Scapegoating and Leader Behavior*

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ABSTRACT

This article examines how the alternatives of scapegoating or social-emotional leadership are determined in small discussion groups. The hypothesis asserts that the alternative “selected” by the group depends on whether the task leader supports the low-status member. An experiment designed to test this hypothesis indicated that scapegoating of the low-status member occurs when the task leader is somewhat hostile toward him. However, social-emotional leadership was not more in evidence when the task leader supported the low-status member. Instead, such support had the unanticipated consequence of increasing the task leader’s legitimacy in performing task activity, thus decreasing both scapegoating and social-emotional leadership.

The research reported here probed the mechanisms behind hostility transference in a small, task-oriented group. The hypotheses are based on Bales and Slater’s (1955) model of role differentiation as modified by Burke (1969). The research included (1) a partial replication of Burke’s study identifying the scapegoat phenomenon, and (2) a test of one mechanism hypothesized to account for that phenomenon.

Bales and Slater (1955) proposed a model of emergent group structure which they termed “role differentiation.” When a group attempts to achieve a goal by means of coordinated interaction, inequality in task-oriented participation develops, and an individual who is highly active (i.e., becomes a task leader) may provoke hostility and tension. The reasoning here is that if one person engages in “too much” task-oriented activity (Burke, 1968), he violates the norms of equality by limiting the opportunities for other group members to engage in this activity; hence, tension and hostility arise.

Bales and Slater view hostility and tension as factors which may be handled either through the emergence of a social-emotional specialist who actively seeks to reduce tensions and hostilities, or the emergence of a scapegoat on whom hostilities and tensions may be spent. Bales (1953:147–8), for example, has suggested that:

The idea man [task leader] is the one most prone to equilibrium-disturbing acts through his constant movement toward the instrumental goal, and hence he is most likely to arouse hostility. The value of the role he plays is so great to the group, however, there are severe limitations on the amount of hostility which can be directed toward him, and as a result, much of it may be displaced onto someone with low status.... the displacement of hostility on a scapegoat at the bottom of the status structure is one mechanism, apparently, by which ambivalent attitudes toward the instrumental-adaptive specialist may be diverted and drained off.

Burke (1969) found that scapegoating of the low-status member as a response to a high output of task activity on the part of the task leader appears to occur, and under the same conditions as do task and social emotional role differentiation—i.e., when the task-oriented activity has a low level of legitimation. Furthermore, these two responses—scapegoating and role differentiation—tend to be complementary alternatives: one occurs at the expense of the other.

To explain the nature and determinants of this complementary arrangement Burke (1969: 166) suggested some possible factors:

(1) whether or not there appears to be a group member who makes a good scapegoat because of some personal characteristic in addition to his just being the low-status member; or (2) whether or not there is a group member who has the per-
sonal characteristics which allow him to play the role of expressive leader thus leading to role differentiation; or (3) whether the task leader tends to be supportive of the low-status member or not. Though analysis of the present data seems to support the third alternative, with the present small sample of low legitimation groups, it is virtually impossible to adequately check any of these possibilities.

From the above, we may say that possible mechanisms fall into two broad categories, psychological and structural, the latter consisting of factors which legitimate scapegoating within the group. Although an adequate theory of scapegoating must include both levels, this research concentrates on the structural.

THEORY

We may now outline a proposed theory of the emergent role structure in a task-oriented group.

1. As a group works toward achieving a particular goal, unequal distribution of task-oriented activity will occur among group members.

2. If the task leader's activity goes beyond the legitimate, expected level, this activity will stimulate tension and hostility within the group. Although the task leader is the source of tension and hostility, he will tend not to be its object because adequate performance of his role is necessary for goal attainment.

3. Either of two roles may emerge: scapegoat or social-emotional leader. These roles function either to drain off or redirect the hostility and tension.

4. These roles stand in a complementary relationship to one another such that
   (a) A scapegoat will emerge if such a role is legitimized by the task leader through a style of interaction which is nonsupportive of or hostile toward the low-status member of the group.
   (b) A social-emotional leader will arise if the task leader supports the low-status member and if the group includes an individual able to give social-emotional leadership.

Following the propositions outlined above, specific hypotheses concerning the impact of experimental conditions on development of the roles of scapegoat and social-emotional leader may now be stated: 1. If the task activity of the task leader goes beyond the legitimate, expected level, and if the task leader is somewhat hostile to the low-status member, then the amount of hostility directed toward the low-status member by members other than the task leader will be significantly greater than if the task leader is neutral or somewhat supportive of the low-status member.

2. If the task activity of the task leader goes beyond the legitimate, expected level, and if the task leader is neutral or somewhat supportive of the low-status member, then the perceived performance level of social-emotional activity by the social-emotional leader will be greater than if the task leader is somewhat hostile toward the low-status member.

In addition to these two primary hypotheses we may state two corollary hypotheses. From propositions three and four above we conclude that there ought to be an inverse relationship between hostility toward the task leader and development of the roles of scapegoat and social-emotional leader. Thus:

3. If the task activity of the task leader goes beyond the legitimate, expected level, and if the task leader is somewhat hostile to the low-status member, then the correlation between the amount of hostility directed toward the task leader and that directed toward the low-status member will be negative and different from zero.

4. If the task activity of the task leader goes beyond the legitimate, expected level, and if the task leader is neutral or somewhat supportive of the low-status member, then the correlation between the amount of hostility directed toward the task leader and the perceived performance level of social-emotional activity by the social-emotional leader will be negative and different from zero.

PROCEDURES

Groups

Twenty-five 5-person groups were scheduled. They included both male and female student volunteers from the Junior Division (freshmen and sophomores) of Indiana University. All subjects were randomly assigned to their specific groups. The task of each group was to
create an outline of a university-level course in Social Problems. Each group was given one-half hour for discussion.

Experimental Conditions
Both positive and negative support conditions were achieved through the use in each group of a confederate who acted as a strong task leader. The same person acted as the confederate in all groups. Under both conditions the confederate was instructed to take control of the group immediately. Through the discussion he maintained his role by constantly guiding and directing the group toward the goal. The confederate was also instructed to use the first ten minutes of the thirty-minute discussion to identify the low-status member of the group. Following Bales (1953) we defined status according to activity; therefore, the least active member was designated as the low-status member. Under the negative support condition, the task leader began to direct some hostility toward the low-status member after the initial ten-minute period. Under the positive support condition, the task leader began to provide some support of the low-status member. Regardless of the condition, he was instructed to show no hostility toward any other member of the group. The level of hostility (or support) involved was small and not unusual for discussion groups of this sort. The important point is that the conditions were relatively controlled.

To achieve a relatively low degree of legitimation of task activity (thus making any high level of task activity “excessive”), procedures used in Burke (1969) were adapted. We began by assuming that the degree of legitimation of the task leader's activity would depend on the degree to which the members of the group were committed to successful completion of the task. Burke (1969), for example, had stimulated a high legitimation condition by informing his subjects that they must achieve consensus in discussing a human relations study. In order to further raise the level of task motivation, members were informed that the quality of their discussion would be judged and rated. After an initial discussion, group members were told that their discussion rated below the average performance of similar groups, and that they should perhaps try a little harder. Groups which had been given no special motivational instructions were found to have a low level of legitimation of task activity. Therefore, in order to minimize the degree of commitment to the groups' task pertinent to the present research and thus minimize the legitimation of high levels of task-oriented activity, all groups were told that they had complete freedom in their task. No conditions other than the task itself were imposed.

Measures
The measures of task and social-emotional leadership were identical to those previously used by Burke (1967). Briefly, the subjects were asked to fill out a questionnaire after the thirty-minute discussion. Included were eight questions on which the subjects rated themselves and each other. Four questions were designed to tap task performance; the other four, social-emotional performance. These ratings were averaged for each person and standardized within groups to a mean of zero. The scores were then factor analyzed, and factor scores were generated for each member on each of the two dimensions. The group member with the highest score on the task dimension was designated as task leader. Similarly, the highest-scoring member on the social-emotional dimension was designated social-emotional leader. Table 1 reports the results of the factor analysis.

For each of the two experimental conditions, the groups were divided into two types: those in which the task leader had a task factor score above the median score of all task leaders (and therefore more likely to be illegitimately high) and those in which the task factor score was below the median performance of task leaders (and therefore more likely to be seen as legitimate).

All groups were scored live by two independent observers using Bales' Interaction Process Analysis. One was the first author who was, of course, familiar with the hypotheses

1 A full debriefing took place at the end of each session in which the manipulations and design were fully explained and questions answered. No participants appeared bothered by these manipulations. As will be seen in the next section, the actual level of hostility initiated by the leader (including disagreements) was quite low.
Table 1. Factor Analysis of Eight Role Performance Items

<table>
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<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Task Dimension</th>
<th>Social-Emotional Dimension</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1.</td>
<td>.93</td>
<td>.23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.</td>
<td>.92</td>
<td>.29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.</td>
<td>.92</td>
<td>.16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.</td>
<td>.95</td>
<td>.24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.</td>
<td>.07</td>
<td>.85</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6.</td>
<td>.44</td>
<td>.78</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7.</td>
<td>.28</td>
<td>.86</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8.</td>
<td>.18</td>
<td>.80</td>
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to be tested. The other scorer operated with no knowledge of these hypotheses. The measures of hostility used here and based on the IPA scores represent an average of the scorer ratings. Following Burke, the main measure of hostility/support is defined as the sum of the acts in Category 1 (shows solidarity) and Category 3 (agrees) minus the sum of acts in Category 10 (disagrees) and Category 12 (shows antagonism). The more negative the index, the greater the net level of hostility. By varying the source and target of the activities, various specific measures of hostility/support may be computed—for example, by all members toward the low-status member or by any one member toward another.

Because the scores using the IPA system represent an arithmetic mean of the two independent scorers, it is necessary to consider the reliability between scorers. A reliability coefficient was computed as follows: a within-scorer error variance, \( V_w \), and a total error variance, \( V_e \), were calculated, and the reliability coefficient, \( r^2 \), was computed as \( r^2 = (1 - V_w / V_e) \). The reliability of the index of hostility/support toward the low-status member by all others across all groups was .88. The reliability between scorers for the index of hostility/support toward the task leader was .82. In addition, a reliability coefficient for the index of hostility/support toward each member was calculated for each group. The mean coefficient for these was .90.

Table 2. Mean Level of Hostility/Support Toward the Low-Status Member by Experimental Condition and Level of Task Leader's Activity

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Task Activity of the Task Leader</th>
<th>Experimental Condition</th>
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<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>High</td>
<td>Positive</td>
<td>1.40</td>
<td>-1.64</td>
<td>2.04*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Low</td>
<td>Negative</td>
<td>1.60</td>
<td>.25</td>
<td>1.35</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
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\* \( p < .10 \)

Before proceeding to analysis of the data, the establishment of the experimental conditions had to be verified. As it turned out in the present experiment, the confederate leader failed to achieve the task leadership position (i.e., have the highest task factor score) in 4 of the 25 groups; hence these 4 (2 in the positive and 2 in the negative condition) were eliminated from the analysis. To achieve the main experimental manipulation, the confederate had been instructed to direct hostility to the low-status member in the negative condition but to support him in the positive condition. For the 21 groups analyzed, the mean hostility/support of the confederate toward the low-status member in the negative condition was \(-.82\); in the positive condition, +2.25. The difference between the two, though small, was significant at the 1 percent level, and represents about 40 percent of the average number of all positive and negative acts directed by the task leader to the low-status member.

RESULTS

For both conditions the average level of hostility/support shown toward the low-status member by group members other than the task leader is shown in Table 2. These results indicate, in conformity with our first hypothesis, that the low-status member receives more hostility in the negative support condition when the leader is highly active in his task performance \((t = 1.48, \ p < .10)\). The difference between the two conditions is not significant when the leader is less active; hence the hypothesized interaction effect is apparently occurring, though it is not exceptionally strong with this small sample.

The second hypothesis, which suggests that the social-emotional leader and the scapegoat are alternative role responses to the problem
Scapegoating and Leadership

Table 3. Mean Level of Social-Emotional Activity of the Social-Emotional Leader by Experimental Condition and Level of Task Leader’s Activity

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Task Activity of the Task Leader</th>
<th>Experimental Condition</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Positive</td>
<td>Negative</td>
<td>Difference</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>High</td>
<td>1.45</td>
<td>1.36</td>
<td>.09</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Low</td>
<td>1.11</td>
<td>1.17</td>
<td>-.06</td>
</tr>
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of hostility and tension, is tested with the data in Table 3 showing the mean performance level of the social-emotional leader in all situations. These results, though in a direction consistent with the hypothesis, are not significant.

The third hypothesis suggests a negative correlation between the amount of hostility directed toward the low-status member, by group members other than the task leader, and the amount of hostility directed toward the task leader when the task leader is highly active and somewhat hostile toward the low-status member. Table 4 presents the correlations in all situations. The hypothesis is supported, although again not strongly with the present small sample ($r = .37, p < .10$).

The fourth hypothesis suggests a negative correlation between the amount of hostility directed toward the task leader and the amount of social-emotional activity by the social-emotional leader when the task leader is highly active and somewhat supportive of the low-status member. Table 5 presents the correlations for all situations. The hypothesis is not supported ($r = .18, p = ns$). Interestingly, however, the only significant correlation between these two variables is negative, and it occurs under the negative support condition with high task-leader activity ($r = -.44, p < .05$)—the same situation under which hostility toward the low-status member seems to drain hostility away from the task leader. This finding suggests that both the social-emotional leader and the scapegoat drain hostility, but, at least in terms of this research, under the same rather than different activity and support situations.

DISCUSSION

We have hypothesized that the task leader provides the cue which stimulates either one of two tension-draining processes. (1) By being somewhat hostile toward the low-status member, the task leader was presumed to stimulate scapegoating because his actions cued the group members in that direction, opening the channel for hostility transference. (2) If the task leader is somewhat supportive of the low-status member, the channel for scapegoating is not opened and a social-emotional leader will presumably arise (given at least one group member able to play that role). The problem here is that, although we find some support for the idea that the task leader can stimulate scapegoating (Hypotheses 1 and 3), we have no evidence that his supportive actions toward the low-status member encourages the rise of a social-emotional leader (Hypotheses 2 and 4).

The immediate question, therefore, is why didn’t a social-emotional leader emerge in the positive condition of support to drain tension and hostility?

Two general explanations are possible: Either the hypothesized mechanism of the “theory” (i.e., the task leader’s support level) is not correct, or the experimental conditions were not what they were intended to be. When examining the first alternative, we considered at least three specific possibilities. First, it
might be that the task leader does not provide a cue for channeling hostility to the low-status member. However, the fact that scapegoating occurred under the predicted condition disproved this possibility.

Second, the task leader may have provided the proper cue to close the channel for scapegoating in the positive condition, but there was no group member capable of playing the role of social-emotional leader to the extent that was necessary. However, this argument may be countered by noting that subjects were randomly assigned to their groups, and there is evidence that activity by a social-emotional leader, as well as scapegoating, served to drain hostility under the negative support condition. It is quite unlikely that chance would fail to assign such individuals to groups opposed to the positive condition of support.

Third, under the positive support condition the group members might have been able to interact without draining the hostility built up by the task leader's activity. If this explanation is adequate, we would expect that, in general, group members experiencing the positive condition would be less satisfied with their experience in the group. To test this idea we examined the responses of group members to two items on the post-session questionnaire. The first question asked whether the group members were more or less tense than they expected to be; the second asked whether they enjoyed the experience more or less than they had expected they would. The subjects' responses indicated no significant differences between conditions on either question, and we must therefore reject this possible explanation.

The second general explanation postulated error in the experimental conditions. One possibility which was examined was that the low degree of legitimation necessary for the development of either social-emotional leadership or scapegoating was not fulfilled. Several approaches to this idea were tested.

First, Burke (1967; 1968) showed that the separation of the task and social-emotional leadership roles is much more likely to occur in conditions of low task legitimation; in conditions of relatively high task legitimation, one person is quite likely to hold both roles. In our negative support condition, we found a separation of roles. However, in the positive condition, in 6 of 10 cases, the task leader and the social-emotional leader were the same person—the confederate.

Additional comparisons with Burke's (1967) study lend further support to the possibility that there was a failure to achieve or maintain the low degree of task legitimation necessary for a full test of the hypotheses. For example, Burke reported a correlation of +.79 between perceived task performance of the leader and role differentiation in the low legitimation condition, while the same correlation in the high legitimation condition was near zero. In this study we found the same correlations to be +.63 in the negative support condition but near zero in the positive condition. Again, Burke found a correlation of −.43 between perceived task performance of the leader and liking of the leader in the low legitimation condition (ours was −.48 in the negative condition) and near zero in the high legitimation condition (ours was +.53 in the positive condition). Finally, Burke found a negative correlation between the task leader's task and social-emotional scores (−.74) in the low legitimation condition (ours was −.60 in the negative condition) but a near zero correlation (−.14) between these two variables in the high legitimation condition (ours was +.27 in the positive condition).

In sum, then, it appears that the general condition of low legitimation of task activity intended for both positive and negative conditions of support did not occur in the positive condition. Thus, while the data show some evidence that the task leader can instigate scapegoating by opening a channel of hostility toward the low-status member, we did not establish the conditions necessary to test his ability to instigate social-emotional leadership by closing the channel of hostility toward the low-status member. We must now ask why the groups failed, to achieve low task legitimation in the positive condition of support.

The concept of legitimation was initially introduced into the theory of role differentiation by Verba (1961) in two related formats. The first centered on the degree of acceptability within a group of instrumental, task-oriented behavior, while the second focused upon the acceptability of a particular person (the "leader") performing instrumental, task-oriented
behavior. In the process of incorporating legitimation into the model of scapegoating (and role differentiation in general), the theoretical focus has been on the role of the task leader. However, experimental attempts to stimulate a given level of legitimation have frequently concentrated on the degree of acceptability to a group, of task-oriented behavior.

In this study the initial task conditions were held constant in a configuration that, in past studies, had yielded low legitimation for task-oriented activity. We can thus conclude that non-task factors were involved in altering the level of legitimation in the positive support condition. Two possible factors were the following. First, the confederate may have achieved a higher level of legitimation for his own activity in the positive condition by being generally more supportive of other group members (perhaps by generalizing his instructions to be supportive of the low-status member). Second, the confederate may have increased his level of legitimation in the positive support condition simply by being supportive toward the low-status member.

The first possibility does not seem to hold since we found no significant difference between conditions in support for the group members ($t = .94, p = ns$). However, the data lend credence to the second possibility. In the positive support condition we found that the correlation between liking the task leader and the task leader's support for the low-status member was $+.51 (p < .05)$. In the negative condition the same correlation is slightly negative but not significantly different from zero ($-.11, p = ns$). It is possible, therefore, that the confederate leader received additional liking and legitimation for his task activity because he supported the low-status member, and this additional legitimation may have been enough to invalidate the desired experimental conditions. Further research, in which the confederate is instructed to be neutral toward all members of the group—including the low-status member—is needed.

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

This article asks how small discussion groups “choose” between the alternative structures of scapegoating and social-emotional leadership. It was hypothesized that the particular mechanism determining which alternative was selected by the group was whether the task leader supported the low-status member. The experiment designed to test this mechanism used a confederate leader who acted either in a somewhat hostile fashion (negative condition) or a supportive fashion (positive condition) toward the person who ranked lowest in participation (low-status member) after the first ten minutes of discussion. Analysis indicated that scapegoating of the low-status member occurred in the negative condition more than in the positive (Hypothesis 1); and this structure does seem to draw some hostility away from the leader (Hypothesis 3). The emergence of a strong social-emotional leader, however, did not occur more frequently in the positive condition as would be suggested by Hypothesis 2. The reason for this lack (suggested by ex post facto analysis) seems to be that the assumed low level of legitimation for the task leader's task activity was, in fact, not there. Further analysis suggested that, by supporting the low-status member, the confederate leader raised his own level of legitimation for performing task activity. In the words of Hollander (1958), he established sufficient idiosyncracy credit that his task behavior apparently did not produce tension and hostility. Without these motivating factors, neither social-emotional leadership nor scapegoating, followed. Instead there was a high degree of what Lewis (1972) calls role integration—performance of both task and social-emotional leadership roles by one person.

We are left, then, with the implication that the hypothesized mechanism governing the emergence of scapegoating or social-emotional leadership must be modified. Hostility of the group’s task leader toward its low-status member produces scapegoating. Task leader support of the low-status member seems to legitimate the activity of the task leader rather than necessitate role differentiation in the form of a separate social-emotional leader. Perhaps neutrality toward the low-status member by the task leader would produce role differentiation, and this possibility should be investigated. In any event, it is clear that the task leader’s behavior toward the low-status member is an important determinant of the structure of relations in a small discussion group.
REFERENCES


Social Class, Style of Life and Fertility in Puerto Rico*

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ABSTRACT

This study examines the relationship between fertility, social class, and styles of life in Puerto Rico. Styles of life are viewed as behavioral constellations selected among available cultural alternatives and manifested in the manner in which goods are consumed. The survey instrument included 43 different behavioral items believed to reflect viable cultural alternatives. Using a principal components solution and varimax rotation procedures, the first four factors were initially selected to characterize life-style components. Cross-tabulations were made on completed fertility by employing both Hollingshead's Social Classes and the Style of Life typology. The style of life approach systematically differentiates fertility patterns within what the Hollingshead procedure would indicate to be a homogeneous group.

Studies demonstrating a relationship between social structure and human fertility (Blau and Duncan, 1967; Davis and Blake, 1956; Freedman, 1961) have frequently singled out social class as a principal factor contributing to the fertility differences observed (Goldscheider, 1971; Stycos, 1968). Research tends to be either intensive investigation of fertility practices within a given social class or statistical analysis of the relationship between birth rates and an index of socioeconomic status (Easterlin, 1969; Peterson, 1969).

Freedman's (1961:59) statement is typical of the conclusions reached from such studies: "Differences in life styles associated with position in a status hierarchy presumably may influence any of the norms or intermediate variables affecting fertility." While such statements often assert or assume the existence of distinctive life styles for the various social classes.

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