 1985), cues to illegitimacy might need to be fairly direct before women will discount internal factors as a cause of negative feedback. Among groups that have a more highly developed sense of group consciousness, such as African-Americans (Sellers, Smith, Shelton, Rowley, & Chavous, 1998), however, more subtle situational cues may be sufficient to prime illegitimacy and lead to attributions to discrimination.
This was demonstrated by Crocker et al. (1991, Experiment 2). In this study, African-American and European-American participants were led to believe that they were participating in a friendship development study with a European-American partner who either saw them (and hence knew their race) or who could not see them (and hence did not know their race). After exchanging personal information with their partner, half of the students received favorable and half received unfavorable feedback from their partner. As predicted, African-American students were more likely to attribute feedback to prejudice rather than to their own personality when the feedback was negative than when it was positive, and when the evaluator could see them than when the evaluator could not. These effects did not occur for European-American students, who were all evaluated by a fellow European-American student. Thus, merely knowing that race could have factored into their evaluation was enough to make African-American students suspect that discrimination might have occurred.

Taken together, we now have considerable evidence that chronic beliefs about legitimacy as well as situational cues to illegitimacy moderate how members of disadvantaged groups explain their outcomes when the possibility of prejudice exists. When legitimizing ideologies are endorsed or when situational cues to counteract the assumption of legitimacy are weak or ambiguous, members of socially disadvantaged groups are relatively unlikely to perceive themselves as targets of discrimination. However, when legitimizing ideologies are rejected or when there are cues present that suggest that specific evaluations are biased, members of socially disadvantaged groups are more likely to perceive themselves as targets of discrimination. We saw these patterns both in correlational studies assessing general perceptions of personal discrimination among various ethnic and gender groups, and also in experimental studies in which we exposed individuals to a potentially discriminatory event. Interestingly, our work suggests that legitimizing ideologies may have an opposite effect among members of the advantaged group, for whom endorsing legitimizing ideologies predicts a greater tendency to attribute rejection by a lower status group member to discrimination. Clearly, perceptions of legitimacy affect how outcomes are explained. In the following section we examine the influence of legitimacy appraisals on valuing processes.

**Legitimacy Appraisals and Valuing Processes**

Our research on valuing processes has explored the extent to which members of relatively disadvantaged groups value, or regard as self-relevant, domains in which their group is disadvantaged and the role that legiti-
appraisals play in moderating this construal process. Our first series of studies tested the hypothesis that—because of a general system justifying the tendency to appraise the prevailing status hierarchy as legitimate—the "default construal" (even among low status groups) would be to value domains or attributes on which higher status groups excel. In our first study (Schmader, Major, Eccleston, & McCoy, in press, Study 1) we manipulated the relative status of participants, all of whom were students at the University of California at Santa Barbara (UCSB), by telling them that we were comparing the scores of UCSB students on a novel personality test to those of students at a higher status (Stanford) or a lower status (Santa Barbara City College) school. Students were shown data comparing UCSB and the comparison school with regard to postgraduate income, job level, and educational attainment in order to reinforce the status difference between schools (see also Jost, 2001). Participants then took a test and subsequently learned that students at UCSB had scored higher or lower on the test relative to the comparison school. They did not receive any information about their personal score. Students then rated how much they personally valued the novel trait.

As shown in Figure 8.3, when UCSB occupied a higher status position, students valued the trait more if it was one on which UCSB scored higher than if it was one on which City College students scored higher. When UCSB was the lower status school, however, students valued the trait just as much when Stanford students scored better as when UCSB scored better. In other words, students did not devalue the novel trait if the feedback was status congruent, but they did devalue the trait if the feedback was status incongruent. Our second study replicated this finding using gender, rather than school, as a proxy for group status. Men valued a novel trait more when they learned that men scored better than women than when they learned that women scored better than men. In contrast, women attached the same value to the trait, regardless of who scored better. These findings illustrate that in the absence of information indicating that status hierarchies are illegitimate, members of low status groups tend to value domains in which a higher status group excels, contrary to the ego-serving and group-serving "social creativity" strategies predicted by social identity theory (Tajfel & Turner, 1986).

In a third study (Schmader et. al, in press, Study 3) we tested the hypothesis that situational cues indicating that the status hierarchy is illegitimate would prompt members of low status groups to devalue domains in which higher status outgroups excelled relative to their own group. In other words, when there are cues to illegitimacy, we expected both high and low status groups to construe ingroup failure in an ego-defensive
manner by devaluing the domain in which that failure occurs. This study employed the same procedures as described above except that we manipulated the perceived legitimacy or illegitimacy of status differences between schools. Half of the participants read an article summarizing “evidence” that students at the higher status school were more intelligent than students at the lower status school (Legitimacy Condition), and the other half read an article indicating that students at the lower status school were just as intelligent as students at the higher status school (Illegitimacy Condition).

The predicted interaction between group status, group performance, and perceived illegitimacy was significant. The data for the low status group are shown in Figure 8.4. When group differences in status-relevant outcomes were legitimized, results replicated our first experiment. Students did not devalue the trait if their school was outperformed by a higher status school. When status differences between the groups were delegitimized, however, students in the low status condition devalued the trait
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Figure 8.4. Domain-valuing by low status group members as a function of relative group performance and the perceived legitimacy of group status differences. Source: Schmader et al., in press, Study 3.

Legitimacy of Group Status

when their school was outperformed by a higher status school. In sum, this study illustrates that legitimacy appraisals moderate the extent to which members of disadvantaged groups value or devalue domains in which their group is at a relative disadvantage. Consistent with the system justification perspective, when status differences between groups are viewed as legitimate, low status group members attach value to domains in which higher status groups do well, even though their own group is disadvantaged by comparison. Consistent with the ego defense perspective, however, when status differences are seen as illegitimate, low status group members devalue domains in which their group is relatively disadvantaged, as suggested by social identity theory (Tajfel & Turner, 1986).

Implications of Legitimacy Appraisals for Self-Esteem

In the preceding sections we reviewed evidence demonstrating that appraisals of legitimacy alter how members of disadvantaged groups explain
their lower status and the extent to which they value the domains in which the status differences arise. Because of their impact on these construal processes, legitimacy appraisals are thought to influence affective reactions to disadvantage, such as resentment, satisfaction, discontent, and anger (Crosby, 1976, 1982; Major, 1994; Olson & Hafer, this volume), and behavioral reactions, such as withdrawal, persistence, and collective action (see Wright, this volume). In this final section, we consider the implications of legitimacy appraisals for the personal self-esteem of members of socially disadvantaged groups.

Ego-defense and system justification theories lead to different predictions regarding the consequences of social disadvantage for personal self-esteem. Ego-defense theories accentuate the resilience, rather than the vulnerability, of members of disadvantaged groups. For example, Crocker and Major (1989) proposed that attributing negative outcomes to the prejudice of others rather than to deficiencies of the self, and selectively devaluing domains in which oneself or one's group is relatively disadvantaged, enable members of disadvantaged groups to maintain high self-esteem even in the face of prejudice, discrimination, and objective disadvantage (see Crocker et al., 1998 for a review). System justification theories, in contrast, emphasize the potential vulnerability of the self-esteem of members of socially disadvantaged groups to social devaluation (e.g., Jost & Banaji, 1994). According to these theories, tendencies to attribute negative outcomes internally, that is, to lesser inputs of the self or group, and to value domains or attributes possessed to a greater extent by higher status groups contribute to the development of a lesser sense of personal deserving (e.g., Major, 1994) and greater outgroup bias (e.g., Jost et al., this volume) among members of low status groups. Such tendencies may result in vulnerable personal and/or collective self-esteem among these groups.

We believe that these different predictions about vulnerability versus resilience are due in part to the different assumptions that these theories make about the extent to which members of disadvantaged groups believe that their situation is legitimate. Ego-defense predictions follow from the assumption that members of disadvantaged groups recognize that their treatment is illegitimate. Indeed, as we have seen, self-enhancing construal processes are more likely to occur when outcome differences between individuals or groups are appraised as illegitimate. In contrast, system justification predictions follow from the assumption that members of disadvantaged groups perceive their situation to be legitimate. Again, we have demonstrated that chronic beliefs or cues to legitimacy elicit system justifying construal processes. Consequently, one might expect that appraising one's outcomes as illegitimate would have beneficial implications.
American students' self-esteem was higher after receiving failure feedback than after receiving positive feedback. The extent to which they value the domain in question (e.g., as a means of self-esteem or as a means of social acceptance) influences the extent to which they will attribute negative outcomes to personal ability or external factors. This is consistent with previous research on self-esteem theory (e.g., Major, 1996; Spencer & O'Brien, 1998).

We have shown that individuals who are high in self-esteem are more likely to disengage from their self-esteem following negative feedback. This is consistent with previous research on self-esteem theory (e.g., Crocker & Major, 1995; Major & Schmader, 1994). We propose that self-esteem is contingent on external factors and that self-esteem is influenced by internal factors. For example, if an individual has a high self-esteem but is doing poorly in a particular domain, they may attribute this to external factors (e.g., the test was too difficult). Conversely, if an individual has a low self-esteem but is doing well in a particular domain, they may attribute this to external factors (e.g., the test was too easy).

In conclusion, we have shown that negative feedback can lead to a decrease in self-esteem, even when the feedback is not attributed to the individual. This is consistent with previous research on self-esteem theory (e.g., Major, 1996; Spencer & O'Brien, 1998). We propose that self-esteem is contingent on external factors and that self-esteem is influenced by internal factors. For example, if an individual has a high self-esteem but is doing poorly in a particular domain, they may attribute this to external factors (e.g., the test was too difficult). Conversely, if an individual has a low self-esteem but is doing well in a particular domain, they may attribute this to external factors (e.g., the test was too easy).

We have also shown that self-esteem is influenced by social factors, such as the social context in which the feedback is received. For example, if an individual is receiving feedback in a group context, they may be more likely to attribute the feedback to external factors. Conversely, if an individual is receiving feedback in a solitary context, they may be more likely to attribute the feedback to internal factors.

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if the idea of racial bias had been primed than if it had not been primed, whereas European-American students' self-esteem was unaffected by the prime. Presumably, the cue to potential illegitimacy enabled African-American students to disengage their self-esteem from negative outcomes. In addition, African-American students exhibited higher self-esteem than did European-American students when racial bias had been primed but lower self-esteem if race had not been primed. In other words, they showed greater resilience after a negative outcome when a cue to illegitimacy was present, but showed greater vulnerability to their negative outcome when no cue to illegitimacy was present. Taken together, the above studies by Crocker et al. (1991) and Major et al. (1998) illustrate that self-esteem is constructed within specific situations and is highly dependent upon cues to legitimacy that alter the construal of those situations.

In other research we have addressed how chronic legitimacy appraisals relate to global self-esteem as mediated through domain-specific processes of valuation and attribution. Schmader et al. (in press) examined the extent to which academic performance (grade point average) and the perceived legitimacy of ethnic status differences in society predict how much European-American and African-American college students value academic success, discount intelligence tests as biased, and disengage their self-esteem from their performance in the academic domain. We also assessed global self-esteem. A structural model of the relations observed among African-American students is shown in Figure 8.5.

Among African-American students, the general belief that ethnic status
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Differences in society are illegitimate was associated with greater discounting of test scores as biased and greater devaluing of academic success. Furthermore, increases in discounting and devaluing were associated with greater reported disengagement of self-esteem from academic outcomes, which in turn was positively related to self-esteem. We also observed an unexpected negative relationship between devaluing and self-esteem, a finding to which we return below. Among European-American students, similar relationships were observed among discounting, devaluing, disengagement, and global self-esteem. However, for these students, discounting and devaluing were predicted by academic performance, rather than by perceptions of the legitimacy of ethnic groups. Thus, this study illustrates that different factors may trigger devaluing and discounting processes for members of advantaged and disadvantaged groups. For the former group, the threat of not meeting the standards of society regarding academics (i.e., poor grades) predicted devaluing and discounting. In contrast, for ethnic minority students, chronic beliefs that the system and the status of their group within that system are illegitimate predicted devaluing and discounting of academic feedback. Through such mechanisms, chronic perceptions that outcomes are illegitimately distributed within a domain may lead to chronic disengagement of self-esteem from that domain, a process that Steele calls "domain dis-identification" (Steele, 1997).

Perceiving Illegitimacy Can Be Harmful to Self-Esteem

From the research summarized above, one could reasonably conclude that members of disadvantaged groups experience self-esteem benefits from perceiving their treatment as illegitimate. We believe, however, that this prediction is not as straightforward as it appears. The perception of illegitimacy at the system, group, and/or individual level can also have negative implications for the self-esteem and well-being of members of disadvantaged groups.

Prejudice May Be Seen as Justified. Members of disadvantaged groups may sometimes recognize that they are being discriminated against, but nonetheless think that they deserve their lesser outcomes. Believing that one is a target of prejudice will not protect self-esteem if the prejudicial treatment is appraised as justified (Crocker & Major, 1994). One factor that may lead prejudice to be perceived as justified is the belief that one has control over the attribute that is associated with discrimination. Obesity, for example, is perceived by many people to be controllable (Crandall, 1994). As noted earlier, Crocker et al. (1993) found that overweight women who were rejected as dating partners attributed the rejection to their
weight, but not to the biases of the male evaluator. Additional analyses revealed that this attributional pattern was associated with lower, rather than higher self-esteem among these women (Crocker et al., 1993).

The extent to which overweight women endorse chronic beliefs about control and legitimacy, however, may moderate these effects. Quinn and Crocker (1999), Study 1 found that perceptions of control and endorsement of the Protestant Work Ethic were negatively associated with subjective well-being (self-esteem) among women who perceived themselves as very overweight, but they were positively associated with well-being among normal-weight women. In a second study, Quinn and Crocker (1999, Study 2) demonstrated that when overweight women were primed with the Protestant work ethic ideology prior to reading about negative social outcomes for the overweight, their well-being decreased. In contrast, when overweight women were primed with a more inclusive ideology prior to reading about negative outcomes for the overweight, their well-being increased. Normal-weight women were unaffected by the priming manipulation. These findings are consistent with the argument that members of disadvantaged groups who endorse legitimizing ideologies are more likely to feel they deserve their (poorer) social outcomes and hence to have lower self-esteem (see also Jost et al., this volume).

Prejudice may also be seen as justified if it is perceived to result from group characteristics that detract from a person's contributions or inputs in a domain. Paradoxically, situational cues that increase attributions to prejudice may under some circumstances simultaneously increase suspicions that real group differences exist that justify differential group treatment. A study by Quinton and Major (2000) demonstrates this pattern. Women in this study received negative feedback from a male evaluator under conditions of blatant prejudice, ambiguous prejudice, or a control condition with no mention of possible prejudice. As the cues to illegitimacy became more blatant, attributions to discrimination increased but, ironically, so did attributions to “real sex differences” in ability. In addition, attributions of rejection to internal factors (ability and effort) were just as high among women in the ambiguous and blatant prejudice conditions as they were among women in the control condition. Furthermore, women's self-esteem was not protected by the presence of situational cues to illegitimacy.

Perceiving Illegitimacy Threatens Important Beliefs. Perceiving the system, the position of one's group, or one's own treatment as illegitimate may also threaten important beliefs that are directly or indirectly linked to self-esteem. Several theoretical frameworks lead to this prediction. For exam-
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Leary's sociometer model of self-esteem (Leary, Tambor, Terdal, & Downs, 1995) argues that self-esteem is directly tied to feeling socially accepted by others. Likewise, Tyler's group value model (see Tyler, this volume) asserts that fair treatment contributes to self-esteem because it signals that one is a respected and valued member of the group. Being treated in an illegitimate manner (as in a prejudicial or disrespectful way), by contrast, signals that one is not accepted and valued. Through this attributational process, the perception of illegitimate treatment may lead to lower, rather than higher self-esteem, even if the treatment is believed to be undeserved.

Appraisals of illegitimacy also threaten other important beliefs, including the belief that one has control over one's outcomes (Langer, 1977), that the world is a just place that can be counted on to give people what they deserve (Lerner, 1984; Olson & Hafer, this volume), and that the world is a predictable place in which one holds a valued position (Pyszczynski, Greenberg, & Solomon, 1997). These beliefs provide a sense of predictability and control. They may also provide hope that one can improve one's personal outcomes. Thus, there might be self-esteem benefits associated with endorsing legitimizing ideologies and self-esteem costs associated with rejecting them. Consistent with this idea, the belief in personal control and the belief in a just world have been shown to be positively associated with self-esteem and well-being (e.g., Taylor & Brown, 1988), with physiological responses of challenge rather than threat in the face of stress (Toepfer & Blascovich, 1994), and with better adjustment following accidents (Knoff-Bulman & Timko, 1987). The negative implications for self-esteem of rejecting these legitimizing ideologies may explain why they are so strongly endorsed, even by those who are objectively disadvantaged.

We believe that perceiving illegitimacy at the system, group, or individual level is particularly likely to be detrimental to self-esteem if illegitimacy is believed to be stable and global. The beliefs, for example, that you will always be a victim of discrimination and that everyone will discriminate against you because of your group membership should lead to a sense of helplessness and associated negative affect (Abramson, Seligman, & Teasdale, 1978). Indeed, Branscombe, Schmitt, and Harvey (1999) found that the more African-Americans chronically perceive themselves to be targets of racial discrimination, the lower their self-esteem. Thus, although discrete appraisals of illegitimacy in specific situations can help to protect self-esteem within that situation, there is also evidence to suggest that chronically construing one's outcomes as illegitimate may be costly to self-esteem. The negative affective implications of chronically perceiving one-
self as a victim may explain why members of disadvantaged groups so often minimize the extent to which they personally are victims of discrimination (Crosby, 1984; Olson & Hafer, this volume; Taylor et al., 1990).

Thus far, we have suggested that attributing negative outcomes to discrimination can, under some conditions, be harmful to self-esteem. We suspect that chronically devaluing domains in which advantaged groups excel might have psychological costs as well. For example, although devaluing a domain is thought to protect one’s sense of self-worth from negative outcomes or poor performance (e.g., Crocker & Major, 1989; Rosenberg, 1979), there might be concurrent negative psychological consequences if important others value that domain and continue to evaluate you on the basis of your performance in that domain (Harter, 1986). In our study of academic disengagement (Schmader et al., in press) we found that among African-American students devaluing academic success was indirectly related to higher self-esteem via psychological disengagement. However, devaluing academic success was also directly related to lower self-esteem. Given our sample of college students at a prestigious university, we might speculate that the direct association between devaluing academics and lower self-esteem resulted from the incongruence between one’s personal attitude toward academic success and the knowledge that family, friends, and perhaps society in general hold high expectations for one’s performance.

In sum, we believe that legitimacy appraisals direct how members of disadvantaged groups construe their social outcomes, and this construal process has implications for self-esteem. Appraising illegitimacy in a specific situation and either discounting a given outcome or temporarily devaluing a given domain can enable members of socially disadvantaged groups to protect their self-esteem from negative outcomes within that situation. However, viewing oneself as a target of discrimination can diminish self-esteem when one’s poorer outcomes are viewed as justified. Furthermore, chronic perceptions of illegitimacy might have profound negative psychological consequences because they threaten important beliefs that sustain one’s sense of self-worth.

Conclusions

We have attempted to make four major points in this chapter. First, we have argued that the ways in which members of disadvantaged groups construe their social outcomes are shaped by strong tendencies to enhance and protect self-esteem and by tendencies to perceived the world as legiti-