Differences in System Justification with respect to Gender, Political Conservatism, Socio-Economic Status and Religious Fundamentalism

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Abstract

In this research, we investigated the differences in system justification in relation to gender, political conservatism, socio-economic status (SES) and religious fundamentalism. Three hundred Turkish University Students were given System Justification Scale, Political Ideology and Religiosity Scale. They also supplied their demographic information. Muslim Religious Orientation Scale was also included into the questionnaire in order to identify those who have extrinsic, intrinsic, quest and fundamentalist orientation. It was found that masculinity, having a conservative political ideology, religious fundamentalism and having a low SES will lead to more individuals having system-justifying thoughts. These findings were discussed in the light of the relevant literature.

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Keywords: system justification; political ideology; religious fundamentalism

1. Introduction

This study aims at identifying differences in system justification in relation to gender, political ideology, SES and religious fundamentalism.

1.1. System Justification

System justification was first proposed by Jost and Banaji (1994) and updated by Jost, Banaji, and Nosek (2004). It is considered within the justification literature. In addition to ego justification which is defined as stereotypes that function to protect the position and behavior of individuals; and group justification which is defined as the stereotypes that function to protect the status or conduct of a social group (Jost & Banaji, 1994), system justification (SJ) is offered as the process by which people embrace ideologies and beliefs that legitimizes social, political, and economic order even when their support appears to conflict with personal and group interests (Jost & Banaji 1994).

System justification has two major goals, the first of which is to understand how and why people provide any type of support for the status quo, even when their support appears to conflict with their private interests...
(negative self-stereotyping) and public interests (negative in-group stereotyping), and the second one is to analyze the social and psychological antecedents and consequences of supporting the status quo, especially for members of disadvantaged groups such as poor, minorities, women, etc.

People who endorse SJ thoughts share certain dispositional factors which mainly function to reduce uncertainty/ambiguity and threats in life. They are uncertainty avoidance, intolerance for ambiguity, need for order, perception of a dangerous world and fear of death.

There are also certain ideologies which are considered as system justifying ideologies. Some of the examples are fair market ideology, economic system justification, belief in just world, social dominance orientation, opposition to equality, right-wing authoritarianism, protestant work ethic and political conservatism (Jost & Hunyady, 2005)

1.2. Political Conservatism

Political conservatism is a system-justifying ideology. It is associated with the endorsement of varieties of rationalizations of current social, economic, and political orders (Jost, Nosek, & Gosling, 2008). Endorsement of system-justifying beliefs is generally associated with high personal pleasure, as well as increased positive emotion (Lerner, 1980; Major, 1994; Wakslak, Jost, Tyler, & Chen, 2007). This is referred to as the palliative function of system-justifying ideology (Jost & Hunyady, 2002). That is why conservatives are happier than liberals.

It has been found that right-wing (vs. left-wing) orientation is associated with greater subjective well-being and that the relation between political orientation and subjective well-being is mediated by the rationalization of inequality which corresponds to system justification (Napier & Jost, 2008). Therefore, we know that system justification is mediating the relationship between certain variables. However, we are not very sure of what mediates the relationship between system justification and variables such as gender, socio-economic status and fundamentalism. How does political conservatism function among these relationships?

1.3. Religious Fundamentalism

Studies mainly provide support for the positive relationship between religious involvement and sexism (justifying the status of especially women) (Glick, Lamerias, & Castro, 2002) and gender role attitudes (Morgan, 1987). Moreover, religious fundamentalism has been found to be related to several social psychological variables such as prejudice (Hunsberger, Owusu, & Duck, 1999) and sexism (Peek, Lowe, & Williams, 1991).

In consistence with system-justification theory, underlying needs for order, stability, meaning, and justice could help to explain the appeal of religious belief systems. This is because religion offers the poor and civiltit mortus the comforting idea that everyone -whether rich or poor, whether women or men, whether master or servant- is valued by God and that they will be rewarded in the afterlife for their commitment to Him (Rankin, Jost, & Wakslak, 2009).

1.4. System Justification in relation to Gender and Socio-Economic Status

System Justification takes place when complementary gender stereotypes are reminded to individuals (Jost & Kay, 2005). These stereotypes include favorable attributes for the disadvantaged (such as women being communal but not agentic) and unfavorable attributes for the advantaged. Moreover, Glick and Fiske (2001) found that there are negative relationships between sexism scores and different indices of gender development level (living standard of women relative to that of men, longevity and women’s education) in 19 different countries. As a result, these findings indicated the existence of consensual ideologies that rationalize gender inequality (a form of SJ) around the world (Jost & Hunyady, 2002).

The stereotypes (related to socio-economic status) which favor disadvantaged groups like “poor but honest” and disfavor the advantaged groups like “rich and dishonest” resulted in increased support for the status quo (Kay & Jost, 2003). These various findings triggered researchers to investigate how victim-derogating and victim-enhancing judgments serve to SJ. A contradictory finding showed that in terms of a just world belief, the disadvantaged (poor) were blamed for their misfortune and were judged negatively (Furnham & Gunter, 1984). Additionally, Jost, Pelham, Sheldon and Sullivan (2003) showed that a low-income group was more likely to support limitations on the rights of citizens to criticize government; to trust in government officials; to believe that
large salary differences are necessary to “get people to work hard”; to endorse meritocratic belief systems; and to believe that economic inequality is legitimate and necessary than a high-income group.

1.5. Hypotheses

The hypotheses of the study are as follow; 1-Males will have higher SJ scores than females, 2-Poor group will have higher SJ scores than rich group, 3-Conservatives will have higher SJ scores than non-conservatives, and 4-Fundamentalists will have higher SJ scores than non-fundamentalists.

2. Method

2.1. Participants

A total of 300 Turkish University Students (129 male, 161 female) took part in the study. The average age of the sample was 21.46 (SD=2,70). Majority of the students were from psychology departments and %99 of the participants were Muslim.

2.2. Instruments

Participants completed System Justification Scale (PVQ), Political Ideology Scale and Muslim Religious Orientation Scale together with some demographics including gender, age, SES and the universities they are enrolled to.

2.2.1. System Justification Scale

This scale has 8 items two of which required reverse coding. Seven-point Likert Type scale is used. Higher scores indicated higher levels of system justification (Jost & Kay, 2005).

2.2.2. Political Ideology

We measured political ideology with a left-right self-placement item. We used the following question: “Where do you politically perceive yourself? 1-Radical Left, 2-Left, 3-Close to Left, 4-Center, 5-Close to Right, 6-Right, 7-Radical Right, 8-Other (8 is treated as missing value). The mean response for the sample was 3.88 (SD = 1.55).

2.2.3. Muslim Religious Orientation Scale-R (MROS)

The MROS-R aimed to measure the intrinsic, extrinsic, quest and fundamentalist dimensions of Muslim religious orientation (Ercan, 2009). This scale is the revised form of MROS developed by Harlak, Eskin and Demirkiran (2008). It has 21 items and 7-point Likert type scale (1: Not at all true of me-7: It is very true of me) is used. The reliability coefficients for intrinsic (α=.83), extrinsic (α=.71), quest (α=.71) and fundamentalist (α=.72) religious orientation subscales were found to be reliable.

2.2.4. Socio-Economic Status (SES)

In order to have two groups one from high SES and one from low SES populations, 150 students from various state and 150 students from various private universities were chosen.

2.3. Procedure

The participants were administered the questionnaires (containing measures of each variable and demographic information) by the author in group sessions containing up to 25 individuals and most of the students were contacted either in cafeterias or in libraries. Informed consent of the participants was taken and confidentiality of responses was assured. In addition, contact information was provided for possible further questions.
3. Results

One-way ANOVA was conducted to understand the differences between males and females on system justification. As a result of the analysis a significant difference was found; \( f(1,298)=5.99, p<.05, \eta^2 =.02 \). However, when ANCOVA is conducted to look at gender differences on SJ after controlling for political ideology, this significant difference is lost \( f(1,286)=2.49, p=.12 \). Therefore, we concluded that gender differences on SJ are mediated by political ideology differences.

Furthermore, four-way Univariate Analysis of Variance was conducted to test the effect of fundamentalism, gender, SES and political ideology on system justification. As a result of this analysis, firstly, the main effect of SES was significant; poor group’s mean was higher \( (M=4.11) \) than rich group’s mean \( (M=3.80) \), \( f(1,184)=6.13, p<.05, \eta^2 =.03 \). Secondly, the main effect of fundamentalism was significant; fundamentalist group’s mean was higher \( (M=4.26) \) than non-fundamentalist group’s mean \( (M=3.65) \), \( f(1,184)=5.91, p<.05, \eta^2 =.03 \). And, lastly, the main effect of political ideology was significant; rightist group’s mean was higher \( (M=4.31) \) than leftist group’s mean \( (M=3.64) \), \( f(1,184)=6.05, p<.05, \eta^2 =.03 \).

Among two-way interactions; the interaction between SES and political ideology was significant, \( f(1,184)=3.26, p<.05, \eta^2 =.02 \). Poor-rightists have higher SJ scores \( (M=4.64) \) than rightists \( (M=3.93) \) and poor-leftists have lower SJ scores \( (M=3.58) \) than right-leftists \( (M=3.74) \). That is to say, being poor leads to having the highest and the lowest levels of SJ depending on the political ideology they have. On the one hand, disadvantaged poor people rationalized this inequality because of their rightist ideology; on the other hand, they did not rationalize this inequality because of their leftist ideology.

Among three-way interactions; firstly, there is a significant interaction between SES, gender and political ideology, \( f(1,184)=5.35, p<.05, \eta^2 =.03 \). After examining the means, it was found that the most striking difference was between leftist females \( (M=3.17) \) and rightist males \( (M=4.77) \). Secondly, there is a significant interaction between fundamentalism, gender and political ideology, \( f(1,184)=4.88, p<.05, \eta^2 =.03 \). Leftist, non-fundamentalist, females have much lower scores \( (M=3.24) \) than rightist, fundamentalist, males \( (M=4.86) \). And lastly, a significant interaction between fundamentalism, gender and SES was evidenced, \( f(1,184)=8.03, p=.005, \eta^2 =.04 \). Fundamentalist males (FM) have much higher scores than non-fundamentalist females (NFF) among poor (Mean of FM=5.44, mean of NFF=3.46) and rich people (Mean of FM=4.05, mean of NFF=3.64). Analyses mainly confirmed our expectations, and our findings are consistent with existing literature.

4. Discussion

The findings have provided evidence for how system justification scores are changing, on the basis of gender, political conservatism, fundamentalism and socio-economic status. Moreover, the findings of testing two hypotheses have showed how much mediating power political ideology has. This must be considered as a big challenge to “End of Ideologists” such as Converse, Shils, Aron, Bell, Lipset, Adorno and his friends (Jost, 2006), who argue that ideology is dead!

Several limitations affect the results, for example socially desirable answers may have been preferred rather than answers reflecting real thoughts and opinions. Moreover, the participants may have held unclear attitudes about the SJ items most of which require participants to express their opinions concerning the gender-related issues in Turkey.

Future studies may take culture issues into consideration. Therefore, cross-cultural studies are highly recommended. Also, specific type of SJ ideologies (e.g. gender-related SJ, economic SJ...) may be investigated to see their interactions if there are, and it would be helpful to see if general SJ scores are moderating the relationships between specific SJ scores.

References


