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Conversational Flow

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Chapter seven

Conversational Flow and Entitativity:
The Role of Status

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Abstract

This paper examines the process by which perceptions of conversational flow foster an emergent sense of group entitativity. We propose that conversational flow influences more than just the quality of interpersonal relations: it signals entitativity--social unity at the group level. We predicted that when conversations are intermitted by brief silences after a target has spoken, this is perceived as disruptive for targets of low social status within the group: For low status group members, such pauses raise concerns over respect and inclusion. However, for high status group members a similar intermission may be interpreted as an acknowledgement of their distinctive position in the group, and may therefore bolster the hierarchy and unity of the group. Two experiments support these hypotheses. Study 1 ($N = 77$) manipulated status in conversations of a target participant with confederates. Study 2 ($N = 138$) replicates the effect among participants who watch a videotaped conversation. Both studies show the predicted pattern, and suggest that belonging (Study 1) and perceived respect (Study 2) may mediate effects of condition on perceptions of group entitativity.

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Conversational Flow and Entitativity: The Role of Status

*~ The most important thing in conversation
is to hear what isn't being said. ~*

Peter F. Drucker

seven
Conversations are fundamental to maintaining human relationships: They provide the means to establish bonds, enable one to regulate the relationship, and are the primary means to develop a shared understanding of reality. Research on communication has traditionally focused on the informational influence exerted by the content of communication. However, features of the conversation itself can also be a socially binding force, in and of their own. In the current paper, we explore whether having a conversation that is experienced as smooth, efficient and engaging has consequences beyond the level of “you” and “me”, and engenders a sense of groupiness at the level of “us”. Specifically, we hypothesize that through fostering a sense of belonging and respect, conversational flow enhances perceptions of the group as an entitative social unit. In addition, we examine the novel idea that some specific conversational behaviors may have either positive or negative effects on perceptions of group unity depending on the perceiver's status within the group.

Conversational Flow

In conversations, interpersonal coordination allows for the smooth and efficient exchange of verbal information. Most people are very adept at having conversations: They are able to take turns with minimal gaps in between, resulting in a conversational flow of smoothly meshed behaviors (Wilson & Wilson, 2005). We define conversational flow as the extent to which a conversation is experienced as smooth, efficient

and mutually engaging. In order to have flow in a conversation, group members (often unconsciously) adjust their communication behaviors to one another so that they can switch speaking turns without talking over each other and experiencing awkward silences (Cappella, 1981; Chapple, 1971, Giles, Coupland, & Coupland, 1991).

Many studies have shown that such (conversational) coordination not only facilitates the communication process (Dittmann & Llewellyn, 1968; Marsh, Richardson, & Schmidt, 2009) but also has a communicative function in itself (Kendon, 1970; Bernieri, 1988; Koudenburg, Postmes, & Gordijn, 2011a, *Chapter 3*). Coordination of communicative behaviors is argued to increase the “goodness of fit” between conversation partners (Burgoon & Saine, 1978). Whereas some conversational patterns are experienced as smooth, comfortable and meaningful, others are experienced as awkward, uncomfortable and puzzling (Cappella, 1991). For instance, if a conversation between peers is interrupted by a brief and unexpected silence, this can signal some form of relational breakdown (Koudenburg et al., 2011a, *Chapter 3*). Such a disruption of conversational flow may raise questions about the relationships within the group, not just at the interpersonal level but also at the level of the group as an entity.

Entitativity

Entitativity is defined as degree to which social aggregates are perceived as a cohesive entity (Campbell, 1958). The concept of entitativity is an important determinant of processes within and between groups (e.g., Castano, Yzerbyt, & Bourguignon, 2003; Lickel et al., 2000; Hamilton, Sherman, & Rogers, 2004). Campbell emphasized that communication plays an important part in giving rise to factors (such as common fate and coordinated action) that contribute to perceptions of group entitativity: “For human groups, face-to-face communication processes made possible by proximity generate similarity and feelings of belongingness which make coordinated action and hence common fate more likely” (p. 22, see also Gaertner &

Schopler, 1998; Lickel, Hamilton, Wieczorkowska, Lewis, Sherman, & Uhles, 2000; Prentice, Miller, & Lightdale, 1994).

Prior research has studied the effects of conversational flow on interpersonal perceptions and emotions (Koudenbourg et al., 2011a, *Chapter 3*). This work has shown that when conversations among peers are intermitted by a brief silence, this tends to be associated with a drop in the levels of a broad spectrum of positive emotions and an increase in feelings of rejection. It was thus suggested that brief intermissions give rise to exclusion concerns. The inference that we drew from this earlier work was therefore that conversational flow affects social relationships in the interpersonal plane (me and you). But one further notable finding in this research was that when there were no intermissions in the conversation, this also enhanced feelings of social validation. This effect of flow on validation signals that there may be another process at work here. Literatures on shared reality (Echterhoff, Higgins, Groll, 2005; Hardin & Higgins, 1996) and common ground (Clark, 1996) both assume that knowledge is socially validated in social communities (referred to by Clark as “ensembles”). Recent research on social identity formation (Postmes, Haslam, & Swaab, 2005; Smith & Postmes, 2011; Swaab, Postmes, Van Beest, & Spears, 2007) shows that social validation of shared knowledge is associated with a stronger sense of “us”. Thus, it appears that the quality of a conversation (independent of its content) may affect not just relations between individuals, but also give rise to an emergent sense of unity at the group level (see also Gaertner, Iuzzini, Witt, & Oriña, 2006). We hypothesize that conversational flow can increase feelings of belonging within the group, and consequently promote group entitativity.

Nevertheless, the straightforward prediction that uninterrupted conversation enhances group entitativity is likely to be overly simplistic. There are good reasons to believe that not all group members experience the same patterns of conversation as smoothly flowing. We predict that the same conversational patterns may have entirely different meanings depending on a person’s status in the group.

The Role of Status in Intra-Group Conversation

Status plays a very significant but subtle (and often implicit) role in conversation (cf. Ridgeway, Berger, & Smith, 1985; Giles & Powesland, 1975). The literature on communication accommodation (Giles, Mulac, Bradac, & Johnson, 1987; Gregory & Webster, 1996), for instance, revealed that status has a strong influence on behavior during interpersonal communication. However, less research has been conducted on the effect of status on the interpretations of conversational behaviors.

In communication with high status others, people of low status often search for equal treatment and respect (Saguy, Dovidio, & Pratto, 2008). Efforts to synchronize with others in conversation are typically performed by low status people rather than high status people (Giles & Powesland, 1975; Gregory & Webster, 1996). Relatedly, speakers who seek social approval converge more strongly to their partner's vocal intensity and pause length than those low on this need (Giles & Coupland, 1991). In a way, these convergence behaviors of low status people can be seen as an attempt to adjust status differences in order to promote conversational flow. A smoothly running interplay between group members may indicate to low status group members that they are respected and included in the group. Indeed, research has shown that respect enhances a sense of equality and inclusion in the group (Spears, Ellemers, & Doosje, 2005; Renger & Simon, 2011; Huo, Binning, & Molina, 2010). As such, the feelings of respect that arise from conversational flow can contribute to a sense of group entitativity. We expect that low status group members are likely to feel that a conversation has flow when turn-taking continues unintermittedly after they have made a statement. Any ambiguous silences by contrast, might raise concerns about dissensus or exclusion.

Whereas low-status group members may value equality, group members with a higher status may feel that a conversation has flow to the extent that their individual contributions to the conversation are acknowledged. They would find a conversation particularly respectful when other group members listen to them. The dual pathway model of

respect (Huo et al., 2010) suggests that respect can be inferred from inclusion, but that group members – especially when they have a high status – can also obtain respect through their perceived standing and worth in the group (see also Tyler & Smith, 1999; Blincoe & Harris, 2011). In this way, high status group members are expected to feel more comfortable when conversational patterns reflect and respect the social order within the group (Tiedens & Fragale, 2003). Consequently, high status group members may perceive a short pause after they have spoken to be a natural sign of respect as others listen to their important contribution to the conversation. Swiftly continuing the conversation after a high status person has spoken might be seen as dismissive and disrespectful and thus, would subtly undermine the efficiency in the conversation and the social order within the group. Therefore, we expect that for high status group members, a brief silence after their statement promotes conversational flow and the group’s functioning as a coherent social unit. It is thus hypothesized that in some cases, low and high status group members have different perceptions of group entitativity resulting from the same conversational behaviors.

The Present Research

Previous research on conversational flow focused on its effects on interpersonal relations, such as belonging and validation (Koudenburg et al., 2011a; 2013a, *Chapter 3, 4*). The first aim of the present research was to extend these findings by examining whether conversational flow has consequences beyond the level of interpersonal relations and influences perceptions of entitativity at a group level. Second, we explored whether the effect of conversational flow on perceptions of group entitativity was mediated by feelings of belonging. The third aim of this research was to examine whether the effect of manipulating a specific conversational behavior, i.e. a brief silence, was moderated by ones status within the group. We expected that when conversational patterns would fit the social relations within the group, group members would be more likely to experience a conversation as smooth, efficient, and engaging, therefore increasing perceptions of group entitativity. The

fourth and final aim of this research was to examine whether feelings of being respected mediated these effects.

Study 1 was designed to examine the hypothesis that status would moderate the effects of brief intermissions on perceived group entitativity in a quasi-natural setting and to test whether feelings of belonging would mediate these effects. Study 2 examined the same phenomenon in a more controlled experimental setting and tested the mediating role of perceived respect.

Study 1

We tested our hypotheses with a confederate-study in the lab. Status was manipulated by giving participants bogus feedback on an abstract reasoning test, in which they scored either much higher (high status) or much lower (low status) than two other ostensible participants (who were actually confederates). Secondly, we manipulated whether the conversation with these two confederates was intermitted by a brief silence after the participants had given their opinion (silence vs. no silence). Perceptions of group *entitativity* and feelings of *belonging* were measured with a questionnaire.

Methods

Participants. Seventy-seven Dutch students ($M_{\text{age}} = 21.03$, $SD = 2.25$, 53 female) participated in a study for partial course credit or a single reward of 5 euros.

Status manipulation. All original materials were in Dutch and are available from the authors on request. To manipulate status, participants received bogus feedback on an abstract reasoning test. Previous research has shown that previous task performance is an important determinant of group members' level of expertise and status within the group (Bunderson & Barton, 2011; Hollander, 1958). After entering the laboratory, participants were directed to separate rooms to complete an abstract reasoning test. This test consisted of two subtests

of the revised Snijders-Oomen Nonverbal intelligence test (SON-R, Tellegen & Laros, 1993). After the test, participants were told that abstract reasoning skills relate to important characteristics such as intelligence and creativity. Then, each participant was collected from their individual room, and sat down with two other participants (who actually were confederates) on three chairs. The chairs were placed such that conversation partners faced away from each other, in order to minimize non-verbal interaction. When participants were seated, bogus results of the test score were communicated on a paper sheet, which participants passed around. The confederates were instructed not to read the results on the paper, to ensure that they were blind to the status condition of the participant. In the high status condition the participant received a score of 198 points, whereas the confederates received 132 and 121 points respectively. In the low status condition, the participant 'scored' 121 points, and the confederates received 187 and 198 points, respectively.

Silence manipulation. After the abstract reasoning test, participants took part in a conversation with the two confederates (1 male, 1 female) in which silence (silence vs. no silence) was manipulated. Each of the conversants was asked to describe in one sentence their opinion on the topic assigned to them. Confederates were instructed and trained to avoid intermissions in turn-taking and to avoid silences. First, the topics of both confederates were discussed (*higher health insurance premiums for obese people* and *illegal downloading*). When it was the participants' turn to give his or her opinion on the final topic (*wearing headscarves in class*), the confederates either continued the conversation by commenting on similar situations in different countries without intermissions (no silence condition) or they remained silent for four seconds (silence condition) after which they continued the conversation in a way identical to the no silence condition. Thus, in both conditions confederates neither agreed nor disagreed with the participant, but continued the conversation on the topic without revealing their own opinion.

Dependent variables. After the conversation, the participant filled out a paper-and-pencil questionnaire, which the confederates ostensibly filled out in their own rooms. Participants indicated on 7-point scales

the extent to which they agreed with each item (1 = *completely disagree*, 7 = *completely agree*). *Belonging* was measured with 4 items (derived from the Need Threat Scale, Van Beest & Williams, 2006; $\alpha = .60$), for example: “I felt connected to one or more group members”, and “during the conversation, I felt that I belonged”. Additionally, participants completed a 4-item measure of *entitativity* (Jans, Postmes, & Van der Zee, 2011): “I feel the members of this group are a unit”, “I experience a feeling of togetherness between the members of this group”, “I have the feeling the members of this group can act in unison”, and “I feel members of this group are as one” ($\alpha = .82$).

Manipulation checks. In order to check whether participants understood the status manipulation they were asked to rate on a 9-point scale whether their score on the abstract reasoning test was 1 = *lower than* to 9 = *higher than* the score of the other two students. To check the silence manipulation, participants were asked to estimate the number of seconds it took before the other students responded after the participant had given his or her opinion on the topic assigned. After filling out the questionnaire, participants were fully debriefed.

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Results

Manipulation checks. The manipulation check for status showed that participants in the high status condition rated their performance on the abstract reasoning test to be significantly higher ($M = 7.41$, $SD = 2.18$) than participants in the low status condition ($M = 2.75$, $SD = 2.30$), $F(1, 73) = 81.82$, $p < .001$, $\eta^2 = .53$. As predicted, neither an effect of silence, nor an interaction between status and silence was found ($F_s < 1$).

To check the silence manipulation, the estimates of the duration between the expressed opinion and the response of the others were log-transformed in order to attain a normal distribution. Participants in the silence condition perceived the time before others responded to be longer ($\text{Duration}_{\text{lg}} = 1.52$) than participants in the no silence condition ($\text{Duration}_{\text{lg}} = 1.07$), $F(1, 72) = 6.50$, $p = .01$, $\eta^2 = .08$. The status main effect and the status by silence interaction were not significant ($F_s < 1$).

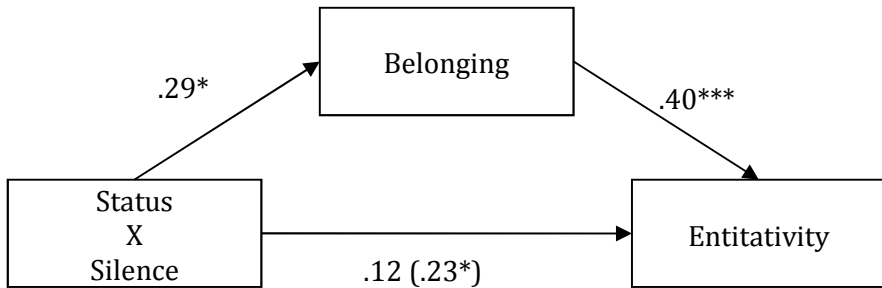
Belonging. The means are summarized in Table 7.1. No main effects of status and silence on belonging were found, ($F_s < 1.4$). However, a significant status by silence interaction was found, $F(1, 73) = 6.65, p = .01, \eta^2 = .08$. Simple main analysis showed that participants in the high status condition felt more belonging to the group when conversation was intermitted with a brief silence after they had made a statement, rather than when the conversation continued without a silence, $F(1, 73) = 7.56, p = .008, \eta^2 = .09$. In the low status condition, no such effect was found.

Entitativity. Similarly, analysis of variance showed no main effect of silence or status on perceptions of group entitativity ($F_s < 1$). However, there was a significant interaction between status and silence, $F(1, 73) = 4.19, p = .04, \eta^2 = .05$. Although individual simple main effects were not significant, the pattern was consistent with the predictions: Participants in the low status condition perceived the group to be more entitative in the no silence condition (vs. silence condition), $F(1, 73) = 2.00, p = .16, \eta^2 = .03$, whereas participants in the high status condition perceived the group as more entitative when conversation was intermitted with a silence, rather than when no silence was present, $F(1, 73) = 2.21, p = .14, \eta^2 = .03$.

Table 7.1 Means (*SDs*) for perceived entitativity and belonging for group members of high and low status in conversations which are either intermitted by a brief silence, or not intermitted in Study 1.

	Low Status		High Status	
	No silence (n = 18)	Silence (n = 20)	No silence (n = 18)	Silence (n = 21)
Entitativity	3.57 (.96)	3.07 (1.06)	2.90 (.96)	3.39 (1.22)
Belonging	5.21 (1.03)	4.93 (.57)	4.55 (.94)	5.30 (.87)

Figure 7.1. Feelings of belonging mediate the effect of the status by silence interaction on entitativity in Study 1. Note: Values represent standardized regression coefficients, * $p < .05$, *** $p < .001$.



Mediation. To establish whether the interaction effect of silence (-1 = no silence, 1 = silence) and status (-1 = low status, 1 = high status) on perceived group entitativity was mediated by feelings of belonging, an explorative mediated moderation analysis was conducted (Muller, Judd, & Yzerbyt, 2005). Feelings of belonging significantly predicted perceptions of group entitativity ($B = .40$, $t(73) = 3.54$, $p = .001$). Furthermore, the effect of the status by silence interaction on perceived group entitativity ($B = .23$, $t(73) = 2.05$, $p = .04$) was significantly reduced when belonging was added as a mediator to the model ($B = .12$, $t(72) = 1.09$, ns), Sobel $Z = 2.09$, $p = .04$, see Figure 7.1.

Discussion

Results confirm the hypothesized pattern that for low status group members, conversational silences may decrease perceptions of group entitativity. For high status group members, however, it seems that a brief intermission in a conversation increases perceptions of group entitativity. For low status group members, we did not replicate the negative effects of pausing on feelings of belonging that was found among peers in previous research (Koudenburg et al., 2011a, *Chapter 3*).

Interestingly however, silences appeared to have a positive effect on the feelings of belonging of high status group members, suggesting that

the interpretation of conversational behaviors is contingent upon one's status in the group. These effects on feelings of belonging were found to mediate the effects of conversational flow on perceived group entitativity.

There are many uncontrollable factors in an experiment based on actual conversations that may have interfered with and thus somewhat reduced the impact of the manipulations. For instance, the contributions of participants to the conversation may have differed (e.g. different opinions, different degree of participation), increasing the level of random noise in the data. This can potentially explain the marginal differences on the measures of entitativity between the two silence conditions. A second study sought more control over these factors, to more clearly and cleanly establish the effects of silence and status on perceptions of group entitativity.

Study 2

To examine whether perceived respect was responsible for the effects on perceived group entitativity, a second experiment was designed in a more controlled setting, using a video-paradigm. The video paradigm had two important benefits: First, it allowed for greater control over the content and non-verbal behaviors of the communicators, as it removed the problem of confederates having to act identically and it removed the influence of idiosyncratic actions of the participant. Second, it allowed for a more natural and engaging social interaction. However, it also required that participants imagined themselves in the conversation making it less directly personally relevant. By using two paradigms with different strengths and weaknesses we aimed to provide the most optimal test of our hypothesis. In addition, Study 2 included a measure of perceived conversational flow, to test whether perceptions of conversational flow differ as a function of whether conversational patterns fit the social relations within the group.

We reasoned that low status group members would feel respected in a conversation in which responses of group members followed immediately after each other without any silences, and that this perceived respect would be a major factor in determining whether they would perceive the group to be entitative or not. For high status group members, however, it was expected that a lack of silences would not increase their perceptions of respect. Instead, high status group members would feel that when other group members continued unintermittedly after they had spoken, this would undermine the social order, decrease perceived conversational flow, and therefore the perceived entitativity of the group.

Methods

Participants. Participants were 138 Dutch students in social sciences who were randomly assigned to conditions in which silence (silence vs. no silence) and status (high vs. low status) were manipulated. Participants ($M_{\text{age}} = 20.46$, $SD = 2.09$, 95 female) received a single reward of 4 euro or participated for partial course credit.

Status manipulation. All original materials were in Dutch and are available from the authors on request. Participants watched a video in which three students had a conversation. Before the video was started, participants were asked to imagine being Vera, one of the students. In the high status condition, Vera was described as being a master's student in clinical psychology, who had a conversation with two first year bachelor's students. In the low status condition, Vera was described as being a first year bachelor's student in conversation with two master's students in clinical psychology.

Silence manipulation. After about four minutes, the students started conversing about a famous TV personality, who was depressed and received antidepressants. Vera said: "One million Dutch inhabitants are prescribed antidepressants and this is an absurdly high number. I think that doctors too often prescribe antidepressants to people who only seem a little depressed." In the no silence condition, the conversation continued unintermittedly with further commentary on the TV personality, with no reference being made to Vera's statement. In

the silence condition, it remained silent for four seconds, after which the conversation continued. Except for the subtle editing of the duration of this single silence so that no discontinuities were discernible, the two videos were identical. A similar manipulation of silence has shown to be effective in previous studies (Koudenburg et al., 2011a; Koudenburg, Postmes, & Gordijn, 2013b, *Chapter 3*, 5).

Dependent variables. After watching the video, participants filled out a questionnaire on the computer. Perceptions of conversational flow were measured with two items: Participants indicated on 7-point scales to what extent they thought the conversation was smooth/engaging (1 = *certainly not*, 7 = *certainly*; $\alpha = .70$). Respect was also measured with two items: "I felt respected by the other group members" (1 = *strongly disagree*, 7 = *strongly agree*) and "to what extent do you think the other group members respected you?" (1 = *certainly not*, 7 = *certainly*; $\alpha = .82$). Perceptions of group entitativity and feelings of belonging were measured with the same questionnaire as in Study 1 (α 's = .83 and .78, respectively).

To check the status manipulation, participants rated to what extent they knew more than the other students, to what extent the other students had more expertise than them (reverse scored) and to what extent they felt that they had more prestige than the other students (1 = *certainly not*, 7 = *certainly*; $\alpha = .62$).

To check the silence manipulation, participants indicated to what extent they had the feeling that there were silences in the conversation (1 = *not at all*, 7 = *strongly*).

Results

One outlier on the measure of respect (Standardized Residual >3) was removed from the analysis.

Manipulation checks. The status manipulation check revealed that participants in the high status condition experienced significantly higher status than participants in the low status condition, $F(1, 133) = 44.40$, $p < .001$, $\eta^2 = .25$. As predicted, neither an effect of silence, nor an interaction between status and silence was found (F 's < .1).

The manipulation check of silence revealed the intended effect of silence, $F(1, 133) = 71.49, p < .001, \eta^2 = .35$, but no effects of status or the status by silence interaction ($F_s < 1.47$). Participants in the silence condition had a stronger sense that there were silences in the conversation than participants in the no silence condition.

Conversational flow. Means are summarized in Table 7.2. Status had a negative effect on perceptions of conversational flow, $F(1, 133) = 8.93, p = .003, \eta^2 = .06$, and silence had no impact on perceptions of conversational flow, ($F < 1$). Importantly, the main effect of status was qualified by a significant interaction, $F(1, 133) = 7.42, p = .007, \eta^2 = .05$. Simple main effect analysis revealed that participants in the low status condition perceived marginally less conversational flow in the silence condition than in the no silence condition, $F(1, 133) = 3.12, p = .08, \eta^2 = .02$. In the high status condition however, participants perceived more conversational flow in the silence condition than in the no silence condition, $F(1, 133) = 4.34, p = .04, \eta^2 = .03$.

Belonging. A marginally significant main effect of status on belonging was found, $F(1, 133) = 3.33, p = .07, \eta^2 = .02$, suggesting that participants in the low status condition felt more belonging to the group than those in a high status condition. The main effect for silence and the silence by status interaction were not significant, $F_s < 1, ns$.

Perceived respect. An analysis of variance on respect showed no main effect of silence or status on perceived respect ($F_s < 1$). However, the predicted status by silence interaction was found, $F(1, 133) = 5.86, p = .02, \eta^2 = .04$. Simple main effects showed that for participants in the low status condition, perceived respect was higher when there was no intermission compared with when the conversation was intermitted by a brief silence, $F(1, 133) = 5.69, p = .02, \eta^2 = .04$. For those in the high status condition, no such difference was found ($F < 1.2$).

Entitativity. As predicted, an analysis of variance showed no main effect of silence ($F < 1$) on perceived group entitativity. A marginal main effect of status on entitativity was found, $F(1, 133) = 3.16, p = .08, \eta^2 = .02$, such that participants in the low status condition perceived the group to be more entitative than participants in the high status condition. However, this main effect was qualified by the predicted

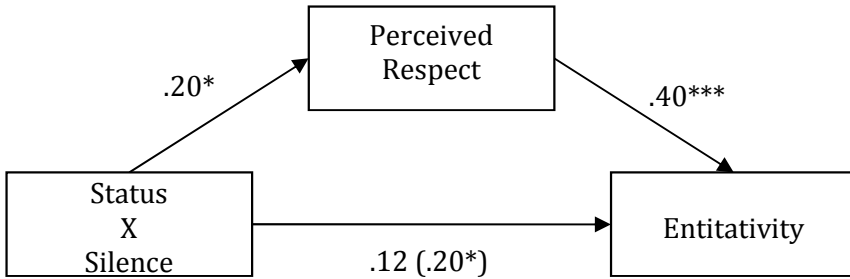
interaction of status and silence, $F(1, 133) = 5.65, p = .02, \eta^2 = .04$. Simple main effects revealed that for participants in the low status condition, group entitativity was perceived to be marginally higher when no silence was present rather than when conversation was intermitted by a brief silence, $F(1, 133) = 3.37, p = .07, \eta^2 = .03$. For participants in the high status condition no significant difference was found, although means were in the predicted direction, $F(1, 133) = 2.34, p = .13, \eta^2 = .02$.

Table 7.2 Means (*SDs*) for perceived conversational flow, perceived group entitativity, belonging and perceived respect for group members of high and low status in conversations which are either intermitted by a brief silence, or not intermitted in Study 2.

	Low Status		High Status	
	No Silence (n = 37)	Silence (n = 34)	No Silence (n = 33)	Silence (n = 33)
Perceived flow	5.47 (.87)	5.05 (.87)	4.49 (1.29)	5.00 (.95)
Entitativity	4.77 (.87)	4.09 (.87)	4.34 (.92)	4.45 (1.16)
Belonging	3.74 (.53)	3.49 (.55)	3.70 (.47)	3.62 (.55)
Respect	5.64 (.69)	5.12 (.98)	5.12 (.89)	5.35 (1.02)

Mediation. To establish whether the interaction effect of silence (-1 = no silence, 1 = silence) and status (-1 = low status, 1 = high status) on perceptions of group entitativity was mediated by perceived respect, a mediated moderation analysis was conducted (Muller, Judd, & Yzerbyt, 2005). Feelings of respect significantly predicted perceived group entitativity ($B = .40, t(73) = 5.10, p < .001$). Furthermore, the effect of the status by silence interaction on perceived group entitativity ($B = .20, t(73) = 2.38, p = .02$) was significantly reduced when respect was added as a mediator to the model ($B = .12, t(72) = 1.49, ns$), Sobel $Z = 2.18, p = .03$, see Figure 7.2.

Figure 7.2. Perceived respect mediates the effect of the status by silence interaction on entitativity in Study 2. Note: Values represent standardized regression coefficients, * $p < .05$, *** $p < .001$.



Discussion

Study 2 provides complementary evidence for the pattern revealed in Study 1, namely that for group members with a low status, but not for those with a high status, uninterrupted conversation increases perceptions of the group as an entitative unit. In addition Study 2 reveals that, as predicted, respect statistically mediates this effect: Whereas low status-group members feel that a pattern of uninterrupted turn-taking signals that they are respected members, and thus experience the group as being more of an entity, high status group members do not feel that way. If anything, the direction of the effects for high status group members suggest that a lack of pausing reduces perceptions of group entitativity.

Study 2 did not replicate the interaction effect on feelings of belonging that was found in Study 1. It is likely that watching conversational patterns on video while imagining being one of the communicators does not induce the same feelings of belonging as being in the conversation oneself, as was the case in Study 1. Whereas respect and group entitativity may be more easily observed by outsiders taking the perspective of a high or low status group member, feelings of belonging are possibly more difficult to induce by perspective taking.

General Discussion

Two studies examined the influence of conversational flow on perceptions of group entitativity for group members of different status. Study 1 reveals a pattern suggesting that uninterrupted conversation leads to higher perceptions of group entitativity amongst low-status group members, but to higher perceptions of group entitativity amongst high status group members. In addition, Study 1 shows that for high status group members, but not for low status group members, interrupted conversation increases feelings of belonging and that these feelings mediate the effects on perceived group entitativity. Study 2 replicates the effect on perceived group entitativity, by showing the same pattern of interaction with means in the predicted directions. In addition, Study 2 identifies perceived respect as a mediator of these effects: Low status group members, but not high status group members, feel more respected in a conversation in which turn-taking occurs uninterruptedly, and this in turn covaries with higher perceptions of group entitativity. Together, the studies provide complementary evidence showing that the same conversational behaviors (i.e. a brief silence) can have different consequences for the unity in the group depending on a member's status.

The present research shows that low status group members feel that a conversation has flow when conversation continues uninterruptedly after they have made a statement, such that no ambiguous silences are allowed to raise concerns about dissensus or exclusion. This conversational flow leads low status group members to feel respected as a group member (Study 2), and this is associated with their enhanced perceptions of the group as a coherent social unit (Studies 1 and 2). The results thus show that the influence of conversational flow goes beyond the level of interpersonal relations, to higher order effects on perceptions of group entitativity.

However, in our studies we did not simply find that the same conversational patterns always lead to higher perceptions of group entitativity. Instead, we found that the effects of brief conversational silences on perceived group entitativity are moderated by status. That

is, for high status group members it is *not* the case that they perceive the group to be more entitative when conversation occurs unintermittedly. On the contrary, Study 1 shows that for high status group members, a brief conversational silence after they have spoken positively affects feelings of belonging, which in turn lead to higher perceptions of group entitativity.

The finding that interaction between individual group members can lead to higher order representations of the group as an entity is in line with previous research (e.g., Gaertner & Schopler, 1998). We extend this research by showing that not all conversation is equally likely to increase perceptions of group entitativity: Specific conversational qualities and structural relations within the group influence whether the group is likely to be perceived as a coherent social unit. Some researchers acknowledge the effect of perceiver characteristics (i.e. need for closure, individualism-collectivism) in their motivation to see group entitativity (Brewer & Harasty, 1996; Triandis, 1995; Webster & Kruglanski, 1994), but here, the focus is on the motivation of external observers. The present research shows that underlying structural relations in a group influence how communication frames social processes, and therefore, how group members perceive social cohesion.

The current research also extends previous findings on conversational flow disruptions in groups with equal status members (Koudenburg et al., 2011a; 2013a, *Chapter 3, 4*). Previous research found that conversation that was intermitted with a single silence threatened belongingness and validation needs. For low status group members in the current research, the negative effects of silences for feelings of belonging were not significantly replicated. Possibly, low status group members in the present research were not as emotionally affected by the silence on this particular dependent variable as were group members without status differences in the previous research (and notable is that in Study 1 participants were assigned a topic to talk about that may not have been as personally engaging). However, low status group members did experience less conversational flow (Study 2) and perceived less group entitativity (Study 1 & 2) after a silence, suggesting that silences are perceived negatively, overall.

An interesting question is what the relation is between effects of conversational flow on interpersonal bonds and social validation (Koudenburg et al., 2011a, *Chapter 3*), as well as belongingness and the emergent sense of groupiness at the overarching level of “us” (this chapter). The literature has traditionally emphasized the distinctions between interpersonal attraction, cohesion and social identification (e.g., Hogg, 1992). Whereas cohesion is concerned with the relations within the group (i.e., at the interpersonal level), entitativity is defined as group unity at the collective or group level. In this framework, identification describes the relation of one particular individual to the group as an entity (Jans et al., 2011). More recently, research has begun to examine the recursive relationships among these concepts (e.g., Gaertner et al., 2006; Postmes et al., 2005). This work extends that line of thought. Across the current studies, we found evidence that a sense of unity at the group level can stem from the flow of a conversation between three individuals. Although we did not test this in the present studies, other research suggests that perceptions of entitativity may be a precursor of ingroup identification (Castano et al., 2003; Jans et al., 2011), positive ingroup regard (Gaertner et al., 2006; Lickel et al., 2000) and stereotyping (e.g. Hamilton et al., 2004).

In the present research, conversational flow was manipulated by only a single brief period of silence. At one level, this is a limitation: Conversational flow is a dynamic process, and thus a single-instance manipulation strictly speaking may not be sufficient. In some of our current research we are implementing delays between when a sound is produced by the speaker, and when it is heard by the listener during conversations via headsets (Koudenburg, Postmes, & Gordijn, 2013a, *Chapter 4*). We find that such a dynamic manipulation of conversational flow which occurs throughout the conversation has broadly similar effects to prior findings using a single instance of silence (Koudenburg et al., 2011a, *Chapter 3*). But using a single silence also has advantages: It increases experimental control over the exact point at which the conversation is intermitted, and therefore limits the possible explanations for the silence. In addition, it allows for minimization of the cross-condition differences during the rest of the conversation. We regard this a conservative test of the hypotheses: Stronger effects would

be expected when using a less subtle manipulation across the course of the conversation (Koudenburg et al., 2013a, *Chapter 4*).

The present research extends previous research that examined conversational flow in videotaped conversations and scenarios (Koudenburg et al., 2011a, *Chapter 3*) by studying the effects of conversational flow also in actual conversations (Study 1). Most of the effects were consistent across the video-study and the confederate-study, increasing the external validity and generalizability of the results. However, the generalizability may be limited by the fact that the present research examined only conversations among people with limited prior acquaintance. It is possible that intermissions are experienced differently if the conversation partners know each other for a long time.

In this research we did not examine the participants' attributions for the silence directly (but see Koudenburg et al., 2011a, *Chapter 3*). The findings for respect are consistent with our prediction that low status group members feel that they are respected elements of the group when their utterances do not result in a conversational pause. But low status group members may also feel that a pause after they have said something indicates that others think they have said something inadequate or incompetent. As such, results for the low status group in particular could be influenced not just by perceptions of respect, but also by feelings of (in)competence. Although this alternative explanation should be addressed empirically, we can infer from prior research that competence feedback has less of an impact on feelings of group commitment compared with feedback that indicates the group respects the person because he or she is liked (Spears et al., 2005). In other words, the emotional consequences of feeling respected because one is liked appear to be more likely to affect the evaluation of groups than competence.

We see the present research as somewhat related to prior research that has demonstrated a link between synchrony and perceptions of entitativity (Bernieri, 1988; Marsh et al. 2009; LaFrance, 1985; Lakens, 2010). It is interesting to note that conversational flow is subtly different from other forms of synchrony in which actors co-act simultaneously and rhythmically: Smoothly meshed turn-taking is certainly a form of coordinated action, but it is one in which actions

alternate. And yet, it appears that more heterogeneous forms of coordinated action can lead to the experience of group entitativity, just as more homogeneous co-action can (cf. Campbell, 1958). Indeed, the idea that group unity can stem from co-action as much as coordinated action is implied in Durkheim's (1893 [1984]) distinction between mechanical solidarity – a sense of unity that is based on similarities amongst citizens – and organic solidarity – unity based on complementarity of actors. An example may illustrate the idea: people may certainly experience entitativity when they are line-dancing, an activity in which a whole social unit makes movements that are similar and synchronous. But group entitativity can also be achieved in more complex dance-forms, such as modern dance, in which a more diverse pattern of alternating behavior is enacted within a shared rhythmic and cultural framework. Here, it is the smoothly meshed complementarity of the dancers' moves in relation to each other that increases the perceived entitativity of the social unit. To disentangle the influence that these different elements (the synchronized co-action, the cultural framework within which it occurs) have on the emergence of a sense of unity would thus appear to be an important focus for future research.

To conclude, the current research underlines the importance of conversational characteristics – other than content – for the regulation of relationships, not just at the interpersonal level but also at the overarching level of constructing a shared sense of “us”. It shows that the same conversational patterns can lead to different perceptions of conversational flow, and therefore to different conclusions about the group unity, depending on whether these conclusions are drawn by a high or a low status group member. For low status group members, uninterrupted conversation signals group unity, whereas for high status group members, unity is experienced when their contribution to the discussion is met with a brief pause. In both cases, the underlying reason that high status and low status members react in this way may well be because they would like the flow of the conversation to reflect and respect the social order (cf. Tiedens & Fragale, 2003). The meanings attributed to silence in conversations underlines that there is more to a conversation than the words that are spoken between a source and a target.

