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Bias in Intergroup Perceptions: Balancing Group Identity With Social Reality

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This study illuminates how social reality affects in-group favoritism in group perceptions. Members of two student associations (which were expected to have differential status) as well as nonmembers participated in this study (total N = 103). Participants rated the perceived status of the two groups and indicated to what extent they identified with each group. They also rated the two groups on typical and nontypical traits and evaluated these traits. In support of predictions, members of the group with lower perceived status displayed more in-group-favoring biases than members of the group with higher perceived status. However, biased ratings did not violate consensual definitions of social reality as indicated by nonmembers. The observed biases correlated substantially with participants' group identifications.

The main premise of social identity theory (e.g., Tajfel, 1978; Tajfel & Turner, 1979) as well as the more recently developed self-categorization theory (Turner, 1985; Turner, Hogg, Oakes, Reicher, & Wetherell, 1987) is that in many social situations people's self-concepts are derived from the social groups to which they belong. By implication, then, the features characteristically associated with these groups affect this part of people's self-concept—their social identity. Proceeding from the assumption that people generally strive for a positively evaluated social identity, the theory maintains that group members are motivated to ascribe positively valued characteristics to the in-group, and/or to evaluate typical in-group characteristics favorably. Indeed, numerous laboratory and field studies have shown that group members tend to ascribe (more) positive characteristics to the in-group and/or evaluate in-group features or in-group products more positively than those of the out-group (for overviews, see Brewer, 1979; Hinkle & Schopler, 1979; Messick & Mackie, 1989).

Establishing positive distinctiveness of the in-group vis-à-vis relevant out-groups is thus regarded as a primary strategy for securing positive social identity. Consequently, the tendency for (positive) intergroup differentiation should be stronger the more people identify with their social group. In previous investigations, it has largely been assumed that if group members display in-group biases in outcome allocations or group evaluations, this must stem from their identification as group members. However, a recent overview of studies that tried to establish a direct relation between strength of in-group identification and the occurrence of in-group biases (Hinkle & Brown, 1990) revealed that, in addition to positive correlations, negative and zero correlations were also found. Thus it turns out that the relation between in-group identification and intergroup differentiation is not as straightforward as it may seem.

In the literature, several explanations have been advanced that may account for the complex nature of this relation (see Hinkle & Brown, 1990). First, it may be that the "simple" social identity prediction (more positive intergroup differentiation the more strongly people identify with their group) applies mainly when groups (initially) have more or less equal positions. When there is a clearly established status difference between groups, the relation between in-group identification and in-group favoritism seems to be less straightforward. In

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some cases, members of lower-status or threatened groups display more in-group bias (Grant, 1993) or out-group derogation (Branscombe & Wann, 1994) the stronger their identity as group members, in line with predictions based on social identity theory. In other situations—for instance, when the differences between the groups seem relatively stable or legitimate (Ellemers, 1993; Ellemers, Wilke, & Van Knippenberg, 1993)—group members may feel compelled to acknowledge this status quo when evaluating the groups or making outcome allocations. For instance, Sachdev and Bourhis (1985, 1987, 1991) observed strong intergroup discrimination only in members of high-status groups, whereas the responses of low-status-group members consistently reflected their group's relative inferiority. As a result, especially in the case of fixed group affiliations (Ellemers, Van Knippenberg, de Vries, & Wilke, 1988; Mlicki & Ellemers, 1996), members of a low-status group may simultaneously display strong in-group identification and concede out-group superiority.

Thus it seems that, on one hand, people who belong to a group with low status should be most inclined to differentiate their group in a positive sense from other groups. On the other hand, the fact that their group has lower status prevents them from claiming overall superiority for it. A similar argument—that the desire to view oneself in a positive way is restricted by social reality—has been put forward in the literature on individual-level comparisons (see Goethals, Messick, & Allison, 1991). Indeed, the ongoing concern with self-enhancement and self-consistency as motives that may guide people's responses to self-relevant social information (e.g., Shrauger, 1975; Swann, Griffin, Predmore, & Gaines, 1987) centers on the dilemma of individuals with negative self-concepts, who like to receive positive information about themselves but consider negative information more credible. An investigation by Brown, Collins, and Schmidt (1988) seems to indicate that individuals with low self-esteem may resolve this dilemma by using less direct self-enhancing strategies than high-self-esteem individuals.

At the group level, this would imply that members of low-status groups may credibly deal with their identity threat by engaging in more subtle identity management strategies than overall claims of in-group superiority (see also Luhtanen & Crocker, 1991). In other words, they are likely to take consensually defined differences between the groups into account while displaying in-group-favoring biases with respect to more ambiguous aspects of the intergroup comparison. At this point, it is important to note that, in line with social identity theory and self-categorization theory, group status and intergroup differences are contextually defined. In this sense, relative status does not necessarily refer to differ-

ences in the objective control of outcomes or to differential social power. Indeed, as has been demonstrated empirically (see Doosje & Ellemers, 1997; Ellemers & Van Knippenberg, 1997), it seems that the same group can be regarded differently in different contexts—that is, depending on the specific comparison groups and comparative dimensions that are relevant in the particular situation. The context dependence of relative status, however, does not imply that there are no restrictions on the way people may perceive their group. Furthermore, some intergroup comparisons may be “chronically salient.” What is important for our present argument, then, is that a comparison of two groups elicits people's awareness of the status position of the in-group relative to that particular comparison group. Specifically, consensually agreed-on descriptive and evaluative differences between these two groups define the social reality that may both threaten group members' social identity and restrict the strategies they may credibly use to deal with this identity threat.¹

Consequently, if in a certain comparative context there is a consensually agreed-on—that is, relatively stable—status difference between groups, members of the lower-status group will have most difficulty in deriving positive distinctiveness from their typical in-group traits. Because they are nevertheless motivated to hold their in-group in positive regard, members of a group that is perceived as having lower status in that particular comparison context should be most inclined to adopt subtle strategies to depict their group somewhat more favorably (Hypothesis 1).

Such subtle patterns of in-group differentiation are likely to emerge when groups are not just compared in terms of one single criterion. Indeed, the multidimensional nature of many intergroup comparisons may further qualify the relation between in-group identification and intergroup differentiation. As Mummendey and her colleagues (Mummendey & Schreiber, 1983, 1984; Mummendey & Simon, 1989) demonstrated, biased evaluations favoring the in-group are observed mainly when only one dimension is available to express differences between groups. When members of different groups are given the opportunity to give more refined judgments, however, they tend to concede that each group may have its own characteristic abilities or features (Van Knippenberg & Van Oers, 1984; Van Knippenberg & Wilke, 1979). This mutual acknowledgment of each group's differential superiority, which has been termed *social cooperation* (Van Knippenberg & Ellemers, 1990), is another reason that the relation between in-group identification and intergroup differentiation is less straightforward than the theory seems to suggest: Strong in-group identification should be related to positive differentiation on certain (in-group defining) dimen-

sions—but negative differentiation on other dimensions, which are characteristic of the out-group, may occur at the same time. A similar pattern, of perceived in-group homogeneity on typical in-group attributes and perceived out-group homogeneity on typical out-group attributes, was recently described by Simon (1992).

The occurrence of social cooperation does not necessarily imply that group members abandon their desire for a positively distinct social identity. However, when multidimensional comparisons are made, this desire is likely to be expressed in more subtle ways. For instance, group members may accentuate differences on in-group-defining dimensions while they attenuate differences on dimensions that are more characteristic of the out-group (see Van Knippenberg, 1984). Alternatively, while indicating differential group superiority on different dimensions, group members may still maintain that those dimensions that characterize the in-group are the more important ones (see Van Knippenberg, 1978). Or, to the extent that the importance of comparison dimensions is unambiguous, in-group favoritism may be selectively displayed on highly valued dimensions, whereas group members acknowledge out-group superiority only on dimensions they consider to be second-rate (see Mummendey & Schreiber, 1983).

Thus, instead of displaying blatant in-group favoritism (which does occur in laboratory studies), patterns of differentiation in natural groups seem to be aimed at achieving positive group distinctiveness within the context of consensual definitions of social reality. A recent investigation into mutual perceptions of different groups of students (Spears & Manstead, 1989) seemed to indicate that these perceivers took social reality into account while giving biased group ratings. From their results, Spears and Manstead concluded that in-group favoring and out-group favoring perceptions on different comparison dimensions were used to express group-serving differentiation strategies within the constraints of established group stereotypes. However, their argument remains somewhat circular because, in their investigation, Spears and Manstead inferred post hoc that dimensions were stereotypical when they seemed to be perceived as such by members of different groups.

To summarize the argument thus far: It appears that, at least in the case of natural groups, group members may give biased judgments when rating “ambiguous” aspects of the intergroup comparison but take “real” differences between the groups into account while doing this. In other words, only when groups are rated in terms of their generalized status or when (positively evaluated) traits are not consensually associated with a specific group may group members display biased judgments and try to claim superiority for the in-group. When specific traits are involved and there exists consensus

about the stereotypicality of these traits, however, group members may favor the in-group by biasing their trait evaluations. Indeed, this notion of reality-constrained in-group favoritism seems to be supported by some of the recent investigations discussed above. In their discussion of stereotype (in)accuracy, Judd and Park (1993) make a similar distinction between descriptive and evaluative biases in group perceptions. They argue that personal beliefs may not always correspond to the true attributes of the group and that the resulting “caricatures of social reality” come about not only when stereotypic attributes are seen as more prevalent than they in fact are (*stereotypic inaccuracy*) but also when there is a systematic tendency to overestimate or underestimate the stereotypicality of group attributes depending on whether they are seen as positive or negative traits (*valence inaccuracy*).

An often-made argument is that such effects of motivational considerations should not be studied in a laboratory context, because membership in artificially created groups may affect only an inconsequential and transitory part of participants' social identities. More importantly, in the case of artificial groups, there is no clear social reality or consensual group stereotype to delimit the ways group members may express biased judgments. A problem with the (field) studies discussed above, however (e.g., Mummendey & Schreiber, 1984; Spears & Manstead, 1989), is that the experimenters could not control for the stereotypicality of the dimensions that were used to give group ratings. Instead, they inferred from their results which dimensions or traits were apparently considered typical for a specific group (“consensual” dimensions) and on which dimensions there was a struggle for in-group superiority (“competitive” dimensions). In other words, these researchers concluded retrospectively that group members' judgments must have reflected social reality to the extent that there was consensus about the relatively typicality of some dimensions, and they inferred biased perceptions when claims of in-group superiority on other dimensions were disputed. Consequently, because the stereotypicality of comparison dimensions was not established independently from the ratings in which group members supposedly expressed their response to these stereotypical differences, the results of the studies conducted so far remain somewhat inconclusive.

To be able to investigate effects of reality constraints, our investigation also had to take place in a natural group context. However, the present research aims at improving on previous work by assessing independently how the social reality in which the groups find themselves is defined. In this way, we can separate consensually perceived reality constraints more reliably from biased judgments. Therefore, we first conducted a pilot study to determine which traits would be characteristic

for each group and which traits could be considered nontypical. Moreover, in the main study, we included nonmembers as participants, to assess how the social reality is defined by people whose identity is not linked to membership in one of the groups under consideration. By directly comparing nonmembers' ratings with the perceptions held by members of the two groups, it is possible to disentangle "objective" perceptions of social reality (given by people who have no vested interest in one group or the other) from specific biases that stem from the desire to elicit a positive image of the group one identifies with.

Accordingly, we can specifically predict that, with respect to *typical group traits*, the consensual agreement that these traits are more characteristic for one group than the other will restrict the extent to which group members may credibly claim in-group superiority. Therefore, we predict that group members will be more or less realistic when rating the relative typicality of these traits for each group. To the extent that the valence of these traits is more ambiguous, however, group members are expected to display in-group-favoring biases in their trait evaluations (Hypothesis 2a). When nontypical but favorable traits are involved, group members will try to establish in-group superiority with respect to these traits; to the extent that they do this, they will correctly indicate the favorable value connotation of these traits, thus contributing to their group's positive identity. Therefore, our prediction for nontypical traits is that in-group-favoring biases will be expressed mainly in the perceived extent to which these traits are characteristic of the in-group (Hypothesis 2b).

Another, related point at which previous investigations have remained equivocal is in ascribing the observed patterns of intergroup differentiation unambiguously to social identity concerns. In many of the previous studies it was simply assumed that participants would feel involved with the group to which they belonged and would accordingly give biased ratings of the intergroup situation in favor of the in-group. Those studies that did explicitly relate strength of identification to the expression of in-group favoritism yielded inconsistent results, as we have described previously (see Hinkle & Brown, 1990). To establish the desire for positive identity as a motive underlying group members' perceptions, however, it is necessary to assure that biased perceptions occur only to the extent that people feel their social identity is at stake (see Maass & Schaller, 1991). We therefore included in-group identification of members as well as nonmembers as a separate measure, to explicitly test the prediction that people are more likely to regard a group favorably the more strongly they identify with that group (Hypothesis 3).

HYPOTHESES

1. When group members are confronted with a comparison group that has higher perceived status than their own group, they are more likely to engage in various in-group-favoring biases than when the relevant comparison group is perceived to have lower status than the in-group.
2. The extent to which group members feel free to express biased perceptions when rating the groups on specific traits is restricted by consensual definitions of the social reality that is salient. Therefore, we predict that:
 - a. When consensus exists about the extent to which traits are considered typical for one group or another, biased judgments will emerge when group members evaluate these traits.
 - b. When traits are evaluated positively but are nontypical for both groups, group members will display biased judgments when rating the typicality of these traits.
3. The more strongly people identify with a group, the more likely they are to hold favorably biased perceptions of that group.

METHOD

Overview

These hypotheses were tested in a natural group setting, involving two student associations: "Group A" and "Group B." The two groups have similar goals and activities, and both are open to all students. However, Group A is considered a "progressive" association; Group B is more "traditional." This is reflected in the fact that the traditional association (Group B) more strongly maintains its old customs and traditions and makes firmer status differentiations among its members than the progressive association (Group A). Moreover, Group B has relatively many members who major in "traditional" fields like law, medicine, or economics, and members of this association usually dress somewhat more conservatively than members of Group A. These associations (and their members) are well known in the academic community, and they are mainly involved in organizing various social activities for their members. Although many students do not join either association, access to membership is free and unrestricted for all students.

The traditional association (Group B) had received considerable negative publicity during the period preceding this study. As a result of some unfortunate incidents the association and its members were depicted in a negative way in the media. A newspaper article in which members of Group B accentuated positive aspects of their association resulted in a stream of letters to the editor pointing out undesirable features and traditions of the association. As a result, we expected that Group A would be considered more positively than Group B in

this specific comparison context, that members and nonmembers would be aware of this situation, and that members of Group B would be more inclined than members of Group A to engage in various identity-enhancing biases.

First, a pilot study was conducted to find traits that would generally be considered typical for Group A, typical for Group B, or nontypical for either group. These traits were used in the main study, whose participants consisted of members of the two groups as well as nonmembers—students who knew about Group A and Group B but were themselves not members of these associations or any other student association. (In this natural group setting, it is quite common not to belong to either group, and being a nonmember does not constitute a statement of active withdrawal from the associations involved.) Nonmembers were included in the study to assess how the social reality is defined by participants who have no vested interest in either group and to check our assumption that Group B would generally be regarded less favorably than Group A. In this way, we could investigate in what ways members of Group A and members of Group B bias their judgments of the two groups relative to nonmembers.

Pilot Study

A pilot study was conducted to find traits that would be typical for Group A, typical for Group B, or nontypical. A list of 44 traits was assembled on the basis of interviews with members of Group A and Group B and newspaper and magazine articles about the two groups. In the pilot study, 40 (male and female) students participated. They did not belong to Group A or Group B themselves, but all stated that they knew about both groups. They were asked to indicate on a 9-point scale to what extent they considered each of the 44 traits typical for each group (1 = *not at all*; 9 = *very much*). All participants rated both groups; the order in which the groups were rated was counterbalanced.

From these 44 traits, 18 were selected for the main study: 6 traits were considered typical for Group A (concerned with the environment, emancipated, socially aware, tolerant, willing to demonstrate, and concerned), 6 were considered typical for Group B (conservative, sensitive to authority, prosperity oriented, law abiding, career minded, and status conscious), and 6 were nontypical traits (active, internationally oriented, graduating fast, successful, companionable, and welfare oriented). Traits were considered typical when they were simultaneously considered quite characteristic for one group but not for the other—that is, when the mean scores for the two target groups lay on different sides of the scale midpoint and differed significantly from each other. Traits for which the mean scores of the two target groups did not differ significantly from the scale mid-

point nor from each other were selected as nontypical traits.

Participants

In the main study, 103 students (58 men and 45 women) from the Municipal University of Amsterdam and the Free University in Amsterdam voluntarily participated. Their mean age was 22 years. Members of the two associations (34 were members of Group A, 39 of Group B) were approached at about dinnertime in the buildings of their respective associations (students of both universities are members of these associations) and were asked to fill out a questionnaire. Nonmembers ($N = 23$) were approached in the dining halls of the two universities. Before nonmembers were asked to fill out a questionnaire, we checked whether they knew about the two associations and whether they were members of a student association themselves. Only students who knew about Group A and Group B but were not members of either group or of any other student association were selected as nonmembers for the study.

The executive committees of the two student associations had given permission to approach members in the building of their association, under the conditions that the identity of the two associations would not be revealed, that the results be used only for scientific purposes, and that they would see the results before they became public. After the study was completed, both executive committees received a short report about the design and purpose of the study and a summary of the main findings.

Procedure and Dependent Variables

Trait typicality. The questionnaire was presented as part of an investigation into the image of different student associations. It was explained at the outset that participants would rate two different associations, Group A and Group B. They were asked not to rate one specific person but to give their impression of members of these associations in general. The first part of the questionnaire asked participants to rate to what extent they found each of 18 traits typical for one group. Then they rated the other group on the same traits, using a 9-point scale to indicate trait typicality (1 = *not at all typical*; 9 = *very typical*). The order in which the two groups were rated was counterbalanced.

The 18 traits selected from the pilot study were intended to comprise 6 typical-A traits, 6 typical-B traits, and 6 nontypical traits. We conducted a preliminary principal components analysis to check whether the 18 traits could indeed be clustered into three groups. Both the ratings of Group A and the ratings of Group B on these traits revealed two-factorial solutions, which supported our initial trait selection. In both cases, typical-A

traits had positive loadings and typical-B traits had negative loadings on the same factor, whereas the nontypical traits loaded on the other factor. Accordingly, unweighted mean scores were computed for traits typical of Group A (Target Group A, $\alpha = .74$; Target Group B, $\alpha = .83$), traits typical of Group B (Target Group A, $\alpha = .85$; Target Group B, $\alpha = .68$), and nontypical traits (Target Group A, $\alpha = .65$; Target Group B, $\alpha = .64$).

Group identification and perceived status. Subsequently, participants answered three questions about their identification with each group. These questions, counterbalanced for group order, were "To what extent do you feel involved with Group A/B?," "How similar are you to the average member of Group A/B?," and "To what extent do you identify with Group A/B?" These were answered on 9-point scales (1 = *not at all*; 9 = *very much*). From these three questions, which were asked for both groups, we calculated unweighted mean scores for identification with each group (Group A, $\alpha = .89$; Group B, $\alpha = .88$).

Three further questions measured the general impression of members of the two groups, which is assumed to indicate the perceived status of each group in this particular comparison context: "What kind of impression do you get about a person, when you find out they are a member of Group A/B?" (1 = *very negative*, 9 = *very positive*), "How would you describe the amount of prestige Group A/B has?" (1 = *very little*, 9 = *a lot*), and "What kind of image do you have of members of Group A/B in general?" (1 = *very negative*, 9 = *very positive*). The perceived status questions were also counterbalanced for group order. From these ratings, we calculated composite scores for further analysis (Group A, $\alpha = .76$; Group B, $\alpha = .73$).

Trait evaluations. In the last part of the questionnaire, the 18 traits were listed again. This time, participants were asked to indicate to what extent they considered each trait important (1 = *not at all*; 9 = *very much*) and how they rated the valence of each trait (1 = *very negatively*; 9 = *very positively*). The valence and importance ratings of the 18 traits were combined into composite evaluative ratings for the three sets of traits. As we had done for the typicality ratings, we calculated unweighted mean evaluations for typical-A traits ($\alpha = .92$), typical-B traits ($\alpha = .90$), and nontypical traits ($\alpha = .73$). Finally, participants were asked to indicate their age, gender, and major subject.

RESULTS

Perceived Status and Group Identification

The composite scores for perceived status and group identification were subjected to a 3×2 multivariate analysis of variance (MANOVA) with Subject Affiliation

(members of Group A, members of Group B, nonmembers) as a between-subjects factor and Target Group (Group A, Group B) as a within-subjects factor. This analysis revealed a significant main effect for subject affiliation, $F(4, 174) = 17.17, p < .001$, with significant univariate effects for group identification, $F(2, 88) = 40.85, p < .001$, and perceived status, $F(2, 88) = 16.48, p < .001$. The relevant means and analysis of specific contrasts indicate that, as expected, level of group identification was significantly lower among nonmembers ($M = 2.30$) than among members of Group A ($M = 4.49$), $F(1, 88) = 74.63, p < .001$ or members of Group B ($M = 4.13$), $F(1, 88) = 53.07, p < .001$. Identification levels among members of the two groups did not differ significantly from each other, $F(1, 88) = 2.60, n.s.$ A similar pattern emerged for the perceived status of the two groups. Overall, the status ratings provided by nonmembers were lower ($M = 4.36$) than the ratings by members of Group A ($M = 5.33$), $F(1, 88) = 28.78, p < .001$, or members of Group B ($M = 5.22$), $F(1, 88) = 23.44, p < .001$; the latter two means did not differ significantly from each other, $F(1, 88) < 1, n.s.$

These main effects of subject affiliation were qualified by a significant multivariate interaction of subject affiliation with target group, $F(4, 174) = 52.07, p < .001$, with significant univariate effects for group identification, $F(2, 88) = 45.26, p < .001$, and perceived group status, $F(2, 88) = 140.16, p < .001$. The relevant means (see Table 1) and analysis of simple main effects indicate that, as expected, members of Group A identified more strongly with Group A ($M = 6.57$) than with Group B ($M = 2.42$), $F(1, 88) = 132.99, p < .001$, whereas members of Group B identified more strongly with Group B ($M = 6.21$) than with Group A ($M = 2.05$), $F(1, 88) = 142.44, p < .001$. Furthermore, it turned out that nonmembers identified somewhat less with Group B ($M = 1.80$) than with Group A ($M = 2.80$), $F(1, 88) = 5.40, p < .025$, consistent with our assumption that Group B has lower status than Group A.

A similar pattern can be observed in the interaction for perceived status. First the ratings provided by nonmembers confirm our assumption that Group A is held in higher regard ($M = 5.01$) than Group B ($M = 3.71$), $F(1, 88) = 12.43, p < .001$. The relevant means in Table 1 further indicate that, when making these generalized status ratings, members of both groups accorded more status to their own group than to the other group (all simple main effects are significant at $p < .002$). However, when we look at how strongly participants differentiated between the two groups, it seems that members of Group B perceived a greater difference in generalized status than members of Group A. Further analysis of the (absolute) difference in perceived status of the two groups confirmed that members of Group B showed a more

TABLE 1: Effects of Subject Affiliation and Target Group on Group Identification and Perceived Group Status

	Subject Affiliation		
	Member, Group A	Member, Group B	Nonmember
Group identification			
Target Group A	6.57 _a	2.05 _b	2.80 _c
Target Group B	2.42 _b	6.21 _a	1.80 _b
Total	4.49 _c	4.13 _c	2.30 _b
Perceived group status			
Target Group A	5.80 _a	4.06 _b	5.01 _c
Target Group B	4.68 _b	6.39 _a	3.71 _d
Total	5.33 _a	5.22 _a	4.36 _b

NOTE: Higher numbers indicate stronger identification or higher perceived status on 1-9 scales. Row or column means with different subscripts differ at $p < .05$.

pronounced in-group-favoring bias than members of Group A, $F(1, 88) = 4.66, p < .035$. This is consistent with our first hypothesis—that members of the lower-status group would be most motivated to display in-group-favoring biases.

Subsequently we conducted correlational analyses to investigate whether participants' identification with each group was related to the perceived status of that group. As predicted, identification with Group A was highly correlated with perceived status of Group A ($r = .71, p < .001$), and identification with Group B showed a strong correlation with perceived status of Group B ($r = .77, p < .001$).² This is consistent with our expectation that the more strongly participants identify with a certain group, the more likely they are to hold favorable perceptions of that group (Hypothesis 3). Moreover, it turns out that the more strongly people identified with one group, the less status they ascribed to the other group, as is evident from the negative correlations between identification with Group A and perceived status of Group B ($r = -.29, p < .01$) and between identification with Group B and perceived status of Group A ($r = -.48, p < .001$).

Trait Evaluations

The composite evaluative scores were subjected to a 3×3 MANOVA with Subject Affiliation (members of Group A, members of Group B, nonmembers) as a between-subjects factor and Trait Set (typical A, typical B, nontypical) as a within-subjects factor. This revealed a significant main effect of trait set, $F(2, 164) = 82.79, p < .001$, and a significant interaction of trait set with subject affiliation, $F(4, 164) = 4.99, p < .001$. The means relevant to the trait set main effect and relevant contrasts indicate that typical-B traits were generally considered more negative ($M = 4.64$) than typical-A traits ($M = 6.66$), $F(1, 82) = 88.36, p < .001$, or than nontypical traits ($M = 6.23$), $F(1, 82) = 122.50, p < .001$. Furthermore, typical-A traits

($M = 6.66$) were evaluated more positively than nontypical traits ($M = 6.23$), $F(1, 82) = 12.97, p < .001$. A comparison of these trait evaluations with the scale midpoint (5) indicates that typical-B traits were considered negative characteristics whereas typical-A traits and nontypical traits were rated positively (all deviations from the scale midpoint are significant at $p < .005$). This is again consistent with our general expectation that Group B (and, accordingly, its typical traits) would be regarded less favorably than Group A (and its typical traits).³ Moreover, the overall positive evaluation of the nontypical traits confirms that this third set of traits seemed sufficiently attractive to claim as characteristic for one's group. This corroborates our expectation and implies that the selected nontypical traits fulfill the assumption underlying Hypothesis 2b.

The significant interaction of trait set with subject affiliation, however, indicates that the three groups of participants differed from one another in their trait evaluations. Analysis of simple main effects and relevant contrasts (see Table 2) reveals that members of Group A and nonmembers made similar trait evaluations: For none of the trait sets was there a significant difference between these two groups of participants. However, members of Group B showed a somewhat different pattern of trait evaluations. They evaluated their own group's typical traits more positively ($M = 5.29$) than did members of Group A ($M = 4.42$), $F(1, 82) = 7.73, p < .01$, or nonmembers ($M = 4.05$), $F(1, 82) = 12.25, p < .001$. Moreover, when we look at the deviation from the scale midpoint (5), we find that although members of Group A and nonmembers evaluated typical-B traits negatively, $F(1, 32) = 9.24, p < .005$, and $F(1, 19) = 10.13, p < .005$, respectively, the evaluation of typical-B traits by members of Group B did not differ significantly from the neutral point, $F(1, 28) < 1$. Thus it appears that members of Group B deviate from the other participants when they evaluate their own group's typical traits—they rate these more positively. This finding corroborates Hypothesis 2a.

Additionally, inspection of simple main effects reveals that the overall higher evaluation of typical-A traits relative to nontypical traits could be traced only to nonmembers $F(1, 82) = 11.40, p < .001$, and members of Group A, $F(1, 82) = 10.24, p < .002$. Members of Group B do not differentiate between the evaluation of these two sets of traits, $F(1, 82) < 1$. However, it is important to note that although their ratings deviate from those by members of Group A and nonmembers, members of Group B did acknowledge the consensual agreement that traits typical of Group A ($M = 6.36$), $F(1, 82) = 8.35, p < .005$, and nontypical traits ($M = 6.46$), $F(1, 82) = 22.54, p < .001$, were more positive than their own group's typical traits.

TABLE 2: Means Relevant to the Main Effect of Trait Set and the Interaction of Trait Set With Subject Affiliation on the Evaluation of Typical and Nontypical Traits.

	Subject Affiliation			Total
	Member, Group A	Member, Group B	Nonmember	
Typical-A traits	6.73 _a	6.36 _{ab}	6.98 _a	6.66 _a
Typical-B traits	4.42 _c	5.29 _d	4.05 _c	4.64 _c
Nontypical traits	6.09 _b	6.46 _b	6.13 _b	6.23 _b

NOTE: Higher numbers indicate more favorable ratings of trait valence and importance on 1-9 scales. Row or column means with different subscripts differ at $p < .05$.

Trait Typicality

The three composite typicality scores were subjected to a 3×2 MANOVA with Subject Affiliation as a between-subjects factor and Target Group as a within-subjects factor. This yields a multivariate main effect of target group, $F(3, 85) = 83.75, p < .001$, a multivariate main effect of subject affiliation, $F(6, 170) = 9.29, p < .001$, and a multivariate interaction of target group with subject affiliation, $F(6, 170) = 5.76, p < .001$. First, we will discuss the results for the traits typical of Group A and Group B (see Table 3). At the univariate level, the target group main effect confirms that A traits were indeed seen as more typical for Group A ($M = 6.44$) than for Group B ($M = 4.38$), $F(1, 87) = 209.41, p < .001$, and B traits were considered more typical for Group B ($M = 7.17$) than for Group A ($M = 4.52$), $F(1, 87) = 212.72, p < .001$.

Subject affiliation also had an (unpredicted) significant main effect on the perceived typicality of traits typical of Group A, $F(2, 87) = 21.13, p < .001$, as well as traits typical of Group B, $F(2, 87) = 5.89, p < .005$. For *typical-A traits*, we see that the overall typicality ratings given by members of Group B were higher than those given by members of Group A or by nonmembers (see Table 3). Furthermore, for typical-A traits, there was a significant interaction between target group and subject affiliation, $F(2, 87) = 3.23, p < .05$. Analysis of simple main effects and inspection of the relevant means indicate that the difference in perceived typicality of A traits was somewhat attenuated for members of Group B. Specifically, members of Group B considered A traits more typical of their own group ($M = 5.17$) than members of Group A ($M = 4.02$), $F(1, 87) = 14.17, p < .001$ or nonmembers ($M = 3.25$), $F(1, 87) = 31.50, p < .001$, were willing to acknowledge. However, it is important to note that members of Group B nevertheless conceded that these traits were even more typical of Group A ($M = 6.86$), $F(1, 87) = 50.17, p < .001$. Although the overall ratings by members of Group A were also higher than those provided by nonmembers, members of Group A

TABLE 3: Means Relevant to the Effects of Target Group and Subject Affiliation of the Perceived Typicality of A Traits, B Traits, and Nontypical Traits

	Subject Affiliation			
	Member, Group A	Member, Group B	Nonmember	Total
Typical-A traits				
Target Group A	6.52 _a	6.86 _a	5.66 _b	6.44
Target Group B	4.02 _c	5.17 _b	3.25 _d	4.38
Total	5.27 _b	6.01 _a	4.45 _c	
Typical-B traits				
Target Group A	4.61	4.25	5.14	4.52
Target Group B	7.28	6.88	7.42	7.17
Total	5.94 _a	5.56 _b	6.28 _a	
Nontypical traits				
Target Group A	5.76 _a	5.25 _b	5.38 _{ab}	5.41
Target Group B	5.97 _a	6.55 _c	4.97 _b	6.05
Total	5.87 _a	5.90 _a	5.17 _b	

NOTE: Higher numbers indicate greater perceived typicality on 1-9 scales. Row or column means with different subscripts differ at $p < .05$.

maintained the same difference between their ratings of Group A and Group B that was displayed by nonmembers.

With respect to the *typical-B traits*, the subject affiliation main effect indicates that members of Group B rated their overall typicality significantly lower than members of Group A and nonmembers. Thus, while more or less maintaining the characteristic difference between the two target groups in their typicality ratings (the difference in rated typicality between the two groups always remains significant at $p < .001$), members of Group B generally gave higher trait typicality ratings for typical-A traits and lower ratings for typical-B traits than members of Group A or nonmembers.

In other words, with respect to typical-B traits, which were evaluated relatively unfavorably, members of Group B were reluctant to regard these as highly typical for their own group, although they did acknowledge that these traits were even less typical for the other group. With respect to typical-A traits, which were generally considered highly desirable, an opposite pattern emerges. Members of Group B appeared to see these traits as rather typical for the in-group, nevertheless conceding that they were even more typical for the out-group. Although we did not predict a main effect of subject affiliation on perceived trait typicality, these effects seem to be in line with our general expectation that members of Group B should be most inclined to display biased perceptions of the intergroup situation and that such biases are restricted by consensual definitions of social reality. Indeed, these target group main effects indicate that group members did take consensual differences in trait typicality into account while giving their (biased) judgments.

As for the nontypical traits, significant univariate main effects of target group, $F(1, 87) = 7.99, p < .01$, and subject affiliation, $F(2, 87) = 7.41, p < .001$, emerged. However, these are qualified by the significant interaction between target group and subject affiliation, $F(2, 87) = 14.64, p < .001$. The means relevant to this interaction (see Table 3) are in accordance with our prediction in Hypothesis 2b. Analysis of simple main effects confirms that the nontypical traits, which were generally evaluated positively, were claimed by members of Group B as more characteristic for their own group, $F(1, 87) = 40.14, p < .001$. Although, compared with nonmembers, members of Group A gave relatively high overall ratings for these traits, they did not consider these traits more typical for one group or the other, $F(1, 87) = 1.05, n.s.$, as was the case with nonmembers, $F(1, 87) = 2.48, n.s.$

Further analysis regarding this effect confirm that members of Group B were inclined to regard nontypical traits as characteristic for their group to the extent that these could contribute to a positive social identity. For members of Group B, evaluation and perceived in-group typicality of the nontypical traits were highly correlated ($r = .75, p < .001$), whereas we find no such relation with perceived out-group typicality ($r = .09, n.s.$).⁴ To shed more light on the relation between evaluation and perceived characteristicness of nontypical traits, we have made a further distinction between the three most positively evaluated nontypical traits (active, companionable, welfare oriented; mean evaluation: 6.94) and the three least positively evaluated nontypical traits (internationally oriented, graduating fast, successful; mean evaluation: 5.63, $t[92] = 10.41, p < .0001$). When we compare these two subsets of nontypical traits, it turns out that members of Group B considered the most favorable nontypical traits much more typical for Group B ($M = 7.22$) than for Group A ($M = 5.44$), $F(1, 89) = 54.89, p < .0001$, and differentiated less strongly between the groups with respect to the least favorable traits, although members of Group B still considered these more characteristic for their own group ($M = 5.86$) than for the other group ($M = 5.09$), $F(1, 89) = 9.54, p < .005$. Looking at this distinction in a different way, Group B's claims of in-group typicality were more pronounced for the most favorable nontypical traits ($M = 7.22$) than for the least favorable traits ($M = 5.86$), $F(1, 89) = 32.65, p < .001$. Thus both the correlational data and the analysis of the two subsets of nontypical traits further support Hypothesis 2b.

Group Identification and Biases Perceptions

To the extent that biased trait evaluations and typicality ratings are part of an identity management strategy, these biases should be more pronounced the more strongly people identify with a certain group. Therefore,

we investigated whether these perceptions may indeed be considered strategic ratings—that is, to what extent they depend on the extent to which participants' social identity is at stake. The relevant correlations confirm that biased trait evaluations and typicality ratings are related to participants' social identifications. Consistent with the results reported above, identification with Group B, the lower-status group of the two, was most strongly related to various biases. First, the more strongly people felt involved with Group B, the more likely they were to evaluate typical-B traits positively ($r = .61, p < .001$) and typical-A traits negatively ($r = -.25, p < .01$). Moreover, identification with Group B was also positively related to the evaluation of nontypical traits ($r = .29, p < .01$), which can be understood in view of the previously described result that members of Group B tried to claim these positively evaluated traits as characteristic for their group. Furthermore, as participants identified more strongly with Group B, they were more inclined to consider typical-A traits (which are considered highly favorable) as characteristic for this group ($r = .56, p < .001$) and to see the (less attractive) typical-B traits as less characteristic for Group B ($r = -.28, p < .01$). Finally, as participants identified more strongly with Group B, they considered the (attractive) nontypical traits as more characteristic for Group B ($r = .34, p < .001$) and less typical for Group A ($r = -.27, p < .01$).

As for identification with Group A, the significant correlations indicate that the more strongly people identified with Group A, the more likely they were to evaluate typical-B traits negatively ($r = -.27, p < .01$). Furthermore, stronger identification with Group A was correlated with a stronger tendency to regard nontypical (desirable) traits as characteristic for this group ($r = .30, p < .01$). To summarize this pattern of correlations, it appears that the differential trait evaluations and trait typicality ratings were generally related to participants' level of group identification.⁵ Thus we find additional support for our prediction that participants are likely to hold biased perceptions of social reality insofar as they feel their identity as group members is at stake (Hypothesis 3).

DISCUSSION

In this study we included ratings by nonmembers to help us define the social reality of the two groups under consideration. These nonmembers had no vested interest in either group (or any other competing group), which is apparent from their lack of identification with both groups. Consequently, they have no self-serving reason to hold systematically biased perceptions of one of these groups or their typical traits. Their ratings indicate that the three sets of traits were interpreted in the intended way: Typical-A traits are indeed considered more characteristic of Group A than of Group B, and the

reverse is the case for typical-B traits. Furthermore, as intended, nonmembers did not rate the groups differently when nontypical traits were concerned. In addition, when we look at the perceived status of the two groups, nonmembers' ratings confirm our prediction that, in this specific comparison context, Group A is held in higher regard than Group B; the recent challenge of Group B in the media possibly made members as well as nonmembers more acutely aware of this. The difference between the two groups in overall perceived status is further reflected in the negative evaluation of the traits typical for Group B compared with the evaluation of typical-A traits, as well as in nonmembers' more extreme rejection of Group B as a group to identify with. Finally, the nontypical traits are generally evaluated positively, suggesting that these might be attractive traits to claim as characteristic for one's group when typical group traits do not contribute to a positive group identity.

Our first hypothesis was that members of the lower-status group would be more inclined to display in-group-favoring biases than members of the group with higher status. As summarized above, nonmembers' ratings of both groups revealed that, in comparisons of these two groups, the characteristic traits of Group B were generally not regarded very highly. Given this specific comparison context, members of Group B would therefore have most difficulty in deriving positive distinctiveness from their typical in-group traits. Indeed, in accordance with our first prediction, it turned out that members of Group B adopted a broader array of different strategies to depict their group somewhat more favorably than members of the Group A, the higher-status group.

Moreover, the design of our study enables us to make direct comparisons of group members' ratings with judgments provided by nonmembers. As a result, we can see that members of Group A show trait evaluations and trait typicality ratings that are similar to the perceptions held by nonmembers whereas the claims made by members of Group B are not supported by nonmembers. In other words, the comparison between members and nonmembers confirms that members of the lower-status group (Group B) show in-group-favoring biases whereas members of the higher-status group (Group A) reflect the same view of social reality that is held by nonmembers (cf. Judd & Park, 1993).

In our second hypothesis, we predicted that biased perceptions of the intergroup situation would be restricted by consensual agreement on which traits are characteristic for which group. Accordingly, when participants were asked to rate the groups on an ambiguous measure—that is, in terms of generalized perceived status—members of each group considered their own group superior (cf. Goethals et al., 1991; Mummendey & Schreiber, 1983, 1984; Mummendey & Simon, 1989).

However, when specific comparison dimensions were involved, it turned out that although various strategic biases were displayed, general trait evaluations and trait typicality ratings (as evident from the ratings by nonmembers) were always taken into account while doing this. Thus members of Group B evaluated their own group's typical traits more positively than seemed justified, given the ratings provided by nonmembers. This result supports Hypothesis 2a. Nevertheless, their awareness that typical-B traits are not regarded very highly was evident from their tendency to underestimate the extent to which typical-B traits applied to the in-group relative to the judgments made by members of Group A and nonmembers. Interestingly, however, when giving these biased judgments, members of Group B did take into account the constraints of social reality. That is, they did indicate that these traits were even less typical for Group A than for their own group, thus acknowledging that these traits were indeed more characteristic of the in-group than of the other group.

Biased ratings were also given for the traits typical for Group A, which were generally considered quite desirable. Here members of Group B displayed a tendency to de-emphasize differences between the two groups for these desirable traits (cf. Van Knippenberg, 1978). Again, however, members of Group B took consensual group stereotypes into account, by conceding that these desirable traits were even more characteristic for the other group. Thus, although we did not predict this difference between members of the two groups in typicality ratings, it does fit in with the general idea underlying Hypothesis 2—that group members will display biased judgments without violating consensual agreement about which traits are characteristic for which group.

In Hypothesis 2b, it was predicted that, for favorable nontypical traits, biased perceptions are most likely to emerge in the typicality ratings. The trait ratings confirmed that the nontypical traits we used in this study were generally considered rather positively but (according to nonmembers' ratings) were not typical for either group. Hypothesis 2b was corroborated by members of Group B, whose positive distinctiveness was most threatened in this comparison situation (see Hypothesis 1). Accordingly, they claimed these nontypical traits as more characteristic for their own group, and this tendency was most pronounced for the subset of most favorably evaluated traits, resulting in a strong positive correlation between the evaluation and perceived in-group typicality of nontypical traits among members of Group B.

Finally, in support of our third hypothesis, it turned out that the more strongly the students identified as members of a specific group, the more they were inclined to regard that group favorably (and the relevant

comparison group unfavorably). This relation was quite strong for ratings of the generalized status of the two groups. As we have noted before, this global and rather ambiguous measure makes it relatively easy to give biased judgments (see Goethals et al., 1991). When specific comparison dimensions are involved, we see that the consensual definition of certain traits as being more characteristic for one group than the other channels group members' tendency to display in-group-favoring biases in specific ways. Nevertheless, this more subtle pattern of in-group-favoring biases that is observed on different measures is correlated with group identification. That is, participants are generally more inclined to give biased evaluations and trait typicality ratings the more strongly they identify with a specific group and are less likely to favor one group over the other when they do not identify with that particular group. Taken together, then, these results offer convincing support for our third hypothesis. Given the fact that the data relevant to this hypothesis are correlational, it is, of course, difficult to unambiguously point out cause and effect. Indeed, from the social identity literature (see Ellemers, 1993), it seems that decreased in-group identification may also be the result of unfavorable intergroup comparisons. Nevertheless, recent data show that this individual-level identity management strategy is observed only under conditions of low group involvement. When people have committed themselves to membership in a particular group, they are relatively unlikely to respond with decreased identification when their group is threatened (see Doosje & Ellemers, 1997; Doosje, Ellemers, & Spears, 1995). Given that the group memberships under investigation in the present study are self-selected rather than imposed, it seems likely that people's sense of commitment to these groups is relatively stable and independent of the particular comparative context they find themselves in. Hence, on the basis of social identity theory, we assume that the extent to which people identify with a particular group affects the way they perceive this group, albeit within restrictions posed by consensual agreement about the relative typicality of specific group features.

In sum, the results of this study corroborate and extend previous findings, in a more controlled setting than has been used so far. We found support for the prediction that members of a lower-status group are more motivated to display in-group-favoring biases than members of a higher-status group. An improvement over previous research (cf. Mummendey & Schreiber, 1984; Spears & Manstead, 1989) is that the comparison with nonmembers' ratings enables us to directly relate biased judgments (which were observed in Group B, the lower-status group) to consensual perceptions of the social

reality that people find themselves in (which members of Group A, the higher-status group, shared with nonmembers).

This explicit assessment of social reality enables us to extend existing insights. First, it became clear that the general desire for positive distinctiveness does not simply result in claims for in-group superiority on all available comparison dimensions. Rather, when positive distinctiveness is not apparent from typical in-group traits (as was the case for Group B), group members seem to employ various subtle strategies to enhance their social identity without violating consensual definitions of social reality. As we have seen, claims for in-group superiority are restricted to global, or "ambiguous," aspects of the intergroup situation, whereas subtle redefinitions of specific, or "real," differences between groups are used to put the in-group in a somewhat more positive light. Second, we have demonstrated that people are more likely to hold favorably biased perceptions of a specific group to the extent that their own social identity is more at stake. However, in doing this, they respect established features of the intergroup situation while trying to balance group identity with social reality.

NOTES

1. In the literature, an important current debate concerns the question whether group stereotypes provide an "accurate" or "distorted" image of group attributes (e.g., Judd & Park, 1993; Oakes & Reynolds, 1997). Our aim in the present study is not so much to determine to what extent group perceptions can be traced to actual differences between members of different groups as, rather, to assess to what extent (and in what respect) perceptions of specific groups vary with the level of involvement with these particular groups.

2. These correlations were calculated for the complete sample, because our theoretical argument is that people who identify with a specific group (e.g., group members) should accord more status to that group than people who do not identify with that group (e.g., nonmembers or members of a different group). Nevertheless, we also checked whether there is a relation between strength of identification and perceived group status among the members of each group. Although the correlations are somewhat lower because of restricted score ranges, we indeed find that members of Group A accorded more status to their group when their level of in-group identification was higher ($r = .62, p < .001$) and that members of Group B likewise perceived their group to have higher status the stronger the identification with their group $r = .44, p < .01$).

3. In this study, we are interested in the question how consensually perceived differences between groups may restrict group members' biased perceptions. To study this question, we have to use naturally existing differences between groups. The groups used in this study differed in their perceived status—Group A was generally rated more positively than Group B. One important consequence of this difference in general evaluation is that the traits typical of Group A were also rated more positively than the traits typical of Group B. Were we to select group traits that would be equally positive/negative for each group, these would necessarily differ in their typicality; equally positive traits would be considered more typical for Group A than for Group B. To the extent, then, that our selection of traits implicates a confound between trait typicality and trait evaluation, this constitutes a natural confound and is an essential aspect of the social contextual effects we intend to study.

4. Among members of Group A, the correlation between evaluation and perceived in-group typicality is less pronounced ($r = .43$ n.s.); moreover, they show a similar correlation for the perceived out-group typicality of these traits ($r = .29$, n.s.).

5. As with the correlations between identification and generalized group status, the argument here is that there should be a general relation between the extent to which people identify with a particular group and the specific perception they have of that group. However, we obtained similar findings for the members of each separate group. Although the within-cell correlations are somewhat smaller because of restricted score ranges and are not always significant because of the limited number of participants per cell, the main findings are the same. Members of Group B evaluate their own group's typical traits ($r = .41$, $p < .05$) as well as the nontypical traits ($r = .28$, $p < .07$) more positively the stronger their in-group identification. Furthermore, for members of Group B, in-group identification was positively correlated with the perceived typicality of (desirable) typical-A traits for their own group ($r = .56$, $p < .001$) and with the claiming of nontypical traits as typical for their own group ($r = .20$, $p < .15$). The correlations between in-group identification and the evaluation and perceived typicality of nontypical traits are somewhat larger when we consider only the three most favorable nontypical traits ($r = .38$, $p < .05$, for the evaluative ratings; $r = .35$, $p < .05$, for the typicality ratings). As for members of Group A, the stronger their in-group identification, the more positively they evaluated their own group's typical traits ($r = .49$, $p < .01$), and the more they were inclined to consider the nontypical traits characteristic for their own group ($r = .46$, $p < .01$).

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