Chapter 1

Pursuing individual upward mobility in low status groups: Negotiating concerns of the ingroup and the outgroup

Numerous members of low status groups, such as members of ethnic minority groups and women, run the risk of facing a dilemma that can substantially impact the course of their life. Their stigmatized low status identity can lead high status outgroup members, such as ethnic majorities and men, to oppose their attempts to improve their social standing. Distancing from the stigmatized identity, on the other hand, can lower support from fellow ingroup members. The central questions in this dissertation focus on furthering our understanding of how this dilemma affects individual upward mobility in low status groups.

During the period in which this dissertation was written the world witnessed an historic event. For the first time in history a non-white candidate - Barack Obama - was elected the president of the United States of America. A renowned Dutch journalist wrote a column on Obama just before he was elected to the presidency (Groenhuijsen, 2008). The central question in the column was whether the African American Obama was too “Black” to beat his Euro-American opponent in the race for presidency. The thrust of the argument was clear. The extent to which Obama was perceived as typically “Black” would significantly affect the support of the White majority voters. That is, in order to be voted into the presidency Obama had to make sure that he was not perceived as overly identified with his African American background. Obama was already fully familiar with this “Blackness” issue. A few years earlier, Obama ran a campaign for a somewhat less prestigious political position against a fellow African American politician. Obama lost this campaign, allegedly because the African American voters thought Obama was not Black enough. By the time Obama ran for president, his fellow African Americans were again not immediately convinced of his Blackness. A round table conference was organized, attended by a powerful lobby of hundreds of African American journalists, during which Obama had to convince fellow group members of his sufficient identification with his African American background (Het belang van Limburg, 2007; Monroe, 2007). While climbing the ranks to the political top Obama thus apparently had to ensure that he was simultaneously strongly and weakly attached to his African American identity in order to receive full support. Failure to meet up to Black and White expectations about identification and identity expression was a serious threat to the success of his upward mobility attempts. Obama’s predicament of navigating between quite diverging, sometimes even conflicting, group related expectations does not stand on its own. Rather, many upwardly mobile members of low status groups have to cope with this dilemma daily.
Individual upward mobility in low status groups

Individual upward mobility refers to individual status improvement in a social hierarchy by increased performance and positive outcomes in status defining domains such as academic achievement and career success (Ellemers, Wilke, & van Knippenberg, 1993; Ellemers & Van Laar, in press; Tajfel & Turner, 1979). Entering university and realizing promotion to higher management in a company are examples of such individual status improvement. In terms of outcomes, individual upward mobility holds the potential to change key elements of an individual’s life through higher pay, improved housing conditions, access to more powerful social networks, and better health care opportunities (Hossler & Coopersmith, 1989; Marmot, 2004; Putnam, 2000). Western societies tend to stress the opportunities that individuals have to cross status boundaries in the social hierarchy, irrespective of their social background (“the individual mobility ideology”; see Ellemers & Van Laar, in press). Indeed, individual upward mobility has yielded success for many individuals, including members of low status groups. Nowadays, it is much more common, for example, to find ethnic minorities and women in higher professional positions than for instance in the 1950’s or the 1960’s.

However, despite these positive changes, the individual upward mobility of members of low status groups still advances with difficulty. Statistics reveal that outcomes in Western societies are still ordered according to group membership. In the Netherlands, for example, whereas the proportion of ethnic minority group members among public servants roughly equals the proportion of ethnic minority group members in Dutch society (10%), less than half a percent of the senior officials in Dutch federal government institutions belong to an ethnic minority group (Nieuwenhuis, 2007). A comparable situation can be observed among women in science in the Netherlands. Whereas roughly half the students in universities are female, women make up only 30% of the assistant professors and only a dramatic 11% of the full professors (VSNU, 2008). These figures run counter to the goal of a properly functioning “diverse” workforce in which individuals with different backgrounds can reach their full potential (Wentling & Palma-Rivas, 1997). In order to reach this goal it is crucial to gain a better understanding of the conditions under which the pursuit of upward mobility is likely to be (un)successful.

This dissertation contributes to the identification of factors that are conducive to individual upward mobility of members of low status groups. We propose that a strict individual focus on upward mobility falls short of recognizing the complicated group-level challenges that face upwardly mobile members of low status groups. Their stigmatized
identity heightens the risk of their upward mobility attempts being rejected by the high status *outgroup*. We address this issue and hypothesize that support from the low status *ingroup* can help to respond effectively to this predicament. That is, we argue that support from other low status ingroup members makes individuals more resilient and helps them maintain their upward mobility attempts in the face of resistance from the high status group. Obtaining such ingroup support for individual upward mobility however is not easy, as the mobility attempt may be seen as expressing disdain for the low status ingroup and what it stands for. Furthermore, we hypothesize that association with the ingroup is an important determinant of receiving such ingroup support. Hence, whereas such ingroup association has been shown to increase the risk of outgroup opposition (Kaiser & Pratt-Hyatt, 2009), upwardly mobile individuals can benefit in other ways by ensuring support from the ingroup. These issues outlined above are investigated in eleven empirical studies conducted with experimental groups in the laboratory as well as with members of low status groups in the field.

**Ingroup association and low status group membership**

Social categories such as ethnicity, gender or socio-economic status, are an important means to order and classify the social environment. Individuals can use their category memberships as cognitive tools to determine their social identity and to make comparisons with individuals who belong to other social categories (Turner, Hogg, Oakes, Reicher, & Wetherell, 1987). Social categories thus present individuals with a sense of “who they are”. However, when individuals acknowledge that they belong to a social category, such as their ethnic, gender or socio-economic group, they do not necessarily identify with that particular category membership. One’s place in society is not simply determined by making an “objective” inventory of one’s category memberships. Instead, one’s perceived place in society is predominantly determined by the group memberships that one identifies with: those group memberships to which value and emotional significance are attached (Tajfel, 1981). For example, an African-American woman can feel strongly affected by her being a female while being indifferent to her ethnic background. Her being categorizable as an African-American woman does not necessarily imply that she feels psychologically connected to the African-American identity.

According to Social Identity Theory (SIT), individuals’ group identifications are also affected by the status of those groups (Tajfel & Turner, 1979). Low group status is an impetus for disidentifying from a group. SIT states that, in addition to a positive personal
identity, individuals also strive for a positive social identity. Both identities are related to an individual's self-image. The positivity of personal identity is determined by interpersonal comparisons, whereas a positive social identity is contingent upon intergroup comparisons, comparisons of ingroups with relevant outgroups. Fulfillment of the need for a positive social identity can be hindered by identifying with a low status group. After all, comparisons of the low status ingroup with higher status groups on status relevant dimensions (such as career success) have negative outcomes: the ingroup is inferior to the other group. A possible response to this situation is to disassociate from the group. Even when born and raised in line with certain category memberships individuals can disassociate from these groups, disconnecting their self-image from the particular group membership. The African-American woman of the previous example may for instance be indifferent to her African-American category membership because she has disassociated from this group in response to its lower status.

The issue of disassociation from a group is particularly relevant for low status group members who pursue individual upward mobility. Those who pursue individual upward mobility tend to loosen the psychological ties with their low status category membership (Ellemers & Van Laar, in press; Tajfel & Turner, 1979). Obviously, low status group members who pursue individual upward mobility perceive intergroup boundaries to be permeable, at least to some degree. On the one extreme, individuals can believe that intergroup boundaries are impermeable in that their gender or ethnic group memberships make individual upward mobility impossible. On the other extreme, individuals can believe that intergroup boundaries are completely permeable, and that their gender or ethnic group membership will not prevent them in any way from pursuing upward mobility. When group boundaries are perceived as at least partially permeable, upward mobility offers the opportunity to stress individual merit and to disassociate the self from the disadvantaged ingroup. Demonstrating how one differs from an average member of the low status ingroup can become a part of the upward mobility strategy. The African-American woman of the previous example may, for instance, set her self apart from other African-Americans by demonstrating how she differs from the ingroup prototype in terms of education or work related accomplishments.

*Ingroup support as a resource*

As described above, the pursuit of individual upward mobility encourages members of low status groups to disassociate from their ingroup. In this regard, most research has
focused on individual upward mobility as a means to “escape” from the low status group (e.g. Wright, 2001). In this view, individual upward mobility stimulates disassociation from the ingroup, helping to avoid a negative group based self-image. This view disregards the need to belong, however. In addition to the need for a positive self-image, people feel the need to belong (Baumeister & Leary, 1995). Although disassociating from a devalued ingroup can help to feel good about the self, having a sense of relatedness is also of major importance. Group memberships provide such a sense of belonging. More often than not, people have been socialized by ingroup members with whom longer lasting and positive relationships are maintained. The significance of this ingroup belonging is illustrated by people’s reluctance to losing or breaking such social bonds, even when pragmatic or material reasons for maintaining these relationships are absent (Baumeister & Leary, 1995; Ethier & Deaux, 1994). Continued identification with the ingroup may thus be desired even when the ingroup has low social status.

We argue that the relationship with the ingroup is also particularly important for low status group members who pursue upward mobility. Individual upward mobility generally takes place in “outgroup contexts” in which members of low status groups are outnumbered by members of the high status group (Ben-Zeev et al. 2005, Derks, Van Laar, & Ellemers, 2006; Inzlicht & Good 2004; Sekaquaptewa & Thompson 2003). In these contexts members of low status groups face the risk of opposition to their upward mobility attempts as the high status group doubts, or challenges, their claims to acceptance to a higher status position. This predicament may sensitize low status group members to upward mobility support from ingroup members. For example, upwardly mobile individuals may ask, hope, or imagine that the ingroup takes pride in fellow group members attempts to pursue upward mobility and show their worth in other group contexts. Ingroup support for individual mobility can signal that the pursuit of upward mobility is accepted and considered appropriate behavior to cope with low status, which may impact positively on the willingness to, or persistence in, pursuing upward mobility in the face of outgroup opposition. As such, we propose that ingroup support is an important social resource for low status group members especially when they pursue individual upward mobility.

In the last decade, research attention for intragroup dynamics in low status groups has increased (e.g. Branscombe, Schmitt, Ellemers, & Doosje, 2002; Jetten, Schmitt, Branscombe and McKimmie, 2005). The results of this work are in line with the idea that devalued groups can be an important resource for their members, for instance to combat the negative consequences of outgroup rejection. An example is work from the perspective of the rejection-identification model as proposed by Branscombe and colleagues (Branscombe,
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Schmitt, & Harvey, 1999). They hypothesized that devalued group members’ awareness of group-based discrimination as a cause of prejudice may strengthen, rather than diminish, the identification with their group as it provides a sense of support and shared fate. Evidence for this prediction was found in a sample of African-Americans. Participants’ tendency to attribute negative life-events to prejudice increased their levels of ingroup identification which in turn enhanced well-being. Believing that one is discriminated against due to one’s group membership thus strengthened the identification with the devalued ingroup and helped people cope with their predicament (also see Armenta & Hunt, 2009). The feeling that appreciation from the outgroup is insecure, increases the need to feel related to the ingroup. Similar results have been found in a study in which future expectations of discrimination were manipulated among members of a socially devalued group (individuals with body piercings; Jetten, Branscombe, Spears, & Schmitt, 2001). The more likely discriminatory treatment by the mainstream population was perceived to be, the stronger the identification with the devalued group.

The need to feel related to the ingroup seems to play a role not only in the case of (alleged) discriminatory treatment. The findings of a study by Jetten et al. (Jetten, Schmitt, Branscombe, & McKimmie, 2005) suggest that this need also increases in the face of ingroup devaluation by an outgroup. Participants were told that others were generally negative or positive about inhabitants of their residential region. Participants who received negative feedback, implying a threat to the value of their ingroup, were more likely to focus on the relationship with their ingroup than participants who received positive feedback about their ingroup. Specifically, value threat encouraged them to emphasize the respect they received from fellow inhabitants of their residential region. Again, the need to feel related to the ingroup appeared to be intensified by low appreciation of the ingroup on the part of an outgroup, instead of weakened as is often assumed. Our research builds on the general notion that group members continue to value the relationship with the ingroup in the face of rejection or devaluation by an outgroup. In an outgroup context in which upwardly mobile individuals can be rejected on grounds of their stigmatized social identity, we propose the relationship with the ingroup to be a resource that helps individuals cope with this predicament. Ingroup support can signal that the ingroup relationship will not be negatively affected by the pursuit of upward mobility. By contrast, the pursuit of upward mobility under opposition from the ingroup (when the ingroup perceives the upward mobility as an attempt to disassociate or even reject or deny group membership, as in the Obama example), triggers the concern that the relationship with the ingroup will be impaired.
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Behavioral identity expression and affective ingroup identification

Given the aim to demonstrate that ingroup support is an important resource for upwardly mobile low status group members the next issue to consider is how upward mobility support in low status groups can be assured. We argue that upward mobility support in low status groups is raised when the upwardly mobile individual continues to associate with the ingroup. A relevant concern however is that ingroup association is also likely to elicit opposition to upward mobility from the outgroup. For example, in a series of experiments Kaiser and Pratt-Hyatt (2009) showed that Euro-Americans’ attitudes toward Black and Latino minority targets were more negative the more the minority target identified with the low status ethnic group. We examine how this apparent tension between ingroup and outgroup expectations and responses can be relieved by differentiating between different types of associations with the low status group: behavioral identity expression and affective ingroup identification. This distinction is further explained below.

Behaving in line with the typical characteristics of an ingroup is what we refer to as behavioral identity expression. To some extent, upwardly mobile individuals will be less likely to engage in behavioral identity expression. A Muslim woman can, for instance, attempt to disassociate the self from the Muslim ingroup in the context of her successful individual mobility. For instance, she may decide not to wear a veil, to downplay the contextual relevance of her Muslim identity. Importantly, however, such behavioral conformity is affected by the fact that upward mobility generally takes place in outgroup contexts in which the high status outgroup determines the norms for appropriate behavior. Theory and research on strategic behavior suggests that when individuals publicly adapt to the expectations of an outgroup this does not necessarily reflect their affective ingroup identification: their emotional ties with the ingroup (Barreto & Ellemers, 2000; Barreto, Ellemers, & Banal, 2006; Ellemers, Van Dyck, Hinkle, & Jacobs, 2000; Reicher, Spears, & Postmes, 1995; Reicher & Levine, 1994a, 1994b). Thus, behavioral adaptation to the expectations of an outgroup audience may be strategic as it helps to avoid outgroup opposition, lowering the risk of behaving in a way considered inappropriate by the outgroup. However, this does not necessarily imply that these behavioral guidelines are internalized or that such behavior is also displayed in other contexts. Muslim women who usually wear a veil can, for instance, decide not to wear the veil in vocational settings as they perceive the mainstream population to consider the veil an inappropriate identification feature, but may continue wearing the veil when among family or friends (e.g., Kamerman & Walters, 2009). Thus, individuals who pursue upward mobility may refrain from signs of behavioral ingroup
association with the aim to distract attention from the stigmatized identity (see also Ellemers & Van Laar, in press).

Conversely, affective disassociation from the ingroup does not necessarily imply that characteristic ingroup behaviors are abandoned. The reason for this is that behavioral ingroup association is also affected by socialization processes. Behavior in line with a social identity can be a remnant of socialization processes even when affective identification with the ingroup has weakened. Therefore, behavior in line with a social identity does not necessarily reflect strong psychological ties with the ingroup. For example, individuals can have foreign accents that correspond with their ethnic or geographical heritage while they have affectively disassociated themselves from the corresponding social identity. An accent can be hard to control, as a result of which this behavioral characteristic remains salient. Individuals may also continue to participate in certain group traditions out of respect for the group, their families and friends, even though they have long since psychologically detached themselves personally from the identity. Thus, although behavioral identity expression and affective ingroup identification tend to covary, these identification features are distinguishable. Behavioral disassociation from the disadvantaged group is not always a reflection of affective disassociation from the group. In turn, affective dissociation can be related to differential levels of behavioral identity expression. Therefore, we distinguish between behavioral identity expression and affective ingroup identification and examine their respective effects.

We propose that distinguishing between affective ingroup identification and behavioral identity expression provides further insight into how the low status ingroup and the high status outgroup respond to the individual upward mobility of members of low status groups. We argue that this may even resolve the tension for upwardly mobile individuals between ingroup versus outgroup expectations and demands. We examine whether the responses of low status groups are primarily determined by the affective association with the low status group, while the high status group is more strongly affected by the behavioral aspects of associating with the low status group. Now that the main issues examined in this dissertation have been outlined, we will summarize how the empirical work to test these predictions was set up.

*Overview of empirical testing of predictions*

The first empirical chapter examines how outgroup opposition and ingroup support impact on the individual upward mobility of low status group members. Thus, this chapter
explores how members of low status groups, such as females, experience upward mobility in the face of outgroup opposition. Outgroup opposition may emerge, for example, when women are evaluated negatively in vocational settings. If this is the case, does it matter then whether they perceive that support from other women is available? We examine how outgroup opposition affects feelings and perceptions with regard to upward mobility, and test the prediction that ingroup support has opposite, more positive effects on the same feelings and perceptions.

Chapter 3 focuses on ingroup association as a determinant of such ingroup support. This chapter addresses the distinction between affective ingroup identification and behavioral identity expression and examines their effects on the likelihood of obtaining ingroup versus outgroup support for upward mobility attempts. Thus this chapter examines, for example, whether support from fellow Dutch-Moroccans is contingent upon the emotional involvement of the upwardly mobile Dutch-Moroccan individual with his or her ethnic group? Or does it depend on the extent to which he or she behaves in ways that are seen to be consistent with Moroccan cultural identity? And how do ethnic majority members respond to Dutch-Moroccans’ affective ingroup identification and behavioral identity expression? These are the type of questions examined in Chapter 3.

The research questions are examined in a range of intergroup contexts and with different methodologies. In Study 2.1 to 2.4, 3.1 and 3.2 participants are members of experimental minimal groups with low status. We developed a research paradigm to conduct such experimental studies among undergraduate students. In order to ensure the ecological validity of the research findings we tested whether the results generalized to natural groups in the field. In Study 2.5 (women) and 3.3 (ethnic minorities in the Netherlands) participants are members of natural groups with low status in a vocational intergroup context. The responses of high status group members are also investigated in an experimental minimal group (Study 3.4) as well as in natural groups (ethnic majorities in the Netherlands in Study 3.5 and 3.6). Furthermore, several research methodologies are combined to investigate the research questions. The methods employed are minimal group experiments (Study 2.1 to 2.4, 3.1, 3.2 and 3.4), field experiments (Study 3.3 and 3.5), and correlational field studies (Study 2.5 and 3.6).

**Summary and conclusion of the findings in this dissertation**

Whereas past theory and research suggests that low status group members tend to attempt individual upward mobility as a primary strategy of status improvement (e.g. Taylor
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& McKirnan, 1984; Wright, Taylor, & Moghaddam, 1990), this thesis looks into the further implications of this type of identity management strategy and the conditions under which it is most likely to be successful. Specifically, this thesis focuses on how this upward mobility is experienced in a context of support and opposition from the low status ingroup and the high status outgroup.

Recent research suggests that the motivation to exhibit goal oriented behavior, such as the pursuit of upward mobility, depends on the experience of negative affect and the perceived feasibility of a particular outcome. Negative affect associated with a particular goal has been shown to decrease the tendency to approach the goal (Aarts, Custers, & Veltkamp, 2008). In addition, the perceived feasibility of a goal impacts on the likelihood that effort is asserted to reach an outcome (Bandura, 1997; Eccles & Wigfield, 2002). The motivation to pursue a goal is a decisive factor since motivated individuals are more likely to persevere in the face of setbacks. As ingroup support impacts on the experience of depressed affect and the perceived feasibility of upward mobility, the results in this dissertation attest to the importance of ingroup support for the upward mobility of low status group members.

Together the findings point to ingroup support as a resource that enables members of low status groups to persevere in the pursuit of upward mobility, even in the face of outgroup opposition. Specifically, several studies in this thesis show that ingroup support for upward mobility helps upwardly mobile low status group members to feel and think more positively about their upward mobility in the face of outgroup opposition. Results from Study 2.1, 2.2 and 2.5 show that outgroup opposition raises threat and depressed emotions like discouragement, while it lowers the perceived feasibility of upward mobility. Results from Study 2.3, 2.4 and 2.5 show that ingroup opposition aggravates the negativity related to upward mobility by raising depressed affect and decreasing the perceived feasibility of upward mobility. Study 2.4 demonstrates that these negative effects of ingroup opposition are explained by the fear that the ingroup fails to continue to perceive the individual as a “good” ingroup member. Conversely, Study 2.3 to 2.5 reveal that support from the ingroup relieves the concern of such anticipated ingroup rejection. Via perceived ingroup acceptance, ingroup support leads to lowered depressed affect and increases the perceived feasibility of upward mobility. Ingroup support has these positive effects on the way upward mobility is experienced while leaving perceived threat unaffected, as is demonstrated by Study 2.3 to 2.5. Thus, by intensifying depressed affect and decreasing the perceived feasibility of upward mobility, outgroup opposition lowers the motivation to pursue upward mobility. Conversely, ingroup support lowers the susceptibility to such motivation losses. Viewed from a stress and coping framework, ingroup support has these positive effects not by taking away the threat
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that is perceived but by equipping low status group members with the means to cope with threat. A situation in which demands outweigh resources is transformed into a situation in which more resources are available (e.g. Blascovich & Tomaka, 1996; Lazarus & Folkman, 1991). In short, the results reported in this thesis indicate that ingroup support raises low status group members’ perseverance in the pursuit of upward mobility, particularly when confronted with opposition from the outgroup.

In addition to showing that ingroup support is an important resource, our studies demonstrate how upwardly mobile individuals can elicit such support from the low status ingroup. Specifically, Study 3.1 to 3.3 show that ingroup support for upward mobility in low status groups can be raised through affective ingroup identification, confirming that one has strong emotional ties with the ingroup. Moreover, Study 3.2 and 3.3 also reveal why affective ingroup identification raises ingroup support for upward mobility. First, these studies indicate that affective ingroup identification leads members of low status groups to perceive the upward mobility of ingroup members as progress for the entire group. Second, Study 3.2 and 3.3 show that upwardly mobile individuals are continued to be perceived as ingroup members as a result of their affective ingroup identification.

The results thus show that individual upward mobility triggers several concerns in low status groups. On the one hand, individual upward mobility is an opportunity for group-based progress that enhances the positivity of the social identity. Successful ingroup members can for instance improve the image of the entire group. On the other hand, individual upward mobility poses a potential threat to the social identity of the group, namely when ingroup members are perceived to distance from the group, appearing to affirm the inferior position of the group (Ellemers, van den Heuvel, de Gilder, Maass, & Bonvini, 2004). Affective ingroup identification positively affects both concerns, leading to support for upward mobility in low status groups. First, low status group members’ perception of the effect of the upward mobility of fellow group members is influenced by affective ingroup identification. Relative to weak affective identifiers, strong affective identifiers are perceived to contribute positively to the image of the entire group instead of just improving their individual status position. As such, these upwardly mobile individuals may help to relieve the shared predicament of low status group members. Furthermore, upwardly mobile individuals who retain strong emotional ties with their low status ingroup are perceived to forgo the opportunity to distance themselves from their ingroup. As a result, the low status group continues to accept these upwardly mobile individuals as “good” members of the group. The effect of affective ingroup identification on both the perceived contribution to the position of the low status group and the maintained acceptance of
upwardly mobile ingroup members lead to stronger support for upward mobility in members of low status groups.

Moreover, affective ingroup identification appeared to be a feasible way of maintaining ingroup identification under upward mobility attempts as the high status group hardly opposes to this identity feature of upwardly mobile individuals. Instead, high status groups mainly object to behavioral identity expression among upwardly mobile members of low status group because behavioral identity expression raises perceptions of threat in high status group members.

In conclusion, this dissertation demonstrates that ingroup support is a key resource for upwardly mobile low status group members and that communicating about strong emotional ties with the ingroup can help to obtain such support from fellow low status group members. In the pursuit of upward mobility, members of low status groups can rely more strongly on their ingroup for support the more secure their affective identification with the low status group is seen to be. For example, reassurance of continued affective identification leads fellow group members to take more pride in the upward mobility of other individuals and to approach them more positively with respect to their upward mobility. The ingroup support that is provided then helps low status group members to persevere in their individual upward mobility when they have to overcome outgroup opposition to their upward mobility. Moreover, affective identification with the low status group was found not only to be a beneficial type of ingroup identification, but also a feasible way of maintaining one’s ties with the ingroup while pursuing upward mobility. Thus, affective ingroup identification is an identification feature that effectively raises support in low status groups, while the high status group does not seem to mind this type of ingroup identification in upwardly mobile low status group members. Lastly, the results in this dissertation counter the possibility that behavioral deviance is a primary reason for ingroup opposition to upward mobility in low status groups. Although behavioral cues of group membership are likely to attract attention from fellow low status group members (as these are visible cues) they seem to be less important for upward mobility support in low status groups than affective ingroup identification. Low status groups tend to tolerate the behavioral deviance of upwardly mobile ingroup members, enabling them to meet behavioral demands of the high status outgroup when necessary, as long as it is made clear that affective identification with the low status group is maintained.
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General contributions and implications of the dissertation

Low status group members pursuing upward mobility: Ingroup representatives or defectors?

In this dissertation we have demonstrated the complications associated with the pursuit of individual upward mobility for members of low status groups. From the perspective of the low status group the behavior of individual ingroup members can affect the image and interests of the group more broadly. The results of the different studies suggest that this concern causes members of low status groups to expect upwardly mobile individuals to fulfill a role that is probably best described as being an ‘ingroup representative’. Ingroup representatives are expected to not only be concerned with their own individual status improvement but also with promoting and protecting the interests of the low status group. They are expected to behave in ways that contribute to the status position of the entire group and to communicate that the group is worthwhile to stand for. Insufficient ingroup identification leads upwardly mobile individuals to be perceived as failing to fulfill the role of ingroup representative. Failure to fulfill this role to a satisfactorily degree leads upwardly mobile individuals to run the risk of being perceived as ‘defecting’. Defectors are perceived as contributing little to the welfare of the group with their upward mobility. The different studies clearly show that low status groups tend to support individuals who are seen as representatives while they are less likely to support upwardly mobile individuals who are perceived as defectors.

Upwardly mobile low status group members are sensitive to being perceived as defecting because this induces the fear that the ingroup will reject them or at least relegate them to the periphery of the group. This sensitivity of upwardly mobile low status group members to their ability to fulfill their role of ingroup representative prompts us to view individual upward mobility in low status group somewhat differently than former research has done. The predominant view on individual upward mobility is that of low status group members who distance from the lower status group in order to enter a higher status group. In this literature, that is strongly inspired by social identity theory (Tajfel & Turner, 1979), successful individual upward mobility is viewed as exchanging the low status group membership for the membership in a more prestigious group (e.g. Wright et al., 1990). However, the present work shows that low status group members pursuing upward mobility may suffer when being perceived as defectors. To the extent that they can maintain perceived acceptance into the ingroup from their fellow ingroup members they may receive support.
from the ingroup that helps them in their upward mobility attempts. This finding thus complements previous work that demonstrated that members of low status groups may psychologically distance the self from the group when they pursue upward mobility. It shows that although individual upward mobility is an individual level strategy for members of low status groups to enhance their social identity, this does not necessarily imply that they become indifferent to the low status group membership.

Perhaps the extent to which low status group members remain psychologically involved in the low status group depends on how assured they feel about acceptance in the high status group. Even when early upward mobility attempts appear promising, the possibility remains that the high status group will eventually reject the upwardly mobile individual. As long as acceptance by the high status group is insecure, continued identification with the low status ingroup can be particularly desirable. As acceptance by the high status group becomes more secured, upwardly mobile individuals may show increased indifference to the low status ingroup and its support. Also, presumably, low status group members who have completed the transition, and have been accepted into the high status group, become less anxious of being perceived as a defector by fellow low status group members.

Individual upward mobility and group-level concerns

This dissertation also offers more insight into the specific group concerns that are affected by the upward mobility of low status group members. Individual upward mobility can be perceived as improving the status of the entire group and the accompanying stigmatized identity. However, upwardly mobile ingroup members who disassociate from their ingroup can also be perceived as confirming the inferior status of the group.

First, upwardly mobile ingroup members who are perceived to act as group representatives offer hope to fellow group members of providing relief for their joint predicament by looking after the interests of the group. Low status groups are particularly in need of an improved position in the social hierarchy and generally prefer to get rid of the stigma of their low status position. Group members who act as representatives may be willing to emphasize and celebrate their ingroup identification (e.g., “This is what Moroccans are capable of!”), to share attained resources, and to help and inform fellow group members. In contrast, ingroup members who are seen as “defectors” are likely to be perceived as predominantly looking after their own individual interests, offering little hope of combating the stigma and the inferior position of the low status group as a whole. Thus,
despite the common sense notion that low status groups consider successful individual upward mobility by ingroup members as a contribution to the societal position of the group, the findings in this dissertation demonstrate that this is not necessarily the case. Upwardly mobile individuals who are perceived as ingroup representatives indeed are perceived as contributing to the societal position of the group. However, when upwardly mobile ingroup members are perceived as defecting they are perceived as contributing little to the position of the group or even as confirming its inferiority.

Furthermore, the notion that individual upward mobility can be perceived as group-based progress is an important contribution to the literature on the responses of low status groups to their disadvantaged societal position. Moreover, the findings presented in this dissertation offer insight into the circumstances under which this is likely to be the case. Wright (2001) argued that individual upward mobility in low status groups discourages these groups to collectively resist their societal position. The reason for this, according to Wright, is that individual upward mobility encourages intragroup interpersonal social comparisons that distract from group-based disadvantages. An alternative mechanism is proposed by the findings in this dissertation. Under specific conditions individual upward mobility can in itself be perceived as offering group-based progress, lowering a sense of collective deprivation in low status groups. When upwardly mobile individuals communicate a continued emotional involvement in the low status ingroup, their status improvement is perceived to generalize to the group as a whole by fellow group members. Thus, in addition to encouraging intragroup interpersonal comparisons upward mobility can also be perceived as contributing to the societal position of the low status group.

**Ingroup identification and individual upward mobility**

So far we have discussed that individual upward mobility is complicated because low status groups want their members to act as representatives while trying to escape negative judgments associated with their ingroup. Representatives maintain ingroup identification while pursuing upward mobility, which is not an easy feat as individual interests need to be reconciled with group-level interests. Signs of ingroup identification may raise opposition in high status outgroup members. The present research shows that the distinction between behavioral identity expression and affective ingroup identification aids members of low status groups in pursuing upward mobility while identifying with their ingroup. High status groups are predominantly interested in behavioral identity expression while low status groups are particularly interested in affective ingroup identification. The expectations of the
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high status outgroup and the low status ingroup are thus not necessarily contradictory. This means that upwardly mobile individuals can fulfill the role of ingroup representative and get ahead in an outgroup context by communicating their affective bond with the low status group while behaving in line with the behaviors of the high status group.

Representatives are thus not per se those low status group members who behave fully in line with ingroup practices. Rather, it is important that these representatives maintain an affective bond with the group. Previous research presented mixed results on the alleged tension between ingroup and outgroup support for upwardly mobile low status group members (Contrada et al., 2001; Cook & Ludwig, 1997; Fordham & Ogbu, 1986). Some upwardly mobile individuals report that they raise ingroup opposition with their non-prototypical behavior whereas others feel ingroup support despite their non-prototypicality in terms of behavior. The research presented in this dissertation suggests a possible explanation for these inconsistencies. When low status group members are perceived as having weak emotional ties with the ingroup their fellow group members probably see their disassociated behavior as symptomatic for their weak affective ingroup identification. Since behavior is more salient this is what fellow group members jeer at. By contrast, behavioral deviation can be tolerated to a stronger degree in upwardly mobile individuals who are perceived to maintain strong emotional ties with the ingroup.

Intrapersonal effects of adapting behavioral identity expression

Apparently straightforward advice from this dissertation for upwardly mobile members of low status groups would be to affectively identify with their group while minimizing behavioral expressions of the low status identity. This identification pattern could positively secure the continued support from the low as well as the high status group. However, the effects shown here regarding behavioral identity expression in low status groups should be considered carefully. The studies in this dissertation focused on the interplay between upwardly mobile low status group members and the immediate social context. We were interested in how others in the social context respond to behavioral association with the low status group.

One should keep in mind however that intrapersonal effects of suppressed behavioral identity expression also play a role. Some members of low status groups may feel fine behaving in line with the norms of the high status group. Others may feel that they are untrue to the self when adapting strongly to the behavioral norms of the high status group. Stated differently, low status group members who suppress behavioral expressions of their
identity in order to meet the behavioral demands of the high status outgroup can feel that they engage in self-discrepant behaviors. Following self-discrepancy theory (Higgins, 1987), such self-discrepant behaviors can be harmful to personal well-being. Inauthentic behaviors may give rise to self-directed negative emotions like shame and guilt (Barreto, Ellemers, & Banal, 2006), particularly when individuals distance from strongly self-defining identities such as race or gender. Furthermore, individuals are likely to experience stress when engaging in self-discrepant behaviors (Kernis & Goldman, 2006). Inauthentic behaviors may even have negative health effects (Cole, Kemeny, Taylor, Visscher, & Fahey, 1996; Pennebaker & Traue, 1993; Traue & Pennebaker, 1993). Future research should thus establish to what degree affective ingroup identification offsets the possible negative effects of suppressed behavioral identity expression for the personal well-being of upwardly mobile low status group members.

Practical implications

The results of this dissertation clearly show the importance of ingroup support in upward mobility of members of low status groups. In practice, support from fellow group members can come in various forms, such as personal relationships with fellow group members. Support can also come from formal or informal social identity related networks, such as professional female networks or ethnicity related networks. In vocational and academic settings ethnic minority group members and women can organize in these networks to offer ingroup support. The findings in this dissertation also offer scope to develop recommendations for the agenda of such identity related networks. To successfully affect upward mobility it will be important for these networks to pay attention to the difficult task of fulfilling the role of ingroup representative. Social networks can for example focus on finding practical ways to affectively identify with the low status group. They can think of innovative ways to anticipate the demands of the high status group while also looking after the concerns of the low status group. Some evidence of the beneficial effects of social identity related networks already exists. Two studies show, for example, that African American students on campuses dominated by Euro-American students profit from African American support networks (Davis, 1991; Levin, Van Laar & Foot, 2006). Participation in these networks was associated with higher academic commitment, higher motivation in college and higher occupational aspirations.

Identity related networks can thus play a significant role in organizing ingroup support in low status groups. Such ingroup focused initiatives are probably good supplements
of outgroup focused initiatives such as affirmative action measures. The basic goal of outgroup focused initiatives is to (temporarily) remove stigma related obstacles for upwardly mobile members of low status groups. Following the results in this dissertation, the aim of identity related networks is not to remove stigma related obstacles per se. Rather, identity related networks have the potential to help low status group members to better cope with the threat of pursuing upward mobility in outgroup contexts. An advantage of social identity related networks is that the organization of these networks is likely to meet fewer objections than outgroup focused initiatives. For instance, affirmative action policies may need far-reaching legal interventions and tend to stir turmoil and resistance in high status groups. Members of high status groups can and often do oppose the alleged “preferential treatment” of women and ethnic minorities in vocational settings. Identity related networks can be considered as less “radical” initiatives that do not interfere with common procedures. In this way these networks can be an important and effective resource for upwardly mobile members of low status groups.

**Strengths, limitations and future research**

A strong feature of the studies presented in this dissertation is the variation in research methods and research samples. Experiments were conducted among natural groups and among students who were allocated to minimal groups. Furthermore, correlational studies were conducted to test whether the experimental findings would hold in settings which were less controlled. Importantly, converging evidence was found with these procedures.

Nevertheless, a limitation of the current work is that all studies presented in this dissertation rely on cross-sectional designs which make it difficult to draw firm conclusions about longer term effects. It can, for example, not be ruled out that upwardly mobile individuals’ reliance on ingroup support is strong only in the short term. Perhaps upwardly mobile individuals become increasingly indifferent to the relationship with the low status group over time, especially when upward mobility progresses well. Longitudinal research will help to further investigate the longer term processes involved in the upward mobility of low status group members. Such research could for instance be conducted among women or ethnic minorities who are initiating a career after graduating from college. Such longitudinal studies could for instance focus on the longer term relationship between perceived support from fellow group members and subsequent outcome variables such as work performance, turnover, and goal-setting behavior in vocational settings.
CHAPTER 1

Conclusion

In this dissertation we have investigated the conditions under which the individual upward mobility of low status group members is likely to succeed, even when confronted with opposition from the high status outgroup. In addition, we have examined how upwardly mobile individuals can create such beneficial conditions. The findings show that ingroup support and affective identification with the low status group have a profound effect on upwardly mobile individuals. The research presented in this dissertation advances previous work on individual upward mobility in low status groups through its focus on the role of the ingroup in upward mobility. Insight into group-level concerns offers a better understanding of the complex processes involved in the pursuit of upward mobility by members of low status groups.