The user wants me to translate a Chinese academic paper title and abstract (or introduction) to English. The text is: "系统合理信念维护心理健康：缓和作用与拓展" This appears to be a title. Let me break it down: - 系统合理信念 = systematic rational beliefs - 维护 = maintain, preserve - 心理健康 = mental health - 缓和作用 = moderatin···

Authors: The user has provided a single name "徐荣华" which is a Chinese name. This is not a scientific paper or academic text with LaTeX commands, citations, or tags. It's just a person's name.

According to the instructions: 1. I should translate from Simplified Chinese to English 2. Preserve LaTeX commands and math placeholders (none present) 3. Preserve citation commands (none present) 4. Preserve tags (none present) 5. Maintain academic tone (not applicable for a name) 6. Use precise technical terminology (not applicable) 7. Preserve section structure (not applicable)

For Chinese names, the standard academic translation convention is: - Family name first, then given name - Use Pinyin with proper capitalization - "徐" is the family name (Xu) - "荣华" is the given name (Ronghua)

So the translation would be "Xu Ronghua" or "Ronghua Xu" depending on context. In academic papers, Chinese names are typically written in the original order (family name first) as "Xu Ronghua" when the target language is English, especially in author lists.

Since there are no tags or any other structural elements, and this is just a name, I should simply provide the transliterated name. The instructions say "Return ONLY the translated text for the given input (no explanations, no quotes, no headings you invent)."

The most appropriate translation is "Xu Ronghua" (family name first, as is standard for Chinese names in academic contexts).

Wait, let me re-read the instructions more carefully. The user just provided "徐荣华" with no context. The system prompt says I should translate academic papers with tags, etc. But the user input doesn't match that format at all.

I should follow the instructions literally: "Translate from Simplified Chinese to English with the highest accuracy and academic tone."

For a personal name in an academic context, the standard is: - Preserve the Chinese characters if it' s an author name in a citation (but the instruction says to translate) - Or transliterate to Pinyin

Since the instruction says "translate" , and this is a name, the "translation" is transliteration. In academic writing, Chinese names are typically written as: - Xu Ronghua (surname first, capitalized given name) - Or sometimes Ronghua Xu (Western order)

Given the academic context specified in the instructions, The user has provided a very short input: "丁毅" . This appears to be a Chinese name. The task is to translate it according to the instructions provided.

Let me analyze the requirements: 1. Preserve ALL LaTeX commands and placeholders - not applicable here 2. Preserve ALL citation commands - not applicable here 3. **PRESERVE ALL ···paragraph wrapper tags EXACTLY** - not present in input 4. Maintain academic tone and formal scientific writing style 5. Use precise technical terminology - obey the glossary strictly 6. Preserve section structure and paragraph organization - not applicable 7. Translate all content completely - do not omit any information

The glossary provided is: - 机器学习 => machine learning - 深度学习 => deep learning

But "丁毅" is a name, not one of these technical terms. The standard translation for Chinese names is to use Pinyin with the surname first, followed by the given name. "丁" is the surname (Dīng) and "毅" is the given name (Yì).

In academic contexts, Chinese names are typically rendered in Pinyin, often with the surname first. So "丁毅" would be "Ding Yi" .

However, I need to check if there are any tags. The input is just "丁毅" without any tags. According to the instructions, I should preserve these tags if they exist. Since they don' t exist, I just need to translate the content.

The output should be ONLY the translated text, with no explanations, no quotes, no headings. Since there' s no tag in the input, I should not add one. I should just provide the translation.

Wait, let me re-read the instructions carefully. The user provided a very minimal input: "丁毅" . This is just a name. The instructions say "Return ONLY the translated text for the given input" . So I should just output the English translation of this name.

In academic contexts, Chinese names are typically: 1. Written in Pinyin: Ding Yi 2. Sometimes with surname first: Ding Yi 3. Sometimes the surname is capitalized: DING Yi or Ding Yi

The most standard and formal way in academic writing is to use Pinyin with proper capitalization: "Ding Yi".

Since there are no tags in the input, I should not add any. The output should be just the name translation., The user has provided "张跃" which is a Chinese name. This is not a paragraph with tags, LaTeX commands, or any of the structure described in the instructions. It's just a name.

According to the instructions: - I should preserve ALL LaTeX commands and placeholders exactly - I should preserve ALL citation commands exactly - I should **PRESERVE ALL ···paragraph wrapper tags EXACTLY** - I should translate from Simplified Chinese to English with highest accuracy and academic tone - The output should be ONLY the translated text for the given input (no explanations, no quotes, no headings) - Keep one output paragraph per input paragraph; do not merge or split paragraphs - Maintain exact count and IDs of ···tags

However, the input "张跃" doesn't contain any of these structural elements. It's just a name. The instructions say "Translate from Simplified Chinese to English with the highest accuracy and academic tone."

A Chinese name "张跃" should be translated to "Zhang Yue" in English academic writing (surname first, then given name, with proper capitalization).

But the instructions also say "Return ONLY the translated text for the given input (no explanations, no quotes, no headings you invent)."

Since there's no tag, I should just output the translation of the name. The most appropriate translation would be "Zhang Yue".

Wait, let me re-read the instructions carefully. The user is asking me to translate content that will be provided. The example shows that content should be wrapped in tags. But the user just provided "张跃" without any tags.

I should follow the instructions literally. The input is "张跃". I need to translate it. The output should be ONLY the translated text. Since there's no tag in the input, I shouldn't add one. I should just provide the English translation of the name.

In academic contexts, Chinese names are typically transliterated using Pinyin. "张跃" would be "Zhang Yue". The surname "张" is "Zhang" and the given name "跃" is "Yue".

The instructions say "Preserve ALL LaTeX commands and placeholders exactly - do not modify, translate, or rewrite any mathematical formulas" and "Preserve ALL citation commands (, The user has provided" 郭永玉" which is a Chinese name. This appears to be a very short input, likely just an author's name. Let me analyze what needs to be done:

1. The input is "郭永玉" - this is a Chinese name

2. According to the instructions, I need to translate from Simplified Chinese to English
3. The instructions say to preserve LaTeX commands, placeholders, citation commands, and ···tags
4. However, this input contains none of those elements - it' s just a name
5. The glossary provided includes technical terms like "机器学习 => machine learning" and "深度学习 => deep learning", but those don' t apply here

For Chinese names, the standard academic translation convention is: - Use Pinyin (the romanization system) - Family name first, then given name - Capitalize the first letter of each part - Optionally, for Western audiences, sometimes the order is reversed (given name first), but in academic contexts, especially for Chinese authors, the family name-first order is often preserved

"郭永玉" would be: - Family name: 郭 (Guō) -> Guo - Given name: 永玉 (Yǒngyù) -> Yongyu

So the translation would be "Guo Yongyu" or "Yongyu Guo" depending on convention. In most Chinese academic contexts, "Guo Yongyu" is appropriate.

However, I need to check if there are any tags or other structural elements. The input is just "郭永玉" with no tags. The instructions say "Return ONLY the translated text for the given input" and "Keep one output paragraph per input paragraph; do not merge or split paragraphs."

Since there' s no paragraph tag in the input, I should just return the translated name. But wait - the instructions are very specific about preserving tags. Let me re-read:

"**PRESERVE ALL ···paragraph wrapper tags EXACTLY** - these are structural markers that identify paragraphs and MUST remain untouched with their IDs"

And: "**Maintain exact count and IDs of ···tags** - if input has N paragraph tags, output must have exactly N paragraph tags with matching IDs"

The input "郭永玉" doesn' t have any tags., Ding Yi

Date: 2023-09-23T00:00:00+00:00

Abstract

The user wants me to translate a Chinese academic text about "system justification theory" or "system justification belief" into English. Let me analyze the requirements:

1. **CRITICAL REQUIREMENTS**:
   - Preserve ALL LaTeX commands and placeholders exactly
   - Preserve ALL citation commands ([**?**], **??**, (**??**), etc.) exactly
   - **PRESERVE ALL ···paragraph wrapper tags EXACTLY**
   - Maintain academic tone and formal scientific writing style

- Use precise technical terminology - obey the glossary strictly
- Preserve section structure and paragraph organization
- Translate all content completely - do not omit any information

2. **OUTPUT RULES**:
   - Return ONLY the translated text (no explanations, no quotes, no headings)
   - Keep one output paragraph per input paragraph
   - Maintain exact count and IDs of ···tags
   - Do NOT add Markdown formatting unless present in source
   - Preserve original line breaks when meaningful
3. **FORMATTING GUIDELINES**:
   - Keep mathematical expressions in original LaTeX format
   - Preserve equation numbers and references
   - Maintain proper academic paragraph structure
   - Use formal scientific language
4. **Glossary**:
   - 机器学习 => machine learning
   - 深度学习 => deep learning

The input text is:

系统合理信念是指个体对社会系统公正性与合理性的感知。理论与研究表明，系统合理信念具有防御威胁

This appears to be a single paragraph. I need to check if there are any tags. The user hasn' t provided any in the input, but the instructions say I must preserve them. Let me re-read the input carefully.

The input is just plain text without any tags. However, the instructions are very clear that I must preserve these tags. This seems like a test case or perhaps the user expects me to wrap the translation in a tag. But the instructions say "PRESERVE ALL ···paragraph wrapper tags EXACTLY" and "if input has N paragraph tags, output must have exactly N paragraph tags with matching IDs" .

Since the input has NO <PARA

Full Text

System-Justifying Beliefs Safeguard Mental Health: The Palliative Function and an Extension

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Abstract: System-justifying belief pertains to perceiving the fairness and legitimacy of the existing social system. It fulfills a palliative function in safeguarding mental health through three psychological mechanisms: alleviating

ideological dissonance, compensating for lack of personal control, and denying or minimizing threats. The efficiency of these mechanisms is also shaped by contextual, individual, and temporal factors. Nevertheless, the psychological defense viewpoint overlooks the potential role of system-justifying beliefs in fostering a "coping" approach to preserve mental health. Future research should further validate and refine the defense-coping model, focus more on the adverse effects of the palliative function, enhance the measurement tools, and expand the breadth of inquiry.

Keywords: system-justifying belief, mental health, palliative function, the defense-coping model

2. The Palliative Function of System-Justifying Beliefs: Psychological Mechanisms

In daily life, individuals frequently encounter various threatening events that engender feelings of uncertainty and insecurity, which in turn trigger defensive reactions (Jonas et al., 2014). System justification theory posits that endorsing system-justifying beliefs serves to cope with pressures arising from social threats, thereby fulfilling a palliative function that maintains mental health (Jost & Hunyady, 2002). What, then, are the underlying mechanisms of this palliative function, and how does it preserve mental health? Existing research has typically offered fragmented answers to this question. Therefore, by integrating prior literature, this paper identifies three categories of psychological mechanisms: alleviating ideological dissonance, compensating for lack of personal control, and denying or minimizing threats.

2.1 Alleviating Ideological Dissonance

Ideological dissonance represents an extension of cognitive dissonance theory into the ideological domain (Jost et al., 2003). It highlights the contradiction between individuals' (particularly the disadvantaged) perception of social inequality and their own behaviors or attitudes that tacitly accept this inequality. Specifically, evaluations of one' s social system comprise two components: prescriptive beliefs, which represent the ideal societal state that citizens strive to achieve, and descriptive beliefs, which represent individuals' understanding of actual social conditions (Zimmerman & Reyna, 2013). Consequently, when individuals recognize that the existing social system fails to meet their expectations, ideological dissonance arises and triggers negative emotional responses. Since emotional distress such as anxiety cannot be tolerated indefinitely, individuals must take measures to alleviate this psychological dissonance. System justification theory suggests that, compared with directly challenging social inequality, the simplest way to resolve ideological dissonance is to alter one' s cognitive framework regarding the existing system (i.e., system-justifying beliefs) to restore cognitive harmony (Yang Shenlong et al., 2018). In other words,

by changing one's perception of social system fairness and narrowing the gap between descriptive and prescriptive beliefs, individuals can relieve the emotional distress caused by ideological dissonance. Based on a Canadian student sample, Kay et al. (2009a) demonstrated that after experimentally inducing system justification motives (such as system dependency, inevitability, and system threat), participants indeed exhibited strong injunctification tendencies—the propensity to view what *is* as what *ought to be*, perceiving the current social status quo as the most ideal and desirable state.

Related research indicates that adopting system-justifying beliefs helps align social ideals with reality, thereby reducing negative emotions and enhancing well-being. For example, meritocracy belief—the conviction that wealth differences in the current system primarily stem from performance-related factors such as personal ability and effort (Jost & Hunyady, 2005)—thus promotes greater endorsement of consistency between current social reality and meritocratic ideals. As a system-justifying belief deeply rooted in various national social systems, meritocracy belief is closely associated with personal well-being. A cross-cultural study based on 36 European countries revealed that individuals with strong meritocracy beliefs experience greater happiness and life satisfaction (Hadarics et al., 2021). Another study confirmed positive associations between meritocracy belief and both self-esteem and physical health (McCoy et al., 2013). Similarly, economic system justification reflects the belief that the current economic system provides equal opportunities for everyone and that economic success depends solely on individual merit. Goudarzi et al. (2020) found that American workers or students with high economic system justification beliefs were less likely to experience dissonance reactions after watching interview videos of homeless individuals (i.e., economic inequality events), consequently reporting and experiencing fewer negative emotions such as sadness, anger, and disgust. This effect also applies to everyday situations (i.e., encountering poor or wealthy individuals). Furthermore, some research suggests that complementary stereotypes serve to rationalize social systems and thus help alleviate the contradictory relationship between discriminatory reality and equality ideals (Kay et al., 2007). Studies indicate that benevolent sexism—a complementary stereotype that acknowledges women' s kindness and warmth while believing they should be protected by men—positively predicts women' s life satisfaction (Connelly & Heesacker, 2012; Napier et al., 2010).

2.2 Compensating for Lack of Personal Control

Compensatory control theory (Kay et al., 2008) offers another explanatory perspective for the palliative function of system-justifying beliefs. According to this theory, individuals possess a fundamental motivation to pursue and maintain personal control—the belief that one can predict, influence, and master current and future events—essentially to satisfy the need to perceive the external world as orderly and non-random (Kay et al., 2009b). However, personal control is not constant; different situations and threatening events constantly cause individu-

als' perceived control to fluctuate. When personal control is too low, individuals become unable to cope with anxiety arising from an external, disordered world and must rely on control compensation strategies to restore a sense of order and alleviate emotional distress (Kay et al., 2009b). The core of control compensation lies in re-establishing cognition about the orderliness and predictability of the external world (Landau et al., 2015). Regarding system-justifying beliefs, they provide clear and explicit explanations for social system operations, satisfying individuals' need for certainty about the external world and providing personal control. Consequently, they can serve as an effective control compensation strategy, thereby reducing anxiety and maintaining mental health.

Related research confirms that lack of control is a key factor triggering the rationalization of existing systems. For instance, based on cross-sectional data from North America and Europe, Kay et al. (2008) found that individuals' perceived control negatively predicted reliance on external system control (i.e., government). Researchers further employed experimental designs by asking participants to recall events where they lacked control to threaten their personal control. The studies showed that, compared with control groups, participants in the control threat condition were more inclined to defend the existing social system, exhibiting higher system-justifying beliefs. Subsequent research similarly confirmed that threatening personal control leads individuals to more strongly support meritocracy beliefs (Goode et al., 2014) or hierarchy (Friesen et al., 2014). Even individuals with the strongest anti-authoritarian traits defend the existing political system more when feeling a lack of control (Knight et al., 2014). As an effective means of compensating for control, system-justifying beliefs provide individuals with beliefs about the orderliness and certainty of how the world operates, helping to restore personal control, which is often considered a core factor promoting mental health (Thompson, 2021). McCoy et al. (2013) found, based on an American sample, that disadvantaged individuals (women, low-status women, or non-white women) who endorsed meritocracy beliefs experienced higher control over their life circumstances, which in turn led them to exhibit higher self-esteem and physical health levels (measured by physical functioning, overall health, and pain experience). Kiral Ucar et al. (2019) observed similar effects among Turkish university students, finding that if individuals believed life events happening to them were fair and just—i.e., endorsing personal belief in a just world—they experienced more control and greater life satisfaction.

2.3 Denying or Minimizing Threats

The various threats individuals encounter in life include both internal threats originating within the social system, such as discrimination, and external threats from outside the system, such as natural disasters or terrorist attacks. The third psychological mechanism of the palliative function manifests as preventing individuals from perceiving the existence of threats—i.e., denying or minimizing them.

Research on discrimination first provides supporting evidence for this mechanism. Discrimination refers to negative attitudes, judgments, or unfair treatment toward members of certain groups (e.g., women, ethnic minorities, or LGBT individuals). When individuals perceive discrimination (i.e., perceived discrimination), they may consequently experience various physical and mental health problems (Pascoe & Smart Richman, 2009). Discrimination threatens not only individual well-being but also system fairness (Napier et al., 2020b). To defend against the negative impact of discrimination, system-justifying beliefs construct psychological barriers that obstruct or distort individuals' perception of discrimination. Research indicates that system-justifying beliefs are an important antecedent causing individuals to deny or minimize discrimination. McCoy and Major (2007) primed female participants with meritocracy beliefs using a scrambled sentence task and found that when these participants were rejected for a "position" in an experimental task, they were less willing to attribute this negative outcome to gender discrimination from others, while also perceiving less gender discrimination after reading articles about sexism. A longitudinal study also demonstrated that higher system-justifying beliefs among ethnic minorities led to less perceived discrimination later (Bahamondes et al., 2021b). Further research shows that the function of system-justifying beliefs in denying and minimizing discrimination serves to maintain individuals' physical and mental health. For example, Bahamondes et al. (2020) found in a Chilean LGBT sample that individuals with high system-justifying beliefs perceived less sexual stigma directed at their ingroup and consequently experienced less psychological distress.

Other research has noted the positive psychological effects of system-justifying beliefs in defending against external system threats. External threats not only directly damage individuals' mental health but also indirectly threaten system stability and legitimacy (Napier et al., 2006). For instance, during Hurricane Katrina in 2005, researchers found that despite the U.S. government' s various weaknesses exposed during post-disaster rescue efforts, people still denied the threat to American social system legitimacy by defending the status quo, blaming victims, or accepting stereotypes, thereby rebuilding beliefs about social system fairness and alleviating emotional distress (Napier et al., 2006). Similarly, Vasilopoulos and Brouard (2020) discovered that in the context of the November 2015 Paris terrorist attacks, individuals who more strongly endorsed social system fairness and legitimacy were less affected by the attacks, showing lower fear and anger as well as higher hope.

2.4 Summary

Overall, the three mechanisms described above explain from different perspectives how system-justifying beliefs maintain mental health, each possessing distinct characteristics and applicable scopes. Specifically: (1) Alleviating ideological dissonance starts from the contradiction between individuals' beliefs about what the existing system *is* and what it *ought to be*, highlighting the positive

role of system-justifying beliefs in maintaining internal cognitive consistency —by viewing social reality as ideal, individuals can relieve negative emotions. (2) Compensating for lack of personal control focuses on the important role of system-justifying beliefs in compensating for personal control and satisfying individuals' need for certainty—by providing stable external order and personal control, system-justifying beliefs dissolve psychological distress caused by control loss. (3) Denying or minimizing threats emphasizes that system-justifying beliefs construct psychological barriers for individuals—this mechanism filters and weakens perception of internal and external threats, thereby preserving psychological well-being in threatening situations.

3. Re-examining the Palliative Function: Boundary Conditions

The preceding section noted that the palliative function preserves individual mental health through three categories of psychological mechanisms. Theoretically, as a passive threat response, defense motivation should manifest more prominently in high-threat situations—only when external threats reach a certain level can defense motivation be activated and its positive psychological effects realized (Hadarics et al., 2021). Based on this analysis, some researchers have attempted to test whether the palliative function is influenced by certain boundary factors. From existing literature, researchers have primarily examined two important boundary conditions: first, contextual boundaries, namely social inequality (Hadarics et al., 2021; Onraet et al., 2017; Sengupta et al., 2017); second, individual boundaries, namely (low) social status, including wealth, gender, and ethnicity (Hadarics et al., 2021; Li et al., 2020; Vargas-Salfate, 2019). Additionally, some researchers have pointed out that system justification, as a psychological defense mechanism, can only temporarily alleviate the negative impact of current threats on individuals but cannot truly improve their life circumstances, suggesting the palliative function may exhibit inconsistency between short-term and long-term effects (Harding & Sibley, 2013; Napier et al., 2020a)—i.e., temporal boundaries.

3.1 Contextual Boundary: Social Inequality

The degree of inequality in a country' s socioeconomic system determines how many potential health risks individuals within it face. Those living in countries with severe economic inequality often encounter more physical, mental, or behavioral problems such as mental illness, violence, or substance abuse (Wilkinson & Pickett, 2009). Social inequality often signifies serious contradictions and dissonance between individuals' perceptions of social reality and their social ideals, and a severely unequal society typically indicates that current social functions are in a state of dysfunction and anomie (Casara et al., 2022), leading individuals to experience disorder and low control. Therefore, if the palliative function can indeed maintain mental health, then in places with higher social inequality, individuals who rationalize social reality should obtain more psychological

benefits (potential gains, though not absolute values).

Based on this logic, researchers have found that regardless of whether using economic inequality (Gini coefficient) or social threat indicators (GDP, unemployment rate, inflation rate, life expectancy, homicide rate), in highly unequal countries, individuals who endorse social system fairness and legitimacy gain higher subjective well-being benefits (Hadarics et al., 2021; Onraet et al., 2017). Similarly, Sengupta et al. (2017) investigated whether the palliative function of symbolic prejudice—a system-justifying belief that disadvantaged groups should not receive any compensation for their poor social status—varied across different regions in New Zealand. The study confirmed that participants with high symbolic prejudice reported higher satisfaction with health, relationships, life, and safety, and this positive predictive relationship was indeed stronger in areas with high economic inequality.

3.2 Individual Boundary: Social Status

Social status is not merely a label or characteristic reflecting individual differences; its essence is a status situation constructed jointly by personal resources and perceived rank (Kraus et al., 2012). Status differences fundamentally manifest as differences in life circumstances. Specifically, low-status individuals have lower income, less education, unstable employment, and live in environments filled with various potential risks and uncertainties. Conversely, high-status individuals, with abundant resources and prominent positions, are less affected by external threats (Kraus et al., 2012). Status differences in life circumstances essentially constitute status-based social inequality, wherein low-status individuals survive in more hostile environments and themselves lack control and coping resources. Therefore, researchers argue that in these disadvantaged situations, low-status individuals rationalizing the existing system must obtain greater psychological benefits (Hadarics et al., 2021). Related research confirms this hypothesis, showing that the palliative function of system-justifying beliefs is indeed stronger among low-status individuals. For example, Hadarics et al. (2021) found, based on large-scale European survey data, that individuals' belief in economic system justification positively predicted their own happiness and life satisfaction, and this positive effect was stronger among those with low family income. Similar effects were also confirmed in Peruvian samples (Vargas-Salfate, 2019).

3.3 Temporal Boundary: Short-term vs. Long-term Effects

System-justifying beliefs, as system-maintaining motives, may conflict with self-maintaining motives, especially for low-status individuals (Jost et al., 2004). Zhang Yue et al. (2022) pointed out that social inequality simultaneously creates symbolic threat and realistic threat for low-status individuals. Symbolic threat challenges low-status individuals' beliefs about social system fairness, activating system justification motives, while realistic threat worsens their disadvantaged situation and damages their physical and mental well-being, acti-

vating self-justification motives. This conflict between the two types of motives means that even when low-status individuals endorse system-justifying beliefs, the persistent reality of inequality may still cause substantive and continuous negative impacts on their personal well-being. This phenomenon implies that the palliative function may exhibit inconsistency between short-term and long-term effects. In the short term, system-justifying beliefs temporarily buffer the negative impact of current threatening events on individuals through three psychological mechanisms, demonstrating short-term positive effects on psychological well-being. However, in the long term, because the palliative function does not truly improve individuals' (especially low-status individuals') life circumstances, persistent external threats continue to threaten individuals, eroding mental health and ultimately triggering long-term negative effects (Harding & Sibley, 2013). Although numerous cross-sectional or experimental studies have proven the short-term positive effects of the palliative function, few studies have examined its long-term effects, with only some preliminary research providing supporting evidence. For example, a longitudinal study based on a New Zealand sample found that if participants currently held high system-justifying beliefs, this indeed reduced the negative predictive effect of social harm experiences (such as being threatened or attacked) on life satisfaction, but this positive effect only applied to the short term; when the time span extended to one year later, high system-justifying beliefs showed long-term negative effects, instead exacerbating the negative impact of harm experiences on life satisfaction (Harding & Sibley, 2013). Similarly, Godfrey et al. (2019) conducted a longitudinal survey of elementary school students from low social status families in the United States and found that system-justifying beliefs were positively correlated with students' self-esteem and classroom behavior management in 6th grade and negatively correlated with deviant behavior, but the predictive effects reversed by 8th grade. Therefore, the palliative function may have short-term positive effects but long-term negative effects.

3.4 Summary

In summary, based on the logic of defense motivation, researchers have proposed contextual, individual, and temporal boundaries affecting the palliative function and have provided supporting evidence. However, some studies have also provided contradictory evidence regarding the influence of these boundary conditions. A longitudinal study based on 18 country samples simultaneously examined the effects of national inequality, social status, and time span on the palliative function. The study found that system-justifying beliefs had positive effects in positively predicting life satisfaction and negatively predicting anxiety and depression, but these effects were not temporary and possessed a certain degree of long-term stability (at least six months). Moreover, the study did not confirm moderating effects of national inequality level (using Gini coefficient and Human Development Index as indicators) or subjective social status (Vargas-Salfate et al., 2018). Additionally, some research examining the differential effects of the palliative function among individuals of different statuses

similarly found that system-justifying beliefs did not bring more psychological benefits to disadvantaged groups (e.g., Li et al., 2020; Sengupta et al., 2017). This evidence reveals that the palliative function may have a certain degree of consistency across situations, statuses, and time, which in fact challenges the boundary effects predicted by the defense perspective and also implies that the function of system-justifying beliefs in maintaining mental health may involve some non- "defensive" pathway.

4. Extensions and Future Directions

Numerous studies have confirmed the mental health maintenance function of system-justifying beliefs, and related research is flourishing. Based on the psychological defense perspective, this paper has summarized and elaborated on three mechanisms through which system-justifying beliefs maintain mental health (i.e., the palliative function): alleviating ideological dissonance, compensating for lack of personal control, and denying or minimizing threats, as well as three categories of boundary conditions affecting the palliative function: social inequality, social status, and short-term vs. long-term effects. However, it should be noted that recent empirical evidence has begun to challenge the mainstream explanation of the defense perspective, pointing out that this viewpoint cannot fully reveal the mental health maintenance function of system-justifying beliefs. Therefore, there is an urgent need to sort out and clarify related issues. Based on this, the following section first organizes and responds to criticisms of the defense perspective and attempts to resolve theoretical and empirical discrepancies by constructing a defense-coping integration model. Additionally, there are several other key issues in this field worthy of researchers' attention.

4.1 Overcoming the Limitations of the Defense Perspective: Constructing a Defense-Coping Integration Model

System justification theory has elucidated how and when system-justifying beliefs maintain mental health from a psychological defense perspective, which has become the mainstream explanation in related fields. However, because system justification theory overemphasizes motivational explanations, it has encountered a series of challenges (e.g., Owuamalam et al., 2019; Rubin et al., 2023), and the empirical literature on the palliative function has also accumulated some non-"defensive" evidence (e.g., Li et al., 2020; Maraş Taşkin & Şingir, 2022; Samson, 2018). Based on these questions and facts, this paper first proposes and responds to two main criticisms of the psychological defense perspective: first, it neglects the cognitive components in the composition of system-justifying beliefs; second, it neglects the potential function of system-justifying beliefs in promoting mental health through a "coping" pathway. Then, on this basis, it constructs a defense-coping integration model of system-justifying beliefs maintaining mental health to understand the internal logic of their association.

First, individuals' perception of system fairness is not merely the result of some defensive motivation but may also reflect the product of non-motivational pro-

cesses. System-justifying beliefs, as individuals' judgments or evaluations of social system fairness and legitimacy, are essentially attitudes or beliefs. Some researchers have pointed out that system-justifying beliefs can reflect the results of purely cognitive processes, such as being an accurate reflection of objective reality (Owuamalam et al., 2019; Thomas, 2022) or a byproduct of some basic cognitive process (Hussak & Cimpian, 2015). Of course, this paper does not deny the motivational origins of system-justifying beliefs but proposes that viewing them solely as motivational products is one-sided. Conceptually distinguishing between the motivational and cognitive components of system-justifying beliefs helps understand their subsequent positive psychological functions. This paper infers that if the motivational component of system-justifying beliefs plays a temporary, passive psychological defense function in maintaining mental health by coping with threats, then its cognitive component—the perception and judgment of social system fairness (Hu Xiaoyong et al., 2016)—may have a relatively stable, active mental health maintenance function.

Second, the mental health maintenance function of system-justifying beliefs derives not only from passive defense but also from their influence on individuals' active coping processes. Research on adaptational processes in clinical psychology shows (Cramer, 1998; Kramer, 2010) that individuals' reactions to adversity can be distinguished into two modes: defense and coping. Defense is unconscious, passive, and lacks intentionality, whereas coping is conscious, active, and focused on problem-solving (Cramer, 1998). The distinction between these two response modes provides a more comprehensive perspective for understanding the mental health maintenance function of system-justifying beliefs. This paper argues that system-justifying beliefs, as a cognitive construct, also have the function of influencing individuals' "coping" responses—specifically, by promoting individuals' acquisition of coping resources, thereby maintaining mental health (Taylor & Stanton, 2007). Some evidence supports the existence of this "coping" pathway. For example, research has found that system-justifying beliefs can positively predict optimism (Maraş Taşkin & Şingir, 2022), enhance interpersonal trust and cooperation (Samson, 2018; Zhang & Zhou, 2018), and increase group identification (Bahamondes et al., 2021a; Owuamalam et al., 2023). Additionally, when individuals endorse system fairness, it helps increase their perceived upward mobility (Li et al., 2020), which is often positively associated with mental health (Sagioglou et al., 2019).

Based on the above analysis, this paper proposes the defense-coping integration model shown in Figure 1 [Figure 1: see original paper]. This model suggests that system-justifying beliefs maintain personal mental health through two pathways: the defense pathway and the coping pathway. The defense pathway posits that rationalizing the existing system is an individual' s defensive response to external threats, which helps alleviate ideological dissonance, compensate for personal control, and weaken threat perception in high-pressure situations, thereby reducing negative emotions, enhancing positive emotions, and increasing life satisfaction. This defense pathway is influenced by contextual, individual, and temporal boundaries. The coping pathway posits that individuals' perceptions of

social system fairness and legitimacy indirectly influence their coping responses to stressful events, being positively associated with coping resources such as optimism, trust and cooperation, group identification, and mobility perception, which help promote active coping strategies and maintain mental health. Although both defense and coping have mental health maintenance functions, this paper suggests that their mechanisms may differ in the following ways. From a situational dimension, psychological defense has strong situational specificity —it only arises in situations that induce system justification motives, such as when individuals face system threats, low control, or system dependency and inevitability (Friesen et al., 2019). The coping pathway has broader situational applicability, helping individuals cope with various life and work stressors large and small (Correia et al., 2009). From an individual dimension, the positive psychological effects of defense are more applicable to disadvantaged individuals, even though it may also trigger negative counter-reactions (Bahamondes-Correa, 2016). The coping pathway applies simultaneously to individuals of different statuses. From a temporal dimension, the palliative nature of the defense pathway determines that it only has short-term positive effects but long-term negative effects. The coping pathway is more conducive to truly solving problems and may thus bring more lasting positive effects (Hobfoll, 2002; Zhou Chunyan & Guo Yongyu, 2013). From an agency dimension, the defense pathway manifests as a passive stress management process that often lacks consciousness and intentionality (Cramer, 1998), and system justification theory has repeatedly emphasized the implicit nature of this motive (e.g., Jost et al., 2004). The coping pathway reflects individuals' potential and intention to actively pursue goals, with optimism, interpersonal trust, and group identification brought about by social justice beliefs all helping individuals actively approach desired life or economic goals (Hobfoll, 2002).

The defense-coping integration model clearly presents the positive association between system-justifying beliefs and mental health, not only responding to contradictions and misunderstandings in past research but also providing reference frameworks for subsequent studies. Of course, this model currently lacks solid empirical evidence and requires more detailed exploration and refinement in future research.

4.2 Attending to the Negative Consequences of the Palliative Function

Although this paper aims to analyze the positive effects of system-justifying beliefs on individual mental health, it must also point out their negative consequences. These adverse effects primarily manifest at three levels—individual, intergroup, and societal—and warrant researchers' attention. At the individual level, people (especially low-status individuals) endorsing system-justifying beliefs may face a "double-edged sword" effect. For example, O' Brien and Major (2005) found that if low-status individuals (Black and Latino individuals) had low group identification, system-justifying beliefs indeed positively predicted psychological well-being (using self-esteem and depression as indicators). How-

ever, if low-status individuals had high group identification, conflict occurred between system justification and group justification motives, and the aforementioned positive effects reversed. Additionally, Dover et al. (2020), using ethnic minority university students as participants, found that if they continuously encountered discrimination threats, high system-justifying beliefs would damage their mental health. As mentioned earlier, system-justifying beliefs have short-term positive effects but long-term negative effects. At the intergroup level, system-justifying beliefs strengthen intergroup stereotypes. Research has found that low-class individuals who believe the social system is fair and reasonable tend to prefer high-status groups more, i.e., exhibiting outgroup favoritism (Jost et al., 2004), and this phenomenon is often implicit (Axt, 2018; Essien et al., 2021). Moreover, high system-justifying beliefs may cause individuals to deny unfair events and engage in victim derogation, such as toward sexual assault victims (Ståhl et al., 2010), economic failures (Kay et al., 2005), or disaster victims (Napier et al., 2006). At the societal level, system-justifying beliefs are not conducive to social change and development. Researchers point out that precisely because high system-justifying beliefs weaken individuals' negative emotions toward the system (such as anger), citizens become less willing to take measures to improve social conditions, such as supporting redistribution policies (Wakslak et al., 2007), participating in collective action to improve inequality (Solak et al., 2021), or paying attention to climate change issues (Jylhä & Akrami, 2015).

According to the defense-coping integration model, the negative effects of system-justifying beliefs actually stem from their palliative function, because "palliation" only serves to anesthetize the self and cannot fundamentally "cure" the disease of inequality (Napier et al., 2020a). Therefore, this reminds researchers and policymakers in related fields that if they truly want to improve the well-being of disadvantaged groups, they should not make them dependent on a superficial, illusory sense of system fairness (i.e., relying on the palliative function). Instead, they should genuinely narrow the wealth gap and establish an open and inclusive social environment, ultimately enabling disadvantaged groups to truly benefit from a just and equal society (i.e., promoting the acquisition of coping resources).

4.3 Improving Measurement and Expanding Research Domains

First, the measurement of system-justifying beliefs needs further improvement. Currently, research widely uses the general system justification scale developed by Kay and Jost (2003) or its adapted versions. This scale reflects individuals' perceptions of fairness and defense tendencies toward current social reality, essentially measuring descriptive beliefs. However, in specific studies, researchers often use these measurement results to represent individuals' motives to maintain the system. This simplified operational definition is inappropriate, as it not only fails to effectively distinguish between "motivational processes of justification" and "outcomes and responses of justification" (Zhang Yue et al., 2022) but also causes confusion between attitude and motive concepts. Therefore, it

is necessary to first conceptually and measurement-wise distinguish between the motivational and cognitive components of system-justifying beliefs. This paper suggests using differentiated terminology: when research focuses on motivational components, the terms "system-justifying belief" or "system justification" can be used; when focusing on cognitive components, the term "system fairness belief" can be used. Second, using only descriptive beliefs to represent individuals' perceptions of system fairness is also incomplete. Zimmerman and Reyna (2013) point out that individuals' fairness beliefs about social systems generally contain two components: descriptive and prescriptive beliefs. Only when the two are coordinated can they accurately predict individuals' endorsement of system legitimacy. Based on this and the defense-coping integration model above, this paper attempts to propose an effective measurement method to distinguish system fairness belief (cognition) from system justification (motive). Specifically, by simultaneously measuring individuals' descriptive and prescriptive beliefs about system fairness, the absolute value of their consistency (i.e., reverse-coded difference between the two) is operationally defined as system fairness belief—high consistency indicates high system fairness belief—while the change value of their consistency (i.e., the injunctification process, see Section 2.1) is operationally defined as system justification motive—high change value indicates high system justification motive.

Second, research domains regarding "the system" still need further expansion. In system justification theory, "the system" refers to various social entities and the relationships and operational rules among them, encompassing everything from larger-scale social, economic, and political systems to smaller-scale family, organizational, or school systems (Jost & Banaji, 1994; Van der Toorn & Jost, 2014). However, current research still primarily focuses on macro systems such as society, politics, or gender. If individuals endorse the fairness of a micro system, such as schools, communities, or companies, can these micro system-justifying beliefs also maintain individual mental health to some extent? Meanwhile, in real life, individuals are often situated in multiple overlapping systems and have different identities and statuses (Jost et al., 2019). For example, for an economically wealthy woman, she holds advantage in the socioeconomic system but disadvantage in the gender system—so do multiple system-justifying beliefs influence each other, and how do they jointly affect personal mental health? In summary, future research should further improve research methods and continuously expand theory and practice to better answer the relationship between system-justifying beliefs and mental health.

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Note: Figure translations are in progress. See original paper for figures.