To appear in the Journal of
Experimental Social Psychology

An Experimental Test of a Reward-Cost Formulation of Status Inconsistency

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Technical Report No. 20 May 1967

Abstract

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Thibaut and Kelley's and Homans' conceptualizations of reward-cost processes are adapted to the problem of explaining the dissatisfaction status inconsistency produces. It is shown: (a) that consistency between position and ability ranks is associated with the best reward-cost outcome in the case of both high and low ability individuals when the rewards attached to holding a position and the rewards attached to performing adequately the activities it entails are equal, (b) that inconsistency of position and ability is associated with the best reward-cost outcome in the case of high ability individuals when performance is rewarded more heavily than position, and (c) that inconsistency of position and ability is associated with the best reward-cost outcome in the case of low ability individuals when position is rewarded more heavily than performance. Subjects are led to believe that they have high or low ability with regard to a task, and rewards for position and performance are varied so as to produce the consistencies and inconsistencies described. Arguing from a position similar to one advanced by Brehm and Cohen, it is predicted that the inconsistencies will not produce lower satisfaction. The prediction receives support.

An Experimental Test of a Reward-Cost Formulation of Status Inconsistency[1]

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Since Weber (1946) first introduced the idea of multidimensional stratification, the process of status equilibration has gained recognition as an area of concern in the study of stratified interaction systems. Much of the work on status equilibration has dealt with the effects of status inconsistency. It has been suggested that status inconsistency leads to personal dissatisfaction, which, in turn, is said to result in a number of possible behavioral consequences, including tendencies towards revolution (Benoit-Smullyan, 1944), political extremism (Lenski, 1954) and psychosomatic stress (Jackson, 1962). While it is generally agreed that the dissatisfaction associated with status inconsistency is potentially disruptive, there exists little consensus as to the exact nature of this dissatisfaction.

In this paper we advance the argument that this dissatisfaction is not a result of status inconsistency per se, but, rather, a result of poor reward-cost outcomes often associated with inconsistency. In order to test a part of our argument, we established some laboratory conditions under which a best reward-cost outcome would require inconsistent behavior, and, then, we attempted to determine whether this behavior had any effect upon satisfaction.

Status consistency refers to consistency of ranks on various dimensions of status. If an individual's general status consists of his ranks on a number of status dimensions, he will be consistent if

he ranks high on all dimensions or low on all dimensions.

In the present experiment we focused our attention on two dimensions of status: position and ability. Position was operationally defined as the possession of a task at a given level of difficulty. Ability was defined as the capacity to solve a task at a given level of difficulty. Status consistency was defined as either high ability and the possession of a hard task or low ability and the possession of an easy task, while status inconsistency was defined as either high ability and the possession of less than a hard task or low ability and the possession of more than an easy task.

The contention of this paper that status inconsistency need not result in dissatisfaction is derived from an application of reward-cost theory. Kimberly (1966; in press) has shown that Thibaut and Kelley's (1959) and Homans' (1961) conceptualizations of reward-cost processes can be adapted so as to explain reactions to inconsistencies of the ability-position type considered in this paper. The definitions and assumptions of Kimberly's adaptation can be summarized as follows. Rewards are defined as position and performance evaluations,[2] and costs are defined as effort. With these definitions in mind, we can present the following assumptions: (a) A hard position is more highly evaluated, and thus more rewarding than an easy position. (b) A good performance is more highly evaluated, and thus more rewarding than a poor performance, and a given level of performance in any position is evaluated the same as that level of performance in any other position, i.e., performance is evaluated relative to position.[3] (c) The effort costs of any position are a function of the difficulty of the position

and the individual's ability. For any given ability, an increase in the difficulty of the position increases costs, and a decrease in the difficulty of the position decreases costs. Furthermore, increases in costs due to increases in position difficulty above the individual's ability level are weighted heavily whereas decreases in costs due to decreases in position difficulty below the individual's ability level are weighted lightly.[4] (d) An individual will tend to choose for himself that position which allows him to realize his best reward-cost outcome.

From these assumptions we can begin to see that by varying the importance of either position or performance evaluations, we should be able to produce differences in the kinds of position an individual will choose. In the present experiment we introduced three types of reward structures which should differentially affect the individual's choice of position. One of these structures should produce consistent choices by both high and low ability individuals; the second should produce inconsistent choices by high ability individuals; and the third should produce inconsistent choices by low ability individuals. Since we used the same kind of tasks in each reward structure, but with differing emphasis on rewards for position and performance, costs resulting from the objective difficulty of positions were considered to be the same for all three reward structures. The three reward structures and their effects on the individual's choice of position are considered in greater detail below.

In a structure that gives roughly the same emphasis to both position and performance rewards (henceforth called a typical structure), we would expect both high and low ability individuals to choose positions that require the amount of ability they have, i.e., we would expect them to equilibrate. In the case of a high ability individual, choosing anything less than a hard position should decrease both position rewards and effort costs. Performance rewards should remain relatively constant because he should still perform well. Since he weights effort costs lightly, the decrease in position rewards should reduce his outcome. In the case of the low ability individual, choosing anything more than an easy position should increase both position rewards and effort costs. Performance rewards should decrease because he should perform less well. Since the decrease in performance rewards tends to offset the increase in position rewards, and since he weights effort costs heavily, the increase in such costs should reduce his outcome.

We call the above structure "typical" because of the three reward structures considered, we feel it to be most representative of our own society. Since any inconsistency in this structure would result in poor reward-cost outcomes, we can understand why dissatisfaction in our society is associated with ability-position inconsistencies. However, as we have indicated, we think that such inconsistencies in themselves have little effect upon satisfaction.

In a structure which strongly emphasizes performance rewards and de-emphasizes position rewards (henceforth called a performance structure), we would expect a high ability individual to choose a position which requires less ability than he has, i.e., we would expect him to disequilibrate. Doing so should decrease both position rewards and effort costs. However, position rewards are small in this structure. Further, choosing an easier position should increase the certainty of obtaining performance rewards which are large in this structure. Thus, when performance rewards are large enough, a high ability individual should obtain his best outcome by disequilibrating.

If our reasoning about the behavior in a performance structure is correct, then we would expect the opposite behavior in a structure where the emphasis is reversed. Thus, in a structure which strongly emphasizes position rewards and de-emphasizes performance rewards (henceforth called a position structure), we would expect a low ability individual to choose a position which requires somewhat more ability than he has, i.e., we would expect him to disequilibrate. Doing so should increase both position rewards and effort costs. However, position rewards are large in this structure. Further, although choosing a harder position should decrease performance rewards, these rewards are small in this structure. Thus, when position rewards are large enough, a low ability individual should obtain his best outcome by disequilibrating.

We can summarize the effects of these reward-cost structures upon choice of position in the form of propositions.

1. Under the conditions of a typical structure, both high and low ability individuals will tend to choose positions which require the amount of ability they possess.

2. Under the conditions of a performance structure, high ability individuals will tend to choose positions which require less ability than they possess.

3. Under the conditions of a position structure, low ability individuals will tend to choose positions which require more ability than they possess.

We can now introduce a final assumption upon which our argument basically rests. This is that: (e) Status inconsistency will have little effect upon the satisfaction of an individual if it is associated with his best reward-cost outcome. Our rationale for this assumption is similar to a position taken by Brehm and Cohen concerning cognitive consistency. These authors suggest that dissonance as a motivating force does not occur when the individual does not feel that he is in some way responsible for an inconsistency (1962, Chapter 11). Our rationale can be stated in similar terms as follows: If an individual is motivated to obtain his best reward-cost outcome and if the reward structure requires that he choose a position which is inconsistent with his ability in order to obtain this outcome, he should not feel responsible for the choice and thus should not be dissatisfied with it.

We are now in a position to formulate the propositions which were tested in the present experiment.

4. There will be no differences in satisfaction between high ability individuals in a typical structure who have positions which require the amount of ability they possess and high ability individuals in a performance structure who have positions which require less ability than they possess.

5. There will be no differences in satisfaction between low ability individuals in a typical structure who have positions which require the amount of ability they possess and low ability individuals in a position structure who have positions which require more ability than they possess.

Experimental Design

General procedure. Two subjects at a time were taken into an experimental room. Inside this room there were two booths, a table for the experimenter, and a blackboard. Each booth consisted of a table and chair and was separated from the other booth by a curtain which made it impossible for the subjects to see one another. Since the particular ability treatment a subject received depended upon the booth he was in, the subjects were randomly assigned to the booths.

Once seated, the subjects were told that they would be given an ability test, and, then, would be asked to choose and to work on two sets of problems. They were further told that each set of problems would be chosen from a list of seven kinds of sets which varied in difficulty. Each set consisted of three problems. Individual problems were defined for the subjects in terms of three levels of difficulty: easy, medium and hard. The seven kinds of sets ranged in difficulty from a set with three easy problems to a set with three hard problems (see the left-hand column of Table 2 for the complete list).

Before the subjects began the two problem periods, they were given the ability test. This consisted of six problems of the same type included in the sets. Two of these problems were labelled easy, two medium and two hard. The subjects were told that these particular problems were "extremely accurate predictors" of how well they would do in the two problem periods. Unknown to them, one subject received problems that were objectively easier than those the other subject received. The same difference in objective difficulty was maintained for the sets in the problem periods as well. This constituted the ability manipulation and will be explained in further detail in the following section.

The subject who received the objectively easier problems, the high ability treatment, was told he got all six problems correct, whereas, the subject who received the objectively harder problems, the low ability treatment, was told he got only the two easy problems correct.

Following the ability test, a point system was explained to the subjects. Unknown to them, there were three reward conditions in the experiment; these were designed to approximate the typical, performance and position structures described in the previous section. These point systems will be described shortly. The subjects were told to obtain "as many points as possible." This directive was designed to strengthen the choice tendencies described in propositions 1, 2 and 3. The subjects were also told that they should not be concerned with group outcome. This was included to provide for an individual orientation toward obtaining rewards.

As indicated earlier, each problem period consisted of each subject choosing and working on a set of problems. The subjects were told prior to each problem period that they could choose any kind of set they wanted, and that there were enough problems so that both of them could have the same kind of set if they both chose the same kind. It was felt that this would eliminate any concern they might have about depriving the other person and, thus, would make any inconsistent choices easier.

After the problem periods, the subjects were given a satisfaction measure. This was followed by the administration of a post-experimental questionnaire which was designed to check the effectiveness of the various experimental manipulations and controls and to ascertain suspicion.

Tasks and ability manipulation. The seven kinds of sets of problems constituted the tasks in the experiment. The individual problems used in these sets were taken from Raven's Standard Progressive Matrices. This is an I.Q. test, but the subjects were told it was not so as to eliminate insofar as possible any suspicion which their conceptions of their I.Q.'s might produce. The solution to each problem requires the completion of a series of symbol configurations. The series to be completed is preceded by two complete series of similar configurations which define a principle of variation.

As indicated earlier, high and low ability conceptions were created by giving the subjects problems of differing difficulty. On the basis of a pretest with twenty-five students from the same college as the subjects, we selected problems from the Progressive Matrices test which fell at five different levels of objective difficulty. These levels ranged from one, the easiest, through five, the hardest. In order for the ability

manipulation to be credible, the first three levels were selected so as to be easy to solve while the last two were selected so as to be extremely hard to solve. Since many of the problems in this test can be solved by the average college student given an indefinite period of time, it was necessary to restrict the time allowed. Fifteen seconds per problem was allowed. The mean proportion of problems solved correctly at level one was 100%; at level two, 88%; at level three, 82%; at level four, 29%; and at level five, 5%.

From Table 1 it can be seen that the high ability conception was

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Insert Table 1 about here

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induced in the ability test by giving a subject problems from levels one, two and three, and labelling these easy, medium, and hard respectively. We believed that a subject in this condition would be confident that he could solve all of the problems correctly. The low ability conception was induced in the ability test by giving a subject problems from levels three, four and five, and labelling these easy, medium and hard. We believed that a subject in this condition would be confident that he could solve only the easy problems correctly. The problems in the sets in the problem periods varied in objective difficulty in the same way as did the problems used in the ability manipulation. For example, as indicated in Table 1, if a subject chose a set with three medium problems in it, he would receive three problems at level two if he were in the high ability condition, but three problems at level four if he were in the low ability condition.

Table 1

Assigned and Objective Levels of Difficulty

Levels assigned high ability subjects	Objective levels	Levels assigned low ability subjects
	5	H (hard)
	4	M (medium)
H (hard)	3	E (easy)
M (medium)	2	
E (easy)	1	

Both in the ability test and in the two problem periods, subjects in the high ability condition were always told they got all of their problems correct, while subjects in the low ability condition were always told they got only their easy problems correct.

Reward conditions. In operationalizing the typical, performance and position reward structures, we had no means for measuring the exact reward-cost magnitudes involved. Consequently, we had to create gross differences between these structures. This was accomplished by awarding points for those aspects of each structure which were to be emphasized and then directing all subjects to maximize these points. Thus we could expect differences in choice behavior between reward conditions, but we could not predict exactly which choice would constitute the best reward-cost outcome in any condition for a given level of ability.

In the typical structure emphasis was given to both position and performance rewards. As indicated in Table 2, points in the typical

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Insert Table 2 about here

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condition were awarded for both the difficulty of the set, position rewards, and the number of problems solved correctly, performance rewards. An attempt was made to give roughly equal emphasis to both components. One point was awarded for each easy problem in a set, two points for each medium problem and three points for each hard problem. The value of an individual set was equal to the sum of the values of the problems in it. Two points were awarded for each problem solved correctly, irrespective of difficulty. It was possible to receive six points, or the average value of the sets, by solving all three problems

Table 2

Point System for Typical Reward Condition

Problem sets	Values			Totals	
	Sets	Solutions high ability subjects were told were correct	Solutions low ability subjects were told were correct	High ability subjects	Low ability subjects
#7 HHH	9	6	0	15	9
#6 MHH	8	6	0	14	8
#5 MMH	7	6	0	13	7
#4 MMM	6	6	0	12	6
#3 MME	5	6	2	11	7
#2 MEE	4	6	4	10	8
#1 EEE	3	6	6	9	9

in a set correctly. However, in examining this system it should be remembered that the low ability subjects were told they solved only the easy problems correctly while the high ability subjects were told they solved all problems correctly. The high ability subjects in this condition could receive their maximum points by choosing an HHH set. Thus maximization for these subjects was associated with consistency. A more interesting situation confronted the low ability subjects. The totals for low ability subjects were symmetrical; these subjects could receive their maximum points by choosing either an EEE or an HHH set. Thus maximization for these subjects was associated with both consistency and extreme inconsistency. Consideration of effort costs led us to predict the former.[6]

In the performance structure, emphasis was given to performance rewards. As indicated in Table 3, points in the performance condition

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Insert Table 3 about here

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were awarded only for correct solutions. Five points were awarded for each problem solved correctly, irrespective of difficulty. It was possible to receive fifteen points by solving all three problems in a set correctly. The high ability subjects could receive their maximum points by choosing any of the seven sets available. Thus maximization for these subjects was associated with consistency as well as with any state of inconsistency. Consideration of certainty in obtaining the maximum led us to predict something easier than the equilibrated HHH set. The low ability subjects could receive their maximum points by choosing an EEE set. Thus maximization for these subjects was associated with consistency.

Table 3

Point System for Performance Reward Condition

Problem sets	Values			Totals	
	Sets	Solutions high ability subjects were told were correct	Solutions low ability subjects were told were correct	High ability subjects	Low ability subjects
#7 HHH	0	15	0	15	0
#6 MHH	0	15	0	15	0
#5 MMH	0	15	0	15	0
#4 MMM	0	15	0	15	0
#3 MME	0	15	5	15	5
#2 MEE	0	15	10	15	10
#1 EEE	0	15	15	15	15

In the position structure, emphasis was given to position rewards. As indicated in Table 4, points in the position condition were awarded

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Insert Table 4 about here

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only for the difficulty of the set. Three points were awarded for each easy problem, six points for each medium problem, and nine points for each hard problem. As in the typical condition, the value of any given set was equal to the sum of the values of the problems in it. The high ability subjects could receive their maximum points by choosing an HHH set. Thus maximization for these subjects was associated with consistency. The low ability subjects could receive their maximum points by also choosing an HHH set. Thus maximization for these subjects was associated with extreme inconsistency.

A word should be added on the distribution of points. Those points that were awarded for the difficulty of the set, in the typical and position conditions, were given immediately after the set was chosen and before the set was obtained. These points were given independently of performance and would not be lost in the event a subject was told he solved a problem incorrectly. Points awarded for correct solutions, in the typical and performance conditions, were given at the end of each problem period after the problems ostensibly has been corrected.

Measures. The two basic manipulations in the experiment were the high and low ability conceptions and the point systems. Two measures of the effectiveness of the ability manipulation were used. Both were contained in the post-experimental questionnaire. One was

Table 4

Point System for Position Reward Condition

Problem sets	Values			Totals	
	Sets	Solutions high ability subjects were told were correct	Solutions low ability subjects were told were correct	High ability subjects	Low ability subjects
#7 HHH	27	0	0	27	27
#6 MHH	24	0	0	24	24
#5 MMH	21	0	0	21	21
#4 MMM	18	0	0	18	18
#3 MME	15	0	0	15	15
#2 MEE	12	0	0	12	12
#1 EEE	9	0	0	9	9

designed to determine how accurate each subject felt the scoring was in the ability test. The other was designed to determine who each subject felt had the highest ability, himself or the other subject. A measure concerning each subject's understanding of the point system operative in the condition he was in was also included in the post-experimental questionnaire.

The measure of a subject's tendency toward or away from status consistency was his choice of a problem set in the second problem period. Since each subject had had experience with nine problems by this time, six in the ability test and three in the first problem period, it was felt that his conception of his ability should be stabilized at this point.

Satisfaction was measured at the end of the second problem period, after the results of that period had been made known. Each subject filled out a questionnaire which required him to compare the difficulty of the problems in his set in the second problem period and the difficulty of the problems he was able to solve correctly on the ability test. He was then asked how he felt about this comparison. His feelings were indicated on an eleven-point scale which ranged from "felt very satisfied" to "felt very dissatisfied."

Subjects. Ninety male students from English classes in a nearby junior college were used as subjects. Of this number, thirty were assigned to each of the three reward conditions, and, within each condition, fifteen were assigned to the high ability treatment and fifteen to the low ability treatment. A maximum age of twenty years was set so as to insure that most subjects would be relatively naive concerning social-psychological experimentation. The subjects were recruited on a volunteer basis and were paid an hourly rate for their participation.

Results and Discussion

In reporting the results of the experiment, we will focus on the comparisons specified in propositions 4 and 5. Although we will present all of the data for high and low ability subjects in all three reward conditions, we shall be primarily interested in any differences in behavior between high ability subjects in the typical and performance conditions and between low ability subjects in the typical and position conditions.

Manipulation validation. As mentioned earlier, measures of the effectiveness of the ability manipulation were obtained after the experiment. One measure involved asking each subject how accurate he felt the experimenter was in scoring both his solutions and the other person's solutions to the problems in the ability test. Each subject responded to questions about self and other by circling a number on a six-point scale, ranging from 0 for "completely inaccurate" to 5 for "completely accurate." It was felt that these would serve as meaningful measures of the effectiveness of ability manipulation because it was assumed that the experimenter's instructions would be highly regarded in the absence of suspicion. It will be remembered that the experimenter told the subjects that their performance on the ability test would be an extremely accurate predictor of their performance during the problem periods.

Table 5 presents the medians of the high ability subjects'

Insert Table 5 about here

Table 5

Median Responses of High Ability Subjects

Concerning Accuracy of Scoring in the Ability Test

	Reward condition		
	Typical	Performance	Position
Own solutions	5.0	5.0	4.0
Other's solutions	5.0[a]	5.0	4.0

Note.-Number in each cell is 15 unless otherwise specified.

[a]N=14; by error the question was not included in one subject's questionnaire.

estimates of scoring accuracy in the ability test. A Kruskal-Wallis one-way analysis of rank variance was made on the distributions for the three reward conditions for both "own solutions" and "other's solutions." The H values (3.26 for "own" and .99 for "other;" corrected for ties) are not significant in either case.[7] Thus we conclude that there were no significant condition effects on the high ability subjects' estimates of the accuracy of the experimenter's scoring of either their own solutions or the other person's solutions in the ability test.

Table 6 presents the medians of the low ability subjects' estimates

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Insert Table 6 about here

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of scoring accuracy in the ability test. Again, the H values (.18 for "own" and 1.06 for "other;" corrected for ties) are not significant. Thus we conclude that there were no significant condition effects on the low ability subjects' estimates of the accuracy of the experimenter's scoring of either their own solutions or the other person's solutions on the ability test.

A comparison of Table 5 with Table 6 reveals that the high ability subjects felt that the experimenter was more accurate in his scoring than the low ability subjects. This difference can be at least partially explained by the ability treatment. The high ability subjects were always told they got all of their problems correct, whereas, the low ability subjects were always told they got their medium and hard problems wrong. If we assume that an individual is more likely to accept positive

Table 6

Median Responses of Low Ability Subjects

Concerning Accuracy of Scoring in the Ability Test

	Reward condition		
	Typical	Performance	Position
Own solutions	4.0	4.0	3.0
Other's solutions	3.0[a]	4.0	5.0

Note.-Number in each cell is 15 unless otherwise specified.

[a]N=14; one subject failed to answer this question.

assessments of his qualities rather than negative ones, we might expect this difference.

While this difference between high and low ability estimates does exist, the medians of the estimates were in all cases above the 2.5 mid-point on the 0 to 5 scale, that is, they were on the accurate side of the scale. Thus, the subjects in both ability treatments appear to have believed that the experimenter was accurate in scoring both their own solutions and the other person's solutions in the ability test.

The other measure of the effectiveness of the ability manipulation involved asking each subject whether or not there was a difference between his ability and that of the other person. The question was responded to by checking a "yes" or a "no" category. If he checked "yes," he was asked to indicate who had the higher ability, he or the other person. All but two of the subjects responded to this question in ways that indicated that the ability treatment they were in was effective. Thus the subjects appear to have perceived a difference between their own and the other person's ability.

The measure of understanding of the point system mentioned earlier involved asking each subject what the number of points received depended on. The question was responded to by checking a category indicating the difficulty of the set chosen, a category indicating the number of problems solved correctly, or a category indicating <u>both</u> the difficulty of the set and the number of problems solved correctly. All but five of the subjects responded to this question in ways that indicated they understood the point system operative in the conditions they were in. The maximum number of subjects in any condition was two.[8]

The final manipulation to be considered is that of position choice. To the extent that the ability manipulations and the operationalization of the reward structures were successful, tendencies toward or away from status consistency in the different structures should occur in accordance with propositions 1,2 and 3. The measure of such tendencies was the subjects' choices of sets of problems from the seven kinds of sets available. Only choices from the second problem period were considered.[9] In analyzing these data, values of one through seven were assigned to the different sets of problems, one representing the easiest kind of set and seven the hardest.

Table 7 presents the medians of the values of the sets chosen by

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Insert Table 7 about here

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high ability subjects in all three reward conditions. According to propositions 1 and 2, high ability individuals will tend to choose positions which require the amount of ability they have in a typical structure and positions which require less ability than they have in a performance structure. The difference between the distributions of set choices for high ability subjects in the typical and performance conditions was tested by means of the Mann-Whitney U test. The U value for the difference between the distributions is highly significant ($U = 15.5$; $p < .001$; 1-tailed test). Thus, we can say that the high ability subjects in the typical and performance conditions behaved as expected.

Table 7

Median Values of Problem Sets Chosen by High Ability Subjects

Reward condition		
Typical	Performance	Position
7.0	5.0	7.0

Note.-Number in each cell is 15.

Table 8 presents the medians of the values of the sets chosen by

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Insert Table 8 about here

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low ability subjects in all three reward conditions. According to propositions 1 and 3, low ability individuals will tend to choose positions which require the amount of ability they have in a typical structure and positions which require more ability than they have in a position structure. The difference between the distributions of set choices for low ability subjects in the typical and position conditions was also tested by means of the U test. The Z for the U value reached .05 (U = 75.5; Z = 1.603; p = .054; 1-tailed test).[10] Thus, we can say that the low ability subjects in the typical and position conditions behaved as expected.

Satisfaction. As stated in propositions 4 and 5, differences in ability-position consistency which result from attempts to obtain a best reward-cost outcome will have little effect upon satisfaction. These propositions were tested by comparing satisfaction scores for the high ability subjects in the typical and performance conditions and the low ability subjects in the typical and position conditions.

As mentioned earlier the measure of satisfaction was a question which required the subject to indicate the difficulty of the problems in his set in the second problem period, the difficulty of the problems in the ability test he was able to solve correctly, whether or not the problems he had in the second problem period were too hard or too easy in terms of how he did on the ability test, and how he felt about this.

The subject responded by circling a number on an eleven-point scale which ranged from -5 for "felt very dissatisfied," to 0 to +5 for "felt very satisfied." The complexity of the question derives from the fact that it was felt desirable to be as sure as possible that the subject's attention was directed to any discrepancy that might exist between his perceived ability and the difficulty of his set of problems.

Table 9 presents the medians of satisfaction scores for high ability

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Insert Table 9 about here

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subjects in all three reward conditions. According to proposition 4, there should be no difference in satisfaction between the high ability subjects in the typical and performance conditions. The difference between the distributions of satisfaction scores for high ability subjects in these two conditions was tested by means of the Mann-Whitney U test. The U value is not significant (U = 102.5; 2-tailed test). Thus, the prediction concerning the effect of inconsistency produced by a performance structure is supported. This finding supports the general thesis that status inconsistency <u>itself</u> has little effect upon satisfaction.[11]

Table 10 presents the medians of satisfaction scores for low ability

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Insert Table 10 about here

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subjects in all three reward conditions. According to proposition 5, there should be no difference in satisfaction between the low ability subjects in the typical and position conditions. The difference

Table 9

Median Satisfaction Scores of High Ability Subjects

Reward condition		
Typical	Performance	Position
5.0	4.0	4.0

Note.-Number in each cell is 15.

Table 10

Median Satisfaction Scores of Low Ability Subjects

Reward conditions		
Typical	Performance	Position
-2.0	-1.0	-3.0

Note.-Number in each cell is 15.

With regard to the generality of the results obtained here, two possible extensions of the present research suggest themselves. First, it would be desirable to show the effects of inconsistency upon satisfaction when the inconsistency is not associated with a best reward-cost outcome. Second, if the results are to be generalized beyond the ability-position inconsistencies studied here, it will be necessary to determine the effects on satisfaction of inconsistencies between other status components. This would require conceptualizing these components in terms of rewards and costs and then testing to see if best outcome inconsistencies between them lower satisfaction.

Footnotes

[1] This research was supported by NSF grant GS-687 to the first author for investigation of status inconsistency in groups and organizations. We would like to express our appreciation to Kurt W. Back for reading and criticizing the first draft of the paper. We are also indebted to Morris Zelditch, Jr. and Bo Anderson for reading and criticizing later drafts of the paper and to Eugene Lehr for his assistance in several phases of the research. A condensed version of the paper was read in the social psychology section of the annual meetings of the Pacific Sociological Association in March 1967.

[2] This analytic distinction between position and performance as alternative sources of evaluation is similar to Davis' distinction between prestige, as an evaluation "attached solely to the --- office," and esteem, as an evaluation attached "to the success or failure in carrying out the stipulations" of the office (1948, pp. 93-94).

Contrary to Davis' conceptualization of esteem, however, we do not consider performance to be an entirely independent status component, even though it is an additional source of evaluation. Assuming a constant or randomized motivation, performance reflects the relation between position and ability. For example, both high and low ability individuals can perform well if they have respectively hard and easy positions, but a low ability individual cannot perform well if he has a hard position.

[3] The second part of this statement is as much an imposed condition as it is an assumption. While to some it may seem an unrealistic condition, consider the following: We often say that two men "both do their jobs well." This is to give both men similar performance evaluations. In such instances, it is only when we note differences in the men's positions, e.g., that one has a hard position and the other an easy position, that overall differences in evaluations tend to arise.

[4] Thibaut and Kelley have reviewed studies which indicate that low ability individuals weight costs more heavily than high ability individuals (1959, pp. 89-95). This assumption is derived from this idea.

[5] We do not think that this contradicts what is known concerning achievement motivation (McClelland, 1961, Chapters 2 and 9). It suggests rather that the motivation to excel may be under certain conditions limited by the costliness of failure.

[6] It should be noted that this structure is directly relevant to the assumption presented in the previous section concerning how costs are weighted. If individuals do weight costs more heavily when position difficulty is above their ability, low ability subjects should make consistent choices.

[7] P values larger than .05 are reported as not significant throughout this paper.

[8]Three of the five subjects were in the performance condition, one was in the high ability treatment and two were in the low ability treatment. The two other subjects were in the position condition, one in the high ability treatment and one in the low ability treatment.

[9]As indicated earlier, the first problem period was included in the experiment because it was believed that the experiment would be more powerful if the subjects were permitted one period in which to "test" the results of the ability test and to gain experience with the point system.

[10]Although Z is normally used only when $N_2 \geq 20$, it was employed here because there were several long ties, the U value was very close to the value required for significance, and only the formula for Z allows for correction of ties.

[11]It might be argued that the position structure may put even greater pressure on the high ability subject to equilibrate than does the typical. If this were true, it could be argued that a more powerful test of proposition 4 would be to compare the distributions of satisfaction scores for high ability subjects in the position and performance conditions. This was done and the U value is not significant (U = 112.5; 2-tailed test).

[12]It might be argued that the performance structure may put even greater pressure on the low ability subject to equilibrate than does the typical. If this were true, it could be argued that a more powerful test of proposition 5 would be to compare the distributions of satisfaction scores for low ability subjects in the performance and position conditions. This was done and the U value is not significant (U = 89.5; 2-tailed test).

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