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Collective action : a regulatory focus perspective

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Chapter 1.

General Introduction, Discussion and Conclusion

At the time of this writing, the populations of several North African and Asian countries have just risen up against corrupt and dictatorial regimes. After weeks of protesting, the populations of Tunisia and Egypt have successfully ousted their dictators. In Libya, however, the dictator decided to respond with violence, causing the country to descend into civil war. At the same time, Dutch students are protesting in the Hague against proposed educational reforms that would result in higher tuition fees. A couple of years earlier, youths from the suburbs of Paris, France took to the streets to protest against the disadvantaged societal position of their group. These protests quickly turned violent. Weeks later, when the smoke had settled, thousands of cars had been burned and damage was estimated to be over 200 million Euros (Landler, 2005).

The individuals protesting in these examples have several things in common. First of all, they are members of groups that feel grieved or disadvantaged. Second, they chose to work together with other members of their group in order to change the group's disadvantaged position, a goal they would never be able to achieve as single individuals. In the psychological and sociological literatures this phenomenon of rising up as a group is known as collective action and is defined as cooperative behavior aimed at achieving group goals (Simon et al., 1998; Tajfel & Turner, 1979). This form of action can be contrasted with individual action, which is behavior aimed at achieving personal goals. Because collective action often is the only way to achieve important societal goals (such as ousting a dictator), and because collective action can be associated with significant societal costs (as illustrated by the Parisian revolt) it is important to understand how individuals become motivated to engage in collective action (versus individual action) and, once they are committed to the collective goal, to understand how they make a choice between different means that can be used to reach this goal.

In this dissertation, these questions will be addressed using insights gained from work on Regulatory Focus Theory (Higgins, 1997), a theory that distinguishes between two types of motivation: one that is gain-oriented (promotion focus) and one that is loss-oriented (prevention focus). I will argue and demonstrate (1) that individuals under prevention focus - because they tend to act based on the negative aspects of the context - are more likely than individuals under promotion focus to respond to group-based disadvantage with collective action rather than individual action in most real-world societal contexts. Furthermore, I will argue and demonstrate that because individuals

under prevention focus experience highly important goals as necessities (compared to as desires under promotion focus), they should (2) commit to collective action even when the likelihood that it will succeed is low and (3) consider more hostile, aggressive forms of collective action as justified means when they place high importance on the goal of collective action. By contrast, I will argue and show that adoption of a promotion focus should lead individuals to only engage in collective action when the likelihood that through this action highly important goals will be achieved is high.

However, before we turn to Regulatory Focus Theory, introduce the predictions and discuss the results, we must first consider the ways in which individuals can respond to the disadvantaged position of their social group.

Responding to Collective Disadvantage

Earlier work has identified three dimensions on which responses to collective disadvantage can differ: the individual – collective dimension, the active – passive dimension, and the hostile – benevolent (also called normative – non-normative) dimension (Wright, Taylor, & Moghaddam, 1990). This three-dimensional framework describes how members of disadvantaged groups have to make three choices when deciding how to respond to the disadvantaged position of their group, and that the outcomes of these three decisions determine if, and how they will act. First of all, members of disadvantaged groups have to make a choice between taking individual and collective action (Tajfel & Turner, 1979; Wright, Taylor, & Moghaddam, 1990). Individual action is aimed at improving the personal societal position of the individual, and can take such forms as pursuing a university degree or asking one's boss for a raise. Collective action, by contrast, is aimed at improving the societal position of the group, not just of the individual, and can take such forms as collective protest and union membership. Thus, to understand the situations in which members of disadvantaged groups decide to take to the streets to engage collective protest, we need to understand why they have chosen to attempt to improve the disadvantaged position of their group instead of merely striving to improve their personal position (the usually preferred strategy, Wright, Taylor, & Moghaddam, 1990).

The second dimension, the active – passive dimension, indicates that at some point members of low status groups have to decide how much either individual or collective status improvement is worth to them. The resultant is their level of commitment: the costs they are personally willing to bear in order to further the goal of either personal or collective status improvement. Understanding individuals' level of commitment to the collective goal is important as some forms of collective action require more commitment than others. For example, signing a petition can be considered a relatively low cost, easy form of collective action, and therefore requires little commitment. By contrast, going on a hunger strike can be life threatening and can therefore be considered a high commitment form of collective action. At more intermediate levels of commitment to collective action one might consider volunteering (which costs time and effort) to further a collective goal. To understand individual engagement in different forms of collective action one thus has to keep in mind the different levels of commitment these forms of action require.

Lastly, responses to group-based disadvantage can vary in the extent to which they are hostile or benevolent. There are often individuals or groups (such as dictators and advantaged groups) that can be held responsible for the ingroup's collective disadvantage. In this situation, collective action may be directed at harming the interests of these individuals or groups, not just at furthering the interests of the ingroup. When this is the case, collective action can be considered hostile rather than benevolent. Examples of hostile forms of action are violent rioting (such as the events that unfolded in the Parisian suburbs in 2005) and civil war.

In summary, in order to understand why and how members of disadvantaged groups decide to engage in collective action we have to understand (1) why they did not choose to pursue individual position improvement instead of collective position improvement, (2) the extent to which they are willing to bear personal costs in order to further the collective goal and (3) the extent to which they are willing, or even motivated, to harm the interests of those held responsible for their group's disadvantage.

In this dissertation, I will investigate these issues using insights gained from Regulatory Focus Theory (Higgins, 1997), a theory that distinguishes between two different types of motivation: promotion focus under which strong motivation is experienced as desire, and prevention focus under which strong motivation is

experienced as necessity. I will argue and demonstrate that understanding individual tendencies towards either promotion focus or prevention focus is critical for understanding the situations under which individuals become committed to collective action and for understanding the means by which they pursue collective goals.

In the following section I will first introduce Regulatory Focus Theory. I will then explain how activation of the promotion and prevention focus affects (1) members of disadvantaged groups' decision between taking in individual and collective action, (2) their level of commitment to collective action, and (3) their choice between taking hostile and benevolent forms of collective action. I will argue that in most real-world societal contexts members of disadvantaged groups under prevention focus will prefer collective action over individual action, whereas adoption of a promotion focus will cause them to prefer individual action over collective action. I will then argue that because individuals under prevention focus perceive important goals as necessities, to the extent they see the goal of collective action as important they (1) should be willing to commit to this goal even if the likelihood that it will be reached is low and (2) should become willing to use more hostile means in pursuit of this goal. By contrast, I will argue that adoption of a promotion focus should lead individuals to only engage in collective action when the likelihood that through this action highly important goals will be achieved is high.

Regulatory Focus Theory

Regulatory Focus Theory (Higgins, 1997; 1998) distinguishes two motivational systems, promotion focus and prevention focus. Promotion and prevention focus can vary in strength momentarily, depending on the requirements of the situation. However, they also have a strong chronic component that is formed during early childhood (Higgins, Friedman, Harlow, Idson, Ayduk, & Taylor, 2001; Keller, 2008). The promotion and prevention systems differ in their function, lead to pursuit of different types of goals, to the use of different strategies during goal pursuit, as well as to different emotional reactions to success and failure of goal pursuit. Furthermore - and important for the current dissertation - promotion and prevention focus involve qualitatively different ways in which strong motivation is experienced (Shah & Higgins,

1997; Scholer, Zou, Fujita, Stroessner, & Higgins, 2010). Below, I will discuss each of these differences in more detail.

First of all, the promotion and prevention systems serve fundamentally different needs and are consequently associated with different types of goals. The promotion system serves the need for growth and accomplishment. Because this need is best served by the achievement of goals that have a gain/non-gain structure (i.e. goals for which achievement is more positive than non-achievement is negative, ideal goals) activation of the promotion focus motivates goal pursuit when there is opportunity for gain, and inhibits behavior when no opportunities for gain are present. The prevention system, by contrast, serves the individual's need for safety and security. Because the need for safety and security is best served by the achievement of goals with a loss/non-loss structure (i.e. goals for which non-achievement is more negative than achievement is positive, "ought" goals), activation of prevention focus motivates goal pursuit when there is a risk of loss. When loss has been averted, or no risk of loss is experienced, activation of the prevention system inhibits behavior.

Activation of the promotion and prevention systems also differentially affects the way in which individuals pursue their goals (Crowe & Higgins, 1997). Goal pursuit under promotion focus typically involves the use of an eager strategy in which matches to desired end states are approached. By contrast, goal pursuit under prevention focus typically involves using a cautious strategy in which mismatches to desired end-states are avoided. This difference in strategy results in two types of bias. Activation of promotion focus gives rise to what is known as "risky" perceptual and behavioral biases. These cause individuals to pay more attention to - and act on - the possibility of positive outcomes than on the risk of negative outcomes. By contrast, activation of the prevention system results in what is known as "conservative" perceptual and behavioral biases. These cause individuals to pay more attention to - and act on - the risk of negative outcomes than the possibility of positive outcomes. Thus, activation of the promotion or the prevention system also affects *how* individuals pursue goals, not just *which* goals are pursued, and creates attentional and behavioral biases towards the positive or the negative, respectively.

Furthermore, promotion and prevention focus are associated with different emotional reactions to success and failure of goal pursuit (Higgins, Bond, Klein, &

Strauman, 1987). While under promotion focus, individuals experience cheerfulness when they are successful in the pursuit of their goals, and dejection when they fail. By contrast, individuals under prevention focus experience feelings of relaxation and quiescence when success is experienced during goal-pursuit, and agitation when they fail.

Lastly, there is a difference in the subjective experience of strong motivation under promotion and prevention focus. When under promotion focus, outcomes that are deemed highly important are viewed with desire. Under prevention focus, by contrast, highly important outcomes are seen as necessities (Higgins, 1997; Scholer, Stroessner, & Higgins, 2008; Scholer et al., 2010; Shah & Higgins, 1997).

In the following sections I will explain how the insights gained from Regulatory Focus Theory can enrich our understanding of (1) individuals' choice to pursue individual-level or collective-level goals, (2) their level of commitment to collective action, and (3) their willingness to engage in hostile forms of collective action. In each of these three sections, I will first outline the predictions and then discuss the results of the studies that were carried out to test these predictions.

The Choice Between Individual Mobility and Collective Action

As explained earlier, to understand disadvantaged group-members' motivation to engage in collective action, we must first understand how they choose between group-level or individual-level goals. Several answers to this question have been offered in the social psychological literature (cf. Ellemers & Van Laar, 2011). For example, work in the social identity tradition has shown that the extent to which individuals identify with their group tends to strengthen their willingness to pursue group-level instead of individual-level goals (Doosje, Spears, & Ellemers, 2002; Ellemers, Spears, & Doosje, 1997; Tajfel & Turner, 1979). Work on social identity theory has also identified the degree to which societal group-boundaries are seen as permeable as a primary determinant of the decision between individual and collective action (cf. Ellemers, Van Knippenberg, & Wilke, 1990). The term permeability refers to the extent to which it is possible for members of disadvantaged groups to improve their status individually. Members of disadvantaged groups tend to prefer individual action over

collective action when the social system is considered “open” (i.e. as having a high degree of permeability) and prefer collective action over individual action when the social system is perceived to be closed (i.e. as having a very low degree of permeability) (Bettencourt, Charlton, Dorr, & Hume, 2001; Ellemers, Van Knippenberg, & Wilke, 1993; Ellemers, Wilke, & Van Knippenberg, 1993; Lalonde, & Silverman, 1994; Tajfel & Turner, 1979; Wright, Taylor, & Moghaddam, 1990).

In most societies, however, group boundaries are not completely open or closed but can be considered semi-permeable (Wright, 2001a). That is, although individual mobility for members of disadvantaged groups is possible in these societies, it is more difficult to achieve for them than for members of advantaged groups. In such semi-permeable systems - also called token systems - members of disadvantaged groups have to choose between taking collective action (to change the system) and individual action (to make use of the limited opportunities the system offers). Surprisingly, research has shown that even when the social system is almost completely impermeable, members of disadvantaged groups still prefer to take individual action over collective action (Boen & Vanbeselaere, 1998; Lalonde & Silverman, 1994; Reynolds, Oakes, Haslam, Nolan, & Dolnik, 2000; Wright, Taylor, & Moghaddam, 1990; Wright & Taylor, 1998; 1999; Wright, 1997).

According to Wright (1997; see also Danaher & Branscombe, 2010; Richard & Wright, 2010), this preference for individual mobility is caused by tokenism’s inherent ambiguity. Wright notes that token systems can be viewed in two ways. Viewed in a positive light, token systems provide opportunities for members of low status groups to climb the social ladder. Viewed negatively, however, token systems unfairly advantage members of high status groups over members of low status groups. Thus, as Wright has noted, the extent to which members of low status groups perceive and respond to the positive or the negative aspects of the token system should determine their choice between individual and collective action. To understand how members of disadvantaged groups decide between taking collective and individual action, then, we need to understand *how* they come to perceive, and act on the positive or on the negative aspects of the social system. I propose that individuals’ regulatory focus should play an important role in this process. Because the activation of promotion focus has been shown to result in a perceptual and behavioral bias towards the positive, individuals

under promotion focus should be likely to act on the *positive* opportunities for individual mobility that token systems offer, and therefore prefer individual mobility over collective action in such situations. By contrast, because activation of prevention focus has been shown to result in a perceptual and behavioral bias towards the negative, individuals under prevention focus should be likely to act on the *negative*, discriminatory aspects of the token system, and can hence be expected to prefer collective action over individual mobility in such situations.

The results of the two studies reported in Chapter 2 of this dissertation showed support for the prediction that adoption of a promotion focus should lead to more engagement in individual action under condition of tokenism than the adoption of a prevention focus. In both studies, the status system was manipulated to be either impermeable or semi-permeable (tokenism). Study 2.1 showed that individuals under chronic promotion focus had stronger preferences for individual action when the social system was semi-permeable than when it was impermeable. Individuals under chronic prevention focus, by contrast, preferred engaging in collective action over engaging in individual action, irrespective of the level of permeability. In Study 2.2, regulatory focus was manipulated and behavioral measures of individual and collective action were used. The results of this study showed that individuals under induced promotion focus spent more effort on achieving individual mobility and less effort on collective action when the system was partially open than when it was closed. Individuals under induced prevention focus, by contrast, engaged almost exclusively in collective action, irrespective of the level of induced permeability.

Thus, the results of these two experiments showed that, as predicted, the opportunities for individual mobility that are present in token systems cause individuals under promotion focus to engage in individual action and abandon collective efforts aimed at social change. Adoption of a prevention focus, by contrast, was shown to cause individuals to recognize and act on the negative, group-undermining aspects of such token systems and to try and change them through collective action. Thus, in societal contexts in which ambiguity exists surrounding the appropriateness of individual and collective action, adoption of a prevention focus causes individuals to engage in collective action, whereas adoption of a promotion focus causes them to seek individual mobility.

Commitment to Collective Action

As explained earlier, the second point we must take into account to understand disadvantaged group-members' collective action behavior is their commitment to the collective goal (i.e. the extent to which they are willing to bear personal costs in order to further the collective goal). Goal commitment has long been seen as the result of cost-benefit analyses (Fishbein & Ajzen, 1975). That is, individuals are thought to commit to goals when they highly value these goals, but then only to the extent that they believe these goals can be achieved. This approach has been applied to the study of collective action as well. In general, research investigating this possibility has shown that members of disadvantaged groups tend to commit to collective action to the extent that they place importance on its goal *and* believe that achievement of this goal through collective action is likely (Klandermans, 1984a; 1984b; 1986; Klandermans & Oegema, 1987; Mummendey, Kessler, Klink, & Mielke, 1998; Van Zomeren, Postmes, & Spears, 2008).

However, other research has demonstrated that these instrumental considerations tend to form rather weak predictors of commitment to collective action, and sometimes do not even relate to commitment to collective action at all (Fox-Cardamone, Hinkle & Hogue, 2000; Fox & Schofield, 1989; Kelly, 1993; Schofield & Pavelchak, 1989; Simon et al., 1998; Stürmer & Simon, 2004, 2005; Stürmer, Simon, Loewy, & Jorger, 2003). Thus, members of low status groups may sometimes commit to collective action even though they do not believe that important goals are likely to be achieved through this action.

I will argue here that differences in promotion and prevention focus among the groups and individuals involved in these actions can explain the relative instability of cost-benefit calculations as predictors of commitment to collective action. As explained before, individuals can perceive goals they deem highly important in two qualitatively distinct ways, depending on whether promotion focus or prevention focus is active. More precisely, research has shown that under promotion focus highly important goals are regarded with desire, whereas under prevention focus they are regarded as necessities (Shah & Higgins, 1997; Scholer, Stroessner, & Higgins, 2008; Scholer, Zou,

Fujita, Stroessner, & Higgins, 2010). This means that - assuming they highly value the goal of collective action - individuals under promotion focus would regard this goal as a desire, whereas individuals under prevention focus would regard it as a necessity. Because promotion oriented individuals regard highly important goals with desire, they should commit to these goals when there are opportunities for furthering them (Shah & Higgins, 1997). By contrast, because prevention oriented individuals regard highly important goals as necessities, they should commit to these goals even if the likelihood that they can be achieved is low. This analysis has important consequences for understanding the situations in which individuals commit to collective action. Specifically, it means that individuals under promotion focus should commit to collective action when they believe it will lead to highly valuable outcomes. By contrast, individuals under prevention focus should commit to collective action when they place high importance on its goal (causing them to see the achievement of this goal as necessary), even if the likelihood that this goal will be achieved is low.

The results of the three studies reported in Chapter 3 of this dissertation showed support for these predictions. Studies 3.1 through 3.3 demonstrated that adoption of a promotion focus, whether chronic or experimentally induced, causes individuals to commit to collective action only when the likelihood that through this action important collective goals will be achieved is high. Also as predicted, the results of these studies showed that individuals under prevention focus commit to collective action when they attach high importance to its goal, regardless of the extent to which they believe that attainment of this goal was likely.

Thus, the results of three experimental studies provided support for our prediction that prevention oriented individuals, because they see important goals as necessities, engage in collective action when they place high importance on its goal, even when the likelihood that this action will be successful is low. Furthermore, the results provided support for our prediction that promotion oriented individuals, who construe important goals as desires, become more instrumental in their decision to engage in collective action the more they place importance on its goal, only becoming willing to participate when the likelihood of success is high.

The Choice Between Hostile and Benevolent Collective Action

As explained earlier, the third point we must take into account to understand disadvantaged group-members' collective action behavior is what determines their choice between hostile and benevolent forms of collective action. Specifically, members of low status groups must decide to what extent they are willing to harm the interests of the ones they hold responsible for their group's disadvantage. When this willingness is high, hostile forms of collective action such as sabotage and terrorism may be seen as justified, or even preferred over more benevolent forms of collective action. Previous research has shown that both laypeople and experienced activists view these hostile forms of collective action as clearly different from the more benevolent ones (Corning & Myers, 2002; Lalonde & Cameron, 1994; Lalonde, Stroink, & Aleem, 2002; Scheepers, Spears, Doosje, & Manstead, 2006; Wolfsfeld, Opp, Dietz, & Green, 1994).

What is it then that convinces members of disadvantaged groups that more hostile, aggressive means of action are justified? Although to date there has been little research on this topic, the studies that have been carried out suggest that members of low status groups only turn to hostile collective action when their group lacks the power to improve its position in more benevolent ways, or when it is confronted with exceptionally unfair and immoral treatment (Gurr, 1993; Louis et al., 2011; Spears, Scheepers, & Van Zomeren, 2011; Tausch, Becker, Spears, Christ, Saab, Singh, & Siddiqui, in press; Wright et al., 1990a; 1990b). I will argue here that regulatory focus plays an important role in the willingness of members of disadvantaged groups to engage in hostile forms of collective action. As explained before, activation of a prevention focus leads to the experience of strong motivation as the pursuit of a necessity. When pursuing a necessity, it should not matter *how* a goal is achieved, *as long as it is achieved*. This means that individuals under a prevention focus, when they are convinced of the importance of the collective goal, should come to see the achievement of this goal as a necessity, causing them to see any means as justified in order to reach this necessary goal. Promotion focus, by contrast, should not lead to engagement in hostile forms of collective action: As explained before, activation of a promotion focus leads to initiation of goal-pursuit when opportunities for goal advancement are present, and to inhibition of goal pursuit when no opportunities for

goal advancement are present. Hostile forms of collective action typically arise in situations in which there is very little opportunity to further the collective goal (i.e., when the situation is desperate, Tausch et al., in press). In these situations activation of a promotion focus should thus lead to inhibition of the pursuit of the collective goal, rather than to engagement in hostile forms of collective action.

Support for these predictions was obtained in two studies that are reported in Chapter 4 of this dissertation. In these studies, the extent to which participants held a moral conviction about the fair treatment of their group was measured as an indicator of the importance they attached to collective action aimed at redressing their group's disadvantage (Skitka, Bauman, & Sargis, 2005; Skitka & Mullen, 2002). The results of the two studies offered support for the prediction that individuals under prevention focus, but not individuals under promotion focus, come to see hostile forms of collective action (i.e. vandalism, sabotage) as justified means when they see the goal of collective action as highly important.

Study 4.1 showed that the extent to which participants attached high moral importance to the goal of gender equality increased their support for both benevolent and hostile forms of collective action, but only among individuals with a strong chronic prevention focus. Promotion focus had no effect of the relation between the extent to which participants attached moral importance to gender equality and support for both types of collective action. The results of Study 4.2 replicated the effects of Study 4.1 and additionally showed that individuals under prevention focus who attach strong moral importance to the goal of collective action come to see the ends as justifying the means. More precisely, the results showed that although for individuals under prevention focus the extent to which they experienced strong moral objections to hostile forms of collective action undermined their support for such forms of collective action, this only happened among prevention oriented individuals that did not attach high moral importance to gender equality. When they attached high moral importance to the goal of gender equality, the strength of prevention oriented participants' moral objections to hostile forms of action had no effect on the support for these forms of action. Neither attaching moral importance to the goal of collective action, nor holding moral objections to hostile collective action affected support for either benevolent or hostile collective action among individuals under promotion focus.

Thus, the results of two studies provided support for our prediction that for individuals under prevention focus who attach high (moral) importance to the goal of collective action, this goal is perceived as a necessity, which causes them to see the ends as justifying the means, paving the way for engagement in hostile forms of collective action. Promotion focus had no comparable effect, suggesting that adoption of a promotion focus, leading to an experience of strong motivation as desire, is not associated with engagement in hostile forms of collective action.

Discussion

Together the results of the 7 studies reported in this dissertation point to prevention focus as the motivational system that is most conducive to collective action. Adoption of a prevention focus causes members of low status groups to work towards group status improvement, even if the permeability of the social system permits (token) members of their group to enter the high status group. Furthermore, individuals under prevention commit to collective action when they place importance on its goal, regardless of the likelihood that through this action important social change will be achieved. Individuals under promotion focus tend to be more instrumental in their responses to group-based disadvantage, only preferring collective action when individual action does not seem to provide a viable alternative path to status improvement and then only committing to collective action to the extent that it is expected to be effective.

To some, the prevention oriented commitment to collective action in situations in which its success seems unlikely might seem futile. However, all social movements have to start somewhere, and the individuals working at the roots of these movements must do so in spite of realizing that success, if possible at all, is very distant. Indeed, adoption of the instrumental mentality that was found to be characteristic of promotion focus seems to preclude engagement in collective action under these circumstances. Engaging in collective action in circumstances under which the ingroup seems to lack the power to change its societal position may be important for another reason as well. In this situation, the fact that the ingroup is relatively powerless (for example because of oppression by a high status outgroup, or by a dictatorial regime) creates a very

compelling reason for engaging in collective action in its own right. The instrumental mentality that is characteristic of promotion focus should lead individuals in these circumstances to accept their group's disadvantaged position. In the light of this, the finding that individuals under prevention focus come to see hostile forms of collective action as justified can be seen as something positive. That is, previous research has shown that members of disadvantaged groups only engage in hostile forms of collective action when they lack the power to change their position in democratic (Gurr, 1993), peaceful (Louis et al., 2011) or normative ways (Tausch et al., 2011). The results of the current studies suggest that it would be individuals under prevention focus, not those under promotion focus, who would be the ones to stand up to the oppression of their group by engaging in hostile forms of collective action in these situations.

Theoretical Implications

The results of the studies reported in this dissertation have important theoretical implications. Specifically, the results show how Regulatory Focus Theory can inform predictions made by Social Identity Theory (Tajfel & Turner, 1979). According to Social Identity Theory, three socio-structural variables impact on individuals' collective action behavior: the legitimacy, the stability, and the permeability of the status system (Ellemers, 1993; Tajfel & Turner, 1979; Wright, 2001b). Legitimacy refers to the bases on which status is distributed. When members of disadvantaged groups see these bases as unfair, and thus see the status system as illegitimate, this increases their motivation to change this system through collective action. Stability refers to the extent to which the status system is open to change. Low levels of societal stability tend to cause members of disadvantaged groups to try and achieve social change through collective action. Permeability refers to the extent to which it is possible for members of disadvantaged groups to raise their status individually. Permeability tends to cause members of disadvantaged groups to pursue individual mobility and to abandon collective efforts towards social change.

The resemblance of these socio-structural variables to the independent variables that were under investigation in the studies reported here makes it possible to integrate our findings with Social Identity Theory. First of all, the results of studies 2.1 and 2.2

showed directly how the opportunities for individual mobility that are offered by semi-permeable status systems cause promotion oriented individuals, not prevention oriented individuals, to prefer individual mobility over collective action. Secondly, the stability of the status system can be considered an important indicator of the likelihood that collective action will succeed that was under investigation in Studies 3.1 through 3.3 (Wright, 2001b; 2009). In this light, the results of Studies 3.1 to 3.3 suggest that that adoption of a promotion focus, but not the adoption of a prevention focus, determines the effects of the instability of the status system on the decision to engage in collective action. Finally, because individuals' perceptions of the illegitimacy of the status system depend on the extent to which status distribution is seen as breaking moral rules about how status should be distributed in society, perceptions of illegitimacy should cause individuals to attach moral value to the goal of collective action. This means that illegitimacy of the status system should motivate engagement in collective action among individuals under prevention focus, not among individuals under promotion focus.

The results of the studies also make it possible to integrate Regulatory Focus Theory with the recent Social Identity Model of Collective Action (SIMCA, Van Zomeren, Postmes, & Spears, 2008). According to this model, there are three distinct motivational pathways that lead members of low status groups to engage in collective action: the perceived injustice of the social system, the efficacy of their group, and the strength of their identification with the group. The perceived injustice of the social system closely resembles Social Identity Theory's concept of illegitimacy and is thought to motivate members of disadvantaged groups to engage in collective action through the emotion of group-based anger (Van Zomeren, Spears, Fischer, & Leach, 2004). The concept of group-efficacy refers to individuals' belief that their group is able to perform the actions needed to achieve social change, thereby complementing SIT's socio-structural variable of instability as an indicator of the likelihood of social change (Wright, 2001b; 2009). Finally, like SIT, SIMCA specified the extent to which individuals identify with their group as an important predictor of members of disadvantaged groups' willingness to engage in collective action. Since injustice and group-efficacy should strongly inform the moral importance and likelihood of social change respectively, it is possible to integrate Regulatory Focus Theory into SIMCA.

More precisely, the pathway of perceived injustice should cause individuals to attach high moral importance to the goal of collective action and thus motivate engagement in collective action among individuals under prevention focus (see also Sassenberg & Hansen, 2007). Furthermore, the results of the studies discussed here suggest that the motivating effects of group-efficacy should depend on the strength of individuals' promotion focus. At present, it is not yet clear how regulatory focus influences the effect of identification on engagement in collective action, and this question thus forms an interesting avenue for further research.

Practical Implications

The results of the studies discussed in this dissertation also have important practical implications. Specifically, they suggest that in most social circumstances, individuals or groups looking to mobilize others into engaging in collective action would do well to frame their message in terms fitting, or even eliciting, a prevention focus (for example by framing its goal as an "ought", highlighting the negative consequences of failing to achieve social change). The results of the current studies suggest that doing so would motivate members of low status groups to (1) prefer collective action even when individual mobility provides a seemingly alternative route to status improvement, and (2) to commit to collective action even when the likelihood that this action will succeed is low. This finding is important because previous research has identified societal permeability (i.e. tokenism, Wright et al., 1990) and low expectations of success (Hornsey et al., 2006) as important reasons for people to abandon collective efforts to achieve social change.

However, in some exceptional situations, individuals committed to collective action and looking to mobilize others to their cause might do well to frame their message in terms fitting, or eliciting, a promotion focus. For example, if it suddenly becomes apparent to people that, contrary to what was previously believed, social change is possible, then taking advantage of the promotion focus might be very effective. For example, the people of Egypt took to the streets en masse when events in the country of Tunisia made it clear that it was possible to achieve social change through collective effort. Framing mobilizing messages in promotion oriented terms (for

example by framing its goal as an “ideal”, highlighting the positive consequences of achieving social change) could be very effective in such situations.

Avenues for Further Research

Even though the present work connected regulatory focus to a broad array of predictors of collective action as well as to different outcome variables related to this form of behavior, there are still more ways in which Regulatory Focus Theory can be integrated with work on collective action. First of all, the current work has not examined the relation between regulatory focus and social identification in the decision to engage in collective action. Work on collective action has shown that politicized identification, the extent to which individuals identify with a social movement or with its goals, forms one of the strongest predictors of engagement in collective action behavior (Bliuc, McGarty, Reynolds, & Mutele, 2007; Sturmer et al., 1998; Van Zomeren et al., 2008). Future research could investigate the role of promotion and prevention focus in the way politicized identification motivates collective action. The results of some recent work suggest that specific moral convictions lie at the heart of politicized identities (e.g. a moral conviction about gender equality forms the core of feminist identification, Zaal, Saab, O’Brien, & Barnett, 2011, but see Van Zomeren, Postmes, & Spears, in press). Connecting these findings to the results of Chapter 4, which showed that moral considerations motivate collective action through the prevention system, would thus suggest that politicized identification motivates collective action through the prevention system as well.

Another interesting possibility for future research lies in further integrating Regulatory Focus Theory with work showing that hostile forms of collective action tend to arise only when more benevolent forms of action are deemed to be ineffective (Gurr, 1993; Louis et al., 2011; Tausch et al., in press). In Chapter 4 of this dissertation, I show that individuals under a prevention focus who see the goal of collective action as a necessity come to support the use of hostile forms of collective action. However, supporting hostile collective action does not necessarily imply actual participation in this form of behavior. Furthermore, activation of the prevention focus has been shown to cause individuals to become risk averse (Crowe & Higgins), which could demotivate

prevention oriented individuals from engaging in hostile collective action, as this course of action arguably carries considerable risk. However, there is evidence that individuals under prevention focus are not always risk averse. Specifically, work by Scholer and colleagues (2010) has shown that prevention oriented individuals, when pursuing goals they deem necessities, are willing to take risks when safe avenues for goal achievement are closed. This means that prevention oriented individuals, when they construe the goal of collective action as a necessity, should be willing to personally engage in hostile (risky) forms of collective action when benevolent (safe) avenues towards social change are closed. We are currently in the process of investigating this possibility (Zaal, Van Laar, Ståhl, Ellemers & Derks, 2011b).

Conclusion

This dissertation discussed the results of a research program that examined the effects of promotion and prevention focus on when and how members of disadvantaged groups decide to engage in collective action. I argued that to be able to answer these questions, we need to understand (1) how members of disadvantaged groups decide between striving for individual and collective status improvement, (2) how they come to commit to collective action, and (3) how they choose between hostile and benevolent forms of collective action. The results of the 7 studies discussed in this dissertation show that knowledge of individual promotion and prevention focus is crucial for understanding members of low status groups' collective action behavior. Specifically, adoption of a promotion focus was shown to make members of disadvantaged groups instrumental in responding to their group's disadvantage, causing them (1) to prefer individual action over collective action when the social system provided opportunities for token mobility, and (2) to only commit to collective action when the likelihood that this action would be successful was high. Promotion focus was unrelated to support for hostile forms of collective action. Adoption of a prevention focus, by contrast was shown to (1) cause members of low status groups to choose collective action, even when individual mobility provided a different route to status improvement. Furthermore, to the extent that the goal of collective action was seen as important, adoption of a prevention focus was shown (2) to cause members of disadvantaged

groups to commit to collective action, even when the likelihood of social change was low, and (3) to come to see hostile forms of collective action as justified means to reach the collective goal. In sum, the results of the current dissertation show a strong connection between the prevention focus and the decision to engage in different forms of collective action.

A note to the reader

The empirical chapters of this dissertation (Chapters 2 to 4) were written as separate journal articles in collaboration with Colette van Laar, Tomas Ståhl, Naomi Ellemers and Belle Derks. As a result, these chapters have been written in the first-person plural and may show some overlap in places. Footnotes are included at the end of each chapter.

