

The Importance of Status Legitimacy for Intergroup Attitudes Among Numerical Minorities

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This study investigated whether the legitimacy of the status structure influences the interactive effects of group status and numerical representation on intergroup attitudes. Participants were randomly assigned to conditions in a 2 (level of status; high, low) by 2 (legitimacy of status; legitimate, illegitimate) by 2 (numerical representation; majority, minority) between-subjects design. The predicted three-way interaction indicated that, when status was illegitimate, majority groups with high status showed more ingroup bias than majority groups with low status, but minority groups with high status did not show more ingroup bias than their counterparts with low status. By comparison, when status was legitimate, high-status groups were more biased than low-status groups, regardless of numerical representation.

In understanding the factors that give rise to potential intergroup conflict, it is important to specify the ways in which structural and psychological variables influence group members' attitudes about and behavior toward other groups. Research documents those variables likely to exacerbate negative attitudes between groups. For example, the literature shows that the degree to which group members have biased attitudes against other groups is a function of whether they have relatively low or high status in the situation (e.g., Sachdev & Bourhis, 1987). In a related vein, it also has been revealed that group members' perceptions of the legitimacy or the fairness of the status structure influence whether groups show ingroup favoritism (e.g., Turner & Brown, 1978). Moreover, some evidence suggests that whether groups constitute a numerical minority or a majority may influence the salience of

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perceptions of status illegitimacy and thereby affect ingroup bias (e.g., Ellemers, Doosje, van Knippenberg, & Wilke, 1992; Ng & Cram, 1988). These structural and psychological variables are likely to be important for understanding instances of real-world conflict, because groups often differ in their relative status as well as their relative size. Moreover, group members often perceive that the status positions they hold are unfair or illegitimate. Our hypothesis is that intergroup situations characterized by stark status differences, perceptions that status differences are illegitimate, and numerical representations that yield a minority and a majority are likely to give rise to intergroup conflict.

Although research has investigated the effects of relative status, status legitimacy, and numerical representation on intergroup attitudes, few studies, if any, have examined the interactive effects of all three of these variables on biased attitudes between groups. Thus, the purpose of our study was to examine the combined effects of these variables to reveal the ways in which they may lead to tension between groups. We begin with a poignant example of real-world intergroup tensions to illustrate that these variables often are present in situations of intergroup conflict. In what follows, we review theory and research that explains why these variables may instigate negative attitudes and intergroup conflict.¹ Finally, we present an empirical study in which we experimentally test the effects of these variables on biased attitudes and conclude by discussing their implications.

Intergroup Conflict Within a Nation

The recent history of South Africa offers a stark example of how status differences, perceived status legitimacy, and numerical representation interact to create intergroup conflict. For many decades, South Africa was governed under a system of forced separation between a high-status group (i.e., White Afrikaners) and a low-status group (i.e., Black South Africans) known as apartheid. In the 1930s and 1940s, Whites and Blacks in South Africa had relatively little contact because Blacks were forced to live and work in rural areas, which separated them from Whites (Worden, 1994). During this time, status differences between the two groups went relatively unchallenged, and conflict was relatively low. However, as South Africa became more industrialized after World War II, the White minority could no longer maintain the country's economy without summoning Black laborers into skilled positions in the factories (Price, 1991). Subsequently, Blacks received opportunities for more education as a result of the need for skilled laborers in the urban centers. Increased contact among Blacks and Whites undoubtedly made status differences more salient.

¹ In the interest of brevity, we merely summarize the relationship between these variables in our examples, so as to focus only on those factors most relevant to the present article.

With time, Blacks became attuned to the relative deprivation of their own group in comparison to the wealth and well-being of the Whites. Moreover, as Blacks became more educated, they probably began to question the fairness of White power and prosperity against the backdrop of severe Black poverty (Price, 1991). That is, Blacks undoubtedly came to perceive the status structure as illegitimate or unfair. Black organizations such as the United Democratic Front began to realize that alternative structures to the current status hierarchy could be implemented through collective action and began to call for such action among the Black people (Price). This process represents what Ellemers and colleagues have described as the realization of cognitive alternatives to an existing, illegitimate status structure (Ellemers, Wilke, & van Knippenberg, 1993).

The realization that one group represented a distinct minority inevitably affected the salience of the status differences as well as alternatives to the status structure. The White minority initially attempted to deal with the situation through stricter enforcement of apartheid laws and incarceration of Black leaders. Over time, however, the White government began to institute reforms in an attempt to make concessions to the Black majority while maintaining its formal control over the nation and the economy (Price, 1991). The illegitimacy of the status structure, in combination with numerical differences, undoubtedly exacerbated group conflict and ultimately led to the fall of apartheid. It is interesting to note also that the "ultimate goal" of apartheid was to promote and maintain the group identity of the White Afrikaners (Price), which suggests that identification with the ingroup may also be important for understanding intergroup conflict.

Social identity theory (Tajfel & Turner, 1986) provides a guiding framework for understanding the significance of status differences for intergroup relations. Groups that compare positively to others on valued or salient dimensions have relatively high status. For high-status groups, intergroup comparisons engender positive social identity, and therefore, high-status group members are motivated to maintain the status structure. On the other hand, for low-status groups, intergroup comparisons threaten social identity, and as such, members of low-status groups should be motivated to improve their relative social standing (Tajfel & Turner). If this is so, a high-status group's motives to maintain its standing and a low-status group's motives for change can be at cross purposes, thereby creating the potential for intergroup conflict.

Group Status and Ingroup Bias

A fairly large number of studies have examined the effect of differential status on intergroup attitudes. This research has often operationalized intergroup attitudes as the extent to which group members show biased favoritism toward their ingroup (i.e., ingroup bias). The findings generally indicate that members of high-status groups favor their own group over lower status groups, but members of low-status

groups either show no bias or favor higher status outgroups over their own groups (e.g., Branthwaite, Doyle, & Lightbown, 1979; Brown, 1984; Brown & Wade, 1987; Commins & Lockwood, 1979; Crocker, Thompson, McGraw, & Ingerman, 1987; Doise & Sinclair, 1973; Ellemers et al., 1992; Mullen, Brown, & Smith, 1992; Ryen & Kahn, 1975; Sachdev & Bourhis, 1987; Turner & Brown, 1978; Vaughan, 1978). Moreover, consistent with the premises of social identity theory, research has shown that ingroup identification is stronger among members of high-status groups than among members of low-status groups (e.g., Ellemers et al., 1992).

A field study conducted in the 1950s provides a poignant example of ingroup favoritism among high-status group members and outgroup favoritism among low-status group members. Clark and Clark (1952) reported that whereas ethnic majority children (i.e., White Americans) preferred dolls that represented their own group over those that represented a lower status ethnic group, ethnic minority children (i.e., Black Americans) preferred dolls that represented the higher status ethnic group over those that represented their own group.

Theoretically, high-status group members are more biased in favor of their ingroups because they seek to maintain their positive social identity vis-à-vis the low status group (e.g., Tajfel & Turner, 1986; also see Ellemers et al., 1993). By comparison, low-status group members may favor the outgroup because they recognize the social superiority of the higher status group. Social identity theory (Tajfel & Turner) predicts that to redress their low-status position, members of low-status groups either individually pursue membership in high-status groups or collectively seek to improve their group's place in the status structure.

Illegitimacy of Status

The legitimacy of the status difference largely influences whether low-status groups are likely to attempt collective action in the service of modifying the existing structure (Tajfel, 1981; Tajfel & Turner, 1986). Status legitimacy is the extent to which both high- and low-status groups accept the validity of the status structure (Tajfel). When the status structure is perceived as illegitimate, the situation conflicts with superordinate values of justice, fairness, or equity, and group members become cognitively aware of alternatives to the existing social order (Turner & Brown, 1978). When low-status groups become cognizant of such alternatives, they may attempt to change the status quo (Ellemers et al., 1993). In short, status illegitimacy makes both high- and low-status group members aware of a variety of alternatives to the existing status structure, which may have the potential to produce intergroup conflict. Supporting these premises, research shows that when they perceive the status structure as illegitimate, low-status group members become more biased in their intergroup attitudes (e.g., Ellemers et al., 1993; Turner & Brown, 1978; Vaughan, 1978).

Numerical Representation

Long-standing theory and research (e.g., Brewer & Miller, 1984; Duval & Wicklund, 1972; McGuire, McGuire, Child, & Fujioka, 1978) has revealed that differences in groups' numerical representation affects the salience of the distinctions between the groups. More specifically, studies have shown that, compared to members of numerical majorities, members of numerical minorities are more aware of their respective group category (e.g., McGuire et al., 1978) and are more self-attentive (e.g., Mullen, 1983). As such, minority groups should be more aware of their relative standing in a status structure (Ellemers et al., 1992).

Theoretically, when they perceive status differences as illegitimate, members of numerical minority groups may be not only more aware of their social standing but also more cognizant of alternatives to the situation. If so, they may be particularly motivated to change the status structure. Although the extant literature provides little direct evidence bearing on this hypothesis, studies have examined the combined effects of numerical representation and group status on intergroup attitudes. Interestingly, the findings of these studies are somewhat inconsistent. Whereas some studies reveal that numerical minorities are most biased when they have high status, other studies suggest that numerical minorities are least biased when they have high status. In what follows we examine these inconsistencies to provide insight into the ways numerical differences influence the effects of group status and status legitimacy.

In their research, Sachdev and Bourhis (1991) theorized that high-status numerical minorities should have positive but insecure social identity by virtue of their weak numerical position in the intergroup setting, and that in turn, they should display more ingroup bias than high-status numerical majority group members. These authors also reasoned that, when status differences are perceived as legitimate and are stable, low-status numerical minorities would be the least discriminatory (especially when they have little power) and high-status numerical minorities would be the most discriminatory. Consistent with this theorizing, the results of their study showed that high-status group members were the most biased when they represented a numerical minority, and that low-status group members were among the least biased when they represented a numerical minority. The authors concluded that, because the implied strength in numbers of the low-status majority seemed potentially to threaten the superiority of the high-status minority group, high-status minority group members held the most biased attitudes.

Using a slightly different but related theoretical premise, Ellemers et al. (1992) hypothesized that because the status position of a numerical minority is more salient than that of a numerical majority, a minority group with low status should be considered very undesirable, whereas a minority group with high status should be considered elite and attractive (see also Brewer, 1991). The results of their study showed that high-status minority groups were more proud of their group membership and

were relatively reluctant to expand the size of their ingroup. The authors concluded that the positive distinctiveness of the high-status identity is enhanced when the members represent a numerical minority, and therefore high-status minorities attempt to preserve the exclusiveness of their group.

In contrast, the results of a series of studies conducted by Ng and Cram (1988) suggest that high-status minorities are not particularly biased in favor of their own group. Their studies varied the perceived numerical representation of two groups defined by their difference in opinions on a particular issue. Because of ongoing societal changes in the participants' home country, one opinion was gaining perceived legitimacy (offensive position; high status) over the other opinion (defensive position; low status), which previously had been perceived as more legitimate. The results revealed that, among those representing a numerical minority, members of the offensive group tended to be less biased than those of the defensive group, but when representing a majority, members of the offensive group were more biased than those of the defensive group. If, as Ng and Cram argued, the offensive groups had higher status because they presumably held more popular opinions, then these results suggest that, when they represent a numerical majority, high-status group members are more biased than low-status group members. However, when they represent a numerical minority, high-status group members are less biased than low-status group members. Consistent with Ng and Cram's findings, a study by Brewer, Manzi, and Shaw (1993) revealed that high-status majorities rated their ingroup more positively than low-status majorities, but high-status minorities rated their ingroup less positively than low-status minorities.

A comparison between Sachdev and Bourhis's (1991) and Ng and Cram's (1988) basic assumptions reveals that perceived status legitimacy may be the variable that determines whether high-status minorities are more or less biased than low-status minorities. Note that Sachdev and Bourhis examined the effects of status with the premise that status differences were perceived as legitimate and were stable, whereas Ng and Cram examined groups for which the perceived legitimacy of members' opinions was in transition. That is, these studies apparently reveal that when the status structure is perceived as legitimate, minority groups with high status are more biased in favor of their ingroup than minority groups with low status, but when the status structure is perceived as illegitimate, minority groups with low status favor their ingroup more than those with high status. As we argued previously, because the minority group's status is salient, members of minorities may be particularly aware of the relative legitimacy of the status hierarchy. As such, compared to those of numerical majorities, the intergroup attitudes of numerical minorities may be more influenced by status legitimacy.

The Present Study

Our primary goal in the present study was to examine whether group status, numerical representation, and status legitimacy interact in their effects on intergroup attitudes. As in other studies investigating the effects of status (e.g., Brewer et al., 1993; Crocker et al., 1987; Ellemers et al., 1992; Turner & Brown, 1978), in our study, participants were assigned to high- and low-status groups on the basis of their alleged performance on a test. In addition, either the high-status or the low-status group constituted the numerical minority in the setting. The legitimacy of status differences between groups was manipulated such that the group members perceived the status assignments as either legitimate or illegitimate. As our measure of ingroup bias, participants evaluated essays that other members of the same high- and low-status groups had supposedly written and completed a measure of ingroup identification.

We hypothesized that numerical representation would moderate the effects of perceived status legitimacy on the ingroup bias of high- and low-status groups. Specifically, consistent with Sachdev and Bourhis (1991), we predicted that minority group members with high status would show more ingroup bias than minority group members with low status, but only when they perceived their status position was legitimate. On the other hand, consistent with the findings of Ng and Cram (1988), we predicted that high-status minority group members would show *less* ingroup bias than low-status minority group members when they perceived their status position was illegitimate. By comparison, we predicted that majority group members would be less responsive to the relative legitimacy of their status and therefore would be more biased in the high-status than in the low-status condition, regardless of perceived legitimacy. Finally, consistent with previous work (e.g., Ellemers et al., 1992; Mullen et al., 1992), we hypothesized that ingroup identification and ingroup bias, overall, would be greater among high-status groups than among low-status groups.

Method*Participants*

Participants were 243 introductory psychology students at a large Midwestern university, who participated in exchange for partial course credit.

Design

Participants were assigned to one of eight conditions according to a random-order schedule in a 2 (numerical representation; majority, minority) by 2 (level of

status; high, low) by 2 (legitimacy of status; legitimate, illegitimate) between-subjects design.

Procedure and Materials

The experimenter explained that the primary purpose of the study was to investigate the types of information people use when making decisions about social dilemmas.² Participants were told that the study would proceed in three phases, the first of which involved assessing each person's ability to integrate and use social information (their "social-cognitive competency"). In a procedure very similar to that used by Crocker et al. (1987), participants completed a bogus "social-cognitive competency test" (SCCT). Participants were told that the test measured competency in social situations, skill in interpreting social information, and likelihood of future social success, and that this competency facilitates judgments about social dilemmas. High scores were said to indicate maturity, receptivity, and superior ability in social and intellectual situations, whereas low scores were said to indicate a lack of social sensitivity and intellectual maturity. Participants were told that their scores would be used as a means of dividing them into groups for a rating task.

Group status and numerical representation manipulations. Participants were told that the experimenter's assistant would take their answer sheets for immediate scoring. Actually, the assistant randomly assigned each participant to either the "high-scorer group" (i.e., high-status group) or the "low-scorer group" (i.e., low-status group). Numerical representation within each session was manipulated by the number of answer sheets assigned to the high- and low-status groups. In half of the sessions, 25% of the answer sheets were assigned to the low-status group (minority) and 75% to the high-status group (majority), whereas in the remaining sessions, the reverse was true.

While the assistant was ostensibly scoring the answer sheets, the experimenter instructed participants to begin a second task. In keeping with the cover story for the study, participants were asked to read about a "relationship dilemma." After reading the vignette, participants wrote a solution to the dilemma. Part of the purpose of the essay task was to provide a rationale for later asking participants to evaluate former participants' solutions to the relationship dilemma. In addition, the sheet on which the participants wrote their solution also included the words "High Group" and "Low Group" at the top. While the participants were writing their solutions, the research assistant returned with the scores. After the participants completed their solutions, the experimenter announced which participants had allegedly scored

² Information concerning exact details of the procedure and materials of this experiment may be obtained from the authors.

high on the test and which had allegedly scored low (identification numbers rather than names were used for this purpose), and participants were instructed to circle the group to which they belonged.

Next, participants were separated into two groups on the basis of their membership in the high- and low-status groups. Once participants were reseated, the assistant made an announcement that led all participants to believe that the High Group had an opportunity to attain resources that were unavailable to members of the Low Group, as often is the case with real groups of differential status.

Legitimacy manipulation. The experimenter then announced that a second test of social competency would be administered. Participants were told that the “social insight inventory” (SII) measured the same constructs as the first test but used a different format. Participants answered the items on this test and wrote their group label (High Group or Low Group) at the top of the inventory. The test sheets were collected, and the experimenter ostensibly computed the average score of each of the two groups.

In the legitimate status condition, the experimenter announced that the members of the High Group had scored relatively better than members of the Low Group: “OK, as usual, the people who got high scores on the SCCT also scored higher on the SII, so that means you all have been assigned to the proper group.” In the illegitimate condition, the experimenter announced that, to his surprise, the members of the Low Group actually had outperformed the members of the High Group on the SII: “Well, this is odd. It looks like the people in the Low Group actually scored better on the second questionnaire than people in the High Group. So actually, it’s not clear which group has higher social-cognitive competency. But, in order to keep the experiment going, we’ll just stick to the same group assignments.” For this latter condition, it was our intention to induce the feeling that the high-status group had unfairly gained its status position, and that the members of the low-status group may have been equal in competence to the members of the high-status group.

Evaluation of ingroup and outgroup targets. In the study’s final phase, participants were asked to evaluate two solutions to the relationship dilemma allegedly written by participants from a previous session. One solution was attributed to a member of the high-status group and the other to a member of the low-status group. Thus, all participants evaluated one ingroup target and one outgroup target. Actually, these solutions were written for the purpose of measuring ingroup bias toward the targets, and the solutions were written to be similar and moderate in strength and quality. Pairing of the solutions with either the high- or low-status label and the order of presentation was completely counterbalanced. Participants evaluated the targets using a questionnaire similar to that used by Gerard and Hoyt (1974). The questionnaire included eight semantic differentials items: intelligent–unintelligent, strong–weak, talented–untalented, definite–wishy-washy, creative–uncreative,

warm–cold, friendly–unfriendly, and honest–dishonest. These were rated on 6-point scales. In addition, participants answered a questionnaire designed to measure ingroup identification (Ellemers, van Knippenberg, de Vries, & Wilke, 1988), using a 6-point Likert-type scale. The measure was composed of eight items that assessed, for example, the extent to which respondents felt like members of their assigned group and believed that members shared commonality ($\alpha = .84$). Finally, manipulation checks assessed perceived ingroup status, ingroup size, status legitimacy, and suspicion of the experimental hypotheses.

Results

Inspection of the responses to the suspicion check indicated that 12 participants (5% of the total N) detected the experiment's true purpose. These participants' data were not used in the analyses, and therefore the results are based on the responses of the remaining 231 participants. Ninety-six percent ($n = 221$) of the participants correctly indicated their ingroup status and ingroup size on the manipulation checks. The results of analyses with the remaining 4% ($n = 10$) excluded were essentially identical to the analyses using the entire data set. Thus, all participants were included in the final analyses. In addition, participants in the legitimate conditions rated the status difference between high- and low-status groups as more legitimate ($M = 3.61$) than participants in the illegitimate conditions ($M = 3.30$), $t(222) = 1.67$, $p < .05$.

For each of the eight semantic differential ratings, bias scores were calculated by subtracting the outgroup ratings from the ingroup ratings. Thus, a positive bias score represents ingroup favoritism, whereas a negative bias score represents outgroup favoritism.³ Next, these bias scores were averaged ($\alpha = .87$) to form an index of ingroup bias. This bias index was analyzed using a 2 (status) \times 2 (numerical representation) \times 2 (legitimacy) ANOVA with unique sums of squares.⁴ In addition, based on a priori predictions, comparisons were conducted between the cell means (see Kirk, 1982, p. 98), and effect sizes were calculated using d -indexes (Cohen, 1988).

³ Prior to the analyses we examined the distribution of the scores for the presence of extreme values (outliers) and for their fit with assumptions of normality. According to the recommendation of Tabachnick and Fidell (1989), Tukey (1990), and Wilcox (1995), outliers were identified examining box plots of the data. Three bias score values and one ingroup identification value were extreme outliers (more than three box lengths from the upper or lower boundary of the box; SPSS, 1990). As recommended by Tabachnick and Fidell as well as Wilcox, these extreme outliers were modified to the value of the next closest value in the distribution. After replacement, inspection of the distributions of scores on the primary dependent measures indicated that they were approximately normal (Tabachnick & Fidell).

⁴ One participant did not complete the final page of the questionnaire. In addition, one participant did not fill out the strength of ingroup identity measure. Therefore the degrees of freedom in each of these analyses are reduced by one.

Ingroup Bias and Identification

We hypothesized a three-way interaction among group status, numerical representation, and status legitimacy on the ingroup bias scores. As can be seen in Figure 1, the three manipulated variables interacted in their effects on ingroup bias, $F(1, 223) = 3.88, p = .05$. Comparisons within the majority group conditions revealed that status legitimacy had little effect on the difference between the ingroup bias of high- and low-status groups. Specifically, members of high-status majority groups showed more ingroup bias than members of low-status majority groups, regardless of status legitimacy, $F(1, 223) = 27.67, p < .001, d = .94; F(1, 223) = 21.33, p < .001,$

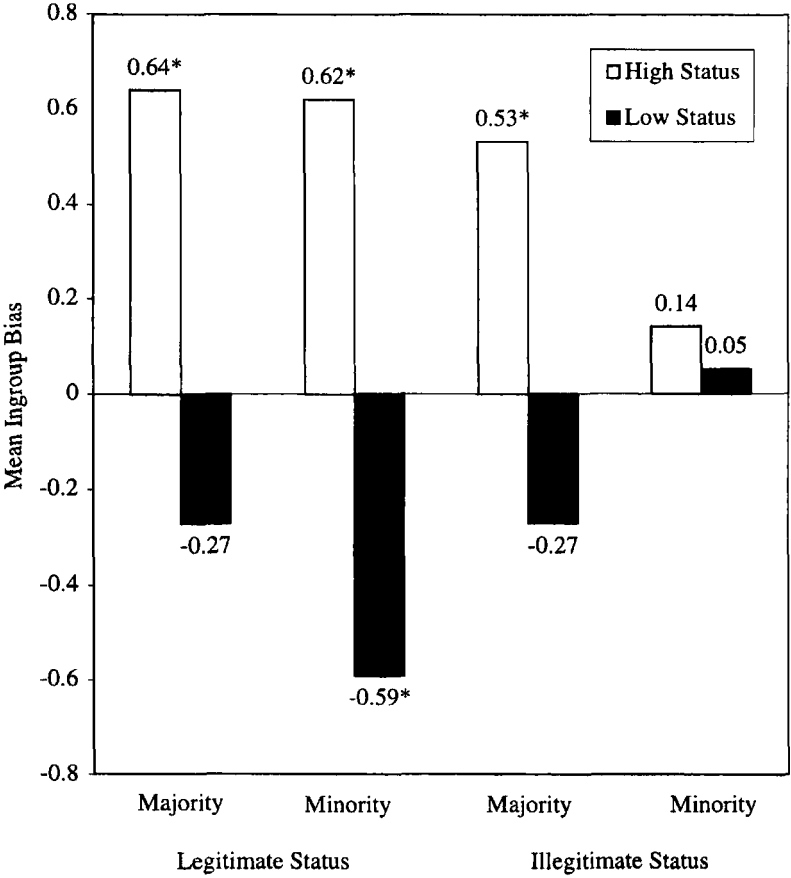


Fig. 1. Mean bias scores as a function of group status, numerical representation, and status legitimacy. Positive bias scores indicate ingroup favoritism; negative bias scores indicate outgroup favoritism. Means marked with an asterisk differ significantly from 0, $p < .05$.

$d = 1.07$, for legitimate and illegitimate, respectively. In contrast, the legitimacy of the status structure affected level of ingroup bias among minority groups. Comparisons between means indicated that when status was legitimate, minority group members with high-status showed more ingroup favoritism than minority group members with low status, $F(1, 222) = 14.60$, $p < .01$, $d = 1.41$, but when status was illegitimate, high-status and low-status groups were similar in their levels of ingroup bias, $F(1, 223) = .10$, $p > .05$, $d = .10$.

The analyses also revealed an interaction between status and legitimacy, $F(1, 223) = 5.64$, $p < .05$, suggesting that the difference in bias scores between the legitimate high-status, $M = 0.64$, and low-status, $M = -0.35$, groups tended to be larger than the difference between the illegitimate high-status, $M = 0.43$, and low-status, $M = -0.20$, groups. Overall, the main effect of status indicated that members of high-status groups, $M = 0.53$, were more biased in favor of their ingroup than members of low-status groups, $M = -0.28$, $F(1, 223) = 34.08$, $p < .001$, $d = .76$.

Finally, consistent with prior research (Ellemers et al., 1988), the findings showed that group status influenced strength of ingroup identification. Specifically, the results of a *t*-test showed that members of high-status groups indicated greater levels of ingroup identification, $M = 4.41$, than members of low-status groups, $M = 3.41$, $t(222) = 8.77$, $p < .001$.

Discussion

Consistent with previous research (e.g., Ellemers et al., 1992; Mullen et al., 1992), the results of the present study revealed that, compared to members of low-status groups, members of high-status groups had stronger ingroup identification and were more biased in favor of their ingroup. More importantly, the present findings supported our hypothesis that group status, numerical representation, and perceived status legitimacy interact in their effects on ingroup bias. The results indicated that, when status was perceived as illegitimate, majority groups with high status were more biased in favor of their ingroup than were majority groups with low status. However, under this same illegitimate condition, minority groups with high status were not more biased in favor of their ingroup than were their counterparts with low status. By comparison, when the status structure was perceived as legitimate, high-status group members were more biased than low-status group members, regardless of numerical representation. To our knowledge, this finding is one of the first empirical demonstrations of this interaction.

Because these findings reveal an interaction between group status, perceived status legitimacy, and numerical representation, they may help resolve an apparent contradiction in the literature. Recall that several studies (e.g., Ellemers et al., 1992; Sachdev & Bourhis, 1991) have shown that high-status groups representing a numerical minority favor their ingroups more than do those representing a numerical majority, but other studies (e.g., Brewer et al., 1993; Ng & Cram, 1988) have

shown that high-status minority groups are among the least biased in favor of their ingroups. The present study's findings reveal that whether the status structure is perceived as legitimate or illegitimate may account for which particular pattern of ingroup bias is revealed.

The current results supported our theorizing that the perceived legitimacy of the status structure would be especially salient for the minority, and as such, their attitudes would be more readily influenced by relative status legitimacy. Therefore our findings suggest that the distinctiveness of the numerical minority category not only heightens awareness of status distinctions (Ellemers et al., 1992), but also makes salient the implications associated with either a perceived legitimate or illegitimate status structure. When group members represent a numerical minority, perceived legitimate high status may be more positively distinct and perceived legitimate low status may be more negatively distinct (Brewer, 1991). However, the relative valence of group distinctiveness may change somewhat when the status difference is perceived as illegitimate. In this last case, groups representing a numerical minority may suffer from the perceived illegitimacy of their high status, thereby rendering the membership in the "high-status" group less positively distinct (Ng & Cram, 1988). By contrast, the salience of an illegitimate low-status minority group may allow assertion of a more positively distinct identity (Tajfel & Turner, 1986).

The results for the majority groups also provide support for Ng & Cram's (1988) argument that membership in a numerical majority buffers threat to positive identity. In the present study it seemed that the presence of a relatively large number of ingroup members might have buffered the implications of perceived illegitimate high status. Moreover, the results tended to suggest that being in a numerical majority might mitigate the negative implications of membership in a legitimately low-status group.

Limitations of the Present Research

Despite the continuity among the results of the present study and those of a variety of other studies (e.g., Brewer et al., 1993; Ellemers et al., 1992; Ng & Cram, 1988; Sachdev & Bourhis, 1991), several limitations of our experimental design may qualify the present results. First, to manipulate the three variables of interest using random assignment, we experimentally created artificial group membership. As such, the responses we obtained may be somewhat different than those we might expect had we used real group memberships with real status differences. For example, in the current study the mean levels of ingroup identification were relatively low compared to what might be expected among members of a real group. Although other research (e.g., Crocker et al., 1987; Branthwaite et al., 1979) has shown very similar effects of status among real and induced groups, future research may need to examine the contributions to intergroup attitudes of group status, numerical representation, and status legitimacy of members of real groups.

In addition, the results of the present study may be limited because we did not vary the permeability of group boundaries. Other research (e.g., Ellemers, van Knippenberg, & Wilke, 1990) has shown that when group boundaries are permeable, low-status group members often desire individual mobility into the higher status group. In contrast, when group memberships are relatively impermeable, group members realize the low probability of individual mobility and identify with their own groups. Because others (Ellemers et al., 1990) have shown that the permeability of the intergroup boundary importantly influences status effects, future research should examine this variable in combination with status legitimacy and numerical representation.

Finally, compared to other manipulations of status legitimacy, ours may have been relatively weak. Despite the fact that the manipulation checks of the legitimacy manipulation revealed a reliable difference between the legitimate and illegitimate conditions, this difference was small. Although the results revealed several effects of perceived legitimacy consistent with our predictions and with the findings of other research, if the manipulation had been stronger, perceived legitimacy may have influenced the results more strongly. Researchers may need to use stronger comparisons of legitimacy to understand more fully the effects of this variable on the intergroup attitudes of high- and low-status groups that vary in their respective numerical representation.

Implications of the Findings

In the last quarter of the 20th century, the legitimacy of the status structure enforced by the apartheid system of racial segregation in South Africa was called into question and challenged. As Blacks came together in the cities for education and work, the relative numerical representation of Whites and Blacks became more salient, and Blacks began to organize in an attempt to make inroads into the White-dominated political power structure (Price, 1991). The elite, high-status White minority faced the inevitable fact that to maintain a prosperous economy, it would have to concede political and social ground to the increasingly loud and strong Black majority. As a result, after many years of struggle and intergroup conflict, the apartheid system eventually was abolished.

That distinct differences in numerical representation among groups may increase the salience of status structures perceived as illegitimate is also exemplified in the civil rights movement within the United States. In that situation, the low-status group represented a distinct numerical minority. Ultimately, the civil rights movement was a collective effort geared toward redressing inequality in status and power. In the history of intergroup conflict, these as well as many other instances stand as clear examples of changing perceptions of the legitimacy of the low- and high-status positions of groups differentially representing a numerical majority and minority.

The present study's findings can be understood in light of these and other intergroup conflicts throughout the world. When status structures are perceived as illegitimate and relative group sizes are unequal, group members become increasingly aware of possible alternatives to the existing status hierarchy. Although majority groups with perceived illegitimate high status may fortify their biased attitudes, relatively small groups with perceived illegitimate high status may realize their lack of numerical power and become willing to negotiate the existing situation. In contrast, compared to a majority group, a minority group with low status may be more readily aware of the illegitimacy of its relative standing, and therefore, its members may be especially likely to develop more positive attitudes toward their ingroup. With more positive views of their ingroup, members of a numerical minority group with perceived illegitimate low status may be particularly likely to engage in collective action to change the status structure. If so, intergroup conflict may arise. That is, under these conditions, changes in status legitimacy may also lay the groundwork for change in status stability (Tajfel, 1981). Overall, the present study suggests that future research should examine the effects of perceived status legitimacy in combination with other variables known to affect intergroup attitudes (e.g., permeability of group boundaries). Given the findings of the present study as well as those of others (e.g., Ellemers et al., 1993; Turner & Brown, 1978), consideration of the presence of perceived illegitimate status differences as well as distinct minority representation seems crucial for understanding intergroup conflict.

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