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## Collective action : a regulatory focus perspective

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## Chapter 4:

By any means necessary:

The effects of regulatory focus and moral conviction  
on hostile and benevolent forms of collective  
action <sup>11</sup>



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## Introduction

In late 2005, youths from the poor suburban housing projects of Paris took to the streets to protest against their seemingly hopeless position. These protests quickly turned violent. Rioting soon spread to other French cities. At the end of the civil unrest, weeks later, thousands of cars had been burned and damage was estimated to be over \$230 million (Landler, 2005). As this example demonstrates, people sometimes respond to the disadvantaged position of their group by engaging in violent protests and riots. At other times they do so by participating in more peaceful forms of protest. In the current research we investigate how individuals decide between taking peaceful vs. more violent forms of collective action from the perspective of regulatory focus theory (Higgins, 1997). By taking a self-regulatory perspective in our investigation of collective action, we aim to provide a further understanding of when and why members of low status groups sometimes choose to go beyond the rules of society, or even beyond what they themselves would normally find morally acceptable, to try to improve their group's disadvantaged position.

We argue that perceiving immoral treatment of the ingroup should form a strong motivation to engage in collective action among prevention-oriented individuals but not among promotion-oriented individuals. Crucially, we propose that a prevention orientation entails the kind of rationality in which strong motivation is experienced as necessity. This "necessity" is predicted to cause the prevention-oriented - when they hold a strong moral conviction about the fair treatment of their group - to perceive any means as justified in order to achieve group status improvement. This should also be true for those means that are intended to harm the interests of those held responsible for the group's disadvantage: hostile or non-normative forms of collective action (Wright, Taylor, & Moghaddam, 1990).

In the next section we discuss hostile and benevolent forms of collective action. We then turn to work on moral conviction and regulatory focus and explain how integrating insights from these fields can help further our understanding of the willingness to engage in hostile and benevolent forms of collective action.

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## **Hostile and Benevolent Forms of Collective Action**

Collective action – cooperative effort towards group status improvement– can be a powerful instrument for low status groups to improve their societal position (Tajfel & Turner, 1979). In the last decades, a large volume of social psychological research has attempted to identify factors that motivate members of low status groups to engage in this form of behaviour (cf. Ellemers, Spears, & Doosje, 1997; Ellemers, Wilke, & Van Knippenberg, 1993; Klandermans, 1984; Mummendey, Kessler, Klink, & Mielke, 1999; Simon et al., 1998; van Zomeren, Spears, Fischer, & Leach, 2004). This research has taught us much about the conditions under which low status group members become motivated to improve the societal position of their group. However, most of this work has focused on the motivation to engage in relatively benevolent responses to group-based disadvantage, such as signing petitions, participating in peaceful demonstrations and aligning oneself with legitimate political movements. In doing so, social psychological research has provided less insight into the willingness to engage in more hostile forms of collective action that are explicitly aimed at harming the interests of those held responsible for the group's disadvantage, such as committing acts of vandalism and participating in riots (Brewer, 1999, but see Louis, Taylor, & Douglas, 2005; Reicher & Levine, 1994; Wright, Taylor & Moghaddam, 1990a; 1990b; Wright & Taylor, 1998 for notable exceptions, see Gurr, 1993 for a sociological account).

Importantly, previous work has found that both activists and lay people perceive these hostile forms of collective action to be clearly distinct from the more benevolent ones, indicating that individuals committed to collective action are not always willing to turn to hostile means such as rioting and vandalism to reach their goals (Corning & Myers, 2002; Lalonde & Cameron, 1994; Lalonde, Stroink, & Aleem, 2002; Scheepers, Spears, Doosje, & Manstead, 2006; Wolfsfeld, Opp, Dietz, & Green, 1994). What is it that makes some members of low status groups decide that achievement of group status improvement justifies the use of these extreme, hostile means? Existing research on this topic suggests that people may only become willing to engage in hostile forms of collective action when their group is confronted with exceptionally unfair and immoral treatment (Wright et al., 1990a; 1990b). For this reason we believe that in order to understand the willingness to take hostile forms of collective action we must first

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examine the role of morality in the decision to engage in collective action in more detail.

### **Moral Conviction**

The extent to which individuals hold a moral conviction about the fair treatment of their group should form a strong motivator of collective action. The term moral conviction refers to a strong and absolute belief that something is right or wrong, moral or immoral (Mullen & Skitka, 2006; Skitka, 2002; Skitka et al., 2005; Skitka & Bauman, 2008; Skitka & Mullen, 2002). Moral convictions differ from other strong, but non-moral attitudes in that they are seen as universally applicable truths. For example, the preference for one form of music over another can be a strong attitude, but as a matter of personal taste or opinion it is not a moral attitude (Spears, Ellemers, & Doosje, 2009). By contrast, attitudes about issues such as abortion, ethnic cleansing and murder are usually considered “moral” in nature in that they refer to the distinction between right and wrong. Individuals holding these moral attitudes 1) believe that their stance reflects what is objectively right, not just personal opinion, 2) contend that others, regardless of their background, should share their stance on these issues and, 3) experience feelings of anger when confronted with what is seen as “immorality” (Skitka et al., 2005). Moreover, moral conviction, more than other types of attitudes, carries within it the obligation to act (Skitka et al., 2005), and is even seen to justify aggression against those who do not share the same moral convictions (Mullen & Skitka, 2006). We apply these individual-level findings to understand group-level concerns. Based on these findings we argue that when group members who hold a moral conviction about the fair treatment of their group are confronted with unfair group-based treatment, they should experience group-based anger and feel an inner obligation to act against the disadvantage (Van Zomeren, Postmes, & Spears, in press). Both of these experiences are considered to be strong motivators of collective action (Stürmer, Simon, Loewy, & Jörger, 2003; Van Zomeren, et al., 2004).

However, we do not believe that having a strong moral conviction about the fair treatment of the group motivates actual engagement in collective action for all individuals or in all situations. In the next section we will argue that because moral

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considerations function as “oughts” (Higgins, 1987; Skitka, 2003), their motivating force should depend on the strength of individuals’ prevention focus. We will then argue that prevention-oriented individuals who engage in collective action out of their moral convictions about the fair treatment of their group view the goal of this behaviour as a necessity, causing them to see the ends as justifying the means and paving the way for hostile forms of collective action.

### **A Self-Regulation Approach to Collective Action**

Regulatory focus theory (Higgins, 1997) distinguishes between two motivational systems that regulate goal directed behaviour: the prevention system and the promotion system. These systems affect which kinds of goals are pursued and how the motivation to pursue these goals is experienced. Prevention and promotion focus vary in strength both chronically across individuals and momentarily across situations (Higgins, Friedman, Harlow, Idson, & Ayduk, 2001).

We argue that holding a moral conviction about the fair treatment of one’s group should predict engagement in collective action in response to group-based disadvantage among individuals with a strong prevention focus. Furthermore, we argue that this moral conviction should be less important in determining the way individuals with a weak prevention focus or individuals with a promotion focus respond to group-based disadvantage. Adoption of a prevention focus indicates a concern with safety and the fulfilment of duties and responsibilities, also referred to as “oughts”. Under prevention focus, strong motivation is experienced as the necessity of goal attainment, which causes unsuccessful goal pursuit to be seen as more negative than successful pursuit is seen as positive (Higgins, 1987; Idson, Liberman, & Higgins, 2000; Shah & Higgins, 1997). Notably, moral considerations function as “oughts” (Higgins, 1987; Skitka, 2003; Skitka & Mullen, 2002), as immorality is judged to be more negative than morality is judged to be positive (Skowronski & Carlston, 1987; 1989). Viewed in this way, moral conviction forms the strong motivation to pursue specific prevention-relevant goals. The fact that moral considerations function as oughts implies that the motivating effects of moral convictions should depend on the strength of the individual’s prevention focus. Thus, we predict that holding a moral conviction about

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the fair treatment of one's group should motivate collective action to redress to group-based disadvantage among individuals with a strong prevention focus but not among individuals with a weak prevention focus (*Hypothesis 1*).

By contrast, adoption of a promotion focus indicates a concern with gain and the achievement of growth and accomplishment goals rather than duties and responsibilities. Promotion-oriented individuals are motivated to pursue ideals, or maximal goals. A promotion orientation involves experiencing strong motivation as desire which causes successful goal pursuit to be seen as more positive than unsuccessful pursuit is seen as negative. (Higgins, 1987; Idson, Liberman, & Higgins, 2000; Shah & Higgins, 1997). Thus, because moral considerations function as "oughts" and not as "ideals", we don't anticipate that holding a moral conviction about the fair treatment of the group should motivate collective action to redress group-based disadvantage among individuals under promotion focus.

### **Hostile Forms of Collective Action**

We propose that holding a strong moral conviction about the fair treatment of their group should cause prevention-oriented individuals to overcome normative objections (and even their own moral objections) to hostile forms of collective action. Prevention-oriented individuals construe strong goals, such as those mandated by moral conviction, as necessities (Scholer, Zou, Fujita, Stroessner, & Higgins, 2010; Shah & Higgins, 1997; Zaal, Van Laar, Ståhl, Ellemers, & Derks, in press, a). When pursuing a goal of which the achievement is seen as a necessity, it should not matter how this goal is achieved, as long as it is achieved. This means that prevention-oriented individuals (but not promotion-oriented individuals) who hold a strong moral conviction about the fair treatment of their group should consider hostile forms of collective action as justified means to a necessary end. Thus, we predict that for prevention-oriented individuals, holding a strong moral conviction about the fair treatment of their group should motivate support for hostile forms of collective action (*Hypothesis 2*).



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## Overview of the Studies

Two studies were conducted to test the predictions concerning individual prevention focus and engagement in different forms of collective action. We used a paradigm in which women were made aware of the discrimination of their group in work situations. They were then asked to indicate their support for several hostile and benevolent forms of collective reactions to this discrimination (Corning & Myers, 2002; Wolfsfeld, Opp, Dietz, & Green, 1994). The extent to which participants supported these hostile and benevolent forms of collective action served as the dependent variable in both studies.

We used different ways to examine how support for hostile and benevolent forms of collective reactions to social discrimination among women is affected by regulatory focus and by the strength of their moral conviction about the equality between men and women. In Study 4.1, chronic individual differences in promotion and prevention focus and the strength of participants' moral conviction about the equality between men and women were assessed as independent variables. In Study 4.2, we used a situational induction of regulatory focus, instead of assessing it as an individual difference variable, and again assessed naturally occurring variations in the strength of participants' moral conviction about the fair treatment of their group as an independent variable. In addition, we included an assessment of moral objection to hostile forms of collective action as a potential moderator.

### Study 4.1

#### Method

##### Participants

One hundred and eighty-two female undergraduate students from Leiden University ( $M_{\text{age}} = 20.44$ ,  $SD = 2.24$ ) participated for €3 or course credit.

##### Procedure

Participants were informed that they would be taking part in two unrelated studies: a short survey and an experiment. The short survey consisted of our pre-

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measure of regulatory focus. We measured participants' chronic promotion ( $\alpha = .81$ ) and prevention focus ( $\alpha = .76$ ) with a shortened version of the Lockwood scale (Lockwood, Jordan & Kunda, 2002).<sup>12</sup> Participants were then informed that the first study was completed and that the second study would now commence. Next, they read a research report supposedly written by two well-known Dutch research organizations, which was constructed to make participants aware of the disadvantaged position of their group (women) in work situations. Participants read that women earn approximately 7 percent less than men for the same work, and receive fewer opportunities for job advancement.

### Measures

All variables were measured on 9-point Likert scales ranging from 1 (*completely disagree*) to 9 (*completely agree*). The correlations between the measures are included in Table 4.1.

*The strength of participants' moral conviction* about gender equality was measured using five items (e.g. "Equality between men and women is part of the core of my moral convictions",  $\alpha = .76$ ).

*Support for benevolent forms of collective action* was measured by asking participants to report the extent to which they supported four different types of benevolent collective action (e.g. "Becoming a member of a collective action group that takes a stance against gender discrimination",  $\alpha = .92$ ).

*Support for hostile forms of collective action* was measured by asking participants to report the extent to which they supported four different types of hostile (and illegal) action (e.g. "Committing sabotage within discriminating organizations",  $\alpha = .78$ ).<sup>13</sup>

### Results

We used hierarchical regression analyses to test the hypothesis that prevention focus influences the effect of the strength of the moral conviction about gender equality on support for hostile and benevolent forms of collective action. For the analyses of both dependent variables the standardized promotion and prevention measures and the standardized measure of moral conviction about the gender equality were entered into

the analysis in the first step. In the second step, the two two-way interaction terms between the moral conviction measure and each of the regulatory focus measures were included.

Table 4.1. *Correlations between measures (Study 4.1)*

	2.	3.	4.	5.
1. <i>Prevention focus</i>	.12	.14	.25***	.14
2. <i>Promotion focus</i>		.28***	.12	.03
3. <i>Moral conviction about gender equality</i>			.26***	.31***
4. <i>Support for benevolent collective action</i>				.37***
5. <i>Support for hostile collective action</i>				

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

### **Support for benevolent forms of collective action**

Analysis of the support for benevolent forms of collective action showed the predicted interaction between prevention focus and the strength of participants' moral conviction about gender equality,  $B = .23$ ,  $SE = .10$ ,  $F(1, 176) = 5.47$ ,  $p = .02$ ,  $\Delta R^2 = .03$ , see Figure 4.1. Simple slope analyses of this effect (Aiken & West, 1991) revealed that the strength of participants' moral conviction about gender equality increased support for benevolent forms of collective action among participants high in prevention focus (+1  $SD$ ),  $B = .54$ ,  $SE = .13$ ,  $F(1, 176) = 16.10$ ,  $p < .001$ , but not among participants low in prevention focus, (-1  $SD$ ),  $B = .09$ ,  $SE = .16$ ,  $F(1, 176) < 1$ ,  $p = .56$ . Promotion focus was unrelated to support for benevolent forms of collective action,  $B = .02$ ,  $SE = .11$ ,  $F(1, 176) < 1$ ,  $p = .84$ , as was its interaction with the strength of participants' moral conviction about gender equality,  $B = -.11$ ,  $SE = .09$ ,  $F(1, 176) = 1.47$ ,  $p = .23$ .

### **Support for Hostile forms of Collective Action**

Analysis of the support for hostile forms of collective action measure showed the predicted interaction between prevention focus and the strength of participants' moral conviction about gender equality,  $B = .30$ ,  $SE = .10$ ,  $F(1, 176) = 8.29$ ,  $p = .004$ ,

$\Delta R^2 = .04$ , see Figure 4.2. As expected, simple slope analyses revealed that the strength of participants' moral conviction about gender equality increased support for hostile forms of collective action among individuals high in prevention focus, (+1 *SD*),  $B = .73$ ,  $SE = .14$ ,  $F(1, 178) = 26.82$ ,  $p < .001$ , but not among participants low in prevention focus, (-1 *SD*),  $B = .13$ ,  $SE = .16$ ,  $F < 1$ . Promotion focus was unrelated to support for hostile forms of collective action,  $B = -.12$ ,  $SE = .12$ ,  $F(1, 176) = 1.05$ ,  $p = .31$ , as was its interaction with the strength of participants' moral conviction about gender equality,  $B = -.01$ ,  $SE = .09$ ,  $F < 1$ .

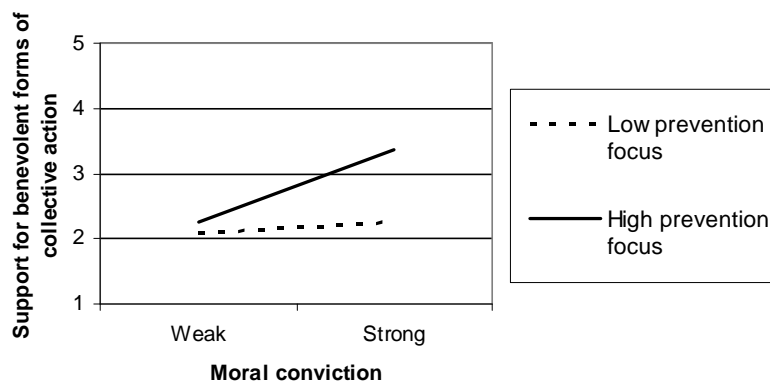


Figure 4.1. Support for benevolent forms of collective action as a function of prevention focus and the strength of the moral conviction about the gender equality (Study 4.1).

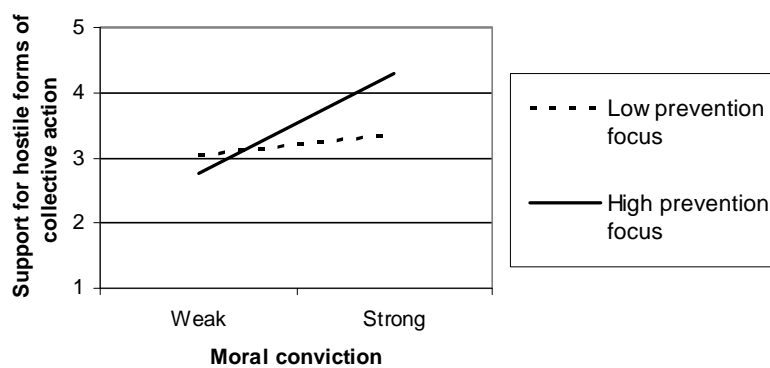


Figure 4.2. Support for hostile forms of collective action as a function of prevention focus and the strength of the moral conviction about gender equality (Study 4.1).

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## Discussion and Introduction to Study 4.2

The results of this first study provide initial evidence for the hypothesis that support for both hostile and benevolent forms of collective action in response to social discrimination can best be seen as prevention-oriented response to perceived immorality. As expected, among participants high in prevention focus, the strength of moral conviction about gender equality increased endorsement of both hostile and benevolent forms of collective action. Among participants with low prevention focus, the strength of this moral conviction had no effect on the endorsement of either form of collective action. Also as expected, promotion focus did not influence the relation between the strength of the moral conviction about gender equality and the support for either form of collective action.

However this first study does have some limitations. First of all, the fact that regulatory focus was assessed, rather than manipulated, leaves open another explanation of the results. Previous work has shown that becoming aware of being a member of a disadvantaged group in itself can cause individuals to adopt a prevention focus (Oyserman, Uskul, Yoder, Nesse & Williams, 2007; Seibt & Forster, 2004). Therefore, it could be the chronic awareness of being a member of a disadvantaged group, rather than the chronic prevention focus resulting from it, that causes support for hostile forms of collective action when this disadvantage is seen as immoral. In addition, recent work has identified some shortcomings of the Lockwood scale that was used as a measure of regulatory focus in Study 4.1 (Summerville & Roese, 2008). For these reasons a different, experimental, operationalisation of regulatory focus was employed in Study 4.2

A second concern with the current study is that, based on its results, we cannot yet rule out that it is the *perceived importance* of countering gender inequality rather than the *moral conviction* with which this goal is pursued, that is responsible for the effects (cf. Skitka, Bauman, & Sargis, 2005). For this reason, we controlled for the effects of the perceived importance of countering gender inequality when examining the influence of moral convictions in Study 4.2.

In addition, an important question that is left unanswered by Study 4.1 concerns the moral objections people may have against hostile forms of collective action. If prevention-oriented individuals base their decision of whether or not to support hostile

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forms of collective action on moral reasoning, then at the same time these individuals may be deterred from the use of such forms of collective action by the perception that these behaviours are immoral. While we acknowledge this possibility, we also argue that moral objections to hostile forms of collective action will not always decrease support for this form of action among prevention-oriented individuals. More specifically, we argue that for prevention-oriented individuals strong motivation (such as the motivation to pursue gender equality for those who hold this goal with moral conviction) is experienced as necessity of goal attainment (Shah & Higgins, 1997; Zaal et al., in press, a). We argue that this perceived necessity of goal attainment may supersede moral objections to the way these goals are pursued, causing individuals to believe that *in this particular instance* the use of “immoral” hostile forms of collective action is justified. Therefore, we predict that holding moral objections to hostile forms of collective action should decrease support for these forms of action among prevention-oriented individuals without a strong moral conviction about gender equality, but not among prevention-oriented individuals holding a strong moral conviction about gender equality. Among individuals under promotion focus, neither the strength of moral objections to hostile forms of collective action nor the strength of moral convictions about gender equality were expected to influence support for hostile forms of collective action. These predictions were investigated in Study 4.2.

## Study 4.2

### Method

#### Participants and Design

One hundred and fifty-one female undergraduate students from Leiden University ( $M_{\text{age}} = 20.30$ ,  $SD = 2.28$ ) participated for €3.50 or course credit. They were randomly assigned to the conditions of a one-factor (regulatory focus: promotion or prevention) between-participants experiment. The strength of participants' moral convictions about gender equality and the strength of their moral objections to hostile forms of collective action were measured as independent variables. As in Study 4.1, support for benevolent (behavioural) and hostile forms of collective action served as the dependent variables.<sup>15</sup>

### Procedure

We used the same procedure as in Study 4.1, with two differences. First, we manipulated (instead of measured) participants' regulatory focus. Second, we included a measure of moral objections to hostile forms of collective action. We manipulated regulatory focus with an adapted version of the procedure suggested by Higgins and colleagues (Higgins, Roney, Crowe, & Hymes, 1994; Zaal et al., in press, a). Prior to being presented with the other materials, participants wrote about what they would ideally like to (promotion condition) or felt they ought to (prevention condition) achieve in their working life. According to Higgins and colleagues (1994) the priming of ideals leads individuals to adopt a promotion focus, whereas the priming of oughts causes individuals to adopt a prevention focus. Participants then read the same research report about the discrimination of women in work situations as in Study 4.1.

### Measures

All variables were measured on 9-point Likert scales ranging from 1 (completely disagree) to 9 (*completely agree*) unless otherwise reported. The correlations between the measures are included in Table 4.2.

*The importance of countering gender inequality* was measured with three items (e.g. "Countering gender discrimination is very important to me",  $\alpha = .85$ ).

*The strength of moral conviction about the gender equality* was measured with five items (e.g. "Equality between men and women is part of the core of my moral convictions",  $\alpha = .72$ ).<sup>14</sup>

*Moral objections to hostile forms of collective action* were measured with four items (e.g. "Harming the interests of organizations that discriminate is morally objectionable",  $\alpha = .63$ ).

To measure *support for benevolent collective action*, we gave participants the option to sign a petition calling for measures against gender discrimination within organizations.

*Support for hostile forms of collective action* was measured by asking participants to report the extent to which they supported five different forms of hostile action (e.g. "Committing sabotage at discriminating organizations",  $\alpha = .71$ ).

Table 4.2. *Correlations between measures (Study 4.2)*

	2.	3.	4.	5.
1. Moral conviction about gender equality	.43***	-.03.	.27***	.23**
2. Importance of countering gender inequality		-.16	.21*	.17*
3. Moral objections to hostile collective action			-.17*	-.04
4. Support for hostile collective action				.20*
5. Signed the petition (benevolent collective action)				

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

## Results

### Manipulation Check

To check whether or not the manipulation of regulatory focus was successful, seven judges, who were blind to condition, independently rated the focus of the paragraphs that the participants wrote as -1 (prevention-oriented), 0 (unclear), or +1 (promotion-oriented). The judgments showed a very high degree of consistency ( $\alpha = .94$ ) and were thus collapsed into a single bipolar variable which reflects the mean judgment of the coders. High scores on this variable indicate promotion-oriented paragraphs, low scores prevention-oriented paragraphs. Analysis of variance showed that the essays of participants in the promotion condition,  $M = .75$ ,  $SD = .31$ , were coded as significantly more promotion focused (and thus also as less prevention focused) than those of participants in the prevention condition,  $M = -.57$ ,  $SD = .59$ ,  $F(1, 149) = 301.60$ ,  $p < .001$ ,  $\eta^2 = .67$ . We therefore concluded that the manipulation of regulatory focus was successful.

### Benevolent Collective Action

Benevolent collective action (signing the petition) was analyzed using logistic regression. Ninety-six participants (out of a total of 151) signed the petition (64%). The effect-coded manipulation of regulatory focus (-1 for the prevention condition, 1 for the promotion condition), the standardized moral conviction scale and their interaction term were entered into the analysis. To rule out the possibility that the importance of



countering gender inequality - instead of the strength of participants' moral conviction about gender equality - could be responsible for the effects, we entered into the analysis this variable and its interaction with the manipulation of regulatory focus (see Yzerbyt, Muller & Judd, 2004).<sup>16</sup> The results revealed the predicted interaction between the strength of participants' moral conviction about gender equality and the manipulation of regulatory focus, *Hypothesis 1*,  $B = -.52$ ,  $SE = .23$ ,  $\chi^2(1) = 5.20$ ,  $p = .02$ , see Figure 4.3. As anticipated, moral conviction increased the odds of signing the petition among participants in the prevention condition,  $B = 1.08$ ,  $SE = .38$ ,  $\chi^2(1) = 8.22$ ,  $p = .004$ , but not among participants in the promotion condition,  $B = .05$ ,  $SE = .25$ ,  $\chi^2(1) = 0.04$ ,  $p = .84$ . No other effects reached significance,  $p$ 's  $> .22$ .<sup>17</sup>

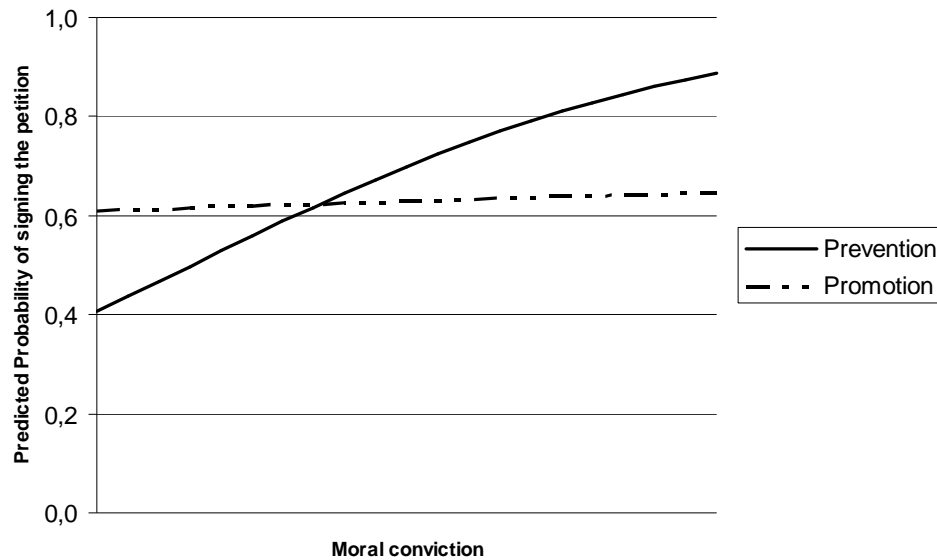


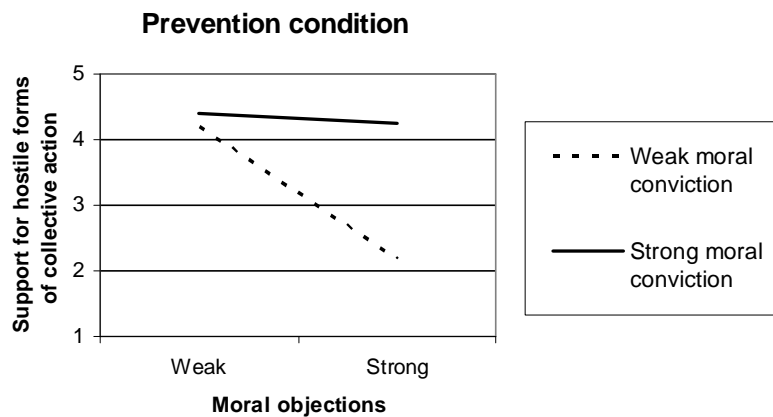
Figure 4.3. The predicted probability of signing the petition as a function of the strength of the moral conviction about gender equality in the promotion and prevention conditions (Study 4.2).

### Support for Hostile Forms of Collective Action

Support for hostile forms of collective action was analyzed using regression analysis. The effect-coded manipulation, the standardized moral conviction and moral objection scales, as well as their two- and three-way interaction terms were entered into the analysis as independent variables. We entered the standardized measure of the importance of countering gender inequality and its two- and three-way interactions with

the manipulation of regulatory focus and the strength of moral objection measure into the analysis as covariates.<sup>18</sup>

The results revealed a three-way interaction between the manipulation of regulatory focus, the strength of moral conviction about gender equality and the strength of moral objections to hostile forms of collective action on the support for these forms of action,  $B = -.25$ ,  $SE = .11$ ,  $F(1, 139) = 5.07$ ,  $p = .03$ ,  $\Delta R^2 = .03$ . To break down this interaction, we performed two additional regression analyses: one for the promotion condition and one for the prevention condition. In both of these analyses, we entered the strength of moral conviction about gender equality, the strength of moral objections to hostile forms of collective action, and their interaction term into the analysis while controlling for the effect of the perceived importance of countering gender inequality and its interaction with the strength of moral objections to hostile forms of collective action. The results revealed the predicted interaction in the prevention condition between the strength of moral conviction about gender equality and the strength of moral objections to hostile forms of collective action on the support for these forms of action,  $B = .47$ ,  $SE = .16$ ,  $F(1, 64) = 8.57$ ,  $p = .005$ ,  $\Delta R^2 = .08$ , see Figure 4.4.



*Figure 4.4.* Support for hostile forms of collective action as a function of the strength of moral objections to these forms of action and the strength of moral conviction about gender equality in the prevention condition (Study 4.2).

Simple slope analyses showed that in the prevention condition, moral objections to hostile forms collective action only decreased support for these forms of action

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among individuals with weak moral conviction about gender equality,  $B = -1.01$ ,  $SE = .25$ ,  $F(1, 64) = 16.81$ ,  $p < .001$ . As hypothesized, moral objections to hostile forms of collective action did not affect support for these forms of action among individuals with a strong moral conviction about gender equality,  $B = -.08$ ,  $SE = .21$ ,  $F < 1$ . In the promotion condition, support for hostile forms of collective action was influenced neither by the strength of moral conviction about gender equality, nor by the strength of moral objections to hostile forms of collective action, nor by their interaction (all  $F$ 's  $< 1$ ). Importantly, neither the perceived importance of countering gender inequality, nor any of its interactions with the manipulation of regulatory focus and/or with the strength of moral objections to hostile forms of collective action were significantly related to the support for these forms of collective action, all  $F$ 's  $< 1.87$ ,  $p$ 's  $> .17$ . Thus, the results reported above cannot be attributed to differences in the perceived importance of countering gender inequality.

## **Discussion**

The results of Study 4.2 provide additional evidence for the prediction that support for hostile and benevolent forms of collective action in response to social discrimination can best be seen as a prevention-oriented responses to perceived immorality. As predicted, holding a strong moral conviction about gender equality was shown to cause individuals under prevention focus to support benevolent as well as hostile forms of collective action, even when they perceived hostile forms of collective action as immoral. Among individuals under promotion focus, neither holding a strong moral conviction about gender equality, nor holding moral objections to hostile forms of collective action affected support for either benevolent or hostile forms of collective action. These findings are in line with our argument that the ends justify the means for prevention-oriented individuals with a strong moral conviction about the fair treatment of their group.

Study 4.2 thus extends the results of Study 4.1 by showing that the different responses of promotion and prevention-oriented individuals can be obtained using a manipulation of regulatory focus instead of a measure. In addition, we were able to rule out the possibility that it is the importance of countering gender inequality rather than the moral conviction with which this goal is held that causes the observed effects.

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Moreover, this second study extends the results of the previous study by taking into account the strength of participants' moral objections to hostile forms of collective action.

### **General Discussion**

The current studies were designed to investigate the effects of regulatory focus on the way moral considerations motivate hostile and benevolent forms of collective action. Previous research has already shown that moral convictions can motivate people to engage in benevolent forms collective action (Van Zomeren, Postmes, & Spears, in press). With the current studies, we build on and extend these findings by demonstrating that moral considerations also motivate hostile forms of collective action and by elucidating why this is the case. We argued that because moral considerations function as “oughts” (i.e. goals of which non-achievement is seen as more negative than achievement is seen as positive; Skowronski & Carlston, 1987, 1989), they should affect behaviour through the prevention self-regulatory system. Furthermore, because a prevention focus involves construing strong goals (such as those mandated by moral conviction) as necessities (Scholer, Zou, Fujita, Stroessner, & Higgins, 2010; Shah & Higgins, 1997; Zaal et al., in press, a), we argued that the effects of holding a strong moral conviction about the fair treatment of their group should cause the prevention-oriented to perceive any means to be justified in order to reach the necessary goal. Thus, we predicted that prevention-oriented individuals (but not promotion-oriented individuals) who hold a strong moral conviction about the fair treatment of their group would be willing to support hostile forms of collective action, even when they themselves would consider these forms of action immoral.

We examined these predictions in two studies. As predicted, the results of both studies showed that moral convictions motivate both hostile and benevolent forms of collective action through the prevention self-regulatory system. When the prevention system was chronically active (Study 4.1) or experimentally activated (Study 4.2), holding a strong moral conviction about the fair treatment of the group increased support for hostile and benevolent forms of collective action. By contrast, when the prevention system was chronically inactive (Study 4.1) or when a promotion focus was

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induced (Study 4.2), holding a strong moral conviction about the fair treatment of the group had no effect on support for either form of action. In addition, and as predicted, Study 4.2 showed that for prevention-oriented individuals holding a strong moral conviction about the fair treatment of the group overrides moral objections to hostile forms of collective action. More specifically, prevention-oriented individuals with a strong moral conviction about the fair treatment of their group supported hostile forms of collective action even when they perceived these forms as being immoral. Thus, for them the ends appeared to justify the means.

### **Implications**

The present work provides a deeper understanding of individuals' willingness to engage in hostile forms of collective action. The results of the studies reported in this contribution suggest that violent, hostile forms of collective action may be better understood as prevention-oriented responses to what is perceived as immoral treatment of the ingroup. Prevention-oriented individuals construe strong goals (such as those mandated by moral conviction) as necessities, which causes them to become insensitive to objections to the way these goals are pursued. When prevention-oriented individuals come to believe that their group is treated in an immoral way, they become highly motivated to rectify this situation. Because under prevention focus strong motivation is experienced as necessity (instead of as "desire" for individuals under promotion focus) prevention-oriented individuals become insensitive to moral objections to the way group status improvement is pursued, paving the way for the occurrence of hostile forms of collective action such as terrorism (Kruglanski & Fishman, 2006; Skitka & Mullen, 2002).

On a practical level, the results of the present work show that there may be risks associated with using moral arguments to promote collective action. More precisely, because moral considerations affect behaviour through the prevention system, those swayed by moral argumentation will come to see the collective goal more as a necessity than as a desire, paving the way for the use of hostile means in pursuit of this goal. Activists who use moral argumentation to mobilize others for their cause may thus inadvertently create the conditions that facilitate the occurrence of hostile forms of collective action. Alternatively, activists could consider framing their moral message in

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terms fitting a promotion focus (i.e. by presenting it as representing a maximal goal, [Janoff-Bulman, Sheikh, & Hepp, 2009]). This should cause those mobilized to see the goal of collective action less as a necessity, thereby decreasing the likelihood that hostile forms of collective action will be undertaken. However, this approach may have drawbacks of its own. Because goal commitment under promotion focus depends heavily on expectations of success (Shah & Higgins, 1997), trying to motivate collective action through reframing its moral goal in promotion-oriented terms should only be effective when the likelihood that collective action will succeed is high (Zaal et al., in press, a), a precondition that is rarely met (Hornsey et al., 2006).

Applying regulatory focus theory to the study of the motivation to engage in collective action appears to be a fruitful endeavour on a broader theoretical level as well. In recent years, the collective action literature has benefited greatly from work investigating the relative strength of different motivators (e.g. instrumentality, perceptions of injustice and different forms of social identification) on commitment to collective action (e.g. Kelly, 1993; Stürmer & Simon, 2005; Van Zomeren, Postmes, & Spears, 2008). A logical next step would be to investigate the situations under which, and the individuals for whom, some factors form stronger motivators of collective action than others, or have different effects on some than on others. Understanding the self-regulatory processes underlying the motivation to engage in collective action promises to be especially important in this next theoretical step. For example, in our own work (Zaal et al., in press, a) we have shown that the distinction between promotion and prevention focus helps to understand how instrumental motives affect the decision to engage in collective action. More precisely, this work has shown that instrumental considerations (i.e. those relating to the expectation that collective action will succeed or not) only motivate promotion-oriented (and not prevention-oriented) individuals to engage in collective action, providing an explanation for inconsistent support for the role of instrumental considerations in the motivation to engage in collective action (Van Zomeren et al., 2008). The present work complements these findings by showing that perceptions of injustice and immorality motivate prevention-oriented (and not promotion-oriented) individuals to engage in collective action (see also Sassenberg & Hansen, 2007). Together, these strands of research show how regulatory focus nicely fits into the perspective proposed by Van Zomeren and

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colleagues (2004) in which perceptions of injustice and instrumental considerations are held to form two separate motivational paths to engagement in collective action.

In this research we investigated individuals' support for hostile forms of collective action on behalf of their group. This does not necessarily imply that our results generalize to *personal* engagement in hostile forms of collective action. Actively engaging in (vs. passively supporting) hostile forms of collective action may involve additional risk. Previous research has suggested that a prevention focus involves an aversion towards risk (Crowe & Higgins, 1997). Because of this risk aversion, it could be that prevention-oriented individuals personally refrain from engaging in hostile forms of collective action, even if they support them. While this may seem plausible, recent work has shown that prevention-oriented individuals are not always risk averse (Scholer, Stroessner, & Higgins, 2008; Scholer, Zou, Fujita, Stroessner, & Higgins, 2010). More specifically, prevention-oriented individuals, when pursuing goals they deem necessities, are willing to take risks if taking risks is the only way to reach their goal. If, as we claim, prevention-oriented individuals construe the goal of collective action as a necessity when they hold this goal with moral conviction, then they should be willing to personally engage in hostile (risky) forms of collective action when benevolent (safe) avenues towards social change are closed. Importantly, research has found hostile forms of collective action to occur precisely in these situations (Gurr, 1993; Louis et al., 2011; Spears, Scheepers, & Van Zomeren, 2011; Tausch, Becker, Spears, Christ, Saab, Singh, & Siddiqui, in press). Thus, because they see social change as a necessity, prevention-oriented individuals with a strong moral conviction about the fair treatment of their group should be especially likely to actually engage in hostile forms of collective action in these situations.

## **Conclusion**

In conclusion, the results of two studies demonstrated that regulatory focus affects the extent to which holding a strong moral conviction about the fair treatment of their group leads individuals to become willing to support both hostile and benevolent forms of collective action. Holding a strong moral conviction about the fair treatment of the group motivated individuals under prevention focus, but not individuals under promotion focus, to engage in benevolent collective action. Furthermore, prevention

(but not promotion) oriented individuals holding a strong moral conviction about the fair treatment of their group were also willing to support more extreme, hostile forms of collective action. This was even the case when these same individuals viewed these hostile forms of collective action as inherently immoral. Thus for prevention-oriented individuals the ends (social change) appeared to justify the means (hostile forms of collective action).



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**Footnotes**

<sup>11</sup> This chapter is based on Zaal, Van Laar, Ståhl, Ellemers, and Derks (in press, b)

<sup>12</sup> Confirmatory factor analyses showed that the promotion and prevention scales could be empirically distinguished. The proposed two-factor structure fit better than the one-factor structure ( $\Delta\chi^2 = 211$ ,  $\Delta df = 1$ ,  $p < .001$ ).

<sup>13</sup> Confirmatory factor analyses showed that the support for hostile and benevolent collective action scales could be empirically distinguished. The proposed two-factor structure fit better than the one-factor structure ( $\Delta\chi^2 = 168$ ,  $\Delta df = 1$ ,  $p < .001$ ).

<sup>14</sup> Confirmatory factor analyses showed that the scales measuring the moral conviction of gender equality and the importance of countering gender inequality could be empirically distinguished. The proposed two-factor structure fit better than the one-factor structure ( $\Delta\chi^2 = 60$ ,  $\Delta df = 1$ ,  $p < .001$ ).

<sup>15</sup> Because of methodological difficulties associated with assessing personal engagement in actual hostile forms of collective action under controlled circumstances, we could not measure this as a behavioural variable.

<sup>16</sup> Not including the importance of countering gender inequality and its interaction with regulatory focus does not substantially alter the results (focus x moral conviction interaction,  $p = .007$ ).

<sup>17</sup> Benevolent collective action was unrelated to moral objections to hostile forms of collective action ( $r(151) = .04$ ,  $p = .66$ ) and to any of its interactions with the other independent variables ( $p > .79$ ), attesting to the fact that signing the petition was not seen as hostile. The interaction between the manipulation of regulatory focus and moral conviction on the odds of signing the petition was not further qualified by moral objections to hostile forms of collective action (three-way interaction  $p = .93$ ).

<sup>18</sup> Not including the importance of countering gender inequality and its interactions with the manipulation of regulatory focus and the measure of moral objections to hostile forms of collective action makes the hypothesized three-way interaction marginally significant ( $p = .08$ ). However, in the prevention condition the predicted interaction between the measures of moral conviction and moral objections to

hostile forms of collective action is still significant ( $p = .01$ ) and the separate lines consistent with predictions.