

The Power of Reputations: The Role of Third Party Information in the Admission of New Group Members

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Two experiments investigated whether groups use *reputational* information to recruit new members. The authors manipulated the candidate's reported self-sacrifices to enter the group and the source of this information. The authors found that third party information was more influential in group admission decisions than information from the candidates themselves, suggesting the power of reputations. Furthermore, group admission rates were also influenced by opportunities to *socialize* new group members. These results are discussed in light of their contribution to research on reputations and group dynamics.

Keywords: reputations, commitment, social dilemma, public goods, socialization

Small groups regularly require new members to either expand their existing operations or to replace exiting members (Moreland & Levine, 1988; Van Vugt & Hart, 2004). Yet despite this need, many groups regard the process of recruiting new members as unsettling and aversive (Levine & Moreland, 1985). Newcomers might pose a threat to the power structure of a group (Moreland & Levine, 1988; Ziller, 1965), the social identity of group members (Lois, 1999; Widdicombe & Woofitt, 1990) or the performance of a group (Ziller, Behringer, & Jansen, 1961). Thus, groups face a problem: They are compelled to recruit new members, but in doing so they make themselves vulnerable. How do groups resolve this problem? One answer is that groups can engage in *selective sociality*; that is, they allow entry only to those individuals who fulfil the entry criteria (Kurzban & Leary, 2001).

Exactly what characteristics groups desire in candidates may vary from group to group (Moreland & Levine, 2003; Zander, 1976). For example, a restaurant recruiting a new chef will select individuals who are skilled in preparing palatable food, whereas an organization seeking a new accountant will select individuals with financial skills. In addition to these specific abilities, it is plausible that groups pay attention to motivational traits in candidate members. One such trait is the *group commitment* of potential members (Moreland & Levine, 1982; Van Vugt & Hart, 2004). Group commitment (loyalty) is defined in terms of an individual's willingness to make sacrifices to further group goals (Van Vugt & Hart, 2004), for example, being prepared to relocate for a new job. Group commitment increases the likelihood that a person internalizes the group values, works for the group goals, and remains in the group (Meyer & Allen, 1991; Moreland & Levine, 1982; Rusbult, 1980; Van Vugt & Hart, 2004).

Thus, we hypothesize that groups will be sensitive to commitment cues in candidate members and only grant entry to those who are believed to have a sufficient level of commitment. Furthermore, groups should pay more attention to what reliable third parties convey about candidate members than what the candidates reveal about themselves. This brings us to consider the role of reputations.

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The Importance of Reputations

A reputation is defined as *socially shared information about a potential interaction partner* (Axelrod, 1984; Frank, 1988; Van Vugt, Roberts, & Hardy, 2007). Reputations give rise to behavioral expectancies about individuals which could be used to assess the suitability of the individual (Carlston & Skowronski, 1994; Winter & Uleman, 1984). Their importance stems from the fact that groups can appraise someone without having previously interacted with them, which vastly enlarges the pool of candidate members. Reputations are known to influence decisions about who people interact with and who they avoid (Fehr & Fischbacher, 2003; Milinski, Semman, & Krambeck, 2002). Some theorists even go so far to suggest that the need for sharing social information such as reputations was one of the driving forces behind the evolution of language in humans (Dunbar, 1996).

In terms of reputations, groups might be particularly interested in information about the perceived group commitment of a candidate member. If information from a reliable third party source reveals that a candidate is making considerable sacrifices to enter a group, this should increase their desirability as a potential group member.

Source of Information

Reputational information is normally obtained from a third party and it may well be that some third party sources are more credible than others. Social impact theory (Latane, 1981, 1996) suggests that proximate sources are more influential than more distant sources. This is consistent with social identity theory, which suggests that ingroup members are more credible sources of information than outgroup members (Tajfel & Turner, 1986; Turner, 1985; Wilder, 1986). Social impact theory further claims that *high status* individuals (such as leaders or independent experts) are more reliable sources (see also Brewer, 1996; Milgram, 1963). High status figures are listened to more often and they produce greater attitude change than do low status individuals (Bohner, Ruder, & Erb, 2002). Interestingly, status indicators do not necessarily have to be specific. Expectation states theory indicates that *diffuse* status char-

acteristics (like age and sex) are sometimes given greater credence than specific task features (de Gilder & Wilke, 1994).

Regardless of the source of the reputation, we believe that reputational (third party) information will be more influential in group admission decisions than information from the candidate members themselves. Groups may be very suspicious of particularly positive information from candidates as it may be difficult to establish whether or not the person is engaging in strategic self presentation (Cialdini, 1989; Gilovich, 1987; Jones & Pittman, 1982). Groups are less likely to trust such information if it cannot be verified (Eagly, Wood, & Chaiken, 1978; see also Gatewood & Feild, 1998; Meyer, 1980; Thornton, 1980). Thus, we expect that reputational information, especially from proximate, high status sources, will have more weight in group admission decisions than nonreputational information, supplied by the candidates.

The Present Research

The main aim of this article is to demonstrate the power of reputations in the admission of new group members. First, the extent to which candidates are prepared to make sacrifices for the group will affect their desirability as potential group members. According to the reputation hypothesis, however, information about a prospective member should be more influential when it comes from a third party than from the candidates themselves.

To test this, we used an experimental game, akin to a public goods dilemma game, in which group members work together to achieve a group goal (an anagram puzzle; for a similar procedure, see Yamagishi, 1988). If the group performance reaches a certain level, the *step-level*, the group reward is divided equally among all members. If the group fails to reach this level its members receive nothing. Feedback on the task will be fixed so that in the majority of trials the group fails to get the reward, allowing members to see the benefits of a newcomer. Subsequently, groups get the opportunity to recruit a new group member.

To help group members decide whether to admit the candidate, they are presented with information about the candidate that is either derived from a third party (reputational) or from

the candidate themselves (nonreputational). Our main research hypothesis is that when a third party is the source of information, participants will perceive a high sacrificing candidate as more committed, and will express a greater preference for this individual. However, when the candidate themselves is the source of information, groups will be much less affected by this information.

Experiment 1

Method

Participants

Twenty-three males and 29 females were recruited from the University of Southampton undergraduate population in return for course credit. Participants' mean age was 20 years ($SD = 2.34$ years) with a range of 18 to 32 years.

Design

A 2×2 design was used that manipulated the value of what the candidate was giving up to enter the group (either high or low sacrifice) and the source from which participants received this information (either reputation or nonreputation). Participants were randomly assigned to conditions, and each cell consisted of 13 people. The main dependent variables in this study were the candidate's perceived commitment, group preferences for the candidate, and a vote regarding the candidate's entry into the group.

Procedure

Participants were initially brought together into groups of three and informed that they would be taking part in a simple task in which they would have to work together to earn points. The purpose of the experiment was made deliberately vague to deter hypothesis-guessing; participants were simply told it was a group performance task. Participants were seated in separate cubicles and told that they would be interacting with one other, but would not be able to directly communicate. Participants were then left alone and presented with all further instructions via a computer screen.

Experimental task. The task itself had the properties of a step-level public goods dilemma

(Van Vugt, Jepson, Hart, & De Cremer, 2004; Yamagishi, 1988). It consisted of five blocks of 10 trials each; although participants were led to believe that the task would contain more blocks to avoid endgame effects. On each trial, participants were presented onscreen with a simple anagram that they were required to solve within six seconds. The puzzles were constructed in such a way that they required virtually no skills to complete; this was so that considerations of ability would not factor into decisions regarding candidate entry.

The step level for the realization of the group bonus was a group total of 18 correct puzzles at the end of each block. Participants were told that if this was achieved or exceeded, the total number of puzzles answered would be converted into points, and these would be divided equally among the three of them. If the group total fell below 18 then its members would receive no points. The points accrued during the experiment would be traded for lottery tickets with cash prizes between £10 (\$20) and £30 (\$60). Post-experimental interviews revealed that participants were very motivated to earn as many lottery tickets as they could.

Each participant worked on his or her own set of puzzles during a block, accumulating his or her own score of correct answers. At the end of each block (i.e., after 10 trials) participants were informed how many puzzles they and their group had answered correctly and therefore how many points each group member received. Although the group total at the end of a block was ostensibly the result of group members' combined efforts, participants were not actually interacting with one another, and the results were fixed by the experimenter so that the group failed in 50% of the blocks before the occurrence of the candidate member.

At the end of the fourth block, each group could add a member to their group—this individual was reportedly a participant in a different experiment in the laboratory. Participants could each express their preference for this candidate and cast their vote to allow them entry into the group (with the majority rule deciding). To assist them with these decisions, participants were told that they would be presented with some information about the candidate. It was here that the primary manipulations for this experiment were introduced.

Manipulation of sacrifice. In all conditions, participants were informed (via the computer) that the candidate had been working on another task in which they had earned some money and now wanted to join the participants' group. In the high sacrifice condition, the candidate could earn considerably more money in his or her current task, and thus gave up a lot to join the group. In the low sacrifice condition, the candidate could earn considerably less in his or her current task, and thus gave up little to join the group (see Appendix for details).

Manipulation of source. The source of this information was varied. In the third party condition (the reputation condition), a member of the current group, who was chosen at random, reported why he or she thought the candidate wanted to join the group. This group member would observe the set-up of the candidate's current task (i.e., exactly what that task was and—more importantly—how much they could potentially earn) and send a message with this information to the rest of the group via the computer. In reality, each participant was told another member of their group had been chosen for this task, and all remained in their cubicles while a message designed by the experimenters appeared on their screens. In the candidate condition (the non reputation condition), the message sent concerning their sacrifices came from the candidates themselves.

Once the information had been received, participants were asked to respond to the items "how committed do you think the candidate is to the group?" (on a 10 point Likert-scale from "not at all committed" [1] to "extremely committed" [10]) and "how much do you want the candidate to enter the group?" (on a scale from 0 to 100 with a higher score indicating a greater desire for entry). Subsequently participants cast their votes to either grant (1) or refuse entry (0) to the candidate.

Following this, participants were informed that the experiment had come to an end, and were given two open ended questions asking whether any aspect of the experiment seemed false or suspicious, and to guess what the experimental hypotheses were. Upon completion of these items, participants were subsequently debriefed, paid, and dismissed. After the data collection for the entire experiment had finished, a lottery was held among all participants

and the prize winners were contacted to pick up their monetary prize.

Results

Perceived Commitment of Candidates

To examine whether our manipulations influenced participants' perceptions of candidate commitment, a 2 (sacrifice: high vs. low) \times 2 (source: reputation vs. nonreputation) ANOVA was run on the item "how committed do you think the candidate is to the group?" ("not at all committed" [1]; "extremely committed" [10]; $M = 4.90$, $SD = 2.02$). Initially, gender was included as a factor; however, this yielded no main effects or interactions in any of the analyses in Experiment 1, and so participants were collapsed across this category. This first analysis yielded a significant main effect for sacrifice, $F(1, 48) = 4.49$, $p < .05$, $\eta^2 = .08$, which indicated that participants perceived candidates in the high sacrifice condition ($M = 5.46$, $SD = 2.04$) as more committed than those in the low sacrifice condition ($M = 4.35$, $SD = 1.87$). The main effect of source was not significant, $F(1, 48) = 1.54$, $p = .22$.

There was also a significant sacrifice \times source interaction, $F(1, 48) = 3.90$, $p < .05$, $\eta^2 = .07$. To examine this further, two planned comparisons were carried out comparing perceptions of commitment for high and low sacrifice individuals for each source. This indicated that when another group member was the source (reputation), candidates were rated as significantly more committed in the high (vs. low) sacrifice condition. There was no difference between the high and low sacrifice conditions when the candidate was the source (nonreputation). Furthermore, the high sacrifice-reputation condition differed significantly from both nonreputation conditions (see Table 1).

Desirability of Candidate

To investigate the effects of our sacrifice and source manipulations on participants' desire for the candidate to enter the group, a 2 (sacrifice) \times 2 (source) ANOVA was run on participants' responses to the item "how much do you want the candidate to enter your group?" (0 to 100 with a higher score indicating a greater desire for them to enter; $M = 54.13$,

Table 1
Perceptions of Commitment in Candidate Members

Source	Sacrifice		<i>t</i>
	Low	High	
Group member	4.15 ^a (1.86)	6.31 ^b (1.55)	2.89 ^{**}
Candidate	4.54 ^a (1.94)	4.62 ^a (2.18)	.10
Total	.51	2.28 [*]	

Note. Figures are participants' responses to the item "how committed do you think the candidate is to the group" (given on a scale from 1 to 10 with a higher score indicating greater perceived commitment). Figures in brackets indicate *SD*. Cells marked with differing letter superscripts significantly differ from one another in row and column-wise comparisons using *t* tests. * = *p* < .05; ** = *p* < .01.

SD = 25.16). This yielded no significant main effects for sacrifice, $F(1, 48) = 1.83, p = .18$ nor source ($F(1, 48) = .48, ns$), but there was the predicted interaction ($F(1, 48) = 6.20, p < .05, \eta^2 = .11$). Again, two planned comparisons were carried out. These indicated that when another group member was the source (reputation), the high sacrifice candidate was perceived a lot more desirable. There was no difference in perceived desirability when the candidate was the source (nonreputation) (see Table 2). A correlation analysis indicated that perceived commitment and desirability of the candidate were significantly correlated, $r(N = 52) = .55, p < .001$.

Voting for Candidate

Finally, a logistic regression was carried out on the entry votes with (high/low) and source (reputation/nonreputation) as predictors and

Table 2
Desirability of Candidate Member

Source	Sacrifice		<i>t</i>
	Low	High	
Group member	43.69 ^a (23.97)	69.15 ^b (16.00)	2.72 ^{**}
Candidate	55.62 ^a (26.36)	48.08 ^a (27.56)	.80
Total	1.21	2.39 [*]	

Note. Figures are participants' responses to the item "how much do you want the candidate to enter your group?" (given on a scale from 1 to 100 with a higher score indicating greater desire). Figures in brackets indicate *SD*. Cells marked with differing letter superscripts significantly differ from one another in row and column-wise comparisons using *t* tests. * = *p* < .05; ** = *p* < .01.

vote as the outcome variable. This yielded no significant main effects for either sacrifice or source (with $\chi^2(1, N = 52) = .33, ns$) and $\chi^2(1, N = 52) = .001, ns$ respectively); however, a significant interaction emerged, in line with predictions ($\chi^2(1, N = 52) = 8.49, p < .01$). When the group member was the source (reputation), the high sacrifice candidate received more votes than the low sacrifice candidate (with $\chi^2(1, N = 26) = 5.85, p < .05$). When the candidate was the source (nonreputation), the difference in votes was not significant (with $\chi^2(1, N = 26) = 2.60, p = .23$) (see Table 3).

Discussion

The results from Experiment 1 provided initial support for the reputation hypothesis. In the reputation condition, group members were responsive to differences in sacrifice between candidates. This was not the case in the nonreputation condition when the candidate was the source of information. This suggests that reputational information matters in group admission decisions.

Experiment 2

High Status Sources and Reputational Effects

In Experiment 2, we aimed to replicate and extend the reputation effect of Experiment 1. In particular we ask: What other third party sources are credible in forming the reputation of candidate group members? According to previous research (e.g., Chaiken, Wood, & Eagly, 1996; Latane, 1981), high status individuals are an important

Table 3
Votes in Favor of Admitting the Candidate According to Sacrifice and Source of Information

Source	Sacrifice		<i>t</i>
	Low	High	
Group member	38.5 ^a	84.6 ^b	61.5 [*]
Candidate	76.9 ^c	46.2 ^c	61.5
Total	57.7 [*]	65.4 [*]	

Note. All figures given as percentages within condition. Cells marked with differing letter superscripts significantly differ from one another in row and column-wise comparisons using crosstabs. * = *p* < .05; ** = *p* < .01.

source of influence. Therefore, it is likely that information from a high status person also matters in group admission decisions. To test this, Experiment 2 used the experimenter (an authority figure) to convey information about the candidate's reputation and compared this with the non-reputation condition from Experiment 1.

Of further interest to us was to examine other, group-level mechanisms that could influence entry decisions regarding candidate members. One such factor may be the presence of a *socialization system* in the group. Group socialization essentially comprises an indoctrination process by which newcomers are provided with the "knowledge, skills and motivation that he or she will need to play the role of a full group member"¹ (Moreland & Levine, 1982, p. 163). Typically, socialization takes the form of training or mentoring, although initiation ceremonies and informal social pressure are also sometimes used (Aronson & Mills, 1959; Lois, 1999; Moreland & Levine, 1989, 2000; Van Maanen, 1976). If there is a socialization procedure within a group, adhering to strict group admission criteria may be less important, because socialization is likely to increase newcomers' group commitment after their entry into the group (Moreland & Levine, 1982). Thus, we expect that if there is a socialization mechanism available, groups are more supportive of candidate members than when such a mechanism is unavailable, regardless of the reputation of these prospective members.

Method

Participants

Twenty-six males and 54 females Southampton University undergraduates were recruited for this study and compensated with course credit. Participants' mean age was 20 years ($SD = 2.32$) with a range from 18 to 34 years.

Design

Three independent variables were examined in this study. Level of sacrifice and source of information were manipulated in the same way as in Experiment 1; the only difference was the experimenter (as opposed to a fellow group member) acting as the third party in the reputation condition. In addition, a *socialization manipula-*

tion was added to the design, making an orthogonal 2 (sacrifice: high vs. low) \times 2 (source: reputation vs. nonreputation) \times 2 (socialization: absent vs. present) design in total. Participants were randomly assigned to one of these eight cells, and each cell consisted of 10 people.

The main dependent variables were the same as Experiment 1: perceived group commitment, desirability of candidates, and voting.

Procedure and Manipulations

We used a similar procedure as in the previous experiment. Participants were brought together in groups of three and worked on a series of anagram puzzles (again the group failed in 50% of the trials). They were then offered the opportunity to grant entry to a new member and received information about them.

Manipulations. The sacrifice manipulation was identical to that of Experiment 1, with groups being told how much the candidate was giving up to join the group. The source manipulation was also similar; here the same text from Experiment 1 was presented to participants, but this time was reported as coming from the experimenter rather than a fellow group member.

Following this, participants were informed about the socialization opportunity. Groups would be able to train new members in the anagram task to provide them with the skills and motivation to solve these puzzles. One group member would be responsible for the training and monitoring of the candidate during the task. The computer then decided (ostensibly at random) if there would be a socialization procedure for this group. Half of the participants worked in groups *with socialization* and half in groups *without socialization*.

The dependent measures were the same as in Experiment 1: (1) "How committed do you think the candidate is?" (given on a 6 point Likert-scale [rather than 10-point scale], from "not at all committed" [1] to "extremely committed" [6] with a higher score indicating

¹ Strictly speaking, socialization is seen by Moreland and Levine as a bi-directional process in which the group socializes the new member whilst the new member simultaneously socializes the group in a reciprocal fashion. However, for the purposes of this paper, we are interested only in ways in which the group can impinge on the candidate. See Moreland and Levine (1982, 2000).

greater perceived commitment); (2) “How much do you want the candidate to enter your group?” (0–100, with a higher number indicating a greater desire to have the candidate in the group); and (3) “Do you vote for this candidate to enter the group?” (0 = no, 1 = yes).

After this, the experiment was terminated and participants were again asked whether any aspect of the experiment seemed false, and to guess what the experimental hypotheses were, before being debriefed, paid, and dismissed.

Results

Perceived Commitment of Candidates

A 2 (sacrifice) × 2 (source) × 2 (socialization) ANOVA was conducted on the perceived commitment question. This yielded a significant sacrifice × source interaction, $F(1, 72) = 8.39, p < .01, \eta^2 = .09$, and two planned comparisons examined the differences in perceived commitment in each source condition. In the reputation condition (when the experimenter was the source) groups perceived candidates high in sacrifice as being more committed than those low in sacrifice. In the no reputation condition (when the candidate was the source), there were no differences in perceived commitment between the high and low sacrifice conditions (see Table 4).

There were no main effects for sacrifice, $F(1, 72) = 2.44, p = .12$, source ($F(1, 72) = .56, ns$) or socialization ($F(1, 72) = .24, ns$). There were also no gender effects so this factor was excluded from further analyses.

Table 4
Perceptions of Commitment in Candidate Members

Source	Sacrifice		<i>t</i>
	Low	High	
Experimenter	2.95 ^a (1.00)	3.85 ^b (.81)	3.16 ^{***}
Candidate	3.65 ^b (1.04)	3.45 ^b (.83)	.67
Total	2.17 [*]	1.54	

Note. Figures are participants’ responses to the item “how committed do you think the candidate is to the group” (given on a scale from 1 to 6 with a higher score indicating greater perceived commitment). Figures in brackets indicate *SD*. Cells marked with differing letter superscripts significantly differ from one another in row and column-wise comparisons using *t* tests. * = $p < .05$; *** = $p < .01$.

Desirability of Candidate

A 2 (sacrifice) × 2 (source) × 2 (socialization) ANOVA was conducted on the item “how much do you want the candidate in the group?” (0–100). This yielded a significant main effect for socialization ($F(1, 72) = 14.51, p < .001, \eta^2 = .15$) indicating that group members’ were more likely to want the candidate in the group when socialization was present ($M = 61.63, SD = 19.88$) than when it was absent ($M = 42.78, SD = 25.32$).

There were no main effects of sacrifice, $F(1, 72) = 2.48, p = .12$ or source ($F(1, 72) = .16, ns$); however, as in Experiment 1, the predicted sacrifice x source interaction was found, $F(1, 72) = 5.20, p < .05, \eta^2 = .05$. Planned comparisons indicated that in the reputation condition, the desirability of the candidate depended upon their sacrifice. Yet, in the nonreputation condition, desirability of the candidate did not increase with their higher (self-reported) sacrifice (see Table 5). No other interactions were significant. Finally, the correlation between the perceived commitment and the desirability of the candidate was moderately strong, $r(N = 80) = .37, p < .05$.

Admittance of Candidate

Finally, a logistic regression was carried out on the votes with the complete factorial design. This yielded a main effect for socialization, $\chi^2(1, N = 80) = 10.93, p < .01$, indicating that a socialization mechanism increases the likelihood of candidate admittance (with 80% of votes when socialization was present and only 45% of votes when socialization was absent). There was no main effect for sacrifice, $\chi^2(1, N = 80) = .99, ns$, nor for source, $\chi^2(1, N = 80) = .25, ns$. However, there was a significant sacrifice × source interaction, $\chi^2(1, N = 80) = 8.19, p < .01$. In the reputation condition, groups were significantly more likely to vote in favor of a high sacrifice candidate than a low sacrifice candidate, $\chi^2(N = 40) = 7.03, p < .05$. However, in the nonreputation condition, there was no significant difference in entry votes for high versus low sacrifice candidates, $\chi^2(N = 40) = 1.67, p = .33$ (see Table 6). No other interactions appeared.

Table 5
Desirability of Candidate Members

Source	Sacrifice		<i>t</i>
	Low	High	
Experimenter	41.75 ^a (20.98)	60.75 ^b (22.61)	2.73 ^{**}
Candidate	56.90 ^b (24.89)	49.40 ^b (26.60)	.92
Total	2.08 [*]	1.45	

Note. Figures are participants' responses to the item "how much do you want the candidate to enter your group?" (given on a scale from 1 to 100 with a higher score indicating greater desire). Figures in brackets indicate *SD*. Cells marked with differing letter superscripts significantly differ from one another in row and column-wise comparisons using *t* tests. * = $p < .05$; ** = $p < .01$.

General Discussion

The main aim of this article was to investigate to what extent groups use reputational information to assess the suitability of candidate members. In two experiments, we found that when groups received third-party (reputation) information about candidate members this affected their judgments and preferences for the candidate more than when they received the *same* (nonreputation) information from the candidates themselves. This research thus shows the power of reputations in group admission decisions.

Reputation Dimensions

Reputations appear to be persuasive in the admission of new group members. When groups are concerned about who they allow entry, they may be interested to know what others say about candidate members, especially if they are deemed to be reliable sources. Our research suggests that reputational cues about people's sacrifice appear to be particularly influential. This effect may be because of the link that groups perceive between an individual's sacrifice and their group commitment, a reliable indicator of people's willingness to contribute to groups (Moreland & Levine, 1982). Yet, there may be other indicators. Morality information, for example, is often seen as diagnostic of people's behavior in group situations in which there is a temptation to free-ride (De Bruin & Van Lange, 1999, 2000). Groups may also attend to reputational information concerning important personality dimensions, for example, Big-Five factors like agreeableness, consci-

entiousness, extraversion, neuroticism, and openness to experience.

Groups may also attend to *specific* reputational cues. If a group task requires a certain level of skill or competence, groups may attend to distinct reputational cues that are diagnostic of these abilities (Wanous, 1980; Zander, 1976). For example, in anagram tasks, groups may also be interested in information about candidates' intelligence, dexterity, or visual/spatial reasoning.

Finally, it is possible that negative reputations might be more important than positive reputations because of a *negativity bias* (for some examples, see Reeder & Spores, 1983; Tversky & Kahneman, 1981), whereby negative information is weighted more heavily than positive information. De Bruin and Van Lange (2000) found that when presented with negative personality information about a partner, people were less motivated to examine subsequent positive information, because they felt it was less diagnostic of the partner's behavior. Clearly then, reputations are extremely diverse, and in subsequent research, we aim to look further at how reputations affect group admission decisions across different tasks.

Group Socialization

Another important finding is that when groups can socialize new members, they are more likely to admit an individual when they need them, regardless of a candidate's level of commitment or their reputation. This suggests that socialization can increase the attractiveness of any candidate members regardless of whether they are perceived to be low or high in group commitment.

From a practical perspective, this allows groups greater scope in acquiring new members

Table 6
Votes in Favor of Admitting the Candidate According to Sacrifice and Source of Information

Source	Sacrifice		<i>t</i>
	Low	High	
Experimenter	45 ^a	85 ^b	65 ^{**}
Candidate	70 ^c	50 ^c	60
Total	55 [*]	70 [*]	

Note. Figures given as percentages within conditions. Cells marked with differing letter superscripts significantly differ from one another in row and column-wise comparisons using crosstabs. * = $p < .05$; ** = $p < .01$.

as they are more confident to admit perhaps less qualified candidates if there is group socialization. Thus, through socialization procedures groups increase the pool size of potential members to draw from, making staffing shortages less likely to emerge. This finding also shows that individuals (even when they are in ad hoc laboratory groups) give thoughtful consideration to entry decisions, factoring in both the qualities of the candidate as well as the structural support facilities within the group.

A caveat should be made here. As the experimental manipulation of socialization contained both the training *and* monitoring of newcomers, it is difficult to discern whether the obtained effects are the result of one or both of these components. Groups may have been more supportive of candidates in the presence of socialization, because they were confident that the candidate would have the skills (training) or the motivation to do well (monitoring). We do not know which factor was decisive, yet given the simplicity of the task we assume it was the monitoring rather than the training aspect that weighted more heavily. In summary, we conclude that the presence of a structural socialization mechanism in a group improves people's chances of becoming group members, and this is probably the first experimental demonstration.

Suggestions for Future Research and Final Conclusions

In summary then, this paper offered some opening arguments to a relatively new area of research, that is, the role of *reputations* in group selection processes. The results of these two experiments suggest reputations are influential in group admission decisions. Yet, structural factors, such as the opportunity to socialize new group members, may also increase the likelihood of candidate entry, independent of other information that is offered.

It is also worth making some comments regarding the influence of information given by candidates themselves. Although the difference in values were nonsignificant, participants did generally tend to give more positive ratings and more often grant entry to low sacrifice candidates than high sacrifice candidates in the non-reputation conditions. This may be because of the fact that bragging is often viewed as a rather

unfavorable personality trait, reducing the perceived desirability of candidates who engage in such behavior (Holtgraves & Srull, 1989). Conversely, modesty or humility is often viewed in a favorable light (Wojciszke, Bazinska, & Jaworski, 1998); therefore, group members may find candidates who play down their good qualities more personable, increasing their desirability. These conclusions are only tentative however, as the data in these studies are insufficient to offer more concrete conclusions on this topic.

With regard to future studies, it is worth noting that although a social phenomenon was under investigation here, participants did not actually interact with one another. This protocol was instigated to maintain scientific rigour and reduce extraneous variables; furthermore, participants did *believe* they were undergoing a social interaction with other members. However, computer-mediated interactions do often show marked differences between face-to-face communications such as more extreme opinion formation, slower trust development, and restricted access to social cues (Hancock & Dunham, 2001; Tanis & Postmes, 2003). Because of this, and to improve overall ecological validity, these experiments and their findings would benefit from confirmation in further, less restrictive studies.

In addition to this, in the current studies participants had no real reason to disbelieve the information provided by third-party sources. An interesting extension to this study may therefore be to supply information from a third party source that a group had reason to believe *may* deceive them; for example, a member of a rival out-group. Furthermore, Dynamic Social Impact theory (Latane, 1981, 1996) argues that the number of individuals espousing an opinion greatly increases its influence over those exposed to it. Based on this, the influence of *multiple sources* of information may be an important consideration. In real-life, we frequently have to consider the opinions of many people when judging another person and these opinions may not always agree (cf. Emler, 1990; Harries, Yaniv, & Harvey, 2004). Therefore, we would like to expose group members to different (possibly conflicting) pieces of information about a candidate. How this information is reconciled should then provide us with further insight into the role of reputations in the acquisition of new group members.

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Appendix

*Commitment Manipulations in Experiments One and Two**High Sacrifice With Third Party as the Information Source*

“The candidate has done very well in the task so far in terms of earning money. I think they could earn a lot more money if they continued in their current task. But he has made it clear that he wants to give up his earnings by joining your group. I believe that this is true. It is my belief they are giving up a great deal to join your group, and are making a significant sacrifice to become a member.”

Low Sacrifice With a Third Party as the Information Source

“The candidate has not done very well in the task so far in terms of earning money. I don’t think they would earn a lot of money if they continued with this task, certainly not compared to what they would get if they joined your group. The candidate does not give up much by joining your group. I believe that this is the reason why he wants to join your group. It is my belief that they are not giving up anything to join your group, and are making no significant sacrifices to become a member.”

High Sacrifice With the Candidate as the Information Source

“I have done very well in the task so far in terms of earning money. I think I could earn a lot more money if I continued in my current task. But I want to give up my earnings and join this new group. I am giving up a great deal to join your group, and am making a significant sacrifice to become a member.”

Low Sacrifice With the Candidate as the Information Source

“I have not done very well in the task so far in terms of earning money. I don’t think I would earn a lot of money if I continued with this task, certainly not compared to what I would get if I joined this new group. I’m not giving up much to join the new group; that’s the reasons I want to join. I am not giving up anything to join your group and am making no significant sacrifice to become a member.”

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