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Received: 20 December 2018 | Accepted: 28 October 2020

DOI: 10.1002/ejsp.2732

THEORY ARTICLE

EASP WILEY

Social creativity: Reviving a social identity approach to social stability

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Abstract

Social Identity Theory (SIT) is commonly applied to explain social change. We aim to revive interest in the concept of social creativity in order to provide a SIT perspective on bolstering and challenging social stability. Social creativity allows people to maintain or achieve a positive social identity through re-interpreting intergroup relations. Despite this crucial role in shaping intergroup comparisons, the causes and effects of social creativity are largely unknown. To understand how social creativity can contribute to social stability, we argue for a return to SIT's dynamic nature of constantly renegotiating intergroup relations, involving both higher- and lower-status groups. Within these dynamics, we propose that social creativity can play the roles of coping with, promoting, and questioning social stability. Additionally, we outline a research agenda for future research on social creativity and discuss the impact that social stability can have in societies.

KEYWORDS

coping, social creativity, social identity management, social identity theory, social stability, social structure

1 | INTRODUCTION

Societies around the world are, to a varying degree, marked by social, economic, and political inequality. Groups of people can differ in income, rights, privileges, education level, and social status. Importantly, inequality is associated with negative health outcomes, higher levels of violence, a lack of trust, and many other adverse outcomes, negatively affecting both advantaged and disadvantaged groups in society (Wilkinson, 2002; Wilkinson & Pickett, 2009). Moreover, inequalities are persistent and increasing in most countries worldwide (e.g., Alvaredo et al., 2018). Against this background, there is a need for understanding how societal inequalities can shape people's beliefs and attitudes about stability versus change in intergroup relations. Social identity theory (Tajfel, 1978; Tajfel & Turner, 1979) has been one of the most prominent theories in social psychology aimed at understanding intergroup relations and intergroup behaviors. Social stability—meaning the perception that relative status differences between groups remain stable (Tajfel, 1982)—is an important concept within social identity theory. However, the factors that can bolster social stability are much less commonly studied compared to social identity factors that contribute to social change through collective action (e.g., Van Zomeren et al., 2008; Wright, 2003). In this theoretical article, we provide a new take on social stability by reviving interest in social identity theory's concept of social creativity.

Intergroup comparisons are central to how people gauge their ingroup's relative standing (Tajfel & Turner, 1979). Tajfel and Turner (1979) argued that the employment of *social creativity* is fundamental in how people can make intergroup comparisons more favorable to

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their ingroup.[1] However, surprisingly little scholarly attention has been given to the concept of social creativity since it was put forward more than 40 years ago. Hence, its antecedents, consequences, and the role it can play in social stability are left largely unclear both theoretically and empirically. We believe, however, that social creativity and its relationship to social stability deserve renewed attention because it could play a significant role in a range of important social phenomena such as political inaction and persistent inequalities. With this theoretical article, we aim to contribute to the intergroup relations literature and the social identity theory framework by (a) proposing a new conceptualization of different roles that social creativity can play in intergroup relations, (b) resolving ambiguities in the literature with regard to the relationship between various forms of social creativity and social stability, (c) arguing for a return to the dynamics of social identity management, and (d) providing a research agenda with untested hypotheses to spur future research on social creativity.

We first trace how social creativity was introduced as part of social identity theory in the 1970s, focusing on how people can create positive differentiation between groups, and provide a brief overview of the different ways in which social creativity has been operationalized since then. In order to understand the role that social creativity can play in social stability as well as social change, we propose a return to a dynamic approach to the social structure of intergroup relations (following Kessler & Mummendey, 2002). In doing so, we add to earlier empirical work (Ellemers, 1993; Ellemers et al., 1990; Ellemers & Van Rijswijk, 1997), examining perceptions of legitimacy, stability, and permeability of intergroup relations.

We offer a new perspective on when and why social creativity bolsters or challenges social stability by proposing that social creativity can serve three distinct roles within the dynamics of social stability: it can help people cope with stable, unsatisfactory social identities, it can be used to promote social stability, and it can be employed to question social stability. For each of these roles, we critically discuss antecedents and consequences of specific social creativity strategies, the role that belonging to a higher- or lower-status group plays, and possible moderating factors that can impact the outcomes of various forms of social creativity. In order to spur future research on social creativity, we put forward a research agenda and discuss methodological issues in studying social creativity, offering specific directions for future research on social creativity and its role in bolstering or challenging social stability. We conclude by discussing how employment of social creativity differs from, and is similar to, system justification theory—a theory focused specifically on why social arrangements are sometimes preserved (Jost & Banaji, 1994)—as well as how social stability is related to inequalities in society.

2 | THE ORIGINS OF SOCIAL CREATIVITY: FINDING DIFFERENTIATION IN INTERGROUP COMPARISONS

In the 1970s, Henri Tajfel and John Turner in various writings laid the foundations of social identity theory (Tajfel, 1969, 1978, 1981, 1982; Tajfel & Turner, 1979). The core of the theory is that people derive a part of their self-concept from membership of groups or social categories that they identify with (Tajfel, 1969). Identification with these groups or social categories in turn shapes a range of attitudes and behaviors, such as preference for the ingroup over relevant outgroups, adherence to norms derived from the group, and engagement in actions to increase the status of the group (Hinkle & Brown, 1990; Hogg, 2000; Tajfel & Turner, 1979; Wright et al., 1990). Social identification is a relational and comparative process: intergroup comparisons provide the information about whether someone is better or worse off compared to members of a relevant outgroup (Tajfel & Turner, 1979). This process is value-laden; people are motivated to achieve a positive intergroup comparison in order to reach a positive evaluation of oneself in society (Turner, 1975).

Tajfel and Turner (1979) specified social creativity as one of the strategies that people can employ to regain or maintain positive distinctiveness for the groups or social categories with which they identify. Rather than seeking ways to improve the status of the ingroup through social competition—for example open hostility—with a relevant outgroup, social creativity concerns reinterpreting or redefining the intergroup comparison in a favorable way (Tajfel & Turner, 1979):

> The group members may seek positive distinctiveness for the in-group by redefining or altering the elements of the comparative situation. This need not involve any change in the group's actual social position or access to objective resources in relation to the out-group. It is a group rather than individualistic strategy. (Tajfel & Turner, 1979, p. 43)

To better understand the difference between social competition and social creativity strategies, it is important to consider how people can compare positively to a relevant outgroup: how are they different? Tajfel and Turner drew from the work on social differentiation by Gerard Lemaine (1974), who—at a time when (American) social psychology was still heavily influenced by Asch's seminal work on conformity (Asch, 1951, 1955)—argued that people have a desire to be unique compared to others and have various ways of finding differentiation in comparisons to others. Lemaine (1974) argued that people might seek social differentiation by stressing how they are *not* comparable to others and emphasize how their social position is unique. The key difference between social creativity and social competition strategies rests on whether a positive intergroup differentiation is achieved through reinterpreting the social comparison itself (social creativity) or attempting to improve the ingroup's status vis-à-vis a relevant outgroup on the comparison dimension causing the status difference.

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[1] We follow Tajfel and Turner (1979), who defined social creativity as a strategy for group members to "seek positive distinctiveness for the in-group by redefining or altering the elements of the comparative situation".

There are different ways in which people can alter the elements of the comparative situation to make it more favorable for the ingroup. Tajfel and Turner (1979) distinguished between three main forms of social creativity, but noted that there might be additional social creativity strategies as well. Subsequent research has provided empirical evidence for the three forms of social creativity strategies identified by Tajfel and Turner (1979). The ingroup can seek comparison on a new dimension—people could say "we are poor but we are happy" (e.g., Becker, 2012; Jackson et al., 1996; Yzerbyt & Cambon, 2017). Additionally, people can change the values assigned to attributes of the group in two ways. Externally imposed negative group attributes can be turned into positive ones—"being poor is pious" (Malovicki Yaffe et al., 2018) and Black is Beautiful (Tajfel & Turner, 1979) are examples of this. This form of "reappropriation" of negative stigma has been shown to increase a sense of empowerment of one's group (Galinsky et al., 2003). Alternatively, changing the value can also include downplaying how important a certain attribute is (Becker, 2012; Jackson et al., 1996; Lalonde, 1992)—"we are poor but we do not care much about money". Finally, the ingroup can be compared to a different outgroup, mainly to avoid comparisons with higher-status outgroups (i.e., downward comparison, Tajfel & Turner, 1979)—"we are poor but they are even poorer than us".

Additional forms of social creativity have also been identified in subsequent research. People can engage in superordinate recategorization (Gaertner et al., 1993), meaning that instead of focusing on the negative identity, a broader and more positive identity can be emphasized that includes both in- and outgroup—"we are poor but we are all part of this great country". This has been identified as an additional social creativity strategy (Blanz et al., 1998). The contrary, subordinate recategorization, involves dividing the ingroup into several smaller ones to attain positive distinctiveness of one's subgroup (e.g., Blanz et al., 1998)—"we are poor but some of us are even poorer". Finally, people can find a new point of reference to which to compare their ingroup. This reference-point can be a certain point in time (Blanz et al., 1998; Kessler & Mummendey, 2002)—"we are poor but compared to ten years ago we are much better off now"—or a certain norm or standard that allows for a more favorable comparison (Masters & Keil, 1987)—"we are poor but we are still doing better than the European average". An overview of these forms of social creativity can be found in Table 1.

Despite the few studies on social creativity that have been conducted since the concept was introduced by Tajfel and Turner several decades ago, certain conceptual issues remain. The issues are important to flesh out in order to better understand the role that social creativity can play in shaping social stability. First, it is unclear exactly which contextual conditions make the employment of social creativity more likely than the use of other social identity management strategies. Second, the differences in form and function between various social creativity strategies are not well understood. Third, with research on social identity processes focusing mainly on lower-status groups, it is unclear whether the employment of social creativity differs between groups that are higher and lower in status. To address these issues, we take an integrative approach to the role that social creativity can play in sustaining perceived differences between groups, focusing on the dynamic relation between antecedents and outcomes of social creativity.

3 | UNDERSTANDING SOCIAL STABILITY THROUGH SOCIAL CREATIVITY: THE SOCIAL STRUCTURE OF INTERGROUP RELATIONS

Why and when the perceived relative standing of groups changes or remains the same—according to the social identity perspective—depends on how people respond to a negative social identity. Do

TABLE 1 Overview of social creativity strategies

Type of strategy	Sub-types	Example	Selection of previous studies
Change values in the comparison	Downplaying the importance	We are poor but we do not care much about money	Becker, 2012; Boen & Vanbeselaere, 2001; Jackson et al., 1996; Lalonde, 1992
	Reappropriation of stigma	Being poor is pious	Galinsky et al., 2003; Malovicki Yaffe et al., 2018
Change comparison dimension		We are poor but we are happy	Becker, 2012; Jackson et al., 1996; Yzerbyt & Cambon, 2017
Change comparison group	Downward comparison	We are poor but they are even poorer than us	Becker, 2012; Blanz et al., 1998
Compare to new reference-point	Over time comparison	We are poor but compared to ten years ago we are much better now	Blanz et al., 1998
	Comparison with standard	We are poor but we are still doing better than the European average	Blanz et al., 1998; Masters & Keil, 1987
Recategorization	Subordinate	We are less poor than other poor people	Blanz et al., 1998
	Superordinate	We are poor but we are all part of this great country	Gaertner et al., 1993

people engage in individual mobility, in social competition strategies, or reinterpret (adverse) intergroup relations through social creativity? Engaging in these different social identity management strategies is dependent on the social structure of intergroup relations (Ellemers, 1993; Tajfel & Turner, 1979). The social structure of intergroup relations concerns a set of beliefs that people have about intergroup relations, rather than a sociological assessment of objective differences between groups (Tajfel & Turner, 1979). The social structure has received relatively little theoretical and empirical attention (Scheifele et al., 2020; Van Zomeren, 2016) but is important in understanding the role that social creativity plays in bolstering social stability. Therefore, we first discuss current theorizing on the role of the social structure in employing social creativity and note some limitations (see also Brown, 2020). Subsequently, we make the case for a dynamic approach to the social structure to better capture how social creativity is related to social stability.

A first characteristic of the social structure is one's belief in social stratification, ranging from social mobility to social change (Tajfel, 1978, 1981). The social mobility belief system (Hogg, 2016) consists of perceptions that group boundaries are permeable; making it relatively easy to move from one group to another as an individual—individual mobility (Ellemers, 1993; Ellemers et al., 1990; Wright, 1997). A social change belief system (Hogg, 2016), on the other hand, is marked by perceived impermeable group boundaries, making active attempts to change the structure necessary (e.g., Ellemers et al., 1990). How people manage their social identity when group boundaries are perceived as impermeable depends on social stability and perceptions of legitimacy of the group's relative status (Tajfel & Turner, 1979).

Intergroup relations are perceived to be stable—also called secure—when cognitive alternatives to the current intergroup status relations are not considered feasible or are even unimaginable (Tajfel, 1978). Different interpretations of SIT exist regarding the role of stability in predicting social competition and social creativity. In the original writings on social identity theory, Tajfel (1974, 1978) argued that both social competition and social creativity strategies could occur only when some cognitive alternatives were available to the inferior group:

> The assumption is made here that, in many of these conditions, the problems of social identity of the inferior group would not necessarily express themselves in social behavior until and unless there is some awareness that the existing social reality is not the only possible one and that alternatives to it are conceivable and perhaps attainable. If this awareness exists, the problems of social identity confronting the members of inferior groups can be solved in one of several ways, or a combination of more than one: (a) To become, through action and reinterpretation of group characteristics, more like the superior group. (b) To reinterpret the existing inferior characteristics of the group, so that they do not appear as inferior but acquire a positively valued distinctiveness from the superior group. (c) To create, through social action and/or diffusion of new "ideologies" new group characteristics which have a positively valued distinctiveness from the superior group. (Tajfel, 1978, p. 93–94)

In subsequent research, however, social creativity has been argued to become more likely only when cognitive alternatives to the current intergroup status relations are not conceivable (e.g., Blanz et al., 1998; Mummendey et al., 1999; Scheifele et al., 2020; Wright, 1997). Haslam (2001), alternatively, has argued that social creativity is employed both when status relations are secure and when they are insecure, depending on the group's status: higher-status groups can employ social creativity both when status relations are insecure and when they are secure, whereas lower-status groups only employ social creativity when status relations are secure. Conversely, when individuals believe that achieving a better group position is possible and necessary, social competition is more likely. For people to engage in social competition, cognitive alternatives to the status quo need to be available (Ellemers, 1993) and the intergroup hierarchy needs to be perceived as illegitimate (Spears et al., 2010). At face value, it makes sense that when both the need for change is low and the possibilities for change are slim, people employ the seemingly less risky strategy of social creativity rather than engaging in social competition. However, several empirical findings regarding both the role of legitimacy and the role of stability suggest that whereas stable and legitimate intergroup relations might be *sufficient* for social creativity to emerge, they do not *necessarily* lead to the employment of social creativity.

Perceived stability in intergroup relations does not always lead to employment of social creativity. Scheifele et al. (2020), for example, did not observe any association between social creativity and social stability in a rare correlational study on social-structural variables and social identity management strategies. Moreover, other responses than social creativity to an ingroup's secure lower group status have also been demonstrated. People have been found to simply accept their lower group status when this is unlikely to change (Boen & Vanbeselaere, 2001; Lalonde & Silverman, 1994; Wright et al., 1990). Additionally, research on non-normative collective action shows that when people lose hope that they can improve the lower status of their group through normative action, they are more likely to engage in more radical forms of collective action (e.g., Jimenéz-Moya et al., 2015; Scheepers et al., 2006; Spears et al., 2015; Tausch et al., 2011). Thus, when intergroup status relations are perceived as stable, especially when the ingroup's status is seen as illegitimate, radical collective action might be more likely than the employment of social creativity.

Similarly, perceived legitimacy in intergroup status relations is not always associated with the employment of social creativity. When lower-status groups reappropriate externally imposed stigma (e.g., Galinsky et al., 2003), for example *Black is Beautiful* (Tajfel & Turner, 1979), this seems to be a response to illegitimate rather than legitimate status relations. This is corroborated by Scheifele et al. (2020), who found that employing social creativity became less likely when intergroup status relations were perceived to be legitimate in the context of gender and leadership positions in organizations. Further supporting this, Schmader et al. (2001) showed that when one's ingroup compares poorly to an outgroup in a certain domain, this domain is devalued when intergroup relations are seen as illegitimate. Although it is not discussed as social creativity, devaluing a domain of comparison is similar to the social creativity strategy of downplaying the importance of a comparison dimension (e.g., Jackson et al., 1996) and it suggests that social creativity can also be employed when status relations are perceived to be illegitimate. Conversely, when status relations are perceived to be legitimate, social creativity is not always employed. In one of the rare empirical tests of the effects of social structural variables on employing social creativity, perceived legitimacy of the ingroup's lower status did not predict any of the tested social creativity strategies that East Germans could employ to manage their social identity (Mummendey et al., 1999). It is conceivable that a stronger perception of legitimate intergroup hierarchies reduces the need to manage one's identity in the first place. Accepting lower group status (e.g., Wright et al., 1990) or not even contemplating one's group status could therefore become more likely than employing social creativity when intergroup relations are seen as legitimate.

Our own research, indeed, shows that perceived legitimacy and stability can be conducive to the employment of social creativity strategies, but that other responses to these perceptions are possible as well. In an online study, we asked Hispanic Americans to respond to the persistent lower wages that Hispanic Americans receive compared to European Americans and presented them with an argument for the legitimacy of this pay gap by linking it to lower education levels (Van Bezouw & Van der Toorn, 2019). We found that 37% of the participants employed some form of social creativity—for example by focusing on family values instead of income, or by downplaying the importance of money (Van Bezouw & Van der Toorn, 2019). Together with the other evidence presented above, this strengthens our idea that stable and legitimate intergroup relations could be conducive to the employment of social creativity, but they will not necessarily elicit it. However, Tajfel's (1978) notion that social creativity is more likely when status relations are insecure is also not fully supported by the evidence we presented in the paragraphs above. To achieve a better understanding of the relationship between the perceived social structure and social identity management strategies, we propose a return to the dynamic nature of intergroup relations that Tajfel (1978) put forward.

The social structure of intergroup relations is regularly conceptualized as a predictor of engagement in different social identity management strategies, both theoretically and empirically (Ellemers, 1993; Ellemers et al., 1990). However, in one of the sparse longitudinal studies of the causes and effects of the social structure, Kessler and Mummendey (2002) found no convincing evidence that perceptions of the social structure are always the precursor of certain social identity management strategies. Instead, they argue that the relations between the social structure and various social identity processes can be bi-directional (Kessler & Mummendey, 2002). Following their conclusions, we argue that the social structure of intergroup relations should be considered as a dynamic, reciprocal process. This means that employing a social identity management strategy can be caused by perceptions of the social structure, but in turn also might change these perceptions of the social structure. For example, employing social creativity might become more likely when intergroup relations are seen as stable, but employing social creativity might subsequently also bolster these perceptions of intergroup stability. We think that this approach reflects the comparative and relational basis of social identity theory, where intergroup relations are theorized as being constantly (re-)negotiated (Tajfel, 1978). Understanding the relation between social stability and social creativity in this dynamic approach, therefore, means that we need to reconsider the different roles that social creativity can play.

4 | THE DIFFERENT ROLES OF SOCIAL CREATIVITY IN A DYNAMIC SOCIAL STRUCTURE

The underlying motivation to employ social creativity is that people strive to make their ingroup positively distinct from other groups (Tajfel & Turner, 1979). However, we propose that social creativity can play three different roles in the dynamic relation between social identity management strategies and sociostructural variables: (a) social creativity can serve the role of coping with an unsatisfactory social identity when intergroup relations are perceived to be stable, (b) social creativity can be employed to promote intergroup stability, and (c) social creativity can be used to question intergroup stability. These different proposed roles of social creativity, we argue, provide a more precise conceptualization of social creativity compared to current theorizing on social creativity. The different roles can clarify why specific forms of social creativity might be employed in certain circumstances, and what their outcomes might be. We will discuss the consequences of employing social creativity for each of the three roles. Although these outcomes are largely unknown (but see Becker, 2012), we will argue that they depend largely on whether the reinterpretation of intergroup comparisons is accepted by both the ingroup and relevant outgroups (Tajfel, 1981). Finally, we discuss how other factors, such as group status, efficacy, and ideology could influence employment of social creativity for each of the three roles. Together, this conceptualization offers an integrated view on the role of social creativity in bolstering or challenging social stability.

4.1 | Coping with social stability

Earlier, we showed that Tajfel (1974, 1978) argued that social creativity becomes more likely when intergroup relations are perceived to be insecure, whereas others have argued that social creativity is more likely to be employed when intergroup relations are seen as stable (e.g., Blanz et al., 1998; Haslam, 2001; Mummendey et al., 1999;

Wright, 1997). We argue that social creativity can indeed serve a palliative function of coping with an unsatisfactory social identity in a stable intergroup context, but that certain social creativity strategies are more likely to be used than others to this end. We conceptualize coping with social stability in line with how Lazarus and Folkman (1984) conceptualize emotion-focused coping: reactions to a stressful event that serve to reduce the experience of stress rather actively addressing the cause of stress (i.e., problem-focused coping). This role of social creativity is mostly relevant for lower-status groups (Haslam, 2001) who deem the perceived status relations unlikely to change. Moreover, status relations need to be perceived as legitimate at least to some extent because when status relations are perceived as illegitimate and stable, radical forms of collective action might be more likely than social creativity (e.g., Spears et al., 2015). However, employing social creativity to cope with a stable negative social identity is also dependent on other preconditions or factors.

Coping with lower group status that is perceived to be stable and legitimate, rather than striving for social change, becomes more likely when group-efficacy is low. In this situation, social creativity strategies that do not challenge existing status relations are most likely to be adopted. For lower-status groups, downplaying the importance of a dimension of social comparison, or changing the comparison dimension might be the most straightforward ways of managing one's social identity. Higher group status is stereotypically associated with competence, rather than warmth (Cuddy et al., 2008). Therefore, we expect that the new comparison dimension most likely concerns a warmth-related dimension (e.g., Fiske et al., 2007), instead of a dimension of competence or material resources that could form a threat to existing status relations—at least in individualistic countries. In collectivistic countries, in contrast, the competence dimension might be a relevant new comparison dimension (Cuddy et al., 2015). These forms of social creativity are, presumably, also more readily accepted by higher-status groups—they do not challenge the hierarchical relations and the culturally valued dimension of the intergroup comparison. Making intergroup comparisons more favorable by choosing another time point of reference (e.g., Blanz et al., 1998) is also a social creativity strategy that helps one cope with a stable unsatisfactory social identity without the risk of not being accepted by higher-status outgroups. If indeed these types of social creativity strategies are accepted by the ingroup and outgroup, social stability is maintained and the current status relations are likely to still be perceived as legitimate. However, employing social creativity to cope with an unsatisfactory social identity can in some instances "strike back" (Derks et al., 2007) and have additional downstream effects on intergroup relations. For example, when a sports team does poorly compared to another team, focusing on their team-spirit instead of performance can actually lead to better performance (Derks et al., 2007).

Instances of social creativity as coping with secure negative social identities can be found in different societal phenomena. For instance, much of the appeal of populist political parties is their anti-elitist rhetoric (e.g., Mudde & Rovira Kaltwasser, 2017). A personal feeling of anti-elitism can stem, in part, from a process of coping with a stable negative social identity among those who feel disadvantaged and inefficacious in society. If people are unhappy with how politics affect them as citizens but do not see any way of changing the political system, they might stress their morally superior position. They can, for instance, make fun of politicians and question their morality while claiming their own moral superiority.

Arguably, reinterpreting the comparative situation through social creativity is more urgent for lower-status groups than for higher-status groups when intergroup relations are perceived to be stable. Nonetheless, higher-status groups can also resort to social creativity when the group's superiority is threatened—for instance, when this superiority is perceived to be based on unfair advantages, exploitation, or force and therefore illegitimate (Tajfel, 1978, p. 89). For example, unscrupulous bankers could emphasize bankers' work ethic instead of the ethics of their work in order to bolster their social identity when faced with moral concerns over their character that cannot easily be refuted (i.e., low efficacy). Additionally, higher-status groups can deny the existence of the group's privilege to counter the perception that their achievements stem from unfair advantage rather than ability, thus maintaining their positive social identity (Knowles et al., 2014). However, these strategies seem to mainly assuage guilt over being privileged (Branscombe et al., 2004), or strengthen an already powerful social identity. As such, coping with secure negative identities is only one of the roles that social creativity can play. Another role, especially relevant for higher-status groups, is to actively promote social stability.

4.2 | Promoting social stability

Perceptions of status relations between groups are constantly changing, and lower- and higher-status groups might have different interests when it comes to promoting social stability through social creativity. For higher-status groups, bolstering existing status relations might help in maintaining a positive social identity. According to Haslam's interpretation of social identity theory (2001), higher-status groups can engage in a form of "reverse social creativity", where they show magnanimity towards lower-status outgroups (Platow et al., 1999)—"we are better, but they are friendlier". Arguably, these strategies serve to maintain the ingroup's higher status. There are more fundamental ways in which higher-status groups play a role in shaping the social structure of intergroup relations as well. Tajfel (1978) argued that when the higher status of a group is threatened, they can adopt rather sinister ideologies about the inherent superiority of the ingroup to justify the ingroup's privileged position—for example white supremacy. Haslam (2001) argues that when higher status is insecure and illegitimate, higher-status groups might express racism or sexism to rationalize the ingroup's higher status and thereby promote their own stable privileged position. Research by Douglas et al. (2005) shows that both social creativity and social competition strategies might be employed by groups when intergroup relations are unstable and the higher status is threatened. They found that White supremacist groups employed social creativity more regularly than social competition strategies in online discussions, invoking a false sense of victimhood and threat that served to justify continued intergroup hostility (Douglas et al., 2005). These actions and attitudes of higher-status groups are important in the general ideological frames in which intergroup comparison are made—they signal that differences between groups are legitimate, stable, and limit the possibilities for forming more inclusive social identities.

Dominant groups can also promote social stability by shaping how lower-status groups manage their social identity. Hogg (2016) argued that higher-status groups can effectively maintain their status by promoting lateral or downward comparisons among lower-status groups. This tactic of "divide and conquer" ensures that (illegitimate) higher status of the dominant group is not challenged (Hogg, 2016). One way of doing so is by providing intergroup help strategically. Higher-status groups have been shown to provide dependency-oriented help in order to maintain existing power relations (e.g., Becker et al., 2019; Halabi et al., 2008; Nadler, 2002).

For lower-status groups, social stability implies that the negative distinctiveness of the social identity cannot easily be changed. Engaging in social creativity to promote social stability might, therefore, be less likely among lower-status groups compared to higher-status groups. However, social stability can be a by-product of lower-status groups employing social creativity. Becker (2012) showed that some, but not all, social creativity strategies can bolster social stability by undermining disadvantaged group members' interest in collective action for social change (Becker, 2012). Specifically, it has been demonstrated that engaging in a downward comparison and selecting a new (complementary) comparison dimension enhanced individuals' self-esteem, but reduced lower status group members' perception of being relatively deprived, which in turn reduced their willingness to engage in collective action to improve the situation for their group (Becker, 2012). However, a positive redefinition of an externally imposed negative group attribute did not diminish collective action intentions (Becker, 2012). Thus, although some forms of social creativity can improve the self-esteem of members of lower-status groups, they can also pacify resistance against structural inequality and contribute to promoting stability. As such, social creativity also legitimizes the current status relations: it reduces the perception that deprivation compared to a relevant outgroup is illegitimate.

4.3 | Questioning social stability

Some social creativity strategies can serve the role of questioning social stability. Especially reappropriation of a stigma—changing a negative dimension into a more valued one—has the potential to question social stability. Reappropriation has been argued to promulgate more assertive social identities (e.g., Tajfel & Turner, 1979) and it has been shown to empower the ingroup (Galinsky et al., 2003). Depending on whether these more assertive identities are accepted by the ingroup, the outgroup, and third parties, social change might become more likely. Some evidence exists on the role that social creativity can play in questioning social stability in perceived intergroup relations.

A series of experiments showed that the use of social creativity strategies inhibits intentions for collective action (i.e., social competition), with the exception of the strategy of reappropriation (Becker, 2012). Becker (2012) found that reappropriation neither increased nor decreased collective action. However, a wealth of politically influential events suggests that reappropriation of negative stigma may increase, or at least is related to increased, political action. Tajfel and Turner (1979) mention how African Americans changed the perceived value of 'Black' by coining the phrase Black is Beautiful, which was widely adopted as a slogan for a social movement. Similarly, when Prime Minister Erdoğan ridiculed protesters in Gezi Park, Istanbul, as *çapulcu* (marauders), these protesters embraced the term and started identifying as *çapulcu*, spurring increased protest (Odağ et al., 2016). Finally, Lalonde et al. (2016) describe how French Canadians created a more assertive social identity based on the French language in the "Quiet Revolution". A political party started using slogans explicitly in French, such as "Maître chez nous" (Masters of Our Own House). This signalled increased awareness and political influence, later resulting in laws favoring French over English (Lalonde et al., 2016). Lalonde et al. (2016) described these slogans as a combination of social competition and social creativity strategies being used at the same time, changing the dimension of intergroup comparisons but aimed at achieving social change. These examples beg the question of how the role of social creativity as questioning social stability differs from social competition. In line with the original definition of social creativity (Tajfel & Turner, 1979), we argue that social competition requires agreement between a lower- and higher-status group on the dimension of intergroup comparison, the relevance of the intergroup comparison, and the value attached to the comparison dimension. Social creativity, on the other hand, means that there is no such agreement and all these aspects are subject to negotiation, interpretation, or can otherwise be contested.

With the abundance of examples of reappropriation of negative stigma and its consequences for social change, it might be tempting to conclude that reappropriation exclusively relates to collective action for social change. Failed attempts at social change, however, are unlikely to gain public awareness through media attention. It is also important to note that reappropriation strategies can elicit strategies with opposing messages by other people. For example, the Black Lives Matter slogan was mimicked in All Lives Matter and Blue Lives Matter slogans that signal a different ideological stance, downplaying the specific difficulties that Black Americans and Americans of color experience (e.g., Carney, 2016).

The role of social creativity in challenging social stability most likely involves the use of reappropriation (i.e., choosing a contested new dimension to compare the ingroup to an outgroup) or creating a more assertive identity by engaging in downward comparisons. We believe that in order to contest social stability, some group-based feeling of efficacy is needed. Additionally, we deem it conceivable that whether people will employ social creativity to question social stability depends on the content of the social identity. Having a politicized social identity makes collective action more likely (e.g., Turner-Zwinkels & Van Zomeren, 2020; Turner-Zwinkels et al., 2015; see also Jost et al., 2017) and along similar lines we think that reappropriation or creating a more assertive social identity in order to question social stability is more likely among politicized groups. The reinterpreted intergroup comparison or the newly created, more assertive, identity (e.g., Lalonde et al., 2016) needs to be accepted by other ingroup members to successfully challenge social stability. Additionally, some form of acknowledgment of the newly created intergroup comparisons by the relevant higher-status group would increase the impact of questioning social stability on actual status relations. However, the higher-status group might not easily accept social creativity strategies that could potentially undermine their dominant position.

4.4 | The dynamics of different roles of social creativity

We think that differentiating between different roles that social creativity can have allows for a better understanding of when social creativity bolsters or challenges social stability. This conceptualization of social creativity fits with the strong focus on dynamics in intergroup relations in the original social identity theorizing (e.g. Tajfel, 1978). Moreover, it allows for more specificity in the antecedents and consequences of different types of social creativity. This is needed because whereas strategies such as comparisons on a new dimension and reappropriation have received considerable scientific attention, much less is known about other strategies.

The three different roles we propose are not mutually exclusive, nor is our conceptualization of social creativity completely deterministic. Within the dynamic approach of the social structure of intergroup relations (see Kessler & Mummendey, 2002), it is conceivable that people employ multiple ways of managing their identity simultaneously or sequentially. This can depend on how successful various strategies are in creating a more positive social identity. Moreover, the wider political, economic, and societal context has an additional impact on perceptions of legitimacy and stability, influencing how people can manage their social identity. The three proposed roles that social creativity can play offer a new outlook on how people negotiate intergroup relations. Moreover, it offers exciting new avenues for future research.

5 | WHERE DO WE GO FROM HERE? A RESEARCH AGENDA ON SOCIAL CREATIVITY

The three different roles of social creativity that we propose provide many possibilities for empirical research. Testing the effect of various levels of perceived social stability and legitimacy on the employment of the different forms of social creativity, followed by a subsequent measurement of social stability and legitimacy, would provide a first step in differentiating between the three different roles of social creativity. Moreover, group-efficacy beliefs, the content of the relevant social identity, political ideology, and group status are among the key preconditions that shape how social creativity is employed. However, we think that answers to several other—but related—questions can provide additional insight about social creativity.

5.1 | How does the societal context influence the employment of different social creativity strategies?

The focus of our conceptualization of social creativity has been how it can bolster or challenge social stability. However, these perceptions of intergroup relations are embedded in a societal reality consisting of a certain political, cultural, social, and historical context (see Rubin & Hewstone, 2004). This context might set limits to which social creativity strategies can be employed, or make other social creativity strategies more likely.

First of all, it seems important to consider the availability of outgroups to which one's own ingroup can be compared. Engaging in downward comparison is contingent on the possibility to do so. Asian Americans could in some cases argue that they have a lower social status than European Americans, but that they are still better off than African Americans. When your sports team is last in the competition, however, it is impossible to engage in downward comparison, which makes focusing on another comparison (e.g., at least we play fairly) more likely.

Existing societal norms and stigma might be especially relevant as contextual factors influencing the use of social creativity. In some of the examples we gave of reappropriation of a negative stigma, lower-status groups seemed to respond to specific name-calling by powerful others or political leaders. These impromptu and often blatantly stigmatizing terms might lend themselves better to being reappropriated than more widespread and enduring stereotypical beliefs. Research on depressed entitlement among women (Callahan-Levy & Messé, 1979) or people in lower-paid jobs (Pelham & Hetts, 2001) shows how people over various decades can see less pay for the same task as fair. These internalized norms about fair payment might not lend themselves as easily to being reappropriated as, for example, the stigmatizing term *çapulcu* that Prime Minister Erdoğan of Turkey used to derogate protesters (Odağ et al., 2016). An additional consideration here is that, consistent with our dynamic conceptualization of the social structure, higher-status groups might play an active role in shaping the norms and ideologies that favor existing status relations in addition to lower-status groups.

A cultural aspect of the societal context is that people might have strong moral feelings or a strong ideology that sets the stage for how one's social identity can be constructed. Strong moral convictions have been shown to be distinct from other inter-individual and intergroup attitudes (Skitka, 2010), and can motivate collective action over and above ingroup interests (van Zomeren et al., 2011). Moral convictions are distinct from other attitudes in that they are seen as universal, objective, and not dependent on the acceptance of others (Skitka, 2010). In line with these findings, certain ingroup attributes that represent strong moral convictions (e.g., for religious groups) are less likely to be open to renegotiation through social creativity compared to less central group attributes. In such cases, people may prefer social creativity strategies that either focus on another comparison dimension or that do not downplay the importance of the moral convictions. Taken together, future research should test whether social creativity strategies aimed at giving new meaning to a negative ingroup dimension become more likely when this dimension is less central to the ingroup's social identity.

5.2 | How do interactions between higher- and lower-status groups impact the use of social creativity and other social identity management strategies?

Our dynamic conceptualization of the social structure and our focus on both higher and lower-status groups in social identity management offer some predictions for which specific type of social creativity people will employ. Research on social workers (Breakwell, 1983), and on people engaging in “dirty work” (Ashforth & Kreiner, 1999) shows that, compared to other social creativity strategies, lower-status groups are more likely to employ finding a new comparison dimension, changing the values that are assigned to the ingroup, or seeking a different comparison group. Whether these specific social creativity strategies have an impact on social stability, however, depends on their acceptance by both lower- and higher-status groups. We think that future research should focus on the interaction between multiple groups going through a process of negotiation about how two groups should be compared, their relative status, and the defining group characteristics.

Haslam (2001), for example, provides an overview of how higher-status groups can employ social creativity strategies in which lower-status groups are described positively, but on an irrelevant dimension. Rich people might, for instance, stress how friendly people from the working class are. There are several ways in which lower-status groups can react to this. When somebody who identifies as working class adopts these characteristics (e.g., “we are not rich, but friendly”), a positive social identity is maintained. However, when the group's negative distinctiveness remains and is unlikely to change, people might have to resort to appeasement and employ more, or other, social creativity strategies in order to maintain a positive social identity. Conversely, displays of higher-status groups justifying their privilege could also spark anger and outrage among lower-status groups and third parties, spurring collective action against the higher-status group. Longitudinal research involving both higher- and lower-status groups is needed to approach this aspect of social creativity.

5.3 | What are the consequences of employing social creativity for the individual?

So far, we have discussed the consequences that the employment of social creativity can have for groups' perceived status and the social structure. However, there might also be specific consequences of employing social creativity for individual wellbeing. The basic motivations for people to engage in social identity management strategies, and whether these motivations are met, remains subject to debate. Abrams and Hogg (1988) have argued that seeking positive group distinctiveness can be motivated by wanting to protect or increase one's self-esteem—in line with Tajfel and Turner's (1979) reasoning—but that the struggle over objective resources can also motivate intergroup competition. Additional empirical findings suggest that engaging in social creativity does not always increase collective self-esteem (i.e., feeling good about one's group), even when it can increase personal self-esteem (i.e., feeling good about the self; Becker, 2012). Future research should test whether these mixed findings can be explained by whether people believe that the social creativity strategy is shared among other ingroup members or not. If the strategy is not shared, only individual self-esteem might benefit from employing social creativity. In order to fully understand the dynamics of employing social creativity, we propose various individual-level outcomes that need to be studied in addition to group-level outcomes.

Employing social creativity could increase a sense of group-based control (Fritsche & Jugert, 2017). Alternatively, feelings of efficacy or empowerment can be increased by its employment. Also, the strength of identification with a certain group might be influenced by engaging in social creativity. This could depend on the type of social creativity that people employ. It is conceivable that reappropriating a negative stigma might strengthen identification, as shown for example by Odağ et al. (2016) in the case of the Gezi Park protesters in Turkey reappropriating their stigmatized name. Downplaying certain group attributes, on the other hand, might create psychological distance between an individual and the group, weakening identification in order to maintain personal self-esteem. We think that employing social creativity can have a series of benefits for individuals, providing a less costly strategy compared to attempts at achieving social change. These benefits, we think, are mostly affective. Like the palliative effects of justifying the system (Harding & Sibley, 2013; Jost & Hunyady, 2002, 2005), which includes several positive emotions (Solak et al., 2012), social creativity can be seen as a coping strategy focused on managing one's emotions in response to negative group distinctiveness (Van Zomeren et al., 2012). As such, we hypothesize that employing social creativity will benefit the emotional wellbeing of individuals.

6 | METHODOLOGICAL CONCERNS IN STUDYING SOCIAL CREATIVITY

The development of social identity theory rests in large part on observations of actual interactions between (minimal) groups (Tajfel, 1970, 1974; Tajfel et al., 1971). This type of labor-intensive research is becoming less common in the field of social psychology where high-volume, easier-to-conduct (online) studies increasingly become the norm (Anderson et al., 2019). Research on social creativity has predominantly made use of questionnaires. We think that, in order to properly gauge the complex dynamics of employing social creativity, three methodological changes are needed. First, a partial return to more laborious qualitative methods will be needed to capture the process of people reinterpreting intergroup relations through social creativity. Second, longitudinal research is crucial for tests of the proposed dynamic social structure of intergroup relations. Third, experimental methods can be used to uncover people's underlying motivations in employing social creativity (adding to the work of Ellemers, 1993; Ellemers et al., 1990; Ellemers & Van Rijswijk, 1997).

Qualitative methods are necessary in studying social creativity because they do not rely as much on predefined (survey) questions compared to quantitative research. The most comprehensive overview of how social creativity can be measured is provided by Blanz et al. (1998), for example with questions such as “how important do you consider the following dimension of the ingroup?” followed by several comparison dimensions which each can be rated on a Likert scale. Similar items have since been used to assess the use of social creativity strategies, sometimes in combination with experimental manipulations of threat or group status (Derks et al., 2007; Ellemers & Van Rijswijk, 1997; Jetten et al., 2005). In all of these cases, the researchers provided the social creativity strategy to the participants in the questions. Although this is useful in capturing differences in strength of the social creativity strategies, it does not capture how people would themselves choose to redefine the intergroup comparison. Considering the importance of different social creativity strategies in shaping the social structure of intergroup relations, capturing this process is more pertinent in studying social creativity compared to social competition strategies that are more readily observable.

Some studies using semi-structured interviews indeed show that people do engage in social creativity strategies when they are not prompted by survey items (e.g., Akfirat et al., 2016; Hajek, 2015; Van Bezouw & Van der Toorn, 2019). In addition, different types of qualitative methods could serve different functions in assessing the use of social creativity. Focus group research could be useful in capturing how the content of social creativity strategies is negotiated between different people, resembling day-to-day interactions to discuss threats or grievances.

In addition to qualitative methods, longitudinal research designs are needed to test causes and consequences of employing social creativity. The dynamic approach to the social structure of intergroup relations, we propose, entails a focus on changes in stability and legitimacy in intergroup relations over time. Whereas previous experimental research has provided insight into causes (Jackson et al., 1996) and consequences (Becker, 2012) of employing social creativity separately, an encompassing longitudinal approach is instrumental in showing possible reciprocal effects between the social structure and social identity management strategies (Kessler & Mummendey, 2002). Lastly, we still think that experimental research is needed to study social creativity—particularly to make causal claims about underlying motivations that drive people to employ social creativity. However, we believe that a combination of methodological approaches is best suited to provide an in-depth understanding of the role of social creativity in bolstering or decreasing social stability.

7 | CONCLUDING REMARKS

In this article, we aimed to revive interest in the concept of social creativity because it can play a fundamental role in shaping perceptions of intergroup relations and social stability. We proposed three different roles that social creativity can play in intergroup relations: it can be a way to cope with stable intergroup relations, it can be employed to promote stability in intergroup relations, or it can used to question intergroup stability. This new perspective on social creativity provides a solution for the ambiguous or under-studied antecedents and consequences of employing social creativity, while staying close to Tajfel and Turner's (1979; Tajfel, 1978) original writings on the dynamic and relational aspects of intergroup relations. Moreover, it provides a framework for distinguishing between different forms of social creativity that offers exciting new ways to study social creativity and social stability.

We have provided our rationale for reviving interest in the concept of social creativity and moving towards a better understanding of social stability clearly within the boundaries of social identity theory (Tajfel & Turner, 1979). However, there are other relevant and insightful theoretical approaches to the social psychology of stable intergroup relations. Most notably, system justification theory (SJT) has been developed to complement and extend social identity theory in an attempt to explain why existing social arrangements are often preserved (Jost, 2011; Jost et al., 2004). The theory posits that various psychological needs (e.g., the need for certainty) motivate people to justify and legitimize the social and political status quo (Jost & Banaji, 1994), even when doing so conflicts with personal or ingroup interests (Jost et al., 2003; Jost & Van der Toorn, 2012). Much empirical evidence supports hypotheses derived from system justification theory (e.g., Jost, 2019) and, as such, elucidates psychological mechanisms that can contribute to the maintenance of inequality and status differences between groups in society. The motivations for legitimizing the status quo, what constitutes “the system”, and the theoretical differences between system justification theory and social identity theory are the subject of ongoing debate (e.g., Jost, 2019; Owuamalam et al., 2019).

While we acknowledge these differences between SIT and SJT, we argue that the psychological needs proposed by system justification theory can complement the social identity perspective we take to explaining the role of social creativity in bolstering social stability. The epistemic, relational, and existential needs that motivate justification of the status quo (Jost & Hunyady, 2002) could make certain social creativity strategies more readily accepted by members of the ingroup, bolstering social stability. Kay and Jost (2003), for example, showed that exposure to complementary stereotypes (e.g., poor people are happier than rich people) increased support for the status quo. In a similar way, we expect that social stability can be promoted when lower-status groups adopt reinterpretations of intergroup comparisons focusing on a new dimension (e.g., we are poor but happy). We suggest that a fruitful way to work towards integration between the SIT and SJT perspectives is to examine when motivations toward positive distinctiveness for one's ingroup (SIT) and toward justifying the status quo (SJT) work in parallel in predicting employment of social creativity and when they diverge.

In outlining social identity theory, Tajfel and Turner (1979) were careful to distinguish social psychological processes (i.e., relational, comparative, implicit processes) in intergroup relations from objective, societal-level factors in intergroup conflict. For social creativity, this distinction is particularly important because the essence of social creativity is to reinterpret intergroup comparisons rather than achieve objective outcomes (e.g., become richer). However, Tajfel and Turner (1979) also noted that intergroup relations rarely, if ever, can be stripped of their social, economic, political and historical contingencies when it concerns existing groups or social categories in society. In order to bridge the gap between social psychological processes and societal-level outcomes, related theorizing on social identity processes is useful, most notably on collective action. Our conceptualization of social creativity and social stability, for example, fits with recent work on the dynamic nature of intergroup relations explained in the dynamic dual pathway of coping with collective disadvantage (Van Zomeren et al., 2012). Within this model, collective action is discussed as a form of coping that can lead to reappraisals of collective disadvantage (Van Zomeren et al., 2012). We think that the recursive effects between employing different types of social creativity and social stability discussed in this article can be related to societal stability in a similar way. However, research on collective action also shows that social identity processes alone do not explain engagement in collective action.

Having a shared identity, efficacy, and the perception that grievances are shared have been shown to be important social psychological underpinnings of engagement in collective action (e.g., Van Zomeren et al., 2008). However, recent proposals have been made to integrate insight from social psychology, sociology, and political science in capturing the role that the social structure plays in collective action (Van Zomeren, 2016). Societal factors as specified in social identity theory (Rubin & Hewstone, 2004)—a social reality consisting of societal norms and values—and structural factors in the supply of politics (Klandermans, 2004) or political opportunity structure (Koopmans, 1999) together provide a more encompassing framework of factors spurring collective action. Along the same lines, we think that our conceptualization of social creativity can be considered a social psychological dimension in societal phenomena such as persistent inequality, which we outlined at the start of this article, or political inaction (see Klandermans & Van Stekelenburg, 2014; Stroebe et al., 2019; Van Bezouw et al., 2019). Additionally, previous research has shown that social creativity plays a role in classroom settings (Boen & Vanbeselaere, 2001), organizations (Elsbach & Kramer, 1996), and sports (Doyle et al., 2017; Jones, 2017); all of which can serve as important contexts in which to examine how the different roles that social creativity can play in bolstering social stability relate to real-life outcomes.

In conclusion, we hope that this article serves as a starting point to revive scholarly interest in social creativity. In the four decades since Tajfel and Turner (1979) proposed social creativity as a way of reinterpreting intergroup comparisons, its antecedents and consequences have been understood much less compared to social competition strategies. We believe that renewed interest in the concept of social creativity is needed for an encompassing approach to the psychology of social change and social stability.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

We are grateful to Ruthie Pliskin, Maja Kutlaca, Arieke Rijken, Catia Teixeira, and Andrew Livingstone for providing suggestions on earlier drafts of this article and sharing their perspectives on social creativity with us.

CONFLICT OF INTEREST

The authors have declared that they do not have competing interests in conducting and reporting on this study.

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How to cite this article: van Bezouw MJ, van der Toorn J, Becker JC. Social creativity: Reviving a social identity approach to social stability. *Eur J Soc Psychol*. 2021;51:409–422. https://doi.org/10.1002/ejsp.2732