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Coping with power asymmetries: The dynamics of emotional reactions in (il)legitimate powerless groups

Abstract: Two studies investigated the process of emotion regulation in powerless groups. We predicted that members of powerless groups would reduce negative emotions when they perceived status differences as illegitimate and ascribed stereotypes to the outgroup. In Study 1 the opportunity to attribute outgroup stereotypes after reading about an illegitimate power distribution reduced negative emotions. By contrast, in socially legitimized powerless conditions participants maintained negative emotions over time, and supported more negative action tendencies towards the outgroup after expressing outgroup stereotypes. In Study 2 we increased the threat imposed by a powerful outgroup and found fear reduction in the illegitimate and maintenance of fear in the legitimate conditions. Additionally, the effect of legitimacy on group efficacy was mediated by threat appraisals. The impact of perceived legitimacy of asymmetric power relations and the salience of outgroup stereotypes on emotional and behavioral reactions to powerlessness is discussed.

Keywords: power, status, legitimacy, emotion regulation, outgroup stereotypes

Social inequalities are known to relate to a wide range of negative psychological and social effects, such as health problems, educational underperformance, violence and many more (Moya & Fiske, 2017; Sutton, Cichocka, & van der Toorn, 2012; Wilkinson & Pickett, 2017). People in a socially disadvantaged position could experience threat to basic social motives of control, certainty or a positive identity of the ingroup (Fiske, 2010). How do groups who suffer from low social power or status cope with such threats? So far, research related mainly to social identity theory (Tajfel & Turner, 1979) focused on this issue and outlined a range of behavioral coping strategies (e.g., social mobility, social creativity or social competition). More recently, the issue of group-based emotional responses to

perceived social threats has been explored more in depth (Goldenberg, Halperin, van Zomeren, & Gross, 2016). This line of research emphasized the role of emotion regulation processes in the context of conflict resolution and reconciliation (Čehajić-Clancy, Goldenberg, Gross, & Halperin, 2016; Halperin, 2014). However, not much attention has been paid so far to the dynamics of emotional reaction to social disadvantage and powerlessness (Vollhardt & Twali, 2016). In our research, we attempt to integrate insights from the social identity approach and research on instrumental emotion regulation to understand how people cope with group level disadvantage (Spears et al., 2011). Specifically, we examine the dynamics of emotional reactions associated with powerlessness as

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a function of its perceived legitimacy. Also, we explore whether emotional processes that reduce or maintain negative emotions can serve the goal of coping with powerlessness by promoting collective action.

From powerlessness to group-based coping mechanisms

For four decades, social identity theory has provided an influential framework for understanding how groups deal with social disadvantage (Tajfel & Turner 1979; 1986). This approach has paid attention to aspects of the social context, and in particular whether the status disadvantage is perceived as stable and *legitimate*. Unstable and illegitimate status disadvantages give the hope and scope for social change, which allow group members to contest their disadvantage openly and directly. Stable and legitimate group disadvantage is by comparison more problematic and difficult to deal with, but as we elaborate below, we consider this case just as interesting from the perspective of coping.

Despite the importance of motivational principles in social identity theory, and the affective core of social identity, emotions and emotional theorizing were absent in its original formulation (Tajfel & Turner, 1979). Although the development of intergroup emotion theory (Smith, 1993) built heavily on the social identity approach (including self-categorization theory), the initial focus of this theory was to explain the different emotional forms of discrimination and prejudice rather than to explain coping with low status or powerlessness.

The stress and coping literature, and specifically the theoretical framework of Lazarus and colleagues (e.g., Lazarus, 1991) provided an important source of analysis that can be transferred to the intergroup domain. Although originally aimed at more interpersonal contexts, the problems of group disadvantage can also be cast in these terms. In the dual path model of van Zomeren and colleagues (van Zomeren, Spears, Fischer, & Leach, 2004; van Zomeren, Postmes, Spears, & Leach, 2008) Lazarus's distinction between emotion-focused and problem focused-coping is applied to the intergroup level. In this model emotions (like anger) are seen as a means to collective action, which is just one, and perhaps and not always the easiest route to coping with disadvantage (van Zomeren, Leach & Spears, 2012). van Zomeren's theoretical model conceptualizes collective action against social disadvantage as the outcome of two distinct processes – one emotional, based on group anger related to appraised unfairness and external blame (emotion focused approach coping in Lazarus' terms) and the other instrumental, based on perceived group efficacy and appraised coping potential for social change (Lazarus' problem focused approach coping) (van Zomeren et al., 2012). The model predicts that people will engage in approach (rather than avoidance) coping when there is some potential for social change, that is the social disadvantage is appraised as unfair and group goals are appraised as achievable (van Zomeren et al., 2012). Thus, perceived illegitimacy of power relations or social disadvantage between groups should

promote more instrumental, problem focused coping. On the other hand, stable and legitimate social disadvantage would limit individuals' approach coping and promote avoidance based coping, such as denial of the disadvantage or disengagement from the group identity (Ellemers, 1993; Tajfel & Turner, 1979).

However, recent research suggests a possible alternative to this classical view on how people deal with legitimate vs. illegitimate power asymmetries and low status. This line of research suggests, in contrast with classical social identity theory, that stable low status can also be especially threatening, prompting group members to resort to even more radical action, as it is the case of the "nothing to lose" effect (Kamans Spears, Otten, Gordijn, & Livingstone, 2013; Scheepers, Spears, Doosje & Manstead, 2006; Spears et al., 2011; Tausch et al., 2011). In a similar vein, some previous research has shown that disadvantage that is accepted as *legitimate* by the in-group itself is especially threatening, in particular among those committed to the group, which can motivate them to challenge this situation (Jiménez-Moya, Rodríguez-Bailón, Spears, & de Lemus, 2017; Spears, Greenwood, de Lemus, & Sweetman, 2010). Although social identity theory would again predict less action here, given the constrained social reality of the legitimate low status groups, coping strategies that promote resistance may be more functional than simply accepting the disadvantage. Thus, it seems plausible that when power asymmetries are portrayed as legitimate, people still actively fight against their unfavorable situation but not by confronting directly the outgroup but by strengthening the ingroup ties and mobilization of group-based resources (such as social support). Two questions arise here – firstly, whether such an active way of coping can be observed in powerless groups whose position is viewed as legitimized and secondly, whether instrumental maintenance of negative emotions can serve this function. We assume that this type of emotion focused coping strategy can be observed in powerless and low status legitimate groups and that negative emotions can in fact serve the final goal of promoting collective action. Further on we discuss the role of emotions and emotion regulation processes in the course of dealing with powerlessness, the legitimate and illegitimate one.

(II) Legitimacy of power/status relations and the regulation of negative emotions

The relation between powerlessness and the expression of negative emotions does not seem to be straightforward and easy to determine without taking into account the social context and the motivational functions of specific emotions (Petkanopoulou, Willis, & Rodríguez-Bailón, 2017). The influence of powerlessness on people's emotional and behavioral responses depends largely on the legitimacy appraisals of these power differences (Lammers, Galinsky, Gordijn, & Otten, 2008; Martorana, Galinsky, & Rao, 2005; Rodríguez-Bailón, Moya, & Yzerbyt, 2000). For example, a key appraisal for anger is perceived unfairness and illegitimacy of power relations (e.g., Nugier, Niedenthal,

Brauer, & Checkrout, 2007; van Zomeren et al., 2004). Anger also motivates collective action tendencies, especially if the disadvantaged situation is perceived as illegitimate (van Zomeren et al., 2004; 2012). According to social identity theory, status and power differences perceived as illegitimate are associated with stronger social change intentions and a tendency to increase social distance between the ingroup and outgroup (Lammers et al., 2012; Tajfel & Turner, 1979). On the other hand, fear and anxiety are likely to be emotional responses to low power or status groups, particularly when power and status differences are seen as legitimized (Mackie, Devos, & Smith, 2000). However, more recent studies show that the type of emotion experienced by powerless legitimate group members depends largely on the appraisal of injustice and the external vs. internal source of disadvantage (other-blaming vs. self-blaming) (Spears et al., 2010; van Zomeren et al., 2012). It seems that when the power differences are externally legitimized but still perceived as unfair and imposed by the outgroup or system, anger and other active coping based emotions can be experienced, whereas when power differences are attributed to the group's failure or inability to gain power then less agitated negative emotions such as sadness or dissatisfaction are experienced (Spears et al., 2010; Walker & Smith, 2002).

The perception of legitimacy of an unequal power/status distribution has therefore direct consequences for the type of emotions experienced. It seems important, however, to interpret those emotional states in a functional framework, that is considering emotions as means to achieve the goal of changing the disadvantaged position of one's group (Fischer & Manstead, 2008; van Zomeren et al., 2012). From this perspective, features of experienced emotions will depend on the importance and attainability of this goal. Negative emotions signal that more effort needs to be directed to the current goal (Carver & Scheier, 2009).

Assumed that group members perceive the value of changing their disadvantaged position, the difficulty to achieve the change might be an important factor that allows us to distinguish between legitimate and illegitimate power differences. Based on the energization theory of motivation it can be predicted that the more difficult a task is the more effort and energization is required to do it (Brehm & Self, 1989). Effort investment should increase up to a point in which the task is still perceived as doable, beyond that effortful processing decreases (Wright, 1992). However, research on personal control deprivation shows that people who experience prolonged uncontrollability, often persist in task performance even when there is no clear solution to it, paying the cost of decreased mental capacity and flexibility (Bukowski & Kofta, 2017). We think that those basic findings can also shed light on the emotional dynamics of reactions to (il)legitimate powerlessness and low status groups. For example, as stated before, experienced anger stemming from an appraisal of unfairness might serve the goal of promoting change in the social structure and reestablishing a desired position of one's ingroup. This goal should be more difficult to achieve when the power differences are viewed as legitimate and relatively more

attainable when there is already a shared perception of illegitimacy. We propose that the regulation of negative affective states (reduction vs. maintenance) is a key process related to goal setting and striving.

Do negative emotional states dissipate or are they maintained over time in powerless groups? Emotional regulation may weaken, intensify or maintain emotion depending on assessable goals (Gross & Thompson, 2007). Traditionally, emotion regulation processes were investigated on a personal or interpersonal level but recently increasing attention has been paid to emotion regulation processes in intergroup contexts (Goldenberg et al., 2016). This research focused on the role of group-based goals as possible determinants of various emotion regulation strategies. Still, the role of emotion regulation processes in dealing with threats arising from status disadvantage, is a novel issue that so far received scarce attention (see Shnabel & Ulrich, 2016; Vollhardt & Twali, 2016). For this reason, we will now briefly describe the possible links between perceived power (il)legitimacy and emotional regulation processes.

It is a well-documented finding across psychological science that people tend to maintain a positive emotional state and improve their negative emotional states (Larsen, 2000). Similarly, in the intergroup area, situations that evoke social threats to ingroup identity and agency motivate ingroup members to use cognitive and behavioral strategies to restore their threatened motives (Ellemers, 1993; Fritsche, Jonas, & Kessler, 2011; Tajfel & Turner, 1979). However, in some situations group members might prefer to maintain negative emotional states than substituting them by positive ones if they believe that this strategy can better serve their goals. For example, anger could motivate negative reactions towards the outgroup (e.g., stereotyping, blaming etc.), which in turn helps to alleviate negative emotions, but it could also motivate action against the perpetrator group. In the present research, we adopt a socio-functional perspective, which views emotions as adaptive responses that are tailored to deal with problems of physical and social survival (Keltner & Gross, 1999). In this account, negative emotions can be regulated (reduced or maintained) depending on specific goals and context at hand. Thus, in order to achieve relevant personal or social goals people might strategically *maintain* negative emotions, if they are deemed useful means to desired ends (Tamir, 2009). For example, Tamir and Ford (2011) showed that people motivated to confront (vs. cooperate with) their partner increased their anger before negotiations to attain instrumental benefits. People might be also motivated to experience negative emotions in intergroup contexts, if they perceive them as serving an instrumental goal (e.g. possible change and a better future for fellow group members; see Goldenberg et al., 2016). Hence, maintenance of negative emotional states can be a mobilizing response when obtaining one's group goal (e.g. equality or justice) is perceived as difficult.

In the context of intergroup relations, the goal to achieve social change is related to the perceived (il)legitimacy of power relations (e.g., Martorana et al., 2005;

Rodríguez-Bailón et al., 2000; Tajfel & Turner, 1979; 1986). It can be assumed that when power differences are appraised as stable and difficult to change, then negative emotional reactions should persist, focusing the ingroup members on the goal of changing the disadvantaged position of their group. This assumption would be consistent with some research showing that high motivational intensity can induce different affective states (such as anger but also fear) which as a consequence narrow people's attention and can their focus on the desired goal (Harmon-Jones, Gable, Prince, 2013). It seems also functional that negative emotions associated with power asymmetries do not dissipate, but are maintained over time to motivate action. Therefore, we expect that negative emotions (especially related to anger or fear) would be maintained over time in legitimate powerless groups.

In order to understand the functions of reduced vs. maintained negative emotional states it seems important to look at the behavioral consequences of legitimate vs. illegitimate lack of power. When the goals of the powerless are not directly related to changing their position in the social structure, illegitimate lack of power promoted more effective goal setting, higher flexibility during goal striving and stronger persistence in the face of difficulties (Willis, Guinote, & Rodríguez-Bailón, 2010). However, recent research also showed that when women's group identity and agency is threatened by presenting social inequalities as stable and legitimized by the system then different forms of motivated resistance could be observed (e.g., stronger persistence on an ability task and support for collective action; de Lemus, Bukowski, Spears, & Telga, 2015). Women also expressed stronger negative emotions after being exposed to stable power differences between men and women and showed stronger implicit ingroup bias (de Lemus, Spears, Lupiáñez, Bukowski, & Moya, 2017). However, the role of outgroup stereotypes in the course of group-based emotion regulation is still not clear.

Stereotyping and the instrumental regulation of negative emotions

How might emotion regulation processes operate in the context of legitimate vs. illegitimate power/status differences and what factors might facilitate it? On the one hand, stereotypes can have a justifying function for social inequalities, even if this is in conflict with group interests (Kay & Jost, 2003). On the other hand, stereotypes can be used instrumentally to challenge the existing power disadvantage (de Lemus, Spears, Bukowski, Moya, & Lupiáñez, 2013; Reynolds, Oakes, Haslam, Nolan, & Dolnik, 2000). This use of stereotypes would seem most likely in the case of illegitimate disadvantage, when derogation of the out-group seems justified. However, precisely the opportunity for this stereotypic derogation may alleviate the negative emotions (Fein & Spencer, 1997), potentially dismantling the emotional basis for action. Paradoxically this may be less likely when the status disadvantage is legitimate and the scope for negative out-group stereotyping is more constrained by social reality.

In this case, maintaining negative emotions may be quite functional because legitimate low power is the context where the group is most threatened and needs to challenge this situation. Recent studies on motivational responses to illegitimate vs. legitimate status differences revealed that low status elicited more threat (less challenge) when it was presented as legitimate vs. illegitimate (Scheepers, 2017). Although fear is often associated more with avoidance than approach, there is some evidence that it can also motivate radical forms of resistance and group action when the ingroup disadvantage is seen as desperate (i.e. the "nothing to lose" effect: Kamans et al., 2013; Jiménez-Moya, Spears, Rodríguez-Bailón, & de Lemus, 2015). In fact, people who are exposed to anxiety inducing threats, experience a sense of uncontrollability, and react with anger towards an outgroup perceived as enemy, ultimately showing a boost in motivation (Motro & Sullivan, 2016). Thus, although anger and fear are often seen as contrasting emotions, they may both interact when feeling low power (or control) and be relevant for the phenomenology of disadvantaged groups. Both may also motivate various forms of collective action.

Overview of predictions and studies

We predict that when an unequal power distribution is framed as illegitimate, ingroup members might experience negative emotions (e.g., anger, fear, anxiety) but that these may reduce over time, especially when there is the opportunity to acknowledge this illegitimacy through stereotyping of the out-group. By contrast, when an unequal power distribution is framed as legitimate, these negative emotions will likely be maintained over time, as they are unlikely to be alleviated by stereotyping, which may reinforce the status disadvantage. We also assume that maintaining negative emotions will result in stronger support for action tendencies to oppose outgroup members and weaker support for tendencies to cooperate with them. Additionally, we assume that higher levels of threat and fear induced in legitimate powerless groups would lead to a more focused (thus also less dispersed and flexible) goal setting process, which could facilitate social change.

We tested these predictions in two studies. In Study 1 we manipulated the legitimacy of power/status asymmetries between two groups of students that differ in terms of status (psychology and social education students) using a fictitious newspaper article. After that participants described the outgroup or a non-social object, in order to test whether stereotyping of the outgroup specifically leads to the down regulation of negative emotions. We expected that when participants in a legitimized, disadvantaged power situation are asked to stereotype a higher status outgroup, they will maintain their initial level of negative emotions because of the threatening intergroup context. This should not occur in the illegitimate powerless group. In Study 2, we additionally used a stereotyping activation method that made salient the competence dimension of the outgroup stereotype, in order to check whether threat from the outgroup is indeed a factor that explains maintenance

of negative emotions in the legitimate powerless group. We also assessed possible consequences of perceived threat for group efficacy perceptions and how the manipulation affects goal setting processes aimed at changing the disadvantaged position of the ingroup.

Study 1

At the individual level, the appraisals of legitimacy of the situation can be different than those expressed publicly by the ingroup or outgroups (Spears et al., 2010). We argue that when the cause of the negative emotions (i.e., the power disadvantage) is presented as illegitimate, a public acknowledgement of illegitimacy could help to regulate the negative emotions. However, when the illegitimacy is not publicly acknowledged and the situation is described as justified, the initial negative emotions might not be reduced, but maintained. In this context, the instrumental function of emotion regulation (reduction vs. maintenance of negative affect) might consist in facilitating the contestation of the socially legitimized but still unfavorable power distribution for the ingroup. When high status outgroup stereotypes are salient, the illegitimacy, but not legitimacy, will lead to a reduction of negative emotions over time. Legitimacy on the contrary, will lead to the maintenance of negative affect as a way to be ready for potential future actions. If this is the case, we think that the possibility to express outgroup stereotypes should increase the intergroup salience leading to the activation of more confrontational and less cooperative behavioral tendencies in the legitimate condition. Therefore, we expect an interaction between legitimacy and stereotyping, such that perceived (il)legitimacy will influence affect regulation only when outgroup stereotypes are used. Further, in Study 1 we look at specific emotions of anger and fear that might be related to the legitimacy appraisals and linked to behavioral tendencies to change the disadvantaged situation (e.g., van Zomeren et al., 2004; van Zomeren et al., 2008). We predict that in a disadvantaged low status position anger and fear are prone to be activated and the reduction of their intensity should be related to weaker tendencies to oppose the outgroup and stronger tendencies to cooperate with it. We did not have specific predictions whether anger, fear or a more general negative emotional state will drive the behavioral effects, that is why we included the analyses on the negative emotion score as well as on the anger and fear subscales.

Method

Participants and design

One hundred twenty-six Social Education students (101 women and 21 men, 4 did not indicate their sex) from the University of Granada participated voluntarily in the study (Mean age = 21.95, $SD = 5.08$).

The experiment constituted a 3 (Legitimacy: illegitimate vs. legitimate vs. control) x 2 (Stereotyping: outgroup stereotyping vs. object evaluation) x 2 (Emotions time-point: before vs. after the stereotyping manipulation) design with repeated measures on the last factor.

Materials and procedure

Participants were presented with a fictitious newspaper article about the job market and their future career opportunities.

Legitimacy manipulation

The article in the newspaper stated that there is a conflict of interests between social education and psychology students with regard to the assessment of their skills and academic preparation that guarantees a job after finishing the studies. Further on, it read that recent research has shown that 95% of the high power, better paid posts (directors and leaders) in the educational sector is occupied by psychologists. In the illegitimate powerless condition the article stated, that this situation is perceived as unjust and unfair. In the legitimate powerless condition, the situation was described as justified by some studies that prove a better preparation of psychology students to perform important management functions and leadership positions. The text in the control condition (equally powerless) stated that the power distribution between the social education and psychology students was not unfair. Instead, it was emphasized that both groups of students are in a difficult position on the labor market due to the economic crisis and that both might have to struggle in the coming years in order to get a job.

Emotion measure

After the legitimacy manipulation, all participants were asked to fill out an emotional state scale related to the news they had just read (Zuckerman & Lubin, 1985). This scale entails three subscales for negative emotions that measure anger, anxiety and sadness related emotions (7 items; the instruction read: "Please indicate on a scale ranging from 1 – not at all, to 7 – extremely, to what extent you experience in this moment a particular emotion from the ones listed below when you recall the situation previously described in the newspaper article"). The average for those three subscales was used as the pre-stereotyping negative emotion measure (Time 1; $\alpha = .80$). We also assessed separate subscales for anger ($\alpha = .77$) and fear (two items, $r = .36$, $p < .001$).

Stereotyping manipulation

Participants were asked to list up to ten attributes that they considered typical for psychology students (stereotyping condition) or a socially irrelevant object (laptop computer; non-stereotyping condition). Later on, participants were asked to evaluate each of those traits on a 7-point scale (-3: very negative to +3: very positive) (open ended stereotyping measure; Esses & Zanna, 1995).

After completing this task, participants responded again to the emotions measure (Time 2; negative emotions: $\alpha = .87$; anger: $\alpha = .85$; fear: $r = .51$, $p < .001$).

Action tendencies

Subsequently, a set of questions were asked about action tendencies towards the outgroup (i.e., psychology students) related to the dimensions of facilitation (using

a scale ranging from 1 – not at all, to 7 – extremely; e.g.; *To what extent would you be willing to cooperate with/help psychology students?*) and harm (e.g.; *To what extent would you be willing to oppose/compete with psychology students?*) based on the BIAS map theory (Cuddy, Fiske, & Glick, 2008).

As a manipulation check, participants were asked to write a short summary of the newspaper article that they had read before. Finally, they were thanked and debriefed.

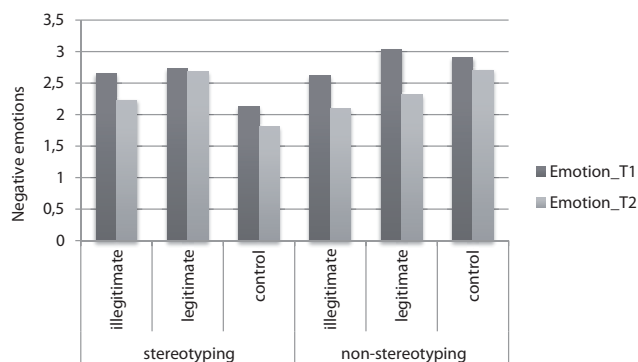
Results

Means for all negative emotions in Time 1 (i.e., pre-stereotyping measure) and Time 2 (i.e. post-stereotyping measure), as well as means for anger and fear subscales in T1 and T2 were computed. Also, relative indexes of emotion regulation (Time 2 – Time 1; negative values indicated reduction of negative emotions, positive values – enhancement of negative emotions and values close to zero – maintenance of emotional states) were computed. Five outliers who scored over 3 SD's on this index were excluded from the analyses.

Emotion regulation analyses

We performed an ANOVA analysis with legitimacy and stereotyping as between subject factors, and repeated measures on emotion time-point. Results showed a main effect of emotion time-point ($F(1,120)=32.74, p<.001, \eta^2_p=.214$), which indicated that in general participants improved their negative emotional state over time. Importantly, results also showed a significant Emotion time-point x Stereotyping x Legitimacy interaction, $F(2,120)=3.34, p=.039, \eta^2_p=.053$ (see Figure 1).

Figure 1. Emotion regulation as a function of power legitimacy and stereotyping



The analysis of the 3-way interaction showed that the Stereotyping x Emotion time-point interaction was only significant for the legitimate condition ($F(1,41)=5.05, p=.03, \eta^2_p=.11$), but not for the illegitimate or control conditions (both $F_s < 1, ns$). The analysis of the legitimate condition revealed a reduction of negative emotions from Time 1 ($M=3.03, SD=0.91$) to Time 2 ($M=2.31, SD=1.01$) only in the non-stereotyping condition ($F(1,120)=24.83, p<.001, \eta^2_p=.171$), whereas in the stereotyping condition emotions were maintained over time

(Time 1: $M=2.73, SD=1.15$; Time 2: $M=2.69, SD=1.61$; $F < 1, ns$). In the illegitimate powerless condition, there was a general reduction of negative emotions ($F(1,120)=18.81, p<.001, \eta^2_p=.135$), from Time 1 ($M=2.63, SD=1.14$) to Time 2 ($M=2.16, SD=1.07$) as it was the case for the control condition ($F(1,120)=5.02, p=.027, \eta^2_p=.04$; Time 1: $M=2.54, SD=1.10$; Time 2: $M=2.29, SD=1.10$).

Analyses performed for specific negative emotions revealed a marginally significant interaction effect for anger, $F(2,120)=2.87, p=.061, \eta^2_p=.046$. The pattern was consistent with the general negative emotion score that showed maintenance of anger related emotions but only in the legitimate powerless condition when the outgroup stereotype was salient. The interaction for the fear was not significant ($F < 1$).

Behavioral tendencies

We analyzed the effects of stereotyping and legitimacy factors on the four action tendencies toward outgroup members measured (help, cooperate, oppose, exclude) in a MANOVA design, including legitimacy and stereotyping as between subjects factor and emotion time-point as a within factor. The interaction Stereotyping x Legitimacy was significant (Roy's Largest Root Statistics: .097, $F(4,116)=2.83, p=.028, \eta^2_p=.089$). Univariate analyses indicated that the effect was driven by differences in the tendency to oppose ($F(2,119)=3.54, p=.032, \eta^2_p=.056$) and cooperate ($F(2,118)=4.14, p=.018, \eta^2_p=.066$). The analysis of this interaction showed that in the illegitimate powerless condition ($F(1,118)=8.18, p<.01$) participants perceived a stronger tendency to cooperate with the outgroup when they were given the opportunity to stereotype them ($M=4.45, SD=0.89$) than when they described an object ($M=3.65, SD=1.19$). No effects were found on cooperation for the legitimate and the control conditions (both $F_s < 1, ns$). On the contrary, results for the tendency to oppose occurred in the legitimate powerless condition ($F(1,118)=5.84, p=.017$), indicating that participants tended to oppose the outgroup relatively more when they were giving the opportunity to stereotype them ($M=1.94, SD=.94$) than participants in the no stereotyping condition ($M=1.28; SD=.61$). It is important to note that overall tendencies to oppose the outgroup were much lower than to cooperate with them.

Moderated mediation analyses

In order to check whether the effects of stereotyping and legitimacy on behavioral tendencies were mediated by the regulation of negative emotions, we conducted two separate moderated mediation analyses on opposition and cooperation as dependent variables (Preacher & Hayes, 2008). First, we focused on the regulation of negative emotions as a potential mediator and predicted that the effect of Legitimacy x Stereotyping on opposition and cooperation would be mediated by the negative emotion regulation (reduction vs. maintenance). A negative emotion difference score (Time 2 – Time 1), for which negative scores indicate reduction of negative emotions and positive

scores indicate enhancement of negative emotions was introduced to the model.

Since the legitimacy variable had three levels, we applied polynomial contrasts (of legitimacy (Contrast 1: Illegitimate condition and Control = 0.5 and Legitimate = -1; Contrast 2: Illegitimate = -0.5, Legitimate = 0.5 and Control = 0) and we used the PROCESS macro (Hayes, 2013; Model 7). The results showed that the moderation effect of legitimacy and stereotyping on the tendency to oppose the outgroup was not mediated by negative emotions using 10 000 samples bootstrapping (BCa 95% CI [-0.273; 0.020]; $SE = .072$). However, the moderated mediation analysis was significant for cooperation (BCa 95% CI [0.003; 0.255]; $SE = .064$). The analyses of the conditional indirect effects of stereotyping on cooperation through negative emotions were significant in the legitimate condition (BCa 95% CI [-0.247; -0.004]; $SE = .061$) but not in the illegitimate and control conditions (BCa 95% CI [-0.028; 0.037]; $SE = .016$). This means that in the legitimate condition participants who stereotype the outgroup, and do *not* reduce their negative emotions over time, tend to cooperate less with the outgroup. We performed analogous analyses for anger, fear and sadness subscales, the results mirrored the pattern for the negative emotions score, yet we obtained a full mediation only for the anger subscale (BCa 95% CI [0.003; 0.245]; $SE = .060$).

Discussion

The results of this study show a gradual dissipation of negative emotions in the illegitimate condition. However, the regulation of negative emotions happened in the non-stereotyping condition as well as in the stereotyping condition which might indicate that any type of evaluation process between the first and second measurement of emotions successfully deployed participants' attention and lead to gradual decrease of negative emotions. This reflects the fact that the illegitimacy of the unequal power/status distribution is widely acknowledged and some actions are already taking place (as was specified in the article newspaper manipulation) and therefore, personal (emotional) involvement is not so necessary (Darley & Latané, 1968). In line with this argument, when a situation is portrayed as overtly illegitimate, it also tends to be perceived as unstable (Tajfel & Turner, 1979). Our results suggest that in the illegitimate condition, when the intergroup setting is salient (i.e., stereotyping condition), those participants who reduce their initial level of negative emotions (especially anger), are the ones who are also more motivated to cooperate with the outgroup.

By contrast, we found that in the powerless legitimate condition outgroup stereotyping prevents participants from reducing their negative emotions, whereas describing a non-social object leads to a decrease in negative emotions. Apparently activating outgroup stereotypes increases the salience of the intergroup context, and therefore, the disadvantaged ingroup position. Further, it seems that the legitimacy of such power asymmetries, leads to maintenance of negative emotions (anger) and higher tendencies to oppose or confront the outgroup.

Presenting the power distribution as legitimate, according to external sources does not mean that this is accepted by ingroup members (Spears et al., 2010). Indeed, the threat of such legitimacy seems to maintain negative emotions over an extended period of time, fostering action tendencies that challenge the power inequality. This is shown by the moderated mediation effect, which suggests that those participants in the legitimate condition that stereotype the outgroup (i.e., high salience of a high-status outgroup) and do not regulate their emotions, are the ones that are less keen on cooperating with them. Hence, the (lack of) emotion regulation has the function of helping them to contest (or at least, not help) the powerful outgroup.

Study 2

The previous study revealed that in salient outgroup stereotype conditions the dynamics of emotional reactions and behavioral intentions to address power inequality differs depending on legitimacy. However, we still know little about the relevant appraisal related to the existing power asymmetry in legitimate vs. illegitimate conditions (e.g., threat or challenge) and how the emotional regulation process influences perceived group efficacy and collective action goal-setting. Therefore, in this study we focused on specific emotions of anger, fear and anxiety, and also appraisals of threat related to the power disadvantage and measure the effects of those on predictors of behavioral tendencies that promote social change. Additionally, in this study we kept constant the stereotyping measure across conditions and manipulated the legitimacy factor (legitimate vs. illegitimate) between groups.

Method

Participants

Participants were eighty-six undergraduate social work students (70 women, 15 men and 1 did not indicate the sex; Mean age = 20.61, $SD = 3.81$) from the University of Granada, who received course credit for their participation.

Materials and procedure

As in Study 1, participants read a fictitious newspaper article describing the situation of the job market and their future career opportunities.

Legitimacy manipulation

The bogus newspaper article presented was the same as the one used in Study 1, stating that recent polls showed that social workers had worse job prospects in the social care market and were worse paid than psychologists.

Emotion measure

After reading the fictitious article, negative emotions (including anger, fear and anxiety, sadness), all related to the previously described situation, were measured (Zuckerman & Lubin, 1985). We calculated an index of negative emotions at this point of measurement, Time 1, ($\alpha = .80$) as well as anger ($\alpha = .69$), fear and anxiety ($r = .23$, $p = .048$).

Outgroup stereotyping measure

Once participants reported how they felt towards the disadvantaged ingroup situation, they were presented with a stereotyping measure of the outgroup. We decided to apply a different type of stereotyping measure than in the previous study, because the open-ended measure used before did not allow us to control for the type of image of the psychology outgroup (i.e., people could categorize and evaluate psychologists using very different traits). Thus, here we focused participants' attention on competence and warmth dimensions of social perception, highlighting the high status (competence) of the outgroup. Participants were asked to what extent they perceived psychology students as competent, intelligent, untidy, ineffective sociable, warm, introverted, and unkind on a scale from 1 (not at all) to 7 (very much). In addition, participants evaluated each trait on a scale from 1 (very negative) to 7 (very positive).

Right after completing this task, participants responded again to the emotions measure (Time 2; negative emotions: $\alpha = .84$; anger: $\alpha = .75$; fear and anxiety: $r = .33$, $p = .004$).

Group efficacy and collective actions measures

Further, we measured group efficacy as a proxy for collective action intentions (cf. van Zomeren et al., 2004). Specifically, we distinguished between two types of group efficacy (see Hornsey et al., 2006; Saab, Tausch, Spears, & Cheung, 2015): political group efficacy was measured with five items ($\alpha = .89$; e.g., *I think that social work students can successfully stand up for their rights*), and identity consolidation efficacy was measured with three items ($\alpha = .88$; e.g., *I think together, social work students will be able to build a movement for equal facilities and opportunities among students.*).

Participants were also presented with six items aimed at measuring the readiness to engage in collective actions ($\alpha = .73$; e.g., *I would attend a demonstration against the inequality between social workers and psychologist*). In addition, in a separate task, they were asked to write down all the different actions they could think of, that could help to diminish the inequality between their ingroup and the outgroup. The number of means to the goal was considered to be an indication of idea generating fluency and the number of new ideas an index of flexibility of means generation (Willis et al., 2010).

We also measured the extent to which participants perceived the disadvantage situation as a future threat with two items (e.g., *I feel anxious regarding the future of social work students*) or challenge (e.g., *I think the social work students can consider their current situation as a challenge*) for the ingroup.

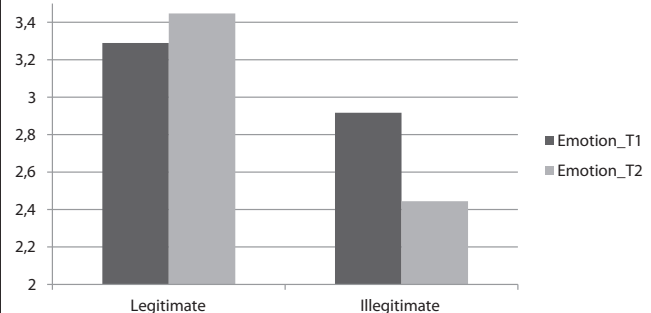
Finally, participants were asked to write a short summary of the newspaper article that served as a memory check of the applied legitimacy manipulation. At the end of the study, participants were thanked and debriefed.

Results

We excluded nine participants who failed the manipulation check question, one who did not believe the

bogus article, and one who reported vision problems. We ran ANOVAs with illegitimacy as a between participants factor and general and specific negative emotion scores (negative emotions, anger, fear, sadness; measured before and after the stereotype measure) as within participant repeated measures. There was no significant interaction effect between legitimacy and emotion measurement for the overall negative emotion score ($F < 1$). We did separate analyses for each specific emotion subscale and found an interaction effect between legitimacy and emotion time-point only for the fear subscale¹, $F(1,73) = 4.08$, $p = .047$, $\eta^2_p = .053$. As depicted on Figure 2, the level of fear for participants in illegitimate powerless conditions decreased significantly over time ($M_{Time1} = 2.92$; $SD_{Time1} = 1.59$, $M_{Time2} = 2.44$; $SD_{Time2} = 1.48$) (Sidak's pairwise comparison: $F(1,72) = 4.45$, $p = .038$, $\eta^2_p = .058$). This result is in line with the results of Study 1, showing reduction of negative emotions over time in the illegitimate group. However, in the legitimate powerless group we found no significant differences between fear measurements over time ($M_{Time1} = 3.29$; $SD_{Time1} = 1.59$, $M_{Time2} = 3.45$; $SD_{Time2} = 1.87$, $F < 1$), indicating maintenance of fear in time. The interaction effect for anger was not significant ($F_s < 1$).

Figure 2. Fear regulation as a function of power legitimacy



We ran additional correlational analyses to check whether perceived outgroup competence (implying potential threat in a competitive context) is related to expression of negative emotions. Interestingly, we found a negative correlation between the level of competence associated with the outgroup (psychology students) and anxiety regulation only in legitimate conditions, ($r = -.32$; $p < .05$). This means that the more competent the outgroup was perceived to be by the participants, the less they reduced their level of fear over time. In the illegitimate condition, we found a positive correlation between the perceived intelligence of the outgroup members and anxiety regulation ($r = .36$; $p < .05$), which means that the more intelligent the outgroup was perceived to be the stronger the initial anxiety level was reduced.

¹ As in Study 1, we report here the interaction for the fear subscale score that consisted of the mean for fear and anxiety measures. However, since the correlation between the two items at Time 1 was weak, we also performed separate analyses on single items of fear and anxiety and found that the significant interaction effect was driven by the emotion of fear, not by anxiety.

Further, to check the effect of the legitimacy variable on participants' threat and challenge appraisals, we ran an ANOVA analysis including legitimacy as the independent variable and the perception of threat or challenge as the dependent variables. Results showed an interaction effect of legitimacy and threat appraisals ($F(1,73)=4.88$, $p=.03$, $\eta^2_p=.06$), which indicated that participants in legitimate powerless conditions reported higher levels of threat regarding the disadvantage ($M=5.14$; $SD=1.23$) than participants in the illegitimate condition ($M=4.43$; $SD=1.37$). There was no significant difference for challenge appraisals ($F(1,73)=1.31$, ns).

We did not find any effect of the legitimacy factor on group efficacy measures ($F<1$, ns). We also analyzed the willingness to take part in collective action as a function of legitimacy and did not find any significant effect ($F<1$, ns). However, we found an effect of legitimacy on the number of means generated by participants to fight against the in-group disadvantage ($F(1,73)=12.83$, $p=.001$, $\eta^2_p=.15$). Specifically, this indicated that participants in the illegitimate condition generated more diverse ways of stopping the inequality ($M=2.00$; $SD=1.49$) compared to participants in legitimate conditions ($M=.87$; $SD=1.25$).

Importantly, in order to check the role of threat appraisals in the impact of power disadvantage legitimacy on group efficacy perceptions, we performed a mediation analysis, in which threat was the mediating variable between legitimacy and group efficacy. Legitimacy significantly predicted the threat appraisals ($\beta=.857$, $t=2.14$, $p=.036$), indicating that higher threat was perceived in the legitimate condition, and threat predicted the identity consolidation measure of group efficacy ($\beta=.244$, $t=3.44$, $p=.001$). Even though there was no direct effect of legitimacy condition on the group efficacy measure, it was justified to test for the indirect effect. A bootstrapping procedure (with 10 000 samples) indicated that the indirect effect of legitimacy condition on group efficacy through threat was .21 with a standard error of .12, and 95% confidence interval = [.029, .506] (Preacher & Hayes, 2008).

Discussion

In this study, similarly to the previous one, when the ingroup's disadvantage was framed as unfair and illegitimate, participants' fear decreased across time. In the legitimate powerless conditions the level of fear was maintained over time, which makes the pattern similar to the results of Study 1. Further, we also found that perceptions of threat regarding the ingroup's future were higher in the legitimate condition.

The increased level of threat in the legitimate conditions might be related to the fact that in this study we increased the salience of the high competence level of the outgroup. We found that, if the powerful outgroup is perceived as competent, fear caused by the disadvantage dissipated only when the situation is perceived as unfair. This suggests that framing the outgroup as a well-prepared competitor on the job market when the inequality is framed as justified, leads individuals to maintain the initial level of fear.

Interestingly, we found that perceived threat related to the situation of legitimate lack of power played an important function in the perception of group efficacy, and enhancing identity consolidation and solidarity with other members of the ingroup. Therefore, it seems that when the situation is portrayed as fair, and difficult to change (i.e., legitimate), people turn to their ingroup in order to reinforce the existing bonds.

In terms of potential collective action that would need to be taken to change the existing situation, we did not find any differences between the illegitimate and legitimate powerless groups; the data indicated that in both types of situation the average support for all types of collective action was very high. However, when participants were asked to additionally generate means to advance social change, more potential means that could be used to stop the disadvantage were generated in the illegitimate condition than in the legitimate condition. This result indicates that in illegitimate low status positions people can think of more ways to protest, whereas in the legitimate one experienced threat reduces people's ability to generate means to achieve social change. This strategy of persisting on few collective actions might be functional in situations when the group does not have the opportunity to try out different types of means and just sticks to the ones perceived as most effective. This is in line with previous work showing that legitimately powerless individuals generate less flexible means to their goals, compared to their illegitimate counterparts (Willis et al., 2010).

General discussion

In this research, we focused on the question of how the experience of illegitimate vs. legitimate power differences influences the negative emotional state of the powerless and their tendency to regulate it (to decrease it or maintain it). We also checked the role of outgroup stereotypes in the emotion regulation process of powerless/low status group members. In line with some previous studies on legitimacy and power differences (see Spears et al., 2010), we found that situations of clear social disadvantage provoke negative emotions. When the illegitimacy of the situation is acknowledged, the level of negative emotions drops over time and salient outgroup stereotypes reinforce this process. However, when power asymmetries are presented as legitimate, negative emotions (mainly anger and fear-based) are maintained over time, but only when outgroup stereotypes increase the salience of the intergroup context and reinforce the threatening nature of a legitimate group difference. Interpreting these results in the framework of instrumental emotion regulation (Goldenberg et al., 2016; Tamir, 2009), we consider the maintenance of negative emotions as a form of preparation to the attainment of one's goal (in this case to contest the threat to social identity and group agency). Stronger action tendencies to oppose the outgroup (Study 1) and increased group efficacy via perceived threat (Study 2) in the legitimate powerless condition, provide initial support for this assumption regarding the instrumental function of negative emotion

maintenance. Stereotyping seems to be a precondition for these emotion regulation effects, as it increases the salience of the intergroup situation, and reinforces the salience of a legitimized and thus threatening group disadvantage. If no “reminder” of the power disadvantage (i.e., no stereotyping) is present, the negative emotions tend to dissipate.

These findings support our initial general assumption that in a context of status and power differences, emotion regulation is a motivated, goal-driven process. This is consistent with an instrumental (utility maximization) and motivated account of emotion regulation (Erber, Wegner, & Theriault, 1996; Parrott, 1993) rather than the hedonistic (pleasure maximization) account (Larsen, 2000). Tamir (2009) emphasizes that the utility criteria is related to the tendency to maximize future, long-term benefits instead of immediate benefits (“feeling good”). Also in the intergroup context it has been shown that short term negative emotional experiences of anger, frustration or fear can be maintained or enhanced in order to pursue long-term goals that are relevant for the group (Goldenberg et al., 2016). Specifically, we place this trade-off between short term vs. long term goals in a context of power asymmetries between groups. It appears that when the power distribution is portrayed as illegitimate, the expectancy of change in the short-term might reduce the negative emotions, initially evoked by the unequal power distribution. However, when the situation is externally legitimized, then the maintenance of negative emotions appears as a more functional strategy to pursue since any change will require more effort and maybe also more radical forms of action. It has been shown that people who are expecting to confront a negotiation partner try to increase their anger (Tamir & Ford, 2012). Our research supports and extends these findings, showing that when it gets more difficult to change a disadvantaged situation, and a confrontation between groups to pursue one’s group goals might be necessary, then the initial level of negative emotions is maintained.

The research presented here gives us a preliminary insight into the specific emotion regulation dynamics in powerless groups and the importance of the depicted legitimacy of status differences. The implications of this work are especially applicable to societies where the gap between the high and low status groups is increasing also because of the current economic recession. This research suggests that the framing of messages regarding the legitimacy of power differences used in the media or by political leaders, either as justified or unfair and unjust, to inform the public about the discrimination they are targets of could clearly affect the ways they react to this power disadvantage. As we have shown in the results of our studies, those group members who perceive their unfavorable situation as unfair reduce their negative emotions, especially when a threatening intergroup context is salient. However, those who are told that their discriminated position is legitimate are the ones who keep experiencing negative emotions, which keep them ready to confront the outgroup. However, this does not mean that the maintenance of negative emotions will lead to

the development of successful collective action. On the contrary, it seems that when the lower status of a group is being legitimized by an external source then a sense of threat increases, which also inhibits the flexibility of thinking about possible alternatives to act for more equal treatment. This finding can be interpreted in the light of theorizing about the motivational bases of radicalization (Kruglanski, Gelfand, Bélanger, Sheveland, Hetiarachchi, & Gunaratna, 2014). A plausible mechanism that accounts for a radicalization process is a strong commitment to the focal goal (e.g., change in the disadvantage position), which in turn strengthens the association between this goal and a specific means perceived as best serving the goal (e.g. violence) and devalues alternative goals. Our research shows, that higher difficulty in pursuing the goal of social change might also restrain the number of means used to achieve this goal, which on the one hand might increase the strength of the goal – means association and individual commitment, but on the other might also enhance more rigid and extreme forms of behavior.

On the contrary, when the low status position is portrayed as illegitimate, more cooperative and diverse action tendencies are preferred by the low status group members, but a drop in negative emotions related to the disadvantaged situation can paradoxically decrease the persistence of the group’s strivings for social change. This finding is consistent with research that revealed decreased support for social change by a disadvantaged group as a result of positive intergroup contact (i.e. reduced negative emotions) and decreased attention to illegitimate aspects of inequality (Saguy, Tausch, Dovidio, & Pratto, 2009). Therefore, it seems important to be aware of these complex effects of legitimacy framings when designing social interventions to motivate collective action.

The perceived stability and scope for change of power asymmetries seems to play a crucial role not only for emotional regulation but especially for the types of actions preferred by ingroup members. Recent research on experienced anger and conflict resolution has shown that anger increased support for aggressive actions and policies but only for people who believe that attitudes and behaviors of groups are fixed and cannot change. However, those who believed that groups are malleable and can change, anger increased support for conciliatory policies (Shuman, Halperin, & Tagar, 2017). Thus, anger (or other negative emotions) maintained over time do not necessarily need to lead to hostile actions, if an appraisal of possible change is present, then maintenance or up-regulation of negative emotions might in fact also promote constructive ways of societal change.

To sum up, this research sheds some light on the applied social implications for social change and resistance to power asymmetries. We identified two important preconditions of instrumental emotion regulation in a social context: legitimacy of power differences and the salience of group stereotypes. The specific functions and the efficacy of different patterns of emotion regulation in the context of collective actions that aim at social change seems an important field of further investigation.

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