

# Explaining the Justification of Violence Against Women based on the System Justification Theory

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## Keywords

System justification, justifying violence, violence against women

## Abstract

The current article reviews recent studies on the justification of violence against women while using the system justification theory as a framework. Accordingly, justifying violence against women is motivated by the will to justify gender-based hierarchical structures in society. In this regard, individuals who justify violence against women adopt gender system justifying ideologies, including ambivalent sexism, domestic violence myths, and gender stereotypes. Also, individuals who adopt increased levels of broader hierarchy-supporting ideologies, such as right-wing authoritarianism, social dominance orientation, belief in a just world, and conservatism, justify violence against women in higher degrees. Contextually, hierarchy-supporting cultures increase the justification of violence against women. Also, perceiving a threat against the gender system in the context makes individuals more prone to justify violence against women. In general, studies show that justifying the gender system, including the unequal instances within it, such as the violence against women, provides a palliative function for the universal needs for safety, social cohesion, and certainty. Yet, women who feel angry toward unequal gender-based instances or both men and women who carry moral-based concerns about these instances might support social changes that favor an equal context in the gender system.

## Kadına Yönelik Şiddetin Meşrulaştırılmasını Sistemi Meşrulaştırma Teorisi Temelinde Açıklamak Öz

**Anahtar kelimeler**  
Sistemi meşrulaştırma, şiddeti meşrulaştırma, kadına yönelik şiddet

Mevcut makale, sistemi meşrulaştırma teorisini bir çerçeve olarak kullanarak kadına yönelik şiddeti meşrulaştırmayı ele alan güncel çalışmaları derlemektedir. Buna göre, kadına yönelik şiddetin meşrulaştırılması toplumdaki cinsiyet temelli hiyerarşik yapıları meşrulaştırma motivasyonundan kaynaklanmaktadır. Bu bağlamda, kadına yönelik şiddeti meşrulaştıran bireyler, çelişik duygulu cinsiyetçilik, aile içi şiddet mitleri, tecavüz mitleri gibi cinsiyet temelli sistemi meşrulaştıran ideolojileri ve cinsiyet kalıpyargılarını benimserler. Keza, sağ kanat yetkecilik, sosyal baskınlık yönelimi, adil dünya inancı ve muhafazakarlık gibi hiyerarşiyi destekleyen daha kapsayıcı ideolojileri artan düzeylerde benimseyen bireyler kadına yönelik şiddeti daha fazal meşrulaştırırlar. Bağlamsal olarak, hiyerarşiyi destekleyen kültürler kadına yönelik şiddetin meşrulaştırılmasını artırır. Buna ek olarak, bağlamda cinsiyet temelli sisteme yönelik bir tehdit algılamak bireyleri kadına yönelik şiddeti meşrulaştırmaya daha yakın hale getirir. Genel olarak çalışmalar, kadına yönelik şiddet gibi eşitsizlikleri de içeren cinsiyet temelli sistemi meşrulaştırmanın güvenlik, sosyal uyum ve kesinlik gibi evrensel ihtiyaçlar için yatıştırıcı bir etki sağladığını göstermektedir. Ancak, cinsiyet temelli eşit olmayan olaylara karşı öfke duyan kadınlar ya da bu olaylarla ilgili ahlaki kaygı taşıyan kadın ve erkekler cinsiyet temelli sistemde eşitlikçi bir ortamı onaylayan sosyal değişimlere destek verebilmektedirler.

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Violence against women (VAW) is a serious societal issue that demonstrates and maintains gender inequality (Watts & Zimmerman, 2002). The prevalence of VAW shows epidemic levels around the globe, with no current society providing an entirely violent-free environment for women (Alhabib et al., 2009). VAW could take physical, psychological, sexual, and economic forms (United Nations Women, 2010), where the perpetrator could be strangers, acquaintances, survivor's partner, or family members (Kilpatrick, 2004). Global statistics show that one in three women become the target of physical and/or sexual violence by a partner or sexual violence by a non-partner at least once in their lifetime (World Health Organization, 2021). For the most part, survivors are repeatedly subjected to violence by a known male perpetrator (Watts & Zimmerman, 2002).

Even though VAW is a serious problem that causes detrimental consequences in women's lives (Watts & Zimmerman, 2002), people might justify VAW by denying the survivor's suffering, blaming the survivor, or excusing the actual perpetrator etc. (Mateus, 2020). In this regard, the system justification theory presents a comprehensive framework to understand the psychological mechanisms underlying the justification of VAW. The theory focuses on the system justification motive that denotes the substantially nonconscious desire to legitimize the existing societal systems, including their unequal aspects (Jost et al., 2015). In the case of the current study, the system is framed as the gender system, while the unequal aspect of the system is VAW. Within the framework of SJT, people justify VAW to sustain gender-based hierarchical systems within society (Mouafo & Nzekaih, 2021), while perceiving the opposition toward VAW as an attack on the existing gender system (Mou et al., 2021).

Literature harbors many studies that focus on the justification of VAW (e.g., Çelik-Ok, 2019; DeVault, 2019; Stahl et al., 2010). However, no study in the literature gathers the related findings to reveal the extensive relationality between the individual and the system in terms of justifying VAW. The current study aims to fill this gap by reviewing the literature related to justification of VAW through using the system justification theory as a framework.

For the stated aim, the review is divided into six topics: (1) gender system justifying stereotypes in relation to VAW, (2) gender system justifying ideologies in relation to VAW, (3) broader system justifying ideologies in relation to VAW, (4) contextual determinants of the justification of VAW, (5) the palliative function of justifying gender system, and (6) the attitudes toward social change for an equal gender system. These topics are respectively presented below, starting with the gender system justifying stereotypes in relation to the VAW.

### **Gender System Justifying Stereotypes in relation to the Justification of Violence against Women**

The System Justification Theory proposes that *stereotypes* about certain groups legitimize the inequalities within the existing system (Jost & Banaji, 1994). Accordingly, the advantaged positions of social groups are justified by assigning them status-relevant stereotypes, while the disadvantaged positions of social groups are justified by assigning them status-irrelevant stereotypes (Friesen et al., 2019). In this way, people assume that the advantaged position of social groups is naturally deserved, while the disadvantaged position of social groups does not pose a problem because the group has other aspects to appreciate (Friesen et al., 2019). In this context, disadvantaged individuals tend to internalize negative stereotypes about their groups and favor the high-status groups instead of their own (Jost et al., 2002; Jost et al., 2004).

In the same vein, gender stereotypes function to legitimize the unequal gender system, where men are assigned agentic qualities as a status-relevant stereotype, whereas women are assigned communal qualities as

a status-irrelevant stereotype (e.g., Sakallı-Uğurlu et al., 2018). Through these stereotypes, men are perceived as independent individuals who govern their lives due to natural reasons, whereas women are valued over their societal roles in the service of others (Jost & Kay, 2005). By constructing the hierarchy-based traditional assumptions about gender groups, gender stereotypes contribute to the justification of violence against women (VAW) in certain occasions (Bates et al., 2019; Powell & Webster, 2016).

Accordingly, the literature suggests that the adoption of the stereotypes about gender roles does not relate to the justification of VAW for people who justify the gender system at low levels (Çelik-Ok, 2019). However, for women who already justify the system with elevated degrees, the activation of gender stereotypes increases the tendency to justify VAW by blaming the survivors (Stahl et al., 2010). Also, people become inclined to justify VAW as they endorse stereotypes that sexually objectify women when the survivor is perceived to carry those characteristics (Cheeseborough et al., 2020). For instance, findings demonstrate that men who adopt gender stereotypes that sexually objectify women are inclined to justify the objectification of women and the control over women's sexuality (Bareket et al., 2018).

Similar to stereotypes, ideologies carry considerable importance for system justification. In the below section, the role of the gender system justifying ideologies in the justification of violence against women will be explained.

### **Gender System Justifying Ideologies in relation to the Justification of Violence against Women**

The system justification theory defines *ideologies* as societal tools to create a false consciousness, which functions to justify the disadvantaged position of social groups (Jost & Banaji, 1994). In this way, maintaining the status quo appears to be a bottom-up process, where disadvantaged people justify unfavorable conditions (Jost, 2001; Van der Toorn et al., 2015). Occasionally, even the most disadvantaged people become the most extreme defenders of the system. Such a contradiction arises from ideological dissonance, where people feel anxious to accept that they are part of an unfair system (Henry & Saul, 2006; Jost, 2001; Jost et al., 2003).

Literature suggests that the major gender system justifying ideologies that relate to the justification of violence against women (VAW) are ambivalent sexism (e.g., Glick & Fiske, 2001), domestic violence myths (e.g., Lelaurain et al., 2018), and rape myths (e.g., Chappleau & Oswald, 2014). These ideologies commonly present VAW as a legitimate part of the broader gender system (Lucarini et al., 2020). A detailed explanation regarding the relationship between justifying VAW and each stated gender system justifying ideology is presented in the below sections.

### **Ambivalent Sexism and the Justification of Violence against Women**

Ambivalent sexism is a concept with two dimensions: hostile sexism (HS) and benevolent sexism (BS). HS embodies open and frank views about the inferiority of women, whereas BS corresponds to perceiving women as naive beings who must be taken care of by men. Both dimensions are defined as gender system justifying ideologies since they justify unequal gender system by bolstering hierarchy-based traditional gender roles (Glick & Fiske, 1997). However, BS functions in a more subtle way by making exploitation look like protection. For this reason, mostly women are more willing to compromise with BS while they assume that men provide them security (Glick & Fiske, 1997, 2001). Similarly, women who reside in disadvantaged contexts are inclined to endorse higher levels of benevolent sexism compared to women who live in more egalitarian gender-based contexts (Glick et al., 2000). These ideologies relate to the justification of violence

against women (VAW) since they picture the survivor as the individuals responsible for the violence due to transgressing the conventional gender roles (Valor-Segura et al., 2011; Yamawaki et al., 2009).

The literature suggests that endorsed ambivalent sexism levels predict the justification of domestic VAW for adult people, where BS applies more to women (e.g., Glick et al., 2002). Yamawaki et al. 2009 show that the adoption of ambivalent sexism makes adult people perceive domestic violence as a nonserious event when the survivor has no injury or when the violence occurred for once. Similarly, adolescents normalize the experience of domestic VAW at higher levels when they endorse increased levels of ambivalent sexism (Fasanelli et al., 2020). As adults, the influence of the BS applies more to adolescent girls, while boys normalize domestic violence to a greater extent compared to girls (Fasanelli et al., 2020).

Ambivalent sexism also predicts the justification of sexual VAW. In this regard, Sakallı-Uğurlu et al. (2007) state that increased levels of ambivalent sexism relate to the justification of sexual VAW by minimizing its harm, disregarding the survivor, blaming the survivor, and believing that the survivor deserved the violence. Results also showed that men justify sexual VAW in higher degrees and possess higher levels of HS while showing less empathy toward the survivors. (Sakallı-Uğurlu et al., 2007). Similarly, Yamawaki (2007) found that ambivalent sexism justifies sexual VAW in the forms of ignoring the seriousness of the violence, blaming the survivor, and exonerating the perpetrator. Further, Russell and Trigg (2004) assert that HS functions to justify sexual VAW, especially for men, by convincing them that the survivors are responsible for the violence, survivors should not try to actively cope with the violence, or survivors should not attribute malicious features to the perpetrator (Saunders et al., 2016). On the other hand, for both women and men, Yamawaki (2007) asserts that BS adoption make people inclined to blame the survivors of VAW and exonerate the perpetrator of VAW when it is a date-rape case.

Similar to ambivalent sexism, domestic violence myths constitute a major gender system justifying ideology that relates to the justification of VAW. In the below section, the role of domestic violence myths in the justification of VAW is explained.

### **Domestic Violence Myths and the Justification of Violence against Women**

Domestic violence myths (DVM) denote justifying assumptions about violence within the familial context (Driskell, 2008). These assumptions suggest that the survivors could have stopped the violence if they wanted, or perpetrators conducted violence because they were out of control (Grothues & Marmion, 2006).

Literature suggests that individuals who adopt increased levels of DVM are inclined to justify violence against women (VAW) usually by excusing the perpetrator, blaming the survivor, ignoring the harm by the violence (e.g., Giger et al., 2016; Grothues & Marmion, 2006; Lelaurain et al., 2018; Peters, 2008; Yamawaki et al., 2012), or even stigmatizing the survivors as criminals (Policastro & Payne, 2013).

Findings show that men justify VAW through the adoption of DVM more than women (e.g., Lelaurain et al., 2018; Policastro & Payne, 2013; Yamawaki et al., 2012). Further studies reveal that both women and men justify VAW through DVM by basically perceiving the survivor as transgressing the gender roles that are assigned by the system (Peters, 2008), such as being verbally aggressive before the assault (Witte et al., 2006), being unfaithful, neglecting the children, or neglecting the housework (Waltermaurer, 2012).

In addition to the familial context, people adopt gender system justifying ideologies that apply to other contexts, such as rape myths. The role of the rape myths as the last major gender system justifying ideology in the justification of VAW is explained below.

## **Rape Myths and the Justification of Violence against Women**

Rape myths are justifying misconceptions about rape that blame survivors and excuse perpetrators (Burt, 1980). These misconceptions suggest that only women who do not comply with the traditional gender roles are raped, while men are not expected to behave in a controlled manner in terms of sexuality according to the gender roles (Chapleau & Oswald, 2014). Some scholars suggest that men believe in myths about rape to higher degrees (e.g., Çelik-Ok, 2019; Gul, & Schuster, 2020). However, others state that the relationship between gender and rape myths loses its importance when other factors are assessed, such as acquiring a scarce knowledge of sexuality or being a non-egalitarian person in general (e.g., See 2021).

Accordingly, the literature suggests that individuals justify violence against women (VAW) through rape myths at increased levels when they perceive that the survivor does not comply with the traditional gender roles (DeVault, 2019). Even some scholars suggest that when people do not know whether the survivor is a woman who complies with the traditional gender roles or not, they assume that the survivor must have violated the gender-based expectations of the system (e.g., Çelik-Ok, 2019).

Findings also show that individuals who justify the VAW by rape myths are inclined to ignore the harm of the violence (See, 2021), accept sexist discourses, and define sexual desire by men as more important than the agency by women (Mackey, 2015). Further, people who justify VAW through rape myths become unwilling to take actions that could aid rape survivors, such as interfering with the rape incident (Martini & De Piccoli, 2020).

Lastly, findings show that people adopt myths about rape in a strategic manner to justify the advantaged status of men in society. For instance, Chapleau and Oswald (2013) reveal that individuals who exhibit low levels of egalitarianism believe that when a woman with a low status reports a man of high status to the police due to being raped, she must be lying or is responsible for the incident. Researchers state that such a tendency demonstrates the link between rape myth acceptance and the willingness to prevent possible harm to the perpetrator, such as being arrested. Study results also showed that individuals falsify rape myths when the same survivor decides not to report the rape incident. In other words, in the case of knowing that the perpetrator will be safe from the punishment, the rape myth adoption becomes strategically unnecessary (Chapleau & Oswald, 2013).

The rape myths constitute the last major gender system justifying ideology that is specified in the current review. Below, the broader system justifying ideologies will be explained in relation to VAW.

### **Broader System Justifying Ideologies in relation to the Justification of Violence against Women**

In addition to the major gender system justifying ideologies that are explained above, there are broader system justifying ideologies that make people more inclined to justify violence against women by supporting hierarchy, such as right-wing authoritarianism, social dominance orientation, belief in a just world, and conservatism (e.g., Barnett & Hilz, 2017; Giger et al., 2016; Riley & Yamawaki, 2018; Rollero et al., 2019). A detailed explanation regarding the relationship between justifying violence against women and each stated broader system justifying ideology is presented in the below section.

### **Right-Wing Authoritarianism and the Justification of Violence against Women**

Right-wing authoritarianism (RWA) is defined by Altemeyer (1998) as a conventional personality trait of individuals who support the authority. On the other hand, Jost et al. (2003) describe authoritarianism as an ideology that might change its manifestations depending on the societal context.

Literature shows that people who endorse RWA are inclined to justify violence against women by blaming the domestic violence survivors, encouraging the survivors to stay in the abusive relationship (Riley & Yamawaki, 2018), and blaming the stranger harassment survivors when they are sexualized (Spaccatini et al., 2019).

### **Social Dominance Orientation and the Justification of Violence against Women**

Social dominance orientation refers to the tendency to favor hierarchy-based relations between social groups (Sidanius & Pratto, 1999). Jost and Thompson (2000) assert that SDO is an ideology encompassing two distinct tendencies: the support for social inequality in a broader sense and the specific support for hierarchy-based relations between social groups.

The literature shows that people who adopt high levels of SDO justify violence against women by legitimizing the control over women's behaviors, not recognizing psychological abuse as a type of violence (Rollero et al., 2019), and disregarding the existence of intimate partner violence (Canto et al., 2020).

### **Belief in a Just World and the Justification of Violence against Women**

Belief in a just world (BJW) denotes the assumption that bad and good things happen to people who deserve them. People hold these beliefs because assuming that the world is a fair place gives them feelings of safety and perceived control (Lerner, 1980).

Literature suggests that people who adopt BJW tend to justify violence against women by blaming the survivors and excusing the perpetrators (e.g., Valor-Segura et al., 2011). Further studies suggest that the increased just world beliefs relate to the increased acceptance of domestic violence myths (e.g., Giger et al., 2016; Lelaurain et al., 2018). BJW is also related to rape myth acceptance and negative attitudes toward rape survivors (Sakalli-Uğurlu et al., 2007; Vonderhaar & Carmody, 2014). Lastly, Özdemir-Planalı and Kırıl-Uçar (2021) reveal that as the adopted levels of BJW increase, the implicit association between the concept of women and the concept of violence increases.

### **Conservatism and the Justification of Violence against Women**

Literature reveals that conservative individuals are more inclined to justify violence against women than nonconservative individuals (e.g., Barnett & Hilz, 2017; Lys et al., 2021; Manoussaki & Hayne, 2019). This is because the power imbalance within the gender system is perceived to be legitimate for conservative individuals (Hunnicut, 2009). Further, conservatism is related to rape myth acceptance due to its moral valuation of hierarchy and social cohesion, which corresponds to the valuation of men's domination over women within the existing gender systems (Barnett & Hilz, 2017).

The conservatism constitutes the last broader system justifying ideologies that is specified in the current review. Below, the contextual determinants of the justification of violence against women will be explained within the framework of system justification theory.

### **Contextual Determinants of the Justification of Violence against Women**

The system justification theory proposes that being dependent on the system and being part of an inevitable system increases the system justification (Friesen et al., 2019; Jost et al., 2015; Kay & Friesen, 2011; Van der Toorn et al., 2015). The current study specified the hierarchy-based cultures as a system justifying context in relation to creating dependence or an inevitable system.

For instance, in honor cultures, a familial structure exists that situates men as the authority to govern women's lives, where violence is one of the means to punish women who transgress traditional gender roles

(Ceylan-Batur et al., 2021). In these cultures, individuals become strongly concerned about the views of their social environment regarding themselves and their families, on which their self-image significantly depends (Leung & Cohen, 2011). Thus, it could be stated that honor cultures are hierarchy-supporting cultures. Accordingly, the literature reveals that people who are highly concerned about honor tend to justify honor-based violence against women (VAW) at increased levels (e.g., Akbaş et al., 2020; Ceylan-Batur et al., 2021; Sakallı-Uğurlu, 2016).

Literature suggests that detecting a threat to the gender system constitutes another contextual determinant of the justification of VAW. For instance, findings show that people become more inclined to justify domestic VAW when the survivor is verbally aggressive before the assault (Witte et al., 2006), or when the survivor does not comply with traditional roles in the familial setting (Waltermaurer, 2012), which are transgressions of the gender roles. Similarly, people blame rape survivors to higher degrees when the survivor is a woman who does not possess a traditional lifestyle (Çelik-Ok, 2019). Findings also show that when it is marital rape, survivors are blamed more when perceived as threatening the husband's reputation (Gul & Schuster, 2020) or the husband's masculine honor (Canto et al., 2017).

To conclude, hierarchy-supporting cultures within the gender system or the perceived threats against the gender system constitute significant contextual determinants in relation to the justification of VAW. In this regard, the current study elaborates on the palliative function of justifying the gender system, including the inequalities within it such as VAW, as explained below.

### **The Palliative Function of Justifying Gender System**

The palliative function of system justification is an alleviation of “*anxiety, guilt, dissonance, discomfort, and uncertainty for both advantaged and disadvantaged people*” (Jost, & Hunyady, 2003, p. 114). Previous literature presents many studies on the relationship between the justification of the gender system and the consequent feelings due to the palliative function (e.g., Connelly & Heesacker, 2012; Napier et al., 2020). These feelings include universal needs of safety, social cohesion, and certainty, as well as well-being and life satisfaction (Harding & Sibley, 2013; Jost et al., 2003; Jost et al., 2015; Vargas-Salfate et al., 2018).

Accordingly, Napier et al. (2020) state that in 23 countries, including Argentina, France, Sweden, Turkey, China, and South Korea, people who justify the gender system by ignoring the existence of gender discrimination report higher levels of well-being compared to people who acknowledge the discrimination. Results also indicate that the stated relationship becomes stronger for women as the system they live in becomes more gender unequal (Napier et al., 2020). Similarly, justifying the gender system by adopting benevolent sexism increases life satisfaction (Connelly & Heesacker, 2012) and the feeling of safety (Hammond et al., 2020). Other scholars argue that when gender discrimination is the norm, people become inclined to justify the discrimination to satisfy their need for social cohesion (e.g., See, 2021). Also, people justify unequal gender system in higher degrees as their need for stability increases, which appeals to their need for certainty (Howard et al., 2021).

The above stating findings reveal that universal needs such as safety, social cohesion, and certainty, as well as well-being and life satisfaction, relate to the palliative function of system justification. These needs are also related to the individuals' attitudes toward social change. Accordingly, people who justify the system perceive the system-challenging social changes as a threat to their universal needs (Jost et al., 2008). Below, the attitudes toward social change for an equal gender system are examined within the framework of system justification theory.

### **Attitudes toward Social Change for an Equal Gender System**

The system justification theory proposes that justifying systems makes people reject social change for a different system (Jost et al., 2003). In this regard, challenging the system might appear threatening to individuals who do not know the precise outcomes of the attempted social change (Jost et al., 2011), or such an attempt might threaten individuals' universal needs (Jost et al., 2008).

Similarly, literature suggests that people who justify the unequal gender system do not support social changes for gender equality (e.g., Radke et al., 2016; Yeung et al., 2013). Accordingly, women and men are inclined to be hesitant to identify with feminism when they perceive it as a threat to the existing unequal gender system (e.g., Yeung et al., 2013). In addition, research states that the traditional gender-based expectations that are involved in the socialization process prevent women from expressing assertive emotions such as anger (Radke et al., 2016), which plays a significant role in the support for social change (Jost et al., 2017).

Accordingly, individuals with low levels of system justification demonstrate higher levels of anger, which relates to increased support for social change (Jost et al., 2011). Regarding gender equality, Uğur (2021) states that for women who are aware of gender discrimination or identify with other women, group-based anger predicts support for social change (Uğur, 2021). Similarly, some scholars suggest that when women feel group-based anger toward the experience of objectification, they support social change for gender equality in the case of being objectified (e.g., Guizzo et al. 2017; Shepherd & Evans, 2019). However, researchers indicate that the relationship between anger and supporting social change for a more equal gender system appeals only to women rather than men (Guizzo et al., 2017).

Kende et al. (2020) state that, for men, moral-based concerns partly determine the relationship between gender system justification and social change. In this regard, men who perceive the social change in the gender system as a chance to improve morally support social change to higher degrees (Kende et al., 2020). Also, moral convictions about gender equality relate to men's increased support for social change in the gender system (Ochoa et al., 2019). However, research shows that women, too, support social change in the gender system based on moral convictions (e.g., De Cristofaro et al., 2021).

On the other hand, Kende et al. (2020) emphasize that, as it is with anger, only women support social change in the gender system as their need for power increases, which refers to the need for an increased sense of personal control and agency (Kende et al., 2020). In support of this view, Uğur (2021) asserts that as women's sense of power as a group increases, they support the social change in the gender system at increased levels.

The attitude toward social change in the gender system constitutes the last topic of the current study that reviews studies on the justification of violence against women within the framework of system justification theory. Below, directions for future research and the societal implications are presented.

### **Directions for Future Studies & Societal Implications**

The current literature review provides a comprehensive social psychological explanation regarding the justification of violence against women (VAW) by using the system justification theory as a framework. In this regard, individual tendencies, such as adopting gender-specific or broader hierarchy-supporting system justifying ideologies, as well as the contextual determinants of the gender system, such as the hierarchy-supporting cultures, play significant roles in the justification of VAW.



Future research could contribute to the existing literature by focusing on certain issues, such as the unexamined relationship between the justification of VAW and its possible palliative function, or its possible consequences in terms of the support for social change in the gender system. The current review focused on the studies that deal with the broader gender system in terms of the palliative function of system justification and the social change. However, justifying VAW might reveal different results in terms of the palliative function and attitudes toward social change.

Regarding the societal implications, the current review emphasizes the consideration of the reciprocal interaction between the individual and the system in terms of the justification of VAW. Similarly, Edwards et al. (2011) indicate the role of the gender system in the justification of unequal gender-based instances by pointing out the role of societal institutions, such as the legal system, media, and religious authorities. In this line of thought, changing the individuals' justification of unequal instances within the system, such as VAW, becomes possible when the institutions adopt attitudes that are more gender equal. For instance, media coverages could be planned to decrease the justification of VAW by framing the objectification of women as a wrongful act (Guizzo et al., 2017) or by focusing on the actual characteristics of VAW survivors instead of violence justifying myths; legal authorities could ignore the gender system justifying assumptions about the survivors and perpetrators of VAW cases, or avoid giving low punishments to VAW perpetrators; religious leaders could acknowledge their in-group members about the unfairness of VAW (e.g., Edwards et al., 2011; Fortuna & Gulla, 2020). Further, the cities must be planned in a more gender equal way to prevent VAW (e.g., Fenster, 2005), before its justification.

Lastly, societal implications for changing the justification of VAW must consider the normative nature of these attitudes, which are constructed mainly through shared and legitimized gender system justifying ideologies. Accordingly, the acceptance and maintenance of VAW could be prevented through public educations about the destructive consequences of violence on women's lives. Also, these educations could emphasize the responsibility of ordinary people to stop the violence. In terms of the interventions, it is important to target younger populations, as far as preschool ages, since the adoption of gender system justifying ideologies are formed at the very early stages of life (Richters, 2019) and could be hard to change in later years.

### Conclusion

The current study reviews the research on the justification of violence against women (VAW) through using system justification theory as a framework. Accordingly, individuals justify VAW to justify the gender system, including the gender-based unequal instances within it. In this regard, individuals adopt major gender system justifying ideologies, such as ambivalent sexism, domestic violence myths, rape myths, and gender stereotypes. Individuals who justify VAW also adopt broader system justifying ideologies, such as right-wing authoritarianism, social dominance orientation, belief in a just world, and conservatism. Regarding the contextual determinants, the current review asserts that hierarchy-based cultures, such as honor cultures, increase the justification of VAW due to creating an inevitable system with its dependent members. Further, detecting a threat to the gender system increases the justification of VAW. The current review shows that justifying the gender system while accepting the unequal instances as a part of the system, such as VAW, provides a palliative function by fulfilling the universal needs of individuals. However, women who feel angry because of the unequal gender-based instances within the gender system support social change for a more equal gender system. Also, both men and women, who carry moral concerns about an unequal gender system, support social change for a more equal gender system.

The current review contributes to the literature by presenting a social psychological approach regarding the justification of VAW while using the system justification theory as a framework. In this regard, individual tendencies, system justifying ideologies, and the contextual factors in the system work in collaboration in the process of justifying VAW. In other words, the current review points out that the justification of VAW can only be fully understood by comprehending all the involved social psychological components in it, which are the individual, the system ideologies, and the system.

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