

The Process of Status Evolution

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## The Process of Status Evolution

### Abstract

In this paper the development of status structures in task-oriented discussion groups is considered. It is shown that the generally accepted belief about the process through which such groups arrive at status differentiation is incorrect and that groups attain status differentiation through at least two distinct paths. Certain gross performance differences between the behaviors of members of groups which arrive at status differentiation through alternative paths are reported. In addition, differences between members of the two types of groups are found in the degree of differentiation in participation among group members at the close of the discussion session, in the extent to which group members recognize differential contributions by members of their groups in the areas of guidance, ideas and ability at the task, and in certain aspects of the qualitative performances of group members.

The development of status or social-dominance orders in face-to-face interactive situations is a topic that has received considerable attention in the past and continues to be one of the dominant issues in social-psychological research on interpersonal behavior (cf. Bales et. al., 1951; Bales, 1953; Slater, 1955; Horvath, 1965; Leik, 1965; Kadane and Lewis, 1969). Since it is likely that when a comprehensive theory of the process of status evolution is formulated and verified it will include propositions that participate in explanations of phenomena such as leadership, stability and change in group structure, intra-group conflict and conformity to group pressure, the topic can reasonably be regarded as one of the key areas in the development of social-psychological theory. Recognition of its importance as an area for research is apparent in the classic work of Bales and his associates (Bales, 1950; Heinecke and Bales, 1953; Parsons and Bales, 1955) and is evident in the current research on the problem (cf. Burke, 1968; Kadane and Lewis, 1969; Kadane et. al., 1969).

In this paper we will present an analysis of temporal changes in the behaviors of members of small, freely interactive task-oriented groups in units of time and action that are sufficiently small to permit a precise description of the process of status evolution. Although it has been well documented that status orders are in evidence in these groups at the end of periods of interaction of as little as forty-five minutes duration (Bales et. al., 1951; Kadane et. al., 1969), the manner in which individuals in

such groups become differentiated with respect to status has never been made clear.<sup>1</sup> That is, there are no reports which provide a detailed description and analysis of changes in the behaviors of group members as they move from a condition of undifferentiated status equals to a condition in which members are ordered with respect to status within the group, i.e., their degrees of control over the activities of the group and their recognized importance and prestige within the group.<sup>2</sup>

While an analysis of this sort would seem to us to be a prerequisite to any study of status orders in interpersonal situations, it is nowhere to be found. We regard such an analysis as vital since it would provide a basis on which to discriminate between proposed explanations for the process of status order development that are potentially viable and proposed explanations that are in fundamental disagreement with empirical reality. The fact that such an analysis is nowhere available is especially surprising since there seems to be widespread acceptance of a conceptualization of the process of status evolution which postulates that if individuals are apparent equals in terms of their visible, diffuse status

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<sup>1</sup>The characteristics of a group that are taken to indicate a status order are that, "marked inequalities develop over time in the rate at which members are observed to initiate interaction," and, "those who initiate action most frequently tend to be ranked highest on the criteria of 'best ideas' and 'guidance' and tend to receive actions from others at the highest rate" (Bales et. al., 1951). By a status order within such groups is meant an ordering of individuals with respect to the extent to which they initiate action, are evaluated as contributing the "best ideas" and greatest "guidance" to the group and have the communications of the other members directed toward them.

<sup>2</sup>The process of status differentiation has been studied in highly controlled experimental situations (cf. Berger et. al., in press) but not in freely interactive settings.

characteristics (age, sex, race, social class, etc.), they will be undifferentiated in their initial behaviors in the group situation and the status order that is observed at the end of the period will emerge as a product of the group members' interactions (Bales et. al., 1951; Heinecke and Bales, 1953; Berger et. al., 1966).<sup>3</sup>

Obviously, acceptance of this description of the phenomenon rules out a certain class of explanations of the genesis of the status order and has a powerful effect on the direction in which research and theory construction will be pursued. For example, explanations that posit status evolution to be caused by powerful personality or socialization variables which influence an individual's behavior to the extent that he dominates the group from the start, would be inconsistent with the "fact" of initial equality. In the search for an explanation then, the accepted evidence would suggest attempting to create an explanation that accounts for the status order through an analysis of the interaction without recourse to variables that are attributes of actors.

Our analysis of the literature on which this conceptualization is based has failed to discover any substantial body of data that supports the process formulation in its entirety. The final result, that of the display of status orders at the end of single discussion sessions, is rather well established since it is reported by a number of investigators who base their conclusions on substantial bodies of data (Bales et. al., 1951; Stephan and Mishler, 1952; Kadane et. al., 1969). The crucial and

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<sup>3</sup>In situations in which group members differ with regard to general status characteristics such as age, sex, race, and social class, these variables determine the status order within the group (cf. Strodbeck et al., 1957; Strodbeck and Mann, 1956; Moore, 1968, 1969).

insufficiently researched part of the argument is that group members begin the discussion session in a state of behavioral equality and evolve during their interaction into a group in which the members display the behavior differences that are taken to indicate the existence of a status order. The contention that there is an initial state of equality between members that changes into an ordered set of positions is based primarily on observations and impressions reported by Bales (Bales et. al., 1951; Parsons et. al., 1953; Parsons and Bales, 1955) and interpretations of Bales' findings of the following sort: "groups tend to become quickly differentiated internally in the exercise of authority" (Parsons et. al., 1953, p.249). There is a lack of empirical support for the contention that the differentiated state is preceded by one of non-differentiation.

Obviously, since definitive relevant evidence is lacking for the contention of status evolution, there can exist no strong support for the opposite assertion: that status orders are in evidence from the start of the interaction. There is, however, some evidence that this may be the case. For example, in an attempt to evaluate a proposed model for participation in Bales-type discussion groups based on the assumption of a developing status structure, Lewis (in press) reported that the model's fit to data for the first segment of the discussion session was poor. The model and the data were in disagreement on the question of the equality with which group members were participating early in the session. The data showed considerably greater early differentiation among group members than was expected by the model.

The research reported below is intended to provide data to clarify

the question of the manner in which status structures originate in task-oriented groups.

Method:

The subjects for this research were all male, first-year undergraduate students at Stanford University. Subjects were assigned to three-person discussion groups which were composed of individuals who had no prior acquaintance with one another and did not differ in any obvious manner with regard to age, social class, or race. A total of 59 such three-person discussion groups comprise the sample used for this study.

When subjects arrived for the study, they were taken to an observation room equipped with a one-way mirror and sound recording equipment. Participants in the research were informed that they were taking part in a study of group problem solving and that their discussion would be observed from another room. They were then presented with the problem that was to be discussed. The task on which the subjects were to work was one of creating a problem to be used as the subject for a group decision making study. The task was further defined such that the problem had to be one on which group members in the population to be studied would find the subject interesting, were unlikely to have special knowledge about the problem and were unlikely to hold strong value positions concerning the subject of their discussion.

The data reported in the remainder of this paper are from the time period that began from the start of the discussion and ended forty minutes later. The final five minutes of the forty-five minute discussion period have been dropped from the analysis since some groups concluded their work on the task prior to the end of the session. Since the problem addressed

in this study is the distribution of member participation and social organization during task activity, it was necessary to control for the point at which the task discussion ended by dropping the final five minutes of the discussion session from the analysis.<sup>4</sup>

Results:

In presenting the analysis of the data generated by the discussion groups we will proceed in the following manner. The first task will be to establish that the groups participating in this research display the characteristic status structures reported in previous investigations. We will then proceed to analyze the manner in which the groups arrive at this state of differentiated individual performance and social organization. We will explore the questions of whether the group members start from a state of behavioral equality or whether the status structure is in any sense imposed on the group from the start of the members' interactions. The final task will be to provide a detailed picture of the temporal dimension of the interaction between participants in the discussion.

The unit of data on which analysis will be carried out is that of a participation. A participation is defined as a complete speech by an individual uninterrupted by an extended pause. Obviously, participations can vary greatly in terms of the number of "acts" they contain under the Bales Interaction Process Analysis (1950) definition of an act. Whether a speaker interjects only a single word and then yields the floor or speaks for several minutes, his contribution is coded as a single participation.

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<sup>4</sup>The raw data on which all computations are based are reported in Fisek (1968).



It was decided to code only participations rather than attempt traditional Interaction Process Analysis since it has recently been shown that when used for coding act-to-act sequences the method produces insufficiently reliable results (Waxler and Mishler, 1966).<sup>5</sup>

The first point to consider is whether or not the groups in this study display a status structure by the close of the session. The data from the last twelve minutes of the interaction period were aggregated for each group and organized as follows. Treating the data for every group as a separate case and using only the final twelve minutes of the session, the proportion of the total number of participations made by each of the three group members was calculated. The members of each of the fifty-nine groups could then be ordered with respect to the relative proportion of their group's activity that they contributed. The mean proportion of contributions made by group members of high, medium and low activity levels are reported in Table 1. The summary data reported in Table 1 reveal substantial mean differences in performance levels for the three members of the groups. The most active man contributes approximately 60% more than does the least active man. The mean participation levels reported in Table 1 reflect the typical behavior differences displayed by members of groups with established status orders.

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Table 1 about here

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<sup>5</sup>Waxler and Mishler (1966) report the results of a number of reliability tests of the Interaction Process Analysis method and conclude: "We have found in our experience with the category system that it is impossible to raise the act-by-act reliability level through training much beyond 60%."

Table 1  
Mean Participation Levels for the  
Final Twelve Minutes

Level	Proportion of Total Participations
High	.42
Medium	.36
Low	.24

Two checks were made in order to establish that the proportions reported in Table 1 indicated the existence of status structures rather than simply chance deviations from situations of equal participation by group members. The first check consisted of a chi-square test of the observed distribution of participation against the distribution that would be expected if all members participated equally. Since the fifty-nine groups in the sample represent fifty-nine independent cases, it was possible to take advantage of the additive property of the chi-square statistic (Cochran, 1952) and calculate the chi-square statistic for each group separately and then to sum these values to arrive at a single statistic for the entire sample. That is, chi-square values are calculated for each group, using expected frequencies based on the no-differentiation hypothesis. The separate chi-square values are then summed, the number of degrees of freedom adjusted and the resulting chi-square value evaluated. This procedure resulted in a chi-square of 496.37, which has a probability of being obtained by chance of less than .001 (d.f. = 118).

The three individuals in each group have been ordered with respect to their average activity levels during the final twelve minutes of the interaction period and it has been shown that the differences in the average participation levels of high, medium and low active members are highly unlikely to have occurred by chance. Although we have established that there are definite differences in proportional participation among members by the end of the session it is still necessary to demonstrate a second point; that members of these groups display the characteristic evaluations of one another that are elements of the definition of a status structure. At the end of the session each participant was asked to provide data on his evaluation of the

relative positions of all group members with respect to three variables: contribution of best ideas, contribution of guidance, and ability at the task. It is generally agreed that these three variables define characteristics of status structures in task group situations and should be positively related to activity level if the groups in the study are to be classified as having developed status structures. The mean ranks on all three variables for group members with high, medium and low activity levels are reported in Table 2.<sup>6</sup> In each case, the result is that the higher the average participation level (in the final twelve minute period) the higher the mean rank on the evaluation variable. Based on the data reported above it seems reasonable to conclude that status orders are in evidence by the close of the discussion session.

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Table 2 about here

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In the following section we will consider certain temporal aspects of behavior in the discussion situation. In order to follow this analysis it should be remembered that the identification of an individual as a high, medium or low activity participant was based on his rank within his three-man group during the final twelve minutes of the interaction period and consequently, no data from the first twenty-eight minutes of the discussion session

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<sup>6</sup>This data was collected in paired comparison form and later converted into rankings. In a few cases this was not possible due to failure of transitivity, and such individuals have been excluded from this analysis. Unfortunately there is no applicable statistical test which would allow us to evaluate the differences in mean rank on each criteria for each activity level.

Table 2  
Participation Level and Mean Rank on  
Three Evaluation Variables

Level	Best Ideas*	Guidance	Ability
High	1.6	1.7	1.6
Medium	1.9	2.0	1.9
Low	2.1	2.1	2.0

\* All ranks were assigned from highest (1) to lowest (3).

were used in determining an individual's participation level. Figure 1 reports the mean probabilities of participations in blocks of time spanning the entire discussion period for individuals who were identified as high, medium or low contributors on the basis of their performance in the final twelve minutes of the session.

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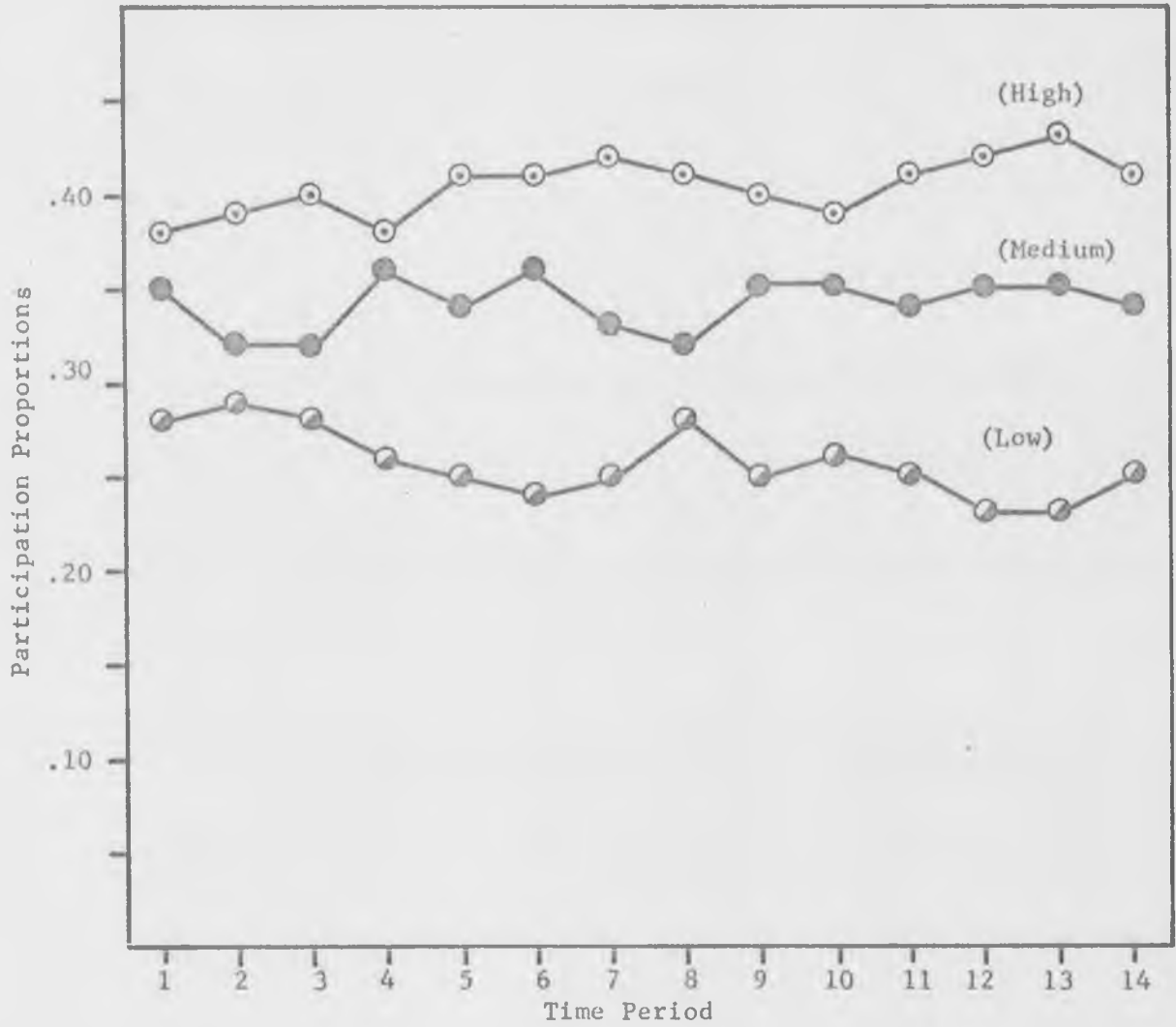
Figure 1 about here

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The data from the final twelve minutes of the interaction period are reported in Figure 1 as the final four three-minute time blocks. Note that the mean participation probabilities of individuals with high, medium and low average activity rates during this period are perfectly ordered for each of the four time blocks that comprise the twelve minute period. It is clear from the data reported in Figure 1 that selecting high, medium and low contributors on the basis of performance during the final twelve minutes of the session permits the prediction of mean participation levels for all previous time blocks. Using the final segment estimates of participation level it is possible to predict perfectly the ordering of participation levels of group members for all preceding time blocks.

The data reported in Figure 1 are directly contradictory to the argument that the development of status orders is solely the result of interaction among group members since if a group's status structure is developed only during the interaction period it would be expected that in the early stages of the session each of the three group members would be contributing equally to the group's interaction. That is, each member could be characterized by a .33 proportion of participation.

Figure 1 - Participation Proportions Through Time



In Figure 1, as in all the following figures, the first time period is of one minute's duration and all other periods are three minutes long. Note that even in the first minute of the group's interaction there is a considerable difference between the behaviors of the individuals who are to become the most and least active participants by the close of the session. The difference in the average proportions of their initiating interactions is .10 (high = .38 and low = .28). There is also some differentiation between the average behaviors of the individuals who are to become the high and medium participants by the close of the session (high = .38, medium = .35).

Although these proportions suggest a departure from the expected state of equality as early as the first minute of the interaction period, they do not provide a sufficiently precise description of the distribution of behavior within each group to permit any conclusion to be reached. A more appropriate manner through which to evaluate whether or not there exists a state of behavioral equality during the early part of the discussion period can be arrived at by the following reasoning. If the status structures that are in evidence at the close of the session are solely the product of the interaction among group members, then it should be the case that no relationship exists between an individual's relative activity level at the close of the session and his relative activity level during the initial segment of the interaction among members of his group. That is, individuals who are high level participators at the end of the session should be found to be distributed with equal frequencies into high, medium and low activity ranks in the early segment of the interaction period. The same relation between final and initial activity rank would also be expected to hold for individuals who are medium and low activity participants at the close of the session.



Table 3 reports the initial distribution of relative activity levels during the first seven minutes of the interaction period for individuals who occupy different status positions at the close of the session. It is obvious from inspection of Table 3 that the observed distribution is different from the distribution that would be expected given an hypothesis of no association between final and initial rank. A chi-square test between the observed and expected distributions leads to rejection of the no association hypothesis ( $\chi^2 = 37.017$ , d.f. = 4,  $p < .001$ ). The data reported in Table 3 reveal the probability to be .51 that a high participator at the beginning of the session will be the dominant participator at the close of the discussion. The probabilities that those individuals who are the medium and low participators early in the session will occupy the same relative positions at the close of the discussion period are .53 and .59.

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Table 3 about here

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The data reported in Table 3 lead to a definite rejection of the argument that members of all of the groups begin the interaction session in a state of behavioral equality. This does not, of course, permit acceptance of the opposite conclusion: that status structures are in evidence in all groups from the start of the interaction between members. When taken as 59 separate cases, inspection of the data on proportional participation by group members indicates that during the first segment of the session there is bi-modality in the participation characteristics of members of different groups. The members of a substantial number of groups begin the discussion period by contributing similar proportions of the total activity while in the remainder

Table 3

End of Session Activity Level and Initial Activity Level

End Level	Initial Level Frequency*					
	High		Medium		Low	
	Obs.	(Exp.)	Obs.	(Exp.)	Obs.	(Exp.)
High	30	(19.6)	17	(19.6)	12	(19.6)
Medium	16	(19.6)	31	(19.6)	12	(19.6)
Low	13	(19.6)	11	(19.6)	35	(19.6)

\* A chi-square between the observed and expected frequencies yields a value of 37.017 with a d.f. = 4,  $p < .001$ .

of the groups members show quite marked inequalities. The following procedure was used to differentiate between groups that could be reasonably classified as beginning the interaction period with no dominance order in evidence from those groups for which a dominance order was clearly present. A chi-square was calculated between the observed distribution of participation during the first seven minutes of the interaction period and the distribution that would be expected given an initial state of equality. The distribution of chi-square values was examined and bi-modality with a natural breaking point corresponding to a .20 probability value was observed. All groups that produced a chi-square which had a probability value greater than .20 were classified as being initially differentiated in terms of dominance and those groups producing chi-squares with probability values of less than .20 were classified as initially undifferentiated.<sup>7</sup>

The procedure outlined above produced two nearly equal size subsets of the original sample. The subset of groups that showed initial dominance

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<sup>7</sup> Attempts to determine whether or not the sample was composed of two or more distinct types of groups and to identify the most reasonable partitions among groups were made using techniques other than the one reported above. We used procedures that are typically employed to discriminate between alternative models for the same data (c.f. Atkinson *et al.*, 1965; Holland, 1965) and obtained essentially the same results as obtained with the procedure reported above.

The partition of the 59 group sample into initially differentiated and initially undifferentiated subsets probably mis-classifies a few groups in one direction or the other. The important point is not that approximately half of the groups we observed started in each state since even if our classification procedures were perfect this would represent only a single sample with a relatively small N and given any reasonable expectation for sampling error it could easily turn out to be the case that repeated samplings might show the true population distribution to be two-thirds of one type and one-third of the other. The important point is that there are two distinct types of groups and the available evidence indicates that there are likely to be substantial numbers of each type in any sample.

differentiation contained 30 groups and the initially undifferentiated subset contained 29 groups. Treating these subsets of the original sample separately, a second check was made on the association between an individual's activity level during the final twelve minutes of the session and his activity level during the first seven minutes of his group's interaction. The expected distribution of initial participation level given an hypothesis of no association with final participation level and the observed distribution of initial participation levels for members of both types of groups are reported in Table 4. Chi-square tests between the observed and expected distributions yield a non-significant value ( $.30 > p > .20$ ) for the subset of groups that were identified as initially undifferentiated and a significant value ( $p < .001$ ) for the subset classified as initially differentiated in terms of proportions of participation. The data reported in Table 4 support the contention that there are two types of groups represented in the sample.

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Table 4 about here

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Given that it has been shown that within the original sample there are two subsets of groups which differ with regard to the display of an initial participation order, the next point to consider is whether or not there are any other variables that distinguish between the two types of groups. In the following sections we will consider the questions of differences between initially differentiated and initially undifferentiated groups in terms of the behaviors of group members through time, the perceptions of the status structures of their groups by members of the two subsets of groups, and possible qualitative differences in the behaviors of the members of the different types of groups.

Table 4  
Initial Activity Level by Group Type  
and End Activity Level

Initially Differentiated Groups (N=30)

End Level	Initial Level Frequency*					
	High		Medium		Low	
	Obs.	(Exp.)	Obs.	(Exp.)	Obs.	(Exp.)
High	18	(10)	7	(10)	5	(10)
Medium	7	(10)	19	(10)	4	(10)
Low	5	(10)	4	(10)	21	(10)

\*  $\chi^2 = 70.600$ , d.f. = 4,  $p < .001$ .

Initially Undifferentiated Groups (N=29)

End Level	Initial Level Frequency**					
	High		Medium		Low	
	Obs.	(Exp.)	Obs.	(Exp.)	Obs.	(Exp.)
High	12	(9.7)	10	(9.7)	7	(9.7)
Medium	9	(9.7)	12	(9.7)	8	(9.7)
Low	8	(9.7)	7	(9.7)	14	(9.7)

\*\*  $\chi^2 = 5.172$ , d.f. = 4,  $.30 > p > .20$ .

The graphs reported in Figures 2 and 3 were produced by using the identifications of high, medium and low activity level participants that were established on the basis of performance during the final twelve minutes of the discussion and a reorganization of the data in accord with the decomposition of the original sample into two subsets. Figure 2 reports the mean proportions of participations across time blocks for different activity level participants for groups that displayed initial differentiation. Figure 3 reports the same data for the initially undifferentiated groups.

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Figures 2 and 3 about here

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The process data for the initially differentiated groups (Figure 2) demonstrate that as early as the first minute of the group members' interaction there exist marked inequalities in participation probabilities which are nearly as strong as the inequalities observed during the final segment of the session. What appears to be happening in these groups over the period of the discussion is that the dominant individual controls an approximately fixed proportion of the available opportunities to speak at all times and fluctuations in the participation rates of the second and third ranked individuals can be viewed as exchanges between occupants of these positions.

It can be seen from the data reported in Figure 2 that symmetric variations in the curves for participation probabilities of the second and third ranked men are quite pronounced. Although the second individual's participation level is close to that of the dominant individual's throughout the session, there is no evidence which indicates any sort of status struggle between them. Increases in the second man's activity level are not at the

Figure 2 - Participation Proportions Through Time - Differentiated Subset

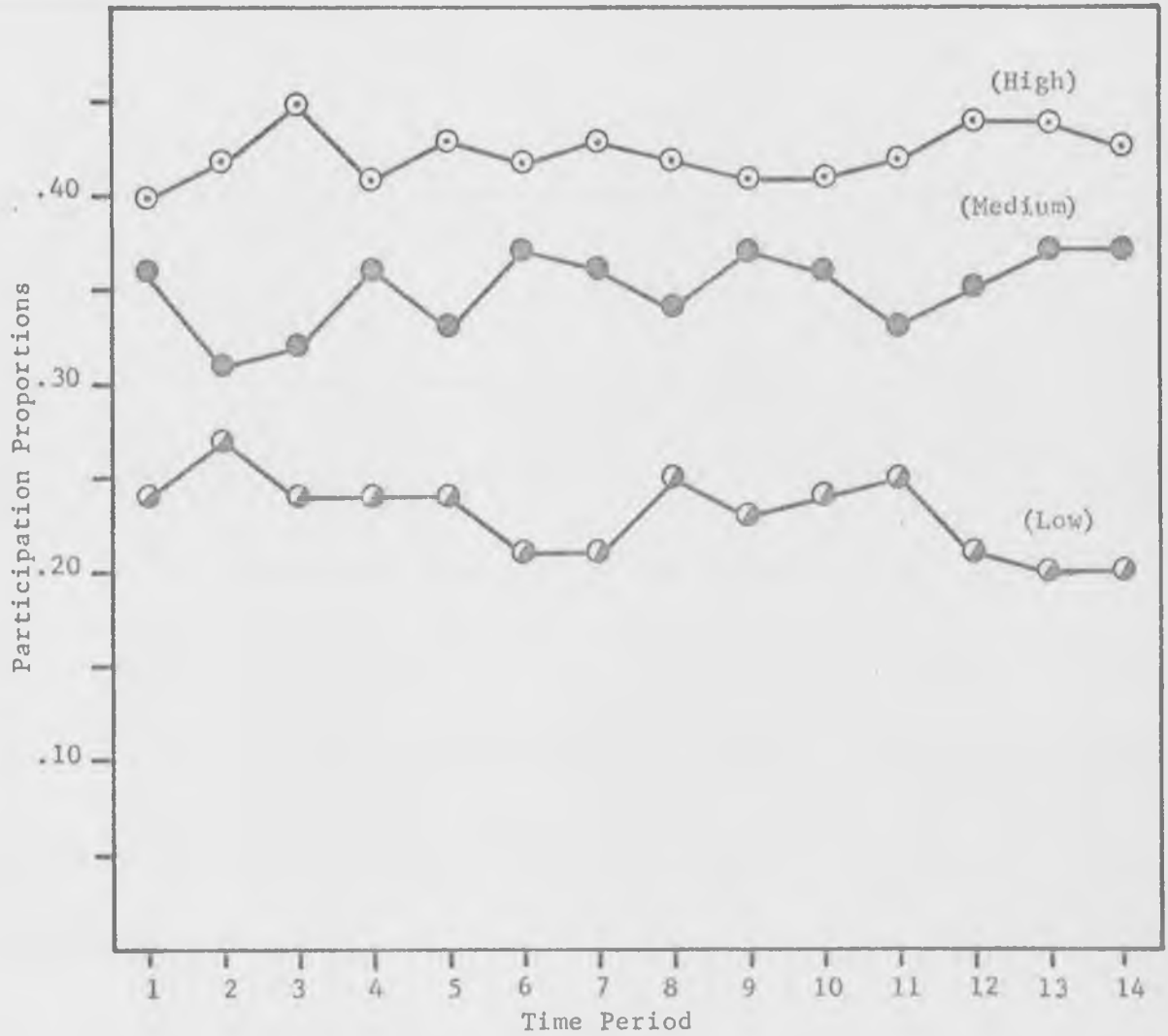
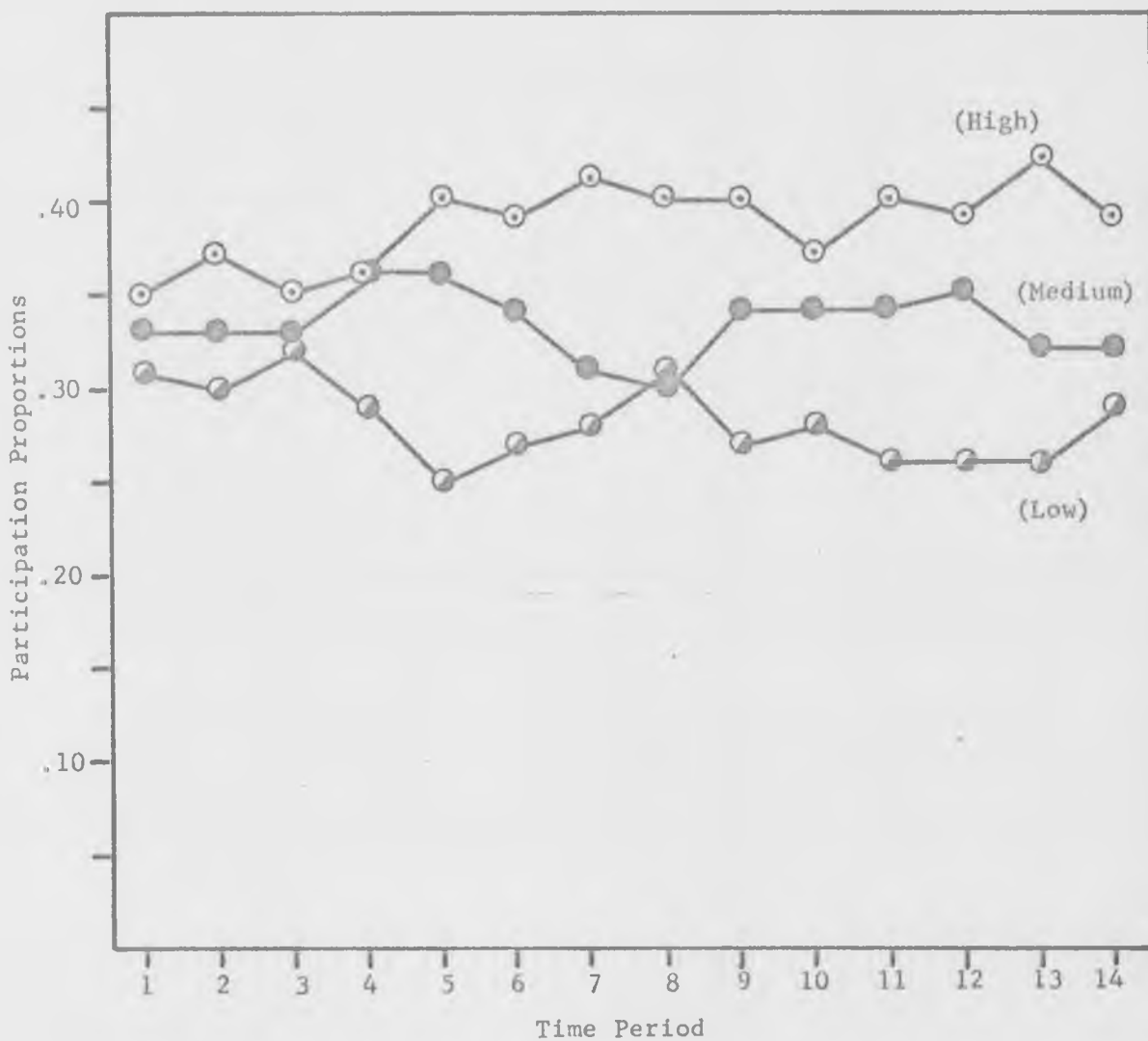


Figure 3 - Participation Proportions Through Time - Undifferentiated Subset





expense of the dominant individual but rather at the expense of the least active member of the group. The second and third ranked individuals appear to vary their relative shares of those opportunities to participate that are not taken by the dominant group member.

The graphs in Figure 3 report the participation probabilities for high, medium and low activity level members for groups that display an initial state of behavioral equality and subsequently develop a status structure. Variations in activity levels among group members in the initially undifferentiated groups do not appear to follow the same pattern as did the exchanges between members of the initially differentiated groups. It can be seen from the data reported in Figure 3 that changes in one member's activity level during a time block can substantially affect any other member's activity level during the same time period. For example, the high participator's activity increase at block five is at the expense of the third ranked group member while the third ranked individual's increase at block eight is accompanied by a decrease in the second ranked member's activity during this period.

The data presented in Table 5 report the change in participation proportions from the first seven minutes of the discussion session to the final twelve minutes for different activity level participants in the two groups. This data, together with the data reported in Figures 2 and 3 indicate that the characteristic ordering of group members' participation probabilities are in evidence in both types of groups. In terms of the magnitudes of the differentiations among group members, the initially undifferentiated groups display a less well developed status order at the close of the discussion session than do the initially differentiated groups.

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Table 5 about here

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The extent to which members of the initially differentiated and initially undifferentiated groups display the cognitions associated with fully developed status structures is reported in Table 6. The same result observed for differences between types of groups with regard to participation probabilities obtains for the two subsets with respect to members' evaluations of one another. That is, the properties that define status structures are in evidence but less strongly so for the groups that begin in a state of initial equality. Note that the most dominant individual is ranked highest on "best ideas," "guidance" and "ability" by members of both subsets of groups. Also note that there is marked differentiation among all members in the initially differentiated group. In the initially undifferentiated groups, however, the dominant individual is clearly differentiated from the second and third ranked men who are not differentiated from one another.

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Table 6 about here

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In an attempt to identify any existing qualitative differences between the behaviors of members of the initially differentiated and initially undifferentiated groups during the first segment of the discussion session, the first twenty participations made in each group were divided into acts (using the Interaction Process Analysis [Bales, 1950] definition of an act) which were then coded into one of three categories on the basis of their subject. The categories were: evaluations of other individuals, the internal social organization of the group, and the task set by the researchers.

Table 5  
Participation Proportions During  
Initial and Final Segments of the Discussion

Type of Group	Activity Level	Initial Segment	Final Segment	Change
Differentiated	High	.43	.43	0
	Medium	.32	.36	+.04
	Low	.25	.22	-.03
Undifferentiated	High	.36	.40	+.04
	Medium	.33	.33	0
	Low	.31	.27	-.04

Table 6  
Participation Level and Mean Rank on  
Evaluation Variables by Type of Group

Participation Level	Type of Group					
	Differentiated			Undifferentiated		
	Ideas*	Guidance	Ability	Ideas	Guidance	Ability
High	1.5	1.6	1.6	1.7	1.7	1.6
Medium	1.9	1.9	1.8	1.9	2.1	1.9
Low	2.3	2.4	2.1	1.9	2.0	2.0

\* All ranks were assigned from highest (1) to lowest (3).

Table 7 reports the results of this coding. The distribution of verbal activity is similar in both types of groups. Between each type of group individuals of different activity levels show generally similar behaviors. It is evident from Table 7 that while all groups' members place major stress on task directed activities there is a slight tendency for an individual's participation level to be positively related to emphasis on task activity and negatively related to questions of the internal social organization of the group.<sup>8</sup>

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Table 7 about here

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The mean number of acts per participation were calculated for the first twenty participations in each group. The result, reported in Table 8, is the only other characteristic we were able to identify that distinguished between groups. Members of the initially differentiated groups were ordered in mean participation lengths in the same manner as they were ordered in mean participation probabilities. That is, on the average, the individual who is most likely to speak presents the greatest number of acts per speech; the second most likely speaker incorporates the second greatest number of acts per speech and the least active participant contributes the fewest number of acts per speech. The situation in the initially undifferentiated groups is similar only to the extent that the highest probability participator contributes a greater mean number of acts per speech than the second and third ranked individuals.

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<sup>8</sup>Traditional I.P.A. coding (from tape recordings) was carried out on this data and revealed no additional obvious differences between members of different types of groups or among different activity level participants.

Table 7  
Proportional Distribution of Acts  
by Type of Group and Participation Rank

Subject	Initially Differentiated			Initially Undifferentiated		
	Participation Rank			Participation Rank		
	High	Medium	Low	High	Medium	Low
Evaluations	.02	.02	.02	.02	.01	.02
Organization	.04	.05	.10	.05	.09	.08
Task	.95	.93	.89	.94	.90	.89

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Table 8 about here

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Conclusions:

In this paper we have shown that there are two different paths to status positions in task-oriented groups composed of individuals who are apparent equals in terms of their external status characteristics. Approximately half of the groups that participated in the study reported here displayed marked differentiation in member participation as early as the first minute of their group's session. The remaining groups in the study displayed near equality in initial participation and appeared to evolve status structures during the course of the members' interactions.

It appears that for a substantial number of the discussion groups it is not possible to account for the emergence of the end-of-session status order through the analysis of the group's interaction. Obviously, if status orders precede interaction in time, the dynamics of the group members' interactions can hardly serve as causal variables in explanations of the initial emergence of the status order. For at least this subset of the discussion groups it must be the case that attributes of the participants themselves are the variables that determine the groups' status structures. That is, in the same manner that general status characteristics determine status orders in task groups in which members differ with regard to these variables (cf. Strodbeck et al., 1957; Strodbeck and Mann, 1956), there must exist a set of variables which cause differences in the behaviors of individuals who are apparent status equals. Probably in the status equal case these variables are socialization differences which result in different conceptions of self on the part of individuals, and in different behavior styles which in turn serve as cues in interaction.

Table 8  
Participation Level and Mean Number  
of Acts Per Speech

Type of Group	Participation Level		
	High	Medium	Low
Differentiated	2.4	1.8	1.4
Undifferentiated	2.1	1.7	1.7



We would interpret the result that differences in diffuse status characteristics determine status orders in task groups as consistent with this line of argument. Diffuse status characteristics are, after all, only powerful variables for the reasons that they determine an individual's conception of himself relative to other individuals and they serve as cues to norms which govern interaction.

The problem of explaining the evolution of status orders in the groups that begin in a state of near behavioral equality entails developing a theory that relates the differences between the qualitative and quantitative aspects of the behaviors of group members to their ultimate status positions within their groups. The data presented in Tables 5 through 8 report what we have learned about differences in modes of behavior of individuals in different types of groups and differences in modes of behavior of individuals who occupy distinct status positions in the same type of group. This information should provide some of the long overdue basic descriptive information that is necessary to build explanations of status phenomena in task-oriented groups.

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