MODES OF STATUS EQUILIBRATION

by

James C. Kimberly, Paul V. Crosbie,

and Eugene W. Lehr

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James C. Kimberly, Paul V. Crosbie, and Eugene W. Lehr

Stanford University

The present paper reports an experiment which was designed to test a number of hypotheses concerning behavioral responses to status inconsistency. No attempt to describe the psychological processes which probably underlie the responses will be made. This has been done elsewhere (Kimberly, 1966, 1967; and Kimberly and Crosbie, 1967). Rather, it will be assumed that status inconsistency is, under the conditions dealt with in the present experiment, psychologically uncomfortable, and the focus shall be on the ways in which the behavioral responses serve to reduce this discomfort.

The type of status inconsistency studied was that between difficulty of task in a group and ability relevant to task. The behavioral responses studied were task mobility and preferences for specialization and despecialization of group task structure. The responses were observed under conditions of high and low status aspiration because it was predicted they would be affected by this variable.

HYPOTHESES

The hypotheses which were tested are part of a theory which has been presented elsewhere (Kimberly, 1966, 1967). Only so much of the theory as is necessary to an understanding of the hypotheses will be presented in this paper.

Two kinds of status inconsistency were studied. These were: (a) having

a hard task and insufficient ability to do it (hard task - low ability) and (b) having an easy task and more than sufficient ability to do it (easy task - high ability). Two kinds of status consistency were also studied. These were: (a) having a hard task and sufficient ability to do it (hard task - high ability) and (b) having an easy task and sufficient but not more than sufficient ability to do it (easy task - low ability).

Two kinds of task mobility were studied. These were: (a) movement upward from an easy task and (b) movement downward from a hard task.

Preferences for specialization and despecialization of group task structure were defined as follows. Preference for specialization was defined as wanting the tasks of different members of the group to differ in difficulty. Preference for despecialization was defined as wanting the tasks of different members of the group to be of the same difficulty. This was possible because each task consisted of subtasks which could vary in difficulty and which could be shifted from one task, and hence from one individual, to another. This kind of task-subtask structure is viewed as being characteristic of most groups

High status aspiration was defined as wanting to be as high as possible on all bases of status. It should be pointed out here that a given task can be wanted for at least two reasons. First, it can be wanted because one has the ability to do it. This is viewed as deriving from a preference for status consistency. Second, it can be wanted because one wants a high overall status and having a hard task contributes to this. This is viewed as deriving from high status aspiration.

The hypotheses which were tested can now be stated.

1. Status inconsistency of the hard task - low ability type results in downward task mobility when status aspiration is low.

The rationale for this hypothesis is that inconsistency results in a tendency to equalize bases of status; in this case, task difficulty and ability. Since status aspiration is low, it should not interfere with this tendency.

The question of why task mobility rather than attempts to change ability was predicted may have occurred to the reader. The answer is that ability was defined in the experiment as relatively unchangeable. The relative ease with which different bases of status can be changed is viewed as the basic factor which determines on which base (or bases) of status mobility designed to equalize the bases will occur.

2. Status inconsistency of the hard task - low ability type results in a preference for a less specialized group task structure when status aspiration is high.

The rationale for this hypothesis is rather complex and requires a somewhat extended explanation. First, it is necessary to define specialization-despecialization of the task structure of a group more specifically. In the interest of simplicity, it shall be defined as it was in the experiment. The task structure of each experimental group consisted of two tasks, each of which was assigned to an individual. Each task, in turn, consisted of two subtasks. In all, there were two hard subtasks and two easy subtasks. Specialization existed when both of the hard subtasks constituted one of the tasks (HH) and both of the easy subtasks constituted the other task (EE). Despecialization existed when one hard subtask and one easy subtask constituted each of the tasks (HE, HE).

The rationale for the hypothesis can now be explained. Initially, there is a low ability individual with an HH task. The hardness of this task con-

tributes in part to his overall status.[2] Thus, status aspiration should make him wish to retain it. Inconsistency, on the other hand, should make him want an EE task. The result is a conflict of forces. This can be resolved by preferring (and obtaining if possible) an HE task. However, if there are only two H subtasks and two E subtasks in the group, both members of the group must have an HE task if one of them does. The fact that one member's preference affects what the other member may have is the reason we view preferences for specialization and despecialization as preferences for group task structures.

Although this is a simple instance of preference for despecialization of group task structure, more complex instances are viewed as being related to status inconsistency in the same way it is predicted this one is.

3. Status consistency of the easy task - low ability type results in a preference for a less specialized group task structure when status aspiration is high.

The rationale for this hypothesis is also rather complex. Initially, there is a low ability individual with an EE task. The easiness of this task makes for low status. Thus, status aspiration should make him want an HH task. Consistency, on the other hand, should make him wish to retain the EE task. Again, the result is a conflict of forces. This can be resolved by preferring (and obtaining if possible) an HE task.

4. Status inconsistency of the easy task - high ability type results in upward task mobility when status aspiration is low.

The rationale for this hypothesis is the same as that for hypothesis 1, namely, that status inconsistency results in a tendency to equalize bases of status. Since status aspiration is low, it should not interfere with this

tendency. Again, mobility on task rather than on ability should occur because ability was defined as relatively unchangeable.

5. Status inconsistency of the easy task - high ability type results in a preference for a specialized group task structure when status aspiration is high.

The rationale for this hypothesis is quite complex. Again, initially there is a high ability individual with an EE task. He should not want an HE task because this would only partially equalize the bases of his status. Further, since status aspiration is high, his wanting an HE task should be even more unlikely. Thus, he should prefer the specialized task structure which already exists if he can exchange tasks with the other member of the group. This would result in his having an HH task.

The question of just how this is different from task mobility may have occurred to the reader. It differs primarily in that it requires the individual to specify what task he wants the other member of the group to have.

Although this is a simple instance of preference for specialization of task structure in a group, more complex instances in which specialization only partially exists are viewed as being related to status inconsistency in the same way it is predicted this one is.

As indicated earlier, it was assumed that, under conditions like those dealt with in the present experiment, status inconsistency is uncomfortable. If this is the case, the following should be true.

6. Status consistency, irrespective of type, is positively associated with satisfaction. Reduction of status inconsistency of either the hard task - low ability or the easy task - high ability type results in an increase in satisfaction.

In the experiment, satisfaction was measured in terms of satisfaction with task because ability was defined as relatively unchangeable and because reduction of inconsistency could be accomplished only by changing one's task.

THE EXPERIMENT

General Procedure. Two subjects at a time were taken into an experimental room where there were two booths, a table for the experimenter, and a blackboard. Each booth consisted of a table and a chair and was separated from the other booth by a curtain which made it impossible for the subjects to see one another.

Unknown to the subjects, the ability treatment a subject received depended upon the booth he was in. The subject in booth A always received the low ability treatment, and the subject in booth B always received the high ability treatment. Upon entering the room, each subject drew a card at random which specified the booth he would take. Since the consistency conditions were created by assigning different tasks to the ability treatments, the card also indicated a particular kind of task. The subject was told he would work on the kind of task on his card for the first two of three problem periods. He was further told that he would be able to express a preference for the kind of task he would like to work on in the third problem period. In order to involve the subjects as much as possible, they were told that the tasks required an ability which is not related to high school or college grades or to I. Q., but which is nevertheless characteristic of successful people in all walks of life.

Once seated, the subjects were given what was described as a test for the ability the tasks required. This consisted of four problems. Two of the pro-

DISCUSSION

Subjects. Two subjects at a time were taken into an experimental
[illegible] that each experimenter [illegible] for [illegible]
[illegible] [illegible] [illegible] [illegible] [illegible]

blems were labeled hard and two were labeled easy. The subjects were told that these were the same type of problems that they would have in the three problem periods, except that in each such period they would have two problems rather than four. The subjects were further told that these particular problems were "extremely accurate predictors" of how well they would do in the three problem periods. Unknown to them, one subject received problems that were objectively easier than those the other subject received. The same differences in objective difficulty were maintained for the problems the subjects received later in the problem periods. This constituted the ability manipulation. It will be explained in greater detail in the next section.

The subject who received the objectively easier problems (the high ability treatment) was told that he got all four problems correct, whereas the subject who received the objectively harder problems (the low ability treatment) was told that he got only the two easy problems correct.

Following the ability test, a point system was explained to the subjects. This was the reward structure. It was based on both possession of a task and performance on the task.[3] More points were given for a hard task than an easy task. Additional points were given for solutions the subject was told were correct, and no additional points were given for solutions the subject was told were incorrect. The reward structure will be described in greater detail later.

As indicated earlier, in the first two problem periods each subject worked on the kind of task indicated on the card he had drawn. After the second problem period, each subject was given a sheet showing the number of points he had accumulated up to that time. There was also on this sheet a number which he was told was the average number of points that other students like himself,

i. e., with similar ability and a similar task in the first two problem periods, had accumulated for all three problem periods. Actually, this number was systematically varied during the experiment. This constituted the status aspiration manipulation which will be explained in greater detail later.

After the subjects had the opportunity to study their accumulation sheets, they were asked to express preferences for the kinds of tasks they would like in the third problem period. The various alternatives available to the subjects provided measures of preferences for task mobility or for specialization or despecialization of group task structure.

Satisfaction was measured at the end of each problem period. Following the third problem period, a post-experimental questionnaire was administered. This was designed to assess the effectiveness of the experimental manipulations.

Task and ability manipulation. The problems used in the experiment were taken from Raven's Standard Progressive Matrices. This is an I. Q. test, but, as indicated earlier, the subjects were told it was not so as to eliminate insofar as possible any suspicion which their conceptions of their I. Q.'s might produce. The solution to each problem in the Progressive Matrices requires the completion of a series of symbol configurations. The series to be completed is preceded by two complete series of similar configurations which define a principle of variation.

As indicated earlier, high and low ability conceptions were created by giving subjects problems that differed in objective difficulty. On the basis of a pretest with twenty-five students from the same college as the subjects, problems were selected from the Progressive Matrices test which fell at three distinct levels of difficulty. These ranged from level one, the easiest, through level three, the hardest. In order for the ability manipulation to be

credible, the first two levels were selected so as to be easy to solve while the third level was selected so as to be extremely hard to solve. Since many of the problems in this test probably can be solved by the average college student given an indefinite period of time, it was necessary to restrict the time limit. The levels of difficulty described hold for a time limit of fifteen seconds per problem.[4]

From Table 1 it can be seen that the high ability conception was induced

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Insert Table 1 about here

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during the ability test by giving a subject problems from levels one and two, and labeling these easy and hard respectively. It was believed that a subject in this treatment would be confident that he could solve all of the problems correctly. The low ability conception was induced during the ability test by giving a subject problems from levels two and three, and labeling these easy and hard respectively. It was believed that a subject in this treatment would be confident that he could solve only the easy problems correctly. The problems used in the tasks during the three problem periods varied in objective difficulty in the same ways as did the problems used in the ability manipulation. For example, as indicated in Table 1, if in a problem period a subject had a task labeled as consisting of two hard problems, he received two problems from level two if he was in the high ability treatment, but two problems from level three if he was in the low ability treatment.

The problems were ostensibly scored at the end of the ability test and at the end of each of the three problem periods. Subjects in the high ability treatment were always told they got both hard and easy problems correct, while subjects in the low ability treatment were always told they got only

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Insert Table 1 about here

Table 1

Labeled and Objective Levels of Difficulty

of the Problems Used in the Experiment

Labels given to high ability subjects	Objective levels of difficulty	Labels given to low ability subjects
	3	H (hard)
H (hard)	2	E (easy)
E (easy)	1	

easy problems correct.

Consistency conditions. As indicated earlier, conditions of consistency and inconsistency were created by varying task difficulty within each of the ability treatments. This was accomplished during the drawing of the cards prior to the ability test. Since the ability treatment a subject received depended on the booth designated on the card he drew, tasks were assigned to cards in such a way as to create the desired consistency conditions. In the inconsistent conditions, the subject who drew the booth receiving the high ability treatment received a task consisting of two easy problems, and a subject who drew the booth receiving the low ability treatment received a task consisting of two hard problems. In the consistent conditions, the subject who drew the booth receiving the high ability treatment received a task consisting of two hard problems, and the subject who drew the booth receiving the low ability treatment received a task consisting of two easy problems.

The subjects worked on the tasks they drew for the first two problem periods. The second problem period was included because it was believed two periods would make it more likely the subjects would become aware of the consistency or inconsistency created in the experiment. In the third problem period, the subjects were given the opportunity to express a preference for the kind of task they would like.

Reward structure. As indicated earlier, the point system used in the experiment was designed to distinguish between the possession of a task and the solution of the problems of which it consisted. An attempt was made to give relatively equal weight to both of these aspects of the reward structure.

Table 2 depicts the reward structure. More points were given for the

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Insert Table 2 about here

Table 2

Point System Used in the Experiment

Tasks	Points			Total points	
	For tasks	For solutions high ability subjects were told were correct	For solutions low ability subjects were told were correct	For high ability subjects	For low ability subjects
HH	30	30	0	60	30
EH	20	20	5	40	25
EE	10	10	10	20	20

possession and solution of hard problems than for easy problems. Fifteen points were given for each hard problem in a task, and five points were given for each easy problem. Similarly, fifteen points were given for each hard problem solved correctly, and five points were given for each easy problem solved correctly. In examining this system, it should be remembered that the high ability subjects were always told that they solved both hard and easy problems correctly, while the low ability subjects were always told that they solved only easy problems correctly.

The method of distributing points was as follows. Points given for the possession of a task were given before the subjects began working on the tasks. These points were given independently of performance and were not lost when a subject was told he solved a problem incorrectly. Points given for correct solutions were given at the end of each problem period after the subjects' answers to the problems had ostensibly been corrected.

Aspiration manipulation. As indicated earlier, aspiration was operationally defined in the experiment as a desire for a given number of total points. This total was the number of points the subject was told other subjects with similar ability and similar tasks had acquired. It was believed the subject would want to be at least as good as these others.

As previously mentioned, the aspiration manipulation was introduced in the form of an accumulation sheet. This was given to the subjects after their solutions in the second problem period were evaluated, but before they were given the opportunity to express preferences for tasks in the third problem period. This sheet showed the number of points the subject had accumulated in the first two problem periods. Since whether or not the subject was told he solved some problems incorrectly depended on the ability treatment and the

tasks he received, this number was the same for all subjects in the same consistency condition. Thus, for example, a high ability subject with an HH task in the first two problem periods always received a sheet showing that he had accumulated 120 points, irrespective of how he actually performed. In addition to the number of accumulated points, the accumulation sheet also showed the average number of points that other subjects with the subject's ability and with his kind of tasks in the first two problem periods had ostensibly accumulated for all three problem periods.

As indicated in Table 3, the subjects always needed additional points in

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Insert Table 3 about here

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the third problem period in order to reach the average for other subjects like themselves. The number of points needed differed, and this difference constituted the aspiration manipulation. In the low aspiration treatment, the average could easily be exceeded by both high and low ability subjects by choosing an EE task and solving one problem correctly. Thus, insofar as aspiration was concerned, there was no reason for any subject in the low aspiration treatment to prefer a task harder than an EE task. High ability subjects, of course, would be expected to prefer an HH task for reasons of consistency. In the high aspiration treatment, the average could be exceeded by low ability subjects only if they chose an HH task. In this treatment, the average could be exceeded by high ability subjects only if they chose an HH task and solved both problems correctly. Thus, insofar as aspiration was concerned, there was some reason for all subjects in the high aspiration treatment to prefer an HH task.

The accumulation sheets were given to the subjects privately so that one

Table 3

Number of Points Subjects Were Told They Needed in the Third Problem Period to Receive the Average Number of Points Other Subjects with Their Ability and Their Type of Tasks in the First Two Problem Periods Had Received in all Three Problem Periods

Ability treatment	Aspiration treatment	
	High	Low
High	57 [a]	13
Low	27 [a]	13

[a] This difference occurs because low ability subjects were always told they solved hard problems incorrectly.

subject would not know the number of points the other subject needed to exceed the average for other subjects similar to himself. This was done because each subject was told that certain preferences for the third problem period could influence the task the other subject received, and it was felt that each subject's preference would more easily be made in the absence of knowledge about the other subject's needs.

Experimental design. The design used in the experiment can now be described generally. The experiment was designed to permit observation of the effects of different consistency conditions and different degrees of aspiration on: (1) task choice, which included (a) preferences for task mobility and (b) preferences for specialization and despecialization of group task structure, and (2) satisfaction. These observations permitted tests of the six hypotheses presented in the previous section.

As indicated in Table 4, the various combinations of tasks, ability, and

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Insert Table 4 about here

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status aspiration produced eight separate experimental conditions. Because tasks and ability define consistency, each condition is defined by a combination of a particular consistency condition and a particular aspiration treatment. For example, a subject in the condition numbered four in Table 4, hard task - low ability - high aspiration, would receive the low ability treatment, would work on an HH task in the first two problem periods, and would see that he needed to obtain a relatively large number of points in the third problem period in order to reach the average number of points that other subjects with his type of tasks in the first two problem periods and his ability had reached.

Table 4

Experimental Conditions

Experimental conditions	Consistency conditions		Aspiration treatment	Relevant to hypothesis
	Task treatment[a]	Ability treatment		
1.	Easy	Low	Low	1
2.	Hard	Low	Low	1
3.	Easy	Low	High	3
4.	Hard	Low	High	2
5.	Hard	High	Low	4
6.	Easy	High	Low	4
7.	Hard	High	High	5
8.	Easy	High	High	5

[a]First two problem periods.

Measures. The basic manipulations in the experiment were the task assignments, the high and low ability treatments, the point system, and the high and low aspiration treatments. Measures of the effectiveness of these manipulations were contained in the post-experimental questionnaire. Two measures of the effectiveness of the ability manipulation were used. One was designed to determine who each subject felt had the higher ability, himself or the other person. The other was designed to determine how accurate each subject felt the scoring of the ability test was. It was believed that a feeling that the scoring was accurate indirectly reflected acceptance of the score received. A more direct measure was not used because it was thought subjects would be reluctant to admit to having been deceived. The measure concerning the effectiveness of task assignments was designed to determine who each subject thought had the harder task in the first two problem periods, himself or the other person. The measure concerning the effectiveness of the point system was designed to determine what each subject thought obtaining points depended on. Finally, the measure of the effectiveness of the aspiration manipulation was designed to determine how concerned each subject was with reaching what he was told was the average number of points that other subjects with his ability and type of tasks in the first two problem periods' had reached for all three problem periods.

The dependent variables in the experiment were task mobility and specialization or despecialization of group task structure. The subjects' preferences for tasks in the third problem period constituted the measures of these variables. Each subject was given the opportunity to express a preference either for a task for himself alone or for both a task for himself and a task for the other person. If a subject expressed a preference only for himself, this

was considered to be an indication of preference for task mobility. If he expressed a preference for both himself and the other person, this was considered to be an indication of preference for specialization or despecialization. The subjects were allowed to express their preferences privately in order to reduce any concern they might have about depriving the other person.

During the first two problem periods each subject had been made aware of the fact that he and the other subject had two problems each. He had also been made aware of the fact that there was in all two hard and two easy problems. Upon being given the opportunity to express a preference for types of problems, he was made aware of the fact that he and the other subject might have one hard and one easy problem each as well as one of them having two hard and the other two easy problems. These limitations on the number and types of problems available were, of course, a necessary part of the operationalization of specialization and despecialization of group task structure.

It was made clear to the subject that if he wished to express a preference for himself alone, he had to choose either two hard or two easy problems. It was also made clear that if he wished to express a preference for a hard and an easy problem for himself, he also had to choose a hard and an easy problem for the other subject. Within the limits of these constraints, it was made clear that the subject could express any preference he wished for himself alone or for himself and the other subject jointly. All of this was done by means of written instructions on the sheet on which the subjects indicated their preferences.

Prior to indicating their preferences, the subjects were told that their preferences would be given equal weight, and that if a conflict of choices occurred, the experimenter would have to be the final arbitrator in deciding

the kind of task each would receive. Actually, each subject received the task he chose for himself. This was possible because in the third problem period the task each subject received and the number of solutions which he was told were correct were not made public.

Satisfaction was measured at the end of each task period after the subject had turned in his solutions but before he was told whether or not they were correct. Each subject was asked how he felt about the task he had just worked on. His feelings were indicated on an eleven-point scale which ranged from "felt very satisfied" to "felt very dissatisfied." These responses were expressed privately.

Subjects. One hundred and twenty male students from English classes in a nearby junior college were used as subjects. Of this number, fifteen were assigned to each of the eight conditions shown in Table 4 above. A maximum age of twenty years was set so as to insure that most subjects would be relatively naive concerning social-psychological experimentation. The subjects were recruited on a volunteer basis and were paid an hourly rate for their participation.

RESULTS

Validation of manipulations. Before presenting the results for the dependent variables, we shall present the post-experimental questionnaire data relevant to the manipulations. Descriptions of the relevant measures are repeated for clarity of presentation.

To assess the effectiveness of the ability manipulation, subjects were asked if there were differences between their own and the other person's

ability, and if so, who had the higher ability. Eleven subjects answered that there were no differences in ability, and one subject did not answer at all. The remainder saw a difference which was consistent with the manipulation. The eleven who saw no difference were scattered randomly through the eight experimental conditions.[5]

As a further measure of the ability manipulation, subjects were asked to rate how accurate they felt the experimenter was in scoring their and the other person's ability test. A six-point scale ranging from zero to five, with five indicating complete accuracy and zero indicating complete inaccuracy, was used. In seven of the eight conditions, the median response was five for both self and the other subject. In the remaining condition (hard task - high ability - low aspiration) medians for both self and the other subject were four. Thus, subjects in all of the experimental conditions appear to have believed the experimenter was accurate in scoring both their and the other person's ability test.

To assess the effectiveness of the task assignments, the subjects were asked who had the harder task during the first two problem periods. All subjects responded in accordance with the manipulation with the exception of one who did not answer.

To determine whether the subjects had understood the point system, subjects were asked whether obtaining points depended only upon the type of task they had, only upon their performance of the task, or upon both the task they had and their performance. The last response, of course, was the correct one. There were fourteen incorrect responses. Of the subjects making incorrect responses, there was a tendency for subjects in the high ability treatment to make errors in the direction of only task and for subjects in the low

ability treatment to make errors in the direction of only performance. This patterning within the incorrect responses is considered to have important implications and is discussed at length in the next section.

To assess the effectiveness of the aspiration manipulation, the subjects were asked to indicate how concerned they were with reaching the average number of points which other sudents with their ability and their tasks in the first two problem periods received for all three problem periods. A six-point scale ranging from zero to five, with five indicating very much concern and zero indicating very little concern, was used. Although at the time of the construction of this measure it was believed that it would reflect differences in concern resulting from the aspiration manipulation, it is now suspected that it may not have been a valid measure of such differences.

The medians for the concern scores ranged from two to four. There are no apparent effects of either aspiration or consistency. There was a tendency for high ability subjects, irrespective of other conditions, to have higher medians than low ability subjects. This suggests that the measure may have tapped general involvement in the experiment as well as concern over doing as well as others with similar tasks and ability. High ability should instill confidence and reduce concern if one is already involved. However, it may also be positively associated with initial involvement, and this may account for the tendency for high ability subjects to have higher medians. Given these considerations and the fact that none of the subjects seemed confused during the experiment about the accumulation sheet, it is believed that the measure and not the manipulation was faulty.

Task choice. Table 5 shows the type of problems chosen by the subjects

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Insert Table 5 about here

Table 5

Task Choice by Experimental Condition

	Experimental conditions			Task choice				
	Consistency conditions		Aspiration	HH/EE	HH	HE/HE	EE	EE/HH
	Task	Ability		(Two hard problems for self, two easy problems for other)	(Two hard problems for self)	(One easy and one hard problem for self, one easy and one hard problem for other)	(Two easy problems for self)	(Two easy problems for self, two hard problems for other)
1.	Easy	Low	Low	4	5	5	[1][a]	0
2.	Hard	Low	Low	0	5	7	[0]	3
3.	Easy	Low	High	1	8	[3]	3	0
4.	Hard	Low	High	2	7	[5]	0	1
5.	Hard	High	Low	2	[11]	2	0	0
6.	Easy	High	Low	1	[9]	5	0	0
7.	Hard	High	High	1	[13]	1	0	0
8.	Easy	High	High	[4]	10	1	0	0

[a] [ ] indicates choice predicted.

Consistency conditions	Task choice			
	(Two hard problems for self, two easy problems for other)	(Two easy problems for self, two hard problems for other)	(Two easy problems for self, two hard problems for self)	(Two easy problems for self, two easy problems for other)
1. Easy Low	4	5	5	0
2. Hard Low	0	7	10	1
3. Easy High	3	8	10	0
4. Hard High	2	7	10	1
5. Easy High	2	5	5	0
6. Easy High	1	9	5	0
7. Hard High	1	10	9	0
8. Hard High	[4]	10	1	0

[ ] Indicates choice predicted.

in each of the experimental conditions. Hypothesis two states that status consistency of the hard task - low ability type results in a preference for a less specialized group task structure when status aspiration is high. Operationally, this means that subjects in row four of Table 5 should have made HH/EE choices. Hypothesis three states that status consistency of the easy task - low ability type results in a preference for a less specialized group task structure when status aspiration is high. Operationally, this means subjects in row three of the table should have made HE/HE choices. In neither row is the majority of cases of this type.

Hypothesis five states that status inconsistency of the easy task - high ability type results in a preference for a specialized group task structure when status aspiration is high. Operationally, this means that subjects in row eight of Table 5 should have made HH/EE choices. The majority of the choices are not of this type.

These findings raise the question of whether that part of the theory dealing with specialization and despecialization is in error, or whether certain factors were present in the experimental situation which were beyond the scope of the theory. It is believed the latter was the case. One thing which may have been present is a "democratic" norm which discouraged the student-subjects from expressing preferences concerning what tasks a fellow student should have. Unfortunately, there are no data bearing on this possibility. Another thing which may have been present is a weighting process in which the subjects tended to minimize inconsistency by varying the weight they assigned to the bases for which points were given in the experiment. There are some data bearing on this possibility. They are considered in the next section.

Hypothesis one states that status inconsistency of the hard task - low ability type results in downward task mobility when status aspiration is low. Operationally, this means that subjects in row two of Table 5 should have made EE choices. A majority of the choices are not of this type. Hypothesis four states that status inconsistency of the easy task - high ability type results in upward task mobility when status aspiration is low. Operationally, this means that subjects in row six in the table should have made HH choices. A majority of the choices are of this type.

Some additional support for the mobility hypotheses comes from an analysis of all choices in the experiment. The theory predicts that high ability subjects will choose so as to keep or to change to difficult problems and that low ability subjects will choose so as to keep or to change to easy problems. The theory also predicts that within an ability level subjects with high aspiration will choose more difficult problems than subjects with low aspiration. That there are tendencies in these directions is clear in Table 6, which is a collapsed version of Table 5.

Insert Table 6 about here

Since the concern is now only with the choice of task for self, the two end columns of Table 5, which had been included to measure specialization, have been collapsed with the adjoining ones. The resulting three columns of task choices can be interpreted as a three-point ordinal scale of preference for task difficulty. Within each ability-aspiration combination, the rows for type of task in the first two problem periods have been collapsed. Within each ability-aspiration combination, the task choice predictions for these rows are the same. This is because, as indicated earlier, the subjects should

Table 6

Task Choice for Self by Ability and Aspiration Treatment

Ability treatment	Aspiration treatment	Task choice		
		HH/EE or HH (Two hard problems)	HE/HE (One easy and one hard problem)	EE or EE/HH (Two easy problems)
Low	Low	14	12	4
Low	High	18	8	4
High	Low	23	7	0
High	High	28	2	0

have chosen tasks which would have either kept their task and ability in line (consistent conditions) or which would have brought their task and ability into line (inconsistent conditions).

The rows in Table 6 are ordered as predicted above. The X^2 for the table is significant at well beyond the .01 level ($X^2 = 19.36$, df = 6).

In spite of these comparative tendencies which are in line with the part of theory dealing with task mobility, it must be noted that on an absolute basis there were a large number of low ability subjects who kept or changed to hard problems. Even in the low aspiration condition, nearly half of the low ability subjects kept or changed to an HH task. This tended to maintain and create rather than resolve inconsistency. Why low ability subjects may have behaved in this manner will be considered in the next section.

Satisfaction. Table 7 shows the median satisfaction scores for subjects

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Insert Table 7 about here

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by ability and consistency condition at the end of the second problem period.[6] The subjects were separated by ability treatment because it was expected that high ability subjects would be generally somewhat more satisfied. As predicted, consistent subjects are more satisfied. For low ability subjects, the difference is significant at beyond the .0001 level ($U = 148$, $Z = 4.35$, one-tailed test). However, for high ability subjects, the difference does not reach significance ($U = 397.5$, $Z = .57$, $p < .30$, one-tailed test).[7]

Table 8 shows the median change in satisfaction scores from the second to the third problem period by movement toward or away from consistency. The

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Insert Table 8 about here

Table 7

Median Satisfaction Scores at the End of the Second Problem Period by Ability and Consistency Treatment

Ability treatment	Consistency condition	
	Consistent	Inconsistent
Low	+2 (N = 29)	-2 (N = 30)
High	+2 (N = 29)	+1 (N = 30)

Table 7

Courage-ucy [illegible]

[illegible] Smithsonian Scored at [illegible]

[illegible] Second Program [illegible] by Ability and

[illegible] Ability	Courage	
[illegible]	[illegible]	[illegible]
[illegible]	[illegible]	[illegible]
[illegible]	[illegible]	[illegible]

Table 8

Median Change in Satisfaction Scores from the Second to the Third Problem Period by Ability Treatment and Movement Toward or Away From Consistency

Ability treatment	Movement		
	Toward consistency	No movement	Away from consistency
Low	+2 (N = 16)	0 (N = 18)	-3 (N = 25)
High	+1 (N = 30)	+1 (N = 26)	+2 (N = 3)

table was constructed as follows. For low ability subjects, those who had been given two easy problems and then chose either a hard and an easy problem or two hard problems were defined as moving away from consistency. For high ability subjects, those who had been given two hard problems and then chose an easy and a hard problem were defined as moving away from consistency.[8] Similarly, low ability subjects who had been given two hard problems and then chose either an easy and a hard problem or two easy problems were defined as moving toward consistency, and high ability subjects who had been given two easy problems and then chose either a hard and an easy problem or two hard problems were defined as moving toward consistency. Any subject who chose the same kinds of problems as he had been given was defined as not moving.

For low ability subjects the satisfaction scores are in exactly the direction predicted by hypothesis six and are significant at beyond the .01 level ($H = 10.0$, $df = 2$). However, for high ability subjects movement toward or away from consistency appears not to be related to satisfaction scores. Some implications of the finding for the high ability subjects is considered in the next section.

INTERPRETATION

In this section we shall consider some theoretical implications of the findings. As indicated earlier, there are some data which suggest that a weighting process which served to minimize inconsistency between bases of status may have occurred. These data suggest that this process is one in which the individual attributes much more weight to those bases of status

which he can modify than he does to those which he cannot. If this process did occur, it apparently is a first reaction to inconsistency and apparently, as such, eliminates to a large extent the need to employ other modes of reducing inconsistency.[9]

Hypothesis one received only partial support and hypotheses two and three received no support because easy task - low ability subjects chose harder tasks than expected (rows one and three in Table 5 above) and because hard task - low ability subjects did not choose as easy tasks as expected (rows two and four in Table 5). One might argue that these two findings indicate simply that high status was more important to the subjects than status consistency if it were not for the fact that both instances involved both high and low aspiration treatments. This anomaly led to the inspection in greater detail of the cases in which subjects had misperceived how points could be obtained in the experiment. Perception of how points could be obtained should, of course, be directly related to the subject's weighting of different bases of status. It will be remembered that the subjects were asked what the number of points obtained in the experiment depended on: only the difficulty of the tasks, only the number of correct solutions, or both of these. In terms of responses to this question, it was possible to make two kinds of errors. One would be to say only the difficulty of the tasks; the other would be to say only the number of correct solutions.

Table 9 shows the number of subjects who made errors by ability treatment and type of error. The reversal in the table is significant at beyond

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Insert Table 9 about here

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the .003 level (Fischer's Exact Test).

Table 9

Number of Subjects Making Errors Concerning What the Number of Points Obtained in the Experiment Depended On by Ability Treatment and Type of Error

Type of error	Ability treatment	
	High	Low
Points depended only on difficulty of tasks	1	8
Points depended only on number of problems solved correctly	5	0

There are two striking things about Table 9. First, low ability subjects make errors entirely in the direction of task difficulty. It will be remembered that the subjects were permitted to choose a set of problems in the third problem period. Ability, however, was fixed with its induction early in the experiment. Thus, low ability subjects make errors in the direction of the base of status which they could change, namely, task difficulty.

Second, high ability subjects, except in one instance, make errors in the direction of correct solutions. Since these subjects could both choose problems and solve problems correctly, it might be argued that they might make errors in the direction of either task difficulty or correct solutions. However, they were permitted to choose a set of problems in only one of the three problem periods whereas, because of the high ability induction, they were able to solve problems in all three problem periods. Thus, it can be argued that they viewed correct solutions as the base of status they could modify more, and it is in the direction of this base that they tend to make errors.

The fact that the fourteen subjects in Table 9 failed entirely to perceive that points were given for both task difficulty and correct solutions suggests that many of the subjects who did see this weighted one of these bases more heavily than the other. On the basis of the patterning of errors, it seems likely that low ability subjects weighted task difficulty more heavily than correct solutions and that high ability subjects did the reverse. The former kind of weighting would account for the fact that easy task - low ability subjects tended to choose harder tasks than expected in both the low and the high status aspiration treatments. It would also account for the fact that hard task - low ability subjects did not choose as easy tasks as

expected in both the low and the high aspiration treatments.

The latter kind of weighting would account for the fact that, although easy task - high ability subjects tended to choose toward the HH/EE end of the task scale in both the high and the low status aspiration treatments, they do not do so as fully as they might (rows six and eight in Table 5 above). It was these outcomes, of course, that resulted in only partial support for hypothesis four, and no support for hypothesis five.

There are data from another study which lend additional support to the weighting hypotheses presented above. These data are from a dissertation in progress (Nichols). The researcher doing this study performed an experiment in which he told groups of subjects that they were either all high and equal or all low and equal in ability and then placed each group in either a centralized or a decentralized communication network where they solved a number of problems. The researcher was interested in organizational consequences of the kinds of inconsistency this produced. However, what is of importance for the present paper is a finding that, in spite of the fact that the researcher told the subjects that times of solutions of problems and correctness of solutions had equal weight in determining their final score, a good many subjects tended to misperceive the weight the researcher gave to these factors. Out of ninety-six high ability subjects, twenty made errors. Seventeen of these were in the direction of thinking more weight had been given to correctness of solutions. Out of an identical number of low ability subjects, twenty-eight made errors. Seventeen of these were in the direction of thinking more weight had been given to time. Data for these errors are presented in the top part of Table 10.

Insert Table 10 about here

The errors of both the low and the high ability subjects reveal clear directionalities. High ability subjects made errors in the direction of correctness of solutions which, because of the ability induction, they could control almost completely. They could not control time as much as correctness because of the restrictions the networks imposed on communication. Low ability subjects made errors in the direction of time of solutions. Although they could control time of solutions only partially, this probably seemed more under their control than correctness of solutions.

Additional data relevant to the weighting process is presented in the bottom part of Table 10. These data show the number of subjects making errors when asked what weight his group actually gave to time and correctness of solutions (irrespective of what the experimenter had said). Again, high ability subjects tend to make errors in the direction of correctness of solutions, and low ability subjects tend to make errors in the direction of time of solutions.

The X^2 for errors concerning the weight the experimenter gave to time and correctness is 8.24 ($p < .01$, corrected for continuity). The X^2 for errors concerning the weight subjects gave to time and correctness is 47.8 ($p < .001$, corrected for continuity).

The last finding in the present experiment to be considered is that, even when satisfaction scores were analyzed in terms of the degree to which subjects actually decreased or increased consistency, there was no clear-cut effect of consistency on satisfaction for high ability subjects.[10] It will be remembered that, if the hypothesis concerning how these subjects weighted

Insert Table 10 about here

Table 10

Number of Subjects in Nichols' Experiment Making Errors by Ability Treatment and Type of Error

Type of error	Ability treatment	
	High	Low
Experimenter seen as giving greater weight to:		
Time of solution	3	17
Correctness of solution	17	11
Subject's group seen as giving greater weight to:		
Time of solution	14	57
Correctness of solution	67	21

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