

# Relative Deprivation

*Specification, Development, and Integration*

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## Collective Action in Response to Disadvantage

### *Intergroup Perceptions, Social Identification, and Social Change*

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Between May and August 1981, ten Irish Republicans imprisoned in the H-Block of the Long Kesh prison in Northern Ireland starved to death in a hunger strike. Their demands were quite simple. They wanted to be recognized not as criminals, but rather as political prisoners. They wanted their cause to be recognized as a political cause and their actions – which the British government described only as criminal – to be recognized as political acts designed to achieve changes that they believed would improve the status and treatment of their group. Their protest rallied the support of much of the Catholic community in Northern Ireland and drew international attention and sympathy for the prisoners and their cause. However, Margaret Thatcher and the British government remained unmoved in their opposition to the prisoners' demands and each of the ten young men suffered a slow and painful death. Although the British government never admitted to having conceded to the demands of the hunger-strikers, many of the privileges normally granted only to political prisoners were subsequently given to other Irish Republicans in prisons in Northern Ireland. But more important perhaps, the Hunger Strike of 1981 remains a pivotal moment in conflict in Northern Ireland (see Feehan, 1983; Sands, 1981).

How can we explain the actions of Bobby Sands and his fellow prisoners? Although a complete answer to this question is certain to be complex and multifaceted, in this chapter we will consider some of what social psychology can contribute to that answer. We propose that one place to begin would be to consider the broader class of behavior to which this most dramatic of examples belongs: *collective action*. That is, we might consider the broader question of why a person might forgo

his or her personal interests and choose instead to take actions designed to benefit the ingroup as a whole?

#### **BRIEF BACKGROUND TO SOCIAL PSYCHOLOGICAL RESEARCH ON COLLECTIVE ACTION**

Although collective action has been widely discussed in the literature, most of the social psychological research on intergroup relations has not studied collective action directly. Several of the models that dominated the social psychological study of intergroup relations in the 1960s, 1970s, and 1980s, such as Equity theory (Adams, 1965; Walster, Walster, & Berscheid, 1978), Distributive Justice theory (Homans, 1961) and Relative Deprivation theory (Crosby, 1976; Folger, 1986; Runciman, 1966; Stouffer, Suchman, DeVinney, Starr, & Williams, 1949; Walker & Pettigrew, 1984) did describe behavioral outcomes. Still, most of the research inspired by these theories failed to measure behaviors per se, but rather measured emotional and cognitive outcomes such as anger and resentment, feelings of satisfaction, and/or perceptions of justice (e.g., Austin & Walster, 1974; Bernstein & Crosby, 1980; Crosby 1982; deCarufel & Schopler, 1979; Dion, 1986; Folger & Martin, 1986; Folger, Rosenfield, & Robinson, 1983; Olson & Ross, 1984; Tripathi & Srivastava, 1981).

There are a number of potential explanations for this lack of attention to behavior. One culprit may be social psychology's predilection for laboratory research (see Kelly & Breinlinger, 1995; Reicher, 1996) and the difficulties in designing studies that can elicit and measure meaningful action in this research context. Another explanation may be the common assumption that frustration, anger, and moral outrage are the essential determinants of action (e.g., Brickman, Folger, Goode, & Schul, 1981; Crosby, 1976; Mark & Folger, 1984). The strength of this assumption is perhaps most clearly demonstrated in Kramnick's (1972) claim that research on perceived injustice was "obvious and trite, for surely only angry men turn to revolution" (p. 56). The underlying assumption of a rather simple linear relationship between strong emotional reactions and collective action may have reduced efforts to focus directly on the more difficult task of measuring action.

Whatever the causes of social psychology's lack of attention to action, the result has been that, until recently, the study of collective action had been left primarily to sociology. And, unfortunately for social psychology, the dominant sociological perspectives during the 1970s and 1980s all but dismissed psychological variables as irrelevant for understanding collective action participation. The resource mobilization approach (e.g., McCarthy &

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Zald, 1977) held that structural and organizational variables determine the likelihood of collective action, and that incorporating psychological variables would not add to the explanatory power of models predicting disadvantaged group behavior. Although sociological perspectives have since expanded to include more psychological concepts (see Gamson, 1992; McAdam, McCarthy, & Zald, 1996; Snow & Benford, 1992), the mainstream of social psychology has made few contributions to this discussion.

Fortunately, we now find ourselves in the midst of a revitalization of the social psychology of collective action. Tajfel and his colleagues' (Tajfel, 1978a; Tajfel & Turner, 1979) Social Identity Theory (SIT) has formed the basis for a new perspective on groups and intergroup relations. This perspective has dominated European and Australian social psychology for the last two decades, and in the late 1990s has arguably achieved a similar position in North American psychology of groups and intergroup relations. The general concept of "social identity" and the fresh perspective on the self that SIT implied has spawned a number of broader models of identity, the most influential of which has been Self-Categorization Theory (Turner, Hogg, Oakes, Reicher, & Wetherell, 1987). However, it is only recently that significant research efforts have concentrated on the specific behavioral outcomes associated with disadvantaged group membership that were so central to the initial model. In addition, Tajfel and Turner's (1979) initial model is being strengthened by emerging perspectives in sociology and more traditional theories of intergroup relations, such as relative deprivation theory and equity theory (see Ellemers, 1993; Hinkle, Fox-Cardamone, Haseleu, Brown, & Irwin, 1996; Kawakami & Dion, 1995; Kelly & Breinlinger, 1996; Klandermans, 1997; Simon, 1998). Creative laboratory investigations and recent field research have tested, and in some cases integrated, aspects of these theoretical perspectives (e.g., Foster & Matheson, 1999; Kawakami & Dion, 1993; Petta & Walker, 1992; Simon et al., 1998; Smith, Spears, & Oyen, 1994), igniting a new interest in the social psychological underpinnings of collective action. In this chapter, we follow in the tradition of these new approaches by considering the social psychological determinants of collective action, with special attention to members of societally disadvantaged groups.

#### DEFINING COLLECTIVE ACTION

The term "collective action" has been used in a variety of ways and, of course, the definition that one chooses has important implications for any analysis of its determinants. We take a decidedly psychological perspective,

defining collective action in terms of the intentions and perceptions of the actors. *A group member engages in collective action any time that she or he is acting as a representative of the group and where the action is directed at improving the conditions of the group as a whole* (Wright, Taylor, & Moghaddam, 1990a). This definition follows directly from Tajfel's (1978a) distinction between interpersonal and intergroup behavior; where interpersonal behavior occurs in interactions between individuals acting on the basis of their unique personal identities and intergroup behavior occurs when the individual's behavior is guided by his or her social identities. Thus, collective action is intergroup behavior because it involves the individual's response as guided by his or her self-representation as a member of a particular group. However, it is a specific case of intergroup behavior, because it is also strategic in that it is intended to improve the status or treatment of the relevant ingroup.

This definition is perhaps best understood by contrasting collective action with alternative responses. Rather than acting to promote the ingroup's interests, group members could choose behaviors designed to improve their personal situation; in other words, they could take *individual action*. In this case, the actor focuses on his or her personal situation and takes actions that distance him or her from the ingroup's disadvantaged position, while improving his or her chances of acquiring a more advantaged position. This distinction between individual action and collective action is consistent with the distinction made in SIT between an "individual mobility" and a "social change" orientation. Tajfel and Turner (1979) proposed that members of low status groups could either attempt to leave their group in favor of a higher status outgroup (individual mobility), or they could attempt to raise the relative status of their disadvantaged ingroup (social change). Thus, in terms of action, the individual-collective distinction depends on whether the intended beneficiary of the desired change in status or treatment is the individual or the ingroup as a whole (see also Branscombe & Ellemers, 1998; Ellemers, 1993; Hogg & Abrams, 1988).

Collective action can be taken by members of any group. Members of relatively advantaged groups can and do engage in actions designed to maintain and enhance the status of their group. They construct discriminatory barriers to protect the privileged position of their ingroup (e.g., Gardner, 1972), and build social institutions that legitimate oppression and even violence against disadvantaged groups (Jackman, 1998). In some cases, individual acts of discrimination can represent efforts to substantiate and maintain the ingroup's higher status position (Sachdev & Bourhis, 1991). However, most of the theorizing and research on collective action has focused on members of societally disadvantaged groups. In this case, there is a third

interesting alternative to individual or collective action – *inaction*. Disadvantaged group members can take no action to improve either their individual or collective position. It is important to recognize that inaction can be associated with a wide range of cognitive and affective experiences. In addition to willing acceptance of one's group's position, inaction can also accompany feelings of resentment, dissatisfaction, anger, frustration, and outrage, as well as stress symptoms, depression, and resignation (see Crosby, 1976; Mark & Folger, 1984; Olson, Herman, & Zanna, 1986; Walker & Pettigrew, 1984). Equity theory (Adams, 1965; Tyler, Boeckmann, Smith, & Huo, 1997), for example, recognizes that feelings of inequity can be restored either by direct action or by altering one's perceptions of the situation in the absence of action. Similarly, SIT outlines a set of psychological strategies designed to enhance the *perceived* status of the ingroup while not directly affecting the group's actual status. These were labeled "social creativity" (Tajfel & Turner, 1979) and included strategies such as seeking new dimensions for intergroup comparisons, focusing on social comparisons with an even more disadvantaged outgroup, and enhancing the salience of an alternative group categorization (see also Lemaine, 1974; Mummendey & Simon, 1989). In short, inaction can be associated with a variety of cognitive and affective reactions, ranging from passive acceptance of the ingroup's low status position, to efforts to revise one's understanding of the ingroup's status, to hopeful patience that the ingroup's situation will soon improve, to angry resignation. Nonetheless, in and of themselves, these responses do not involve actual, overt behaviors and thus the outcome is very likely to be little change in the relative position of the individual and the ingroup.

#### THE ROAD TO COLLECTIVE ACTION

The present chapter outlines a set of psychological processes that can enhance or diminish the likelihood that group members will engage in collective action. These include: (a) the individual's self-representations as group members and his or her level of ingroup identification, (b) social comparisons with other groups in the social structure, (c) assessments of the permeability of intergroup boundaries, and (d) perceptions of the legitimacy and stability of the intergroup context.

##### **Self-Representation: Recognizing Oneself as a Member of a Social Category**

It is obvious that in order to engage in collective action the individual must recognize his or her membership in the relevant group. Thus, a psy-

chological analysis of collective action might logically begin by considering what will lead people to think of themselves as members of a social category, and when that category membership will serve as the foundation for thought and action. Basic to this question is the distinction, alluded to earlier, between one's personal identity and one's social identity; where one's personal identity includes those attributes that make one unique and distinct from others, and one's social identity involves those aspects of the self that connect one to others through group memberships. The distinction between personal and social aspects of the self is a cornerstone of SIT (Tajfel & Turner, 1979), Self-Categorization Theory (Turner et al., 1987), and other theoretical accounts on the self (Brewer, 1991; Brewer & Gardner, 1996; Sedikides & Brewer, in press; Taylor & Dube, 1986). When personal identities are salient within a given social context, people will be more likely to think and act as unique individuals. In contrast, when social identities are salient, a process of *depersonalization* occurs, wherein individuals perceive themselves less as individuals and more as representatives of the relevant social category (Turner et al., 1987). The first roots of collective action are found in these salient social identities, in that individuals who recognize their membership in a social group and act as representatives of that group are more likely to engage in action intended to benefit the group.

Each of us belongs to a large number of groups and, thus, there are many different social identities that can attract our self-representation at a given time. As such, it is necessary to consider how specific group memberships become the salient aspects of individuals' self-conceptions. Broadly speaking, Tajfel's (1978a) conceptualization of social identity stated that the salience of a given group membership rests upon two factors: (1) immediate situational and contextual cues that focus the individual's attention on the group membership, and (2) the psychological salience of that group membership for the individual. Self-categorization theorists expanded on Tajfel's ideas by proposing an "accessibility  $\times$  fit" formulation of self-categorization processes (see Oakes, Haslam, & Turner, 1994, for a review). According to this perspective, self-categorization occurs as a result of the interaction between the perceived relevance or appropriateness of a categorization within a given situation ("fit") and the individual's preparedness to refer to oneself in terms of the social category ("accessibility").

**Fit: Situational Salience of Group Identity.** Many factors can enhance the situational salience of a particular group categorization for the individual. The power of local contextual cues to evoke collective self-repre-

sentations has been reviewed extensively by self-categorization theorists (see Oakes et al., 1994; Turner et al., 1987). For example, if a group membership is distinctive, such as when the group is underrepresented and/or physically different from others in a given context, the relevant category distinction will become more salient (e.g., Lord & Saenz, 1985; Taylor, Fiske, Etcoff, & Ruderman, 1978).

*Accessibility: Psychological Salience of Group Identity.* At the same time, when entering a given social context, a given group categorization may be more *psychologically* salient for some individuals than for others. Group categorizations will be more readily accessible as a dominant self-representation to the extent that they have proven useful or relevant across past social experiences and interactions. Increased accessibility of a category can result from frequent or repeated use of that category (Bargh, Lombardi, & Higgins, 1988; Macrae, Bodenhausen, & Milne, 1995) over a history of accumulated social experiences. Thus, representation of one's group in the broader society can impact the salience of a category, such that the group membership is more salient for members of minority groups who have grown accustomed to being perceived as different (Brewer, 1991; Mullen, 1991), oftentimes regardless of their actual numerical representation in the given context.

The notion of accessibility may be particularly useful for understanding self-categorizations associated with membership in a disadvantaged group. For members of disadvantaged groups, group membership is likely to play a prominent role in many social interactions with others (see Goffman, 1963). Disadvantaged group members are readily aware of biases against their group, and may feel that they are being evaluated on the basis of their group membership (Crocker & Major, 1989; Frable, 1993; Jones et al., 1984). In turn, members of disadvantaged groups may approach social situations with a preconceived awareness of their group membership, along with anticipation of how they will be treated due to that membership (see Crocker, Major, & Steele, 1998).

A research example can demonstrate the dual importance of accessibility and situational salience for individuals' self-conceptions. McGuire, McGuire, Child, and Fujioka (1978) assessed "spontaneous" self-concepts (i.e., self-generated identity attributes) among White, Black, and Hispanic students. The authors found that 17% of the Black and 14% of the Hispanic students mentioned ethnicity as part of their self-descriptions, as compared with only 1% of the White population of students. These results suggest that, due to a history of experiences across a variety of contexts,

“ethnicity” had become a more accessible category for self-definition among ethnic minority students. At the same time, McGuire et al. (1978) also discovered that White students from more ethnically diverse classrooms were more likely to include ethnicity in their spontaneous self-descriptions than White students in more homogeneous, predominantly White classrooms. This additional finding reveals that, even among members of the majority group, contextual influences can make ethnicity a relatively more accessible construct for self-definition.

*Ingroup Identification.* Much of the theorizing on accessibility has followed a largely cognitive approach, emphasizing the frequency with which particular group memberships are recognized and salient in social situations. At the same time, however, social identities are valued by individuals – and are therefore significant for individuals’ self-conceptions – beyond their repeated salience in social situations. Indeed, Tajfel (1981) stated that social identity derives from *both* people’s “knowledge of their membership in a social group (or groups) together with the value and emotional significance of that membership” (p. 255). The strength of these feelings toward one’s group has been discussed in terms of *ingroup identification*. Group identification has generally been regarded as the personal importance that a particular group membership holds for the individual (see Ellemers, this volume; Ellemers, Spears, & Doosje, 1997; Tajfel, 1981), or the psychological attachment that individuals feel toward their groups (Lau, 1989). We define group identification as the individual’s psychological connection with a group, based on the significance that the group membership holds for one’s sense of self – that is, the extent to which the ingroup is “included” as part of the self (see Tropp & Wright, in press).

It appears increasingly clear that identification with the ingroup is an important factor in the prediction of collective action. Research from a social identity perspective has shown that, even among members of disadvantaged groups, individuals with high levels of ingroup identification are more committed to the ingroup (Ellemers et al., 1997) and desire more for their ingroup (Tropp & Wright, 1999; Wann & Branscombe, 1995) than individuals with lower levels of ingroup identification. Further, evidence for the association between ingroup identification and collective action has been found in research on pro and anti-abortion lobbies (Hinkle et al., 1996), union participation (Kelly & Kelly, 1994), participation in the women’s movement (Kelly & Breinlinger, 1995), participation in the gay movement in the United States. (Simon et al., 1998, Study 2), and in research on laboratory-created groups (see Branscombe & Ellemers, 1998;

Ellemers et al., 1997). In the words of Doosje and Ellemers (1997), “‘die-hard’ members (i.e., those people who identify strongly with their group) are more predisposed to act in terms of the group, and make sacrifices for it, than are ‘fair-weather’ members” (p. 358).

### **Determining the Position of the Ingroup Within an Intergroup Context: Social Comparisons**

An individual’s self-representation as a group member and feelings of identification with that group constitute only the foundation for collective action. Individuals’ thoughts and feelings about their groups do not occur in a vacuum; rather, they occur within a context in which other groups exist, and where the social position and attributes of one’s group can be compared to those of others. Indeed, status (whether one’s own or that of one’s group) is interpreted and evaluated through the process of social comparison (Major, 1994; Pettigrew, 1967) and the perceived status of the ingroup in the broader social structure plays a pivotal role on the road to collective action. Therefore, we will turn our attention to the role of social comparison in creating perceptions of disadvantage and the recognition that the disadvantage is collective in nature.

*Perception of Disadvantage.* Clearly, one factor associated with interest in action should be whether a social comparison results in a sense of disadvantage relative to the comparison target. Research inspired by Relative Deprivation Theory has focused extensively on this topic (see Olson et al., 1986; Tyler et al., 1997). Relative deprivation has been defined as one’s sense of deprivation in comparisons with other individuals or social groups (Runciman, 1966). In particular, relative deprivation research has focused on feelings of deprivation among members of disadvantaged groups, which result from comparisons with relatively advantaged individuals or groups (Vanneman & Pettigrew, 1972; Walker & Pettigrew, 1984). Rather than necessarily reflecting objective circumstances, these feelings of deprivation stem from individuals’ subjective assessments of their own situation, in relation to the perceived situation of the target of their social comparisons (Taylor & Moghaddam, 1994).

*Recognition of Disadvantage on a Collective Level.* Runciman (1966) established an important theoretical distinction between personal (egoistic) deprivation, which develops from comparisons between oneself and more advantaged individuals, and group (fraternal) deprivation, which results from comparisons between one’s ingroup and more advantaged

outgroups. Recent attempts to link ideas from Social Identity Theory and Relative Deprivation Theory have considered the connections between the level of self-representation (personal or social identities) and the types of social comparisons that will be made and, thus, the type of relative deprivation that will result (e.g., Ellemers, this volume; Smith & Ortiz, this volume; Smith et al., 1994). Social identity and self-categorization theories propose that when group membership is salient, attention is focused on collective outcomes and the status of the group, rather than on one's own personal outcomes or status (see Hogg & Abrams, 1988; Tajfel, 1981). Salient group identities would, therefore, lead individuals to engage in intergroup comparisons, which can result in greater feelings of group deprivation (see Kawakami & Dion, 1993, for an extended discussion).

Research has also suggested that people who are highly identified with the ingroup report greater levels of group deprivation than people who are less strongly identified with the group (Abrams, 1990; Petta & Walker, 1992; Tropp & Wright, 1999). For example, in a study of Italian immigrants in Australia, Petta and Walker (1992) found that identification with the ethnic ingroup was most strongly associated with perceptions of group deprivation, while only weakly associated with personal deprivation. It appears that recognition that the ingroup holds a relatively disadvantaged position leads to stronger feelings of deprivation for individuals for whom that group membership is more central to their self.

### **Ingroup Identification, Relative Deprivation, and Multiple Targets of Social Comparison**

Our own research (Tropp & Wright, 1999) confirms this association between strength of ingroup identification and reports of relative deprivation among disadvantaged groups members. However, we have also considered another thorny question in the relevant social comparison literature: how to deal with the issue of multiple targets of social comparison. Not only can the disadvantaged group member make either personal or group-level comparisons, but within most social contexts there is more than one available outgroup that can serve as a target of comparison (see Taylor & Moghaddam, 1994). Clearly, which of these outgroups becomes the active target of social comparison will have a major impact on the strength of one's feelings of deprivation (either personal or group). More specifically, the relative status of the target may be particularly relevant (Walker & Pettigrew, 1984). One is likely to perceive more deprivation as a result of comparisons with a more advantaged target, and less when comparing to a target that is similar to the ingroup (Crosby, 1982). As a first

effort to link the concepts of ingroup identification, group versus personal relative deprivation, and multiple targets of social comparison, we selected a sample of high and low identifiers from two traditionally disadvantaged groups in the United States (Latinos and African Americans).

Based on their scores on a measure of ethnic identification, participants were initially classified as either high-identifiers (top 40% of respondents) or low-identifiers (bottom 40% of respondents). Latino(a) and African-American respondents answered a series of relative deprivation items that directed them to make five separate social comparisons: two group-level comparisons and three personal-level comparisons. They were asked to consider the position of their ethnic group: (a) compared to other disadvantaged groups ("other minorities"), and (b) compared to a clearly advantaged outgroup ("Whites"). They were also asked to consider their own personal situation: (a) compared to other members of their own ethnic group, (b) compared to members of other disadvantaged groups (minority groups ("other minorities")), and (c) compared to members of a clearly advantaged outgroup ("Whites").

Separate analyses were conducted for responses regarding group-level deprivation and personal deprivation. In terms of group-level relative deprivation, compared to low-identifiers, high-identifiers reported significantly greater personal and group deprivation. However, reports of deprivation varied depending on the target of social comparison, such that respondents reported significantly more deprivation in comparisons with Whites than in comparisons with other minorities. Further, these two main effects were qualified by a significant Ingroup Identification  $\times$  Comparison Target interaction. Specifically, while high-identifiers reported more deprivation than low-identifiers in comparisons with other minorities; this difference between high- and low-identifiers was even greater in comparisons with Whites (see Figure 10.1).

A similar pattern was found for the personal-level comparisons. The difference between high-identifiers and low-identifiers was small for comparisons with other ingroup members; both high and low identifiers were satisfied with their personal situation relative to ingroup members. However, high-identifiers were significantly less satisfied than low-identifiers with their personal position relative to members of other minority groups. When the comparison target was Whites, the difference between high-identifiers and low-identifiers became even larger, with high-identifiers indicating clear feelings of personal deprivation (see Figure 10.2).

These findings provide support for the importance of both ingroup identification and the target of social comparison in determining the psy-

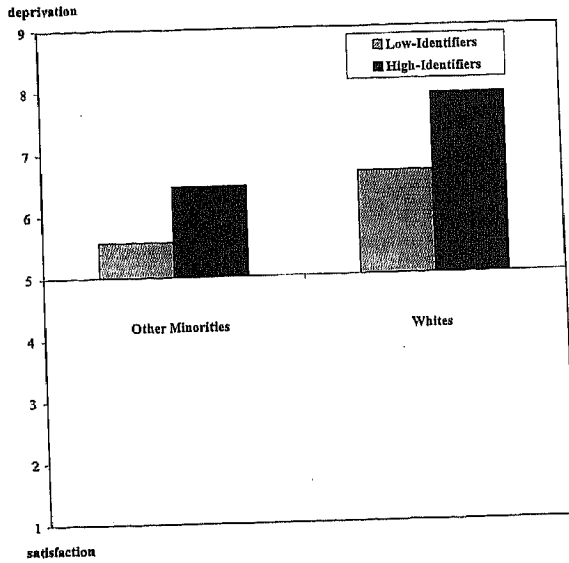


Figure 10.1. Assessments of collective (group-level) relative deprivation among high- and low-identifiers, in comparisons with other minorities, and Whites.

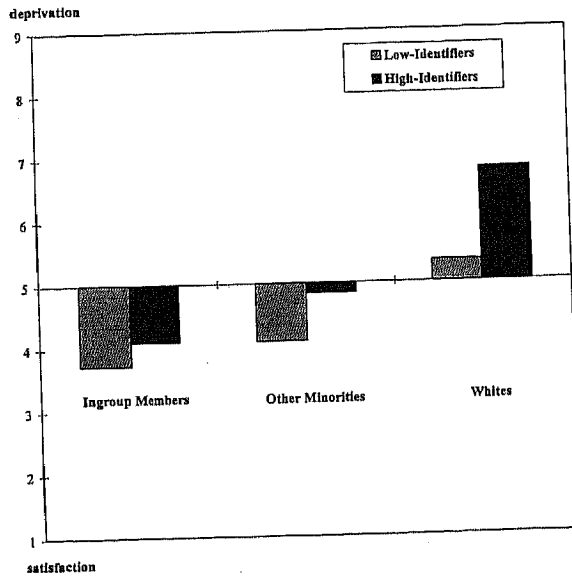


Figure 10.2. Assessments of personal (individual-level) relative deprivation among high- and low-identifiers, in comparisons with ingroup members, other minorities, and Whites.

chological outcomes of membership in a disadvantaged group. More specifically, high identification with the ingroup and comparison to a clearly advantaged outgroup (in this case, Whites) combined to produce the strongest feelings of group-level and personal-level relative deprivation. These findings become important for our discussion of collective action when we consider that other research has shown that feelings of collective deprivation can serve as an initial impetus for action directed at changing the status and outcomes of the ingroup. Feelings of group deprivation have been connected to perceptions of social injustice (Martin, 1986; Vanneman & Pettigrew, 1972), as well as support for separatist and nationalistic attitudes (Abrams, 1990; Guimond & Dube-Simard, 1983), social protest (Birt & Dion, 1987; Walker & Mann, 1987), and programs that can enhance the welfare of one's group (Tougas & Beaton, this volume; Tougas & Veilleux, 1988). For example, in a longitudinal study, Abrams (1990) examined causal relationships between ingroup identification, relative deprivation, and support for nationalism among Scottish youth. His findings showed that ingroup identification was a significant predictor of group deprivation and, in turn, these two factors predicted nationalistic attitudes. Similarly, Tougas and Veilleux (1988), in a study involving a diverse sample of women, found that support for affirmative action (a program designed to enhance the opportunities of women) was associated both with higher identification with the ingroup (women) and feelings of relative deprivation associated with a comparison between men and women. In summary, we would predict that it will be those individuals who identify strongly with their ingroup and who make group-level social comparisons with more advantaged outgroups that will feel the most relatively deprived and will be most likely to support collective strategies for social change.

*Extending the Prediction of Collective Action: Emphasizing the Intergroup Relationship.* Although high levels of ingroup identification and strong feelings of group-level relative deprivation may provide the foundation, our approach proposes that we consider other psychological processes on the road to collective action. It may be more than the relative advantage or disadvantage of the comparison target that propels individuals to support collective strategies for social change. Additionally, it may be the particular *intergroup relationship* that surrounds the status difference between the groups (see Wright, 1997; in press-a). Our research on Latinos and African Americans (Tropp & Wright, 1999) provides an illustrative example. For both groups of respondents, group-level compar-

isons to Whites lead to clear feelings of collective relative deprivation. Comparisons to other minorities also led to significant, albeit lower, feelings of collective deprivation. However, these two social comparisons may differ in more than just the magnitude of the relative advantage of the comparison outgroup. Social comparisons with Whites may represent a comparison with the *dominant* group in the status hierarchy; the group that is seen to be responsible for the subordinate status of the ingroup; the group that maintains and supports the status quo; the group that is perceived to have a greater degree of control over and access to resources and higher status positions (see Sidanius & Pratto, 1993). Thus, it may be that in order for collective action to be undertaken, in addition to perceiving one's group as relatively disadvantaged (relatively deprived), the target of comparison must be understood to have had some agency in creating or maintaining the group status hierarchy. As such, support for collective action should be related specifically to feelings of deprivation relative to a *dominant* outgroup. This view is consistent with those who have argued that collective action requires the isolation of a particular villain (i.e., the "they" that is set in contrast to the "we") to whom blame for the ingroup's disadvantaged position can be attributed (see Gamson, 1992; Klandermans, 1997; Snow & Benford, 1992).

This position would lead to the prediction that reports of deprivation in comparisons with a dominant group would predict interest in collective action, while deprivation resulting from comparisons with members of other nondominant outgroups would not. To test this hypothesis, we used regression analyses to determine how well ingroup identification and feelings of relative deprivation associated with group-level and personal-level social comparisons with the dominant outgroup (Whites) and other non-dominant outgroups (other minorities) could predict Latino and African American respondents' support for collective action (Tropp & Wright, in press).

We also considered the distinction between cognitive and affective components of relative deprivation: where the cognitive component represents an individual's *perceptions* of deprivation, and the affective component reflects the individual's *emotional responses* to the deprivation they perceive (see Walker & Pettigrew, 1984). There is some evidence that it may be the affective component rather than the cognitive component that best predicts attitudes and behaviors associated with collective action (e.g., Guimond & Dube-Simard, 1983; Smith & Pettigrew, 2001; Tougas & Veilleux, 1988). In other words, the perception of inequality alone may not be sufficient to encourage collective action. Rather, it is the anger, resentment, or dissatis-

faction that can result from that perception that serves as a driving force behind collective action. Thus, we predicted that the affective component of group-level relative deprivation associated with comparisons with the dominant outgroup (Whites) and ingroup identification should be the two primary (perhaps only) predictors of support for collective action.

*Predicting Collective Action: Ingroup Identification, Target of Comparison, Affective and Cognitive Relative Deprivation.* Ingroup identification was assessed using a standardized, composite measure, which combined items from several different identity scales (e.g., Cheek, Tropp, Chen, & Underwood, 1994; Luhtanen & Crocker, 1992; Tropp & Wright, in press). Possible scores ranged between 1 and 7, with greater values indicating higher levels of ingroup identification.

Relative deprivation (RD) was assessed using four social comparisons. Two group-level measures asked respondents to make social comparisons: (a) between their ethnic ingroup and other disadvantaged groups (other minorities), and (b) between their ethnic ingroup and the dominant outgroup (Whites). Two personal-level items asked respondents to make social comparisons: (a) between their personal situation and that of members of other disadvantaged groups (other minorities); and (c) between their personal situation and that of members of the dominant outgroup (Whites).

For each of the five comparison targets, two items were included. The first assessed the cognitive component (perception) of RD ("Would you say that you are [your ethnic group is] better off or worse off than ..."), and the second assessed the affective component (emotional responses) of RD ("How angry or satisfied are you about your [ethnic group's] situation relative to..."). For each item, possible scores ranged between 1 and 9, with higher values corresponding to greater reports of deprivation.

Support for collective action was measured with a single item ("Members of our ethnic group must stick together and work as a group to change the position of all the members of the group"). Respondents were asked the extent to which they endorsed the item on a 9-point scale, where higher scores corresponded to stronger support for collective action.

Correlations were conducted between support for collective action and each of the ingroup identification and RD measures (*Ns* ranging from 295 to 301). Results from these analyses indicated that ingroup identification and most of the RD measures were significantly correlated with support for collective action (see Table 10.1). Overall, greater support for collective action was associated with higher levels of ingroup identification, and greater per-

**Table 10.1.** Correlations between Support for Collective Action and Measures of Ingroup Identification and Relative Deprivation

	Support for Collective Action
Ingroup identification	.32***
Other minorities	
Personal RD – cognitive	.10 <sup>^</sup>
Personal RD – affective	.16**
Group RD – cognitive	.28***
Group RD – affective	.28***
Whites	
Personal RD – cognitive	.29***
Personal RD – affective	.23***
Group RD – cognitive	.40***
Group RD – affective	.48***

<sup>^</sup> $p < .10$     \* $p < .05$     \*\* $p < .01$     \*\*\* $p < .001$

sonal and group deprivation in comparisons with both other minorities and Whites. As shown in Table 10.1, support for collective action was most strongly related to group deprivation in comparisons with Whites and least related to personal deprivation in comparisons with other minorities.

A standard regression analysis ( $N = 279$ ) was conducted using the ingroup identification and the eight RD measures as predictors of support for collective action (see Table 10.2). The overall model was significant,  $R^2 = .28$ ,  $F(9,269) = 11.48$ ,  $p < .001$ . As can be seen in Table 10.2, only two measures uniquely accounted for a significant portion of the variance in support for collective action: Ingroup Identification and Affective Group RD in comparison with Whites.

Additionally, a hierarchical regression analysis was conducted to examine whether Ingroup Identification and Affective Group RD in comparisons with Whites would account for a significant portion of the variance after the other predictor variables were entered into the model. At the first stage, the seven remaining predictor variables were entered into the model. The model was significant at this stage,  $F(7,271) = 8.38$ ,  $p < .001$ , accounting for 18% of the variance in support for collective action. At this stage, only the Cognitive Group RD item regarding comparisons with Whites accounted for a significant portion of variance in support for collective action (Beta = .27,  $sr = .20$ ,  $t = 3.58$ ,  $p < .001$ ). At the second

**Table 10.2.** Summary of Standard Regression Analysis Using Ingroup Identification and Relative Deprivation Measures as Predictors of Support for Collective Action

	<i>B</i>	<i>Beta</i>	<i>r</i>	<i>sr</i>	<i>t</i>
Ingroup identification	.33	.20	.34	.18	3.54***
Other minorities					
Personal RD – cognitive	-.01	-.01	.10	-.01	-.15
Personal RD – affective	.01	.01	.15	.01	.23
Group RD – cognitive	.10	.09	.27	.07	1.31
Group RD – affective	-.07	-.06	.29	-.04	-.79
Whites					
Personal RD – cognitive	.06	.07	.29	.04	.84
Personal RD – affective	-.04	-.05	.23	-.04	-.73
Group RD – cognitive	.03	.03	.39	.02	.30
Group RD – affective	.44	.38	.48	.23	4.35***

\*  $p < .05$     \*\*  $p < .01$     \*\*\*  $p < .001$

stage, Ingroup Identification and the Affective Group RD in comparison with Whites were added to the model. The full model accounted for 28% of the variance in support for collective action, demonstrating a significant increase in the amount of variance accounted for beyond that predicted by the seven other predictor variables ( $R^2$  change = .10,  $F$  change = 18.53,  $p < .001$ ).

*Conclusions and Summary.* Generally, these results indicate that ingroup identification and relative deprivation both contribute substantially to the prediction of support for collective action. However, beyond this, three more specific conclusions can be drawn regarding the relationships between relative deprivation and support for collective action. First, group deprivation, and not personal deprivation, predicts support for collective action. These findings are consistent with previous findings (e.g., Abrams, 1990; Birt & Dion, 1987; Walker & Mann, 1987). In addition, although cognitive and affective components of collective RD are both correlated with support for collective action, the cognitive component accounts for virtually no unique variance beyond that accounted for by the affective component. The prominence of affective over cognitive RD in predicting collective action is also consistent with previous research (e.g., Guimond & Dube-Simard, 1983; Smith & Pettigrew, 2001; Tougas & Veilleux, 1988).

Finally, and perhaps most interestingly, group deprivation that results from comparisons with a dominant outgroup (in this case, Whites) is a strong predictor of support for collective action, while group deprivation resulting from comparisons with other disadvantaged outgroups (other minorities) adds virtually no predictive power. This may result, in part, because people generally feel more deprived in comparisons to the dominant target. However, it is also consistent with the prediction that comparison with the dominant group is the most appropriate comparison for determining the need for social change. It may be that only when relative deprivation involves comparisons with the agent of the intergroup inequality – the group responsible for the present status hierarchy – that collective action will be perceived as the appropriate response.

### **Individual Mobility or Social Change: Assessing Boundary Permeability**

For the most part, we have been considering psychological processes that have focused on the individual and his or her relationship with the relevant ingroup and how these contribute to interest in collective change – processes such as self-representations and identification with the ingroup, perceptions of collective disadvantage, and feelings of deprivation. However, in describing the importance of social comparisons with a *dominant* outgroup (as opposed to other outgroups that might hold a more advantaged position), we have also alluded to the importance of the individual's understanding and interpretation of the existing social structure as a crucial determinant of participation in collective action. How the individual evaluates the structural relationship between the relevant groups will play a pivotal role in his or her subsequent behavior. Social Identity theory (Tajfel & Turner, 1979; see also Hogg & Abrams, 1988) has pointed to three important assessments: (a) the permeability of the intergroup boundaries (i.e., can the individual move from the lower to higher status group?); (b) the stability of the intergroup status hierarchy (i.e., is the low status position of the ingroup open to change?); and (c) the legitimacy of the intergroup status hierarchy (i.e., is the low status position of the ingroup appropriate/deserved?). Our earlier discussion of relative deprivation foreshadowed the importance of legitimacy assessments. Clearly, feelings of anger and dissatisfaction about the status of one's group require not only the recognition that the ingroup is disadvantaged, but also feelings of entitlement that imply perceptions of illegitimacy (see Major, 1994). We will consider the assessment of legitimacy and stability shortly. However, in other writings

(Wright, 1997, in press-b) we have argued, in a manner consistent with Tajfel (1978a) and others (see Ellemers, in press), that the assessment of boundary permeability may be the primary of these three assessments in determining disadvantaged group behavior.

Once an individual recognizes that the ingroup holds a relatively disadvantaged position, he or she will then evaluate the ease with which individuals can move from one group to another – that is, he or she will assess the degree to which individual upward mobility is possible (Hogg & Abrams, 1988; Tajfel & Turner, 1979; Taylor & McKirnan, 1984). If individual upward mobility seems possible, the individual adopts an “individual mobility orientation” (Tajfel, 1981). This orientation is marked by dissociation from the disadvantaged ingroup, a focus on improving one’s own position, and a preference for individual actions. Thus, the belief that the intergroup boundaries are permeable will serve to reduce or prevent interest in collective action. However, if the intergroup boundaries are perceived to be closed, the individual will adopt a “social change orientation” (Tajfel, 1981). This orientation is marked by increased identification with the ingroup, an enhanced motivation to improve the position of the ingroup, and an interest in collective action (see Ellemers, 1993; Wright & Taylor, 1998; Wright et al., 1990a).

The apparent simplicity of this basic model is very appealing. However, there are a number of complexities that not only strengthen the model but also broaden the importance of this initial assessment of permeability as a determinant of collective action. So in addition to providing a more complete discussion of the importance of perceptions of legitimacy and stability, we will consider two important extensions to the discussion of boundary permeability: (a) the distinction between internal (psychological) and external (structural) barriers to boundary permeability; (b) the importance of considering the permeability as a continuum, rather than a dichotomy and the significance of a context we label “tokenism.”

*Internal and External Barriers to Boundary Permeability.* Broadly speaking, an assessment of boundary permeability considers two types of barriers to leaving the disadvantaged ingroup: *external* barriers and *internal* barriers. External barriers include physical and structural factors that reduce individual’s chances of moving from the disadvantaged group into a more advantaged social group. Some of these external barriers include ascribed characteristics that cannot be changed (e.g., race, gender), social norms and practices that prevent members of the disadvantaged group from leaving their own group or joining the outgroup (e.g., prejudice and

discrimination, both direct and institutional, by the advantaged group), or geographical distances that separate the groups.

Most of the existing work on boundary permeability has focused on these types of physical and structural factors, and this narrow focus has prompted some controversy. For example, Taylor and McKirnan's (1984) "Five-Stage Model" of intergroup relations proposes that individual action will always precede collective action, and it is the failed attempts at individual mobility that lead to the recognition that group boundaries are closed, which in turn leads to collective action. Others, however, have criticized this sequential model, pointing to the presence of personal and psychological factors that can also influence group members' assessments of boundary permeability, and their preferences for individual or collective strategies (e.g., Branscombe & Ellemers, 1998; Ellemers et al., 1997; Wright, Taylor, & Moghaddam, 1990b). These personal and psychological factors can be described as *internal* barriers to perceiving boundary permeability. For example, strong ingroup identification serves to tie the individual psychologically to the ingroup, and this psychological attachment to the ingroup is likely to lead the individual to believe that he or she simply could not leave the group. Thus, even if the actual (external) barriers to moving into a more advantaged group are minimal, strong identification serves as a psychological barrier to perceived boundary permeability (see also Ellemers et al., 1997; Spears, Doosje, & Ellemers, 1997).

Thus, one interpretation of the previously described research on importance of ingroup identification as a predictor of interest in collective action is that ingroup identification steers interest away from individual action and toward collective action, by reducing the individual's perception that he or she could leave the disadvantaged ingroup and move into the more advantaged outgroup. Thus, ingroup identification increases interest in collective action by reducing the perceived permeability of group boundaries.

In summary, assessment of boundary permeability involves an analysis of both external and internal barriers. The individual considers both the structural barriers and those imposed by his or her own relationship with or position within the ingroup. When either or both of these assessments result in perceptions that boundaries between the groups are open, individual mobility will be seen as appropriate and desirable. However, when a disadvantaged group member cannot (or will not) abandon his or her membership in the disadvantaged group to become part of the dominant group, individual action is no longer perceived as an option, and he or she must choose between collective action and inaction.

### **Cognitive Alternatives: Assessing Legitimacy and Stability**

The decision to take collective action over inaction rests on the disadvantaged group member's ability to imagine a situation in which the relative positions of the two groups are different. In SIT terms, he or she must recognize "cognitive alternatives" to the present status relationship. Tajfel and Turner (1979) propose that the recognition of cognitive alternatives depends on two assessments: *legitimacy*, an evaluation of the justice or fairness of the present status relationship; and *stability*, an evaluation of the likelihood that the present status relationship can be changed.

*Legitimacy.* The concepts of "legitimacy" and "justice" are basic to many theoretical perspectives in intergroup relations (see, e.g., Jost & Major, in press; Major, 1994; Olson, Herman, & Zanna, 1986; Runciman, 1966; Tajfel, 1981; Tyler et al., 1997; Walker & Pettigrew, 1984), and to a number of theories of social movements (e.g., Gamson, 1992; Klandermans, 1997). As described earlier in our discussion of relative deprivation, in addition to recognizing that one's group is disadvantaged relative to another group, members must also feel dissatisfaction, even anger, about the position of their group. These feelings of dissatisfaction and anger are closely linked to perceptions of the legitimacy of the social structure. Feeling dissatisfied with one's position indicates a sense of *entitlement* (see Major, 1994), the feeling that one deserves more. If a disadvantaged group member believes that his or her ingroup deserves more, this directly implies that the present state of affairs is unfair or illegitimate (Major, 1994). The feeling of illegitimacy that results from the assessment that one's group deserves higher status or better treatment is an essential step on the road to collective action, because this feeling provides the motivation and the justification for actions that may be socially disruptive and potentially costly or even dangerous (Tajfel, 1981; see also Hogg & Abrams, 1988).

*Stability, Agency and Collective Control.* In addition to perceiving illegitimacy, SIT proposes that disadvantaged group members must also see instability in the present social order. When disadvantaged group members believe that the relative positions of the groups are part of a fixed social hierarchy, an immutable reality, they will be disinclined to engage in collective action. In contrast, when they believe that the relative positions of the groups can change, they become interested in collective action (Tajfel, 1981; see also Kelly & Breinlinger, 1996; Martin, Brickman, & Murray, 1984). A number of others have presented conceptually similar constructs. For example, Gamson (1992) and Klandermans (1997) have used the term

*agency frame* to refer to the extent that group members feel capable of producing collective action that can successfully reduce or remove the injustice they face. Bandura (1997) defines *collective efficacy* as "the group's shared belief in its conjoint capability to organize and execute the courses of action required to produce given levels of attainment" (p. 477).

Although these concepts of agency frame and collective efficacy are very similar to Tajfel and Turner's concept of stability, they are not identical. The distinction between the SIT's stability and these two other concepts can be most easily understood by referring to theories of *perceived control* (e.g., Abramson, Seligman, & Teasdale, 1978). According to this perspective, in order to feel that one has control of one's outcomes one must make two simultaneous judgments. First, the individual must believe that that the situation can be changed if certain actions are taken (that outcomes are contingent on behavior). At the group level, this judgment corresponds with SIT's concept of *stability*. Second, the individual must also believe that the relevant agent (oneself or the group) is able to execute the behaviors necessary to produce the desired change. This second judgment corresponds to the concept of *agency* or *collective efficacy*. Thus, from this perspective, a lack of *collective control* can result from either a belief that the status relationship between the groups cannot be changed no matter what actions are taken, or from a belief that the relevant ingroup lacks the necessary resources or abilities to produce the desired change.

***Assessing Legitimacy and Collective Control When Group Boundaries Are Closed.*** It is clear that the assessments of legitimacy and collective control are most accurately considered as continuous; that is, situations will be seen as "more or less just" and "more or less stable." However, action and inaction represent discrete categories (one either takes action or one does not) and there would need to be a relatively discrete point at which the situation is seen as "unstable enough" and/or "illegitimate enough" to warrant action. In this sense, while assessments of stability and legitimacy are made on a continuum, for each individual in a given situation there is a relatively discrete point at which these assessments initiate a qualitative switch in the individual's behavioral strategy.

With that introduction, the combination of the assessments of legitimacy and collective control leads to four alternatives (see Figure 10.3). At one extreme, the relative position of the groups is believed to be both legitimate and uncontrollable; that is, the status differences are based on principles or norms that are accepted by both the advantaged and disadvantaged groups, and neither group questions their place in the

	Legitimate	Illegitimate
Uncontrollable	Inaction With Acceptance	Inaction With Anger/Frustration
Controllable	Collective Normative Action	Collective Non-normative Action

Figure 10.3. Assessing legitimacy and collective control when group boundaries are closed.

social structure. In SIT terms, cognitive alternatives to the present situation are not recognized and collective action not considered. The result is inaction. At the other extreme, the inequalities between the groups are seen as illegitimate and controllable. Neither the principles that support the status hierarchy nor the inevitability of the hierarchy is accepted. Disadvantaged group members see unfairness, believe the situation can change, and believe that the ingroup has the necessary resources and capabilities to achieve that change. The result is collective action.

It is likely that controllability and illegitimacy will be correlated in ways that will make one of these two extreme alternatives likely. That is, conditions that undermine the stability of the status hierarchy are also likely to raise doubts about its legitimacy. Similarly, conditions that undermine the legitimacy of the present social structure should motivate disadvantaged group members to consider and perhaps even seek out evidence of its controllability (Tajfel, 1978b). Alternatively, the pressure could be in the other direction. That is, clear evidence that the situation is uncontrollable should lead individuals to alter their perceptions so that the situation appears increasingly legitimate (see Pettigrew, 1961, for a discussion of the "psy-

chology of the inevitable"). Also, strong beliefs in the legitimacy of the existing group hierarchy should reduce both the search for evidence that the situation can be changed and efforts to build the resources necessary to produce change.

Despite the pressures that move perceptions toward either the illegitimate/controllable or the legitimate/uncontrollable extremes, it is worth considering the two mixed situations that fall in between the two extremes. It is possible that the status hierarchy might be considered illegitimate but uncontrollable, or legitimate but controllable. Not only are these two situations possible, there are contexts where they can be relatively enduring. Take, for example, a nation ruled by a strong military dictatorship. Much of the population may see the status differences between rich and poor as unfair, but may also see little chance that the distribution will ever be more equitable. The principles or beliefs that sustain intergroup inequalities are challenged, yet the relative status of the two groups appears unchangeable. Under these circumstances, collective action is unlikely. Of course, the resulting inaction does not indicate "acceptance" of the social situation, but rather an angry or begrudging admission that things cannot be changed.

It should be noted, however, that when this anger and resentment are not expressed in actions, observers from both the advantaged and the disadvantaged groups may interpret this inaction as *de facto* acceptance. The advantaged group may believe that disadvantaged group members share their understanding of the principles and myths that legitimize the status hierarchy. At the same time, this misinterpretation can also have important implications for the actions of other ingroup members. Research on a process labeled "pluralistic ignorance" (Miller & McFarland, 1987) shows that even when most group members do not agree with the direction taken by their group, when others fail to act on their misgivings, each individual member can mistakenly assume that he or she alone disagrees. The resulting normative pressures lead the individual to conform to the group's chosen direction despite the fact that most of them privately do not support this course of action. In this way, pluralistic ignorance provides a partial explanation for why inaction would persist even when, if suggested, collective actions might be supported by many disadvantaged group members.

In the other "mixed" case, the situation is perceived to be legitimate and controllable. This situation is consistent with a two-party democratic political system such as in the United States. Members of the party that does not hold power (i.e., the disadvantaged group) generally accept their present low status position as legitimate. As long as they believe that the

rules of democracy were followed, they recognize that they failed to get the necessary votes and, thus, must settle for a lower status position. However, they also believe that this situation is controllable; that they may well be able to garner the necessary votes to change the status hierarchy in the next election. Thus, the perceptions of controllability and legitimacy coexist because the means by which group status is determined (democratic elections) and the inherent instability of their present positions are accepted by both groups. In this case, perceived control will inspire interest in collective action, but only collective actions that conform to the rules of the social system.

This raises an important additional distinction relevant to our discussion of collective action. Resembling Martin's (1986) distinction between "positive" and "negative" behavior, and Simpson and Yinger's (1985) distinction between "aggression" and "reformism," Wright and his colleagues (Wright et al., 1990a) propose a distinction between normative and nonnormative collective actions. Normative actions conform to the shared rules of the existing social system, while nonnormative actions violate the existing social rules. Like the distinction made at the beginning of this chapter between collective and individual action, the distinction between normative and nonnormative action is also expressly psychological. If the actor believes that his or her action is consistent with the relevant societal expectations, then the action would be designated normative. However, if the actor is aware that his or her behavior is inconsistent with the expectations of the broader social system, the action is nonnormative. Notice, however, that this does not involve the actors' perception of the appropriateness, legitimacy, or morality of their actions. She or he simply needs to be aware that the action, no matter how justified, violates some societal expectation or convention. In addition, this distinction is not synonymous with the violent/nonviolent distinction (Martin, Scully, & Levitt, 1990). Many forms of civil disobedience are nonviolent but are also understood to be inconsistent with normative practices. On the other hand, in some intergroup contexts (e.g., in a football game) acts of violence are an accepted part of the intergroup interaction.

The important point here is that perceptions that the low status position of the ingroup can be changed (i.e., perceiving collective control) will open the doors for collective action. However, when the present low status position of the ingroup is also perceived as just and appropriate (i.e., perceived legitimacy), collective action will be limited to normative forms. From the perspective of the disadvantaged group, limiting themselves to actions that are consistent with the rules and practices of the social system is not

	Legitimate	Illegitimate
Uncontrollable	Individual Normative Action	Individual Non-normative Action
Controllable	Individual Normative Action	Collective Action

Figure 10.4. Assessing legitimacy and collective control when group boundaries are highly restricted (tokenism).

problematic as long as their perceptions of collective control are accurate (i.e., as long as the normative channels for social change are actually effective). In our example of two-party democratic process, limiting party members' actions to those prescribed by the rules of the electoral process is reasonable as long as the electoral process is indeed fair. When the normative avenues for change are ineffective (e.g., if the election is fixed), limiting actions to those allowed by the present process may result in little real social change. Thus, while perceived controllability appears to play a pivotal role in the initiation of collective action, perceived illegitimacy is critical for nonnormative (i.e., socially disruptive) forms of collective action to be considered.

In summary, when intergroup boundaries are closed, the assessment of legitimacy and collective control will lead to inaction whenever the intergroup context is perceived to be uncontrollable. When this stable intergroup context is seen as illegitimate, this inaction will likely be associated with anger and/or frustration. However, when the intergroup context is perceived to be controllable, normative forms of collective action will result if the context is also seen to be legitimate. Nonnormative collective

action designed to change the social structure will occur only when the intergroup context is perceived to be both controllable and illegitimate.

### **Restricted Group Boundaries: Responding to Tokenism**

Although theories like SIT have represented boundary permeability as a continuous variable, most of the relevant research has operationalized boundary permeability as a dichotomous distinction between "open" and "closed" contexts. Elsewhere (see Wright, in press-b for a review) we have argued that in contemporary North American society, and many other intergroup contexts, individual mobility is neither completely impossible (closed) nor is it entirely meritocratic (open). Instead, group boundaries are often restricted (Farley, 1985; Martin, 1986; Pettigrew & Martin, 1987), such that a small number of disadvantaged group members are accepted into advantaged positions, while access is systematically blocked for most qualified members of the disadvantaged group. Extreme restrictions on boundary permeability result in a form of intergroup discrimination referred to as "tokenism" (Moreland, 1965). In a number of studies (Wright, 1997; Wright & Taylor, 1998; Wright et al., 1990a), we have shown that disadvantaged group members faced with an entirely closed context prefer disruptive forms of collective action. However, when as few as 2% of the qualified ingroup members are allowed access to advantaged positions, individual actions become the response of choice. Thus, it appears that even the slightest hint of boundary permeability may undermine interest in collective action.

Our research suggests that this tokenism effect is multiply determined. In part, tokenism leads to a preference for individual action by focusing attention on personal identities and encouraging interpersonal social comparisons with the few successful tokens who now hold high status positions (Wright, 1997). By comparison, a completely closed intergroup context leads to intergroup social comparisons with the advantaged outgroup. Thus, tokenism undermines interest in collective action by refocusing attention away from the intergroup social comparisons that form the basis for interest in collective action. However, there is also evidence that tokenism may undermine collective action by obfuscation of the two assessments of the intergroup context, the perceived legitimacy and stability of the intergroup status hierarchy (Wright, 1997).

*Assessing Legitimacy and Control When Group Boundaries Are Restricted.* Inherent in tokenism is a paradox. On the one hand, tokenism is like a closed context in that group membership is used as a criterion to

prevent individual mobility. Therefore, tokenism might be seen as discriminatory and thus lead to feelings of illegitimacy. On the other hand, tokenism is like an open context in that merit remains a partial criterion for success. For a few disadvantaged group members, individual merit results in success. This mingling of merit and discrimination can lead to uncertainty about the legitimacy of the social order (Wright, in press-b). Consistent with this interpretation, Wright and Taylor (1998) found that participants in a laboratory experiment who were faced with a tokenism context consistently perceived less collective injustice than those faced with completely closed intergroup boundaries.

If tokenism leads to uncertainty about the illegitimacy of the ingroup's low status, it should also lead to uncertainty about how other ingroup members will respond. Perceived instability hinges on the belief that collective action can be effective (Kelly, 1993), and confidence that ingroup members will mobilize can be a prominent factor in assessing the efficacy of collective action (Klandermans, 1997). Thus, uncertainty about illegitimacy may coincidentally raise uncertainty about ingroup support for collective action, and hence uncertainty about the instability of the ingroup's status.

Thus, all three assessments of the intergroup context necessary for collective action are compromised in the tokenism context. As some degree of permeability persists, tokenism can lead to a focus on one's personal position and therefore to a preference for individual action. Additionally, tokenism can undermine assessments of both the illegitimacy and controllability of status inequalities, thereby making collective action seem less appropriate and/or less likely to succeed. As a result there is a strong tendency for disadvantaged group members who are faced with a context of tokenism to prefer individual action. Indeed, only when group members receive clear information that strongly emphasizes the collective injustice of tokenism and points out the potential instability of the intergroup context will collective action occur in response to tokenism (Wright, 1997).

#### SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

Inequality in the distribution of resources and status, and the resulting stratification of groups into relatively advantaged and disadvantaged positions, is a basic feature of most social contexts (Sidanius, 1993; Taylor & McKirnan, 1984). Groups occupying a dominant position are motivated to maintain their collective privilege (Apfelbaum, 1979; Ng, 1982; Tajfel, 1982) and, in the words of Martin Luther King Jr., "Privileged groups rarely give up their privileges without strong resistance." Thus, changes in

the status hierarchy depend primarily on the actions of the disadvantaged group. Further, as suggested by the slogan "United we stand – Divided we fall," change in the social order is most dependent on the propensity of the disadvantaged group members to engage in *collective action* (see Gamson, 1990; Tarrow, 1994).

Yet it is clear that the road to collective action is fraught with obstacles and often individual social mobility becomes the action of choice for members of disadvantaged groups. However, collective action does occur. As was the case in 1981 in Long Kesh prison in Northern Ireland, collective acts can have dramatic and tragic consequences. In this chapter, we have considered some of the variables relevant to predicting collective action. Our analysis has been expressly psychological, in that it focuses on the emotions, perceptions, and assessments of individuals. It is our conclusion that the roots of disruptive collective action, the kind of collective action most likely to change the existing social structure, can be found in: (a) the individual's psychological connection with the ingroup (ingroup identification); (b) the propensity to make group-level social comparisons with a dominant outgroup that lead to strong feelings of collective relative deprivation; (c) the individual's assessment of, and subsequent rejection of, the possibility for individual upward mobility; and (d) the assessment of the ingroup's low status position as illegitimate and controllable.

Thus, it is not surprising that Bobby Sands and his fellow Irish Republicans were highly identified with the Irish Republican movement. In fact, the very essence of their demands – recognition as members of the Irish Republican political movement and, thus, as political prisoners – makes their ingroup identification abundantly apparent. Second, we see in Bobby Sands' own writing constant references to the poor treatment of the Irish Catholics at the hands of the British and Loyalists (the Protestants). Third, the hunger strikers' strong ingroup identification created psychological barriers to leaving the ingroup, and the history of conflict and discriminatory practices on both sides of the conflict prevented movement between social groups in Northern Ireland. Also, they were prisoners with bars and walls to serve as clear barriers to changing their group identity. Fourth, the perceived illegitimacy of the British "occupation" of Northern Ireland is amply apparent in the writings of the Irish Republicans. Finally, in 1981, there was real confidence among the prisoners that the British would capitulate to their demands. In fact, as the national and international attention to the hunger strikes grew and as the first strikers died, the British government's unwillingness to concede became increasingly astonishing to the prisoners and their followers.

For what seems like a long time, social psychology has moved away from the study of action in favor of cognition, away from broader societal phenomena – what Tom Pettigrew (1991; 1996) has called “macro-level” phenomena – in favor of intrapersonal phenomena – what Tom has called “micro-level” phenomena. However, it is our perception that this is changing, and that social psychology now finds itself in the midst of a resurgence of what some have called truly ‘social’ social psychology (see Pettigrew, 1988; 1991; Taylor & Brown, 1979). One outcome of this “resurgence” has been a growing interest and an increasing diversity of research approaches focusing on the social psychology of collective action. This chapter reflects and, we hope, assists this revitalized interest by focusing attention on a number of interrelated processes that contribute to disadvantaged group members understanding their social position in a way that will promote action directed at social change.

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