

DISSERTATION DEFENSE

The Effects of Group Status on Intragroup Behavior: Implications for Group Process and Outcome

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How does the status of a group influence the behavior of individuals within the group? This dissertation aims to answer this question by investigating the psychological and behavioral implications of membership in high- versus low-status groups, with a primary focus on the impact of membership in a high-status group. I propose that in high-status groups, personal interests, including material and relational, are more salient, therefore guiding member behavior within the groups. This emphasis on personal gain leads to behavior that best suits their interests regardless of the impact on group outcomes. In six studies, using both experimental and correlational methods, I test this main idea and examine boundary conditions. The first set of studies examines members' group-oriented behavior, and finds that membership in a high-status group (a) decreases the resources allocated for the group as members attempt to ensure personal gain; (b) lowers the preference for a competent newcomer who may enhance group outcome but who may jeopardize personal gains; and (c) reduces the amount of voluntary information sharing during group negotiations, hindering group outcomes. The findings also reveal that reducing the conflict between group and personal interests via cooperative incentives encourages group-oriented behavior in high-status groups. The next two studies conceptually replicate these findings focusing on members' self-oriented behavior, and show that high-status group-membership increases self-interested behavior - intentional withholding of information - which members do to prevent other in-group members from outperforming them. This in turn impairs group outcomes. However, this damaging pattern of intragroup behavior triggered by membership in a high-status group is alleviated when group members are led to believe that their group status is at stake. In the last study, I find that high group status engenders distinct patterns of intragroup behavior: members of a high-status group are more likely to selectively engage in behaviors to the extent that doing so is valued and acknowledged in the particular group context wherein they are embedded. This dissertation provides converging evidence that membership in a high-status group increases emphasis on personal interests within the group and that these concerns manifest in intragroup behavior that is distinct from that triggered by membership in a low-status group. The findings illuminate how the status of a group might shape the ways that members interact with other in-group members, as well as document the potential micro- and meso-level mechanisms through which status differences among social groups persist and change.