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On the Malleability of Ideology: Motivated Construals of Color Blindness

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The authors propose that the content of certain sociopolitical ideologies can be shaped by individuals in ways that satisfy their social motivations. This notion was tested in the context of color-blind ideology. Color blindness, when construed as a principle of distributive justice, is an egalitarian stance concerned with reducing discrepancies between groups' outcomes; as a principle of procedural justice, however, color blindness can function as a legitimizing ideology that entrenches existing inequalities. In Study 1, White people high in antiegalitarian sentiment were found to shift their construal of color blindness from a distributive to a procedural principle when exposed to intergroup threat. In Studies 2, 3A, and 3B, the authors used manipulations and a measure of threat to show that antiegalitarian White people endorse color blindness to legitimize the racial status quo. In Study 3B, participants' endorsement of color-blind ideology was mediated by increases in their preference for equal treatment (i.e., procedural justice) as a response to threat. In the Discussion section, the authors examine implications of the present perspective for understanding the manner in which individuals' compete over the meaning of crucial ideologies.

Keywords: color blindness, ideology, legitimization, distributive justice, procedural justice

In 2007, a bitterly divided U.S. Supreme Court struck down a Seattle school district's efforts to integrate its campuses (*Parents Involved in Community Schools v. Seattle School Dist. No. 1*, 2007). The Court majority argued that the district's policy—whereby a child's race could, under certain circumstances, be used to decide which school he or she would be permitted to attend—violated the Fourteenth Amendment's Equal Protection Clause. The dissent objected in unusually vehement terms, decrying the decision as one that "the Court and the Nation will come to regret" (p. 68). Yet despite reaching starkly differing conclusions, both sides pinned their reasoning on the same legal precedent—*Brown v. Board of Education* (1954)—and on the color-blind ideology (cf. Bonilla-Silva, 2003) that anchored it. Though both judicial camps laid claim to color blindness, a philosophy that abhors the controlling influence of race on people's lives, they each drew on opposing versions of it. Justice Breyer's dissent portrayed color blindness as calling for the creation of racial equity, even if reaching this goal requires color-conscious public policy (e.g., school busing). He thus described *Brown's* legacy as the establishment of "one law, one Nation, one people, not simply as a matter of legal principle but in terms of how we actually live" (p. 67). For its part, the court majority saw color blindness as strictly prohibiting government policies from recognizing an individual's race. Concurring with the majority, Justice Thomas espoused this sense of color blindness when he asserted that "all race-based government decision-making—regardless of context—is unconstitutional" (p. 6).

That the justices in *Parents Involved in Community Schools v. Seattle School Dist. No. 1* (2007) could disagree so strenuously in their conclusions, despite having based their arguments on the same core principle, points to a largely overlooked property of sociopolitical ideologies—namely, that their specific content is malleable and, as such, a given ideology can be made to serve opposing goals and agendas. We suggest that a given ideology can mean different things to different people—and, indeed, different things to the same person in different situations. Adding precision to this claim, we develop a justice-based framework for understanding which forms certain ideologies' meanings may take. Finally, we argue that individuals exploit the malleability of sociopolitical ideologies by actively endorsing them in forms that promote their intergroup goals.

Taking the U.S. Supreme Court as inspiration, we explore the malleability and motivated construal of ideology in the context of color-blind ideology. We argue that color blindness can assume one of two meanings: a distributive-justice mandate or a procedural-justice dictate. As such, we predicted that White people motivated to protect the racial hierarchy would construe the ideology in its procedural form, as this construal's requirement of equal treatment across racial groups prohibits many inequity-reducing policies. Moreover, we provide evidence that antiegalitarian White people support procedural color blindness as a legitimizing ideology, endorsing it as a means of combating

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threats to the status quo. In sum, when faced with a threat to the racial hierarchy, antiegalitarian White people exploit ideological malleability by molding color blindness—a notion that they normally reject—into a legitimizing ideology that they can (and do) support.

The Malleability of Sociopolitical Ideologies

Most theories of ideology imply that ideological meanings are, for the most part, inflexible. Prominent theories of legitimization, for instance, suggest that a given belief's function (e.g., hierarchy-enhancement or hierarchy-attenuation) is a static feature of the ideology itself (Jost, Banaji, & Nosek, 2004; Sidanius, Levin, Federico, & Pratto, 2001). Consistent with this view, social dominance theory proposes that individuals endorse ideologies that match their level of social dominance orientation (SDO; Pratto, Sidanius, Stallworth, & Malle, 1994). That is, individuals high and low in antiegalitarian sentiment (i.e., SDO) will tend to gravitate toward hierarchy-enhancing and hierarchy-attenuating ideologies, respectively (Federico & Sidanius, 2002; Sidanius & Pratto, 1999; Sidanius, Pratto, van Laar, & Levin, 2004). From this perspective, meaning and function are fixed properties of the ideologies themselves, leaving individuals to engage in a kind of assortative endorsement as they pair up with the ideology that best suits their purposes. Although we do not doubt that individuals select among ideologies, we submit that existing perspectives underestimate ideologies' flexibility. In fact, when sufficiently motivated, individuals may be capable of altering an available ideology to make it serve their immediate needs.

A malleable ideology exhibits both stability and change, with specific elements of its content shifting even as its core meaning remains the same. For example, the core meaning of racist ideology has remained static over many decades: Differences between racial groups' outcomes stem from fundamental differences between the groups themselves. At the same time, the specific content of racist ideology has mutated from an assertion of White genetic superiority into a claim of Black cultural maladaptation (Katz & Hass, 1988; McConahay, Hardee, & Batts, 1981; Ryan, 1976). In addition to such gradual shifts, research suggests that ideological content can also change on a much shorter, developmental timescale. For example, whereas young children use the ideology of the Protestant work ethic (PWE) to argue that social groups should receive equal outcomes, older children attach different content to the ideology—including the notion that the failure to achieve success is traceable to individuals' personal shortcomings (Levy, West, Ramirez, & Karafantis, 2006). So construed, the work ethic maintains its core meaning (the idea that prosperity is tied to hard work) but becomes an ideology that justifies inequality (i.e., a system-legitimizing or hierarchy-enhancing ideology; Kay & Jost, 2003; Sidanius & Pratto, 1993).[1]

Though historical and developmental shifts in ideological content are consistent with the present account, our approach extends this research by suggesting that individuals purposively alter ideologies' content in response to immediate situational demands. We argue that one motivation in particular—the motivation to bolster the status quo—often drives shifts in ideological content. We next describe a framework that links shifts in ideological content to shifts in conceptions of justice—in particular, individuals' focus on distributive justice versus procedural justice (Thibaut & Walker, 1975)—and, in so doing, explicates how given ideological meanings can serve specific intergroup motivations.

Conceptions of Justice and the Legitimation of Inequality

Individuals maintain a multifaceted understanding of justice. Perhaps the most fundamental distinction is that between distributive and procedural justice (Thibaut & Walker, 1975; Tyler, 1990). Distributive justice refers to individuals' preference for fair outcomes (e.g., patterns of resource apportionment), whereas procedural justice captures individuals' desire for fair institutional rules (Blader & Tyler, 2003; Bobocel, Song Hing, Davey, Stanley, & Zanna, 1998; Leventhal, 1980; Schweitzer, Sylvester, & Saks, 2007). In addition to this crucial dichotomy, individuals also distinguish between the fair treatment of individuals (i.e., microjustice) and the fair distribution of resources across society as a whole (i.e., macrojustice; Clayton & Tangri, 1989). Although the distinction between microjustice and macrojustice is separable from the distributive-procedural distinction, the two dichotomies typically coincide. That is, a focus on macrojustice is often associated with distributive concerns, whereas a microjustice focus is typically associated with procedural concerns (Clayton & Tangri, 1989; Murrell, Dietz-Uhler, Dovidio, Gaertner, & Drout, 1994).

The distinction between distributive and procedural justice is porous (Skitka & Houston, 2001; Van den Bos, 2005). Nevertheless, individuals assess distributive and procedural justice according to different criteria. Judgments of distributive justice focus on outcomes and, as such, frequently invoke the principle of equity (Blader & Tyler, 2003; Bobocel et al., 1998). Any evidence of disparities in outcomes that are not tied directly to differences in individual talent and hard work would constitute evidence of (distributive) injustice. In contrast, judgments of procedural justice focus more narrowly on the processes enacted in allocating outcomes. Procedures can be experienced as inherently just or unjust (Rawls, 1971), primarily as a function of whether they are unbiased and impartial, operating in the same fashion for everyone (Leventhal, 1980). In other words, individuals tend to perceive procedures as just when they exhibit neutrality (Blader & Tyler, 2003; Leventhal, 1980; Schweitzer et al., 2007).

When groups' outcomes differ as a function of variables unrelated to individual talent and effort (e.g., when institutional discrimination exists), differences in the criteria that define distributive and procedural justice have important implications for the maintenance of the status quo. Individuals focused on distributive justice are likely to favor differences in treatment across individuals, so long as these differences help eliminate unjust disparities in outcomes (Crosby & Franco, 1993; Son Hing, Bobocel, & Zanna, 2002). In contrast, individuals focused on procedural justice are likely to favor equal treatment across individuals, even if such treatment entrenches existing inequalities (Crosby & Franco, 2003; Son Hing et al., 2002). Because of its power to preempt efforts to reduce inequality, emphasis on procedural (as opposed to

[1] In their analysis of the Protestant work ethic, Levy and colleagues (2006) distinguish between surface and associated meanings of the ideology. This dichotomy is largely analogous to our distinction between the core meaning of an ideology and its specific content. Our distinction, however, is intended to highlight the fact that ideologies have relatively static (core) features as well as more fluid content.

distributive) justice has the potential to legitimize and entrench the status quo (Clayton & Tangri, 1989; Crosby & Franco, 2003). Consistent with this possibility, research suggests that individuals oppose redistributive policies more when those policies are framed in narrowly procedural, rather than distributive, terms (Murrell et al., 1994; Son Hing et al., 2002).

Justice and the Construal of Ideologies

We have argued that when groups' outcomes differ in ways not to tied talent or effort, the narrow focus on procedural (as opposed to distributive) concerns can serve to entrench existing inequality. This raises the possibility that individuals who are motivated to legitimize the status quo will purposively shift their focus from distributive to procedural justice. Although we know of no direct evidence that the desire to protect the hierarchy affects individuals' focus on procedural versus distributive justice, research suggests that justice concerns are context-dependent. For example, individuals tend to focus on procedural justice in the context of an ingroup but tend to focus on distributive justice when interacting with outgroups (Tyler & Smith, 1999). Research also suggests that whether individuals focus on procedural or distributive justice can be directly manipulated (Murrell et al., 1994).

The evident sensitivity of justice concerns to contextual factors suggests that situationally activated intergroup motivations might drive shifts in justice concerns. For such shifts in justice concerns to alter the content of malleable ideologies, however, there must also be a link between the conceptions of justice and the content of ideology. Indeed, many (perhaps most) sociopolitical ideologies encapsulate, or otherwise influence, people's notion of what is and is not just. For instance, the belief in a just world (Lerner, 1980) represents the general view that people deserve what they get and get what they deserve. Likewise, the PWE asserts that good fortune is earned through discipline and hard work (Weber, 1904/2001). Racism, too, affects individuals' assessments of justice: By asserting that discrepancies in social outcomes reflect inherent differences between groups, racism casts such differences as fair. In light of the link between sociopolitical ideologies and justice concerns—coupled with evidence that justice concerns are potentially sensitive to hierarchy-relevant motives—we reasoned that motivated conceptions of justice might manifest as shifts in ideological content. We next explore the possibility that the content of a given ideology—color blindness—can be construed in terms of both distributive and procedural justice and that the preferred construal can affect whether the ideology is likely to challenge or protect the status quo.

Construals of Color Blindness

Color-blind ideology is a moral outlook that locates dignity, worth, and moral agency in the individual and, therefore, abhors the influence of race on peoples' fortunes in life (Rousseau, 1754/1994). In his 1963 "I Have a Dream" speech, Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.—the American most strongly associated with color blindness—captured the essence of the ideology when he hoped for a future in which individuals would be judged "not by the color of their skin but by the content of their character" (Dyson, 2000). In short, color blindness requires that social burdens and benefits be independent of one's membership in a particular racial group.

Color-blind ideology's core meaning—the humanistic admonition that race should not matter—carries considerable moral weight and enjoys widespread support in the United States (Bonilla-Silva, 2003; Brown et al., 2003). This essence, however, does not exhaust the content of the ideology. Rather, individuals supplement color blindness with content specifying to what race should not matter. We argue that the choice of additional content produces alternative construals of color-blind ideology: a distributive-justice mandate and a procedural-justice dictate. It is this feature of color blindness that explains how individuals, whether laypeople or Supreme Court justices, can assert the same ideology and yet disagree sharply in their conclusions.

Color Blindness as Distributive Justice Principle

Color-blind ideology, construed as a principle of distributive justice, mandates that race not matter to individuals' outcomes in life. Individuals who construe color blindness as a distributive-justice prescription ought therefore to find present-day patterns of racial disparities objectionable. Moreover, because the primary focus of distributive justice is on societal outcomes—a macrojustice concern—individuals who endorse color blindness in the distributive sense should be unperturbed by unequal treatment as long as such violations of procedural neutrality produce a net reduction in racial inequality. Moreover, these same individuals should be less likely to endorse equal treatment if they perceive such treatment to entrench existing inequalities in outcomes.

Color Blindness as Procedural Justice Principle

Many Americans regard color blindness not as a principle of distributive justice but rather as a procedural-justice dictate. Color-blind ideology, construed as a principle of procedural justice, dictates that race not matter in the way individuals are treated. For individuals that construe the ideology in terms of procedural justice, color blindness requires that the rules used by institutions conform to the procedural justice principle of neutrality (Bennett, 1992; Connerly, 2000; Horowitz, 1999; Krauthammer, 2002; Steele, 1990). Because procedural justice focuses narrowly on how institutional rules are applied to individuals—a microjustice concern—procedural objections to redistributive social policies (e.g., affirmative action) are immune to larger concerns about groups' outcomes (Crosby & Franco, 2003). Thus, when brought to bear in the procedural sense, color blindness can entrench inequality by requiring equal (i.e., race blind) treatment, even when unequal treatment might reduce racial disparities (Bonilla-Silva, 2003; Dyson, 2000; Omi & Winant, 1994; Winant, 2001).

Consistent with the notion that color blindness can serve hierarchy-enhancing ends, White people induced to adopt a color-blind perspective tend to exhibit greater explicit and nonconscious racial bias (Richeson & Nussbaum, 2004; Wolsko, Park, Judd, & Wittenbrink, 2000). Moreover, group-blind thinking may often reflect dominant-group members' desire that intergroup inequalities be ignored and, in fact, may lead people to overlook such inequalities (Norton, Sommers, Apfelbaum, Pura, & Ariely, 2006; Plaut, 2002; Saguy, Dovidio, & Pratto, 2008). Although these findings do not demonstrate that dominant-group members exploit

color blindness in order to safeguard the status quo (a goal of the present research), the links between color blindness, prejudice, and desire to downplay racial disparities highlight the ideology's hierarchy-enhancing potential.

The Motivated Construal of Ideology

We have argued that flexibility in the justice-related content of a given ideology can allow it to take on either hierarchy-enhancing or hierarchy-attenuating functions. If this is correct, then individuals' intergroup motivations—in particular, their desire to subvert or buttress the status quo—might influence individuals' construal and ultimate endorsement of a given ideology.

On the present account, three factors determine the manner in which individuals construe an ideology: (a) the ideology's default construal, (b) the individual's attitude toward hierarchy, and (c) whether the individual perceives a threat to the hierarchy (i.e., intergroup threat). The notion of a default construal recognizes the fact that ideologies have more and less prominent meanings in social discourse at any given point in time. Therefore, ideologies can be expected to revert to a dominant interpretation absent any countervailing motivational pressure. However, if individuals are motivated to protect the status quo, they might construe an available ideology as a hierarchy-enhancing belief—even if its default construal challenges the status quo. Recent research suggests that the motivation to engage in hierarchy-legitimizing behavior has two necessary antecedents: antiegalitarian sentiment and the perception of intergroup threat (Quist & Resendez, 2002; Riek, Mania, & Gaertner, 2006). Thus, we would expect individuals who prefer hierarchy to construe an ideology in its hierarchy-enhancing form when they perceive intergroup threat. It is important to note that for individuals to satisfy their intergroup motives, it is not sufficient for them merely to note the existence of a legitimizing ideology. Rather, they must also endorse it: Ideologies gain force when individuals come to believe in them (Gramsci, 1971; Haney-Lopez, 1996; Jost & Banaji, 1994; Sidanius & Pratto, 2004; Winant, 2001).

The person probably most strongly associated with color-blind ideology, Martin Luther King, proposed the ideology as a challenge the racial status quo (King, 1967). Thus, we suggest that a distributive justice construal is the default for color-blind ideology. However, we predict that individuals who harbor antiegalitarian preferences will shift their construal of color blindness from an ideology of distributive justice to one of procedural justice—that is, a hierarchy-enhancing ideology—in response to an intergroup threat. We also predict that the desire for equal treatment inherent in the procedural construal will increase antiegalitarians' endorsement of color blindness when they perceive intergroup threat.

Overview of Studies

We conducted four studies to examine the motivated construal and endorsement of color-blind ideology. In Study 1, we tested the hypothesis that when antiegalitarian White people perceive intergroup threat they construe color blindness in its procedural (i.e., hierarchy-enhancing) form. Consistent with this prediction, antiegalitarian White people whose dominant-group identity was made salient—a subtle intergroup threat induction—shifted from a distributive to a procedural construal of color-blind ideology. The subsequent studies examined how White people seeking to stabilize the hierarchy exploit ideological malleability by endorsing color blindness in response to intergroup threat. In Study 2, antiegalitarian White people responded to having their racial identity made salient by increasing their endorsement of color-blind ideology. In Studies 3A and 3B, antiegalitarian White people who reported high levels of perceived threat (Study 3A) or who had their perceptions of threat heightened experimentally (Study 3B) reported greater support for color blindness than did those who perceived relatively low levels of threat. Study 3B also provides evidence that the effect of threat on antiegalitarian White people's support for color blindness is driven by their group-serving desire for equal treatment (i.e., procedural justice).

Study 1

We predicted that antiegalitarian White people would alter their construal of color-blind ideology upon perceiving a threat to the racial hierarchy—specifically, by recasting color blindness as a procedural (rather than distributive) principle. To test this hypothesis, we designed a subtle manipulation of intergroup threat that relies on racial self-categorization. Self-categorization theory (Turner, Hogg, Oakes, Reicher, Wetherell, 1987) implies that White people will be especially likely to engage in group-relevant cognitions—such as perceiving intergroup threat—when they are currently thinking of themselves in terms of the group.[2] To assess the effectiveness this manipulation, 82 White participants were asked to identify either their racial group or their region of birth. Consistent with self-categorization inducing intergroup threat, participants who identified their race perceived significantly more threat than did those asked to identify their region of birth ($B = 0.30$, $SE\ B = 0.12$, $\beta = .26$), $t(80) = 2.57$, $p = .01$. Furthermore, analyses revealed that the self-categorization manipulation increased perceptions of threat among high-SDO individuals ($B = 0.59$, $SE\ B = 0.19$, $\beta = .51$), $t(80) = 3.12$, $p = .003$, but not among those low in SDO ($t < 1$). With this evidence for the efficacy of our self-categorization manipulation, we proceeded to test the hypothesis that color-blind ideology is subject to motivated construal.

Method

Participants

The present sample consisted of 84 self-described "Caucasian/White" individuals (53 women, 31 men) ranging in age from 19 years to 68 years ($M = 34.35$, $SD = 12.00$). Participants were recruited from an e-mail list of individuals interested in receiving online survey announcements. As compensation, each participant received a $5 gift certificate from an online retailer.

[2] Although ethnographic evidence (e.g., Flagg, 1993; Frankenberg, 2001) suggests that White people, as members of a numerically and politically hegemonic group, often lack racial self-awareness, psychological research suggests that White people are quite capable of appreciating the link between their personal fates and the fate of their racial group as a whole (e.g., Chow, Lowery, & Knowles, 2008; Knowles & Peng, 2005; Lowery, Unzueta, Knowles, & Goff, 2006).

Measure and Manipulation

Antiegalitarian sentiment. We administered a four-item measure of SDO (Sidanius et al., 1996) to assess participants' antiegalitarian sentiment. These items were "It's okay if some groups have more of a chance in life than others," "If certain groups stayed in their place, we would have fewer problems," "We would have fewer problems if we treated people more equally" (reversed), and "To get ahead in life, it is sometimes necessary to step on other groups" ($\alpha = .78$).

Self-categorization manipulation. The self-categorization manipulation was designed to increase the salience of membership in the dominant racial group and thus, as demonstrated in the pilot study, sensitivity to intergroup threat. Participants in the race condition identified their racial/ethnic group membership from the following set of choices: White; Asian, Asian American, or Pacific Islander; Latino/Latina; American Indian/Alaska Native; African American/Black. In the control condition, participants identified their region of birth from a list of five possible choices (West, Midwest, Northeast, South, international).

Procedure

Participants were emailed a link to a website containing study materials. The experiment was described as an investigation of "attitudes and social beliefs." Upon beginning the study, participants were administered the self-categorization manipulation; after being randomly assigned to either the race condition or the control condition, participants were shown the corresponding question alone on the screen. Immediately after the manipulation, participants were presented with the following open-ended question:

> In his "I Have a Dream" speech, Martin Luther King, Jr., famously said that he had a dream that Americans of all colors "will one day live in a nation where they will not be judged by the color of their skin but by the content of their character."
>
> We would like to get your thoughts on how Americans can create a color-blind society. In this space, please list some things that people (including citizens, politicians, educators, and anyone else) can do to help the United States become color-blind.

Upon completing their responses to this question, participants were administered the SDO items. Participants then filled out a set of standard demographic items, after which they were debriefed and thanked.

Results

Participant gender did not moderate the present findings or any of the findings in subsequent studies and is therefore omitted from all analyses to follow.

Coding of Responses

Two undergraduate research assistants, who were blind to our hypotheses, participants' SDO scores, and participants' experimental condition, coded each open-ended response as a distributive or procedural-justice construal of color blindness. A distributive response was defined for the judges as outcome-focused and not means-constraining—as one that "mentions the goal of racial equality and expresses support for race-conscious efforts to achieve it (e.g., affirmative action), or makes no mention of specific means." A procedural response was defined as constraining the rules by which institutions, such as the government or educational authorities, can treat individuals—specifically, as "asserting the impropriety of race-conscious decision-making, with no mention of racial equality as a goal." Any response that did not fit into distributive or procedural categories was coded as missing and/or uncodable. The judges were instructed to discuss and reconcile any disagreements as to a response's category. The judges eventually coded 27 responses as distributive-justice construals, 39 as procedural-justice construals, and 18 as missing and/or uncodable.[3]

Primary Analyses

Because SDO represented an individual-difference measure in this study but was administered after the self-categorization manipulation of intergroup threat, we first sought to confirm that the manipulation did not affect participants' SDO scores. Thus, we conducted an independent-samples t test examining the effect of self-categorization on SDO. No significant effect was observed ($t < 1$).

Our primary aim was to examine the effect of SDO, the self-categorization manipulation, and the SDO $\times$ Self-Categorization interaction on the likelihood of a participant construing color blindness as a procedural-justice dictate as opposed to a distributive-justice mandate. Missing and/or uncodable responses were omitted from the analysis. We began by creating an outcome variable in which a distributive response was coded as 0 and a procedural response was coded as 1. Next, we mean-centered participants' SDO scores, dummy-coded the self-categorization manipulation, and multiplied these effects to create an SDO $\times$ Self-Categorization interaction term. We then conducted a binary logistic regression analysis in which SDO, self-categorization, and their interaction predicted the log-likelihood of procedural responses. We observed a significant main effect of SDO ($B = 0.93$, $SE\ B = 0.45$, $p = .04$), such that high-SDO participants were more likely than were low-SDO participants to construe color blindness as a procedural-justice dictate. We also observed a marginally significant main effect of the self-categorization manipulation ($B = 0.74$, $SE\ B = 0.38$, $p = .05$), such that participants were more likely to construe color blindness as a procedural-justice dictate in the race condition than in the control condition. Finally, we observed a significant SDO $\times$ Self-Categorization interaction ($B = 0.80$, $SE\ B = 0.38$, $p = .04$).

To visualize the observed interaction, we plotted it in accordance with Aiken and West's (1991) procedures, converting pre-

[3] To illustrate, "Get rid of affirmative action. Judge people on what they do, not how they look" was coded as a procedural construal, whereas "Make more laws against prejudice and discrimination" was deemed a distributive response. The number of missing and/or uncodable responses did not vary substantially between experimental conditions, with 8 such responses occurring in the race condition and 10 occurring in the control condition.

In some cases, participants made multiple statements in their responses, some of which could be coded as distributive and others of which could be coded as procedural. In such cases, the coders were instructed to apply a single code to the entire response on the basis of which type of statement (distributive or procedural) came first.

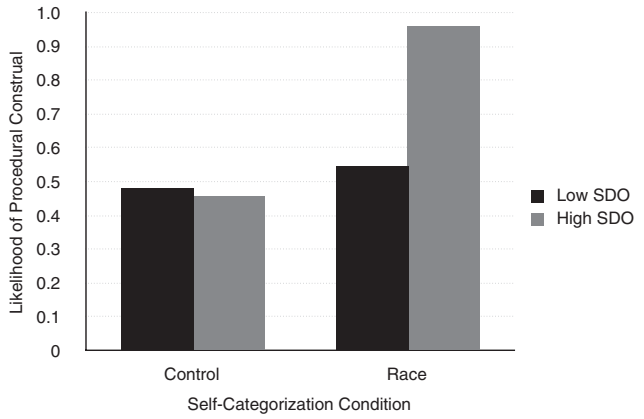

Figure 1. Likelihood of procedural (vs. distributive) construal as a function of social dominance orientation (SDO) and self-categorization manipulation in Study 1 ($N = 84$).

dicted points from log-likelihoods into probabilities ranging from 0 to 1. As can be seen in Figure 1, the effect of self-categorization on the construal of color blindness was driven entirely by high-SDO participants. Confirming this, simple slopes analysis revealed that high-SDO White people were more likely to construe King's statement as an expression of procedural (vs. distributive) color blindness in the race condition than in the control condition ($B = 1.6$, $SE\ B = 0.79$, $p = .02$). In contrast, the self-categorization manipulation did not affect construal of King's statement among White people low in SDO ($B = -0.15$, $SE\ B = 0.40$, $p = .7$).

Discussion

The results of Study 1 provide evidence that color-blind ideology can assume at least two construals and that dominant-group members shift between these construals in motivated fashion. Specifically, antiegalitarian (i.e., high-SDO) White people who self-categorized as White—and who therefore, per the pilot study, perceived intergroup threat—were more likely to construe color blindness in terms of procedural justice than were those not focused on their racial group membership. These results suggest that individuals can shift their construal of color blindness along the procedural–distributive dimension and do so in line with their hierarchy-relevant motivations.

On our account, perceptions of threat associated with racial salience caused our antiegalitarian participants to construe color blindness in terms of procedural justice and, thus, as a hierarchy-enhancing ideology. However, it is unlikely that merely recognizing an ideology's legitimizing potential would satisfy these individuals' desire to defend the status quo. Rather, if ideologies gain their legitimizing force when they are endorsed, then intergroup threat should also cause antiegalitarian White people to increase their support for color blindness. The next study was designed to test this hypothesis.

Study 2

Study 2 examined whether the variables (antiegalitarian sentiment and intergroup threat) that cause White people to construe color blindness as a procedural-justice dictate also result in higher levels of endorsement of the ideology. To test this, we administered the same self-categorization manipulation used in Study 1 to heighten high-SDO White people's perception of intergroup threat. We predicted that the intergroup threat associated with the self-categorization would cause high-SDO White people to increase their endorsement of color blindness.

Method

Participants

The present sample consisted of 85 self-described "Caucasian/White" individuals (62 women, 23 men) ranging in age from 18 years to 56 years ($M = 34.09$, $SD = 9.32$). Participants were recruited from an e-mail list of individuals interested in receiving online survey announcements. As compensation, each participant received a $5 gift certificate from an online retailer.

Manipulation and Measures

Self-categorization manipulation. The present study made use of the same manipulation of self-categorization described in Study 1.

Endorsement of color-blind ideology. From our reading of literature relevant to color blindness (e.g., Bonilla-Silva, 2003; Dyson, 2000; Plaut, 2002; Rousseau, 1754/1994; Wolsko et al., 2000), we constructed four items to capture the ideology's major themes. The items used to assess color blindness were:

1. I wish people in this society would stop obsessing so much about race.
2. People who become preoccupied by race are forgetting that we are all just human.
3. Putting racial labels on people obscures the fact that everyone is a unique individual.
4. Race is an artificial label that keeps people from thinking freely as individuals.

Participants made their responses on a 5-point scale anchored on the left by *strongly disagree* and on the right by *strongly agree*. The scale exhibited good internal reliability ($\alpha = .80$).

Antiegalitarian sentiment. Antiegalitarian sentiment was gauged with Pratto and colleagues' (1994) 16-item SDO measure ($\alpha = .93$).

Procedure

Participants were e-mailed a link to a Web site containing study materials. The experiment was described as an investigation of attitudes and social beliefs. Upon beginning the study, participants were administered the self-categorization manipulation. After being randomly assigned to either the control condition or the race condition, participants were shown the corresponding question (region vs. race) alone on the screen. Immediately following the manipulation, participants completed the Color-Blindness Scale and SDO items in fixed order. Participants then filled out a set of standard demographic items, after which they were debriefed and thanked.

Results

Our aim was to examine whether the shift in antiegalitarian White people's construal of color blindness is paralleled by an increase in their endorsement of the ideology. Because the SDO Scale was administered after the self-categorization manipulation, we conducted an independent-samples t test to examine whether the manipulation affected participants' SDO scores. No such effect was observed ($t < 1$).

We next sought to test whether the self-categorization manipulation increases endorsement of color blindness among White people high in SDO. Statistically, this corresponds to an SDO × Self-Categorization interaction on Color-Blindness Scale scores. To test this, we first mean-centered participants' SDO scores, dummy-coded the self-categorization manipulation, and multiplied these variables to form an interaction term. We then regressed participants' Color-Blindness Scale scores on the main effects and interaction term. We observed a main effect of SDO such that higher levels of SDO predicted lower levels of endorsement of color blindness ($B = -0.53$, $SE\ B = 0.10$, $\beta = -.48$), $t(83) = -5.43$, $p = 6 \times 10^{-7}$. We also observed a main effect of self-categorization on color blindness such that individuals endorsed color blindness more in the race condition than in the control condition ($B = 0.22$, $SE\ B = 0.10$, $\beta = .20$), $t(83) = 2.30$, $p = .02$. Finally, we observed a significant SDO × Self-Categorization interaction on color blindness ($B = 0.36$, $SE\ B = 0.10$, $\beta = .32$), $t(83) = 3.64$, $p = 5 \times 10^{-4}$.

In order to visualize the SDO × Self-Categorization interaction, we plotted it in accordance with procedures outlined by Aiken and West (1991). As can be seen in Figure 2, the effect of self-categorization on color blindness was driven entirely by participants high in SDO. Confirming this, tests of simple slopes (Aiken & West, 1991) revealed that racial self-categorization led high-SDO participants to increase their endorsement of color blindness ($B = 0.57$, $SE\ B = 0.13$, $\beta = .52$), $t(83) = 4.24$, $p = 6 \times 10^{-5}$, whereas self-categorization did not significantly effect low-SDO participants' level of endorsement ($B = -0.12$, $SE\ B = 0.14$, $\beta = -.12$, $t < 1$).

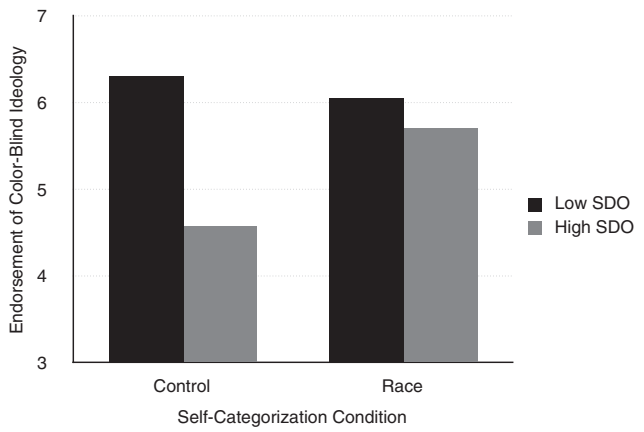

Figure 2. Endorsement of color-blind ideology as a function of social dominance orientation (SDO) and self-categorization manipulation in Study 2 ($N = 85$).

Discussion

The present results provide evidence that asking antiegalitarian White people to self-categorize as White increases their endorsement of color blindness. These results closely parallel the pattern of ideological construal observed in Study 1. When sensitized to intergroup threat, antiegalitarian White people not only construe color-blind ideology as a procedural-justice dictate (Study 1) but also endorse color blindness in an apparent attempt to legitimize the status quo. Together, these experiments suggest that racial self-categorization induces high-SDO White people to convert color blindness from a principle that they oppose (a distributive-justice mandate) into one that they can endorse for legitimizing purposes (a procedural-justice dictate).

Our argument that antiegalitarian White people in Study 2 marshaled color blindness as a legitimizing ideology rests on the assumption that our self-categorization manipulation heightened perceptions of intergroup threat. Although the pilot study provides evidence for the manipulation's validity, we sought more direct evidence that the observed pattern of endorsement reflects the influence of threat. Study 3A was designed to provide such evidence by making use of an established measure of intergroup threat.

Study 3A

The present study sought to provide direct evidence that perceptions of intergroup threat predict antiegalitarian White people's endorsement of color-blind ideology—and, by extension, that color blindness, in its procedural-justice form, appeals to antiegalitarian White people as a hierarchy-enhancing ideology. In Study 3A, we directly measured perceived intergroup threat to establish that such threat predicts antiegalitarian White people's endorsement of color blindness as a legitimizing ideology.

Method

Participants

The present sample consisted of 42 self-described "Caucasian/White" individuals (23 women, 19 men) ranging in age from 18 years to 61 years ($M = 31.23$, $SD = 8.32$). Participants were recruited from an e-mail list of individuals interested in receiving online survey announcements. As compensation, each participant received a $5 gift certificate from an online retailer.

Measures

Intergroup threat. To measure participants' sense of intergroup threat, we used Bobo's (1998) four-item Intergroup Threat Scale. The items were

1. More good jobs for Blacks means fewer good jobs for members of other groups.
2. The more influence Blacks have in local politics the less influence members of other groups will have in local politics.
3. As more good housing and neighborhoods go to Blacks,

the fewer good houses and neighborhoods there will be for members of other groups.

4. Many Blacks have been trying to get ahead economically at the expense of other groups.

Participants rated these items on a 5-point scale anchored on the left by *strongly disagree* and on the right by *strongly agree*. The scale exhibited good internal reliability ($\alpha = .92$).

Antiegalitarian sentiment. Antiegalitarian sentiment was again measured with Pratto and colleagues' (1994) 16-item SDO Scale ($\alpha = .92$).

Endorsement of color-blind ideology. Endorsement of color blindness was measured with the four-item Color-Blindness Scale reported in Study 2 ($\alpha = .79$).

Procedure

Participants were e-mailed a link to a Web site containing study materials. The study was described as an investigation of attitudes and social beliefs. Upon beginning the study, participants were administered the Intergroup Threat Scale, the Color-Blindness Scale, and the SDO scale in fixed order. Participants then filled out a set of standard demographic items, after which they were debriefed and thanked.

Results

Our analytic aim was to examine endorsement of color blindness as a function of SDO, threat perceptions, and their interaction. We began by mean-centering SDO and intergroup threat and multiplying them to create an SDO × Intergroup Threat interaction term. We then regressed color blindness scores onto these variables. As in Study 2, higher levels of SDO predicted less support for color blindness ($B = -0.50$, $SE\ B = 0.17$, $\beta = -.47$), $t(40) = -2.94$, $p = .005$. The relationship between threat perceptions and color blindness was not significant ($B = 0.08$, $SE\ B = 0.12$, $\beta = .11$, $t < 1$). However, conceptually replicating Study 2, we observed a significant SDO × Intergroup Threat interaction ($B = 0.26$, $SE\ B = 0.10$, $\beta = .38$), $t(40) = 2.76$, $p = .009$.

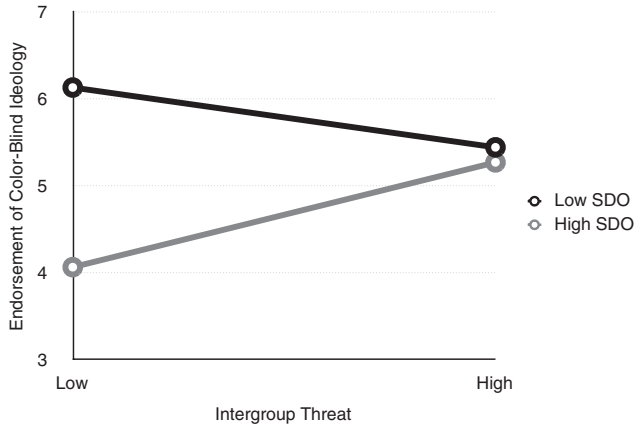

Figure 3. Endorsement of color-blind ideology as a function of social dominance orientation (SDO) and measured intergroup threat in Study 3A ($N = 42$).

To visualize the observed interaction, we plotted it in accordance with Aiken and West's (1991) procedures. As can be seen in Figure 3, among White people high in SDO, increasing perceptions of threat were associated with increased support for color blindness ($B = 0.37$, $SE\ B = 0.15$, $\beta = .50$), $t(40) = 2.46$, $p = .02$. In contrast, for White people low in SDO, we observed no significant association between threat perceptions and support for color-blind ideology ($B = -0.21$, $SE\ B = 0.17$, $\beta = -.29$), $t(40) = -1.28$, $p = .2$.

Discussion

Study 3A provides evidence that among antiegalitarian White people, perceptions of intergroup threat are associated with increased endorsement of color-blind ideology. White people who were both high in antiegalitarian sentiment and perceived intergroup threat—and thus likely motivated to legitimize the status quo—strongly supported color blindness. We suggest that the desire to enforce procedural neutrality (i.e., procedural justice) as means of maintaining the status quo drives the effect of intergroup threat on antiegalitarian White people's support for color blindness. To test this hypothesis in Study 3B, we included a measure of desire for equal treatment as a potential mediator of the observed effect on endorsement. In addition, we manipulated, rather than measured, intergroup threat, to test whether perceived threats to the status quo cause antiegalitarian White people to increase their endorsement of color-blind ideology.

Study 3B

In Study 3B, we sought to conceptually replicate Study 3A, using a direct manipulation of intergroup threat. In addition, we sought to extend the findings of Study 3A in an important way. The close correspondence between the pattern of endorsement observed in Study 3A and the pattern of construal observed Study 1 provide circumstantial evidence that antiegalitarian White people actively (re)construe color blindness as procedural-justice dictate that they can endorse as a hierarchy-enhancing ideology. To directly test whether antiegalitarian White people's endorsement of color blindness is driven by a preference for procedural justice—that is, the equal treatment of ingroup and outgroup members—we sought to test whether the desire for equal treatment mediates the interactive effect of SDO and threat on ideological endorsement.

Method

Participants

The present sample consisted of 58 self-described "Caucasian/White" individuals (46 women) ranging in age from 18 years to 62 years ($M = 32.03$, $SD = 9.79$). Participants were recruited from an e-mail list of individuals interested in receiving online survey announcements. As compensation, each participant received a $5 gift certificate from an online retailer.

Manipulation and Measures

Intergroup threat manipulation. All participants were told that the study concerned the manner in which social attitudes in the United States have changed over time. To manipulate White peo-

ple's sense of intergroup threat, participants in the threat condition were told that "contrary to popular opinion, recent research has found that affirmative action policies have resulted in fewer economic opportunities for Whites." Participants in the control condition were given no information about the effect of affirmative action on White people.

Antiegalitarian sentiment. To measure participants' levels of antiegalitarian sentiment, we administered the same four-item SDO Scale (Sidanius et al., 1996) used in Study 3A ($\alpha = .68$).

Endorsement of color-blind ideology. As a measure of participants' endorsement of color blindness, we administered the Color-Blindness Scale used in the previous studies ($\alpha = .88$).

Desire for procedural justice. To measure their desire for procedural justice among racial groups, participants were asked, "To what extent do you think that to achieve racial justice, all groups should be treated equally?" Participants made their response on a 7-point scale anchored on the left by *not at all* and on the right by *very much*.

Procedure

Participants were e-mailed a link to a Web site containing study materials. The experiment was described as an investigation of attitudes and social beliefs. Upon beginning the study, participants were randomly assigned to either the threat condition or the control condition. After reading the manipulation materials, participants completed the Color-Blindness Scale, the procedural justice item, and the SDO Scale, in fixed order. Participants then filled out a set of standard demographic items, after which they were debriefed and thanked.

Results

Because the SDO Scale was administered after the threat manipulation, we tested whether the manipulation affected participants' SDO scores. An independent-samples t test examining the effect of intergroup threat on SDO scores revealed no significant effect ($t < 1$).

Color-Blind Ideology

In the present analyses, we examined the effect of intergroup threat on White people's support for color-blind ideology. We predicted that high-SDO White people would endorse color blindness more strongly after receiving information suggesting that their group is harmed by affirmative action policies. At the same time, we predicted that low-SDO White people's support for color blindness would not vary as a function of intergroup threat. These predictions entail an SDO $\times$ Intergroup Threat interaction on Color-Blindness Scale scores. To test this, we mean-centered participants' SDO scores, dummy-coded intergroup threat, and multiplied these variables to create an SDO $\times$ Intergroup Threat interaction term. We then regressed participants' color-blindness scores on these effects. We observed a marginally significant main effect of SDO ($B = -0.28$, $SE\ B = 0.15$, $\beta = -.24$), $t(56) = -1.90$, $p = .06$, such that high-SDO participants tended to endorse color blindness less than did those low in SDO. No significant main effect of threat condition emerged ($t < 1$). However, replicating Study 3A, we observed a significant SDO $\times$ Intergroup Threat interaction on color blindness ($B = 0.34$, $SE\ B = 0.15$, $\beta = .30$), $t(56) = 2.32$, $p = .02$.

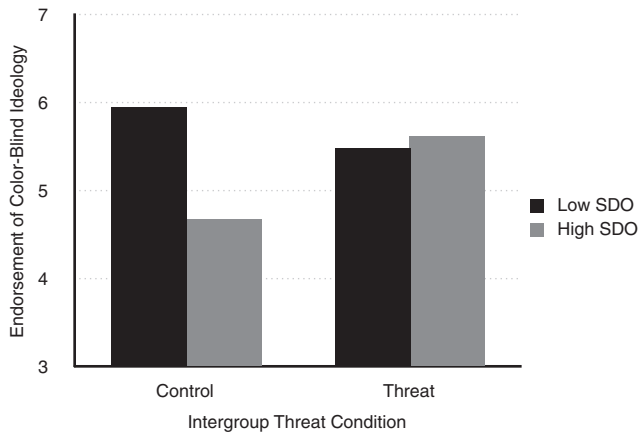

Figure 4. Endorsement of color-blind ideology as a function of social dominance orientation (SDO) and manipulated intergroup threat in Study 3B ($N = 58$).

To visualize the observed interaction, we plotted it in accordance with Aiken and West's (1991) procedures. As can be seen in Figure 4, high-SDO White people endorsed color blindness more after exposure to the threat condition than when given no threat-related information ($B = 0.48$, $SE\ B = 0.21$, $\beta = .40$), $t(56) = 2.24$, $p = .03$. In contrast, low-SDO White people's endorsement of color blindness did not differ significantly across threat conditions ($B = -0.24$, $SE\ B = 0.22$, $\beta = -.20$), $t(56) = -1.09$, $p = .3$.

Desire for Procedural Justice

We predicted that high-SDO White people would support procedural justice more in the threat condition than in the control condition, whereas threat was not predicted to affect support for procedural justice among low-SDO White people. Thus, we predicted an SDO $\times$ Intergroup Threat interaction on procedural fairness support. We observed a significant main effect of SDO ($B = -0.46$, $SE\ B = 0.12$, $\beta = -.45$), $t(56) = -3.87$, $p = 2 \times 10^{-4}$, such that high-SDO White people were less likely to endorse procedural justice than were low-SDO White people (perhaps reflecting a general negative association between antiegalitarianism and concern for justice). Threat had no main effect on procedural justice ($B = -0.001$, $SE\ B = 0.12$, $\beta = -.001$), $t(56) = -0.01$, $p = .99$. It is, however, important to note that we observed the predicted SDO $\times$ Intergroup Threat interaction on the desire for procedural justice ($B = 0.35$, $SE\ B = 0.12$, $\beta = .35$), $t(56) = 2.99$, $p = .004$.

Examination of the interaction revealed that high-SDO White people were significantly more supportive of procedural justice in the threat condition compared with control ($B = 0.37$, $SE\ B = 0.18$, $\beta = .34$), $t(56) = 2.08$, $p = .02$. In contrast, low-SDO White people became significantly less supportive of procedural justice after receiving threat information ($B = -0.37$, $SE\ B = 0.18$, $\beta = -.35$), $t(56) = -2.09$, $p = .02$.

Mediation Analysis

We predicted that the interactive effect of SDO and threat on endorsement of color blindness would be mediated by White

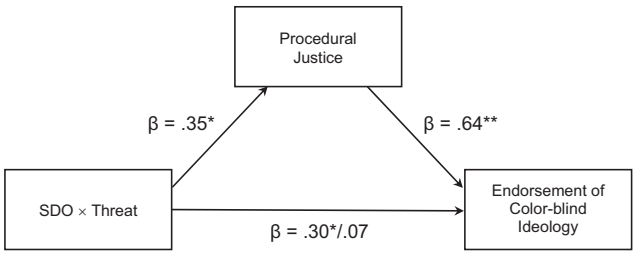

Figure 5. Desire for procedural fairness mediates the interactive effect of social dominance orientation (SDO) and intergroup threat on endorsement of color blindness in Study 3B ($N = 58$). $^{*}p < .05$. $^{**}p < .01$.

people's desire for equal treatment (i.e., procedural justice). Consistent with this possibility, the SDO × Intergroup Threat interaction predicted both participants' endorsement of color blindness and their desire for equal treatment in the domain of race. We also observed a significant relationship between desire for equal treatment and color blindness, $r(58) = .64$, $p = 5 \times 10^{-7}$. To test for mediation of the SDO × Intergroup Threat interaction, we regressed participants' endorsement of color blindness on SDO, threat, and their interaction, while controlling for the effect of equal treatment (see Baron & Kenny, 1986). Consistent with mediation, the effect of the SDO × Intergroup Threat interaction on color blindness dropped below significance (see Figure 5). A Sobel test confirmed that the pattern of mediation was significant ($z = 2.60$, $p = .009$).

Discussion

The results of Study 3B further support our hypothesis that color blindness can function as a legitimizing ideology. Conceptually replicating Studies 2 and 3A, antiegalitarian (i.e., high-SDO) White people in the present experiment increased their endorsement of color blindness after exposure to intergroup threat. At the same time, threat did not increase low-SDO White people's endorsement of color blindness.

The current experiment extends the previous findings in two ways. First, we used a direct manipulation of intergroup threat, allowing us to conclude that threat caused high-SDO participants to increase their endorsement of color blindness. Second, we showed that the pattern is indicative of the hierarchy-enhancing use of color-blind ideology—the SDO × Intergroup Threat interaction on ideological endorsement—was mediated by variance in individuals' desire for equal treatment. This suggests that intergroup threat leads high-SDO White people to endorse color-blind ideology to satisfy their temporarily heightened desire for procedural justice. That color-blind ideology could meet these individuals' procedural concerns, in turn, is consistent with the notion that color blindness can itself assume more and less procedural forms. The picture that emerges is one in which White people motivated to protect the status quo take an available ideology and mold it to serve their needs.

General Discussion

The present studies suggest that perceptions of intergroup threat lead antiegalitarian White people to construe color blindness as a procedural (rather than distributive) principle. Furthermore, intergroup threat leads antiegalitarian White people to embrace color-blind tenets they normally reject—an effect mediated by these individuals' temporarily heightened desire for procedural justice. It thus appears that antiegalitarian White people can create a hierarchy-enhancing ideology (procedural color blindness) out of a hierarchy-attenuating one (distributive color blindness) and deploy it as a response to current perceptions of intergroup threat. In so doing, these individuals exploit a set of humanistic philosophical principles that they normally reject.

Ideologies as Dynamic Entities

Although these data shed considerable light on the use (and perhaps abuse) of an important American credo, our findings also support a more general theoretical perspective on the legitimization of social hierarchy. Specifically, this research suggests that ideologies may be more dynamic than the typical assumption of assortative endorsement (i.e., the pairing off of compatible individuals and ideologies) implies. Rather than pulling static ideologies "off the shelf," individuals are able to mold ideologies—even ones with which they usually disagree—into a form that suits their goals in the moment. Individuals engage in ideological construal when, as a joint function of their attitudes toward hierarchy and current awareness of threats to the status quo, they are motivated to construe a principle such that it serves their current sociopolitical interests.

Legitimizing Uses of the Distributive–Procedural Distinction

The meanings of sociopolitical ideologies may be able to shift along a number of dimensions. However, given the centrality of justice to many or most ideologies, conceptions justice may constitute a particularly important dimension along which ideological meanings can change. Research suggests that a microjustice focus on procedural justice has different implications for the status quo than does a macrojustice focus on distributive justice (Clayton & Tangri, 1989; Crosby & Franco, 2003; Murrell et al., 1994). Because procedural critiques are particularly effective in warding off threats to the status quo—such as affirmative action, school busing, and other redistributive social policies—it follows that allowing procedural concerns to dominate may serve a legitimizing function. Thus, individuals may assert procedural (as opposed to distributive) concerns when they are motivated to legitimize group disparities and bolster the status quo. The present research, by showing that dominant-group members can deploy a sociopolitical ideology construed to reflect procedural concerns (i.e., procedural color blindness) as a legitimizing ideology, bears this out.

Although our focus has been on changes in ideological meaning, we suggest that motivated shifts in justice concerns precede associated changes in ideology. When an individual complains that a particular decision is procedurally unfair, this claim may reflect antiegalitarian motives as well. For instance, upon learning that his employer has enacted an affirmative action policy that resolves employment decisions regarding equally qualified employees by favoring members of underrepresented groups, an antiegalitarian White may claim—and sincerely feel—that an important criterion of procedural justice (i.e., neutrality) has been violated. However,

this concern for procedural justice might in fact be driven by a desire for an outcome that favors the individual or his group. In this scenario, no broad ideology such as color blindness or meritocracy is being strategically construed; rather, the same motivations which we explored in this article manifest in a more humble way—as a specific complaint concerning the fairness of a specific employment decision. Although shifting justice concerns might be sufficient to argue against sources of threat to the status quo, it seems that individuals sometimes go a step further and embed these motivated justice concerns in ideology.

Motivated Construals of Color-Blind Ideology

Our data suggest that when comfortable with the current state of the racial hierarchy, White people agree on the meaning of color-blind ideology. Unthreatened White people, whether high or low in SDO, are as likely to see color blindness in terms of distributive justice as procedural justice. It is therefore not surprising that support for color blindness is lower among antiegalitarian White people (who are relatively comfortable with racial inequality) than among egalitarian White people (who are less tolerant of racial inequality). Raising the specter of resource redistribution associated with distributive justice, however, leads threatened antiegalitarian White people to convert color blindness into something they can support—namely, a procedural justice dictate capable of obstructing efforts to create equality.

This pattern of results raises a fascinating question: Why do antiegalitarian White people go to the trouble of toggling between different construals of color-blind ideology? They might instead hold to their construal of color-blind ideology as a distributive principle—perhaps rejecting it all the more strongly when the hierarchy is threatened. This scenario exemplifies the notion of assortative endorsement, in which individuals embrace those ideologies for which they have an affinity and reject those that they find repellent. Although transforming color blindness into a strict procedural dictate—and then endorsing it as such—might require more effort, it might also be a more sophisticated legitimizing maneuver than rejecting color blindness in its (default) distributive form. Co-opting the ideology of those with whom one disagrees may serve a persuasive function; it may be possible to persuade others that their own ideological commitments require coming around to the alternative view (Omi & Winant, 1994).

Color blindness, with its civil rights pedigree and kinship with other sacrosanct American values (e.g., the desire for meritocracy), carries considerable moral weight (Plaut, 2002). Thus, rather than rejecting color blindness—an ideology widely accepted as a moral imperative—when the status quo is threatened, antiegalitarian White people construe it in fashion that furthers their hierarchy-enhancing goals. Ideologies like color blindness might allow individuals to express self-serving support for procedural fairness with ideological backing—and thus reduced risk of social censure. We suggest that ideological legitimization may commonly reflect battles over the interpretation of ideological commitments whose moral weight and valence is nearly universally acknowledged. Indeed, the most effective legitimizing ideologies appeal to individuals from across social strata and political agendas as moral truth or common sense (Gramsci, 1971; Haney-Lopez, 1996; Jost & Banaji, 1994; Sidanius & Pratto, 2004; Winant, 2001).

The Battle Over Ideological Meanings

Although we have focused on color blindness as a highly malleable ideology, we believe a number of other ideologies may share this feature. For example, the PWE (Weber, 1904/2001), with its appealing emphasis on hard work as the path to prosperity, is an ideology that enjoys broad support in the United States. Consequently, the PWE possesses a great deal of moral weight: Few would deny the rectitude of working hard in order to earn good fortune. Given this, the PWE is highly likely to be subject to motivated ideological construal, as individuals with antithetical intergroup motivations (i.e., hierarchy enhancement and hierarchy attenuation) attempt to lay claim to the PWE while interpreting it in different ways. Consistent with this, Levy and colleagues (2006) note that the PWE is subject to both egalitarian and antiegalitarian construals. For children, the PWE conveys the importance of social equality; to adults, the ideology implies that subordinate groups have earned their low status. As with color blindness, the distributive-procedural distinction may be at work here as well. If the message of the PWE is that hard work is sufficient for success in life, then one might reasonably infer that outcomes should be equally distributed among social groups. In contrast, those who interpret the PWE's message to be that the rules affecting individuals' lives are fair wield a procedural form of the ideology that supports antiegalitarian conclusions.

Racism offers another case-in-point. Although racism is an ideology that few people would publicly endorse, it nevertheless figures prominently into social discourse in another capacity: that of accusation. That is, although seldom embraced publicly, racist ideology is frequently bestowed on others (usually our social or political opponents). We suggest that the same process of motivated construal that we have illustrated in the case of color blindness may operate here, too. Ethnographic evidence (Frankenberg, 1993; Perry, 2002) suggests that individuals levy accusations of racism against those who reason or talk openly about race. On this construal, those who would address racial inequalities openly can be branded as racists. Many others, however, would reject the reduction of racism to color-consciousness. Thus, fights over the ideology of racism—not as something to be embraced but rather as an ideological weapon—illustrate the manner in which shared ideological memes (Dawkins, 1976; Heath, Bell, & Sternberg, 2001) are fought over, construed, and twisted to suit individuals' social goals and agendas.

Patriotism—love of country—is another prime example of an ideology that is almost universally endorsed and yet bitterly contested. Some individuals (usually those in power) argue that patriotism requires that citizens refrain from criticizing their government. Thus, conservative pundit Laura Ingraham (2003) urges performers such as Barbra Streisand and the Dixie Chicks, whose criticism of the Bush administration Ingraham deems unpatriotic, to "shut up and sing." Others assert that patriotism requires vigilant critique of the government. The historian Howard Zinn, for instance, asserts that "dissent is the highest form of patriotism" (Basco, 2002). Why is it that individuals do not simply endorse patriotic ideology if it matches their interests and agenda or reject it if it contradicts them? The answer is that to do so would require that the rejecter concede all of the ideology's moral weight and power to persuade. Consistent with the notion that the most effective ideologies are largely taken for granted within a society,

individuals would be well served to marshal patriotic ideology in support of their interests. A crucial avenue for future investigation is to examine whether ideological co-optation with modification actually serves to persuade one's ideological opponents more effectively than outright rejection of his or her beliefs.

Conclusion

The social–psychological study of ideology has tended to rest on the notion that ideological meanings are fixed and, thus, that individuals sort through, seek out, and embrace those ideologies that best cohere with their intergroup motivations. Although this process no doubt explains a great deal of individuals' ideological behavior, we hope that the reader is persuaded that it is not the whole story. Rather, we submit that individuals with antithetical intergroup motivations frequently attempt to tap a common set of ideologies whose moral weight—and therefore persuasive power—is largely consensual within society.

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