

# Identity Entrepreneurship and the Consequences of Identity Failure: The Dynamics of Leadership in the BBC Prison Study\*

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*The BBC Prison Study was an experimental case study in which participants were randomly assigned to groups as prisoners or guards. This paper examines the impact of interventions designed to increase prisoners' sense of shared social identity on processes of leadership. It presents psychometric, behavioral, and observational data which support the propositions that (a) social identity makes leadership possible, (b) effective leadership facilitates the development of social identity, and (c) the long-term success and failure of leadership depends on the viability of identity-related projects. The study also points to the role of identity failure in precipitating change in general and the emergence of authoritarian leadership in particular. Findings provide integrated support for claims that social identity and self-categorization processes are fundamental to the leadership process and associated experiences of collective efficacy.*

*I'd like to see it go forward in harmony—irrespective of our race, colour, creed, religion, political points of views, etc., etc. I'd like everyone to move forward and to discuss these things and see where we come out at the end of the day. I'd like to think that we would all come out friends. And I'd like to think that we'll all come out a little bit more tolerant and educated towards our fellow men. (PB<sub>p</sub>—addressing other participants in the BBC Prison Study)*

*It takes strong leaders to implement order, and I know it's harsh at first, like in Russia when Stalin took over. It did bring the people together. I know it became an oppressive state, but that was the normal breakdown of things. But it moved things forward and, you know, that's the way life is. (PB<sub>p</sub>—speaking to the experimenters later in the study)*

This paper seeks to explore three theoretical propositions related to the process of leadership: (1) that leadership of a group depends upon members of that group sharing a consensual social identity, (2) that leaders can play an important part in developing a shared and consensual social identity, and (3) that the relationship between these first two facets is rooted in social reality.

In this way, our concern lies in the dynamic relationship between leadership, social identity, and social reality. We are particularly interested in the way that this relationship evolves over time, and in how and why identity and leadership projects change. A key question raised by our research is why groups that have previously embraced democratic identities and democratic leadership lose faith in these structures and instead turn towards more autocratic solutions. In concrete terms we can look at the two statements with which this paper is prefaced—both of which were articulated by the same participant in our study (PB<sub>p</sub>)—and ask “What trajectory takes a person from the first leadership vision to the second?”

Interest in the interplay between these various elements, particularly the relationship between agency and structure in models of

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leadership, has escalated dramatically in recent years. For instance, within the literature on social movements, it is increasingly recognized that leaders do not simply respond to existing identities and opportunities, but that they “offer frames, tactics, and organizational vehicles that allow participants to construct a collective identity and participate in collective action at various levels” (Morris and Staggenborg 2004:180)—thereby also reconfiguring the opportunity structure. In this way, leaders are critical to the success of social movements. Within that body of psychological research informed by social identity and self-categorization theories (Tajfel and Turner 1979; Turner et al. 1987, 1994), there is also an emerging consensus on some core ideas about leadership (e.g., see Haslam 2004; Hogg and van Knippenberg 2004; Turner and Haslam 2001). In particular, a large body of evidence suggests (a) that leadership is contingent upon leaders being perceived as prototypical of a social identity that they share with followers (Hogg 2001; Turner 1991), (b) that in order to be influential and effective, leaders need to represent and define social identity in context (Haslam and Platow 2001; Platow et al. 1997; Platow and van Knippenberg 2001), and (c) that in order to satisfy these demands, leaders need to be active entrepreneurs of social identity (Reicher and Hopkins 1996, 2003; Reicher, Haslam and Hopkins 2005).

While the corpus of empirical work used to advance these claims is quite large and growing all the time, (e.g., see Ellemers, de Gilder, and Haslam 2004; Haslam 2004; van Knippenberg and Hogg 2003), this research has focused mainly on the capacity for leaders to receive support or to exert influence as a function of the extent to which their behavior embodies characteristics of a pre-existing identity shared by putative followers (the research participants) in a particular setting. To select just one study as an example, in Platow et al.’s (1997) research, the independent variable was the apparent decision by a (male) leader to allocate resources to people who did or did not share national identity with research participants at a New Zealand university. The dependent variable was the extent to which those participants supported the leader

(Experiments 1 to 3) and were willing to go along with his policy suggestions (Experiment 3). As predicted, support and influence depended on the extent to which the leader had displayed ingroup favoritism (i.e., allocating more resources to New Zealanders) rather than even-handedness, and was thus perceived by participants to embody relevant ingroup norms.

Although research of this form has garnered impressive support for hypotheses derived from the social identity approach to leadership, it also has a number of significant limitations. First, while confirming that leaders’ influence derives from the relative prototypicality and normativity of their messages with respect to a given identity, there is a relative neglect in the implicit and logically prior assumption that the very possibility of leadership depends upon the existence (or creation) of a shared social identity (Haslam, Postmes, and Ellemers 2003; Haslam and Reicher 2007). In experimental studies, such identities (e.g., as a New Zealander or a student of a particular university) exist (or are assumed to exist) *a priori* and are mechanically invoked for experimental purposes. In practice, though, it is clear that leaders ‘on the ground’ typically have the practical task of creating or manipulating such identities in order to affirm their own leadership and for that leadership to succeed. How shared social identity is achieved and the extent to which it proves effective remain core empirical questions.

Second, while it is explicitly assumed that leaders are active agents in the process of promoting their own prototypicality (e.g., Reicher and Hopkins 1996), the actual behavior studied in experimental research tends, almost exclusively, to be that of followers. Indeed, because the behavior of leaders is usually manipulated by the experimenter, it is generally passive, static, and taken-for-granted rather than in any sense *active*. The need to retain control over relevant theoretical variables and to eliminate potential experimental confounds account for this empirical strategy and make good sense in these terms. Nevertheless, the consequence is an analytic imbalance such that leadership is understood more through the behavior of followers than through the activi-

ties of leaders. Indeed, one somewhat ironic result is that much of the research that routinely provides insights into leadership might more appropriately be seen as helping to understand followership (Hollander 1995).

Of course, there is an ample literature across the social sciences examining what leaders do and, more particularly, how they shape identities (e.g. Ahmed 1997; Barker, Johnson and Lavalette 2001; Morris and Staggengborg 2004). Within the social identity tradition, Reicher and Hopkins (1996, 2003; Reicher et al. 2005) have drawn particular inspiration from Besson's (1990) notion that leaders are 'entrepreneurs of identity'. Through detailed examination of politicians' speeches, their work draws on social identity and self-categorization theories to examine the processes through which social identity shapes collective action. In particular, this investigation shows how the identity entrepreneurship of political leaders centers around the rhetorical ability to construe social categories that affirm their own leadership credentials. This point is illustrated in speeches delivered by Margaret Thatcher and Neil Kinnock to the British political parties that they were leaders of during the British Miners' Strike of 1984–5. These speeches were analyzed, and in both cases the language employed served to construe the events surrounding the strike so that (a) the leader's party could be seen as representative of a positively defined ingroup which, unlike the negatively defined outgroup, encompassed almost the entire population (e.g., 'a moderate and responsible majority . . . fighting for great and good causes' opposed to an 'organized revolutionary minority' of 'thugs and bullies'; Reicher and Hopkins 1996:360–361) and (b) the policies that the leader advocated (e.g., conflict with the miners) were consonant with the definition of that ingroup identity.

However, in stark contrast to experimental research, the work of Reicher and Hopkins relies predominantly on observational and qualitative data rather than controlled manipulation and quantitative measurement. This contributes to an analytic skew which has complementary properties to those of experimental studies. Here there is an analysis of

leaders' behavior, but little or no analysis of its impact on followers, which is assumed rather than assessed. There is also an examination of the ways in which leader–follower identities are negotiated in an ongoing fashion, but no attempt (or capacity) to control the theoretical variables that bring those identities into play.

Considered together, these two approaches to leadership research successfully explore the two sides of the leadership process. On the one hand, it is apparent that leadership and followership flow from shared identity, while, on the other hand, leaders work to create and manage social identity. Yet while the integrated understanding that this work contributes to is widely accepted, it is clear that, to date, the two sides of this analysis have been examined in isolation and in very different ways. Significantly, then, no prior research has studied these two sides of the process simultaneously in order to explore the dynamic interplay between active leadership and responsive followership.

As a consequence, there is a need for research which attempts such integration: not only to ensure that the two sides of the analysis are empirically compatible, but also to gain potential insights that may be concealed through their analytic estrangement. At a theoretical level, such research is important in order to understand the dialectic relationship between (a) leadership as constrained by existing social identities and (b) leadership as creative of social identities. At a methodological level, this work requires the development of an empirical strategy to accommodate both quantitative and qualitative analysis. The strategy should also attempt to marry the benefits of experimental manipulation with those of fine-grained analysis of leader and follower behavior.

In order to fully understand this reciprocal relationship between social identity and leadership, it is necessary to add another term to the analysis: *social reality* (Oakes, Haslam, and Turner 1994; Reicher 2001). Social identity relates to the organization of reality, both in the sense that it (a) reflects existing forms of social organization and (b) envisages desired forms of social organization (seen, for example, in the way that

nationalism is both a reflection of the world of nations and a political project that allows new nations to be created). Hence in social identity definition, there is always a balance between existing constraints and future possibilities (Drury and Reicher 2005; Reicher 1996, 2001; Reicher, Drury, Hopkins, and Stott 2001).

Critically, leadership is bound up with this balance as it concerns the way that social identity is harnessed to create new social and material realities. Although much research focuses either on what we think of leaders or on how leaders affect what we think, leadership is, above all, a practical matter. It is primarily about getting people to do things. The way in which people are moved to action is by offering a vision of who they are and how their world should be. If, in the short term, the success of a leader depends upon followers accepting this vision as valid, then, in the long term, success depends upon it being realized in practice. Would-be leaders can only create new identities to the extent that they can mobilize potential followers to create new social realities in their image. The balance between constraint and creativity is therefore a negotiation between having to accommodate existing social practices and having the ability to fashion new social practices (Advares-Yorno, Postmes, and Haslam, forthcoming).

Put together, the above points make a case for wanting to conduct research to study the dynamics of leadership, social identity, and social reality as they develop over time. Yet whatever the conceptual validity of such a project, it is very difficult to realize in practical terms. Indeed, one major reason why research into such dynamics has rarely been attempted is that the logistical demands of setting up a study to examine them are quite daunting. Amongst other things, such a study would ideally (a) examine active not just reactive processes (e.g., by looking at ongoing behavior rather than just one-shot responses), (b) allow for the possibility of both individual and collective action, and (c) explore intra- and inter-group dynamics as they evolve over time.<sup>1</sup> Indeed, it is worth noting that the

demands of conducting such research (as well as the attendant difficulties of analyzing and publishing data) have meant that studies with these features are increasingly rare. In contrast to 'classic' studies of yesteryear (e.g., Haney, Banks and Zimbardo 1973; Sherif 1956), contemporary research demonstrates little study of interaction, let alone diachronic investigation of patterns of interaction as they unfold (Haslam and McGarty 2001; Levine 2003).

Nevertheless, the present authors, in collaboration with the British Broadcasting Company, conducted a study with the unique ability to provide such analysis and integrate the study of leadership with a broad and intensive examination of group functioning (the BBC; Haslam and Reicher 2005; 2006a; Reicher and Haslam 2006a; 2006b). One distinctive feature of the study was that participants were unobtrusively filmed throughout, with key footage subsequently edited and broadcast by the BBC in the form of four one-hour television documentaries, entitled *The Experiment* (Koppel and Mirsky 2002).

In the study 15 participants were randomly assigned to either a high- or low-status group in a closed institutional environment (as guards or prisoners in a specially constructed 'prison'). Their behavior was studied closely over a period of eight days. The goal of the research was to provide an integrated test of social identity theory in the form of an experimental case study. This goal was achieved by manipulating factors that were predicted to influence the prisoners' degree of social identification and examining their impact on the behavior of both groups, as well as on the functioning of the social system as a whole.

At the start of the study, participants were led to believe that the boundaries between high- and low-status groups were permeable and that, subject to appropriate conduct, promotion from prisoner to guard was possible. In line with a core prediction of social identity theory (Tajfel and Turner 1979), at this stage prisoners were expected to pursue a strategy of individual mobility and attempt to enhance their status by working individually

<sup>1</sup> Sherif's (1956) Boys' Camp Studies were probably

the last experimental case study that explored the unfolding interaction between group dynamics and leadership.

to gain favor with the guards and prove themselves worthy of promotion (Ellemers 1993; Wright, Taylor, and Moghaddam 1990).

However, following this, opportunities for promotion were ruled out (i.e., group boundaries were made impermeable). It was expected that this would increase prisoners' sense of shared social identity and encourage them to develop a more collective response to their situation. Finally, a trade union leader was introduced as a new prisoner (and subsequently withdrawn) in the expectation that he would propose an alternative vision of existing conditions. Specifically, it was anticipated that he would encourage the prisoners to redefine their current situation as illegitimate and unstable (i.e., providing a set of cognitive and practical alternatives that would lead them to see their status position as insecure; Tajfel and Turner 1979), and unite the prisoners around a collective identity and a plan for social change. These predictions accord with a body of previous research which has demonstrated (a) that because their identity tends (in the absence of boundary permeability) to be defined oppositionally, low-status groups are more likely to develop shared identity than high-status groups (e.g., Melucci 1995; Simon and Brown 1987), (b) that social identification is a necessary precursor to collective action (and tends to be enhanced by factors of the form manipulated in our study; e.g., Kelly and Breinlinger 1996; Simon and Klandermans 2001; Stryker, Owens, and White 2000; Veenstra and Haslam, 2000; Wright et al. 1990), and (c) that legitimacy is critical to processes of social identification and leader endorsement (e.g., Tyler 2006).

Results on social psychological and clinical measures have been reported elsewhere (Haslam and Reicher 2006b, 2006c; Reicher and Haslam 2006b). In the present paper, though, we focus on the ways in which leadership did (and did not) emerge in the study and on the inter-relationship between (a) leadership, (b) social identity, and (c) features of social and structural context.

It is important to acknowledge from the outset that our use of experimental case study methodology necessarily places certain limits upon the conclusions we can draw with regard

to these issues. Most notably, the wealth of variables involved makes it impossible to draw definitive support for specific hypotheses and to rule out alternative explanations of particular findings. Nonetheless, and particularly in the light of the lacunae we have identified in the literature, we believe that this disadvantage is more than offset by the advantages of the case study method. First, it is still possible to establish whether data are (or are not) consonant with our claims and hence to disconfirm them. For instance, if leadership is argued to be dependent upon shared social identity (as it is above), then this argument would clearly be undermined if the study were to yield evidence of leadership in the absence of shared social identity (Popper 1972). Second, a case study can provide detailed insights into the manner in which factors (such as social identity) impact upon social action. In this way, the case study *generates* hypotheses that can subsequently be tested in more systematic analysis (an aspect of the research process which tends to be neglected and undervalued; Blumer 1969). Finally, case studies have the capacity to shed light on complex inter-relationships between factors and to examine how these relationships develop over time. In light of the fact that static research methods tend to (re)produce static and one-sided theoretical models, we have already noted the importance of such a dynamic analysis for the understanding of leadership.

With these strengths and limitations in mind, our analysis explores three propositions derived from the theoretical position outlined above:

*Proposition 1:* The emergence of leadership is related to the development of a shared social identity.

*Proposition 2:* Leadership serves to facilitate the development of shared social identity.

*Proposition 3:* The success of leaders relates (i) to their ability to convince others to accept their proposals as valid expressions of group identity, and (ii) to their ability to create a social reality which corresponds to their definition of social identity.

As well as allowing data relating to these propositions to be collected on multiple occa-

sions, a distinctive feature of the study was that it was possible to obtain data on a broad range of measures. In particular, in addition to self-report measures (e.g., of social identification, perceived leadership, and preferred leadership style), participants were under round-the-clock surveillance, and this made it possible to triangulate psychometric data with data obtained from behavioral observation (both by the researchers and by independent viewers). Amongst other things, we hoped that this might bring to light some novel leadership-related consequences of social identity dynamics.

## METHOD

### Ethics

The study aimed to create a system of intergroup inequality that was meaningful, but not harmful either physically or mentally to participants. In order to ensure that this was the case, a range of safeguards were built into the study. These included (a) three-phase clinical, medical, and background screening to ensure that participants were neither psychologically vulnerable nor liable to put others at risk, (b) round-the-clock monitoring of participants by clinical psychologists, (c) paramedic and security guards on call at all times, and (d) an independent five-person ethics committee monitoring proceedings throughout with the power to change or terminate the study at any time. This panel was chaired by a British Member of Parliament and included a senior academic psychologist, the chief adviser of the BBC's independent Editorial Policy Unit, and representatives from the Howard League for Penal Reform and the Holocaust Memorial and Education Centre.

### Participants, Procedure, and Description of Key Events

Participants in the study were 15 adult men drawn from a larger pool of 332 applicants in order to ensure diversity of age, social class, and ethnic background. They were randomly divided into two groups: 5 as guards, 10 as prisoners.

The study created a hierarchical institution in which people would live for up to 10 days. It was conducted within a purpose-built prison-like environment that had been constructed inside Elstree Film Studios in North London. Prisoners were assigned to lockable three-person cells that were located off a central atrium with an adjoining communal shower. A lockable partition separated the prisoners from the guards' quarters, comprised of a dormitory, bathroom, and mess room. The environment was designed in such a way that participants could be unobtrusively observed and heard (and video- and audio-recorded) wherever they were at all times. Comprehensive details of the procedures are available in Haslam and Reicher (2006c) or from the authors. The following description outlines key features of the study pertaining to issues of social identity and leadership.

At the start of the study, the boundaries between guard and prisoner groups were permeable. Specifically, participants were told that group assignment was not fixed and that it was likely that one of the prisoners (the one who guards perceived to be most suitable) would be promoted to the guard group. This promotion took place on Day 3. After this, further promotion was ruled out, making group boundaries impermeable. As predicted, this had the effect of increasing the sense of shared identity among the prisoners as well as their collective resistance to the guards and their regime. Unexpectedly, prior to this point, several guards were wary of assuming and exerting their authority and were ambivalent about their assigned identity. As a consequence, the guards did not develop a strong sense of shared social identity. This ambivalence became more pronounced once promotion was ruled out and the prisoners' resistance increased.

On Day 5 a new prisoner ( $DM_p$ )<sup>2</sup> with a professional background as a senior negotiator in a large British Trades Union was introduced into the prison. The participants were not told anything about him prior to his introduction to the study. However, once he

<sup>2</sup>  $p$  indicates a prisoner,  $g$  indicates a guard.

arrived, he was expected to introduce a new way of thinking about intergroup relations (a set of cognitive and practical alternatives; Tajfel and Turner 1979) that would encourage the prisoners to see the status relations between prisoners and guards as insecure (i.e., illegitimate and unstable).

On the morning of Day 6,  $DM_p$  was withdrawn from the study because we were interested in the impact of the ideas he had introduced upon the subsequent dynamics of the study. After he left, the prisoners' resistance increased to the point where, on Day 7, prisoners in Cell 2 broke out of their cells and into the guards' quarters. At this point, the prisoner-guard system was no longer viable and the participants proposed the formation of a 'self-governing, self-disciplining Commune' in which they all worked together as a single group. This was accepted by the experimenters and the Commune lasted for a day and a half until the termination of the study (for a video record of key events see Koppel and Mirsky 2002; for a detailed written account see Haslam and Reicher 2006; Reicher and Haslam 2006a).

Every day during the study, participants completed a battery of psychometric measures. However, to minimize response fatigue, different measures were completed on different days.

### Leadership Measures

In addition to behavioral observation, there were two key psychometric measures of leadership process. The first was a single-item measure of perceived leadership among each of the prison groups (Do you think there is a leader (or leaders) among the prisoners? Do you think there is a leader (or leaders) among the guards?). This was administered on Day 2 and Day 6.

The second was a four-item measure of belief in authoritarian leadership (A good leader can't afford to sit around talking; A leader should always be a good listener (reversed); A good leader will persuade rather than bully (reversed); A leader will act more like a friend than a boss (reversed)). This was administered on Day 2, Day 4, and Day 6.

### The Impact of Interventions on Social Identification

The impact of the above manipulations on participants' social identification with their ingroup was assessed by means of a six-item measure (e.g., 'I identify with the [prisoners/guards]; after Doosje, Ellemers, and Spears 1995). Participants responded to all items on seven-point scales with appropriately labeled end-points (1 = 'do not agree at all' to 7 = 'agree completely'). As reported elsewhere (Reicher and Haslam 2006a), social identification varied interactively as a function of group and phase,  $F(5,55) = 3.05$ ,  $p < .05$ ,  $\eta^2 = .22$ . As predicted, social identification among the prisoners increased linearly as the study progressed,  $t(7) = 2.46$ ,  $p < .05$ . On the other hand, identification among the guards declined as the study progressed, but non-significantly,  $t(4) = -.77$ , ns.

## RESULTS

The following results are organized as a function of the three propositions developed in the introduction. Data from different sources (qualitative, quantitative, and observational) will be brought together in relation to each of these propositions.

### P1. Shared Social Identity and the Emergence of Leadership

The consequences for leadership of having (vs. not having) a sense of shared social identity are clearly illustrated in the following two extracts. The first is taken from a meeting between prisoners and guards on Day 5. Earlier that day, a prisoner ( $PB_p$ ) had stolen a set of the guards' keys. The new prisoner,  $DM_p$ , had been elected as the prisoners' representative (along with  $JE_p$  as his deputy) and was negotiating the return of the keys in return for certain concessions:

#### *Extract 1*

$DM_p$ : We're giving you the opportunity to avoid a one-to-one personal confrontation. By doing this collectively I'm going to get you the keys. I didn't steal the keys, now you've got to believe me on that.

*TA<sub>g</sub>*: We should have looked after the keys, but we got a bit too trusting and because of that one of your lads—one of your lads, as in one of your members—nicked the keys. And now you're basically saying to us: 'we'll give you the keys back, if you give us something in return'.

*DM<sub>p</sub>*: Alright. OK. Let's tell you our position on that: nobody has got your keys. Is that what you want? Because that's the position that's going to prevail if I go out of here and I say, you know, there's no broad agreement on this. And it'll not be the keys tomorrow, it'll be something else.

Throughout this extract, *DM<sub>p</sub>* talks confidently for his group and is persuasive that what he says is what the group will do (or not do): if he says that the guards' refusal to cooperate will lead to retention of the keys and to continued subversion by the prisoners, then that will happen. As a consequence, despite being in a numerical minority in the room, *DM<sub>p</sub>* (and the position of the prisoners) prevails. This is a simple and obvious example of leadership, a leadership whose effectiveness derives from the presumption of group consensus.

In contrast, the second extract exemplifies what happened when the guards met to plan their upcoming negotiations with *DM<sub>p</sub>* and to decide who would speak for them in the meeting:

### Extract 2

*TM<sub>g</sub>*: I think [*BG<sub>g</sub>*] or [*FC<sub>g</sub>*] would be a good spokesman because of their nature . . .

*TQ<sub>g</sub>*: I would like to be considered as well—I see it as my dream job.

*TM<sub>g</sub>*: Yeah and me as well, but I know I'm going to just rack on for ages and I think that with my personality, I think, I mean no disrespect to anyone here and even to myself, but I know my personality, I'd . . .

*TQ<sub>g</sub>*: I think I'm just born to do that.

*TM<sub>g</sub>*: OK then why don't we just, why don't we have a ballot and decide on it that way?

*TQ<sub>g</sub>*: You say a first and a second?

*TM<sub>g</sub>*: Yeah. Write down first, write down second on the same sheet. The first gets two points, sec-

ond gets one point. We add up the points. Now obviously it doesn't mean that anyone's the leader of anyone else . . .

*TQ<sub>g</sub>*: No it's a spokesman, it's a courier.

*TA<sub>g</sub>*: OK then, write it down. Is it a secret?

Here, not only do the guards disagree about who should be leader, they also disagree about the very idea of leadership. Rather than being a group, the guards are simply a collection of competing personalities, each advocating different positions and unable to secure the support of others. As a result, no one is prepared to allow anyone to instruct others or to suppose that they can speak for others. Indeed, no one can represent the group because there is no idea of a shared group to be represented.

The disempowering effects of this lack of group identity are clear in the next extract where all the guards met together with a single prisoner, *JE<sub>p</sub>*. Just after the promotion, at lunch on Day 4, *JE<sub>p</sub>* had initiated a confrontation between prisoners and guards by throwing his food to the floor. Later that afternoon, the guards summoned him to their quarters:

### Extract 3

*TM<sub>g</sub>*: We've had our disciplinary meeting and it's been decided that you'll spend tomorrow one-and-a-half hours in the isolation cell.

*TQ<sub>g</sub>*: Or you can take it tonight, if you want to do it tonight.

*JE<sub>p</sub>*: And if I refuse?

[Several guards start speaking and talking over each other]

*TM<sub>g</sub>*: If you refuse . . .

*TQ<sub>g</sub>*: If you refuse . . .

*BG<sub>g</sub>*: If you refuse . . .

*TM<sub>g</sub>*: If you refuse, then we take you back to your cell . . .

*TQ<sub>g</sub>*: We'll take you back to your cell . . .

*JE<sub>p</sub>*: First of all, first of all, can I say, who is handling this disciplinary meeting? Because I'm

speaking to three different people here and I'm not sure as to who . . .

[Several guards start speaking and talking over each other]

*BG<sub>g</sub>*: No it has to be . . .

*TQ<sub>g</sub>*: No there is a consensus . . .

*BG<sub>g</sub>*: Mr E., by consensus of opinion . . .

*JE<sub>p</sub>*: Yeah if I'm going to be asked a question, can I have one person answer it please?

*BG<sub>g</sub>*: I'm not asking the questions. One of the rules on our side is the fact that there is no display of aggression or physical violence. You did display aggression.

*JE<sub>p</sub>*: Can I suggest something before I leave? Because I think it's a very valid point.

*TA<sub>g</sub>*: Very quickly please.

*JE<sub>p</sub>*: It's been very confusing, this disciplinary meeting.

*TA<sub>g</sub>*: Of course, it's our first one.

*JE<sub>p</sub>*: Can I suggest something—that maybe if you're going to ask any questions, one of you ask them, if you've got any questions that maybe you make a note of them and one person ask them. Because this has been a nightmare for me.

*TQ<sub>g</sub>*: We understand if it's . . .

*JE<sub>p</sub>*: This has been an absolute nightmare. I'm listening to you [points to *TQ<sub>g</sub>*], I'm listening to you [points to *TM<sub>g</sub>*], [*IB<sub>g</sub>*] hasn't said anything, and it's difficult to deal with.

In this extract, each individual guard has a different notion of how the guards as a group should be acting; each fears what the others will do and seeks to preempt their actions. Thus, different guards constantly interrupt each other, drown each other out, and make differing suggestions. As a consequence, their numbers work against them rather than for them. The lone prisoner, *JE<sub>p</sub>*, is able to take control of the meeting and dictate to the guards rather than vice-versa.

However, it isn't just that the guards do not have leadership while the prisoners do.

The prisoners also become increasingly aware of the guards' lack of leadership. This is quite explicit in Extract 4 below, which is part of an interaction between *DM<sub>p</sub>* and his cellmates very shortly after he entered the prison on Day 5:

#### Extract 4

*DM<sub>p</sub>*: What is the hierarchy? All of the guards are of equal status, are they?

*FC<sub>p</sub>*: At the moment, yeah. They haven't organized themselves into a leader and pack or anything.

*DM<sub>p</sub>*: Who do you negotiate with if you want something?

*FC<sub>p</sub>*: Any of them.

*DM<sub>p</sub>*: [quizzically] Any of them?

These observational data can be corroborated further by quantitative analysis. Specifically, we can turn to data concerning both (a) participants' and (b) observers' perceptions of leadership amongst prisoners and guards. To look at participants' perceptions first, responses on the measure of perceived group leadership were subjected to a 2 (assigned group) × 2 (phase) × 2 (rated group) analysis of variance with repeated measures on the last two factors.<sup>3</sup> This analysis revealed a significant and large effect<sup>4</sup> for rated group,  $F(1,11) = 7.97, p < .02, \eta^2 = .42$ . This was qualified by a significant and large interaction between rated group and assigned group,  $F(1,11) = 7.97, p < .02, \eta^2 = .42$ , and a

<sup>3</sup> Given the interaction between participants, it could be argued that the group rather than the individual group member should be the unit of analysis here. For this reason, the present data were also analyzed using methods developed by McGarty and Smithson (2005) that do not require independence of observations. These analyses confirmed the reliability of the various patterns reported here.

<sup>4</sup> Given the small number of participants, the study inevitably has a low level of statistical power. In light of this, statistical significance was considered in conjunction with effect size (Cohen 1977). For all analyses effects were only considered meaningful when, as well as being significant at conventional levels ( $\eta = .05$ ), effect size was large by Cohen's (1977, p. 283) criteria (i.e.,  $\eta^2 > .14$ ).

marginally significant but large interaction between rated group and phase,  $F(1,11) = 3.99, p = .07, \eta^2 = .27$ .

Means are presented in Figure 1. Tests of simple effects to decompose the interaction between rated group and assigned group revealed that this arose from the fact that, in the study as a whole, the prisoners perceived more leadership among the guards than among the prisoners ( $M_s = 3.75, 2.62$ , respectively),  $t(8) = 4.28, p < .01$ , but there was no such effect for the guards ( $M_s = 2.70, 2.70$ , respectively),  $t(8) = 0.00, p = 1$ .

More relevant to our claim that leadership depends upon shared social identification, similar tests were conducted to decompose the interaction between rated group and phase. These indicated that this arose from the fact that there was a significant difference in the perceived leadership of the guards and the prisoners on Day 2 ( $M_s = 3.64, 2.21$ , respectively),  $t(13) = 3.07, p < .01$ , but no such difference on Day 6 (indeed the pattern here had slightly reversed ( $M_s = 2.86, 3.00$ , respectively),  $t(13) = 0.33, p = .7$ ). As Figure 1 demonstrates, this second interaction mirrored changes in the two groups' social identification over time. As the guards' sense of shared

social identity declined, this was reflected in a decline in the sense that they had a leader; as the prisoners' sense of shared identity increased, the sense that they had a leader also increased.

Second, we examined the extent to which independent observers felt that the groups had leaders. A questionnaire was distributed to 10 viewers who had watched the four episodes of *The Experiment*, asking them to evaluate the leadership behavior of the guards and prisoners at different phases of the study. Specifically, these observers were asked to indicate the extent to which on Day 2 and Day 6 (a) the guards/prisoners had a sense of shared group identity, (b) there was evidence of leadership among the guards/prisoners, (c) the guards/prisoners were effective as a group, and (d) the guards/prisoners appeared to favor a hard-line authoritarian approach to leadership (relevant to P3 below).

Means are presented in Table 1. Scores on each measure were subjected to  $2$  (group)  $\times$   $2$  (phase) analysis of variance with repeated measures on both factors. These analyses revealed a significant and large main effect for phase on the measure of perceived group identity;  $F(1,9) = 18.6, p < .01, \eta^2 = .67$ . They also

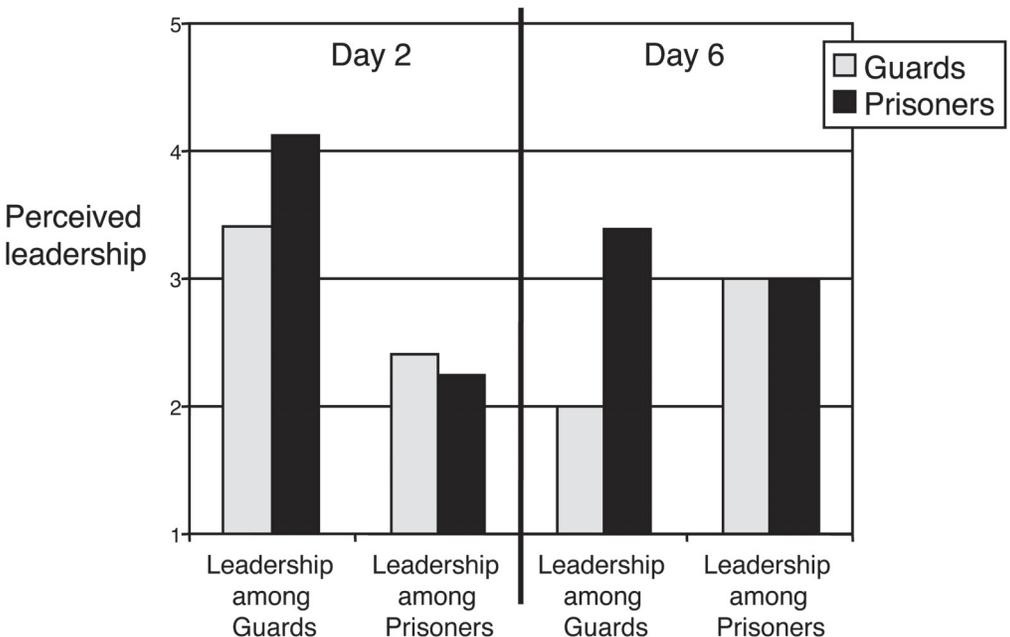


Figure 1. Perceived group leadership as a function of assigned group, judged group and study phase

Table 1. Television viewers' perceptions of leadership-related processes as a function of group and study phase

Group: Study phase:	Guards		Prisoners	
	Day 2	Day 6	Day 2	Day 6
Measure:				
(a) Perceived group identity	3.80 <sup>ab</sup>	2.30 <sup>ac</sup>	2.50 <sup>bd</sup>	5.60 <sup>cd</sup>
(b) Perceived leadership	3.60 <sup>ab</sup>	1.90 <sup>ac</sup>	2.70 <sup>bd</sup>	5.80 <sup>cd</sup>
(c) Perceived group efficacy	4.00 <sup>ab</sup>	1.80 <sup>ac</sup>	2.70 <sup>bd</sup>	5.50 <sup>cd</sup>
(d) Perceived belief in authoritarian leadership	2.00 <sup>a</sup>	3.50 <sup>a</sup>	2.30 <sup>b</sup>	4.60 <sup>b</sup>

Note: Cells in the same row with the same superscript are significantly different ( $p < .05$ , two-tailed)

revealed a significant and large main effect for group on measures of perceived group identity, leadership, and group efficacy;  $F_s(1,9) = 13.9, 27.0, 13.5$ , respectively; all  $p_s < .01$ ;  $\eta^2_s = .61, .75, .60$ , respectively. However, qualifying these effects, there was also a significant and large interaction between phase and group on measures of perceived group identity, leadership, and group efficacy;  $F_s(1,9) = 72.1, 96.0, 53.6$ , respectively; all  $p_s < .001$ ;  $\eta^2_s = .89, .91, .86$ , respectively.

As can be seen from Table 1, follow-up tests to decompose these interactions indicated that they arose from the same pattern of differences on each measure. Specifically, compared to Day 2 and to the prisoners on Day 6, the guards on Day 6 were observed to have a weaker sense of shared social identity, to display less leadership, and to be less effective as a group.

In summary, alongside the observational data, psychometric data from both participants and observers supports the idea that, as the prisoners gained a sense of shared social identity, so leadership of their group became increasingly apparent. However, as a corollary, as the guards' sense of identity declined, so too did their leadership.

## P2. Leadership and the Emergence of Shared Social Identity

From the preceding section it is clear how a changing structural context—notably the promotion and the creation of impermeable boundaries between prisoners and guards and the associated increase in prisoners' shared social identity—created the conditions for leadership amongst the prisoners. More specifically, Extract 1 illustrates the way in which DM<sub>p</sub> was able to emerge as a leader in

these conditions. Now let us consider what DM<sub>p</sub> actually did both to achieve and to exercise leadership.

Within a short time of his arrival, it became clear that DM<sub>p</sub> sought to replace a social system based on antagonism between prisoners and guards with one organized around the participants as a whole challenging the experimenters. This goal was based on a desire to turn a social system that was conflict-ridden, dysfunctional and unsafe into one that was functional and safe. This was because, as DM<sub>p</sub> later indicated in debriefing:

When I entered the prison I felt intimidated and worried about my own safety as well as that of everyone else. There were some dangerous characters threatening to run amok and the whole place needed to be brought into some sort of order. But, as things stood, the guards clearly weren't in a position to do this—so the whole system needed to be rethought and reorganized. To do this I also realized I needed to deal with the experimenters, as they were a major source of power.

As DM<sub>p</sub> saw it, this goal was consistent with the ideology of progressive social change that informed his union work but involved translating the skills and knowledge that he had acquired to the novel situation with which he was now confronted (a process which Morris (2000) calls 'frame lifting').

In order to bring about this change, DM<sub>p</sub> needed to encourage participants to see themselves in terms of a new set of categories and to imagine a world based on those new cate-

<sup>5</sup> These observations were based on field notes made after DM<sub>p</sub>'s withdrawal from the study and confirmed in a subsequent interview with the participant (April 11, 2006).

gories. The nature of this vision was incipient in a couple of early interactions between  $DM_p$  and his cellmates,  $FC_p$  and  $DD_p$ . First, he initiated a discussion about the clothes they were wearing (orange singlets and baggy orange trousers) and suggested that they looked like the uniforms of local government employees. The others picked up on the analogy and extended it, suggesting that perhaps they looked like miners and other groups of workers. Next  $DM_p$  raised the issue of the heat in the prison and asked why people put up with it. When  $FC_p$  and  $DD_p$  responded that it was just part of the study which they had agreed to participate in,  $DM_p$  challenged this, saying that whatever else he might have agreed to, the heat was not part of it.

$DM_p$ 's vision, and the social categories around which it was organized, were spelt out much more clearly in a conversation he had soon afterwards with a guard,  $TQ_g$ , during one of the daily work periods:

#### Extract 5

$DM_p$ : We used to represent people in the prisons—in the catering staff and whatever—and I've been inside a prison but it certainly wasn't as hot as this.

$TQ_g$ : Yes, this is hot, it is. We, we—and as a Union man you may be thinking about the regs [regulations] on the old health and safety. We have . . .

$DM_p$ : Very much so.

$TQ_g$ : We have, we have made that point very clear on a number of occasions—not least because we are wearing this [ $TQ_g$  indicates his guard uniform] and that mess room is an absolute sauna.

$DM_p$ : If this was a real life situation . . .

$TQ_g$ : Yes.

$DM_p$ : . . . and you were working in this condition, then you as an employee could well go to the employer and say 'the condition is unacceptable, I'm not prepared to work in it'. Now let's treat this as a real life situation. You and I—your group and the group I'm in—both have this problem of the heat. And if I've got to sleep in

this, there is no way I will. And, you know, I won't bear it. And I think collectively we should do something about it to the people who are running the experiment. Now you know in a normal, day-to-day, real life situation, that's what would happen.

$TQ_g$ : Well, I am most impressed with your new-found kind of angle on this, which possibly shouldn't come as a surprise to me. But I think that is a very, very valid point you are making and I'm going to go along with it completely.

The categories that  $DM_p$  was working to create, and encouraging others to embrace, were those of workers (both prisoners and guards) vs. management (the experimenters and the BBC); the shared vision he was seeking to promote was of a workers' struggle for enhanced conditions. The difficulty with achieving this vision, of course, was that, at this time, any sense of unity seemed distant given the increasing antagonism between prisoners and guards and the lack of any institutional basis for bringing them together as a common category.  $DM_p$  was well aware of this and of the fact that, in order to achieve his ultimate ambition, he first had to overcome the existing guard-prisoner divide. His opportunity to do so came through  $PB_p$ 's theft of the guards' keys which we noted above. The prisoners met as a group in order to decide how to exploit the opportunity that this gave them. Where  $PB_p$  wanted to use his individual act to win a one-off concession (hot drinks every day),  $DM_p$  proposed an alternative approach:

#### Extract 6

$PB_p$ : What the issue is, they want the fucking keys back and all I am saying is I want to use the keys as a lever to move us forward as a group.

$DM_p$ : Can I make a suggestion? What we should do is, we should suggest to them—and I suggested this to a couple of lads before, and the guards, and they were nodding—we should have a forum that meets once a day between us, all of us, the guards and us, and in the forum we'll discuss the grievances we've got.

There are three critical differences between  $DM_p$ 's position and that of  $PB_p$

(which effectively prevailed before DM<sub>p</sub>'s arrival) that largely account for the former's success in this context. First, despite PB<sub>p</sub>'s claims to want to 'move us forward as a group' his approach comes across to other prisoners as individualist where DM<sub>p</sub>'s is collectivist (see Extract 8 below, where JE<sub>p</sub> comments to PB<sub>p</sub> "I'm not being funny mate, but your grabbing the keys affects us all . . . that's not the way we want to do things . . . we want to do things as a team here"). This is apparent in the substance of the proposals: whereas PB<sub>p</sub> advocates an exclusive approach based on individual acts of heroic subversion, DM<sub>p</sub> advocates an inclusive approach in which everyone works together to advance the group position. However, it is equally apparent in the different language used by the two men: PB<sub>p</sub> stresses 'what *I* am saying' and 'what *I* want' whereas DM<sub>p</sub> refers to 'what *we* should do,' 'we should suggest to them,' 'we should have a forum' and so on (see Donnellon, 1996).

Second, PB<sub>p</sub>'s approach is conflictual while DM<sub>p</sub>'s approach is consensual. Heroic subversion involves constant acts aimed against the guards whereas the forum involves prisoners and guards working together in a common enterprise (though one which, as noted above, was based on a recognition of conflict and the need to manage that conflict). Indeed, in DM<sub>p</sub>'s contribution, there is a gradual elision between 'we' as referring to the prisoners and 'we' referring to the participants as a whole such that, by the end ('in the forum we'll discuss the grievances we've got') it is not entirely clear to which he is referring. Thus, even as DM<sub>p</sub> provides a clear formulation of prisoner identity and prisoner norms, he provides a bridge towards a broader participatory identity.

Third, PB<sub>p</sub> advocates an uncertain and erratic way forward that is dependent upon unpredictable acts. DM<sub>p</sub> proposes a clear structure to implement his cooperative version of guard/prisoner identity and a process by which to achieve that structure. Hence, in addition to a vision of how the group should be, DM<sub>p</sub> lays out a practical path to realizing that vision.

Overall, then, DM<sub>p</sub> may have benefited from conditions conducive for social identity

and leadership to emerge amongst the prisoners (as outlined in relation to Proposition 1 above). Yet, however necessary these were, they are not sufficient to explain (a) how an agreed sense of selfhood emerged, (b) the form that it took, or (c) the fact that DM<sub>p</sub>'s definitions prevailed. Indeed, far from emerging spontaneously, identity definitions were carefully and effortfully crafted by DM<sub>p</sub>. Moreover, far from being bound by present conditions, the mark of DM<sub>p</sub>'s leadership was his ability to imagine and organize towards alternative futures. This involved (a) envisioning and working toward a new form of social organization and a new set of social categories (participants vs. experimenters) and (b) reconceptualizing the existing organization of categories (cooperative prisoners in a consensual relationship with guards) as a bridge towards that new world.

DM<sub>p</sub>'s position supports the idea that effective leadership helps create and marshal a shared sense of social identity. As a corollary, it is striking that there was no point in the study when any guard was acknowledged by his peers as being authorized to define the group position (as illustrated in Extract 2 above). All statements of belief were those of individuals *qua* individuals, and many took the form of disagreements between individuals (as in Extract 3). Even on the one occasion where the guards did elect a spokesperson (prior to the meeting with DM<sub>p</sub>), they still disagreed with and undermined him. The sense that no one was in a position to define a group norm, let alone enforce it, was eloquently expressed in one of the guards' private comments to the experimenters:

#### Extract 7

FC<sub>g</sub>: Is it worth me saying to the prisoners 'We are going to start implementing security and violation issues' if no one's going to challenge the prisoners? . . . I can't challenge everyone all the time.

As we can also see from this extract, this dual sense of the futility of attempted leadership and the impossibility of consensus led to a certain sense of bitterness and hopelessness (see Haslam and Reicher 2006b).

### P3. Leadership success and the realization of social identity in practice

Immediately after DM<sub>p</sub>'s proposal to establish the forum in Extract 6, there was a period of discussion between the prisoners as to how to proceed:

#### Extract 8

PB<sub>p</sub>: I'll be honest, right. I don't want to be part of any forum. Because I know it won't work. We'll be pissing in the wind. We'll be sitting here for fucking hours arguing with each other about shit. And nothing will be done. All I want to do is: 'Give me a fucking answer. Do you want hot drinks or not? Yes or no' That's all, right. Now I'm going to try to do them a deal with the keys. End of story. I'm not interested in solving the problems of the world, I want to solve the problem of the hot tea because [JE<sub>p</sub>] requested it.

JE<sub>p</sub>: So what you are saying is then, [PB<sub>p</sub>] that you do not wish to discuss it in a forum, you just want to go in there . . .

PB<sub>p</sub>: I don't want to be part of it. I don't want to be part of a forum. I know we're all here because we're wearing the same uniform but we're all here as individuals. And I am here as an individual individual.

JE<sub>p</sub>: Yeah but your grabbing the keys . . .

PB<sub>p</sub>: I'll do what I can to help you guys, but I'm not going to . . .

JE<sub>p</sub>: [PB<sub>p</sub>] I'm not being funny mate, but your grabbing the keys affects us all. If you want to go in there and, you know, nick the keys, that is fine. You know, I stand behind you. But if you want to do a deal right now with them, that's not the way we want to do things.

PB<sub>p</sub>: Yeah, but the only thing I was interested in negotiating for was a hot drink.

JE<sub>p</sub>: The majority—we want to do things as a team here.

In this way the collective position championed by DM<sub>p</sub> clearly prevails. PB<sub>p</sub> is marginalized and DM<sub>p</sub> is elected unopposed as the prisoners' representative to go and negotiate with the guards for a forum in exchange for the return of the keys. On the one hand, DM<sub>p</sub>'s

success derives from the fact that he alone has based his proposal on group identity—as what 'we' should do rather than what 'I' want to do (as in Extract 6). Picking up on this, JE<sub>p</sub> now clearly articulates the desire of the prisoners to act collectively ('as a team').

Moreover, and in line with previous research, it would appear that another dimension of DM<sub>p</sub>'s success lies in his 'initiation of structure' (Fleishman and Peters 1962). That is, he not only proposes that the prisoners act collectively but he also works to provide them with a means for doing so. More precisely, though, we would refer to this as the *initiation of identity-embedding structure*. To be effective, both the structure and the process that achieves it must be seen as related to identity-based norms and values rather than as an independent elements. It is not just 'any old structure' that needs to be initiated, rather one that can serve as a vehicle for the realization and advancement of collective identity.

As noted above, DM<sub>p</sub> was withdrawn from the study at the end of Day 5. This first led to the abandonment of any cooperation between prisoners and guards and to an increase in acts of insubordination and subversion by the prisoners. There was growing disillusionment on the part of the guards, who were now deprived of the workable structure DM<sub>p</sub> was helping to create. This culminated in a revolt by the prisoners in Cell 2, leading to a collapse of the prison system. The prison system was then replaced by a Commune in which participants agreed to organize themselves on a cooperative and voluntary basis. The democratic and harmonious character of the Commune is indicated by the first of the two statements from PB<sub>p</sub>, with which this paper is prefaced. However, that system too quickly fell into crisis. In part, this occurred due to internal dissent. Members of the Commune were not prepared to exercise discipline in order to deal with it; in part, the system failed because the 'Communards' (falsely) believed that the experimenters disapproved of the system and would not allow it to survive, and that, in the face of this, they were powerless to respond.

In this context, the 'Communards' began to lose faith in their system. One committed

supporter commented that things were even worse than before, since now the group had both the increasingly difficult challenge of trying to make the failing Commune work and also held the responsibility for its failure. In this context too, some key dissenters began to envisage a new and radically unequal system. This was foreshadowed in the second of the statements included at the start of the paper, in which  $PB_p$  indicated the experiment in democracy had failed and that “strong leadership” was now needed in order to restore order and “move things forward.” The precise nature of this order was signaled in the following exchange:

Extract 9

$PB_p$ : I'm gonna say “Listen we want to be the guards.”

$PP_p$ : Yeah good idea.

$PB_p$ : And fucking make them toe the line.

$PP_p$ : Yeah.

$PB_p$ : I mean on the fucking line.

$PP_p$ : Yeah mate, yeah yeah.

$PB_p$ : [As if talking to prisoners] No fucking talking while you're eating. Get on with your food and get the fucking hell back to your cell.

$PP_p$ : I agree, I totally agree.

$JE_p$ : Yeah I'll have some of that.

Consistent with this vision, on the morning of Day 8,  $PB_p$  introduced a new strict prisoner-guard system to a meeting of all the participants. Notably, while none of the supporters of the Commune actively embraced this proposal, with one exception, nobody actively opposed it either. Indeed, the predominant reaction was one of resignation and dejection. During the debriefing period after the end of the study, one of the Commune's key supporters observed that while the new system violated everything he believed in, he was rapidly losing faith in the Commune and would not have put up much resistance to a takeover.

These observations are corroborated, first of all, by responses on measures of participants' belief in authoritarian leadership. The four measures of this construct were averaged and submitted to a 2 (assigned group)  $\times$  3 (phase) analysis of variance with repeated measures on the last factor. This analysis revealed a significant and large effect for assigned group,  $F(1,11) = 17.05, p < .01, \eta^2 = .60$ , and study phase,  $F(2,22) = 5.79, p < .01, \eta^2 = .35$ . Trend analysis revealed that this phase effect had a significant linear,  $t(12) = 2.52, p < .05$ , and marginally significant quadratic,  $t(12) = 2.08, p = .06$ , components. The quadratic trend arose from the fact that, as can be seen in Figure 2, participants' belief in authoritarian leadership increased sharply between Day 4 and Day 6.

Further support for this shift comes from the ratings of independent observers. They were asked to indicate the extent to which on Day 2 and Day 6 the guards/prisoners appeared to believe in a hard-line authoritarian approach to leadership (see Table 1(d) for means). Scores were subjected to 2 (group)  $\times$  2 (phase) analysis of variance with repeated measures on both factors. This analyses revealed no group effect  $F(1,9) = 0.8; \eta^2 = .40; p = .4$ , and no interaction between phase and group,  $F(1,9) = 1.3; \eta^2 = .12; p = .3$ , only a significant and large main effect for phase;  $F(1,9) = 27.3; \eta^2 = .75; p < .01$ . This indicates that, over time, both groups had an increasing belief in the need for authoritarian leadership.

These results suggest that while there is some evidence that successful leadership depends upon making proposals consonant with social identity and successfully implementing these identity-based proposals, there is stronger and more consistent evidence concerning the consequence of the failure to achieve such implementation (if nothing else, because the study provides more evidence of identity failure than success). In situations where participants failed to create a system that expressed, and created an order based on, their social identity, they were increasingly willing to embrace alternative models of leadership and alternative social systems.

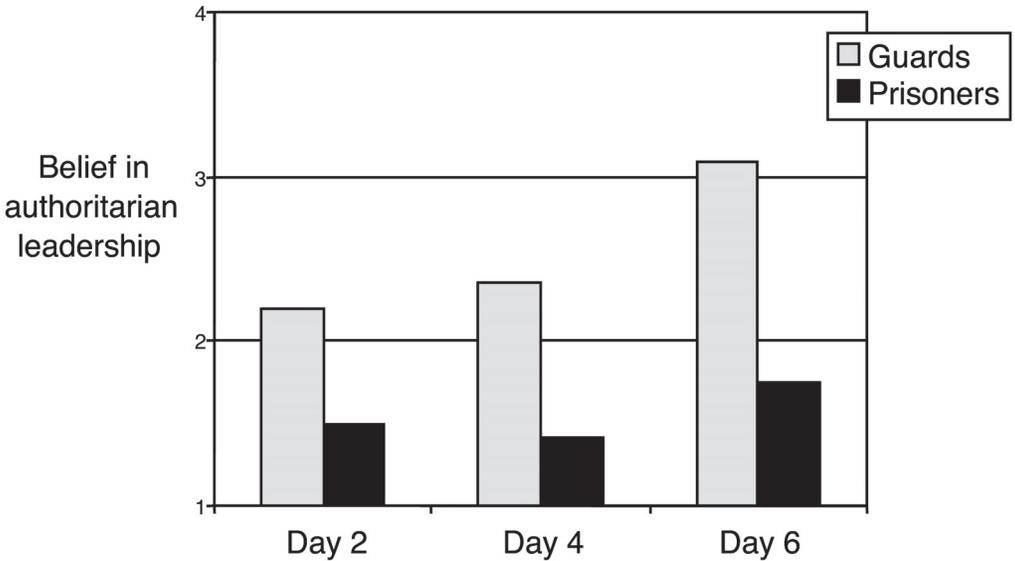


Figure 2. Belief in authoritarian leadership as a function of assigned group and study phase

## DISCUSSION

### Identity, Leadership, and Social Reality

The present study provided a unique opportunity to examine processes of leadership and followership as they unfolded over time. This was especially true in light of the fact that both qualitative and quantitative data were collected in the context of a series of planned interventions designed to influence the shared social identity of the participant groups. More specifically, the study provided an unprecedented opportunity to examine three interrelated propositions simultaneously: (P1) that social identity makes leadership possible (and that lack of social identity makes leadership impossible); (P2) that effective leadership facilitates the development of a sense of shared social identity (and that ineffective leadership compromises a sense of shared social identity); and (P3) that the long-term success (and failure) of leadership depends upon the creation of structures and processes through which identity-based projects can be realized.

Support for these propositions emerged primarily from the behavior of the prisoners. Note here though, that the low and oppressed status of the prisoners within the system did not in itself lead to high social identification. At the start of the study, members of this

group had a low level of social identification—lower than that of the guards. Believing that it was possible to be promoted and become a guard, prisoners generally strove as individuals to gain entry into this high-status group. At this stage no prisoners were able to exercise leadership over the group—not least because there was no psychological group to lead. However, once group boundaries were rendered impermeable and the relations between groups came to be seen as insecure, there was a marked increase in the shared social identification of the prisoners and increasing evidence of effective leadership in the mobilization of collective resistance. These patterns were apparent both in participants' ratings of the prisoners' leadership and in those of independent observers.

Thus, a sense that the prisoners shared social identity meant that there was a collective entity to be led. As a result, leadership became both meaningful and possible. At the same time, though, leadership efforts were generally successful only to the extent that they both enhanced this sense of shared identity and derived from it. This dialectic relationship is seen most clearly in the interactions involving the trade union leader, DM<sub>p</sub>. On the one hand, he worked hard to cultivate a viable identity that instantiated individuals as members of a collective: he made the prison-

ers aware of their common fate, used metaphors and similes that clarified their shared plight, and promoted the inclusive language and structures of 'we-ness' (as in Extracts 5 and 6). His own stature as a leader (in contradistinction to that of PB<sub>p</sub>, the "individual individual") then derived from the fact that this identity had been created and that he had played a key role in its creation. In short, DM<sub>p</sub> developed a workable consensus about what 'we' meant and then invoked that consensus to validate leadership projects that translated identity into structure (e.g., by setting up the forum; Extract 6).

In contrast, data from the guards provide evidence for the negative consequences of failing to develop or maintain a sense of shared identity. At the start of the study, the guards had a moderately strong sense of shared identity and this provided the basis for a reasonable level of organization. Indeed, although the guards themselves never recognized or seized the opportunity that this provided, it is apparent that in the first few days of the study the prisoners tended to think that the guards had quite a strong sense of identity and to think that they displayed quite high levels of leadership. Significantly though, once group boundaries had been rendered impermeable and the prisoners started actively resisting the guards (rather than trying to ingratiate themselves to them), the collective identity of the guards evaporated rapidly—and with it went any capacity for leadership. Again, these changes were apparent both to participants in the study (especially the guards themselves) and to independent observers.

As the prisoners started to speak with one voice, the guards increasingly spoke with different voices, contradicting each other and undermining each others' authority (e.g., Extracts 2 and 3). This meant that individual guards' attempts to display leadership were increasingly unsuccessful and they began to see little point in trying to exert leadership (see Extract 7). This in turn meant that no one even tried to define what the group should be doing and, increasingly, individual guards simply went their own way.

Limitations and strengths of the current study

As noted in the introduction, our use of case study methodology means that the above findings do not, on their own, provide conclusive support for our theoretical analysis. Nonetheless, confidence in our claims is enhanced by the ways in which the present findings mesh with a range of ideas that have previously been explored by researchers in the social identity tradition. Significantly, though, for the first time, our findings derive from a method where processes of leadership and followership are examined simultaneously and as they unfold over time.

There are three significant dividends which this approach yields. The first relates to the contribution of this study to the understanding of leadership. Whereas leadership research in general (and its psychological branch in particular) tends to conceptualize and study leadership as a process that centers around the particular traits and attitudes that particular individuals possess (e.g., Burns 1978; Fiedler 1978), we see instead that leadership is in fact a much more dynamic, active and practical process of social identity management. In short, it is more about doing than having.

Interestingly, outside the context of the present study, many of the participants were extremely successful leaders and possessed a range of qualities, skills, and management training experience that 'on paper' would tend to indicate that they 'had what it takes' to be effective (most notably, one of the guards, TQ<sub>g</sub>, was a senior executive in a successful medium-sized British company). Significantly, though, structural factors that precluded the development of a shared identity to which individual guards could (or would want to) contribute meant that this leadership potential counted for little and that, as individuals and as a group, they were rendered impotent and ineffective. This observation accords with previous work revealing the capacity for social structure to effectively neutralize individuals' leadership (e.g., Howell, Dorfmann, and Kerr 1986; Kerr and Jermier 1978), but identifies social identity as a critical mediating variable.

The second major dividend that flows from the longitudinal design of the present study relates to its contribution to our understanding of social psychological process. In order to understand the relationship between social identity and the dynamic and practical nature of social leadership, we clearly need a dynamic and practical conception of social identity itself. In particular, social identity is related to the organization of social reality in a two-sided manner: social identity not only reflects existing forms of social organization, but is also a means of envisaging and creating new forms of social reality. Moreover, the relationship between these two sides is constantly evolving: as groups attempt to create their own social realities and impose them on others, they confront attempts by other groups to impose their social realities upon them. The skills of leaders are one important factor in determining the course of this tension between social determination and social change. More generally, we contend that it is important to apply this conception of social identity not only in relationship to leadership but in relation to all group phenomena (see the Elaborated Social Identity Model of collective action—ESIM; Drury and Reicher 2005; Reicher 2001).

### The Emergence of Autocratic Leadership

In contrast to more constrained experimental paradigms, a third dividend which derives from the methodology of an intensive case study arises from its ability to generate entirely unexpected phenomena. In the present case, this was realized in the form of the rising specter of tyranny at the end of the study. What we saw here was that participants who had rejected a rather mild hierarchy at the study's outset were close to accepting a far more draconian system at its end (Haslam and Reicher 2005; Reicher and Haslam 2006a). More specifically, at the start of the study, participants were highly committed to democratic leadership styles; but by the experiment's end, this commitment had become far more fragile. Most vividly, this was marked by the movement amongst a subset of former prisoners and guards to set up a military-style junta

that sought to run the prison along dictatorial lines (as indicated in Extract 9). However, this move away from democracy was also evident in all participants' responses on measures of their belief in authoritarian leadership.

This finding is noteworthy in several important respects. First, it provides a rare opportunity to examine the social psychological and structural processes which precipitate moves towards autocratic leadership. For obvious reasons (in particular, the need to understand events leading up the Holocaust), researchers have long been interested in this question. However, they have principally answered it only by means of historical analysis. On the basis of such research, Gastil (1994) identifies four candidate explanations for the attractiveness of authoritarian leadership: (a) its appeal to people who have deep-seated authoritarian values and who have a need for directive authority (Lassey 1971), (b) the unconscious desire of people for a charismatic figure who can take control of a difficult situation and replace confusion with order (Abse and Jessner 1962; Adorno 1950; Stenner 2005), (c) people's lack of faith in leaders of any kind (Nagel 1987), and (d) the fact that a particular autocratic regime serves the interests of particular individuals or sub-groups (e.g., those who would lose power under democracy; Slater and Bennis 1992). To this we can add (e) the explanation offered by Haney et al. (1973), namely that a move towards tyranny and tyrannical leadership is a 'natural' consequence of assigning people to groups where those groups have roles centered around clearly-defined power differentials.

We can rule out the latter suggestion in light of the twin facts (a) that the guards initially rejected their roles and (b) that the primary advocates of the tyrannical regime were prisoners—so that tyrannical leadership actually reflected a subversion of role (for more elaborated discussion, see Reicher and Haslam 2006a). This indeed illustrates one of the strengths of case study methodology: its capacity to falsify previous analyses by predicting and demonstrating exceptions to what had previously been thought to be general truths (Popper 1972:193; Turner 2006).

Nevertheless, in line with Haney et al.'s (1973) analysis and in contrast to the first of Gastil's explanations, the present findings suggest that far from being a fixed personality or attitudinal variable, acceptance of authoritarian leadership is a product of social structural factors that impinge upon and shape individuals' collective experience (Reicher and Haslam 2006a; Turner, Reynolds, Haslam, and Veenstra 2006). Likewise, we see that far from being a universal given or a psychodynamic primitive, belief in the need for a strong leader (or willingness to tolerate one) arises in response to a specific set of structural conditions and experiences. In this regard, our findings are most consistent with the last two of Gastil's candidate explanations. However, they suggest a significant elaboration of these analyses.

The move towards hard-line leadership, we suggest, is not a function of difficult times, of threats to group values, or of chaos in and of themselves. Rather, it derives from an impasse in attempts to create a social order based upon democratic values. This impasse results as much from internal failures of leadership, organization, or collective action as from external factors. It is this failure of democratic groups that provides the structural impetus for a union between those whose interests are served by autocracy and those who no longer feel empowered to resist them. As observed by  $PB_p$  in the second of the statements reproduced at the beginning this paper, in order to regain a sense of efficacy and agency, people would rather have malevolent leadership and a malevolent social order than have no prospect of social order at all (see also Haslam and Reicher 2005; Reicher and Haslam 2006a).

Significantly, these arguments accord with historical analysis of the rise of fascist leaderships which suggest that these thrive upon, and hence actively promote, the failure of democratic identities (e.g., Abel 1986; Gellately 2001; for relevant theoretical analysis, see also Turner 2005). The point is illustrated by the words of a Nazi high-school teacher, reflecting on the failure of the Weimar republic:

I reached the conclusion that no party, but a single man could save Germany. This opinion was shared by others, for when the cornerstone of a monument was laid in my home town, the following lines were inscribed on it: 'Descendants who read these words, know ye that we eagerly await the coming of the man whose strong hand may restore order'. (Abel 1938[1986]:151)

However, if our findings suggest that the rise of support for autocratic leadership derives from the failure of democratic groups and systems, they also suggest that the rise of support for democratic leadership can derive from the failure of autocratic systems. Thus, in the first phase of our study, as the guards lost faith in their own system and their ability to make the hierarchical prison regime work, so they became attracted to (and ultimately enacted) the democratic vision offered by  $DM_p$ . Equally, after the prisoner-guard system finally collapsed, participants were able to 'appropriate' the perspective offered by  $DM_p$  and come together to form the Commune. Overall, then, our conclusion is broader than the old idea that chaos facilitates fascism (e.g., Fromm 1941; Reich and Carfango 1970). Instead, we suggest that group failure facilitates social change and increases the attractiveness of leaders and groups who provide a vision of an alternative and viable way of being. To borrow from Parsons (who in turn was paraphrasing Weber), and without ascribing any content to either institution or movement:

Any situation where an established institutional order has to a considerable extent become disorganized, where established routines, expectations, and symbols are broken up or are under attack . . . creates widespread psychological insecurity which in turn is susceptible of reintegration in terms of attachment to a charismatic movement. (1947:71)

## CONCLUSION

It clearly remains for future work to elaborate and test the above ideas further. We have noted the inherent limitations of case study research and the need to weigh our conclusions accordingly. At the same time, though, we would assert that the present study repre-

sents a significant and important extension to the understanding of leadership processes and of the identity-related dynamics that underpin them. Moreover, this is an understanding that could not be advanced by means of more conventional forms of experimentation.

At the most basic level, then, a core contribution of the present paper is that it studies leadership processes in action in way that has rarely, if ever, been possible in previous research (not least because leadership research—like social psychological research in general—is increasingly unlikely to study social interaction in the context of emergent group histories; see Haslam and McGarty 2001). More substantially, though, the study's findings provide integrated support for a number of core principles which underpin the social identity approach to leadership but which, to date, have tended to be implicitly assumed or taken for granted rather than empirically assayed.

This is particularly true of the idea that leadership and social identity are mutually interdependent and mutually constituted facets of group life. In the present study, we see not only that each is facilitated by the other but also that both are constrained by social reality and its psychological and structural dimensions. These ideas are, at the same time, both deceptively simple and enormously powerful.

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