

1-2015

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DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1037/a0036708>

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Citation

THAU, Stefan; DERFLER-ROZIN, Rellie; PITESA, Marko; MITCHELL, Marie S.; and PILLUTLA, Madan M.. Unethical for the sake of the group: Risk of social exclusion and pro-group unethical behavior. (2015). *Journal of Applied Psychology*. 100, (1), 98-113. Research Collection Lee Kong Chian School Of Business.

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Unethical for the Sake of the Group: Risk of Social Exclusion and Pro-Group Unethical Behavior

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Published in *Journal of Applied Psychology*, Vol 100(1), Jan, 2015. pp. 98-113.

<http://dx.doi.org.libproxy.smu.edu.sg/10.1037/a0036708>

Abstract: This research tested the idea that the risk of exclusion from one's group motivates group members to engage in unethical behaviors that secure better outcomes for the group (pro-group unethical behaviors). We theorized that this effect occurs because those at risk of exclusion seek to improve their inclusionary status by engaging in unethical behaviors that benefit the group; we tested this assumption by examining how the effect of exclusion risk on pro-group unethical behavior varies as a function of group members' need for inclusion. A 2-wave field study conducted among a diverse sample of employees working in groups (Study 1) and a constructive replication using a laboratory experiment (Study 2) provided converging evidence for the theory. Study 1 found that perceived risk of exclusion from one's workgroup predicted employees' engagement in pro-group unethical behaviors, but only when employees have a high (not low) need for inclusion. In Study 2, compared to low risk of exclusion from a group, high risk of exclusion led to more pro-group (but not pro-self) unethical behaviors, but only for participants with a high (not low) need for inclusion. We discuss implications for theory and the management of unethical behaviors in organizations.

Keywords: social exclusion, exclusion risk, pro-group unethical behavior, need for inclusion

Rising reports of corporate scandals and incidents of employees engaging in behaviors that are considered "illegal or morally unacceptable to the larger community" (Jones, 1991, p. 367) have increased scholarly attention to the nature and causes of unethical behavior in organizations. Examples of unethical behaviors include stealing from one's employer, deceiving customers, and misrepresenting performance (Treviño, den Nieuwenboer, & Kish-Gephart, 2014). The costs associated with just one type of these behaviors—employee theft—are estimated at as much as \$40 billion yearly (U.S. Chamber of Commerce, 2013), which is nearly ten times the cost of all street crime combined, including burglaries and robberies (Federal Bureau of Investigation, 2011). A large body of research has identified characteristics of individuals, moral issues, and organizational contexts as antecedents of unethical behavior (Kish-Gephart, Harrison, & Treviño, 2010; Treviño, 1986; Treviño et al., 2014; Treviño, Weaver, & Reynolds, 2006).

A common assumption among many studies in the unethical behavior literature is that unethical behaviors produce benefits primarily for the self (Greenberg, 2002; Grover & Hui, 1994; Kish-Gephart et al., 2010; Reynolds, 2006; Sonenshein, 2007; Treviño et al., 2014; Treviño & Youngblood, 1990). However, employees sometimes behave unethically to benefit their workgroup (Gino & Pierce, 2009; Umphress, Bingham, & Mitchell, 2010). The popular press has highlighted such acts. For example, a New York Police Department narcotics detective, Stephen Anderson, reportedly framed innocent people to help fellow officers from his department achieve higher rates of drug-related arrests, allowing them to keep their jobs and outperform other departments in competition for federal antidrug funds (Balko, 2011).

We refer to these unethical behaviors as *pro-group unethical behaviors*, because the beneficiaries of the behavior are fellow group members and not just the person behaving unethically. Employees engage in various unethical behaviors to benefit their coworkers, such as misrepresenting performance and withholding relevant information from the public (Umphress et al., 2010). Although these types of unethical behaviors are estimated to cause high costs to organizations (Cialdini, Petrova, & Goldstein, 2004; Dunlop & Lee, 2004; Long & Rao, 1995), we know very little about what motivates group members to engage in pro-group unethical behaviors. Indeed, our review of the workplace unethical behavior literature, as summarized in Kish-Gephart et al. (2010), found that virtually all studies examined unethical behaviors that produced benefits for the self rather than others (for notable exceptions, see Gino & Pierce, 2009; Umphress et al., 2010; Wiltermuth, Bennett, & Pierce, 2013).

The contribution of our research is thus that we provide a theoretical model explaining why group members engage in unethical behaviors that benefit the workgroup, rather than unethical behaviors that primarily benefit the self. Our theory starts with the observation that pro-group unethical behaviors allow employees to contribute to their group's interests over and beyond what would be possible through ethical means. What motivates group members to resort to unethical means to make particularly large contributions? We answer this question by considering the social motivation that stems from group members' risk of exclusion from their group (Kurzban & Leary, 2001; Robinson, O'Reilly, & Wang, 2013; Scott & Thau, 2012). People fundamentally care about group inclusion (Baumeister & Leary, 1995) and take steps to minimize their risk of being excluded (Allen & Badcock, 2003; Leary, Tambor, Terdal, & Downs, 1995). Because inclusionary status in the group is affected by members' level of contributions to the group (Hirshleifer & Rasmusen, 1989; Kurzban & Leary, 2001), group members at risk of exclusion should be particularly motivated to make as large contributions to their group as possible in an effort to improve their inclusionary status. When confronted with opportunities to increase their group contributions through unethical behavior, group members at exclusion risk should be more likely to use that opportunity.

The focus on exclusion risk as a cause for pro-group unethical behaviors highlights a second contribution of our research. Past research on exclusion has primarily investigated the consequences of definite exclusion (i.e., absolute rejection or ejection from a group; Robinson et al., 2013; Scott & Thau, 2012). This work has shown that definitive exclusion motivates people to engage in antisocial behavior that is likely to promote further exclusion (e.g., Buckley, Winkel, & Leary, 2004; Maner, DeWall, Baumeister, & Schaller, 2007; Twenge, Baumeister, Tice, & Stucke, 2001; Twenge & Campbell, 2003). Yet, definitive exclusion is usually only the final result of a gradual worsening of a group member's inclusionary status, during which group members receive signals that they are at risk of exclusion (Allen & Badcock, 2003; Molden, Lucas, Gardner, Dean, & Knowles, 2009). Our work contributes to this research by demonstrating that exclusion risk motivates group members to behave unethically to advance the interests of their group.

We test our theory across two studies. Study 1 is a two-wave field survey among employees from various industries working in teams. It examines the relationship between perceptions of exclusion risk and pro-group unethical behaviors. Study 2 is a laboratory experiment that investigates whether exclusion risk uniquely causes pro-group unethical behaviors, as our theory claims, or whether exclusion risk also causes self-benefiting unethical behaviors. To test our theory's claim that pro-group unethical behavior is engaged in to improve inclusionary status, both studies examine whether the degree to which those at risk of exclusion engage in pro-group unethical behavior depends on the strength of their need for social inclusion (Hill, 1987; Leary & Allen, 2011).

Exclusion Risk and Pro-Group Unethical Behavior

Pro-group unethical behaviors are violations of moral and legal standards of how employees should behave when trying to contribute to the performance or well-being of their groups. For example, Umphress et al. (2010) found that employees misrepresented and exaggerated the truth about their company's products and services to customers in order to benefit their company. Similarly, Geis (1977) reported a price-fixing scandal in which the employee who committed the unethical act claimed he did so to prevent fellow employees from losing their jobs.

The majority of past research on unethical behaviors was concerned with immoral or illegal actions that primarily benefit the person engaging in such behavior. The examples we just gave show that employees sometimes engage in unethical behaviors that can benefit the performance or well-being of others. That does not imply that pro-group unethical behavior serves no personal interest. By virtue of being a member of the group, the actor is likely to benefit from the contributions to the group. However, pro-group unethical behavior differs from the unethical behaviors in which the sole beneficiary is the self (e.g., stealing company money and keeping it for oneself).

Another characteristic of pro-group unethical behavior is that it allows group members to contribute to the group's performance and well-being of their group over and beyond the limits imposed by ethical rules. Moral and legal expectations constrain the amount of contributions an individual can make to the group in a given situation. For example, when sales agents are called upon to report their sales, they are expected to accurately report how much was sold. If the agent is part of a group that is remunerated on the basis of joint sales performance, the agent can benefit the group by inflating his or her sales. Similarly, the sales agent may be expected to share relevant product information that helps in selling a company product with employees outside the agent's own workgroup. By withholding information from other groups but sharing it with the own group, individuals can contribute to their group beyond what would be possible if they were to do what is morally, or perhaps even legally, expected.

When are group members motivated to increase their contributions to their groups and benefit their groups beyond what would be possible by behaving ethically? We answer this research question by considering group members' motivation that follows from the risk of exclusion from the group. Theory and evidence suggest that groups put members at risk of exclusion when they perceive that members have insufficiently contributed to the group goals (Kurzban & Leary, 2001; Robinson et al., 2013; Scott, Restubog, & Zagenczyk, 2013; Scott & Thau, 2012). Groups benefit from members to the extent that members can effectively contribute to the group (Kurzban & Leary, 2001). For this reason, groups are sensitive to the value that each member brings to the group (Allen & Badcock, 2003) and are likely to retain members who contribute to the attainment of the group's goals and socially exclude those who do not (Hirshleifer & Rasmusen, 1989; Kurzban & Leary, 2001).

Actual exclusion from a group is usually only the final result of a gradual deterioration in group members' inclusionary status. Before individuals are definitely excluded, they likely receive signals from other group members that suggest they are at risk of being excluded. These signals may be communicated formally (e.g., being told to become a better team player in a performance review) or informally (e.g., being told that one may not "fit in"; Derfler-Rozin, Pillutla, & Thau, 2010).

Being socially included is more or less important to all individuals. Consequently, group members are motivated to maintain good inclusionary status by ensuring that other group members perceive them as valuable contributors (Baumeister & Leary, 1995; Hill, 1987). Those who perceive that they are at risk of exclusion will therefore be strongly motivated to improve their inclusionary status by demonstrating their value through increased contributions to the group (Allen & Badcock, 2003). Consistent with this idea, Derfler-Rozin et al. (2010) found that, compared to individuals who were not at risk of exclusion, those at risk of exclusion trusted others more. Trusting behavior can be interpreted as an attempt to improve one's inclusionary status because the recipients of trust often reciprocate it, and a mutual relationship could develop as a result. Similarly, Molden et al. (2009) found that signs of the possibility of exclusion, as opposed to definite exclusion, were associated with more attempts to reengage in social contact.

We argue, based on the theory and associated findings we presented above, that one way people can improve their inclusionary status is by increasing contributions to their group through pro-group unethical behavior. Because those at risk of exclusion wish to avoid definite exclusion, they are strongly motivated to demonstrate they are valuable to their group by increasing the level of their contributions. Pro-group unethical behavior allows employees who are at risk of being excluded to increase their contributions beyond what is possible through ethical means. Thus, employees at risk of exclusion should be more likely to resort to pro-group unethical behavior in an effort to improve their inclusionary status. We predict

Hypothesis 1: There is a positive relationship between exclusion risk and pro-group unethical behaviors.

In making this prediction, we assume that the group knows about the contributions of its members but does not necessarily know whether the contribution was made by way of unethical means. This assumption is consistent with research showing that employees often report being unaware of unethical behavior performed by their coworkers (Berry, Carpenter, & Barratt, 2012; R. M. Lee, 1993). The lack of awareness about the unethicality of the contribution behavior could be because the transgressor conceals the unethical nature of the behavior or because the group does not want to know whether members' contributions were rendered by unethical means. One well-known example is Enron's CEO, Jeff Skilling, who did not want to know how exactly David Fastow, Enron's CFO, was achieving the desired goal of removing poorly performing or volatile assets from Enron's balance sheet (Jenkins, 2002).

The Role of the Need for Social Inclusion

An important assumption of our theory is that the reason why exclusion risk motivates individuals to engage in pro-group unethical behavior is because they seek to improve their inclusionary status in the group. One way of testing this assumption relies on the logic of examining theoretically relevant conditions under which, if the proposed explanation is correct, the effect of interest should exhibit differential levels of occurrence (Spencer, Zanna, & Fong, 2005). We argue below that a theoretically relevant condition that can be examined to probe the assumption that exclusion risk motivates individuals to engage in pro-group unethical behavior because they seek to improve their inclusionary status is the degree to which people care more versus less about their inclusion in groups.

Although the need for inclusion is a universal need (Baumeister & Leary, 1995), just as with other needs, not all individuals care to the same degree about inclusion (Hill, 1987; Leary & Allen, 2011). Individuals with high inclusion needs are more strongly predisposed to seek out and maintain their inclusion in groups than are individuals with low inclusion needs. The need for social inclusion makes individuals averse to being rejected by others (Shipley & Veroff, 1952) and, instead, motivates them to establish, maintain, and restore social relationships (Koestner & McClelland, 1992; Leary, 2001; Leary & Allen, 2011). For instance, individuals with a strong need for inclusion are highly sensitive to affiliation cues they receive from other group members (Byrne, McDonald, & Mikawa, 1963; Pickett, Gardner, & Knowles, 2004), and they are sensitive to situations in which rejection is possible (Decharms, 1957).

If those who are at risk of exclusion engage in pro-group unethical behavior because in this way they seek to improve their inclusionary status, this effect should be moderated by group members' need for social inclusion. Individuals with a high need for inclusion should be more strongly motivated to improve their inclusionary status when faced with exclusion risk than should those with low need for inclusion (cf. Lecky, 1945). If pro-group unethical behavior is engaged in as a means of improving one's inclusionary status, when faced with exclusion risk, people with high inclusion needs should be motivated to resort to pro-group unethical behavior. In contrast, individuals whose need for social inclusion is low should be less motivated to engage in pro-group unethical behavior when faced with exclusion risk because they care less about inclusion in social groups. We predict

Hypothesis 2: The need for social inclusion moderates the relationship between exclusion risk and pro-group unethical behavior such that the relationship is stronger when the need for inclusion is high rather than low.

Overview of the Present Research

We conducted two studies to test our theory. Study 1 was a field study with employees from various industries working in teams. Study 2 was a laboratory experiment that sought to constructively replicate the results of Study 1 in a controlled environment. Another goal in Study 2 was to exclude potential alternative explanations, which we discuss in the introduction of Study 2. Together, the two studies provide a test of our theory using both field and experimental laboratory methodologies, thus ensuring both the ecological and internal validity of our conclusions.

Study 1

Method

Sample and procedure

Data were collected from individuals working in full-time positions among various industries located in the United States including finance, insurance, education, health care, information technology, and retail. Surveys were administered via the Internet. Students from a southeastern U.S. university were asked to serve as organizational contacts for course credit by providing the contact information for full-time working adults who worked in an environment with other coworkers and who expressed willingness to complete two surveys, separated by approximately three weeks. We followed design protocols established in the literature to ensure the data were from working adults (e.g., emphasize importance of integrity, compare student and participant e-mail and International Protocol addresses; for a similar procedure, see, e.g., De Cremer, van Dijke, & Mayer, 2010; Grant & Mayer, 2009; Mayer, Aquino, Greenbaum, & Kuenzi, 2012).

A total of 298 individuals completed the Time 1 survey (83.9% response rate), and 252 individuals completed the Time 2 survey (71.0% response rate from the overall initial starting sample of 355). The Time 1 survey contained measures of our independent variables and control variables, and the Time 2 survey contained the dependent variable and demographic questions. The independent and dependent measures were collected at two different points in time to strengthen the ability to make a causal inference and to reduce common method bias (Podsakoff, MacKenzie, Lee, & Podsakoff, 2003). The final sample consisted of 228 respondents who provided complete responses for our study's variables ($M_{age} = 42.4$ years, $SD_{age} = 12.7$, $M_{tenure} = 8.13$ years, $SD_{tenure} = 7.5$; 57.94% were women and 48.4% were managers).

Measures

The Appendix contains details of additional studies conducted to evaluate the validity of the risk of exclusion and pro-group unethical behavior measures used in Study 1. Unless otherwise noted, all items in Study 1 were measured on a 5-point scale ranging from 1 (*Strongly disagree*) to 5 (*Strongly agree*).

Risk of exclusion

To measure perceived risk of exclusion, we adapted seven items from the Workplace Ostracism Scale (Ferris, Brown, Berry, & Lian, 2008) and the UCLA Loneliness Scale (Russell, Peplau, & Cutrona, 1980) to reflect possible, rather than definite, exclusion. Respondents indicated their agreement with the following seven items: "I sometimes feel as though members of my workgroup might ignore me," "I feel like it is likely that my workgroup members will not invite me for lunch," "I wonder if my workgroup members might try to avoid me," "I suspect I might be shut out of conversation by my workgroup members," "I think it is possible that members of my workgroup might treat me as if I am not there," "I feel that members of my workgroup might not invite me or ask me if I wanted anything when they go out for a coffee break."

Need for inclusion

We used a six-item measure by Armeli, Eisenberger, Fasolo, and Lynch (1998) to assess individuals' need for social inclusion. Sample items are "I feel like I have really accomplished something valuable when I am able to get close to someone" and "Just being around others and finding out about them is one of the most interesting things I can think of doing."

Pro-group unethical behavior

A five-item measure of unethical pro-group behavior was developed for this study, based on items from Mitchell, Baer, Ambrose, Folger, and Palmer (2012). The items measured the frequency with which employees engaged in different unethical behaviors for the benefit of their workgroup: "Failed to tell someone not in your workgroup that something they did was done wrong so they do not perform as well as your workgroup," "Discredited another workgroup or another workgroup member's performance to make your workgroup look better," "Bad-mouthed another workgroup or another workgroup member to take them out of the competition for opportunities in the company," "Withheld information to put your workgroup ahead of

another workgroup or another workgroup member,” “Purposely did not include another workgroup member to make your workgroup more valuable” (1 = *Never*; 5 = *Very often*).

We also measured several theoretically relevant control variables.

Self-control

To account for the possibility that those at risk of exclusion behave more unethically because their self-control is impaired (Baumeister, DeWall, Ciarocco, & Twenge, 2005; Mead, Baumeister, Gino, Schweitzer, & Ariely, 2009), we assessed chronic self-control via the measure by Tangney, Baumeister, and Boone (2004). Sample items are “I am able to work effectively toward long-term goals” and “I have a hard time breaking bad habits” (reverse-coded).

Job satisfaction

We controlled for participants’ job satisfaction because previous research suggests it can affect employees’ willingness to engage in unethical behavior (Kish-Gephart et al., 2010). Employees indicated their agreement with six items (e.g., “I feel fairly satisfied with my present job,” “Most days I am enthusiastic about my work”) from a job satisfaction scale (Brooke, Russell, & Price, 1988) based on Brayfield and Rothe (1951).

Dispositional affectivity

We controlled for respondents’ long-term affectivity to account for the possibility that exclusion risk affects how people feel (Allen & Badcock, 2003; N. I. Eisenberger, Lieberman, & Williams, 2003), which could influence how they approach moral issues at work (Yang & Diefendorff, 2009). We used the 20-item Positive and Negative Affect Schedule (PANAS; Watson, Clark, & Tellegen, 1988). Employees indicated how often they had experienced the feeling depicted (e.g., “hostile,” “enthusiastic”) over the past 6 months on a 5-point scale (1 = *Not at all*; 7 = *A lot*).

Impression management

Because our questions concerned sensitive topics, we controlled for participants’ tendency to respond in a socially desirable manner using the impression management subscale from the Balanced Inventory of Desirable Responding (Paulhus, 1984). Respondents indicated their agreement with the statements (e.g., “Once in a while I laugh at a dirty joke,” “I have some pretty awful habits”), and the responses were averaged.

Demographics

Finally, we controlled for employee age and gender, as prior research suggests that these variables may affect employees’ willingness to engage in unethical behavior at work (Kish-Gephart et al., 2010).

Results and Discussion

Hypothesis 1 test

Table 1 contains variable means, standard deviations, internal consistency statistics, and correlations. We conducted hierarchical regression analyses to test our prediction that need for social inclusion moderates the effects of risk of exclusion on pro-group unethical behavior. The results of the analyses are presented in Table 2. We found a significant positive effect of exclusion risk on pro-group unethical behaviors, $b = 0.10$, $SE = 0.05$, $t(218) = 2.16$, $p = .032$ (see also Table 2, Model 2), supporting Hypothesis 1.

Table 1

Study 1: Means, Standard Deviations, Correlations, and Internal Consistency Statistics

Variable	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
1. Age	42.49	12.77	—									
2. Gender ^a	0.60	0.49	0.05	—								
3. Positive affect	3.73	0.70	-0.01	0.01	(.88)							
4. Negative affect	2.00	0.62	-0.14	0.05	-0.26	(.87)						
5. Job satisfaction	3.92	0.75	0.07	0.10	0.54	-0.34	(.87)					
6. Impression management	3.13	0.46	0.19	0.18	0.16	-0.29	0.20	(.77)				
7. Self-control	3.56	0.57	0.06	0.17	0.32	-0.36	0.21	0.62	(.82)			
8. Need for inclusion	3.54	0.63	-0.04	0.17	0.31	0.09	0.33	0.07	0.06	(.87)		
9. Exclusion risk	1.98	0.81	-0.02	-0.02	-0.27	0.13	-0.36	-0.13	-0.20	-0.26	(.92)	
10. Pro-group unethical behavior	1.31	0.57	-0.08	-0.21	-0.05	0.07	-0.07	-0.21	-0.27	-0.10	0.19	(.88)

Note. *N* = 228. All values greater than .12 are significant at *p* < .05. Cronbach's alphas are displayed on the diagonal.

^a Women were coded 1 and men were coded 0.

Study 1: Means, Standard Deviations, Correlations, and Internal Consistency Statistics

Table 2

Study 1: Moderated Regression Analysis Results

Independent variable	Pro-group unethical behavior: Model 1						Pro-group unethical behavior: Model 2						Pro-group unethical behavior: Model 3					
	<i>b</i>	<i>SE</i>	<i>t</i>	<i>p</i>	<i>LLCI</i>	<i>ULCI</i>	<i>b</i>	<i>SE</i>	<i>t</i>	<i>p</i>	<i>LLCI</i>	<i>ULCI</i>	<i>b</i>	<i>SE</i>	<i>t</i>	<i>p</i>	<i>LLCI</i>	<i>ULCI</i>
(Constant)	2.70	0.39	7.00	.000	1.94	3.45	2.38	0.41	5.79	.000	1.57	3.18	2.38	0.41	5.86	.000	1.58	3.18
Gender ^a	-0.11	0.07	-1.64	.102	-0.25	0.02	-0.11	0.07	-1.63	.105	-0.25	0.02	-0.13	0.07	-1.95	.052	-0.27	0.00
Age	0.00	0.00	-1.45	.149	-0.01	0.00	0.00	0.00	-1.49	.137	-0.01	0.00	-0.01	0.00	-1.84	.067	-0.01	0.00
Positive affect	-0.04	0.06	-0.77	.443	-0.16	0.07	-0.03	0.06	-0.44	.659	-0.14	0.09	-0.01	0.06	-0.11	.916	-0.12	0.11
Negative affect	0.01	0.06	0.11	.913	-0.11	0.12	0.02	0.06	0.3	.765	-0.10	0.14	0.01	0.06	0.16	.874	-0.11	0.13
Job satisfaction	0.03	0.05	0.53	.595	-0.08	0.14	0.07	0.06	1.25	.212	-0.04	0.18	0.06	0.06	0.98	.329	-0.06	0.17
Impression management	-0.10	0.09	-1.07	.285	-0.28	0.08	-0.09	0.09	-1.04	.301	-0.27	0.09	-0.1	0.09	-1.14	.256	-0.28	0.08
Self-control	-0.24	0.08	-3.02	.003	-0.39	-0.08	-0.22	0.08	-2.83	.005	-0.37	-0.07	-0.19	0.08	-2.49	.013	-0.35	-0.04
Exclusion risk ^b (A)							0.10	0.05	2.16	.032	0.01	0.19	0.11	0.05	2.37	.019	0.02	0.19
Need for inclusion ^b (B)							-0.05	0.06	-0.79	.433	-0.16	0.07	-0.05	0.06	-0.94	.350	-0.17	0.06
A × B													0.12	0.05	2.38	.018	0.02	0.21
<i>R</i> ²				.150						.172						.194		
ΔR^2				.150						.023						.021		
<i>p</i> (ΔR^2)				<.001						.052						.018		

Note. *N* = 228. *LLCI* = 95% confidence interval lower limit; *ULCI* = 95% confidence interval upper limit.

^a Women were coded 1 and men were coded 0. ^b Mean-centered.

Study 1: Moderated Regression Analysis Results

Hypothesis 2 test

Table 2 (Model 3) also shows that the interaction between exclusion risk and need for inclusion is significant, $b = 0.12$, $SE = 0.05$, $t(217) = 2.38$, $p = .018$. To interpret the interaction, we analyzed simple slopes of exclusion risk at ± 1 *SD* of employees' need for inclusion (see Figure 1). As predicted, the effect of exclusion risk on pro-group unethical behavior was not significant when need for inclusion was low (2.91), $b = 0.03$, $SE = 0.05$, $t(217) = 0.60$, $p = .550$, but it was significant and positive when need for inclusion was high (4.18), $b = 0.18$, $SE = 0.06$, $t(217) = 3.19$, $p = .002$. These results show that individuals who perceived they were at risk of exclusion were more likely to engage in pro-group unethical behavior when they had a high need for social inclusion, but not when they had a low need for social inclusion, supporting Hypothesis 2.

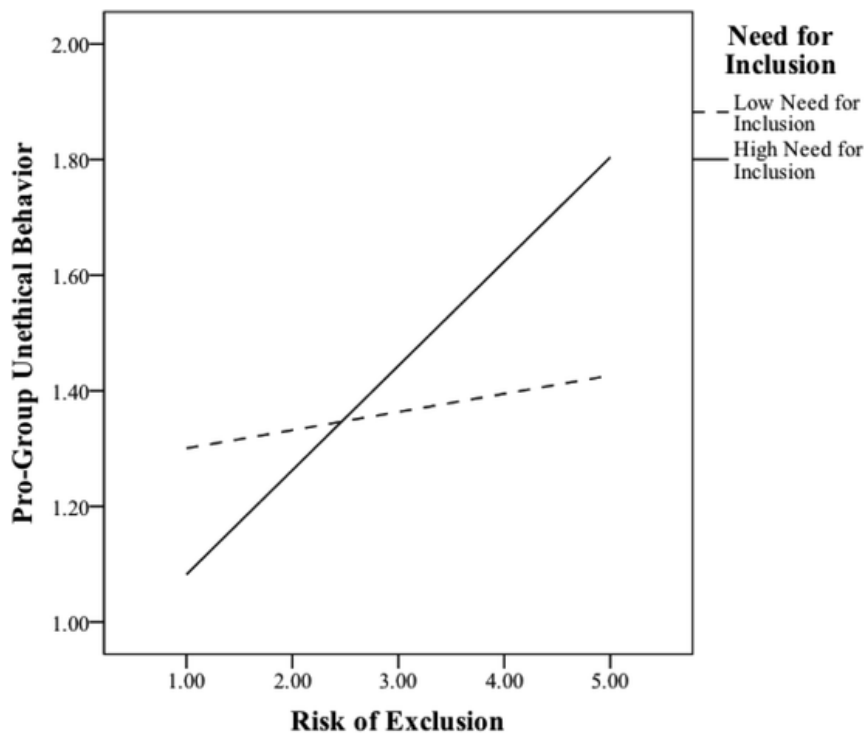


Figure 1. Study 1: Simple slopes for employees' pro-group unethical behavior.

Study 2

Study 2 was designed to extend Study 1 in two ways. First, correlational studies do not allow for causal inferences, so we replicated Study 1 with a lab experiment in which participants were randomly assigned to conditions. Second, another potential limitation of Study 1 was that we were unable to distinguish between pro-group unethical behavior and unethical behavior motivated by self-interest. Although we used a measure tapping specifically into unethical behaviors that benefit the group and the validation studies reported in the Appendix show that this measure captures a construct distinct from self-serving unethical behavior, Study 1 does not explicitly exclude the possibility that exclusion risk leads to an increase in all types of unethical behavior. We considered this possibility unlikely, given the evidence supporting Hypothesis 2 and showing that the effect of exclusion risk on pro-group unethical behavior is stronger for those with high need for inclusion (i.e., individuals highly motivated to maintain and improve their inclusionary status; Koestner & McClelland, 1992; Leary, 2001; Leary & Allen, 2011). If the unethical behavior as a result of exclusion risk were not aimed to benefit the group, there would be no differences in the effect of exclusion risk as a function of inclusion needs.

Nevertheless, in Study 2 we address this concern directly by experimentally varying whether participants' unethical behaviors benefited either the group but not the self, or the self but not the group. If exclusion risk leads to unethical behavior aimed at benefiting the group as a means of improving inclusionary status (rather than a general propensity to behave unethically), then participants at high risk of exclusion, compared to those at low risk of exclusion, should engage in more unethical behavior only when such behavior benefits the group and not when it benefits themselves.

The final goal in Study 2 was to constructively replicate (Lykken, 1968; Shadish, Cook, & Campbell, 2002) the moderating effect of need for inclusion on the effect of exclusion risk on pro-group unethical behavior. To this end, we used an alternative (Leary, Kelly, Cottrell, & Schreindorfer, 2013) but also widely used measure of inclusion needs (e.g., Blader & Chen, 2011; Molden et al., 2009; Murray et al., 2005; Plaut, Garnett, Buffardi, & Sanchez-Burks, 2011) to assess participants' need for inclusion a week prior to the experiment. As in Study 1, need for inclusion was expected to moderate the effect of exclusion risk such that the positive

effect of exclusion risk on pro-group unethical behavior is stronger among those with high, compared to low, need for inclusion. In contrast, when the unethical behavior benefits the self, exclusion risk should have no effect on unethical behavior regardless of participants' inclusion needs.

Method

Participants and design

One hundred university subject pool members participated in the study in exchange for £12 ($M_{age} = 26.09$ years, $SD_{age} = 9.48$; 59.00% female). Subjects were told the study was about group formation and were asked to complete a prestudy questionnaire (ostensibly measuring personality characteristics shown to predict leadership emergence in groups) 1 week prior to the experiment. The lab experiment was a 2 (exclusion risk: high vs. low) \times 2 (unethical behavior beneficiary: pro-group vs. pro-self) between-subjects design, with participants randomly assigned to one of the conditions. Participants were run in sessions of four. In one session, participants indicated they all knew each other (in no other session was this indicated). As the experiment manipulated intragroup relationships, their knowledge threatened to invalidate the cover story and the manipulations, so these four cases were excluded from the analysis sample.

Prestudy questionnaire and need for inclusion measure

In the prestudy questionnaire, participants indicated their agreement with a list of statements on a 5-point scale (1 = *Strongly disagree*, 5 = *Strongly agree*). Among filler statements, the 10 items from the Need to Belong Scale (Leary et al., 2013) were included to measure participants' chronic need for social inclusion ($\alpha = .85$). Sample items are "I want other people to accept me" and "I have a strong need to belong."

Experiment procedure and materials

Participants arrived at the lab in groups of four and were told that the study consisted of three group tasks. Upon arrival, participants were given blue tags to wear on their shirts, identifying them by color and number (e.g., "Blue 1"). They were then led to a room and presented with an overview of the experiment. Participants were told that they would first engage in a 15-minute group discussion. The second task was described as a competition against another group in the other room (the "Reds"), with a chance of winning additional compensation. Participants were also told that only three out of the four people were required for the final group task and that they would have to select who would be included in the final task. The person not chosen to participate would do a similar individual task instead. No compensation was announced for either final task.

After the overview, participants were told to start the first group task, the 15-minute group discussion. They were given a set of questions about their personal lives (adapted from Sedikides, Campbell, Reader, & Elliot, 1999), and it was suggested they answer the questions in turns to facilitate the discussion and allow participants to get to know each other.

Fifteen minutes later, the experimenter returned and instructed the participants to log onto their computers (located in isolated cubicles in the same room) and follow the instructions on the screen to engage in the problem-solving task. Participants were also instructed to verify each other's group member numbers briefly for purposes of the vote for the inclusion in the third group task.

Exclusion risk manipulation

The computer informed the participants that a brief preliminary vote for the inclusion in the third group task would take place before they engaged in the problem-solving task. Participants were told that the final vote deciding who would be included in the third group task would take place after the problem-solving task. They were asked to cast their preliminary vote for two (out of three) members they wanted to be included in the third group task. Afterward, participants saw an indicator suggesting that the computer was awaiting responses from all members to be entered. Then, all members were shown the results of the preliminary voting.

In the *high risk of exclusion* condition, participants read that only one other group member voted for them to be included in the final task and their chance of being included in the final task was therefore low. In the *low risk of exclusion* condition, they read that three other group members voted for them and their chance of being included in the final task was therefore high. They were reminded that this vote was only preliminary and that the final vote would be made after the problem-solving task.

Unethical behavior beneficiary manipulation and manipulation check

Next, participants were told that the problem-solving task consisted of solving 10 anagrams (words in which letters have been scrambled). The goal of the task was to work out the original words within three minutes. Participants were told they would compete against a member of the “Reds” group and that the person who solved more anagrams would win the competition. Further, in the pro-group [pro-self] condition, the instructions read, “Note that you will compete on behalf of your group [yourself]. If you win the competition, each member of your group (except you) [you (and no one else)] will win an extra £2 bonus.”

Next, because our theory suggests that exclusion risk prompts pro-group unethical behavior with the goal of improving one’s inclusionary status in the group, it was important to make participants’ performance in the task known to their group members. Thus, in both conditions the following line read, “Your result in the competition will be known to other group members.”

On the next screen, participants were asked to respond to five questions purportedly checking their comprehension of the task (1 = *Strongly agree*; 5 = *Strongly disagree*). Three of the questions verified they understood what anagrams were and how to solve them (e.g., “Anagrams contain rearranged letters from common words in English,” “I have to use all the letters in the anagram to work out the original word”). All participants responded correctly to these questions. The final two questions checked the effectiveness of our manipulation: “If I win the competition, members of my group get a bonus” and “If I win the competition, I get a bonus.”

Unethical behavior measure

Participants then saw the 10 anagrams and a 3-minute countdown timer that reminded them of the time they had left to work on the anagrams. They were provided with pen and paper to help them work on the anagrams. After 3 minutes, the page auto-advanced and participants were asked to report the number of anagrams they solved (1 = *None*, 10 = *All*). Unbeknownst to the participants, the anagrams were unsolvable, so the number of anagrams reported as solved constituted our measure of cheating. To minimize suspicion, the anagrams were selected from common English words and we changed a single letter to make them unsolvable. All participants were native English speakers, so it was almost impossible for them to mistakenly think they had constructed a common English word. This measure of cheating has been widely used in prior research (e.g., DePalma, Madey, & Bornschein, 1995; R. Eisenberger & Leonard, 1980; R. Eisenberger & Masterson, 1983; R. Eisenberger & Shank, 1985; Pitesa, Thau, & Pillutla, 2013; Shmueli & Muraven, 2007; Wiltermuth, 2010).

Exclusion risk manipulation check

After reporting the number of anagrams solved, participants responded to several questions ostensibly aimed at checking whether they understood the previous group interaction and how the upcoming final voting would be conducted. In addition to administering comprehension checks (e.g., “Only three out of four members will be selected for the final group task,” “Members will vote on who will be selected for the final group task”), to which all participants responded correctly, we administered the following items measuring perceived risk of exclusion: “I was at risk of being excluded from the group” and “My chances of being included were low.” The two items were averaged and used as the exclusion risk manipulation check ($r = .66, p < .001$). Afterward, participants reported their age and gender. The experimenter then informed them the study was over and debriefed them thoroughly.

Results and Discussion

Analysis

Our experimental design required participants to be run in sessions of four, yielding a data structure in which participants were nested in sessions. This design could thus lead to nonindependent observations within

sessions, violating statistical assumptions of ordinary least squares–based regression techniques (including analysis of variance) and potentially biasing the standard errors of the regression parameters. Confirming that the data had a nested structure, a preliminary analysis of the dependent variable (number of anagrams misreported) revealed a significant between-session variance, $F(24, 95) = 2.46, p = .002$, and intraclass correlation, ICC1 95% CIs [0.048, 0.486]. We thus analyzed Study 2 data using multilevel linear regression with restricted maximum likelihood estimation, which produces unbiased standard errors and parameter estimates with nested data (Hox, 2010; Kenward & Roger, 1997). All parameters were estimated as fixed (γ) effects.

Manipulation checks

Participants in the pro-group condition ($M = 4.69, SD = 0.78$) indicated a greater level of agreement with the statement that their group would win a bonus if they won the competition than did participants in the pro-self condition ($M = 1.60, SD = 1.03$), $\gamma = 3.02, SE = 0.19, z = 16.30, p < .001$. Participants in the pro-self condition ($M = 4.83, SD = 0.38$) indicated a greater level of agreement with the statement that they would win a bonus if they won the competition than did participants in the pro-group condition ($M = 2.48, SD = 1.65$), $\gamma = 2.30, SE = 0.24, z = 9.47, p < .001$. Thus, participants in the pro-self condition believed they (but not their group) would win the bonus if they won the competition, but participants in the pro-group condition believed their group (but not they) would win the bonus if they won the competition. These results show that the manipulation of unethical behavior beneficiary was successful.

In addition, participants in the high exclusion risk condition reported they were at greater risk of being excluded from the group ($M = 4.39, SD = 0.99$) than participants in the low exclusion risk condition ($M = 2.51, SD = 1.10$), $\gamma = 1.87, SE = 0.21, z = 9.09, p < .001$. Thus, the exclusion risk manipulation was also successful.

Hypothesis 1 test

To test Hypothesis 1, we must examine whether exclusion risk leads to more pro-group unethical behavior. In addition, if the effect of exclusion risk is specific to pro-group unethical behavior, as we claim, and does not promote unethical behavior more generally, then exclusion risk should have no effect when the self (but not the group) is the beneficiary of the unethical behavior. Thus, to show this more stringent evidence for Hypothesis 1, we must demonstrate a significant interaction between exclusion risk and unethical behavior beneficiary on unethical behavior (indicating that the effect of exclusion risk differs significantly depending on the beneficiary of unethical behavior) such that exclusion risk leads to more unethical behavior when the beneficiary is the group but not when the beneficiary is the self.

Figure 2 displays the mean number of anagrams misreported as solved by condition. As shown in Table 3 (Model 1), the expected interaction between exclusion risk and unethical behavior beneficiary was significant, $\gamma = 1.63, SE = 0.79, z = 2.07, p = .038$, and an analysis of simple slopes revealed that exclusion risk led to more pro-group unethical behavior, $\gamma = 1.21, SE = 0.53, z = 2.27, p = .023$ ($M_{risk} = 2.58, SD_{risk} = 2.40$; $M_{no risk} = 1.08, SD_{no risk} = 2.24$), but not more pro-self unethical behavior, $\gamma = -0.42, SE = 0.53, z = -0.79, p = .428$ ($M_{risk} = 1.04, SD_{risk} = 1.20$; $M_{no risk} = 1.38, SD_{no risk} = 1.53$). These results support Hypothesis 1.

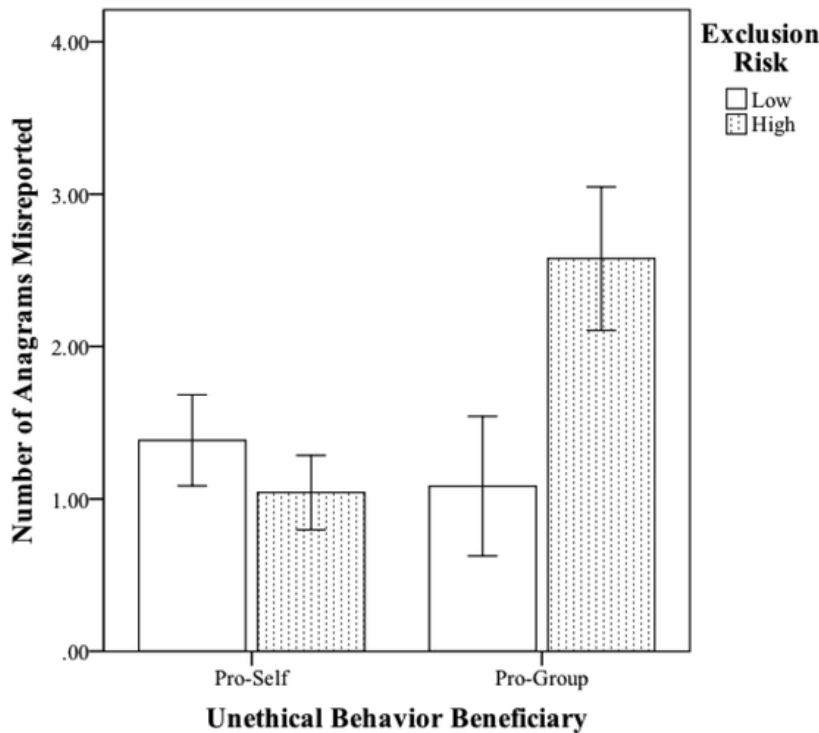


Figure 2. Study 2: Mean number of anagrams misreported by condition. Error bars represent standard errors.

Table 3
Study 2: Multilevel Moderated Regression Analysis Results

Independent variable	Unethical behavior: Model 1						Unethical behavior: Model 2					
	γ	SE	z	p	LLCI	ULCI	γ	SE	z	p	LLCI	ULCI
(Constant)	1.49	0.41	3.63	.000	0.68	2.29	-1.52	1.75	-0.87	.386	-4.95	1.92
Exclusion risk ^a (A)	-0.42	0.53	-0.79	.428	-1.46	0.62	2.29	2.65	0.86	.388	-2.91	7.49
Unethical behavior beneficiary ^b (B)	-0.37	0.53	-0.70	.485	-1.41	0.67	3.92	2.35	1.67	.096	-0.69	8.53
A × B	1.63	0.79	2.07	.038	0.09	3.18	-7.21	3.89	-1.85	.064	-14.84	0.41
Need for inclusion (C)							0.90	0.51	1.78	.076	-0.09	1.90
A × C							-0.82	0.78	-1.06	.290	-2.35	0.70
B × C							-1.30	0.69	-1.88	.060	-2.66	0.06
A × B × C							2.64	1.14	2.33	.020	0.42	4.87
R ^{2c}				.062						.107		

Note. $N = 94$. Dependent variable is the number of anagrams misreported. *LLCI* = 95% confidence interval lower limit; *ULCI* = 95% confidence interval upper limit.

^a Coded 1 for high and 0 for low exclusion risk. ^b Coded 0 for pro-self and 1 for pro-group. ^c Calculated per Snijders and Bosker (1999, pp. 99–105).

Study 2: Multilevel Moderated Regression Analysis Results

Hypothesis 2 test

To test Hypothesis 2, we examined whether the effect of exclusion risk on pro-group unethical behavior varies as a function of participants' need for inclusion such that the effect is stronger when they have a strong need for social inclusion. In contrast, exclusion risk should have no effect on unethical behavior when the beneficiary of the behavior is the self, regardless of participants' need for inclusion. This pattern of results implies a three-way interaction among exclusion risk, unethical behavior beneficiary, and need for inclusion, such that the effect of exclusion risk varies as a function of need for inclusion when the unethical behavior benefits the group but does not vary as a function of need for inclusion when the unethical behavior benefits the self.

The results are reported in Table 3 (Model 2). The expected three-way interaction was significant, $\gamma = 2.64$, $SE = 1.14$, $z = 2.33$, $p = .020$, so we followed the procedure specified by Dawson and Richter (2006) in interpreting the interaction. As summarized in Table 4 and depicted in Figure 3, the effect of exclusion risk on pro-group unethical behavior was stronger among those with high need for inclusion (4.05), $\gamma = 2.46$, $SE = 0.75$, $z = 3.28$, $p = .001$, than those with low need for inclusion (2.71), $\gamma = 0.01$, $SE = 0.78$, $z = 0.01$, $p = .995$, and the slope difference between these two slopes was statistically significant, $\gamma = -2.45$, $SE = 1.09$, $z = -2.25$, $p = .025$. In contrast, exclusion risk had no effect on pro-self unethical behavior regardless of the level of participants' need for social inclusion. Accordingly, the slopes for the effect of exclusion risk on pro-self unethical behavior as a function of inclusion needs were nonsignificant and did not differ between each other (see Table 4 for all details). The results provide support for Hypothesis 2.

Table 4
Study 2: Simple Slopes for the Effect of Exclusion Risk on Number of Anagrams Misreported (Up) and Slope Difference Test (Down)

Slope	Unethical behavior beneficiary	Need for inclusion	γ	SE	z	p	LLCI	ULCI
1	Pro-self	Low (2.71)	0.06	0.72	0.09	.928	-1.34	1.47
2	Pro-self	High (4.05)	-1.04	0.75	-1.38	.167	-2.52	0.43
3	Pro-group	Low (2.71)	0.01	0.78	0.01	.995	-1.53	1.54
4	Pro-group	High (4.05)	2.46	0.75	3.28	.001	0.99	3.93

Slopes compared		Slope difference test						
1 versus 2		1.11	1.05	1.06	.290	-0.94	3.16	
3 versus 1		-0.06	1.08	-0.06	.956	-2.17	2.05	
3 versus 2		1.05	1.12	0.94	.348	-1.14	3.24	
4 versus 1		2.39	1.05	2.27	.023	0.33	4.45	
4 versus 2		3.50	1.12	3.13	.002	1.31	5.69	
3 versus 4		-2.45	1.09	-2.25	.025	-4.59	-0.31	

Note. SE = standard error; LLCI = 95% confidence interval lower limit; ULCI = 95% confidence interval upper limit.

Study 2: Simple Slopes for the Effect of Exclusion Risk on Number of Anagrams Misreported (Up) and Slope Difference Test (Down)

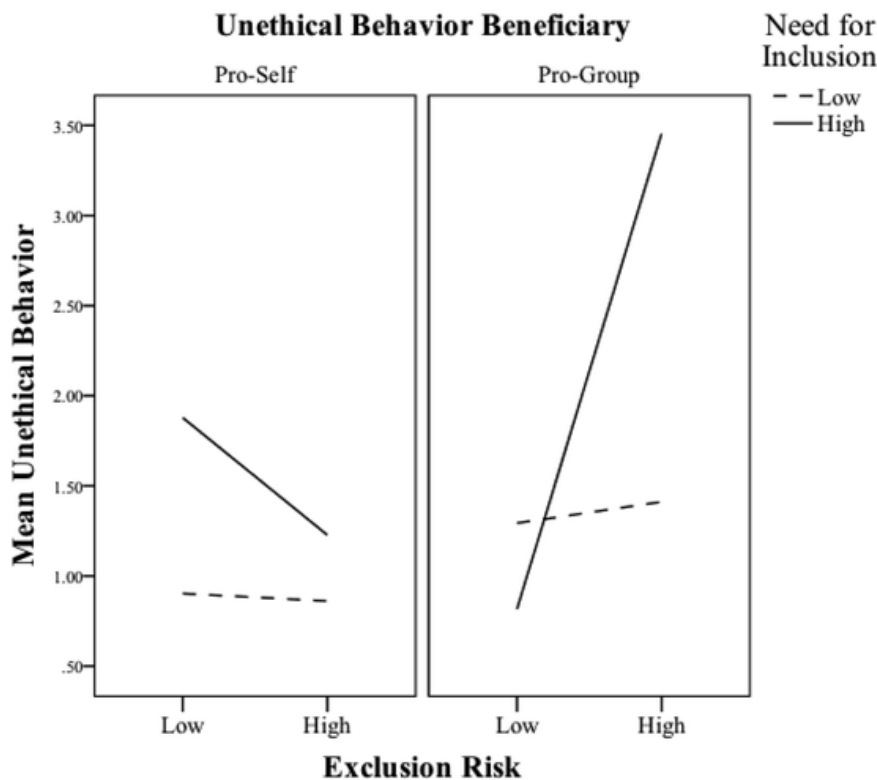


Figure 3. Study 2: Simple slopes for the effect of exclusion risk on the number of anagrams misreported as a function of unethical behavior beneficiary and need for inclusion.

General Discussion

We argued that exclusion risk motivates employees to engage in unethical behaviors that have the potential to benefit their workgroup and that they do so in an attempt of improving their inclusionary status. Two studies offer evidence for our theory. Study 1 found that employees who believed they were at risk of exclusion (e.g., believed that it was likely that workgroup members might avoid, exclude, or ignore them) were more likely to engage in general acts of pro-group unethical behavior (e.g., discrediting, bad-mouthing, and excluding out-group individuals to enhance group goals), particularly when the employee had a high need for inclusion. When the employee's need for inclusion was low, exclusion risk did not predict pro-group unethical behavior. Overall, the results support the notion that pro-group unethical behavior is motivated by the goal of improving inclusionary status. Study 2 replicated this pattern of results experimentally and also showed that the effect of exclusion risk is specific to pro-group unethical behavior (but does not affect pro-self unethical behavior), thus providing additional evidence for our theory.

Theoretical Contribution

This research makes several theoretical contributions. Much of the literature on unethical behavior conceptualized unethical behavior as primarily self-benefiting (Greenberg, 2002; Grover & Hui, 1994; Kish-Gephart et al., 2010; Reynolds, 2006; Sonenshein, 2007; Treviño & Youngblood, 1990). However, employees sometimes engage in unethical behavior to benefit their workgroup (Gino & Pierce, 2009; Umphress et al., 2010). Although such pro-group unethical behavior may result in actions that are devastating to organizations, there is little research explaining unethical behavior committed to benefit others (Treviño et al., 2014; Umphress & Bingham, 2011). We advance the understanding of unethical actions that benefit one's group by emphasizing the importance of a fundamental aspect of the relationship between the individual and the group: group members' inclusionary status in the group. We show that the risk of exclusion from the group serves as a powerful motivator of pro-group unethical behavior and in so doing detect an important factor driving this problematic behavior in organizations.

Our results are also relevant for social exclusion research. This literature has focused predominately on the effect of definite exclusion and has overlooked the role of the risk of exclusion. Yet, exclusion risk is likely to precede definite exclusion (Allen & Badcock, 2003) and may occur in many cases that do not result in definite exclusion (Molden et al., 2009). For this reason, exclusion risk may be a more frequent experience in organizations. To date, however, it remains relatively unexplored. We contribute to the literature by investigating the consequences of exclusion risk for the important social phenomenon of unethical behavior that seeks to provide benefits for others. In contrast to past work on definite exclusion, which has concluded that exclusion leads to undifferentiated antisocial responses that seem self-defeating and irrational because such acts likely further worsen the individual's social position (e.g., Buckley et al., 2004; Maner et al., 2007; Twenge et al., 2001; Twenge & Campbell, 2003), our studies found that exclusion risk promotes more calculated actions aimed at improving the person's inclusionary status. For instance, in Study 2, we found that exclusion risk led to more unethical behavior when such behavior benefited the group (and not the self), but not when the behavior benefited the self (and not the group).

At a more general level, our research also contributes to past work in related disciplines, which has viewed the possibility that others would exclude the person committing unethical acts as a major deterrent to unethical behavior (e.g., Hirschi, 1969; Hollinger, 1986; Hollinger & Clark, 1982; Sims, 2002; Toby, 1957). We contribute to this literature by emphasizing that, in certain situations, unethical behavior is engaged in to benefit one's group. We show that when this is the case, exclusionary concerns have a different motivational effect from that usually assumed. Those at risk of exclusion become highly motivated to improve their standing by increasing their contributions to the group. Because pro-group unethical behavior offers a way for people to increase the contributions to their group beyond what is possible through ethical means, those at risk of exclusion are particularly likely to engage in it.

Limitations and Future Research

The theory we proposed and tested in this research is agnostic with respect to the group's knowledge of the fact that the member's contributions made through pro-group unethical behavior were accomplished immorally. As discussed previously, some groups might tolerate occasional unethical contributions on the part of their members (or even appreciate them as a sign of the member's willingness to take on a personal risk to benefit the group), but some groups might object to the unethical nature of the contribution. We tacitly assumed that the member engaging in pro-group unethical behavior would be strategic about revealing the unethical nature of the contribution based on the knowledge of within-group ethical norms and preferences. When the member anticipates that the group might react negatively to the fact that the contribution was made through unethical means, the member is likely to conceal the unethical nature of the contribution. In the field study (Study 1), using a sample that was probably normally distributed in terms of respondents' within-group ethical norms and their group's knowledge of its members' pro-group unethical behavior, we found support for our theory that exclusion risk motivates more pro-group unethical behavior (and especially among those strongly motivated to be included), suggesting the external validity of our theory across a range of real-world situations. Nevertheless, this research may be extended by taking into account these situational features and by providing empirical evidence for their role in the effect of exclusion risk on pro-group unethical behavior. Future research might vary experimentally whether the group is aware of the unethical nature of the contribution in conjunction with within-group ethical norms (cf. Pearsall & Ellis, 2011) to test how these factors moderate the effect of exclusion risk as documented in this research.

A limitation of this research warranting discussion is the fact that we focused on situations in which people are able to increase their contributions to the group through unethical behavior beyond what is possible through ethical means. In some situations, however, there will be no occasion to contribute to the group unethically. In other cases, the ratio of personal investment (in terms of time, energy, and risk incurred) to potential gains (i.e., total contributions to the group generated) will favor ethical over unethical conduct. For example, this might be the case in situations in which only minor contributions can be made unethically or in situations in which behaving unethically involves a risk of extremely harsh sanctions. Nevertheless, our research, like all research on unethical behavior (and social science research more generally), seeks to explain behavior in situations that do afford a reasonable opportunity for engaging in the behavior of interest.

A final avenue for future research on pro-group unethical behaviors is to more systematically consider situations in which the self's and the group's outcomes are unrelated, positively interdependent, or negatively interdependent (Thibaut & Kelley, 1959). Our research was concerned with situations in which the group is the primary beneficiary of the unethical behavior and the self's direct outcomes were unaffected by the behavior. In many situations, both the self and the group are direct beneficiaries of the focal actor's transgression and their outcomes are positively interdependent. These are arguably the most common situations of pro-group unethical behaviors, and it is possible that many of the causes that past research identified to predict unethical behavior in general are also predictive of such pro-group unethical behaviors. Finally, in some situations the self's and the group's outcomes may be negatively interdependent. These are situations in which the focal actor makes heroic sacrifices to benefit the group through an unethical act. One example may be an unethical act that will lead to punishment of the focal actor but the group goes either completely unpunished or just suffers a comparatively lesser punishment. Future research could take these differences in outcome interdependence more systematically into account. To us, sacrificial pro-group unethical behavior seems to be an area of research that is particularly interesting and unexplored, and we encourage researchers to devote attention to understanding when and why individuals engage in sacrificial pro-group unethical behaviors.

Practical Implications

The present research has important implications for practice. Unethical behavior in organizations can prove to be very costly to organizations and their members (Cialdini et al., 2004; Dunlop & Lee, 2004; Long & Rao, 1995). Therefore, it is important for organizational decision makers to understand factors that motivate unethical behaviors in order to address the issue effectively. Our results suggest that workgroup social dynamics impact employees' unethical behavior, especially when this behavior promotes the group's goals. In particular, those at risk of exclusion from their workgroup were more likely to engage in unethical pro-group

behavior. Notably, although these acts may produce benefit to the workgroup (and potentially the organization) in the short term, they may very well prove costly to the workgroup and the organization in the long term. The findings from our studies imply that leaders should be particularly alert to employees who are at risk of exclusion. Employees who believe they are at risk of being excluded may engage in behaviors that are unethical, costly, and harmful. In such situations, these vulnerable team members should be managed with care.

Our studies provide a possible policy implication concerning sanctioning systems aimed at regulating unethical behavior. Instead of simply sanctioning employees who behave unethically, managers should, when possible, enact publicly stated policies qualifying that team contributions are based on ethical behaviors and that, potentially, an entire team may be held accountable for contributions that were misrepresented or were accomplished through unethical means. Such a policy would reduce the value of unethical behavior as a means of improving one's inclusionary status and would, thus, be likely to discourage such unwelcome behaviors.

Finally, decision makers may also deter pro-group unethical behavior by focusing on other situational elements that make such behavior less rewarding, more difficult to execute, or more detectable by superiors (Tenbrunsel, Smith-Crowe, & Umphress, 2003). We argued that, in certain cases, employees can contribute to their workgroup through unethical behavior over and beyond what they could contribute through ethical behavior. These types of behaviors allow employees at risk of exclusion to provide benefits for their workgroup, which serves to demonstrate their value to their workgroup and potentially avoid definitive exclusion. Yet, theorists (Tenbrunsel et al., 2003) have argued that organizations may foster ethical behavior and minimize unethical behavior if appropriate, ethical infrastructures guide the actions of employees who are faced with difficult choices, such as how to improve their inclusionary status. If decision makers find a way to create opportunities for employees to increase contributions to and benefits for their workgroup through ethical means, pro-group unethical behavior may simply be rendered less necessary, which should reduce its occurrence. In addition, making pro-group unethical behavior more difficult to execute or easier to detect should reduce its attractiveness to employees at risk of exclusion, as they might not dare to expose their workgroup to potential sanctions (and in that way also jeopardize their own inclusionary status even further).

Conclusion

This research proposed that the risk of exclusion motivates people to engage in pro-group unethical behavior as a means of improving their inclusionary status. Using both field and experimental studies, we found converging support for this theory: Exclusion risk motivated greater pro-group unethical behavior, and this effect was stronger the greater the individual's need for inclusion. Our results extend the understanding of pro-group unethical behavior and open up new avenues of research by demonstrating the importance of exclusion risk for understanding moral and legal transgressions.

Footnotes

¹ The pattern of the effects and their statistical significance pertaining to the hypotheses tests remain the same regardless of whether we include or exclude these four cases.

² We note that ordinary least squares estimation leads to the same substantive conclusions for all analyses reported; the pattern of the effects and their statistical significance are the same regardless of the estimation method.

³ We thank an anonymous reviewer for making this suggestion.

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APPENDIX A: Study 1: Scale Validation Methods and Results

We report here the two supplemental data collections undertaken to examine the validity the risk of exclusion and pro-group unethical behavior measures used in Study 1. The same scale validation strategy was followed in both data collections.

Because there were no existing established measures of the two constructs, we followed Anderson and Gerbing (1988) and tested convergent validity by examining whether all the items of the measure load significantly onto the latent construct (see, e.g., Epitropaki & Martin, 2004; Holtz & Harold, 2009, for the same approach). We also tested whether the variance the constructs share with their indicators (ρ_{vc}) is higher than the convergent validity threshold of .5 (Fornell & Larcker, 1981) as an additional way to examine convergent validity.

Next, because discriminant validity “means that one can empirically differentiate the construct from other constructs that may be similar” (Kerlinger, 1973, p. 462), we tested discriminant validity by examining whether our measures are distinguishable from measures of similar but theoretically distinct constructs (see also Messick, 1995). This was done first through a preliminary exploratory factor analysis (EFA) that examined whether our construct loads onto a separate factor and does not cross-load onto other factors. Next, we used a confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) to model the relevant constructs as distinct, then restricted the variance between the relevant pairs of constructs in subsequent nested models to one; if this resulted in a poorer model fit, we concluded the two constructs were distinct (Bagozzi, Yi, & Phillips, 1991; Widaman, 1985).

Finally, we provided further evidence of the nomological validity of our measures by examining whether each correlates with an additional set of theoretically related variables (Bagozzi, 1980; Cronbach & Meehl, 1955).

Measure statistics for the two data collections are presented in Tables A1 and A2 at the end of the Appendix. Unless otherwise noted, we used 5-point scales with anchors taken from the original research in which the measure was described, which we cite for each scale.

Table A1

Exclusion Risk Measure Validation Data Collection: Means, Standard Deviations, Correlations, and Internal Consistency Statistics

Variable	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
1. Exclusion risk	2.41	0.91	(.95)							
2. Workplace ostracism	1.72	0.90	0.67	(.95)						
3. Loneliness	2.58	0.72	0.52	0.4	(.94)					
4. Coworker social support	3.35	0.79	-0.66	-0.43	-0.54	(.84)				
5. Positive affect	3.57	0.70	-0.26	-0.18	-0.57	0.32	(.90)			
6. Negative affect	2.07	0.80	0.39	0.41	0.47	-0.27	-0.09	(.93)		
7. MARTI ^a	3.16	1.26	0.24	0.10	0.13	-0.04	0.03	0.24	(.94)	
8. Self-esteem	4.03	0.74	-0.48	-0.45	-0.61	0.36	0.47	-0.55	-0.10	(.91)

Note. $N = 189$. All values greater than $|\cdot17|$ are significant at $p < .05$. Cronbach's alphas are displayed on the diagonal.

^a MARTI = motivation to acquire relationship-threatening information in the workgroup context.

Exclusion Risk Measure Validation Data Collection: Means, Standard Deviations, Correlations, and Internal Consistency Statistics

Table A2

Pro-Group Unethical Behavior Measure Validation Data Collection: Means, Standard Deviations, Correlations, and Internal Consistency Statistics

Variable	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
1. Pro-group unethical behavior	1.61	0.6	(.78)						
2. UPOB ^a	2.18	0.86	0.31	(.89)					
3. OCB-I ^b	3.66	0.79	0.16	-0.05	(.91)				
4. Pro-self unethical behavior	1.53	0.45	0.49	0.31	0.03	(.69)			
5. Machiavellianism	2.65	0.44	0.26	0.45	-0.18	0.31	(.78)		
6. Moral identity	4.37	0.64	-0.17	-0.28	0.23	-0.29	-0.22	(.82)	
7. Workgroup commitment	3.63	0.96	0.21	0.05	0.38	0.07	-0.06	-0.13	(.94)

Note. $N = 189$. All values greater than $|\cdot15|$ are significant at $p < .05$. Cronbach's alphas are displayed on the diagonal.

^a UPOB = unethical pro-organizational behavior. ^b OCB-I = organizational citizenship behavior directed at coworkers.

Data Collection

The sample consisted of 189 full-time employees working in workgroups ($M_{age} = 34.27$ years, $SD_{age} = 10.34$, $M_{tenure} = 8.36$ years, $SD_{tenure} = 5.85$; 58.76% male). They were recruited through Amazon's Mechanical Turk, an online crowd-sourcing mechanism with members representative of the U.S. population (see Buhrmester, Kwang, & Gosling, 2011, for subject pool details). Participants responded to our exclusion risk measure and a series of other measures used to establish the validity of our measure.

To examine discriminant validity, we administered the two measures from which we drew to create the exclusion risk measure, the Workplace Ostracism Scale (Ferris et al., 2008) and the UCLA Loneliness Scale (Russell et al., 1980). The measure of exclusion risk should be distinguishable from the Workplace Ostracism Scale, because the latter represents the state of definitive rather than possible exclusion. It should also be distinguishable from the UCLA Loneliness Scale, because loneliness is a psychological symptom rather than a social situation. We also included the coworker social support measure developed by Ganster, Fusilier, and Mayes (1986). Our exclusion risk measure should be distinguishable from this construct because it is more focused on task-related social interactions and, similar to the Ostracism Scale, concerns a current rather than potential or anticipated state.

To examine nomological validity, we administered measures of three constructs theoretically predicted to correlate with exclusion risk. First, Allen and Badcock (2003) suggested that exclusion risk results in a depressed mood so we administered the PANAS mood measure (Watson et al., 1988). Theory also suggests that exclusion risk should result in a greater attentiveness to potentially threatening social information (Allen & Badcock, 2003). We thus measured the motivation to acquire relationship-threatening information in the workgroup context using the six items developed by Marr, Thau, Aquino, and Barclay (2012), to which participants responded on a 5-point scale (1 = *Definitely do not want to know*, 5 = *Definitely want to know*) and their responses were averaged. Finally, the sociometer theory of self-esteem suggests that exclusion risk should result in reduced self-esteem (Leary et al., 1995). To examine whether this is the case, we administered the Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale (Rosenberg, 1965).

Results

Convergent validity

A CFA found that all the items of the exclusion risk scale loaded significantly onto their latent construct ($ps < .001$). In addition, the variance the construct shared with its indicators was higher than the threshold of .5 ($pvc = .69$). These results provide evidence of the convergent validity of the measure.

Discriminant validity

We conducted an EFA that included measures of exclusion risk, ostracism, loneliness, and coworker social support and used oblimin rotation to account for the predicted correlation among the constructs. It showed that all the items of the exclusion risk measure loaded strongly onto the same factor (.69–.81) and cross-loaded weakly on the remaining factors (.00–.36), interpreted following the thresholds proposed by Comrey and Lee (1992). Next, a CFA with the same measures found that restricting the covariance between exclusion risk and either of the remaining constructs to one results in a poorer fit of the model to the data (χ^2 increase of 21.34 or higher, $ps < .001$). These results provide evidence of the discriminant validity of the exclusion risk measure.

Nomological validity

As shown in Table A1, exclusion risk correlated significantly and in the predicted direction with all the theoretically related variables: mood (negative affect: $r = .39$, $p < .001$; positive affect: $r = -.26$, $p < .001$), motivation to acquire relationship-threatening information in the workgroup context ($r = .24$, $p = .001$), and self-esteem ($r = -.48$, $p < .001$). These results provide evidence of the nomological validity of our measure.

Data Collection

We recruited an independent sample of 187 full-time employees working in workgroups ($M_{age} = 31.13$ years, $SD_{age} = 9.50$, $M_{tenure} = 7.57$ years, $SD_{tenure} = 4.80$; 51.00% male) using the same recruitment mechanism as in the first validation data collection.

To examine discriminant validity, we administered the six-item unethical pro-organizational behavior measure by Umphress et al. (2010). Pro-group unethical behavior should be distinguishable from this measure, because the beneficiary of pro-group unethical behavior is the employee's group rather than the entire organization as an abstract entity. We also administered the measure of organizational citizenship behavior directed at coworkers by K. Lee and Allen (2002). Pro-group unethical behavior measure should be distinguishable from this measure, because it benefits others through unethical rather than ethical means. Finally, we administered a measure of self-benefiting unethical behavior taken from Barnes, Schaubroeck, Huth, and Ghumman (2011). The pro-group unethical behavior measure should be distinguishable from this measure, because the beneficiary of the unethical behavior assessed by our measure is the group rather than the self.

To examine nomological validity, we administered measures of three constructs theoretically related to pro-group unethical behavior. First, engaging in pro-group unethical behavior requires one to deviate from moral rules to accomplish external objectives. We measure respondents' chronic willingness to disregard moral rules to accomplish their objectives using the Machiavellianism scale by Christie and Geis (1970). Next, based on a similar reasoning, research suggests people for whom moral values are important for their self-definition should be less likely to make moral compromises, such as those required to engage in pro-group unethical behavior (Aquino & Reed, 2002; Aquino, Reed, Thau, & Freeman, 2007). To examine whether this is the case, we administered the internalization subscale of the Moral Identity Scale (Aquino & Reed, 2002). Finally, we reasoned that to engage in unethical behavior for the benefit of the group, the prerequisite is that the employee cares about and is committed to the group. Pro-group unethical behavior should thus be positively correlated with workgroup commitment. To test whether this is the case, we administered the workgroup commitment scale from Bishop and Scott (2000).

Results

Convergent validity

A CFA found that all the items of the pro-group unethical behavior scale load significantly onto the latent construct ($ps < .001$). In addition, the variance the construct shared with its indicators was higher than the threshold of .5 ($\rho_{vc} = .58$). These results provide evidence of the convergent validity of the measure.

Discriminant validity

An EFA with measures of pro-group unethical behavior, pro-organizational unethical behavior, organizational citizenship behavior directed at coworkers, and self-serving unethical behavior (with oblimin rotation to account for the predicted correlation among the constructs) found that all the items of the exclusion risk measure loaded strongly onto the same factor (.64–.78) and cross-loaded weakly on the remaining factors (.01–.16). Next, a CFA with the same measures included found that restricting the covariance between pro-group unethical behavior and either of the remaining constructs to one leads to a poorer fit of the model to the data (χ^2 increase of 120.06 or higher, $ps < .001$). These results provide evidence of the discriminant validity of the exclusion risk measure.

Nomological validity

As shown in Table A2, pro-group unethical behavior correlated significantly and in the predicted direction with all the theoretically related variables: Machiavellianism ($r = .26$, $p < .001$), moral identity ($r = -.17$, $p = .017$), and workgroup commitment ($r = .21$, $p = .004$). These results provide evidence of the nomological validity of our measure.

Table A1

Exclusion Risk Measure Validation Data Collection: Means, Standard Deviations, Correlations, and Internal Consistency Statistics

Variable	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
1. Exclusion risk	2.41	0.91	(.95)							
2. Workplace ostracism	1.72	0.90	0.67	(.95)						
3. Loneliness	2.58	0.72	0.52	0.4	(.94)					
4. Coworker social support	3.35	0.79	-0.66	-0.43	-0.54	(.84)				
5. Positive affect	3.57	0.70	-0.26	-0.18	-0.57	0.32	(.90)			
6. Negative affect	2.07	0.80	0.39	0.41	0.47	-0.27	-0.09	(.93)		
7. MARTI ^a	3.16	1.26	0.24	0.10	0.13	-0.04	0.03	0.24	(.94)	
8. Self-esteem	4.03	0.74	-0.48	-0.45	-0.61	0.36	0.47	-0.55	-0.10	(.91)

Note. $N = 189$. All values greater than $|.17|$ are significant at $p < .05$. Cronbach's alphas are displayed on the diagonal.

^a MARTI = motivation to acquire relationship-threatening information in the workgroup context.

Exclusion Risk Measure Validation Data Collection: Means, Standard Deviations, Correlations, and Internal Consistency Statistics

Table A2

Pro-Group Unethical Behavior Measure Validation Data Collection: Means, Standard Deviations, Correlations, and Internal Consistency Statistics

Variable	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
1. Pro-group unethical behavior	1.61	0.6	(.78)						
2. UPOB ^a	2.18	0.86	0.31	(.89)					
3. OCB-I ^b	3.66	0.79	0.16	-0.05	(.91)				
4. Pro-self unethical behavior	1.53	0.45	0.49	0.31	0.03	(.69)			
5. Machiavellianism	2.65	0.44	0.26	0.45	-0.18	0.31	(.78)		
6. Moral identity	4.37	0.64	-0.17	-0.28	0.23	-0.29	-0.22	(.82)	
7. Workgroup commitment	3.63	0.96	0.21	0.05	0.38	0.07	-0.06	-0.13	(.94)

Note. $N = 189$. All values greater than $|.15|$ are significant at $p < .05$. Cronbach's alphas are displayed on the diagonal.

^a UPOB = unethical pro-organizational behavior. ^b OCB-I = organizational citizenship behavior directed at coworkers.

Pro-Group Unethical Behavior Measure Validation Data Collection: Means, Standard Deviations, Correlations, and Internal Consistency Statistics