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Social identity threat and performance motivation : the interplay between ingroup and outgroup domains

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Chapter 1 | Introduction

Upon declaring her intention to leave a cushy job with a Fortune 500 company ... a young black woman ... was pulled aside by her vice president. Why, the executive wanted to know, was the company having such a difficult time retaining young minority professionals? The young woman's frustrations were numerous: ... she was weary of racial insensitivity, of people who saw nothing about her except her color, or conversely of those who, in acknowledging her talents, in effect gave her credit for not really being black; she deemed it unlikely ... that she would be allowed to make it to the top ... Rather than to try to explain, the woman finally blurted out that there were no blacks, and certainly no black women. "What reason do I have to believe," she added, "that *I* can make it to the top?" When she related the incident to me several years later, she remained discouraged by what seemed a simple reality of her existence. "The bottom line is you're black. And that's still a negative in this society."

- Cose (1993, p. 5-6)

This quote, taken from Ellis Cose's essay on continuing racism in American society, exemplifies how members of groups that are socially devalued (e.g., ethnic minorities, women) can come to withdraw their investment in domains that determine status in society (e.g., career success, academic achievement). Being in an environment in which one is constantly under threat of being devalued on the basis of a social category such as race or gender is psychologically costly (Crocker, Major, & Steele, 1998; Inzlicht & Good, 2006; Tajfel & Turner, 1986). It can lead individuals to give up their ambitions and to conclude that performing in these contexts (e.g., high ranking companies, high status schools and universities) or on these performance dimensions (e.g., mathematics, academic achievement, leadership ability) is reserved exclusively for members of groups holding higher societal status (e.g., men, white Americans, native Dutch). This dissertation attempts to answer the question asked by the vice president in the quote above: How can members of

socially devalued groups retain their motivation to pursue high performance in contexts and performance domains that are stereotypically associated with members of higher status groups? In this dissertation this question is studied from the perspective of social identity theory (Tajfel & Turner, 1979, 1986). Chapters 2 to 4 report experimental studies that examine how people's motivated performance on status-defining dimensions is negatively affected by the social status of their group, and how these effects can be alleviated by protecting social identity. Below I provide an introduction to the social identity approach and explain how social identity is related to people's motivation on dimensions that predict societal status.

Group membership and the self-concept: social identity theory

Being a member of a group that holds low societal status can negatively affect an individual's self-concept. The social identity perspective (Tajfel & Turner, 1979, 1986; Turner, Hogg, Oakes, Reicher, & Wetherell, 1987) posits that the reason for this is that people not only derive a sense of self by assessing what makes them unique and different from other people ('personal identity'), but also base their self-worth on the social categories to which they belong ('social identity', e.g., gender, ethnicity, occupation). Social identity theory (Tajfel & Turner, 1979, 1986) posits that individuals are motivated to have a positive self-concept and therefore need to have a positive perception of their personal identity as well as their social identity. Whereas personal identity is evaluated by comparing oneself to other people, social identity is determined by comparisons between the groups to which one belongs ('ingroups') and relevant comparison groups ('outgroups'). Self-categorization theory (Turner et al., 1987; Turner, Oakes, Haslam, & McGarty, 1994), which is also part of the social identity framework, argues that, depending on which level of self-categorization is salient individuals will perceive themselves as individuals (focusing on personal identity) or as members of a specific group (focusing on social identity). Whether people categorize themselves and act as individuals or as group members is jointly determined by contextual factors (e.g., whether interpersonal or intergroup comparisons are salient, whether people are treated as individuals or group members) and individual differences in readiness to self-categorize on an individual or collective level (e.g., group identification, previous self-categorizations). Whereas a woman might focus on her individual goals and achievements when competing in a tennis tournament, she might focus on her female characteristics when discussing relationship difficulties with her female friends (*contextual fit*). In addition, some women are generally more likely to define themselves by their gender group

identity, whereas other women feel this category does not fit them very well (*readiness*). However, even when group membership is of low importance to people initially, continuous treatment by others in terms of this category will make it more relevant.

Protecting social identity

Being in a situation in which an ingroup negatively compares to a relevant outgroup, for example in a work setting in which coworkers hold negative attitudes about one's ethnic group, increases self-categorization on the collective level and threatens social identity (Turner et al., 1987). In this way, contexts in which an important ingroup is devalued directly threaten one's self-concept. Research has revealed that social identity threat not only lowers psychological well-being but even leads to physiological stress-responses such as increased cortisol levels and increased blood pressure (Blascovich, Spencer, Quinn, & Steele, 2001; Clark, Anderson, Clark, & Williams, 1999; Matheson & Cole, 2004; Scheepers & Ellemers, 2005).

Members of socially devalued or stigmatized groups are not passive recipients of social identity threats that elicit stress-responses, but actively seek ways to cope with social identity threat (Branscombe & Ellemers, 1998; Crocker & Major, 1989; Crocker et al., 1998; Ellemers, 1993; Levin & Van Laar, 2006; Miller & Major, 2000; Swim & Stangor, 1998). Social identity theory proposes three types of strategies that group members can use to improve their social identity, namely individual mobility, social change and social creativity strategies. Below, each of these strategies is discussed.

Individual mobility

The first way in which members of low status groups can improve their social identity is by attempting to leave or psychologically distance themselves from groups that are socially devalued. Additionally, they can join or affiliate themselves with groups that enjoy higher standing (individual mobility; Ellemers, 2001a; Wright & Taylor, 1998). When this is successful, the new groups that contribute to one's social identity are likely to compare more positively to other groups, leading to a more satisfactory social identity. Individual mobility can take many forms, the most obvious one being when group members leave a low status group and gain membership in a group with higher societal status. However, although it is not always possible to leave a low status group (as is the case with gender groups and

ethnic groups), people can still pursue individual mobility by psychologically distancing themselves from this group. For instance, women can emphasize how they differ from other women and how they are similar to men. Thus, the most defining characteristic of individual mobility is that it entails a physical or psychological distancing from the low status group and that it is aimed at improving one's personal status within a social hierarchy.

The use of individual mobility to improve social identity is restricted by contextual factors as well as individual differences. In terms of context, individual mobility will only be a feasible strategy in contexts in which boundaries between groups are perceived to be *permeable*, so that individuals can leave or dissociate themselves from one group and gain entrance into another group (Ellemers, Van Knippenberg, & Wilke, 1990; Lalonde & Silverman, 1994; Wright, Taylor, & Moghaddam, 1990). For example, whereas in some work settings entry into leadership positions is open to both women and men, in other work settings leadership positions are exclusively held by men, leading to perceptions of impermeable group boundaries and lower individual mobility attempts by women. Importantly, the pursuit of individual mobility strategies is determined by *subjective* perceptions of permeability rather than objective opportunities for individual mobility (Ellemers & Van Laar, in press). For example, although women cannot change their gender, they may perceive status hierarchies as permeable in that their gender is not an obstacle in achieving higher status. By contrast, although some people rise above their social background and move up in the social hierarchy, others perceive their working class background as fixed and believe they will never fit in a higher social class.

The use of individual mobility is also affected by individual difference variables such as individual ability and the degree of identification with the devalued group. Individual mobility is used especially by group members who perceive their individual ability on status-defining dimensions to be as high as that of high status group members (Boen & Vanbeselaere, 2002; Taylor & McKirnan, 1984). In addition, even though low status groups negatively contribute to social identity and are therefore likely to foster lower identification than high status groups (Ellemers, 1993; Simon, 1998), group members can be highly committed to their low status group. The degree to which individuals are identified with a low status group and tend to perceive themselves in terms of their membership in this group rather than as an individual negatively predicts the degree to which they are

willing to individually strive for higher status when their group is devalued (Ellemers, Spears, & Doosje, 1997).

Social change

A second way by which people attempt to improve their social identity is by improving the status of the ingroup that poses a threat to their social identity (social change; Simon, 1998; Wright & Tropp, 2002). Social change strategies can take different forms. For instance, groups can strive for social change by improving the group's performance on dimensions that lead to higher social status (Ouwerkerk, De Gilder, & De Vries, 2000; Ouwerkerk, Ellemers, & De Gilder, 1999). Additionally, groups can instigate collective action such as political protest to strive for better outcomes for their group (Simon & Klandermans, 2001; Wright et al., 1990). Social change is not necessarily a collective strategy, as even individual group members can pursue social change, for instance by standing up against discriminatory treatment or by helping other members of their group to achieve higher status. In essence, social change strategies are defined by a focus on one's group membership and by the goal to improve the status of the whole group.

It is predicted that people will only pursue social change when they think it is impossible, or not preferable to achieve individual mobility (Taylor & McKirnan, 1984). Therefore, whether group members pursue strategies aimed at social change is negatively predicted by factors that steer group members towards individual mobility (i.e., permeable group boundaries, low group identification and high individual ability; Ellemers et al., 1990; Taylor & McKirnan, 1984). In addition, group members are more likely to strive for social change when they perceive the social hierarchy as *unstable* (possible to change) and *illegitimate* (based on unfair treatment and procedures, Ellemers, Wilke, & Van Knippenberg, 1993; Wright, 2001b).

Social creativity

A third way by which group members can cope with social identity threat is by improving their own perception of their group's standing. This can be done in a variety of ways, and collectively these strategies are termed 'social creativity'. In essence, social creativity is a set of cognitive strategies by which group members can downplay the effect that their low status has on them. For example, by restricting comparison of one's outcomes to other low status group members rather than to members of higher status outgroups, and by self-segregating into contexts that are

made up of ingroup members rather than outgroup members individuals are less likely to be confronted with the low status of their ingroup (Major, Crocker, & Sciacchitano, 1993; Major & Forcey, 1985). Furthermore, in order to differentiate the ingroup positively from other groups, devalued group members tend to search for alternative comparison dimensions on which their ingroup is successful (Cadinu & Cerchioni, 2001; Ellemers & Van Rijswijk, 1997; Jackson, Sullivan, Harnish, & Hodge, 1996; Lemaine, Kasterztein, & Personnaz, 1978). Ethnic minorities, for example, can compare themselves to majority group members on dimensions such as athletic ability or cultural values, dimensions on which they perceive their group to hold higher standing than the outgroup. Finally, by cognitively devaluing the dimensions on which the ingroup is expected to show lower performance (e.g., mathematics for women, academic performance for ethnic minorities) and by disconnecting self-worth from these domains, the impact of low personal or ingroup performance on these dimensions to social identity and self-esteem is reduced (Major & Schmader, 1998; Osborne, 1995; Schmader & Major, 1999; Schmader, Major, & Gramzow, 2001; Van Laar & Derks, 2003). Similar to social change strategies, social creativity is a group level strategy that is more likely used by group members who identify with their group (Ellemers, Spears & Doosje, 2002; Ellemers & Van Rijswijk, 1997).

Status improvement vs. coping

Social identity theory describes the use of individual mobility, social change and social creativity strategies as mutually exclusive. Furthermore, it predicts that social creativity is a last resort *coping* strategy rather than a *status improvement* strategy which members of devalued groups will only use in impermeable, stable and legitimate status hierarchies when individual mobility and social change seem unfeasible (Taylor & McKirnan, 1984). Whereas individual mobility and social change are problem-focused ways of dealing with social identity threat that aim to change actual outcomes, social creativity is discussed as a strategy of inaction (Tajfel & Turner, 1986; Wright, 2001b). That is, social creativity is described as an emotion-focused way of coping that improves group members' perception of their group without directly improving objective outcomes. It is suggested that social creativity could have quite negative implications as it potentially diverts group member's attention away from the low status of their group. This in turn, is said to reduce the chances that group members will challenge existing status differences (Tajfel & Turner, 1979, 1986; Van Laar & Sidanius, 2001). For instance, although restricting

comparisons to those who are equally badly or even worse off, and self-segregation into safer 'ingroup contexts' reduces the negative experience of deprivation (Crosby, 1982), it also leads to lowered feelings of entitlement and obscures the necessity of striving for equality (Major, 1989). Similarly, since alternative dimensions used by low status groups to achieve positive distinctiveness (e.g., sociability, expressiveness, see Paez, Martinez Taboada, Arrospe, Insua, & Ayestaran, 1998) are often less instrumental to gaining status than the dimensions on which high status groups perform well, focusing on alternative dimensions of ingroup success is hypothesized to distract group members from performing on dimensions that define status in society (Lemaine et al., 1978, but see Hinkle, Taylor, Fox Cardamone, & Ely, 1998). Finally, when people reduce the value they attach to dimensions on which their group stereotypically underperforms (e.g., career success as in the case of the black female professional in the opening quote) it is likely that their motivation to perform on these dimensions suffers as well. In conclusion, although social creativity strategies protect well-being among members of low status groups, each social creativity strategy is also hypothesized to prevent group members from striving for better outcomes as it directs their attention away from the low status of their group, and as such may maintain differences in social status.

Social identity threat and motivation

The question with which this chapter started is how members of socially devalued groups can be prevented from withdrawing their investment in contexts that threaten their social identity and how they can maintain or increase motivation to perform on dimensions that lead to higher social status. Returning to the black female professional in the opening quote, from a social identity perspective it seems that she in the end chose not to pursue individual mobility or social change to improve her social identity. Instead, it could be argued that she attempted to maintain a positive perception of her ingroup (black Americans) by leaving the high status company that devalued her group (self-segregation). Although social identity theory predicts that social creativity is a last resort strategy which will only be used when individuals believe that attempts to achieve individual mobility or social change would not lead to better outcomes (Tajfel & Turner, 1986; Taylor & McKirnan, 1984), we argue that this strategy is actually used quite often. This is because status hierarchies are often perceived as impermeable, stable and legitimate (Wright, 2001a; Wright & Taylor, 1998), limiting behavior aimed at actual status improvement through upward mobility or collective action. For example, as

exemplified by the black female professional in the opening quote, low status group members often perceive very limited opportunities for status improvement by members of their group (low permeability), reducing attempts to improve one's personal performance and strive for upward mobility (Ellemers & Van Laar, in press). Indeed, current multicultural societies and corporate structures are often characterized by tokenism, a system in which only a very limited number of devalued group members ('tokens') are allowed to achieve positions of status (Kanter, 1977; Wright, 2001a). In addition, although the effects of discrimination and negative treatment of members of devalued groups such as women and ethnic minorities have been well-documented (for examples across many domains see Sidanius & Pratto, 1999), individual members of discriminated groups tend to downplay the occurrence of discrimination in their own life (Crosby, 1984; Major et al., 2002). Furthermore, members of low status groups often perceive systems that discriminate against them as just and legitimate, limiting the probability that they will instigate collective action or aim for social change (Jost, Burgess, & Mosso, 2001; Jost, Pelham, Sheldon, & Sullivan, 2003). As a result, members of devalued groups are actually quite likely to resort to social creativity strategies such as domain devaluation and self-segregation when they are confronted with social identity threat. However, since these forms of social creativity can have quite detrimental consequences for motivation in status-defining domains, social identity threat becomes a force that keeps low status groups in their place and reduces tendencies to self-improve and strive for better outcomes.

The goal of this dissertation is to find a way by which members of socially devalued groups can be dissuaded from devaluing domains and withdrawing from performance settings that are associated with higher status groups. In order to achieve social equality it is important that low status group members strive for high performance on the dimensions that define status in society instead of resorting to social creativity strategies that prevent their pursuit of better outcomes (e.g., domain devaluation, self-segregation). The key argument that is made in this dissertation is that the negative effects of social identity threat on motivation can be mitigated by offering members of devalued groups opportunities to protect their social identity in ways that are not necessarily detrimental to their motivation in status-defining domains. These opportunities to deflect social identity threat will lower the need to protect identity by devaluing status-defining domains or by withdrawing from threatening contexts, enabling members of low status groups to remain invested in status-defining domains. In this dissertation, we present social creativity as the *cause*

of impaired motivation, as well as the *solution* to improved motivation in status-defining domains. That is, we argue that although some forms of social creativity lower motivation in status-defining domains (domain devaluation, self-segregation), other forms merely focus on positive aspects of the group. We predict that these forms of social creativity (i.e., focusing on the ingroup's high performance on alternative dimensions) can effectively lower threat and are therefore quite instrumental in stimulating members of low status groups to pursue individual mobility and collective action strategies.

Social identity protection and motivation

Given that a threat to social identity and the resulting stress-response (caused by social devaluation of one's group) can lead people to lower their investment in performance domains and settings in which their group is negatively stereotyped, we propose that providing them with less motivation-debilitating forms of social identity protection lowers their need to withdraw from contexts in which their group might underperform (mathematics courses, top ranking companies, high status universities). One way by which members of devalued groups can improve their social identity without lowering their investment in status-defining domains is by drawing attention to the ingroup's high performance in alternative performance domains ('ingroup domains'). Because this form of social creativity improves social identity by focusing group members on the positive characteristics of their group, we expect it to lower the necessity of devaluing and withdrawing from domains in which the ingroup is negatively stereotyped ('outgroup domains'). When devalued group members' social identity is sufficiently buffered we expect them to be more able to focus on performance goals and self-improvement in settings that would otherwise pose too great a threat to their social identity. With this hypothesis we contest the idea that social creativity is a last resort strategy that limits individuals' attempts to improve their situation. Instead, we propose that forms of social creativity that do not directly lower investment in status-defining domains but simply induce a focus on the group's positive characteristics, can diminish the initial stress-response caused by devalued group status, preparing individuals for individual mobility or social change. We think this proposition is important because, as argued above, social creativity is used more frequent than is often assumed. By showing that social creativity is not necessarily a last resort strategy of inaction, but that some forms of social creativity can actually prepare group members for status improvement, we gain more insight into how social equality can be achieved.

Although social identity theory has maintained that in essence all forms of social creativity distract devalued group members from their performance goals, no research has actually examined the effects of valuing alternative dimensions of ingroup success on motivated performance in status-defining domains. Previously, it has been assumed that a focus on alternative dimensions automatically reduces the value that individuals attach to status-defining dimensions. For example, Lemaine and colleagues (1978) propose that emphasizing dimensions on which the ingroup is successful will only lead to a satisfactory social identity when these dimensions are perceived as more valuable than the dimensions on which status was originally based. However, experimental studies (Ellemers, Van Rijswijk, Roefs, & Simons, 1997; Hinkle et al., 1998; Schmader, Major, Eccleston, & McCoy, 2001) have shown that when members of low status groups start using new comparisons dimensions that shed positive light on their ingroup, they are at the same time also likely to acknowledge that the dimensions on which they are outperformed by higher status groups are more important and valuable than these alternative dimensions. We propose that because a focus on alternative ingroup dimensions does not necessarily lead to a decrease in interest in status-defining outgroup dimensions, it could actually help devalued group members to reduce their identity concerns, enabling them to focus on performing well in a situation that would otherwise pose too much of a threat to their social identity (e.g., male-dominated companies, predominantly white universities).

Although no research has explicitly examined the relation between social identity protection and motivation, evidence for the possibility that social identity protection can serve as a buffer against social identity threats can be found in research on self-affirmation. Self-affirmation theory (Steele, 1988; Steele & Liu, 1983) focuses on threats to personal instead of social identity and argues that people are motivated to sustain a positive overall self-concept. When the self-concept is under threat, for example when people receive negative performance evaluations, they are motivated to restore their self-concept. Self-regard, however, is not exclusively restored by addressing the specific threat, for example by disregarding the importance of the feedback, but can also be affirmed by confirming other parts of the self-concept, for example by focusing on high performance in other domains (Steele & Liu, 1983; Tesser & Cornell, 1991; Tesser, Crepaz, Beach, Cornell, & Collins, 2000). Several lines of research on self-affirmation have indeed shown that when individuals under threat are given the opportunity to elaborate on positive aspects of their personal identity, they are less inclined to use coping strategies that

would potentially lower their motivation. For example, Koole, Smeets, Van Knippenberg and Dijksterhuis (1999) showed that participants who received failure feedback on an IQ-test were less likely to engage in ruminative thinking (which can impede future performance motivation) when they were provided with self-affirmation. Self-affirmation has also been shown to decrease defensive reactions to threatening information, such as failure feedback and health-related information (Harris & Napper, 2005; Sherman & Cohen, 2002). In this way, self-affirmation increases the chances that individuals process feedback less defensively and change their behavior to improve their performance or health. Additionally, research by Siegel, Scillitoe and Parks Yancy (2005) revealed that individuals are less likely to create performance handicaps that enable them to explain possible failure with factors other than their ability ('self-handicapping'), when they are given the opportunity to affirm a positive part of their self-concept. Although the research discussed above provides evidence that people are less likely to display defensive reactions to negative feedback that potentially harm motivation when they have been able to improve their self-worth in other ways, none of this research has directly examined the beneficial effects of self-protection on motivation we propose (see also Siegel et al., 2005). Demonstrating the link between social identity protection and performance motivation has important theoretical as well as practical implications. First, it would redefine social creativity as a positive strategy that prepares group members for higher performance on status-defining dimensions rather than inducing inaction. Second, it would offer a way by which members of socially devalued groups can overcome social identity threat and strive for social equality.

In conclusion, this dissertation examines in detail the effects of social identity threat and social identity protection on low status group members' performance motivation in status-defining domains. First, we examine the positive effect of social identity protection on performance motivation. Then, we examine *how* social identity protection improves performance and whether it does so even in highly threatening outgroup contexts (contexts that are dominated by high status outgroup members). Finally, we examine the advantages of protecting social identity by comparing it to a more individualistic form of self-protection (self-affirmation, Steele, 1988).

Overview of the chapters

Chapter 2: Social creativity strikes back: Social identity protection and performance motivation

In Chapter 2 experimental research is presented to test the hypothesis that social creativity (by focusing on dimensions on which the ingroup is successful) allows members of low status groups to strive for higher performance in status-defining domains. In Experiments 1 and 2 we focus on group members' spontaneous use of social creativity (i.e., the degree to which they value an alternative dimension that reflects positively on their ingroup), and examine whether it relates positively to performance motivation on status-defining dimensions. In both experiments we manipulate contexts that differ in the degree to which they elicit identity threat. We predict that social identity protection by valuing an alternative dimension of ingroup success will be related to higher motivation on the outgroup dimension in contexts that pose a threat to social identity, but not in contexts in which social identity threat is not activated. Whereas Experiments 1 and 2 rely on low status group members' spontaneous tendency to protect their social identity by personally attaching value to an ingroup dimension, in Experiment 3 we test whether *offering* devalued group members information that protects their social identity also improves their performance motivation in status-defining domains. More specifically, instead of measuring the *personal* value participants attach to an alternative dimension, we offer social identity protection by emphasizing the high *contextual* importance of an alternative dimension that reflects positively on the ingroup. Orthogonally, we manipulate the contextual importance of a status-defining dimension on which outgroup members (supposedly) outperform the ingroup. We hypothesize that participants will show the highest persistence and performance on the status-defining dimension when the context emphasizes the importance of this dimension *as well as* offering an opportunity for social identity protection because it values the alternative performance dimension. By examining both the effects of *spontaneous* social identity protection (Experiments 1 and 2), as well as *offered* social identity protection (Experiment 3), we aim to obtain evidence that both a personal and a contextual focus on the value of an ingroup dimension, while maintaining the value of the status-defining dimension, allows members of devalued groups to achieve higher performance.

Chapter 3: Protecting social identity in outgroup contexts: Focusing on success vs. failure

The goals of the two experiments reported in Chapter 3 are twofold. First, Chapter 3 aims to extend the findings of Chapter 2 by examining *how* focusing on ingroup dimensions improves the performance motivation of members of socially devalued groups. Second, it examines in detail the social identity threatening effects that occur when members of low status groups are confronted with members of higher status groups. In order to achieve the first goal, we examine the performance goals towards which people strive when they perform on a status-defining dimension. Different social psychological models such as the trichotomous model of achievement goals (Elliot & Church, 1997) and regulatory focus theory (Higgins, 1997) point to the fact that people in achievement situations can focus on achieving success or on avoiding failure. In order for devalued group members to become motivated to increase their performance on a status-defining outgroup dimension, it is important that previous personal or group failure on this dimension does not deter them from persisting in the future. Whether devalued group members view achievement situations as settings in which to vigilantly avoid failure or as settings in which to eagerly approach success has important consequences for their chances to improve performance in status-defining domains. Devalued group members who focus on possible failure will try to avoid situations in which they run the risk of failing, such as performance settings that focus on a status-defining dimension on which they or their ingroup has failed in the past. However, previous failure will not deter people who focus on success, as they will interpret the situation as a new opportunity to achieve success on the status-defining dimension. We predict that low status group members become more focused on failure in a context that devalues their social identity. However, we predict that offering social identity protection by expressing value for dimensions that positively define the low status group, alleviates the negative effects of social identity threat and improves a focus on success. By examining devalued group members' focus on success or failure, Chapter 3 examines in more detail how social identity threat and social identity protection affect performance motivation on status-defining dimensions.

The second goal of Chapter 3 is to examine what happens when members of socially devalued groups are confronted with members of higher status groups. To this aim, we compare their focus on success versus failure in a context in which they are surrounded by high status outgroup members, and a context in which they are surrounded by ingroup members. We hypothesize that outgroup contexts induce

members of low status groups to feel threatened and to focus on failure because they are perceived to place a high value on performance on the status-defining dimension. Ingroup contexts, on the other hand, are hypothesized to induce a focus on success because we predict them to be perceived as placing emphasis on dimensions on which the ingroup is successful. By examining in detail how outgroup contexts induce members of low status groups to focus on failure rather than success, we hope to gain more insight into how these detrimental effects can be alleviated.

Chapter 4: Working for the self or for the group: How personal vs. social self-affirmation promote performance motivation

Chapter 4 aims to show the advantages of motivating members of low status groups towards higher performance in status-defining domains by protecting their social identity. To this end we examine how social identity protection differs from a more individualistic form of self-protection, namely personal self-affirmation (Steele, 1988). We predict that although both social identity protection and self-affirmation will motivate individuals towards higher performance in status-defining domains, the processes underlying these effects are qualitatively different. That is, whereas social identity protection induces members of low status groups to focus on their social identity, personal self-affirmation induces group members to focus on their individual identity. We argue that this has important consequences for social change as group members who are induced to focus on their individual identity are more likely to pursue individual mobility strategies that do not necessarily improve status for the rest of their group. By contrast, we argue that offering members of low status groups ways to improve their social identity increases the chances that they will aim for higher performance on status-defining dimensions while simultaneously aiming for more general collective status improvement and social change.

Additionally, Chapter 4 examines the psychological mechanism that explains why social identity protection and self-affirmation induce higher self-improvement motivation among members of a group that threatens social identity. We propose that affirming an important part of the self-concept (personal identity or a valued social identity) induces people to reappraise the threats that their group membership poses to their self-concept as positive *challenges*. We adopt ideas from Lazarus and Folkman's model of stress and coping (1984) and the biopsychosocial model of Blascovich and colleagues (Blascovich & Tomaka, 1996; Tomaka, Blascovich, Kelsey, & Leitten, 1993). These theories propose that individuals in performance situations

will cognitively appraise the demands of the task and the personal resources to deal with these task demands. Individuals feel threatened when task demands exceed their perceived personal resources to cope with these demands but challenge results when personal resources are perceived to meet or exceed task demands. By focusing members of a devalued group on the positive aspects of their group we predict that they will be more inclined to perceive performance settings in which they are to perform on a status-defining outgroup dimension as challenging rather than threatening.

Chapter 5: Summary and Discussion

Finally, Chapter 5 provides an overview of the results found in Chapters 2 to 4 and discusses the theoretical and practical implication that follow from the experimental studies reported, as well as some limitations and suggestions for future research.

It should be noted that Chapters 2 to 4 are separate papers that are either published (Chapter 3: Derks, Van Laar, & Ellemers, 2006a), in press (Chapter 2: Derks, Van Laar, & Ellemers, in press) or submitted for publication (Chapter 4: Derks, Van Laar, & Ellemers, 2006b). As a result, there is some overlap between these chapters, which makes it possible to read each chapter separately from other parts of the dissertation.

Conclusion

In contrast to earlier accounts of social creativity, this dissertation examines social creativity as a potentially positive strategy that prepares members of devalued groups for status improvement. We examine the direct positive link between social creativity and performance motivation on dimensions that determine status in a social hierarchy. We study in detail how social creativity improves motivation by examining the types of goals devalued group members pursue and the cognitive appraisals they make in performance settings that focus on status-defining performance dimensions. Finally, we aim to differentiate social creativity from more individualistic self-protective strategies, to show the important benefits social identity protection has as it improves behavior aimed at social change.

