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John T. Jost is professor of psychology and politics and codirector of the Center for Social and Political Behavior at New York University. He has published over 150 scientific journal articles and book chapters, and his work has received professional acclaim as well as national and international media attention. With over 20,000 academic citations, he is one of the most highly cited social and political psychologists of his generation. He is best known for his work on stereotyping, prejudice, intergroup relations, social justice, political ideology, and the theory of system justification (Hunyady 2011).

Early Life and Educational Background

John Thomas Jost was born in 1968 in Toronto, Ontario, Canada, to American parents from Rochester, New York. His father, Lawrence Jost, was a Ph.D. student in philosophy at the University of Toronto at the time, but the family (including a daughter born in 1970) soon moved to Cincinnati, Ohio. Lawrence Jost became a professor of ancient Greek philosophy at the University of Cincinnati, and Jean Jost (née Effinger) received her Ph.D. in English from the same university before becoming a professor of medieval literature at Bradley University in Peoria, Illinois. John Jost graduated from Walnut Hills High School in 1986 and matriculated at Duke University, where he studied psychology.

At Duke University, John Jost took undergraduate and graduate courses in cognitive, developmental, social, personality, and clinical psychology with a number of influential teachers, including David Goldstein, Irving Alexander, and Philip Costanzo. He worked as a volunteer research assistant in the experimental laboratories of David Goldstein (a developmental psychologist) and Lynn Hasher (a cognitive psychologist). He also studied with Irving Alexander (1922–2007) – a former student and close friend of the legendary Silvan Tomkins (1911–1991), whose work in the 1960s on a left-right polarity theory of personality and politics made a lasting impression on Jost. Professor Alexander allowed Jost to attend an advanced seminar on personality assessment, in which doctoral students in clinical psychology learned to administer various diagnostic tests, including the Wechsler Adult Intelligence Scale, the Thematic Apperception Test, and the Rorschach Inkblot Test.

It was during a summer abroad as a visiting student in London in 1988 that Jost was first exposed to the field of social psychology. He was drawn to the field immediately and became a devotee of social identity theory. Social psychology allowed Jost to envision ways of integrating

his theoretical and practical interests in (a) the thoughts, feelings, and behaviors of individuals as well as (b) dynamics of collective action, social change, and mass politics. Upon returning to Duke, Jost wrote a senior thesis on the phenomenon of group polarization and took courses in sociology and philosophy, as well as Professor Costanzo's graduate seminar in Social Psychology. He graduated Phi Beta Kappa and magna cum laude in 1989, after 3 years, with a major in psychology and a certificate in human development.

Jost was admitted to the Ph.D. program in social psychology at Yale University but deferred his admission for a year to do graduate work in philosophy at the University of Cincinnati as a Charles Phelps Taft Fellow. There he took courses in logic, epistemology, philosophy of science, philosophy of language, philosophy of mind, and social theory, focusing especially on Descartes, Hume, Marx, Sartre, Habermas, Rawls, and contemporary critical and feminist theorists. Jost wrote a masters' thesis on the later writings of Ludwig Wittgenstein under the supervision of Professor Donald Gustafson (1934–2009). In the thesis, Jost argued that cognitive development (including acquisition of a "theory of mind") could be understood in terms of the child's progression through increasingly complex "language games" pertaining to mental activity; the manuscript was eventually published in *Theory and Psychology* in 1995 (and anthologized in 2001 and 2011).

When Jost arrived at Yale University in 1990 to study social and political psychology, the dominant methodological approach was that of social cognition, which utilized reaction time and other behavioral paradigms developed in cognitive psychology to investigate processes involved in social categorization, evaluation, and judgment. Upon joining the laboratory of Mahzarin Banaji, he was exposed to the first generation of research on implicit attitudes about the self and various social groups (including work on implicit bias that led to the development of the Implicit Association Test).

As a student in Professor Banaji's seminar on Stereotyping and Prejudice, Jost proposed ideas that led to the development of system justification theory. His term paper, which was entitled "Salvaging Exploitation Theories of Prejudice: Stereotypes as Social Justification," was inspired by quotations from Karl Marx and Gordon Allport:

> The class which has the means of material production at its disposal, has control at the same time over the means of mental production... (Marx and Engels)

> [T]he rationalizing and justifying function of a stereotype exceeds its function as a reflector of group attributes. (Allport)

The basic argument was that "(a) specific stereotype contents arise because they explain and justify the status quo, especially the exploitation of certain groups of people, (b) they are initially promulgated by those members of society who stand to gain the most advantage by preserving the exploitative system, and (c) they are eventually spread by virtually all members of society, since stereotypes serve the ideological function of explaining social reality in a way which makes it seem natural and just." These ideas were received enthusiastically by Professor Banaji, and when the *British Journal of Social Psychology* announced plans for a special issue on "the structure and functions of stereotyping," the two proposed an article emphasizing its ideological function. In early 1994, when Jost was just 25 years old, he and Banaji published an influential article entitled "The Role of Stereotyping in System Justification and the Production of False Consciousness," which outlined the starting assumptions of system justification theory.

While at Yale, Jost attended a weekly research meeting at the Institute for Social and Policy Studies devoted to the topic of political psychology. The group was organized primarily by Robert Abelson (1928–2005) and Donald Green. Other regular attendees included Leonard Doob (1909–2000), with whom Jost completed an independent study on the early history of social psychology, as well as Robert Lane and other

prominent political scientists. A constant stream of guest speakers and visitors at Yale exposed Jost and his cohort of graduate students (which included Curtis Hardin, Alexander Rothman, Irene Blair, Nilanjana Dasgupta, and Jack Glaser) to many of the most prominent intellectuals of the late twentieth century, including Clifford Geertz, Jürgen Habermas, Catharine MacKinnon, bell hooks, Amartya Sen, and others.

Jost completed his dissertation under the supervision of William J. McGuire (1925–2007), a cognitively oriented social psychologist who possessed a lifelong interest in philosophy, literature, and history. Emboldened by McGuire's advice to explore creatively the meanings and implications of one's own conceptual insights, Jost sought to develop a more formal theory of system justification as an approach not only to the study of intergroup relations but to the subject matter of social and political psychology more broadly. This overall project was influenced by McGuire's perspectivist method, which invites researchers to integrate what is valuable about alternative theories and hypotheses in a sustained empirical effort to "conduct studies about people rather than studies about studies" (Jost et al. 2004a).

Professional Career

After Yale, Jost became a postdoctoral researcher at the University of Maryland in the laboratory of Arie W. Kruglanski. Early on, Professor Kruglanski asked Jost whether psychological conservatism – including the "need for cognitive closure," the tendency to "seize and freeze" on information that is salient, familiar, or accessible – would be associated with political conservatism: the ideological tendency to maintain the societal status quo. Jost's background in political psychology – including his familiarity with Adorno and colleague's work on the authoritarian personality and Tomkins' left-right theory of ideological polarity – led him to expect that there would be a reasonably close association. Jost and Kruglanski pursued these ideas and later published, in collaboration with Jack Glaser and

Frank Sulloway, an influential theory of political conservatism as motivated social cognition.

In 1996, Jost moved to the University of California at Santa Barbara, where he held the position of visiting assistant professor of psychology. There he and Brenda Major planned an interdisciplinary conference on processes of legitimation that would eventually take place at Stanford University, where Jost began as an assistant professor the following year. In 2001, Jost and Major published *The Psychology of Legitimacy*, an edited book with Cambridge University Press that was inspired by the conference. The goal of the project was to compare and contrast, and to some extent consolidate, what had been learned in sociology and psychology about subjective appraisals of legitimacy (and illegitimacy) from a number of related perspectives, including theories of social comparison, relative deprivation, social identity, social dominance, and system justification (Jost and Major 2001).

In 2000, Jost was promoted to Associate Professor of Organizational Behavior at the Graduate School of Business at Stanford University, where he taught M.B.A. courses in teamwork, social influence, and negotiation. Soon thereafter, he spent a highly stimulating year as a fellow of the Radcliffe Institute for Advanced Study at Harvard University. This rekindled a close working relationship with Mahzarin Banaji, who had recently moved from Yale to Harvard. During that year, Jost joined a working group comprised of legal scholars and social psychologists devoted to increasing "behavioral realism" in the legal code, especially with respect to implicit, unintentional forms of bias and discrimination. With Gary Blasi, a professor of law at the University of California at Los Angeles, Jost coauthored an article on implications of system justification theory for law and society, which was published in a special issue of *California Law Review* (Blasi and Jost 2006). At Radcliffe, Jost completed work on several articles and two edited books: *Political Psychology: Key Readings* (Jost and Sidanius 2004) and a Festschrift in honor of William J. McGuire entitled *Perspectivism in Social Psychology: The Yin and Yang of Scientific Progress* (Jost et al. 2004a).

In 2003, Jost received a tenured appointment in the Department of Psychology at New York University, so he and his wife, Orsolya Hunyady, a clinical psychologist of Hungarian extraction, relocated to Manhattan's Greenwich Village. (The two were married in 2001 and now have two daughters, Eva and Simone.) The move allowed Jost to return to his home discipline of social psychology and to join an illustrious faculty and prodigious Ph.D. training program. Thus began an extremely productive period of research with an outstanding, lively group of doctoral students, which included Hulda Thorisdottir, Cheryl Wakslak, Alison Ledgerwood, Jaime Napier, Ido Liviatan, Jojanneke van der Toorn, Avital Mentovich, Erin Hennes, Hannah Nam, and Chadly Stern – all ten of whom currently hold faculty positions. Jost's work, and that of his students, has been funded consistently by the National Science Foundation.

Throughout his career, Jost has received a number of prestigious honors and awards. These include the Gordon Allport Intergroup Relations Prize (three times) sponsored by the Society for the Psychological Study of Social Issues (SPSSI), the International Society of Political Psychology (ISPP) Erik Erikson Award for Early Career Research Achievement in Political Psychology, International Society for Self and Identity (ISSI) Early Career Award, Society for Personality and Social Psychology (SPSP) Theoretical Innovation Prize, Society of Experimental Social Psychology (SESP) Career Trajectory Award, and the Morton Deutsch Award for Distinguished Scholarly and Practical Contributions to Social Justice, which is presented by the International Center for Cooperation and Conflict Resolution at Columbia University.

Jost has been a visiting scholar in the Department of Science and Education at the University of Bologna, Italy (1998), visiting professor of psychology and public policy at Princeton University (2009–2010), and visiting research scholar in the Graduate School of Education at Fordham University (2016–2017). He has delivered major keynote speeches in the USA, Netherlands, Germany, Italy, Israel, Japan, New Zealand, and Argentina and addressed a meeting of the United Nations in Tunisia. He has served on the executive committees of several professional societies and on 20 editorial boards. Jost was editor-in-chief of *Social Justice Research* from 2003 to 2008 and is currently editor of the Oxford University Press book series on Political Psychology. He has taught in a number of international workshops and summer schools and hosted professional conferences, such as the biennial meeting of the International Society of Justice Research (ISJR) in New York City in 2014 and the annual meeting of the International Society of Political Psychology (ISPP) in Warsaw, Poland, in 2016. He was elected Fellow of Societyra for Personality and Social Psychology (SPSP), Society of Experimental Social Psychology (SESP), and the Association of Psychological Science (APS). Jost served as vice president (2013–2015) and president (2015–2016) of the International Society of Political Psychology (ISPP).

Research Interests

Jost has published impactful articles on a variety of topics, including social justice (Jost and Kay 2010), prejudice (Kay et al. 2007), implicit bias (Jost et al. 2009b), resistance to change (Jost 2015), political neuroscience (Jost et al. 2014a), and social media usage (Barbéra et al. 2015). Nevertheless, most of his work has focused on system justification (Jost and Banaji 1994; Jost et al. 2004; Kay and Jost 2003), political ideology (Amodio et al. 2007; Carney et al. 2008; Jost 2006; Jost et al. 2003a, 2009c), and the connections between the two (Jost et al. 2008, 2009a; Napier and Jost 2008).

System Justification Theory

Jost and Banaji (1994) proposed system justification theory as a way of bringing together several distinct theoretical traditions. One line, which derived from philosophy and social theory in Marxian and feminist traditions, emphasized the power of dominant ideology, cultural hegemony,

and the problem of false consciousness. Other influences came from empirical research in social and personality psychology. It included the work of Kurt Lewin, who wrote about "group self-hatred" among Jews and other disadvantaged groups; Gordon Allport, who described stereotypes as rationalizations for exploitation and oppression; Leon Festinger, who highlighted the dynamics of cognitive-motivational processes such as denial, justification, and rationalization; Melvin Lerner, who characterized the desire to believe in a just world as a "fundamental delusion;" and Henri Tajfel, who noted that members of disadvantaged groups sometimes appear to accept the legitimacy and stability of their own disadvantaged position in the social order (Jost and Hunyady 2002).

The most distinctive aspect of system justification theory was the notion that members of disadvantaged (as well as advantaged) groups – for psychological as well as ideological reasons – would be *motivated* to believe that the existing social system is good, fair, legitimate, desirable, stable, and just (Jost and van der Toorn 2012). The term "system justification" had appeared once in *Beliefs about Inequality*, a book in which Kluegel and Smith (1986) noted that "certain Marxist theories…assume working-class people will come to recognize the contradictions between their self-interests and their system-justifying beliefs" (p. 15). Jost and Banaji (1994) proposed that people are not only motivated to defend and justify (a) their own characteristics and actions in the service of self-esteem (a process labeled ego justification) and (b) the characteristics and actions of fellow group members in the service of social identification (group justification) but also (c) social inequalities and other aspects of the status quo in the service of maintaining the legitimacy and stability of the social system (system justification). This formulation has been very influential in the social and behavioral sciences, and the initial article has been cited over 2000 times, according to Google Scholar.

According to system justification theory, people in general are motivated (often nonconsciously, i.e., without deliberate awareness or intention) to defend, justify, and bolster aspects of the status quo, including existing social, economic, and political institutions and arrangements. The general cognitive-motivational process of system justification is expected to be largely the same for members of advantaged and disadvantaged groups. Thus, endorsement of the legitimacy of the social system has been observed among rich and poor, men and women, old and young, gay and straight people, and individuals of diverse national, ethno-linguistic, and racial backgrounds. Members of advantaged and disadvantaged groups often accept rather than reject existing hierarchies, favoring the advantaged over the disadvantaged on implicit and sometimes explicit measures of evaluation (Jost and Hunyady 2005).

At the same time, the strength of system justification motivation and its expression vary according to situational (contextual) and dispositional (individual difference) factors. In particular, system justification motivation is increased (or activated) when the social system is perceived to be (a) inevitable or inescapable, (b) criticized, challenged, or threatened, or (c) traditional or longstanding, and when (d) the individual feels especially dependent on the social system and its authorities (van der Toorn et al. 2015). For example, several experiments demonstrate that threats to the legitimacy of the system lead people to defend the system more vigorously and rely more heavily on stereotypes to justify inequalities in the system. In the USA, heightened patriotism and increased support for governmental institutions (even among those who are chronically low in system justification) following reminders of the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001, provide further evidence that system threat activates or enhances system justification motivation. System justification is theorized to arise from basic epistemic needs for certainty, structure, and closure, existential needs for safety, security, and reassurance, and relational needs for affiliation, conformity, and shared reality. Studies show that dispositional (as well as situational) variability in epistemic, existential, and relational needs are associated with the endorsement of system-justifying attitudes.

Consistent with a "goal systems" framework, there are several possible means by which the social system can be justified. These include direct endorsement of conservative belief systems or ideologies, the legitimation of institutions and authorities, denial or minimization of system problems or shortcomings, rationalization, and so on. In the context of intergroup relations, system justification needs are frequently satisfied through processes of stereotyping, whereby members of both advantaged and disadvantaged groups accept and perpetuate the existing hierarchy by judging the advantaged to be more competent and industrious (and sometimes better overall) than the disadvantaged and by endorsing "complementary stereotypes" that create an "illusion of equality" in society (Jost and Kay 2005; Kay and Jost 2003).

There are a number of preexisting ideologies or belief systems that people can embrace to bolster the societal status quo. These include the Protestant work ethic, belief in a just world, meritocratic ideology, fair market ideology, economic system justification, power distance, benevolent sexism, social dominance orientation, right-wing authoritarianism, religious fundamentalism, and political conservatism (Jost et al. 2003a, b, 2014b). What these various belief systems have in common is that they explain social, economic, or political outcomes in a manner that generally maintains the perceived legitimacy of the status quo. For this reason, their endorsement should satisfy epistemic, existential, and relational needs to a greater extent than belief systems that are openly critical, contemptuous, or challenging of the status quo. The fact that there are so many different types of system-justifying belief systems highlights the fact that such concerns permeate individuals' social relationships, family dynamics, and work lives, as well as their attitudes about society, religion, politics, economics, business, and the law.

Some of the long-term social psychological consequences of system justification are theorized to be opposite for members of advantaged and disadvantaged groups. For members of advantaged groups (i.e., those who are favored by the status quo), the perception of being "on top" of society is consonant with the holding of positive attitudes about the self and the groups to which one belongs. In other words, system justification is consonant with ego and group justification motives; it is positively associated with self-esteem, ethnocentrism, and subjective well-being. Members of disadvantaged groups (or those who are disfavored by the status quo), however, are faced with a potential conflict between their need to justify the system and competing motives to enhance their own self-esteem and group status. For them, system justification conflicts with ego and group justification motives; it is negatively associated with self-esteem, ethnocentrism, and long-term well-being. Specifically, the more they justify the system, the more disadvantaged group members exhibit outgroup favoritism and suffer in terms of self-esteem, neuroticism, depression, and generalized anxiety.

At the same time, system justification appears to serve a short-term palliative function of increasing positive affect and reducing negative affect for members of advantaged and disadvantaged groups alike (Jost and Hunyady 2002). That is, the endorsement of system-justifying beliefs and ideologies is associated with increased positive affect, decreased negative affect, and satisfaction with the status quo. For example, the tendency to embrace meritocratic ideology (e.g., believing that economic inequality is legitimate and necessary in capitalist society) is associated with increased life satisfaction and contentment among the poor as well as the rich. The adoption of system-justifying beliefs and ideologies can reduce feelings of uncertainty, distress, guilt, frustration, helplessness, cognitive dissonance, and moral outrage brought on by social inequality and other deficiencies of the system.

System justification research paints a fairly bleak picture with regard to prospects for social change. System justification, like rationalization in general, does seem to help people cope with unwelcome realities, but it also hampers the remediation of injustice and other system-level problems. Studies have demonstrated that system justification reduces moral outrage, and in doing so undermines the implementation of intentions and actions designed to help the disadvantaged.

Thus, system justification motivation typically leads people to resist social change and to perceive it as threatening to the status quo.

Nevertheless, some research suggests that people are more willing to embrace social change when it is perceived as inevitable and/or congruent with the preservation of the social system and/or its ideals. Thus, people engage in anticipatory rationalization of a new regime as soon as its implementation is regarded as extremely likely. One would expect this process to be facilitated by a rapid transition that replaces the previous regime entirely, thereby avoiding the problem of divided loyalties between current and former systems. Other research suggests that it is possible to harness system justification on behalf of social change by framing proposed interventions as "system sanctioned" (i.e., as patriotic and consistent with the goal of preserving a familiar "way of life"). With the right kind of leadership and communication, then, it may be possible to direct system justification motivation so that it leads people to seek out improvements to the status quo rather than defending against the threatening possibility of social change.

Political Ideology as Motivated Social Cognition

Jost et al. (2003a) conducted a quantitative, meta-analytic review of political conservatism and its underlying social, cognitive, and motivational underpinnings. The review – which covered 88 studies conducted between 1958 and 2002 involving over 22,000 individual research participants or cases from 12 different countries – was published in *Psychological Bulletin* under the title of "Political Conservatism as Motivated Social Cognition." The authors concluded that intolerance of ambiguity and stronger personal needs for order, structure, and closure were positively associated with the endorsement of conservative attitudes, whereas integrative complexity, openness to new experiences, and tolerance for uncertainty were negatively associated with conservative attitudes (or positively associated with liberal attitudes). Stronger feelings of threat, perceptions of

danger, death anxiety, and exposure to system threat were positively associated with conservatism. The article was highly publicized in the mass media and reignited once vigorous debates about authoritarianism, dogmatism, and the covariation of psychological characteristics and political beliefs, opinions, and values.

Jost et al. (2008) proposed that since the time of the French Revolution, there have been two core philosophical dimensions of value that distinguish left vs. right (or liberal vs. conservative) ideology, namely, (a) advocating versus resisting social change (as opposed to tradition) and (b) rejecting versus accepting hierarchy and inequality. The crux of the theory of political ideology as motivated social cognition, which shares some of the same assumptions as system justification theory, is that situational and dispositional needs to manage uncertainty and threat contribute to resistance to change, acceptance of inequality, and a preference for conservative ideology. Presumably, this is because maintaining the status quo, with its attendant degree of hierarchy, provides certainty, structure, and familiarity, whereas changing the status quo requires tolerance of risk, uncertainty, and perhaps even chaos.

A tacit assumption of this theory is that individuals gravitate toward those ideas and opinions that "match" (or "resonate" with) their own underlying needs, interests, and desires. Because this process involves some element of choice – or, to use Max Weber's term, "elective affinity" – the theory is not well poised to explain political preferences under established totalitarian regimes such as communism or fascism, which compel nearly all members of a society to support an official ideology. Nevertheless, in circumstances that provide at least some range (or "menu") of ideological options, Jost and colleagues hypothesize that conservative ideology should be more attractive to people who are temporarily or chronically high in needs to reduce uncertainty and threat, whereas progressive ideology should be more attractive to individuals who are low in such needs.

Research teams around the world have taken the theory of political conservatism as motivated social cognition in a number of stimulating

directions, documenting the influences of genetic heritability and assortative mating strategies on resistance to change and acceptance of inequality; the continuity between childhood temperament and political orientation in adulthood; interpersonal attachment styles and their implications for the adoption of right-wing ideology; ideological differences in approach-oriented, exploratory behavior; perceptual vigilance and physiological reactivity in response to negative stimuli; "conservative shift" in response to threatening situations, such as terrorist attacks; and ideological differences in neurocognitive structures and functions, especially when it comes to the amygdala and the anterior cingulate cortex. In political science, the theory has been applied to core topics, such as domestic and foreign policy decision-making on the part of elites and voting behavior on the part of ordinary citizens. The article by Jost et al. (2003a) has been cited over 2000 times and contributed to an unprecedented level of popular interest in the subject matter of political psychology, as indicated by the number of trade books and websites devoted to the topic in the early years of the twenty-first century.

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