PART ONE. INTRODUCTION
1 Emerging Perspectives on the Psychology of Legitimacy

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With this book, we are proud to present what we see as the best research currently being conducted in a rapidly emerging interdisciplinary field seeking to understand processes of legitimation in social relations. The contributors are leading researchers in relatively diverse fields and sub-fields of sociology, psychology, political science, and organizational behavior, but the themes they cover are overlapping and mutually informative. The book is constructed primarily around the authors and their theories, and there is an uncommon degree of dialogue among the authors. The chapters converge on key questions concerning the ways in which people construct ideological rationalizations for their own actions and for the actions of others taken on behalf of valued groups and systems. The result is a general approach to the psychological basis of social inequality, which may be applied to distinctions of race, gender, social class, occupational status, and many other forms of inequality.

In this introductory chapter we wish to accomplish three main things. The first is to articulate briefly the conceptual relevance of legitimacy for social, organizational, and political psychology. We argue that the concept applies extremely well to key questions in each of these fields, although psychologists have generally not addressed it systematically. Second, we provide a rational reconstruction of recent history leading up to serious interest in the psychology of legitimacy in the mid-1990s. Specifically, we highlight sociological and social psychological influences from the 1960s, 1970s, and 1980s and show how they led to a spate of papers that were published in 1993 and 1994 linking ideology, justice, and intergroup relations and prompting our interest in putting this book together. Our third and final goal in this chapter is to introduce the specific contributions to this volume, placing them in a common context. The chapters address multiple levels of analysis, from individual cognitions and motivations
that shape the self-concept, to the role of social identification and conflict between groups, to organizational and political systems that reinforce differences in status, power, and prestige. We hope you will agree that a number of focused and generalizeable principles concerning the legitimation of social arrangements emerge from this unique compilation of interdisciplinary collaborators.

The Concept of Legitimacy in Social, Organizational, and Political Psychology

Although the concept of legitimacy may be relatively new to empirical psychology, it has played an extremely prominent role in social and political philosophy for well over 2,000 years, as Zelditch recounts in the next chapter. Only very recently has legitimacy found its way into the study of psychology, largely because of the cumulative efforts of the researchers who are brought together in this volume across disciplinary boundaries.

What this book represents is a convergence of interest in the notion that attitudes, beliefs, and stereotypes serve to legitimize social arrangements and to provide ideological support for social and political systems (see also Ellemers, 1993; Jost & Banaji, 1994; Major, 1994; Pratto, Sidanius, Stallworth, & Malle, 1994; Sidanius, 1993; Tyler, 1990). The starting assumption of this chapter and this book is that issues of legitimacy have far-reaching implications for a great many core topics in social, organizational, and political psychology.

In the domain of politics, Machiavelli is well known for having argued that power depends upon legitimacy and social influence. Several centuries later, it is now a well-established fact in sociology and political science that leaders and authorities are effective to the extent that they are perceived as having legitimate authority and acting in accordance with prevailing norms of appropriate conduct (e.g., Berger & Zelditch, 1998; Parsons, 1937; Useem & Useem, 1979; Weatherford, 1992; Worchel, Hester, & Kopala, 1974; Zelditch & Walker, 1984). The converse also seems to be true: when systems and leaders are perceived to be illegitimate, their power begins to erode very quickly in the absence of physical force (e.g., Gurr, 1970; Martin, Scully, & Levitt, 1990; Moore, 1978). Legitimacy is, quite literally, the key to politics, and it therefore deserves a central place in any theory of political psychology (e.g., Flacks, 1969; Kelman, 1969; Tyler, 1990).

But issues of legitimacy and justification enter into ordinary as well as overtly political forms of social interaction, and they are therefore integral to the concerns of social psychology more generally (e.g., Baron & Pfeffer, 1994; Berger & Luckmann, 1966; Haines & Jost, 2000; Jost & Banaji,
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1994; Lind & Tyler, 1988; Major, 1994; Ridgeway & Berger, 1986). Legitimacy is crucial to impression management as well as to developing a meaningful sense of the self as a worthwhile and valid individual. People are required by others to justify their attitudes and behaviors and to demonstrate that they are acting in a legitimate manner (e.g., Anderson, Krull, & Weiner, 1996; McLaughlin, Cody, & Read, 1992; Scott & Lyman, 1968; Staw, 1976). Even privately, we seek to develop rationalizations for our own thoughts, feelings, and actions, and we hope to attain legitimacy in our own eyes as well as the eyes of others (e.g., Aronson, 1973/1989; Festinger, 1957; Jost, 2001; Weick, 1993). The concept of legitimacy, therefore, has importance not only for political life but for everyday social interaction as well (Ridgeway, this volume). In part, this is because people are intuitive politicians who are trying to balance various constituencies (Tetlock, 1991), and in part this is because people genuinely value integrity, fairness, rationality, and other characteristics that are strongly associated with perceptions of legitimacy (Bierhoff, Cohen, & Greenberg, 1986; Folger, 1984; Greenberg & Cohen, 1982; Lerner & Lerner, 1981).

Achieving legitimacy is an important practical matter for both public institutions and private organizations (e.g., Dowling & Pfeffer, 1975; Hannan & Carroll, 1992; Meyer & Rowan, 1977; Powell & DiMaggio, 1990), especially when controversial events force them to defend their legitimacy in response to actual or anticipated criticism from external sources (e.g., Bettman & Weitz, 1983; Bies & Sitkin, 1992; Elsbach, 1994). Here again, we see a blend of impression management and justice motives, and this blend is integral to the enterprise of legitimation (e.g., Elsbach & Sutton, 1992; Greenberg, Bies, & Eskew, 1991). In institutional and organizational contexts, there is a bright side and a dark side to issues of legitimacy. Organizations can build loyalty and create positive work environments by fostering legitimacy (e.g., Folger & Cropanzano, 1998; Tyler, this volume). At the same time, however, the carrying out of extreme acts of exploitation, violence, and evil is socially and psychologically feasible only to the extent that perpetrators are able to make their actions seem legitimate (e.g., Darley, 1992; Jackman, this volume; Kelman & Hamilton, 1989; Lerner, 1996; Milgram, 1974). Thus, the concept of legitimacy is central to the operation of institutional norms and organizational behavior in ways that are both heartening and disheartening.

As the extreme example of violence in social relations makes clear (e.g., Jackman, this volume), the act of legitimation becomes even more significant when people must justify beliefs or behaviors that are unpopular or counternormative. Thus, discriminatory or prejudicial treatment of outgroups must be justified and made to seem legitimate (e.g., Allport, 1954;
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Hunyady, 1998; Jost & Banaji, 1994; Sidanius, 1993; Tajfel, 1981). Even more basically, social inequality is the kind of thing that requires legitimation in order for it to be accepted (e.g., Della Fave, 1980; Jost, 2001; Lane, 1962; Olson & Hafer, this volume). The primary function of ideological thought, in general, is to legitimate ideas and actions that might otherwise be objectionable (e.g., Berger & Luckmann, 1966; Marx & Engels, 1846/1970). Thus, “dominant ideologies” serve to rationalize social and economic forms of inequality and to preserve the sense that such inequality is fair and legitimate (e.g., Jackman & Senter, 1983; Kluegel & Smith, 1986). This is the essence of Marxist theories of legitimation, which are addressed in several chapters in this book with special regard to consequences for intergroup relations (e.g., Jackman; Jost, Burgess, & Mosso; Spears, Jetten, & Doosje; Zelditch).

Despite compelling calls for research attention over the years (e.g., Della Fave, 1980; Flacks, 1969; Kelman, 1969), the concept of legitimacy has not been the focus of much systematic thought in social psychological circles. This omission is especially surprising given the extremely broad applicability of the concept of legitimacy to nearly every dimension of social life, and given the clear ideological role played by legitimating beliefs in the maintenance of authority as well as the perpetuation of inequality and injustice. Thus, while the concept of legitimacy has been central to the disciplines of sociology and political science for decades and to social and political philosophy for many centuries, it has never occupied center stage among psychologists—that is, until very recently. What the book you are now holding attempts to do is to capture an emergent focus on the social psychology of legitimacy, a focus that came into view for a somewhat loose aggregate of researchers in the mid-1990s.

A Rational Reconstruction of Research Programs on the Psychology of Legitimacy

In what hindsight could scarcely allow us to see as coincidence, a relatively large number of social psychological articles and book chapters published in 1993 and 1994 addressed, in different but compatible ways, the theme of legitimacy as it applies to the study of ideology, justice, and intergroup relations. These writings were motivated primarily by social identity theory (Ellemers, 1993; Ellemers, Wilke, & van Knippenberg, 1993; Lalonde & Silverman, 1994), social dominance theory (Pratto et al., 1994; Sidanius, 1993; Sidanius & Pratto, 1993), and theories of system justification or system legitimation (Jost & Banaji, 1994; Major, 1994; Martin, 1993), all of which are covered in this book. Although these three perspectives differ in
important ways, they converge on the notion that people use ideas and beliefs to reinforce the legitimacy of the status quo, at least under some circumstances. Outside of the theoretical boundaries of social identity, social dominance, and system justification perspectives, other researchers were simultaneously exploring the role of ideological justifications and their consequences for stigma, prejudice, and the self-concept (e.g., Crandall, 1994; Crocker & Major, 1994; Eagly & Mladinic, 1994; Fiske, 1993; Tomaka & Blascovich, 1994). At the same time, issues of legitimation were being revisited by sociologists and organizational theorists (Baron & Pfeffer, 1994; Elsbach, 1994; Jackman, 1994), who seemed to be influenced by progress in theoretical and experimental social psychology. Social psychologists had largely borrowed the concept of legitimation from organizational sociology, and by the mid-1990s they finally appeared to be ready to give something back.

Probably none of the contributions of 1993 or 1994 would have taken the forms they did, were it not for a number of important books and papers that had already appeared in the 1980s and early 1990s and which built upon earlier sociological works. Some of the most influential of these addressed phenomena such as the belief in a just world (Lerner, 1980; Rubin & Peplau, 1975), obedience to authority (Darley, 1992; Kelman & Hamilton, 1989; Tyler, 1990), the tolerance of injustice (Croby, 1984; Lind & Tyler, 1988; Martin, 1986), dominant ideology (Billig, 1982; Kluegel & Smith, 1986; Moscovici, 1988), and false consciousness (Tyler, 1990; Tyler & McGraw, 1986). Still others focused on issues of legitimation in intergroup relations (Ridgeway & Berger, 1986; Tajfel & Turner, 1986), including social stereotyping (Eagly & Steffen, 1984; Hoffman & Hurst, 1990; Jackman & Senter, 1983; Ridgeway, 1993; Spears & Manstead, 1989), group consciousness raising (Gurin, 1985), and collective protest (Martin, Brickman, & Murray, 1984; Wright, Taylor, & Moghaddam, 1990). Although these publications represented the fruits of relatively autonomous research programs, their commonalities may be appreciated in historical setting. Specifically, we can now see that a relatively clear consensus emerged concerning the pivotal role played by attitudes, beliefs, and stereotypes in the ideological perpetuation of the status quo through social and psychological processes of justification, rationalization, and legitimation.

Very recently, then, a number of social psychologists on both sides of the Atlantic have incorporated political dimensions into their theorizing about persons and social groups, and so the concept of legitimacy has found its way, somewhat independently, into discussions of selfhood, entitlement, ideology, justice, stereotyping, and intergroup relations (e.g., Ellemers, 1993; Hunyady, 1998; Jost & Banaji, 1994; Major, 1994; Martin,
It was in light of these developments that we decided to hold a confer-
ence at Stanford University in August 1998 on “The Psychology of Legiti-
macy.” The goal of the conference was to highlight what we saw as some
of the best social scientific research being conducted on the ways in which
people maintain social inequality through stereotypes, justifications, ra-
tionalizations, and legitimizing ideologies. Because these questions were at
the cutting edge of several different disciplines (including psychology,
sociology, political science, and organizational behavior), we felt that the
time was right to assemble top researchers in various fields and to attempt
the shared integration of insights coming from diverse theoretical perspec-
tives and distinct research methodologies.

What this volume represents, then, is a unique convergence of theoreti-
cal opinion that began to emerge in social psychological treatments of
ideology, justice, and intergroup relations by the time of the Stanford
conference. In many ways, this convergence is traceable not only to the
cumulative work of the 1980s and 1990s that we have already mentioned,
but also to the traditions of equity theory, relative deprivation theory, and
social identity theory. According to equity theories of justice, people will
accept outcomes as fair and legitimate to the extent that they are directly
proportional to inputs (Adams, 1965; Homans, 1961; Walster, Walster, &
Berscheid, 1978). As Folger (1986) points out, issues of legitimacy and
justification enter into calculations of equity in practice, so that people are
willing to accept outcomes that are not commensurate with their abilities
or efforts, as long as they are treated with consideration and provided with
reasonable explanations for the inequity. Thus, equity theorists identify an
important basis for perceiving injustice as well as a legitimate rationale for
getting people to accept unequal outcomes, but they probably underesti-
mate the strong moderating role played by procedural justifications (Fol-

Theories of “relative deprivation,” like equity theories, were largely
borrowed from sociological accounts (e.g., Gurr, 1970; Pettigrew, 1967;
Runciman, 1966) and applied to individual and group judgments about
fairness and entitlement (e.g., Cropanzano & Randall, 1995; Crosby, 1976;
Major, 1994; Martin, 1993; Olson, 1987; Wright et al., 1990). The guiding
notion was that people would experience injustice not necessarily because
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of absolute levels of deprivation but rather because they were deprived relative to others. In many ways, this insight opened the door to the empirical study of the tolerance of injustice (Martin, 1986), the denial of personal discrimination (Crosby, 1984), and false consciousness (Jost & Banaji, 1994; Tyler & McGraw, 1986). The traditions of equity theory and relative deprivation are exemplified most clearly in this volume by Olson and Hafer, whose chapter integrates work on relative deprivation and the belief in a just world.

Finally, work on the psychology of legitimacy owes a considerable debt to the legacy of Henri Tajfel, who in the 1970s successfully drew on sociological works such as Berger and Luckmann’s (1966) The Social Construction of Reality and Albert Hirschman’s (1970) Exit, Voice, and Loyalty in the course of proposing a psychological theory of intergroup relations that placed issues of system legitimacy and stability at its core (e.g., Ellemers et al., 1993; Tajfel, 1978, 1982; Tajfel & Turner, 1986; Wright et al., 1990). The essence of social identity theory, insofar as it applies to issues of legitimacy, is that members of low status groups will accept their inferiority to the extent that they perceive the status differences between groups to be both highly legitimate and unlikely to change. This insight has provided inspiration for system justification theorists such as Jost and Banaji (1994) who have sought to pick up where social identity theory leaves off (see also Jost et al., this volume; Major & Schmader, this volume).

Tajfel is an especially important model not only because of his interdisciplinary breadth, but also because he explicitly linked intergroup relations to issues of justice, justification, ideology, and myth (Tajfel, 1981, 1984b). For instance, he argued that an “important requirement of research on social justice would consist of establishing in detail the links between social myths and the general acceptance of injustice” (Tajfel, 1984b, p. 714). Interestingly, Tajfel was quick to observe that much work remained to be done in integrating insights concerning ideology, justice, and intergroup relations (see also Jost, 2001). He noted, for example, that the asymmetry in patterns of ingroup and outgroup favoritism between members of high status and low status groups “has been recognized to some extent in the social identity approach to intergroup relations,” but he concluded that “this is not enough” (Tajfel, 1984b, p. 790). It is fitting that this volume, which seeks to rekindle interest in questions of legitimacy in social relations, is being published by the same press, Cambridge University Press, that published most of the enormously influential books written or edited by Tajfel (1981, 1982, 1984a).

Tajfel’s untimely death in 1982 caused a fairly serious setback in making progress on these ambitious theoretical and empirical goals (see Robinson,
The influence of social identity theory has remained very strong, but most empirical research on the theory has addressed issues of personal and collective self-esteem, situational and individual variation in identification with the ingroup, and perceptual and cognitive processes of self-categorization (e.g., Abrams & Hogg, 1990; Spears, Oakes, Ellemers, & Haslam, 1997; Turner, Hogg, Oakes, Reicher, & Wetherell, 1987). Work on the system-level concepts of legitimacy and stability fell off somewhat after Tajfel’s death, although that tradition of theorizing has been represented admirably by three of the contributors to this volume: Russell Spears, Naomi Ellemers, and Stephen Wright. The group-value model developed by Tom Tyler (1989, 1990) and Allan Lind (Lind & Tyler, 1988), too, owes a considerable debt to Tajfel and Turner’s (1986) social identity theory, as do social dominance theory (Sidanius & Pratto, 1993, 1999) and system justification theory (Jost & Banaji, 1994; Jost & Burgess, 2000).

The Hungarian philosopher of science Imre Lakatos argued that scientific research programs acquire coherence only retrospectively, through the rational reconstruction of advances and developments. Although the convergence in the 1990s of social, organizational, and political psychological perspectives on topics of legitimacy and legitimation may have been something of an accident, meaning can be provided now. The question, therefore, that the reader may pose in relation to this book is, “What are the emerging insights of the psychological study of legitimacy?” By way of introduction to this volume, we summarize the elements of a collective answer to this question.

An Introduction to This Volume

This book is organized according to five major substantive themes. Following this introduction, part two recounts historical perspectives on sociological and psychological theories of legitimacy and contains personal and profound chapters by two pioneers of the study of legitimacy, Zelditch and Kelman. Part three focuses on understanding the cognitive and perceptual processes involved in the appraisal of legitimacy and includes contributions by Crandall & Beasley, Yzerbyt & Rogier, and Robinson & Kray. Part four concerns the tolerance of injustice among members of disadvantaged groups, with special attention given to consequences for self and society. It features chapters by Olson & Hafer, Major & Schmader, Ellemers, and Wright. Part five addresses issues of stereotyping and ideology in the legitimation of inequality, integrating insights from theories of social identification, social dominance, and system justification. This section contains chapters by Ridgeway; Glick & Fiske; Sidanius, Levin, Fed-