

## Left–right ideological differences in system justification following exposure to complementary versus noncomplementary stereotype exemplars

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### *Abstract*

*The capacity for victim-derogating stereotypes and attributions to justify social inequality and maintain the status quo is well known among social scientists and other observers. Research conducted from the perspective of system justification theory suggests that an alternative to derogation is to justify inequality through the use of complementary stereotypes that ascribe compensating benefits and burdens to disadvantaged and advantaged groups, respectively. In two experimental studies conducted in Poland we investigated the hypothesis that preferences for these two routes to system justification would depend upon one's political orientation. That is, we predicted that the system-justifying potential of complementary versus noncomplementary stereotype exemplars would be moderated by individual differences in left–right ideology, such that left-wingers would exhibit stronger support for the societal status quo following exposure to complementary (e.g., “poor but happy,” “rich but miserable”) representations, whereas right-wingers would exhibit stronger support for the status quo following exposure to noncomplementary (e.g., “poor and dishonest,” “rich and honest”) representations. Results were supportive of these predictions. Implications for theory and practice concerning stereotyping, ideology, and system justification are discussed. Copyright © 2008 John Wiley & Sons, Ltd.*

Despite pervasive inequality and other potential injustices, much evidence suggests that people are motivated to defend and bolster the societal status quo and to maintain the belief in a just world (Jost & Banaji, 1994; Lerner, 1980). This motivation often manifests itself in tendencies to blame the disadvantaged, thereby deflecting blame away from the social system itself (e.g., Lerner & Simmons, 1966; Napier, Mandisodza, Andersen, & Jost, 2006; Ryan, 1971). Criticizing the poor for being unintelligent, lazy, disagreeable, or dishonest is one common way of preserving the belief in a just world (Furnham & Gunter, 1984; Hafer & Bègue, 2005; Montada & Schneider, 1989).

Research conducted from the perspective of system justification theory has demonstrated that an alternative to derogation is to justify inequality by endorsing or thinking about *complementary* stereotypes that ascribe compensating benefits and burdens to disadvantaged and advantaged groups, respectively (Jost & Kay, 2005; Jost, Kivetz, Rubini, Guermandi, & Mosso, 2005; Kay & Jost, 2003; Kay, Jost, & Young, 2005; Oldmeadow & Fiske, 2007). The idea is that complementary stereotypes contribute to the perceived legitimacy of the social system by suggesting that no single group in society holds a monopoly on all that is desirable (or undesirable). They portray a system, in other words, that is fair and “balanced” because no group “has it all” and no group is bereft of valued characteristics. For instance, the notion that despite their financial hardships the poor are happier or more honest than the rich rationalizes the unequal division of wealth by creating an illusion of equality (see Lane, 1959).

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Studies by Kay and Jost (2003) demonstrated that exposure to “poor but happy/rich but miserable” and “poor but honest/rich but dishonest” stereotype exemplars led people to score higher on a general measure of system justification. That is, reminding participants of complementary (vs. noncomplementary) stereotypes of the rich and poor bolstered their perceptions of the fairness and legitimacy of the social system. This suggests that, in the context of disadvantaged groups, enhancement may be an alternative to derogation as a means of satisfying system justification needs (Kay et al., 2005). In addition to “poor but happy” and “poor but honest” stereotypes, the system-justifying potential of complementary representations has been shown with respect to other disadvantaged groups such as women (Glick & Fiske, 2001; Jost & Kay, 2005), the obese and the powerless (Kay et al., 2005), and regional and ethnic minorities (Jost et al., 2005).

If derogation and enhancement are indeed alternative routes to system justification (see Kay et al., 2005), it seems likely that people would sometimes be more responsive to negative representations of low status group members and at other times to positive representations. The system-justifying potential of complementary “poor but happy” and “poor but honest” stereotypes, for example, may be moderated by situational and dispositional variables. With regard to the former, Kay et al. (2005) demonstrated that enhancement is an effective system-justifying strategy to the extent that the trait used to enhance the status of the victim is seen as causally irrelevant to his or her plight. In one study, a system threat manipulation designed to activate the system justification motive led participants to derogate those who “fail” (e.g., the powerless) on traits that were perceived as causally relevant to their misfortune (lack of intelligence), and, at the same time, to enhance their status on causally irrelevant traits (e.g., happiness). Whether derogating or enhancing representations are more effective as system-justifying devices therefore depends upon subjective perceptions of the causes of success and failure (i.e., attributions). This leaves room for ideological motivations to moderate the effects of exposure to complementary and noncomplementary stereotypes (see also Kay & Jost, 2003; Oldmeadow & Fiske, 2007).

There is a good deal of evidence that liberals (or leftists) and conservatives (or rightists) differ in the extent to which they make internal versus external attributions for success and failure. As a general rule, right-wingers make more internal (i.e., victim-blaming) attributions for poverty, obesity, and other potentially stigmatizing characteristics, in comparison with left-wingers (e.g., Crandall, 1995; Pandey, Sinha, Prakash, & Tripathi, 1982; Skitka et al., 2002; Skitka, Mullen, Griffin, Hutchinson, & Chamberlin, 2002; Zucker & Weiner, 1993). There is also evidence that victim-derogation is more prevalent among individuals who score relatively high on related ideological variables, such as the Protestant Work Ethic (Crandall, 1994; Kay & Jost, 2003; Quinn & Crocker, 1999) and the Belief in a Just World (Cozzarelli, Wilkinson, & Tagler, 2001; Furnham & Gunter, 1984; Hafer & Bègue, 2005; Lerner, 1980; Oldmeadow & Fiske, 2007). Right-wingers, therefore, may be more likely than others to adopt “strategies” that ascribe negative characteristics, such as dishonesty, to disadvantaged groups when justifying economic inequality within the social system.

What about left-wingers? Given the extent to which leftists (and perhaps centrists) may resist blaming the poor for their suffering, how might they explain and justify inequalities in the system? According to equity theory (Adams, 1965; Walster, Walster, & Berscheid, 1978), when people are confronted with a potential instance of undeserved disadvantage (and therefore inequity), there are two primary ways by which they can psychologically maintain perceptions of fairness. That is, the equity equation can be “balanced” by either (1) seeing the disadvantaged person as having contributed to his or her plight (i.e., decreasing the inputs) or (2) seeing the disadvantaged person as benefiting from the system in other ways (i.e., increasing the outputs). The former strategy, given its clear connection to processes of victim-derogation and victim-blaming, is unlikely to appeal to leftists as a means of system justification. As a result, they should be more likely than rightists to pursue the latter “strategy.” In other words, leftists and rightists may generally adopt different means of restoring the perception of equity to the social system; rightists should react more favorably to adjustments in inputs, whereas leftists should react more favorably to adjustments in outputs. It is plausible, therefore, that leftists will be more likely to see the social system as fair and just when reminded that the disadvantaged may experience other compensating rewards, whereas rightists may feel that the system is more just when reminded that success and failure are accompanied by character strengths and flaws, respectively. As a result, exposure to complementary versus noncomplementary stereotypes may exert opposite effects on the attitudes of leftists and rightists. Leftists, for instance, may show stronger support for the societal status quo following exposure to “poor + happy” and “poor + honest” than “poor + unhappy” and “poor + dishonest” stereotype exemplars, whereas rightists may show stronger support for the societal status quo following exposure to “poor + unhappy” and “poor + dishonest” than “poor + happy” and “poor + honest” stereotype exemplars. We investigated this possibility in two experimental studies conducted in Poland.

There are several reasons why Poland is a particularly interesting context in which to conduct research concerning the system-justifying effects of stereotypes of the rich and poor. First, the transition from a socialist to a free-market system in

the early 1990s has led to substantial income inequality in Polish society. How people respond to the rich and poor, therefore, is a question of both theoretical and practical significance. Second, feelings of political alienation appear to have increased after the transition (Korzeniowski, 1994), and there is some evidence that Polish respondents in general may be less likely to report believing in a just world, compared to respondents from other countries (see Dolinski, 1991; Wojciszke & Dowhlyluk, 2006). Third, there is inherent interest in the concomitants of left-wing versus right-wing ideology in formerly Communist countries (e.g., Bardi & Schwartz, 1996; Thorisdottir, Jost, Liviatan, & Shrout, 2007). Fourth and finally, prior research on complementary stereotyping as a system-justifying alternative to derogation has been conducted only in North American contexts (Jost & Kay, 2005; Kay & Jost, 2003; Kay et al., 2005), so the current study provides a valuable opportunity for cross-cultural replication and extension of previous findings.

We started with a pilot study designed to determine whether, in a Polish context, rightists would be more likely, and leftists less likely, to blame the poor, and credit the rich, for their economic status. We expected that right-wingers would be more likely than others to believe that wealth and poverty are caused by internal attributes such as one's degree of intelligence. Next, we conducted two experimental studies in which we investigated the effects of political orientation and exposure to complementary versus noncomplementary stereotype exemplars on the tendency to perceive societal arrangements as fair and legitimate. Study 1 focused on the system-justifying effects of "poor but happy"/"rich but miserable" representations, whereas Study 2 focused on "poor but honest"/"rich but dishonest" representations (see Kay & Jost, 2003).

## PILOT STUDY

A pilot study was conducted to assess the extent to which political orientation relates to the tendency to believe that poverty and wealth are generally caused by internal (vs. external) attributes. To this end, 111 students (60 male, 49 female, 2 did not report gender) at the Czestochowa University of Technology in Poland filled out a very brief questionnaire in Polish. Participants were asked to indicate (1) the extent to which they believed intelligence is *causally* related to being rich and (2) the extent to which they believed intelligence is *causally* related to being poor. Responses were made on a nine-point scale ranging from one ("not at all causal") to nine ("highly causal"). Participants also assessed their current financial situation on a nine-point scale ranging from one ("very bad") to nine ("very good"). All analyses in the pilot study and in subsequent studies adjust for participants' financial situation, although we present unadjusted means for ease of interpretation. Participants also reported their political orientation on a 9-point scale ranging from -4 ("leftist") to 4 ("rightist"). This method of ideological self-placement is a highly useful, effective, and efficient means of measuring the content and orientation of an individual's political attitudes (e.g., Fuchs & Klingemann, 1990; Jost, 2006; Knight, 1999).

As hypothesized, two regression analyses confirmed that, adjusting for financial situation, political orientation predicts internal explanations for inequality. In the first regression, both political orientation and financial situation were used to predict the extent to which participants believe that a lack of intelligence causes one to become *poor*. Political orientation exerted a significant effect in the predicted direction,  $b = 0.40$ ,  $SE = 0.15$ ,  $\beta = .24$ ,  $p = .01$ , indicating that right-wing orientation was positively related to the participants' tendencies to offer an internal attribution for poverty. Financial situation did not exert a significant effect,  $b = -0.17$ ,  $SE = 0.17$ ,  $\beta = -.09$ , *ns*. [For the model as a whole,  $R^2 = 0.06$ ,  $F(2, 108) = 3.60$ ,  $p = .03$ ].

In the second regression model, both political orientation and financial situation were used to predict the extent to which participants believed that intelligence causes one to become *rich*. Again, political orientation exerted a marginally significant effect in the predicted direction,  $b = 0.34$ ,  $SE = 0.18$ ,  $\beta = .18$ ,  $p = .06$ , indicating that right-wing orientation was positively related to participants' tendencies to offer an internal attribution for the attainment of wealth. Financial situation did not exert a significant effect,  $b = -0.01$ ,  $SE = 0.20$ ,  $\beta = -.01$ , *ns*. [For the overall model,  $R^2 = 0.03$ ,  $F(2, 108) = 1.82$ ,  $p = 0.17$ ]. These findings replicate research conducted in Western contexts (e.g., Crandall, 1995; Skitka et al., 2002; Zucker & Weiner, 1993) and confirm that right-wingers in Poland are indeed more likely to make internal attributions for poverty and wealth, in comparison with centrists and left-wingers. Thus, to the extent that people rely on principles of equity to explain and justify inequality in their social systems, these data provide further support for the possibility that

right-wingers are more likely than others to make adjustments in terms of “inputs” rather than “outputs” (see also Walster et al., 1978).

## STUDY 1

### Method

#### *Research Participants*

Ninety-nine participants (19 women and 76 men; 4 participants did not indicate gender), ranging in age from 19 to 38, were recruited from the Institute of Sport at the Czestochowa University of Technology in Poland.

#### *Procedure*

Upon arrival at the laboratory, participants were informed that the experiment involved measuring verbal memory and reasoning. Participants were first asked to assess their financial situation (on a nine-point scale, with one indicating “very bad” and nine indicating “very good”) and their political orientation (on a nine-point scale, with 1 = “leftist,” 5 = “centrist,” and 9 = “rightist”).

As in previous research by Kay and Jost (2003, Study 3), participants were then asked to read a story about two friends and told that they would be tested on their memory for the story later in the experiment. They were instructed to read the story as many times as necessary to memorize the main details. Half of the participants read about a rich target person who was happier than his poor friend, and the other half read about a poor target person who was happier than his rich friend. These passages were adapted from the materials used by Kay and Jost (2003) and translated into Polish. The first part of the text was the same in both conditions:

Janusz and Michal both grew up in Lodz and now both live in suburbs. Janusz is 39 and Michal is 41. They met for the first time at the beginning of their studies and they were friends for a few years after graduation. For the past few years because of their work schedules, they have had no contact. Janusz has an excellent job now, lives in a beautiful, spacious house in a lavish neighborhood, and makes a very large salary. Michal spends a lot of his time watching and playing sports, but unlike Janusz, his job doesn't pay him much, so his home, which is in a rather inexpensive part of town, is a bit cramped and not very nice-looking.

In the “poor happier than rich” (complementary, low-status enhancing) condition, the story concluded with the following:

Despite Michal's smaller house and lower salary, he is much happier with his life than Janusz. Michal enjoys most aspects of his life and is known amongst his friends as that guy who's always “broke and happy.” Janusz, on the other hand is generally not so happy and is often thought of as that “rich and unhappy guy.”

In contrast, the passage in the “rich happier than poor” (noncomplementary, high-status enhancing) condition concluded with the following:

Not only does Michal have a smaller house and lower salary than Janusz, he also is much less happy than Janusz. Janusz enjoys most aspects of his life and is known amongst his friends as that guy who is “rich and happy.” Michal, on the other hand, is generally not so happy and is often thought of that “always broke and unhappy guy.”

Next, as part of a “separate task” all participants indicated their degree of support for the societal status quo by indicating (on a nine-point scale) their agreement or disagreement with each of the eight items that were translated and modified from Kay and Jost's (2003, p. 828) scale for measuring general or diffuse system justification (see also Jost &

Kay, 2005). Sample items include: “In general, the Polish political system operates as it should,” “Everyone has a fair shot at wealth and happiness,” and “Polish society needs to be radically restructured” (reverse-scored). We conducted a principal component analysis to insure that the translated items formed a cohesive scale. Results indicated that six of the items loaded onto the primary factor, which yielded an eigenvalue of 2.05, and the other factors yielded eigenvalues of 1 or less. We therefore dropped two items (“Our society is getting worse every year” and “Everyone has a fair shot at wealth and happiness”) and calculated the mean of the remaining six items to estimate individuals’ system justification scores ( $\alpha = .57$ ).

At the end of the session, participants were asked to answer some short questions about the two protagonists from the first task. They were then debriefed and probed for awareness or suspicion of the hypothesized connection between the independent and dependent variables. None of the participants was able to guess the goals or hypotheses of the study.

## Results and Discussion

To examine the main and interactive effects of stereotype exposure and political orientation on system justification scores, we conducted regression analyses. In Step 1 of this regression, predictor variables included a dummy code for exposure to complementary versus noncomplementary representations, mean-centered political orientation scores, and adjustment variables of age, gender, and financial status. (Note that the significant results reported below remain significant, although at slightly higher  $p$  values, when these adjustment variables are omitted.) At Step 2, the interaction between stereotype exposure and political orientation was added to the model. The analysis yielded no reliable main effects, but it did produce the hypothesized interaction involving stereotype exposure and political orientation,  $b = -0.40$ ,  $SE = 0.15$ ,  $\beta = -.40$ ,  $p < .01$ . Adding the interaction term at Step 2 resulted in a significance increase in variance accounted for,  $\Delta R^2 = 0.08$ ,  $\Delta F(1, 84) = 7.32$ ,  $p < .01$ .

As illustrated in Figure 1, exposure to complementary and noncomplementary exemplars had opposite effects on system justification, as a function of participants’ political orientation. Following exposure to the complementary “poor but happy/rich but unhappy” vignette, participants on the left-wing side of the ideological spectrum scored significantly higher on system justification than did those on the right-wing side of the scale,  $b = -0.29$ ,  $SE = 0.11$ ,  $\beta = -.42$ ,  $p = .01$ . Following exposure to the noncomplementary “poor + unhappy/rich + happy” vignette, the opposite trend was observed, but the effect of political orientation did not attain statistical significance,  $b = 0.16$ ,  $SE = 0.11$ ,  $\beta = .23$ ,  $p = .14$ , *ns*. Taken as a whole, the results of the first study suggest that political ideology does play a moderating role in how people respond to complementary versus noncomplementary stereotypical representations. We pursued this possibility further in Study 2,

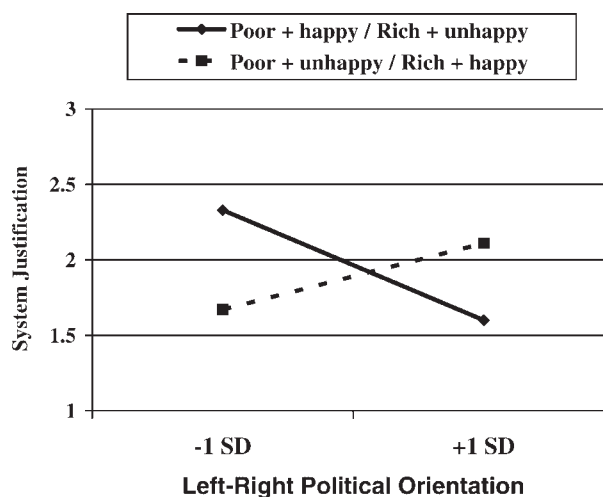


Figure 1. Spotlight analysis of effects of exposure to complementary (poor but happy/rich but unhappy) and noncomplementary (poor and unhappy/rich and happy) representations on system justification as a function of political orientation (Study 1). Means are adjusted based on all other variables included in the model

this time with respect to “poor but honest/rich but dishonest” and “poor and dishonest/rich and honest” stereotype exemplars.

## STUDY 2

### Method

#### *Research Participants*

One-hundred two participants (38 women, 60 men, and 4 who did not disclose their gender), ranging in age from 19 to 23, were recruited from the same population as in Study 1.

#### *Procedure*

The procedure was identical to that of Study 1 except that the two vignettes, also based on materials used by Kay and Jost (2003), addressed representations concerning honesty rather than happiness. In the “poor but honest/rich but dishonest” (complementary) condition, the story concluded as follows:

Despite Michal’s smaller house and lower salary, he tends to be much more honest than Janusz. Michal is generally honest in most aspects of his life and is known amongst his friends as that guy who’s always “broke and honest,” while Janusz, on the other hand, is not particularly moral and is often thought of as that “rich and dishonest guy.”

In contrast, the passage in the “rich and honest/poor and dishonest poor” (noncomplementary) condition concluded as follows:

Not only does Michal have a smaller house and lower salary than Janusz, he also tends to be much less honest than Janusz. Janusz is generally honest in most aspects of his life and is known amongst his friends as that guy who is “rich and honest,” while Michal, on the other hand, is not particularly moral and is often thought of as that guy who is always “broke and dishonest.”

All other aspects of the methodology were the same as in Study 1. Results of a principal component analysis indicated that the same six items used in Study 1 loaded onto a single factor (with an eigenvalue of 1.6), with other factors yielding eigenvalues of 1 or less. Therefore, we again took the mean of responses to these six items to estimate individuals’ system justification scores. As before, none of the participants were able to guess the goals or hypotheses of the study.

### Results and Discussion

To examine the main and interactive effects of stereotype exposure and political orientation on system justification scores, we conducted a regression analysis. In Step 1, predictor variables included a dummy code for exposure to complementary versus noncomplementary representations, mean-centered political orientation scores, and adjustment variables of age, gender, and financial status. (Note that the marginally significant results reported below become nonsignificant when these adjustment variables are excluded.) At Step 2, the interaction between stereotype exposure and political orientation was added to the model. This analysis yielded a marginally significant main effect of political orientation,  $b = 0.16$ ,  $SE = 0.09$ ,  $\beta = .27$ ,  $p = .10$  as well as a marginally significant interaction involving stereotype exposure and political orientation,  $b = -0.20$ ,  $SE = 0.12$ ,  $\beta = -.26$ ,  $p = .10$ . Entering the interaction term in Step 2 resulted in a slight increase in variance accounted for,  $\Delta R^2 = 0.03$ ,  $\Delta F(1, 90) = 2.69$ ,  $p = .10$ .

As illustrated in Figure 2, following exposure to the noncomplementary “poor and dishonest/rich and honest” vignette, participants on the right-wing side of the ideological spectrum evinced significantly more system justification than did

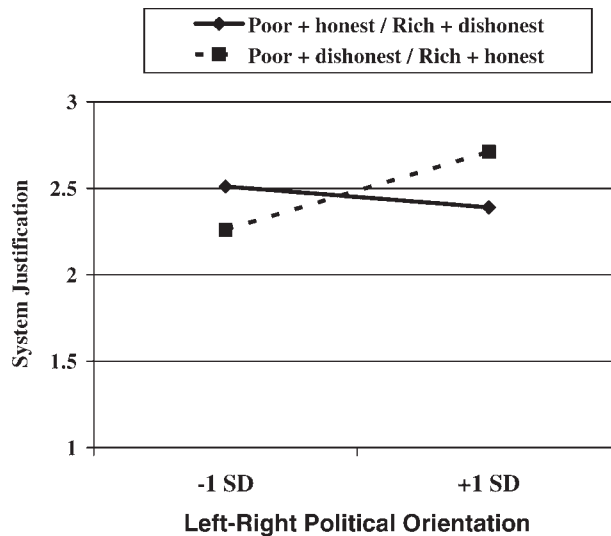


Figure 2. Spotlight analysis of effects of exposure to complementary (poor but honest/rich but dishonest) and noncomplementary (poor and dishonest/rich and honest) representations on system justification as a function of political orientation (Study 2). Means are adjusted based on all other variables included in the model

those on the left-wing side,  $b = 0.20$ ,  $SE = 0.09$ ,  $\beta = .32$ ,  $p < .05$ . Following exposure to the complementary “poor but honest/rich but dishonest” vignette, however, no significant effect of political orientation emerged,  $b = -0.05$ ,  $SE = 0.09$ ,  $\beta = -.10$ ,  $p = .54$ , *ns*.

## CONCLUSION

We have obtained fairly consistent evidence that the system-justifying consequences of exposure to complementary and noncomplementary stereotype exemplars differ as a function of political ideology. In our first study, we found that left-wing participants, but not right-wing participants, scored higher on system justification following exposure to compensatory representations of the poor as happier than the rich. In our second study, we found that right-wing participants scored higher on system justification when they were reminded of noncomplementary stereotypes that derogate those who “fail” and lionize those who succeed in society (i.e., “poor and dishonest/rich and honest”) than when they were reminded of complementary stereotypes. That is, right-wingers held significantly more favorable attitudes toward the societal status quo after they were primed with vignettes in which rich people were described as honest and poor people were described as dishonest. These results point to chronic differences in ideological orientation as constituting an important boundary condition on the system-justifying potential of complementary stereotypes (see also Kay, Jost, Mandisodza, Sherman, Petrocelli, & Johnson, 2007).

In general, the pattern of responses exhibited by left-leaning university students in Poland resembled that of North American university students in previous research by Kay and Jost (2003). The notion that leftists and centrists (but not rightists) would feel better about the societal status quo following exposure to stereotypical representations of the poor as possessing compensating advantages was also suggested by Kay and Jost (2003), who found some evidence that people who scored especially low on the Protestant Work Ethic were more affected by “poor but happy” and “rich but miserable” stereotype exemplars (p. 832). However, the two studies reported here provide the strongest evidence to date that the effects of complementary versus noncomplementary stereotype exposure on support for the status quo are moderated by individual differences in political ideology.

The question of whether ideologies of left and right have similar meanings and effects in different cultural contexts is an important one for social and political psychology (e.g., see Jost, 2006; Jost, Glaser, Kruglanski, & Sulloway, 2003). Taken

as a whole, the evidence presented here suggests that right-wingers in Eastern Europe resemble right-wingers in Western nations in making internal (rather than external) attributions for wealth and poverty and in responding favorably—at least with respect to their attitudes concerning the overarching social system—to relatively flattering representations of the rich and unflattering representations of the poor. At the same time, it is conceivable that political polarization in Poland may be even greater than in the United States and elsewhere, insofar as right-wingers in Poland exhibited patterns of response that were opposite to those exhibited by left-wingers and centrists. Future research would do well to flesh out differences between East and West with respect to the social and psychological antecedents, correlates, and consequences of political ideology (see also Thorisdottir et al., 2007).

Our studies suggest that there are potentially interesting differences in how people respond to representations of the rich and poor with respect to happiness versus honesty. Whereas the tendency for left-wingers to system justify more following exposure to complementary stereotypes was more pronounced in the context of happiness, the tendency for right-wingers to system justify was more pronounced in the context of honesty. One possibility is that leftists and rightists hold different default assumptions concerning the extent to which the traits of happiness and honesty are causally related to the acquisition of wealth. Indeed, we know that differences in the perception of causality between trait and outcome moderates the system-justifying potential of complementary versus noncomplementary stereotypes (Kay et al., 2005, 2007). Another possibility is that leftists and rightists may hold different *a priori* stereotypes regarding the degree of happiness and honesty possessed by the rich and poor, and that expectancy violation may have contributed to the observed differences between leftists and rightists. This interpretation would be consistent with prior work suggesting that the system-justifying potential of complementary stereotypes depends on the stereotypes being available and accessible (see Jost & Kay, 2005).

There are, unsurprisingly, several limitations of the data presented here that should be noted. For one thing, it is conceivable that left-wingers and right-wingers have different thresholds for declaring the existence of “disadvantage,” such that participants on the left may have been more likely than those on the right to view the protagonists in our scenarios as poor. It is also conceivable that people might attach different hedonic values to the specific traits implicated in complementary stereotypes as a function of political orientation. Thus, it may be that the trait of “happiness” was viewed as more important and therefore as more capable of balancing out poverty for leftists and centrists than for rightists. Although neither of these accounts is more parsimonious or convincing (given prior theory and research) than the one we have offered, and neither poses a threat to our theoretical conception (see also Kay et al., 2007), future research would do well to focus more narrowly on the specific mechanisms that are responsible for ideological differences in responding to complementary versus noncomplementary stereotypes.

In any case, the studies presented here contribute to a growing literature at the intersection of stereotyping, ideology, and system justification (e.g., Glick & Fiske, 2001; Jost & Kay, 2005; Jost et al., 2005; Kay & Jost, 2003; Kay et al., 2005, 2007; Oldmeadow & Fiske, 2007). There is by now good reason to think that stereotyping serves an important function in bolstering (as well as challenging) support for the societal status quo, in addition to its other well-known functions, such as categorization, simplification, affiliation, and communication (e.g., see Schneider, 2004). The notion that stereotypes are political is not especially new; their role in victim blaming, for example, has been relatively well-understood for over 50 years (e.g., Allport, 1954; Lerner & Simmons, 1966; Ryan, 1971). What is newer is the idea that victim-enhancing stereotypes, which appear to compensate—at least symbolically—for social and economic inequality can also affect attitudes toward existing political institutions. For some people, including those who identify themselves as left-of-center, these symbolic forms of compensation appear to increase their affinity for such institutions, whereas for others, including those who are right-of-center, symbolic compensation through stereotyping and related means appears to decrease their affinity for the status quo.

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