Effects of the Legitimacy of Low Group or Individual Status on Individual and Collective Status-Enhancement Strategies

Naomi Ellemers, Henk Wilke, and Ad van Knippenberg

Two experiments investigated predictions from social identity theory and relative deprivation theory regarding membership in low-status groups, using a 3 (legitimacy of low status) × 2 (permeability of group boundaries) × 2 (stability of group status) between-subjects design. Main dependent variables concerned in-group identification and individual and collective mobility attempts. Group members considered their low status more acceptable when it seemed legitimate. In Experiment 1 (N = 184), illegitimate assignment of low status to the Ss' group increased in-group identification. In Experiment 2 (N = 178), illegitimate allocation of individual Ss to a low-status group decreased group identification. Attempts to acquire higher status individually (individual mobility) or collectively (group mobility) were more strongly affected by prospects for status improvement than by legitimacy manipulations.

This article investigates how people react to membership in socially disadvantaged or low-status groups: whether they resign to their fate, undertake attempts at improving their personal situation, or strive to improve the position of their group as a whole (cf. Wright, Taylor, & Moghadam, 1990). In two experiments we investigated circumstances under which members of low-status groups are motivated to work at improving their social standing instead of accepting the status quo. We also attempted to determine which situational characteristics affect group members' preference to work at achieving higher status either individually or collectively.

The question of which social structural variables induce people to operate in social situations as individuals or as group members is dealt with extensively in social identity theory (cf. Tajfel, 1974, 1975, 1978; Tajfel & Turner, 1979). An important assumption of social identity theory is that membership in a high-status group is desirable because it may contribute to positive social identity. Conversely, membership in a group that has low status may negatively affect group members' self-concept as well as the image others may have of them. Indeed, it has repeatedly been established (in laboratory settings as well as in field studies) that members of low-status groups evaluate their group less positively than members of high-status groups (Brown, 1978, 1984; Brown & Wade, 1987; Sachdev & Bourhis, 1985, 1987) and favor own group less in outcome allocations than members of high-status groups (Sachdev & Bourhis, 1987; Turner & Brown, 1978). Moreover, empirical investigations indicate that members of high-status groups identify more strongly with their group than do members of low-status groups (Ellemers, van Knippenberg, de Vries, & Wilke, 1988; Ellemers, van Knippenberg, & Wilke, 1990). Accordingly, members of groups with low status will be particularly motivated to improve their status position to achieve a more positive social identity (cf. Hogg & Abrams, 1988).

Two main strategies are available to group members who strive for a higher status. First, individual group members may try to leave their low-status group and gain admission to a group with higher status (the "passing" or individual mobility strategy). Second, they may try to upgrade the relative status position of their own low-status group as a whole (group mobility; Tajfel, 1978, referred to this as the "social change" strategy).

An important part of social identity theory deals with characteristics of the intergroup situation that affect group members' preference to work either at individual or at collective status improvement. In these theoretical statements, social structural variables such as permeability of group boundaries and stability of group status are assumed to affect the subjects' preference for one identity management strategy over the other. The extent to which group boundaries are permeable delimits, by definition, the likelihood or feasibility of individual locomotion across groups. Stability of group status refers to the extent to which an alternative status position for the group as a whole is likely to be realized.

In previous experiments it was shown that permeable group boundaries induced group members to focus on the possibility for individual mobility, whereas unstable status differences between groups invoked the subjects' interest in working at group mobility (cf. Ellemers et al., 1988; Ellemers et al., 1990). Further-
more. It appeared that opportunities for status improvement mainly appealed to members of low-status groups; that is, the responses of members of low-status groups depended on the permeability of group boundaries and the stability of group status, whereas responses of subjects in high-status groups were hardly affected by these situational characteristics. In the present study, therefore, we were exclusively concerned with the impact of social structural conditions on members of low-status groups.

Tajfel (1974, 1975) posited that, in addition to permeability of group boundaries and stability of group status, the legitimacy of the status structure is important. The extent to which group members consider their low status to be legitimate or illegitimate determines whether they are motivated to undertake any attempts to change the status quo at all. Presumably, people are inclined to accept a low status position when they consider their position to be the legitimate outcome of a just procedure. An illegitimately low status position, however, would not correspond to what people believe they deserve (cf. Folger, 1987). In fact, in some empirical studies, members of groups with illegitimately low status appear to display behavior that is usually observed in members of groups with high status. Turner and Brown (1978) found that members of groups having an illegitimately low status show relatively strong out-group discrimination in reward allocation. Similarly, Caddick (1982) reported stronger in-group favoritism on evaluative and behavioral measures in groups with illegitimately low status than in groups with legitimately low status. There is also some evidence that group members particularly try to improve their unfavorable situation when it results from an unjust procedure (cf. Comms & Lockwood, 1979a, 1979b; Taylor, Moghadam, Gamble, & Zellerer, 1987). Therefore, our first hypothesis is that a low status position will be more readily accepted if it is assigned legitimately than when it is accorded illegitimately.

At this point, however, we also have to be more specific about what kind of outcomes can be allocated in a legitimate or illegitimate way. In line with the distinction between situations that allow for the upgrading of personal outcomes and situations that permit improvement of group outcomes, we also have to distinguish between the legitimacy of individual outcomes and the legitimacy of group outcomes. Legitimacy of individual outcomes has to do with the way in which a person is treated individually, which may be assessed by comparing one's treatment with that of other individuals. The legitimacy of group outcomes, on the other hand, is determined by procedures affecting the in-group as a whole; these procedures may be appraised by means of intergroup comparisons (cf. Austin, 1986; Levine & Moreland, 1987). In relative deprivation theory, the quite similar distinction between egoistic (individual) and fraternal (group) deprivation has been proposed (cf. Runciman, 1966). Most relevant to the present investigation is that deprivation of individuals or social groups calls for action at the appropriate social level (cf. Walker & Mann, 1987; Walker & Pettigrew, 1984). People experiencing individual deprivation may try to ameliorate their personal situation, whereas group deprivation should give rise to attempts at a more fundamental change of the social structure. Indeed, research in field settings suggests that group deprivation, rather than individual deprivation, appears to be related to collective action directed at improving the disadvantaged position of the group as a whole (cf. Dion, 1986; Dubé & Guimond, 1986; Walker & Mann, 1987).

In their model of intergroup relations, Taylor and McKinnon (1984) approached this issue from a different theoretical perspective. They argued that perceived injustice is crucial for members of disadvantaged groups to undertake attempts at changing their unfortunate situation. Taylor and McKinnon claimed, furthermore, that an illegitimate stratification of individuals into groups gives rise to attempts at individual mobility, whereas a social structure with illegitimate status differences between groups will evoke collective action. Our expectation, therefore, is that legitimacy or illegitimacy of low group outcomes and low individual outcomes may yield very different effects. Membership in a group with legitimately low status is not likely to be considered particularly desirable because the low status position accurately reflects the group's (lack of) capacities. Conversely, an illegitimately low group status implies that the in-group may compare favorably with other groups but that this potential is not reflected in the present status structure because the group collectively has suffered unjust treatment, which in turn may induce mutual solidarity between group members. Moreover, the appropriate way to remedy this injustice would be to alter the status position of the in-group as a whole. Therefore, we expect that members of a group with an illegitimately low status position will identify relatively strongly with their group (Hypothesis 2) and will be primarily concerned with opportunities for collective status improvement (Hypothesis 4).

In situations in which legitimacy pertains to treatment of the individual, instead of the group, the effects of unjust procedures and undeserved outcomes may be argued to be quite different. When individuals are legitimately allocated to a group with low status, they will probably accept their association with that low-status group. Individuals who are assigned to a low-status group on unjust grounds, however, will most likely contest their membership in that group. Finchilescu (1986) indeed reported that individuals whose membership in a low-status group did not correspond to their self-categorization showed relatively little concern with group goals. In such a situation, striving for individual social mobility seems to be a more appropriate strategy. Accordingly, we expect individuals who have been treated illegitimately (as a result of which they are included in a low-status group) to show relatively little identification with their group (Hypothesis 3) and to undertake attempts at gaining access to a group with higher status through individual mobility (Hypothesis 5).

Although, as argued earlier, group members' primary concern with either collective or individual status improvement is likely to be mediated by the collective or individual nature of illegitimate treatment, the successful use of one strategy or the other may be restricted in certain social situations. Consequently, group members may resort to an alternative strategy when the most preferred course of action does not seem feasible. Indeed, some experimental results suggest that frustrated attempts at individual mobility may induce subjects to undertake collective action (Taylor et al., 1987) and that individuals who try to gain higher status instigate a collective protest once they learn that the high-status group does not accept any new members (Wright et al., 1990). The experimental design used in
these studies was inspired by an assumption in Taylor and McKirnan's (1984) five-stage model of intergroup relations. Taylor and McKirnan posited that there is a fixed sequential order in the use of different status-improvement strategies. At first, group members attempt to realize individual mobility; collective action is undertaken only when the individual strategy fails to alleviate illegitimate status differences. In fact, Tajfel (1974, 1975, 1978) made a similar suggestion, namely, that group members will initially pursue individual mobility and only resort to collective strategies when individual mobility is not feasible. The experiments carried out by Taylor et al. (1987) and by Wright et al. (1990) reflect this theoretical presupposition because they investigate whether the extent to which individual mobility appears feasible affects the use of individual or collective strategies. In these studies, however, the stability of the group's status position was not systematically manipulated. Therefore, it is not clear whether collective strategies are only used when individual mobility cannot be achieved or whether they are an equally (or even more) preferred option when intergroup status relations are unstable.

Thus, to establish which identity-enhancement strategy group members opt for in different social structures, it seems important to study the consequences of legitimacy of low status in different types of situations. In addition to the manipulation of legitimacy, we therefore vary the extent to which a higher status position for the in-group as a whole may be realized (stability of group status) as well as the extent to which individual locomotion across groups is feasible (permeability of group boundaries).

**Summary of Hypotheses**

The following hypotheses were made in this study:

1. A low status position will be more readily accepted when it is assigned legitimately than when it is accorded illegitimately.
2. Illegitimate treatment of the group as a whole, resulting in low group status, will evoke stronger in-group identification than legitimate assignment of low group status.
3. Illegitimate assignment of an individual to a low-status group, implying low individual status, will result in less in-group identification than legitimate allocation to a group with low status.
4. If a group has an illegitimately low status position, group members will focus more on opportunities for collective status improvement (which depend on the stability or instability of group status) than in the case of legitimately low group status.
5. If individuals have been illegitimately assigned to a group with low status, they will be more sensitive to opportunities for individual status improvement (which are determined by the permeability or impermeability of group boundaries) than when their assignment to a low-status group is legitimate.

An additional goal of the present investigation is to provide a methodological alternative to previous operationalizations of legitimacy. In the experiments that were conducted so far, status differences were defined as legitimate when relative status positions corresponded to differences in relative competence, whereas status differences were considered illegitimate when they did not (clearly) reflect differential competence (cf. Cadick, 1980, 1982; Commins & Lockwood, 1979a; Taylor et al., 1987; Turner & Brown, 1978). In general, outcomes are considered to be less legitimate when they are lower than expected (Austin, McGinn & Susmilch, 1980). However, such an operationalization of legitimacy implies that two factors are manipulated simultaneously, namely, (a) relative competence and (b) whether the status assignment procedure seems justified. Differential responses to such a manipulation then cannot be ascribed unequivocally to the legitimacy of the status position because subjects having illegitimately low status also were more competent than subjects with legitimately low status. In other words, the research results that were obtained so far could have been caused by differential competence-based expectancies, by the perceived legitimacy of the status-assignment procedure, or by both. Nevertheless, the breach of expectancy and the legitimacy of the procedure are conceptually quite distinct features of the situation (cf. Folger, 1987).

In the present study, we therefore attempted to induce a differential sense of legitimacy for subjects with similar competence. In addition to a legitimate and illegitimate condition, which differ from each other with respect to competence-based expectancies as well as with respect to the legitimacy of the status-assignment procedure, a third condition is introduced. In this justified condition (as is the case in the illegitimate condition), a superior performance is coupled with low status. In this condition, however, the status-assignment procedure is justified in retrospect. Consequently, eventual differential responses of subjects in the illegitimate and justified conditions can only be attributed to the perceived legitimacy of the status assignment because subjects in both conditions are equally competent.

**Experiment 1**

**Method**

**Overview**

To investigate Hypotheses 1, 2, and 4, legitimacy of group status was manipulated in Experiment 1. The independent variables were legitimacy of assignment to groups (illegitimate, justified, and legitimate), stability of group status (unstable vs. stable), and permeability of group boundaries (permeable vs. impermeable). In all experimental conditions, the group of which the subject was a member was accorded a low status position. Dependent measures consisted of several evaluative questions, in-group identification, and behavioral measures. The latter were designed to establish whether subjects tried to improve the status position of their group or attempted to maximize the possibility that they personally would be assigned to the group with higher status.

**Subjects**

One hundred eighty-four students of a professional school for economics and administration in Groningen, The Netherlands, participated as subjects in the experiment. These subjects, 135 men and 49 women between 18 and 25 years of age, were randomly assigned to one of the experimental conditions; the proportion of male and female subjects was kept equal across conditions. Each experimental session took approximately 2 hr. Students had voluntarily signed up for participation in the experiment; their school rewarded participation with a credit point for social skills. At the end of each session, the experi-
turned out that one group member made better or worse decisions than the rest of the group.

Dependent measures. After induction of the expected status position (but before the actual status positions were assigned to the groups), two questions were posed. These checked whether subjects thought the high-status position was attractive and asked what status position they thought their group deserved. After all the instructions were completed, three questions were asked. These were meant to check whether subjects thought the groups could change positions (stability), whether individuals could change groups (permeability), and whether they considered the status-assignment procedure to be just (legitimacy). Furthermore, subjects were asked how satisfied they were with their group's task performance to check whether they felt their group had performed competently. Subsequently, three questions were posed to find out how group members evaluated the way they had been treated. Finally, a 10-item in-group identification scale that was developed by Ellemers et al. (1988, Ellemers, et al., 1990) was used to assess the extent to which group members identified with their group. All questions had to be answered on 6-point scales, with 1 indicating not at all and 6 very much.

Behavioral measures. After all participants had completed these questions, the explanation of the collaborative task proceeded. First it was repeated that during this task the aim was to make correct decisions and that speed would not be relevant; both groups had to complete the same number of items. For a series of nine decision problems the decision made by the high-status group would be given as an advice to the group with low status. The low-status group could follow this advice or make a different decision.

The scoring system for this collaborative task rewarded correct decisions. However, it was devised in such a way that both groups could earn the most credit points (and would thus have the best chance at winning a cake) if the low-status group made the decision that the high-status group had suggested. If this were the case, the high-status group would always gain more points than the group with low status, but both groups could win a cake if they had gained enough points. If the low-status group would not comply with the suggested decision, both groups would earn less points and thus have a smaller chance of winning a cake. By going against the advice, the low-status group would prevent the high-status group from gaining any points. If this were the case, only the low-status group could gain some points, that is, if their decision was the correct one. Thus, the only way for the low-status group to gain more points than the high-status group was to go against the advice given. However, this would lessen their chance of winning a cake. After this scoring system had been explained, nine items followed. For each item of the collaborative task, the subject's group (which always held the low status position) received plausible advice from the other group. Thus, it would be unlikely that subjects would go against this advice for other than competitive reasons. The behavioral measure consisted of the number of times (out of nine decisions) subjects went against the advice given and prevented the other group from gaining credit points.

After this series of nine decisions had been completed, subjects were given an opportunity to find out how competent they personally were at decision making, as had been announced at an earlier stage. For this purpose, additional items would be presented for which group members would have to make their decisions individually. The points that were gained with these items could either be kept for oneself or they could be used to augment the total amount of points gained by the group. If a group member would choose to keep his or her own points, it could be established how proficient he or she was at decision making. The information about a subject's personal competence would be lost when the points were added to the group's total. As a result of these instructions, keeping one's own points would, in the permeable condition, maximize one's chance to be assigned to the higher status group.

However, this would go against the group's best interest. In the impermeable condition, keeping one's own points could only serve to find out about one's personal competence at decision making. Apart from this informational purpose, the points kept for oneself would be inconsequential when the group's boundaries were impermeable. Before they decided how to use any extra points, subjects were asked whether they would try to gain more points than their fellow group members.

Finally, by means of point-allocation matrices, subjects could indicate how they would divide points between their own group and the other group, contrasting in-group favoritism with out-group favoritism (Matrix 1) and fairness with a maximizing-difference strategy (Matrix 2). The distribution of points in a third matrix was identical to Matrix 1, only this time subjects could indicate how they would allocate points to themselves and their own group (Matrix 3).

Results and Discussion

Manipulation Checks

To check for the manipulation of stability, subjects were asked whether they considered it possible that the groups would change positions (1 = definitely not and 6 = definitely). In the unstable condition, a change of positions was considered to be much more likely (5.28) than in the stable condition (1.57). F(1, 172) = 346.05, p < .001. In accordance with the manipulation of permeability, the probability that individuals would change groups was rated to be larger in the permeable condition (5.86) than in the impermeable condition (1.05). F(1, 172) = 2516.43, p < .001. Subjects were also asked to indicate to what extent they considered the procedure followed to assign status positions to groups to be a just one (1 = extremely unjust and 6 = extremely just). This question yielded a significant effect of the legitimacy manipulation, F(2, 172) = 65.37, p < .001. In the legitimate condition the assignment of positions to groups was rated as being significantly more just (M = 4.35) than in the justified condition (M = 2.90); the mean in the justified condition was significantly higher than that in the illegitimate condition (1.87). Because speed of decision making was used to explain the unexpected status assignment in the justified condition, it could be argued that subjects in this condition felt less competent as a result. If this were the case, then the difference between the illegitimate and justified conditions would still be confounded with perceived competency. However, an additional question, checking subjects' perception of the performance feedback, indicated that this argument does not seem to

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2 These items had been tested in a pilot study with 51 subjects from the same population to find out which decisions would be most plausible. For five items, the advice shown to subjects was the decision made by 86%–94% of the participants in the pilot study. For the remaining four items the advice given was the decision that 45%–49% of participants in the pilot study had made.

4 Point-allocation matrices, which are intended to measure in-group favoritism, traditionally constitute the main dependent variable in experimental research on social identity theory (cf. Billig & Tajfel, 1973; Tajfel & Billig, 1974; Tajfel, Billig, Bundy, & Flament, 1971). Because of the controversy regarding the correct analysis and interpretation of the original Tajfel matrices (cf. Aschbrenner & Schaefer, 1980; Bornstein et al., 1983a, 1983b; Brown, Tajfel, & Turner, 1980; Turner, 1983a, 1983b) we use three simplified point-allocation matrices to supplement our cognitive and behavioral measures.
be valid. This question revealed that subjects were more satisfied with their group's task performance in the illegitimate and justified conditions (Ms = 4.46 and 4.26, respectively) than in the legitimate condition (M = 3.10), F(2, 172) = 12.38, p < .001. Moreover, additional analyses showed that introducing performance satisfaction as a covariate did not alter effects of the legitimacy manipulation. This confirms that subjects indeed considered speed of decision making to be a temporary status criterion: They evaluated their group's task performance in terms of the number of points they had gained with making correct decisions, instead of the number of items completed.

From the two questions that were posed before the positions had been assigned to the groups, it appeared that in all conditions the high status position was considered to be extremely attractive (mean rating of attractiveness = 5.22 on a 6-point scale). Moreover, subjects in the illegitimate and justified conditions, after being shown their test score, held the opinion that their group deserved to get the high status position (illegitimate M = 5.38, justified M = 5.39, and legitimate M = 3.40 on a 6-point scale). Thus, even though in both the illegitimate and justified conditions the status position accorded was relatively unattractive and lower than expected, the manipulation check revealed that, on average, subjects in the justified condition experienced the status assignment as less unjust than subjects in the illegitimate condition. From the answers given on the manipulation checks we therefore conclude that all independent variables had been induced successfully.

**Evaluation**

To investigate Hypothesis 1, predicting that a legitimate low status would be more acceptable than an illegitimately assigned low status position, subjects were asked to evaluate the status-assignment procedure. Subjects indicated the extent to which they were angry about the procedure (1 = not at all angry and 6 = very angry), how they evaluated “the way in which test results had been used” (1 = very negatively and 6 = very positively), and whether they preferred groups to be evaluated on the basis of a criterion other than decision making (1 = not at all and 6 = very much). These three questions were analyzed by means of a three-way multivariate analysis of variance (MANOVA), which yielded a multivariate significant main effect of legitimacy only, F(6, 340) = 9.24, p < .001, with significant univariate effects on all three evaluative measures (see Table 1).

The means in Table 1 show the predicted effect, namely, that subjects expressed less anger and evaluated the procedure more positively when the status assignment was more legitimate. These results support our first hypothesis that a legitimately low status position seems more acceptable than an illegitimate one. Most striking is that the illegitimate and justified conditions yielded different evaluations, although in both cases the status position of the in-group did not correspond to group members' initial expectations on the basis of their group's relatively high competence.

It turned out that group members' preference for the use of an alternative criterion to compare the groups was strongest in the legitimate condition (i.e., when the in-group had performed poorly on the established dimension of comparison, namely, decision making). In a previous study (Ellemers et al., 1990) a similar preference for an alternative status criterion was found in subjects whose group held a stable low status position. Ellemers et al. (1990) considered this effect to be an instance of social originality (cf. Lemaîne, 1974). The present effect might be interpreted in the same terms. Assuming that group members generally strive at positive distinguishiveness of the in-group vis-à-vis relevant comparison groups, they apparently attempt to introduce alternative dimensions of comparison when positive distinguishiveness cannot be achieved on the established criterion.

**In-Group Identification**

In-group identification was measured to examine Hypothesis 2. This was done by means of a scale (cf. Ellemers et al., 1988) comprising 10 questions (e.g. “Do you find it pleasant to be a member of this group?”) that could be answered on 6-point scales (1 = not at all and 6 = very much). The unweighted mean identification was 4.11 (Cronbach's α = .88). To check whether these 10 questions indeed measure one underlying concept, a principal-components analysis was performed. The pattern of eigenvalues confirmed that a one-factor solution should be used. The first factor (without rotation) had an eigenvalue of 4.99; it accounted for 50% of the variance in the separate questions, and all questions had factor loadings of .50 or more. This factor solution strongly resembled factor solutions reached with the same scale in previous studies; the coefficient of congruity (Tucker's phi) was .99 (see Ellemers et al., 1988, for the exact wording of all questions).

In Hypothesis 2, a main effect of legitimacy on in-group identification was predicted. A three-way analysis of variance (ANOVA) on the in-group identification factor scores yielded two significant main effects and a significant three-way interac-

**Table 1**

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<th>Effects of Legitimacy on Three Evaluative Questions</th>
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<td>Evaluation question</td>
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<td>Angry about status assignment</td>
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<td>Evaluation of use of test</td>
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<td>Preference for alternative criterion</td>
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*Note. Only means with different subscripts differ significantly from each other (p < .05).*
tion. First, there was an unpredicted main effect of permeability, F(1, 172) = 4.98, p < .05, that revealed generally stronger in-group identification in the impermeable condition (15) than in the permeable condition (-15). Although this effect was not explicitly hypothesized, it replicates findings in previous studies (Ellemers et al., 1988; Ellemers et al., 1990).

From the means relevant to the main effect of legitimacy, F(2, 172) = 31.02, p < .001, it appears that in-group identification was stronger as the group had been treated less legitimately, which corroborates Hypothesis 2. The mean in the illegitimate condition (5.52) was significantly higher than that in the justified condition (0.15); the latter mean was significantly higher than the mean identification level in the legitimate condition (-0.66). This result is more interesting in view of the fact that, in general, identification with low-status groups is relatively weak. To gain more insight in the unpredicted three-way interaction between legitimacy, stability, and permeability, F(2, 172) = 5.16, p < .01, we conducted post hoc tests for simple main effects and simple interactions. It turned out that the main effect of legitimacy was present in the permeable as well as in the impermeable condition (p < .001). When the group boundaries were impermeable, however, there was also a significant interaction of stability and legitimacy (p < .01). The relevant means indicate, as can be seen in Figure 1, that the main effect of legitimacy was most pronounced when group boundaries were impermeable and group status was unstable.

The latter situational characteristics imply that the status position of the in-group may be upgraded, whereas group membership is fixed. The marked increase in in-group identification in the illegitimate condition under these circumstances may not only be accounted for by the fact that the group has been treated unjustly; the characteristics of the status structure also evoke enhanced in-group identification because collective status improvement is possible, whereas individual mobility cannot be realized. Thus, these three conditions jointly create a situation in which a collective injustice has occurred that may only be resolved by collective status improvement, resulting in a strengthening of group ties. In sum, the identification measure as well as the evaluative questions reveal that the illegitimate and justified conditions yield different effects, even though the in-group is equally competent in both cases. These effects may now confidently be ascribed to the perceived legitimacy of the procedure used to assign status to groups. Apparently, an explanation offered afterward, which is apparently acceptable for other group members, may constitute an effective justification for inequitable outcomes (cf. Austin, 1977).

**Behavioral Measures**

In Hypothesis 4 we predicted that in groups with illegitimately low status attempts at collective status improvement will depend on the stability of group status. To investigate this hypothesis, we recorded the number of times the subject's decision deviated from the advice given by the high-status group. This score (minimally 0 and maximally 9) indicates to what extent subjects displayed competitive behavior toward the other group.8 Three-way ANOVA on this measure revealed that the interaction of legitimacy and stability that was predicted in Hypothesis 4 was only marginally significant, F(2, 172) = 2.81, p = .07. Post hoc comparisons of the means relevant to this interaction show that only in the case of illegitimate group status was there a significant difference between the stable and unstable conditions. In line with our prediction, when group status was illegitimate, subjects in the unstable condition displayed more competitive behavior toward the other group (M = 3.90) than subjects in the stable condition (M = 2.90, p < .05). There was no significant difference between the stable and unstable conditions for members of groups with justified (Ms = 4.13 and 3.23, respectively) or legitimate (Ms = 3.32 and 3.81, respectively) low status.

The second behavioral measure indicated whether subjects wanted to use extra points to establish their own personal competence or to devote these to their group's interest. Subjects were first asked to indicate on a 6-point scale whether they would try to gain more points than their fellow group members (1 = definitely not and 6 = definitely). A three-way ANOVA on this question yielded main effects of permeability, F(1, 172) = 24.76, p < .001, and of stability, F(1, 172) = 4.40, p < .05. Subjects showed less competitiveness toward their fellow group members when group boundaries were impermeable (3.45) than when they were permeable (4.55). Moreover, when the status position of the group could still be improved because it was unstable, there was less intragroup competitiveness (3.84) than in groups with stable status (4.26). The actual decision whether one wanted to gain points for oneself or for one's group had to be made by indicating one's choice between these two options. The frequencies of either decision in the permeable and impermeable conditions indicated that only 12% (11 out of 92) of the subjects in the impermeable condition chose to keep their own points, whereas 50% (46 out of 92) of the subjects in the permeable condition preferred this option, χ²(1, N = 184) = 29.38, p < .001.

Finally, subjects could indicate by means of three point-allocation matrices how they would divide points between their own group and the other group (Matrices 1 and 2) or between themselves and the rest of their group (Matrix 3). Analysis of the choice values showed that there was an overall slight bias favoring the in-group, but for Matrix 1 and Matrix 2 there were no differences between conditions. The only significant effect was a main effect of permeability on subjects' behavior when using Matrix 3, which pertains to the distribution of points between oneself versus one's group. Choice value 1 indicates a distribution with 0 points to self and 100 points to one's group; choice value 11 denotes an allocation of 100 points for self and 0 for the in-group. The mean choice value of subjects in the permeable condition for this matrix was 6; this is the distribution.

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7 This effect may have been enhanced because the legitimacy manipulation was supplemented with information about the extent to which other group members considered the status-assignment procedure to be just. As a result, it is possible that in-group identification was enhanced in the illegitimate condition because subjects experienced more social support for their resentment than in the justified and legitimate conditions. Nevertheless, we consider this an essential aspect of the legitimacy manipulation; by definition, subjects can only experience collective injustice when they are convinced that the people who share their fate feel unjustly treated as well.

8 From subjects' remarks at the debriefing it appeared that they indeed saw the possibility to go against the advice given as an opportunity to compete with the other group for the high status position.
LEGGITIMACY OF LOW STATUS

Figure 1. The interaction effect of legitimacy of group status assignment, stability of group status, and permeability of group boundaries on in-group identification (factor scores) in Experiment 1.

allocating 50 points to oneself and 50 points to one's group. In the impermeable condition, the mean choice value was significantly lower (4.60), $F(1, 172) = 16.12, p < .001$, indicating that subjects sacrificed personal profits to favor their group (i.e., on average they allocated 28 more points to their group than to themselves).

The effect of permeability of group boundaries on the in-group identification measure replicates previous findings. In this experiment the impact of permeability is extended, however, to behavioral effects as well. On the basis of both subjects' decision how to use any extra points and their choice in the point-allocation matrix, we may conclude that subjects mainly serve their group's interest when the low status position of the in-group can be improved (unstable group status) or when group membership is fixed (impermeable boundaries). If group status is stable, or group boundaries are permeable, however, many more group members sacrifice their group's best interest while trying to maximize their personal chances to be assigned to the higher status group.

When we compare results of the different dependent variables, a remarkable pattern arises. Group members' appreciation of their situation (as it appears from the evaluative measures and the degree of in-group identification) is mainly affected by the perceived legitimacy of the procedure followed to assign status to groups. The behavioral pattern, however, is predominantly determined by more objective situational factors, that is, by the stability of group status and the permeability of group boundaries, which determine the extent to which collective status improvement or individual mobility may constitute a feasible strategy.

Experiment 2

Method

Overview

In the second experiment, we attempted to manipulate the legitimacy of low individual outcomes to investigate Hypotheses 3 and 5, in addition to Hypothesis 1. The independent variables in this experiment were legitimacy of the assignment of individuals to groups (illegitimate, justified, and legitimate), stability of group status (unstable vs. stable), and permeability of group boundaries (permeable vs. impermeable). In all experimental conditions, the subject was assigned to a group with two incompetent co-workers; this group performed poorly and held a low status position. Dependent measures consisted of questions investigating the evaluation of the procedure followed to assign individuals to groups, the in-group identification scale, and measures of group members' behavior directed at collective or individual status improvement.

Subjects

One hundred seventy-eight students from the same population used in Experiment 1 (104 men and 74 women) participated as subjects in the experiment. The participants were randomly assigned to one of the experimental conditions, with the proportion of male and female subjects kept equal across conditions. Each session took approximately 2 hr. Participation in the experiment was on a voluntary basis; to compensate for their time students could choose between a social skills credit point or the equivalent of $10. At the end of each session, the experimenter explained what the actual purpose of the experiment was and asked subjects not to discuss this with fellow students.

Procedure

Reception of subjects took place in the same manner as in the first experiment.

Individual test. It was explained that all participants would first complete an individual test, the scores of which would be used to divide the 6 participants into two groups of 3. These groups would then simulate the collaboration between a group with high status and a low-status group in an organization. After the groups were formed, each group would perform a group decision-making task to determine which would get the high status (managerial) position and which would operate at the low-status (workers') level. During the experiment, each participant allegedly would be assigned a unique letter by the com-
computer. In fact, each subject was designated with the letter K. The individual task consisted of items in which estimations had to be made that were relevant to managerial decisions. It was explained that in business settings decisions often have to be made in uncertainty. Therefore, for a decision maker, it is important to be able to make accurate estimates of quantities that are not precisely known. After this explanation, the individual test followed; after the subject had completed 10 items it was stated that the time for the individual test had expired and that the test results would be presented shortly.

Induction of expected group assignment. Subjects were consecutively shown (preprogrammed) information about the test scores of all 6 participants. In addition to the test scores, information was provided about the number of items completed, from which it appeared that some participants had worked faster than the subject. In the illegitimate and justified conditions, the subject had a high score of 16 points, in the legitimate condition subjects received a low score of 10 points. In both cases, test scores of the 6 participants ranged from 10 to 16 points. After feedback on the individual test had been given, subjects were asked which group seemed the most attractive to whom and in what group they thought they deserved to be placed. Subsequently, the group assignments were made; the subject was always placed in a group with 2 participants who had performed poorly on the task.

Manipulation of legitimacy. We induced three legitimacy conditions: an illegitimate, justified, and legitimate condition. In the legitimate condition, the group assignment matched the (poor) individual performance of the subject. In the illegitimate and justified conditions, the groups were allegedly formed on the basis of the number of items completed. The subject supposedly was among the three slowest workers. In these conditions, the assignment to the same group as 2 participants who had performed poorly did not correspond to the superior task performance of the subject. In the justified condition, this unexpected group assignment was motivated with an explanation about the importance of making quick estimations. Furthermore, it was suggested that participants in previous studies had rated this group assignment procedure as just. In addition, it seemed that the participants in this session had also accepted the explanation given and considered the group assignment to be just. In the illegitimate condition, no further explanation was given for the formation of the groups. In this condition, both the bogus information given about judgments of participants in former research and the (simulated) answers of other participants suggested that the procedure used was generally considered an unjust one. In the legitimate condition, subjects were shown that former subjects as well as the participants now present had rated the procedure as just.

Assignment of status to groups. After the two groups had been created, they first performed a group decision-making task. The items and procedure used for this task were identical to the task used to induce expectations about group status in Experiment 1. This time, each group had to complete 10 items. Afterward, subjects in all conditions were informed that their group had gained 16 points and that the other group had gained 25 points. They could indicate which status position seemed most attractive and which position they felt their group deserved. Subsequently, in line with the bogus feedback, the low status position was always assigned to the subject's group; the other group was always accorded the high status position. Further instructions for the manipulation of stability and permeability, as well as for the dependent measures, were identical to those used in Experiment 1.

Results and Discussion

Manipulation Checks

In the unstable condition, subjects thought it more likely that the groups would change status positions ($M = 4.90$) than did subjects in the stable condition ($M = 1.75$), $F(1, 166) = 143.43$, $p < .001$. Furthermore, in the permeable condition, subjects estimated the chance that individuals might be reassigned to another group to be greater ($M = 5.85$) than those in the impermeable condition ($M = 1.03$), $F(1, 166) = 7900.31$, $p < .001$. The check for the manipulation of legitimacy also yielded the intended results. In both the justified and legitimate conditions, the procedure followed to assign participants to groups was rated as more just (justified $M = 3.48$ and legitimate $M = 3.80$; these means did not differ significantly from each other) than in the illegitimate condition ($M = 2.15$), $F(2, 166) = 32.99$, $p < .001$. Furthermore, satisfaction with individual task performance was greater in the illegitimate and justified conditions ($M = 4.47$ and $M = 4.30$, respectively) than in the legitimate condition ($M = 2.51$), $F(2, 166) = 34.41$, $p < .001$.

From the two questions posed before the group assignment was made, it appears that in general subjects preferred to be assigned to a group with others who had performed well on the individual task (overall $M = 4.66$ on a 6-point scale). Furthermore, subjects in both the illegitimate and justified conditions strongly felt they deserved to be assigned to the competent group (illegitimate $M = 5.05$, justified $M = 5.22$, legitimate $M = 2.36$). Thus, the procedure in the justified condition was perceived as more legitimate, in spite of the fact that the group assignment was equally unattractive as in the illegitimate condition. In all conditions, after the group decision-making task had been completed, subjects agreed that they would like their group to gain the high status position (mean desired position $M = 4.43$) but conceded that the position their group deserved was low (mean desired position $M = 2.62$).

Evaluation

To examine the effects of the experimental manipulations that were predicted in Hypothesis 1, the three evaluative questions were subjected to a three-way MANOVA. This analysis yielded the predicted multivariate significant main effect of legitimacy, $F(6, 320) = 7.93$, $p < .001$, as well as a significant interaction effect of legitimacy and stability, $F(6, 328) = 3.39$, $p < .01$. The question whether subjects were angry about the way in which groups were formed yielded a univariate significant main effect of legitimacy, $F(2, 166) = 8.33$, $p < .001$. The relevant means indicate that subjects expressed less anger as the group assignment was made on more legitimate grounds (illegitimate $M = 2.54$, justified $M = 2.07$, legitimate $M = 1.64$; all three means differ significantly from each other). The rated use of the individual test to assign participants to groups was also significantly affected by the legitimacy manipulation, $F(2, 166) = 7.47$, $p < .001$. In general, the use of the test was rated more favorably in the justified and legitimate conditions ($M = 3.25$ and $3.41$, respectively; these means do not differ significantly), than in the illegitimate condition ($M = 2.63$). The means relevant to the univariate significant interaction effect of legitimacy and stability, $F(2, 166) = 9.01$, $p < .01$, reveal that this

* An example of an item is: "What is the average percentage of employees in a company that is member of a trade union: (a) 20%, (b) 25%, (c) 30%, or (d) 35%?"
main effect can only be traced to the subjects in the unstable condition. When group status was stable, the mean value in the illegitimate condition did not differ significantly from that in the justified condition, nor from that in the legitimate condition (see Table 2).

Thus, one finds that less anger is expressed as the formation of the group has been more legitimate and that the procedure used to form groups was evaluated more positively in the justified than in the illegitimate condition. These results complement our findings in Experiment 1 and imply that support for Hypothesis 1 can also be found when the legitimacy of low individual status is concerned. The differential evaluation of the procedure is actually caused by subjects in the unstable condition, suggesting that when there is a possibility that the low-status group may still achieve higher status, subjects resign more easily to their inclusion in the low-status group when an explanation is available (i.e., in the justified and legitimate conditions).

Finally, there was a univariate significant main effect of legitimacy on the question as to whether subjects would prefer a criterion other than estimating ability to compare individual participants. $F(2, 166) = 10.39, p < .001$. It turns out that subjects in the legitimate condition were more eager to introduce an alternative criterion (4.20) than were subjects in the illegitimate or justified conditions ($M_s = 3.39$ and 3.37, respectively). In other words, those subjects who could not achieve positive distinctiveness from others on the established dimension (i.e., subjects in the legitimate condition) expressed the strongest desire to introduce an alternative criterion to compare individuals. This effect, at the individual level, was similar to what we observed at the group level in the first experiment and might also be considered an instance of social originality.

In-Group Identification

The 10 questions measuring in-group identification (unweighted $M = 3.52$; Cronbach's $\alpha = .87$) were subjected to principal-components analysis, which confirmed that a solution with one factor should be used. All questions had an (absolute) loading of .50 or more on the first factor (without rotation), which had an eigenvalue of 4.75 and accounted for 47.5% of the variance in the separate questions. The coefficient of congruity between this factor solution and the factor structure found in Experiment 1 was .99. A three-way ANOVA on the in-group identification factor scores only yielded the main effect of legitimacy we predicted in Hypothesis 3, $F(2, 166) = 3.06, p < .05$, with stronger in-group identification when the assignment of individuals to groups was more legitimate (illegitimate $M = -0.20$, justified $M = -0.04$, legitimate $M = 0.25$). Only the means of the illegitimate and legitimate conditions differed significantly from each other, with the mean in the justified condition in between. It appears that, in accordance with our prediction, identification with the low-status in-group decreased as inclusion in it was less legitimate. Or, to put it differently, individuals showed less resistance to identify with a low-status group, the more their membership in that group seemed justified.

Behavioral Measures

The deviation scores (minimum of 0–maximum of 9) indicate to what extent subjects displayed competitive behavior toward the other group during the collaborative task. A three-way ANOVA on these scores indicated that there was more intergroup competition in the impermeable condition ($M = 4.10$) than in the permeable condition ($M = 3.45$), $F(1, 166) = 4.44, p < .05$. The means relevant to the significant interaction of legitimacy and permeability, $F(2, 166) = 3.51, p < .05$, however, reveal that in the justified condition subjects were equally competitive in groups with impermeable as in groups with permeable boundaries (see Table 3).

Permeability of group boundaries also affected subjects' intention to gain more points than their fellow group members, $F(1, 166) = 12.68, p < .001$. Subjects in the permeable condition were more competitive toward their fellow in-group members ($M = 4.03$) than subjects in the impermeable condition ($M = 3.27$). The choice to gain points for oneself instead of using them for the group was made by 55% of the subjects (49 out of 89) in the permeable condition, whereas only 11% of subjects in the impermeable condition (10 out of 89) made this choice, $\chi^2(1, N = 178) = 36.61, p < .001$.

A three-way ANOVA on subjects' choices in the point-allocation matrices yielded a significant effect of permeability on Matrix 1, $F(1, 166) = 5.25, p < .05$. A high score (maximum = 11) on Matrix 1 is indicative of in-group favoritism (100 points for in-group and 0 points for out-group); a low score (minimum = 0) signifies out-group favoritism (0 points for the in-group and 100 points for the out-group). The mean choice in this matrix was higher for subjects in the impermeable condition ($M = 6.93$; on average 18.60 points more were allocated to the in-group than to the out-group) than in the permeable condition ($M = 6.30$; an average of 6 points more for the in-group than for the out-group).

<table>
<thead>
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<th>Condition</th>
<th>Illegitimate</th>
<th>Justified</th>
<th>Legitimate</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
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<td>3.67c</td>
<td>3.30c</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stable</td>
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<td>3.83b</td>
<td>3.52</td>
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<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>2.63</td>
<td>3.25</td>
<td>3.41</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note. $t$ tests were used to test for simple main effects; row and column means with different subscripts differ significantly from each other ($p < .05$).

Table 3

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Condition</th>
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<th>Justified</th>
<th>Legitimate</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
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<td>Permeable</td>
<td>3.13b</td>
<td>4.20b</td>
<td>3.00c</td>
<td>3.45</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Impermeable</td>
<td>4.34c</td>
<td>3.70b</td>
<td>4.27c</td>
<td>4.10</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note. $t$ tests were used to test for simple main effects; row and column means with different subscripts differ significantly from each other ($p < .05$).
This indicates that subjects generally showed more in-group favoritism when group boundaries were impermeable than when they were permeable. The analysis of Matrix 2 yielded no significant main or interaction effects; overall, there was a slight bias favoring the in-group.

On subjects' point-allocation behavior with Matrix 3 there was a significant main effect of permeability as well, $F(1, 166) = 10.14, p < .01$, which is qualified by the significant interaction of legitimacy and permeability, $F(2, 166) = 2.75, p < .05$. Matrix 3 refers to subjects' behavior in favor of themselves (maximum = 1; 100 points for self and 0 points for in-group) or in favor of the in-group (minimum = 0; 0 points for self and 100 points for in-group). The main effect of permeability revealed that subjects in the permeable condition tended to favor themselves when allocating points with this matrix (mean choice = 6.24; on average 4.72 more points were allocated to self than to in-group). In the impermeable condition subjects rather favored their group (mean choice = 5.18; on mean 16.40 more points were allocated to in-group than to self). From the means relevant to the interaction effect of legitimacy and permeability (see Table 4), it turns out this effect was caused by subjects in the justified condition. When assignment of individuals to groups was illegitimate or legitimate subjects always chose a more or less equal distribution of points to self and in-group, irrespective of permeability of group boundaries.

Results of the different behavioral measures yield a quite consistent pattern. Apparently, when group boundaries are permeable, subjects easily sacrifice their group's best interest while trying to maximize their chances to realize individual mobility to the higher status group. In groups with permeable boundaries, group members are more competitive toward their fellow in-group members, and their point-allocation behavior shows evidence of selfishness. When subjects' personal outcomes are tied to their group's outcomes (because group boundaries are impermeable) keeping one's own points is less consequential because it may only serve to determine one's personal competence at decision making. Hence, subjects appear to be prepared to work for their group: They show in-group favoritism (in point allocation) and competitive behavior toward the out-group on the collaborative task. Because there are no effects of stability of group status on group members' behavior, the general pattern seems to indicate that, in this experiment, subjects show no substantial concern for the possibility or impossibility to upgrade the status position of their in-group as a whole. Hence, when group members are individually assigned to a group with low status, they prefer to pursue individual mobility.

Only in the case of impermeable group boundaries, implying that individual ambitions are not likely to be realized, do subjects seem more willing to work for their group.

Interaction effects of permeability and legitimacy indicate that subjects in the justified condition displayed a specific behavioral pattern. Unlike subjects in the illegitimate or legitimate conditions, subjects in the justified condition showed competitive behavior toward the other group, irrespective of the permeability or impermeability of group boundaries. On the other hand, with regard to subjects' point-allocation behavior (Matrix 3), subjects in the justified condition reacted most strongly to the permeability manipulation; they favored their group when group boundaries were impermeable and favored themselves in the permeable condition. In other words, in the justified condition, behavior toward the out-group was always relatively competitive (regardless of the extent to which group boundaries were permeable). However, most points were allocated to the in-group when group boundaries were impermeable, implying that subjects were bound to their group's fate, whereas permeable group boundaries induced more selfish point-allocation behavior. This pragmatism in the justified condition may stem from the manipulation of legitimacy. In the legitimate condition, assignment to the low-status group matched the subject's low test score. In the illegitimate condition, the notion that inclusion of the subject in a low-status group was unjust was acknowledged by the other participants. In the justified condition, however, the disappointment of ending up in the low-status group could neither be attributed to a poor performance, nor was it alleviated by commiseration from others. This apparently led subjects in the justified condition to be most concerned with their personal interest, which could be best served by favoring the group to which they belonged, unless there was a more direct way to achieve personal gains.

The results on the evaluative questions suggest that the appreciation of one's personal situation is affected by the legitimacy of the procedure used to form groups of individual participants. Conversely, similar to what we found in the first experiment, we see that subjects' behavior was mainly contingent on the possibility or impossibility of achieving individual mobility (permeability of group boundaries), instead of the legitimacy manipulation. Interestingly, in the second experiment, where subjects were individually assigned to a group with low status, stability of group status did not affect any of the behavioral measures.

General Discussion and Conclusion

Taken together, the results of these two experiments provide substantial support for our argument that low status is more acceptable when based on a procedure that appears more legitimate (cf. Hypothesis 1). Moreover, this holds for the acceptability of low group status as well as low individual status. We furthermore set out to improve on the methodology that has been used to investigate the legitimacy of status differences in previous research. The findings of both experiments reported here suggest that, although relative competence remains equal, differences in perceived legitimacy may result in divergent evaluations of objectively the same unfavorable situation. These results appear to corroborate Folger's (1987) contention that the

Table 4

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
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<th>Illegitimate</th>
<th>Justified</th>
<th>Legitimate</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Permeable</td>
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<td>7.15</td>
<td>5.48</td>
<td>6.24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Impermeable</td>
<td>5.34</td>
<td>4.75</td>
<td>5.47</td>
<td>5.18</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: *tests were used to test for simple main effects; row and column means with different subscripts differ significantly from each other ($p < .05$). A higher score indicates more self-favoritism at the expense of the in-group.
favorability of expected outcomes on the one hand and the legitimacy of the procedure on the other hand may independently contribute to people's evaluation of their situation. In fact, our findings support the assertion that feelings of justice are more related to procedural characteristics than to the favorability of the outcomes of these procedures (Thibaut & Walker, 1975; Tyler, 1989; Tyler & McGraw, 1986).

The distinction we made between legitimacy of collective outcomes and legitimacy of individual outcomes appears to be a valid one because the effect on in-group identification is dramatically different. When low status is the result of a collective injustice, it results in feelings of solidarity (as predicted in Hypothesis 2); in-group identification is especially strong when the collective disadvantage can be resolved by working at the enhancement of group status. Illegitimate treatment of individuals, however, causes them to resist identification as a member of the low-status group (in accordance with Hypothesis 3).

Contrary to what we expected (Hypotheses 4 and 5), group members' behavior directed at individual mobility or at achieving social change was mainly affected by situational characteristics instead of by legitimacy considerations. Thus, the motivation to improve on the present situation, as reflected in the evaluative questions and the in-group identification measure, does not predict actual behavioral patterns. When confronted with the possibility to upgrade their status, either individually or collectively, subjects are pragmatic. They work at that form of status improvement that appears to be most feasible, given the characteristics of the situation.

The pervasiveness of group members' desire to alter the predicament of having low status is illustrated by the subjects in the legitimate conditions. Because their low status derives from their (group's) apparent incompetence, striving to improve their position within the established status structure is somewhat unrealistic. Therefore, they prefer to introduce alternative comparison dimensions, in the hope that these will provide them with a chance to compare favorably with others.

When the results of the two experiments are compared, it appears that, when subjects are treated as group members (Experiment 1), they consider possibilities for group mobility as well as individual mobility. Conversely, treatment of subjects as individuals (as was the case in Experiment 2) directs group members' attention primarily toward personal opportunities for status improvement. Whether the group's status can be changed seems less relevant to them. Apparently, when low group status is the result of a collective treatment (Experiment 1), the group is more salient as a social entity. Then, in spite of what Taylor and McKinnon (1984) as well as Tajfel (1974, 1975) suggested, striving at group mobility may constitute a primary strategy. When subjects are essentially treated as individuals (Experiment 2) their group membership is likely to be less salient. Therefore, striving at group mobility does not seem to have particular relevance as a status-improvement strategy. This interpretation is rendered more plausible when we compare the mean scores on the in-group identification questions of Experiment 1 (collective treatment) with the mean identification scores in Experiment 2 (individual treatment). The overall level of in-group identification appears to be somewhat lower in Experiment 2 than in Experiment 1.

Equally important, perhaps, is the fact that in the second experiment the subject is assigned to a group with two incompetent fellow group members. As a result, the subject's group performs poorly on the group task. The low group status is therefore in fact legitimate.11 Hence, there is little chance of achieving higher status by collaborating with these fellow in-group members. This might offer an additional explanation of why the stability of group status does not affect group members' behavior in Experiment 2.

In sum, it appears that although their evaluation and in-group identification were affected by the legitimacy of the status-assignment procedure, subjects generally attuned their behavior to that status-enhancement strategy that seemed most feasible given the situation. From this general pattern one might conclude that, apparently, subjects are simply concerned with selecting that course of action that offers the highest subjective utility. It should be kept in mind, however, that the only material reward that could be gained was the cake each group could supposedly win. When preventing the other group from gaining points, which entailed making a less plausible decision, subjects also sacrificed absolute in-group gains and as a result had less chance of winning the cake. Similarly, subjects who chose to keep any extra points for themselves thereby reduced their prospects for winning a cake with their group. Therefore, it may be argued that their concern with achieving positive social identity, or positive distinctiveness, in some instances led subjects to jeopardize real benefits. In other words, instead of pursuing material gains, subjects competed for social status (cf. Turner, 1975). To us then, these results only seem the more forceful as they demonstrate that, under specific circumstances, social competition may prevail over the competition for material resources.

10 Comparison of factor scores is not informative because they are standardized for each experiment.

11 Rather than constituting an experimental confounding, the experimental procedure in Experiment 2 was deliberately designed to imply that the low status position of the group was legitimate. This is in agreement with our purposes, because we believe this to be a crucial property of the social situation we are interested in, which should be reflected in the experimental design.

References


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