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LEGITIMACY AND COLLECTIVE ACTION\*

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## Abstract

It is commonly assumed in sociological theory that legitimation plays an important role in the mobilization of collective action; yet, the direct effects of legitimacy on collective action remains theoretically vague. We develop a theory of the legitimation process that emphasizes its constitutive aspects, distinguishing between validity--the collective orientation to a binding rule, and propriety--an individual's approval of the rule. The theory states that validity has direct effects on mobilization independent of propriety and also of power and social control. We report the results of a laboratory study that isolates these direct effects. Within a task group, the communication network creates inequity to the disadvantage of the S's. Given the rules of the group, S's defined as members with decisionmaking rights, and an institutionalized means of changing the network toward equity, group mobilization for change is a routine part of the situation. In the experimental condition the network is legitimated so that it is linked to the purpose of the study, resulting in a significant suppression of mobilization. Further results reveal indirect effects of validity on propriety: Within a legitimated system individuals act out commitment to the constitutive rules and then organize attitudes to conform to that action. We conclude by drawing out the implications for the structural relation of legitimacy to collective action.

and tends to ignore legitimacy as a relatively autonomous basis of collective action and purpose.

Bachrach and Baratz's (1962; 1963; 1970) theory of nondecisionmaking provides a more comprehensive picture of the place of legitimacy in the political process. Research on "nondecisions" focuses less on mobilization and movements and more on the emergence, shaping, and eventual success or failure of an issue as it passes through stages of the agenda-setting process. Issues can be defeated at any stage by the mobilization of bias (Schattschneider, 1960): the making, reinforcing, or invoking of values, beliefs, rules, practices and procedures that make actors, issues, and tactics legitimate or illegitimate. Evidence suggests that populations are quiescent, no matter how aggrieved, if practices are unquestionable or alternatives politically impossible (Gaventa, 1980; Moore, 1978). If protest is attempted, it often is defined as "crime" and not "protest" (Lauderdale, 1980), and movement members are defined as outsiders without legitimate access to the polity, making their tactics necessarily illegitimate (Gamson, 1975; Tilly, 1978).

Though they address more fully the role of legitimacy in collective action, Bachrach and Baratz do not say much about the direct effects of validity: They conceptualize legitimation almost entirely in terms of instrumental elite manipulation of rules. Yet, following Schattschneider, it is important to recognize that the mobilization of bias is structural. It can come into play apart from direct action by elites and apart from coercion or the threat of it. The mere everyday use of rules within the given institutional contexts can work against

groups that are attempting change. We first formulate and then test this hypothesis in the present study.

## II. Theory

### Legitimacy, rules, and meaning

Weber (1968:31) states that a legitimating order (1) includes or entails "determinable maxims" or rules and (2) is held by the collective to "define a model or to be binding" within a situation. Action is legitimate if it accords with a rule. Many kinds of behavior are not rule-governed: Habit, uniformities of action resulting from similar interests, convention, custom, and inspiration all are not (Black, 1967; Weber, 1968; Wittgenstein, 1953). In all these cases one could have behaved differently without being "incorrect" or "immoral" in what one did, whereas rule-governed behavior is normative in prescribing the right behavior.

A binding or exemplary rule does not just regulate action, it also constitutes it. That is, rules define what actions (and actors, objects and circumstances) mean (Douglas, 1973). A coherent, inter-related system of rules is a practice or institution (Wittgenstein, 1953). Money, banking, marriage, baseball, chess, language, and lawmaking are practices--most rather complex ones made up of parts that themselves are practices. The institutional order has been described as an ontological reality comprised of abstract categories or typifications of people, actions, circumstances, and things or entities. Particular actions by concrete individuals make sense only in the context or frame of this ontological order. The act of paying a bill by check is not meaningful apart from the existence of money and banking, getting married is meaningful only within the reality of the family and the authority of a

minister or a justice of the peace, stealing a base is nonsensical (and possibly illegal) apart from the existence of the game of baseball and the entity known as a base.

To act even in the most instrumental way is to act out a social reality that is collectively created and shared (Goffman, 1967; 1974). If a person is committed to a purpose or line of meaningful action that is achievable only within some practice, then either one acts in accordance with the rules or one is not performing the intended action. In the latter case, one is a nonperson who has performed a nonact and who faces the moral response to violation (Austin, 1961; Garfinkel, 1967). In this sense, the constitutive features of rules have profound regulatory consequences and are exterior to and constraining on the actor in exactly Durkheim's sense (cf. Mulligan and Lederman, 1977). The key process is not individual internalization or propriety but rather the collective orientation to the legitimating order as part of the external natural world of things (Berger and Luckmann, 1966; Meyer et al, 1980; Zucker, 1977). Some actors comply with such rules because they in fact believe in them, some from habit, custom, or because of a calculation of interest and sanctions. Thus, a collective moral order does not presuppose "consensus" or uniformity of individual belief; it does presuppose that there is a known institutionalized order within the collective. It is enough to explain system maintenance and compliance by noting that an actor is committed to a purpose and therefore to the socially recognized practice by which accomplishing that purpose is constituted.

Action is not legitimated by being grounded in disembodied abstract societal values or in the presupposed intentions of socialized members.

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Rather, it is grounded in specific situated rules within interaction. At this level, rules function as accounts in that they provide valid motives and identities within the constituted situation (Mills, 1940; Scott and Lyman, 1968). Intentions and purpose themselves are actively constructed by and interpreted in terms of the rules of the game. This often occurs after the fact in attempts at justification and explanation (Garfinkel, 1967).

There are other types of rules that are less constitutive in nature, such as regulative or instrumental maxims. Yet, even these have constitutive aspects.<sup>2</sup> For example instrumental or performance rules constitute the organization of action as a means to do something well, skillfully, and effectively. Such rules often legitimate change of organization in attempts to improve performance. This would include the best ways to swing a golf club, open a chess game, motivate employees, or create the best school curriculum. If performance is highly inadequate, especially as the demands for efficiency or success are increased, others will come to view the actor as not carrying out the task or not knowing how to carry it out. We conceptualize rules as varying in the extent to which they are an integral part of the legitimating order and crucial to the constitution of action, performance, and purpose within a concrete situation.

#### Legitimacy and collective action

Legitimacy processes operate at all stages of social protest. The legitimization of a subgroup and its demands on the center are especially important in its mobilization of resources and public support (e.g., Gamson, 1975; McCarthy and Zald, 1977; Morris, 1981; Ragin et al., 1982; Snyder, 1975; Tilly, 1978). Changes in constitutive rules of

political-economic structures are integral to theoretical conceptualizations of regime instability (e.g., Lipset, 1959), social revolution (Skocpol, 1979), and in the experimental literature to revolutionary coalitions (Michener and Lawler, 1971). The delegitimation of a regime results in an increase in the validity of collective demands, the delegitimation of the use of violence by the regime and the overall level of collective action (cf., Gamson, 1975; Thomas and Meyer, 1980).

We suggest that legitimacy as an externally valid institution has its most dramatic effects at the earlier stages of protest. Rules that govern action make alternative courses of action nonsensical and immoral (Berger and Luckmann, 1966). Change in action presupposes change in the legitimating frame to which the collective is oriented and in which action is constituted, which is accomplished through collective-action--sometimes from the top downward. Change by an individual or subgroup is not change; it simply is not "doing" the correct action, and the actor consequently is defined as a nonmember or a (political) deviant and as raising a nonissue. One therefore gives up purpose and identity or gives up changing the institutional order. The result is system reproduction via nondecisionmaking.

Structural bias against change is seen most dramatically when a system of inequality is defined as equitable, but even when inequities or injustices exist and are collectively perceived as such, attempts at change may be infrequent (Moore, 1978; Weber, 1946).<sup>3</sup> It often is difficult to formulate alternatives given the embeddedness of a given rule in the larger system of practices governing the situation. To change one aspect leads to seemingly overwhelming change throughout the system that would call into question the very purpose of the collective.



Even if possible alternatives are formulated and means of change are institutionally given, attempts to mobilize action might be low. Specifically, if the rule is so embedded in the constitutive order as to make change in it result in the breakdown of situational meaning and purpose, then the initiation of mobilizing collective action is unlikely. If the unjust rule is not crucial to the constitution of action, performance, or purpose, mobilization is likely. In short, the more directly a rule is linked to collective, situational purpose, the less likely mobilization of collective action will occur.

The resulting hypothesis is that the validity of a practice has a direct negative effect on attempts at mobilizing collective action oriented to change of an unjust situation. This effect is structural in that it is not a function of instrumental elite manipulation or the threatened use of power; nor is it a result of individuals personally evaluating the situation as fair and appropriate.

#### The experiment as a social practice

The present paper employs experimental methods to test this hypothesis. This is useful first of all because the hypothesis requires effective control of the threat of coercion and the measuring and tracking of individual beliefs in propriety. *It* is also useful because an experiment is itself a highly institutionalized social practice. Subjects (S's) who volunteer for experiments typically are committed to the purposes of science in general and the experiment in particular (Adair, 1973). This makes the demand characteristics of experiments (Orne, 1962) useful for investigating legitimation processes. Any set of experimental instructions affects the conduct of S's in the experiment by placing it within a particular frame: the purposes of the experiment and

how the actions constituted by its rules accomplish those purposes (Goffman, 1974). Most experimental manipulations do not alter the frame of the experiment itself, but there is no real barrier to doing so, and in the present study we use manipulations of the frame of the experiment to alter the significance of collective action in relation to it.

In the experiment, S is given a task, a way to perform it, and a particular network for communicating with other S's. The communication network and reward structure result in a reward allocation that is both objectively and subjectively inequitable; that is, it is neither valid nor proper. There is a valid mechanism for changing the communication network that requires mobilization of other actors because it necessitates a group decision and shared cost. The legitimacy of a S's initiating mobilization depends on the situated frame. In the control condition mobilization toward change preserves the basic objectives of the experiment. In the experimental condition the situation still is defined as inequitable but change in the network would damage the purpose and meaning of the situation. In the control condition we expect a high rate of initiating collective action as a routine aspect of the task group. In the experimental situation, S's are oriented to and by the rules which constitute it as a practice--rules that are crucially linked to the communication network. Thus, even against material interest and definitions of injustice, and even though the S's are full members with access to collective mechanism of change, the constitutive rules of action will prevent attempts to change the situation.

### III. Methods

#### Subjects, setting and procedure

Subjects in this investigation were male students<sup>4</sup>, undergraduates and graduates, who served as paid volunteers. When recruited, the participants were told that they could earn, on the average, around \$6.50 for helping in a study of communication systems.

The setting consists of a set of rooms, one for each S and each equipped with a desk, chair, television monitor, signalling device, and a variety of message slips. When S's arrived at the laboratory, they each drew a colored token which corresponded to one of the rooms. They were led to believe that the draw was at random. The colors of the tokens were used to identify the participants throughout the study.

Participants received video-taped instructions that indicated that they were members of a five-person group which would work two practice problems and then a series of ten criterion problems. Each problem or trial required the construction of a series of five-point, multi-line graphs (cf. Faucheux and Mackenzie, 1966; Mackenzie, 1976). At the beginning of a trial, each S had information which corresponded to two lines of the solution graph. Completing a problem required that each member collect the information of the other four, from that information construct the graph, and then send the completed graph to the office staff. The exchange of information and all communication were restricted to written messages, hand carried by staff messengers. The message slips were designed so that S's could send only task information to others and only the completed answers to the office. A problem was completed when the office had received an answer from each of the five members. There was then a short rest period after which the office sent

a written message to each S informing them of the team earnings on the problem just completed and instructing them to begin the next problem.

The study was presented to all S's in both conditions as an investigation of "the various kinds of communication systems that can be used when people must work together but can communicate only indirectly by written messages." It was made clear that cooperation and accurate transmission of messages were necessary for any member of the group to correctly solve the problems. As a consequence, all earnings were to be awarded to the group. Each member of the team was to submit an answer, and the group would receive \$0.25 for each correct answer submitted on each trial. The group earnings were to be divided equally among the members at the end of the study. In this manner, the equal distribution of rewards was constituted as equitable and just.

The communication network

Each group of S's was assigned to a Bavalas (1950) "wheel" that consisted of a central position (played by a confederate) and four peripheral positions. Each peripheral position could communicate directly only with the center. They could communicate with each other only by marking on the message that the center should forward it to a particular person. Although the center had to forward it, he could read the information before passing it on. In actuality all messages were returned to the staff. In this manner all messages, both sent and received by the S's, were strictly controlled and monitored.<sup>5</sup>

The network was never presented graphically but described in the taped instructions and in a printed list of open and closed channels. S's were reminded that they had been randomly assigned to positions and that individual ability was irrelevant to the study.

### Mobilization of collective action

The group members were instructed that they could alter the communication network by renting additional communication channels at a cost of five cents per channel for each trial during which the channel was rented. Channels could also be closed at no cost. A majority of the group had to approve the action before any channels could be opened or closed, and rental costs were to be divided equally among the five members. Each member had a list of open and closed channels, and the exact procedure for opening and closing them was explained during the instructions: Any member could initiate specific network changes by filling out a rental request form, specifying what channels were to be opened and/or closed, and sending it to a fellow team member. The instructions made it clear that (1) the central position had to forward it (although he also could read it) and (2) if the member who received the request approved it he would send it to the office which would then take a vote of the five members. Rental requests could be sent only during the rest periods.

As soon as a participant sent a rental request to a teammate, he was stopped. Since all messages received by a participant were simulated by the staff and since all messages sent by a participant were intercepted by the staff messengers and never delivered to the others, the others were completely independent subjects and therefore continued.<sup>6</sup>

We interpret the initiating of the rental process as an attempt by a member to mobilize collective action using a collectively acceptable mechanism: Each S can request the support of another to put the issue of changing the source of request on the collective agenda. This action

puts demands on the whole group in that the costs of the proposed change would be shared by all.

This setting and procedure allow us to ascertain (1) the proportion of S's who initiate change in the communication network and (2) at what point in the series of ten problems they do so. The second piece of information is important because a rental request at say trial seven is different than at say trial two. In the former case, mobilization has been delayed and its initiation has overcome the inertia and lack of activity of others. Because S's are terminated when they first suggest a change, each can be characterized as surviving for a certain number of trials. If someone sends a rental request during the rest period after problem two, for example, then that S "survived" through two problems. The number of trials that individuals complete is represented by a survival curve which is our dependent variable.

#### Creating inequity and collective action

After the two practice problems a short questionnaire was given to the S's. After they returned the questionnaires, and before the start of the ten criterion problems, the study director reappeared on the monitor and indicated that although the team had done well on the practice problems, it was thought that they could work faster. He stated that, as an incentive for individual members to work more quickly, for each problem a bonus of \$1.25 would be awarded to the individual who submitted the correct solution first. The bonus was over and above team earnings and was not divisible. The S's were informed who won the bonus on a given problem along with team earnings after the rest period. Each S quickly perceived that because of the communication network the central position would always receive all of the information first, precluding

other members winning the bonus unless the network was changed or the rules violated. This meant that the center could earn as much as \$15, \$12.50 in bonus money alone, whereas the peripheral participant could earn \$2.50 at the most.

The S's were initially led to believe that they were all similar in age, sex and education and that they had the same amounts of information so that they could expect to earn equal amounts in a cooperative situation. Within this context, the administration of a sizable bonus based on competition within an exchange network that insured the center's winning the bonus, creates both inequity and material interest in changing the structure.

We initially legitimated changing the communication network by describing in detail the procedure that an individual could take to initiate opening and/or closing communication channels.<sup>7</sup> This condition therefore gives us a baseline measure of protest: attempts to mobilize support for changing the communication structure, using an institutionalized collective mechanism of voting for rental. Pretests of it led us to believe that it would be characterized by a survival curve in which the majority of S's did not survive beyond the third problem.<sup>8</sup>

#### Non-mobilizing action

Through extensive pretests we found that because of the openness of the experimental setting, S's are capable of circumventing the inequity and the material disadvantage in two other ways which we describe as non-collective or non-mobilizing because they do not attempt to change the rules of the game nor do they attempt to mobilize collective action around claims of inequity. First, S's can send the wrong information to the center. This would result in only that person having the correct

answer and consequently receiving the bonus. He need only do this twice before attaining a fair share of the bonus. However, this would hurt the earnings of all of the S's, not just that of the center; it would undermine team performance by insuring four wrong answers; and if more than one member pursued this activity on the same problem, no one would get the correct answer or bonus. A second non-mobilizing response is simply to refuse to send information to the center. By holding out, one would hope to force the center to send all of the other information--otherwise the problem would never be completed. Again, this response is at the expense of team efficiency and possibly of team earnings. Because neither of these responses constitute attempts to mobilize others toward getting the issue of inequity on the collective agenda, we do not count them as collective action. We ran subjects until we attained twenty in each condition (ten graduates and ten undergraduates) that either did not protest at all or responded by initiating collective action by renting. A total of five participants responded non-collectively in the baseline condition and eleven did so in the legitimacy condition before the twenty were attained. Thus there are totals of 25 and 31 subjects in the baseline and legitimacy conditions, respectively.<sup>9</sup> We first analyze the entire sample, contrasting no protest with protest, with the latter including both mobilizing protest (rental) and non-mobilizing protest (N=56). We then perform identical analyses after excluding participants with non-mobilizing responses (N=40). This second set of analyses focuses on our primary interest of the effects of legitimacy on the initiation of collective action in order to get an issue on the collective agenda. We anticipate that results will be similar in both analyses.



### Legitimizing the communication network

In the experimental condition, the communication network is legitimated so that any change in it would damage the purpose of the experiment. We legitimated the structure by linking it directly to the purpose of the scientific situation, concretely defining the purpose of the experiment and therefore participation in it as "using this structure." This delegitimizes change in that changing the network while still possible would cause the situation to become without purpose and in that sense disorderly. In addition to the general purpose read to S's in both conditions, after the first practice problem the study director gave information over the monitor about the purposes of the study; this information was said to be important for the individuals to understand in order for them to participate adequately. An elaborate history of scientific research into this particular communication network was fabricated and was described both verbally and by a summary chart over each S's desk. The fact that the rental procedure was available was explained by the fact that the experiment replicated in all detail this prior research. The director summarized by saying,

What we want to study is the detailed pattern of information flow in restricted communication systems. On the eighth problem we will measure the detailed pattern of information flow. To successfully measure this pattern, we need you to continue with the same restricted communication system for at least eight problems after you complete the two practice problems.

The participants then performed the second practice problem, filled out a short questionnaire, heard the description of the bonus (which created

inequity in a situation which until then was equal and fair), and then began the criterion problems.

#### The operational hypothesis

In both conditions S's have a legitimate claim that the situation is unfairly disadvantageous to them because of the bonus and communication network. In both conditions, they are equal members of the group with decisionmaking rights and equal access to initiating legitimate mechanisms of change. In the baseline condition, collective action will take the form of using the change mechanism as a routine part of the task situation. In the legitimation condition, the valid scientific context becomes concretely linked to the network by the rule delineated in the manipulation. In orienting themselves to participating in the study, individuals will come to realize that action is constituted by that rule. Therefore in the interest of maintaining meaning and purpose, S's will carry out lines of action that will preserve the communication structure for at least eight problems. The mechanism of change is still legitimate and defined as an integral part of legitimate political activity, but change itself is delegitimated and counter to the nature of participation in the situation. Thus, S's will resign themselves to inequity or attempt to right the situation through means other than changing the structure. The proportion of S's sending rental requests will be less in the experimental condition than in the baseline, and the requests that are sent will occur later in the sequence of trials.

This is a direct effect of validity. The manipulation is designed to establish validity of the network but not its propriety. At no point do we say that the communication structure is the best or most efficient nor do we on any other basis state that S's should view this structure as

proper. Additionally, power, threat of coercion, or direct social control by the experimenter or other S's are excluded from the situation.<sup>10</sup>

Since we legitimate the structure and delegitimate change for only the first eight problems, there may be frequent attempts to change after that point without it bearing negatively on our hypothesis; however, by that time inequity is ensured, and we expect most people will not bother changing at that point. We hypothesize that the survival curve of the legitimacy condition will show more S's surviving through eight problems than that of the baseline for all S's but especially when examining only collective protest and excluding non-mobilizing responses.

IV. Results and Discussion

Collective action

When including non-mobilizing action as protest, the proportion of S's surviving through each trial is shown in columns two and three of Table 1; Figure 1 displays the corresponding survival curve, plotting the proportion of participants surviving through each problem against the problem number. There is a dramatic difference between the two conditions. In the baseline, 84 percent of the 25 participants tried to circumvent the inequity, all but one of these before problem eight, and 68 percent of the 25 before problem four. When the structure was legitimated and change was delegitimated, 55 percent of 31 participants attempted some form of action; 20 percent did so after problem eight, leaving only 35 percent who attempted to get around the inequity before problem eight.

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Table 1 and Figure 1 about here

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The statistical significance of the difference between these two curves can be calculated by a logrank test (Peto, et al., 1977). As participants attempt to change the structure, or attempt to circumvent it through non-mobilizing action, they are terminated. The expected value of protest in a condition at a given trial is therefore a function of the proportion of the experimental sample left in that condition at that trial: This is the proportion exposed to risk of termination. The logrank test calculates an expected value for each condition by summing the different expected values of each trial for that condition. The degree of difference between the observed and expected protest, across treatments behaves similarly to chi-square, and statistical significance can be ascertained by using the chi-square distribution with  $k-1$  degrees of freedom (see Peto, et al, 1977). The  $\chi^2$  for our conditions is 10.12 (d.f. = 1,  $p < .005$ , using a one-tailed test because we are hypothesizing that the legitimacy condition has a lower rate of change than the baseline).

The analysis of collective agenda-setting action, with non-mobilizing protest excluded, shows that the effects of legitimacy on collective action is even more pronounced (see Table 1, columns four and five; and Figure 2). In the baseline condition, 80 percent of the 20 participants tried to change the communication network, all of them before problem eight and 75 percent of them before problem four.<sup>11</sup> In the legitimacy condition, only 30 percent of 20 participants attempted change

with only ten percent of the 20 initiating change before problem eight. The  $\chi^2$  for the difference between the two survival curves is 12.17 (d.f. = 1,  $p < .001$ ).

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Figure 2 about here  
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The hypothesis is clearly supported. Even though maintaining the communication structure perpetuates inequity and even though it works against the material interest of the S's, they do not attempt to change the structure nearly as much when the structure is legitimated and change is delegitimated. The communication network constitutes and gives meaning and purpose to the study and to participation within it, causing individuals to orient action toward it. Changing the communication structure would result in the breakdown of the situation for both self and other. Thus, changing the system in order to establish a fair structure or in order to pursue material interest is actively suppressed at the stage of S's not even attempting to mobilize collective action and to get the issue on the agenda.

#### Non-mobilizing protest

There are two possible effects of the validity manipulation on non-mobilizing protest such as withholding information, sending incorrect information, and ending participation. It might delegitimize change in general, causing a reduction of all attempts to circumvent the system. On the other hand, this manipulation does not decrease or redefine inequity. Because the inequity resulting from the bonus and the structure still remains, this manipulation might cause an increase in alternative, non-mobilizing responses. We tended to favor the latter

possibility and expect to see a larger number of non-mobilizing responses in the legitimacy condition than in the baseline. If we legitimated the unequal system as equitable and just, then we would have expected to see a decline in all types of protest. The present study was not designed to analyze these possibilities in detail; however, we were able to keep track of non-mobilizing responses and can tentatively see which alternative results.

There are three results that are suggestive. First, there is a strikingly high level of non-mobilizing protest in both conditions. Even in the baseline condition 5 of the 25 S's protested without attempting to mobilize collective action (i.e., renting), constituting about a quarter of the 21 total protests in this condition. Thus, even in the most conducive circumstances protest takes individuated non-collective forms. Second, although the differences are not statistically significant, there is more non-mobilizing protest in the experimental condition in which 11 of 31 S's attempted to circumvent inequity. This is 35% of S's and, more striking, 65% of all changes in this condition. This suggests that the effect of the validity manipulation on initiating change does not generalize to all other action that addresses inequity, most likely because the manipulation leaves the situation defined as unjust.

A third interesting finding is that the legitimation manipulation appears to increase more generally illegitimate behavior. In the baseline condition all five nonmobilizing responses are the withholding of information from the center in order to force it to send information to other S's first. In the validity condition, five S's withheld information, five sent false information and one stopped participation in the experiment. While only 5 S's sent false information ("cheated"), we nevertheless find it suggestive. Such action is illegitimate in both the

experiment and the larger cultural context, but it is not directly threatening to the collective purpose of the study, as is the changing of the communication network. This suggests that tactics which are abstractly illegitimate are less compelling if they are not specifically linked to situated collective meaning and purpose, even if it is presumed that actors have internalized the larger cultural values. Thus, given a range of illegitimate tactics, those which are most closely linked to situated meaning or to the collective purpose are the least likely to be used while there is an increasing probability of use as the rules become only generally and abstractly present. This might be offset by specific social sanctioning mechanisms which, however, have been abstracted out of the experimental situation.

#### A note on performance rules

The present validity manipulation grew out of a protracted series of pretests that attempted to establish both the validity and propriety of the communication structure. We attempted to convince S's through the presentation of objective scientific evidence that this was the best, most efficient network. In order to accomplish this, we placed the task and experimental situation in a long line of research on indirect communication. We emphasized the importance of the network being the most efficient or simply the best, and we asserted explicitly several times, both verbally and in print, that this system was in fact the best because previous research had determined it to be the most efficient. We were successful in instituting this context in that our manipulation clearly defined efficiency as the ground of action. In the baseline condition in which this presentation did not occur, the justifications used by the participants infrequently referred to efficiency, especially for those who attempted to change the structure. However, in the

legitimacy condition, the manipulation had the contextual effect that action--whether protest or not--was justified by considerations of efficiency. Those that did not attempt to change the structure thought that the system was unfair, but also thought that it was efficient and therefore probably should not be changed. Those that initiated renting thought that the system was unfair, but they justified their action not so much by claims of inequity, but primarily by asserting that the system was not efficient and that they were attempting to establish a more efficient one. Some that initiated renting thought the system was fair--the central person deserved the extra bonus money because there was more work in that position--but they reported that the reason they attempted to change the structure was because it did not seem efficient.

While our manipulation clearly shifted the contextual ground of action to efficiency, it failed to establish the legitimacy of the communication network in that it did not institute a belief or a "fact" that the system being used was the best one. We found through interviewing that reporting that the system of communication "has proved to be the best" or "the most efficient" was interpreted as being "so far" and the purpose of the study--and participation in it--was to find the most efficient communication network. Our post hoc interpretation is that given within at least student culture is the knowledge that a scientific study is to generate new data independent of previous research. Thus, the manipulation constituted the situation in such a way as to make performance criteria crucial to interpreting successful participation. Participants come to focus on performance standards of efficiency, and whatever will improve their performance within the limits of the experiment is morally imperative. Efficiency, as the purpose of the study, provided not only a ready-made motive for change, but a



ready-made account for change no matter what the "real" motive of the participant. Thus, a legitimating order can constitute action around performance rules that link ongoing action to the frame only as a means to an end. The constitutive purpose is to find the most efficient means; this "project" in itself is a powerful legitimation for change in the given organization of action (Meyer et al., 1980).

#### Validity, behavior and propriety

In shifting our approach, we manipulated experimentally only validity: The communication network is legitimated by an external, valid rule that linked the network to the goals of the study within the larger context of scientific research. The participant's action was oriented toward maintaining this structure. While not attempting to manipulate propriety of the structure in terms of the individual's approving it or thinking it in some way being the best or most efficient, our standardized procedure allowed us to measure the resulting effects, if any, on individual propriety. In a short questionnaire administered after the second practice problem (after the legitimation manipulation in the experimental condition) but before the description of the bonus (the introduction of inequity), and in a post-session questionnaire, we asked the participants if they approved of the communication network and if they thought it was efficient. These two measurements are PROPRIETY<sub>1</sub> and PROPRIETY<sub>2</sub>, respectively. We had expected that in reaction to the inequity of the bonus and network S's would reduce the degree to which they perceived the structure as proper in both the baseline and validity conditions. The results (see Table 2) show that those in the legitimacy condition did not change in this direction as much as those in the baseline. Excluding non-mobilizing responses, when asked before the

bonus was introduced if they approved the structure, the S's in the baseline condition had a mean score of 4.00; this went to 2.15 when the question was asked after the session. In the legitimacy condition, the PROPRIETY<sub>1</sub> and PROPRIETY<sub>2</sub> scores were 3.74 and 3.37, respectively. The difference between the means in the baseline is statistically significant whereas that in the legitimacy condition is not. Similar results are found for the question on efficiency. In the baseline condition the before and after scores are 4.0 and 3.0, indicating a decrease in perceived efficiency of the network. In the legitimacy condition the scores are 3.8 and 4.05, indicating a slight increase in perceived efficiency. The decline of means in the baseline condition is statistically significant; the slight increase in propriety in the legitimacy condition is not statistically significant.

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Table 2 about here

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A similar pattern is found when non-mobilizing responses are included. There is a large drop in approval in the baseline condition from 4.00 to 2.04. There is also a decrease in approval when the communication network is legitimated with scores changing from 3.70 to 3.0. Although change in both conditions are statistically significant, the decrease of approval in the legitimacy condition is only about one third the magnitude of decrease in the baseline condition. Examining perceived efficiency, there is a statistically significant decrease in the baseline condition from 4.00 to 2.73. There is no loss of perceived efficiency when the communication structure is legitimated; before and after scores are 3.74 and 3.52, respectively.

It appears that the legitimacy of the communication network lessened the likelihood that people link inequity to it and inhibited their thinking that the network was improper and inefficient. This occurs despite the fact that the validity manipulation did not directly affect propriety: The means of the questions when asked initially are not statistically different between conditions for either the approval or efficiency questions.

How does validity prevent the erosion of propriety? The nature of the effects of validity on propriety, whether direct or indirect, can be studied by analyzing different causal models of the legitimacy effects of PROPRIETY<sub>2</sub>. The three most reasonable models of the process are shown in Table 3. Model I states that the validity manipulation directly affects propriety which then determines behavior (trials). The notion is that although measured after the session, propriety reflects S's reporting the underlying prior attitude that caused them to behave the way they did. This directly contradicts our theory, and as noted, already is somewhat unsupported in that there is no initial difference in propriety across conditions. Model II states that validity directly affects trials which shapes personal propriety as reported in the post-session interview. Consistent with our theory, evaluations are accounts that justify the acted-out commitment to the organization of interaction. Model III states that validity directly governs both trials and propriety and that there is only a spurious correlation between the latter two. The path coefficients predicted by each model are included in the table and are tested by ordinary least squares regression analyses. Table 4 presents the analysis of the effects of validity on trials controlling for propriety. Equations were estimated using approval (Eqs. 1a - 2b) and

efficiency (Eqs. 3a - 4b) as the measures of propriety; these were estimated first using all responses and then just collective action. Equations labelled "a" control only for PROPRIETY<sub>1</sub>, and those labelled "b" also control for PROPRIETY<sub>2</sub>. By comparing each pair of equations (e.g., 1a with 1b), we can assess the results of controlling for PROPRIETY<sub>2</sub>.

Prediction 1.1 is unsupported because all comparisons show that when controlling for PROPRIETY<sub>2</sub> the effect of VALIDITY on TRIALS decreases only slightly but remains essentially the same. These equations also contradict prediction III.2 in that the relation of PROPRIETY<sub>2</sub> to TRIALS is not zero or close to zero when controlling for VALIDITY. The most revealing results are found in Table 5 which reports the effect of VALIDITY on PROPRIETY<sub>2</sub> controlling only for PROPRIETY<sub>1</sub> (Eqs. "a") and then also for TRIALS (Eqs. "b"). In all cases, when controlling for TRIALS the large effect of VALIDITY on PROPRIETY<sub>2</sub> drops substantially and no longer is significantly different from zero. This refutes predictions I.3 and III.3 (as well as III.2) and supports a crucial and unique prediction of Model II.

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Tables 4 and 5 about here

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We infer that validity affects propriety indirectly through its effects on behavior as summarized in Figure 3. A valid order, in defining meaningful behavior, commits individuals to particular lines of behaving so as to preserve that order independent of personal attitudes. In carrying out this behavior they reorganize preferences and evaluations so as to support and justify their behavior as well as the larger order.

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Figure 3 about here  
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## V. Conclusions

The basic finding of this study is that when change is legitimate, mobilizing collective action to correct inequity becomes a routine aspect of ongoing activity; however, when the social organization is legitimated so that change would damage collective purpose participants behaviorally support the order by conforming to the social organization and by not attempting to change it--even though the structure generates what is collectively defined as inequity to their disadvantage. This occurs when change is possible and specifically delineated and individuals have full access.

The validity manipulation framed participation in such a way that the social organization was directly linked to that frame--to the maintenance of situated purpose and meaning. This delegitimated change in that to change the network would mean either calling into question the nature and purpose of the study or simply deciding not to participate. This was a direct effect: It was independent of propriety, and social control and power were not relevant to the participant's action.

Interestingly, there is an increase in action abstractly illegitimate in the larger culture such as sending false information. People seem to prefer legitimate avenues of redress, but given a choice among illegitimate tactics, they tend to choose ones (withholding information and sending wrong information) that preserve the validity and purpose of the situation over one (changing the structure) that would destroy situated purpose and meaning. This appears to be especially

powerful when one considers the larger cultural forces against "cheating."

Legitimizing orders may frame the situation so as to increase collective action. Our initial manipulation framed the group task with goals of efficiency. This caused individuals to orient themselves to performance standards that increased the level of mobilization by providing a ready-made account for justifying change.

A second major finding is that validity can lead to individuals positively evaluating a structure. This effect is mediated by behavior: Individuals act out commitment to the valid order and then bring attitudes and motives into conformity. As summarized by Mills who was analyzing the effects of macro accounts on micro interactions, "The long acting out of a role, with its appropriate motives, will often induce a [person] to become what at first [s/he] merely sought to appear (1940:398)." This goes a long way in revealing the strength of nondecisionmaking effects early in the collective action process. Through a period of conforming to a particular social organization and using a valid order to explain and justify behavior, individuals come to view the social organization as proper. This might be reinforced by the lack of protest from others leading to attributes of collective approval which would then support change in ones own propriety (cf. Walker et al, 1985; Zelditch and Walker, 1984).

Even those participants who thought the communication structure was proper did not view the allocation of the bonus as just. The legitimation of one aspect of the situation did not generalize to all aspects and neither did the use of the bonus generate propriety of the reward structure. This is due to the fact that the outcomes are clearly

defined as violating the equal distribution of rewards and the bonus was never linked to the purpose and constitutive arrangements of the study. Interestingly, despite a more focused perception on the bonus as the source of inequity, there was no attempt to discuss or change the bonus, except indirectly when during the post-session interview several people suggested change in future studies. This results because the bonus allocation rule is simply given with no possible alternatives presented, no right of the participants to question it, and no vehicle for putting it on the agenda.

All aspects of social organization (such as rules of resource distribution, manner and structure of communication, role definitions, and situated accounts) often come to be framed as constituting the rationale and purpose of the collective. That is, social organization is commonly viewed as important and crucial in carrying out and attaining social purpose, but it also often comes to define value attainment. Thus, attempts to change any aspect of social organization are viewed as threatening to the purpose and meaning of the enterprise—whether it be a society, organization, or structured situation. This linkage of situated rules to the larger order appears to be a major force of structural bias against change and illustrates how easily this bias is mobilized even apart from overt action. Certainly such action, including the use or threat of power, plays an important role in political situations, but the dynamics of legitimacy are at least in part structural and independent of such factors.

A situation or aspects of a situation in which change is not even "possible" and a situation in which "inequity" is redefined as "equity" are extreme versions of mobilization of bias and nondecisionmaking. Yet,

even in a situation in which clearly perceived inequity can be corrected by changing the structure of interaction, if ongoing activity is organized by a validating order, there are low levels of initiating collective action; this in turn leads people to positively evaluate that organization.



## Notes

1. Related investigations of the indirect effects of validity and other relevant research are reviewed by Zelditch and Walker (1984).
2. On the interconnectedness of constitutive and regulatory rules, see Gumb, 1972; Anscombe, 1958; and Hare, 1964. A common point is that constituting reality creates regulation, and regulating action assumes an ontology. Geertz (1974) addresses this issue in discussing the relation of world view and ethos.
3. Legitimacy is a more general process than equity which ultimately must be analyzed within a theory of legitimacy. For example, the literature suggests that the clearer the rules are concerning exactly what is objectively given, the clearer the definitions of equity within a particular situation and the more discernable the effects of equity on behavior (e.g., Berger et al., 1972; Cook, 1975).
4. An analysis of gender differences have been carried out and reported elsewhere (Walker and Smith-Donals, 1981).
5. In the few cases where a participant tried to communicate by writing messages over the printed information slips, these attempts were systematically ignored by the center.
6. After the S's were stopped or after they completed all ten trials, they filled out a post-session questionnaire, were interviewed, debriefed, and paid. During the debriefing, all deceptions were revealed and explained, and S's were given the opportunity to ask questions about procedures and the study in general.
7. Changing the manner in which the bonus was distributed would also correct the disadvantage and inequity. However, aside from refusing to

continue with the study (which one participant did) there was no manner in which the bonus could be changed. This in itself is a demonstration of the process we are examining: The fact that changing the bonus is not even possible, that it is part of the ground within which solutions centering on the "figure" are decided upon, makes protest unthinkable.

8. Thus, any tendency to delay or prevent the issue from emerging in the experimental condition cannot be interpreted as absence of an issue. The comparison with the control condition means that such differences must be seen as suppression of the issue by the manipulated experimental conditions. On the controversy over empirically identifying "nondecisions" and distinguishing them from "nonissues" see Frey, 1971; Polsby, 1980; Wolfinger, 1971; and Zelditch, et al, 1983.

9. In attaining the criterion number of participants, we excluded individuals who misunderstood the task, did not perceive any inequity, did not hear the experimental manipulation, or were suspicious. The total rate of exclusion was 31 percent, 32 percent in the baseline and 30 percent in the legitimacy conditions.

10. This manipulation makes use of the rational legitimating properties of scientific research as well as the authority of the head experimenter. However, the manipulation is not dependent upon the director's personal authority nor on any legitimated use of power. A previous study (Walker, 1979) attempted to manipulate personal authority in particular and showed its inability to affect protest. Additionally, the experimenter is physically absent from the situation. No formal or informal sanctions from any of the staff are present: (1) They only carry messages and clarify instructions and (2) according to university rules, we make it clear that S's can stop participation, and in effect bring the study to a

halt with no pressure or questions asked. Additionally, no power relations are at work within the five-member task group. There are, of course, the inherent consequences of violating collective purpose, but these result from structural process--not the exercise of power.

11. One reason why in the baseline condition the highest proportion of initiating renting takes place immediately after trial three is that many participants wait to see if the center will allow others to get the bonus. The center's winning the bonus on the first and then on the second trials leads some to infer that he will not give up the bonus. With an equitable distribution being two bonuses per member, the center's winning the third bonus insures inequity and seemingly confirms to most of the participants that he is in fact unconcerned with equity.

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Table 1: The Proportion of Individuals Not Protesting (Surviving)  
Through Each Trial.

Trial Number	<u>All Protest Included</u> <sup>a</sup>		<u>Collective Action Only</u> <sup>b</sup>	
	Baseline (N=25)	Legitimacy (N=31)	Baseline (N=20)	Legitimacy (N=20)
1	1.00	1.00	1.00	1.00
2	.76	.97	.75	1.00
3	.64	.94	.60	.95
4	.32	.87	.25	.95
5	.28	.74	.25	.90
6	.20	.68	.20	.90
7	.20	.65	.20	.90
8	.20	.65	.20	.90
9	.16	.52	.20	.75
10	.16	.45	.20	.70

<sup>a</sup> $\chi^2 = 10.12$ , d.f. = 1,  $p < .005$ , one-tailed test.

<sup>b</sup>Non-mobilizing responses excluded.  $\chi^2 = 12.17$ , d.f. = 1,  $p < .001$ ,  
one-tailed test.

Table 2: Assessing the Effects of Validity on Propriety: Before and After Scores of Propriety by Condition

<u>Question<sup>a</sup></u>	<u>Condition</u>	<u>Before (Propriety<sub>1</sub>)</u>	<u>After (Propriety<sub>2</sub>)</u>	<u>t</u>	<u>d.f.</u>	<u>p<sup>b</sup></u>
<u>All responses</u>						
Approval	Baseline	4.00	2.04	3.85	24	.001
Approval	Validity	3.70	3.00	2.10	29	.044
Efficiency	Baseline	4.00	2.73	8.12	21	.000
Efficiency	Validity	3.74	3.52	.76	30	.451
<u>Collective Action only<sup>c</sup></u>						
Approval	Baseline	4.00	2.15	7.28	19	.000
Approval	Validity	3.74	3.37	.92	18	.368
Efficiency	Baseline	4.00	3.00	2.92	16	.010
Efficiency	Validity	3.80	4.05	-.82	19	.425

<sup>a</sup> answer categories are coded "1" = highly disapprove or very inefficient to "5" = highly approve or very efficient

<sup>b</sup> Two-tailed test.

<sup>c</sup> Non-mobilizing protest excluded.

Table 3: Models of Validity, Behavior and Propriety with Predictions of Path Coefficients for each Model.<sup>a</sup>

## I

Validity → Propriety → Trials

$$I.1. \rho_{vt.p} = 0$$

$$I.2. \rho_{pt.v} = \rho_{pt}$$

$$I.3. \rho_{vp.t} = \rho_{vp}$$

## II

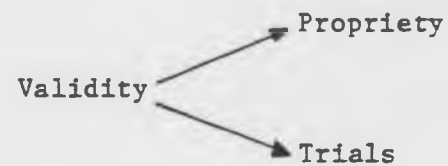
Validity → Trials → Propriety

$$II.1. \rho_{vt.p} = \rho_{vt}$$

$$II.2. \rho_{pt.v} = \rho_{pt}$$

$$II.3. \rho_{vp.t} = 0$$

## III



$$III.1. \rho_{vt.p} = \rho_{vt}$$

$$III.2. \rho_{pt.v} = 0$$

$$III.3. \rho_{vp.t} = \rho_{vp}$$

<sup>a</sup>"Validity" refers to the experimental condition; "Trials" to the number of trials survived, hence behavior; "Propriety" to approval and perceived efficiency measured after the session.

Table 4: Regression Analysis of the Effects of Validity on Trials Survived  
Controlling for Propriety<sup>a</sup>

Eq. Number	Independent Variables			Constant	N
	Validity	Propriety <sub>1</sub> (Approval)	Propriety <sub>2</sub> (Approval)		
All Participants					
1a	.51 (.84)**	.09 (.39)		4.48	55
1b	.37 (.83)**	-.01 (.37)	.38 (.28)**	7.32	55
Collective Action					
2a	.68 (.93)**	.02 (.46)		4.03	39
2b	.54 (.99)**	-.05 (.45)	.30 (.35)**	6.46	39
	Validity	Propriety <sub>1</sub> (Efficiency)	Propriety <sub>2</sub> (Efficiency)		
All Participants					
3a	.54 (.85)**	.12 (.37)		4.47	53
3b	.43 (.82)**	.01 (.36)	.38 (.27)**	6.54	53
Collective Action					
4a	.71 (.91)**	.04 (.41)		3.89	37
4b	.61 (.98)**	-.03 (.42)	.25 (.38)*	5.58	37

\*,  $p < .05$

\*\* ,  $p < .01$

<sup>a</sup>Propriety is measured first by approval and then by perceived efficiency.

Propriety<sub>1</sub> is measured before the bonus instructions (after the experimental manipulation in the validity condition); Propriety<sub>2</sub> is measured after the session;

Validity is measured: 1, experimental condition; 0, control condition.

Standardized regression coefficients with standard errors in parentheses.

Table 5: Regression Analysis of the Effects of Validity on Propriety<sub>2</sub> Controlling for Trials Survived<sup>a</sup>

Eq. Number	Independent Variables			Constant	N
	Validity	Propriety <sub>1</sub> (Approval)	Trials		
All Participants					
1a	.35 (.39)**	.25 (.18)*		3.25	55
1b	.13 (.42)	.21 (.17)*	.43 (.06)**	4.09	55
Collective Action					
2a	.45 (.42)**	.25 (.21)		3.15	39
2b	.17 (.54)	.24 (.20)	.42 (.07)**	3.80	39
	Validity	Propriety <sub>1</sub> (Efficiency)	Trials		
All Participants					
3a	.28 (.41)*	.30 (.18)**		2.45	53
3b	.04 (.45)	.24 (.17)*	.45 (.06)**	3.35	53
Collective Action					
4a	.43 (.39)**	.29 (.18)*		2.32	37
4b	.15 (.54)	.27 (.17)*	.39 (.07)*	2.85	37

\*,  $p < .05$

\*\* ,  $p < .01$

<sup>a</sup>Propriety is measured first by approval and then by perceived efficiency.

Propriety<sub>1</sub> is measured before the bonus instructions (after the experimental manipulation in the validity condition); Propriety<sub>2</sub> is measured after the session;

Validity is measured: 1, experimental condition; 0, control condition.

Standardized regression coefficients with standard errors in parentheses.

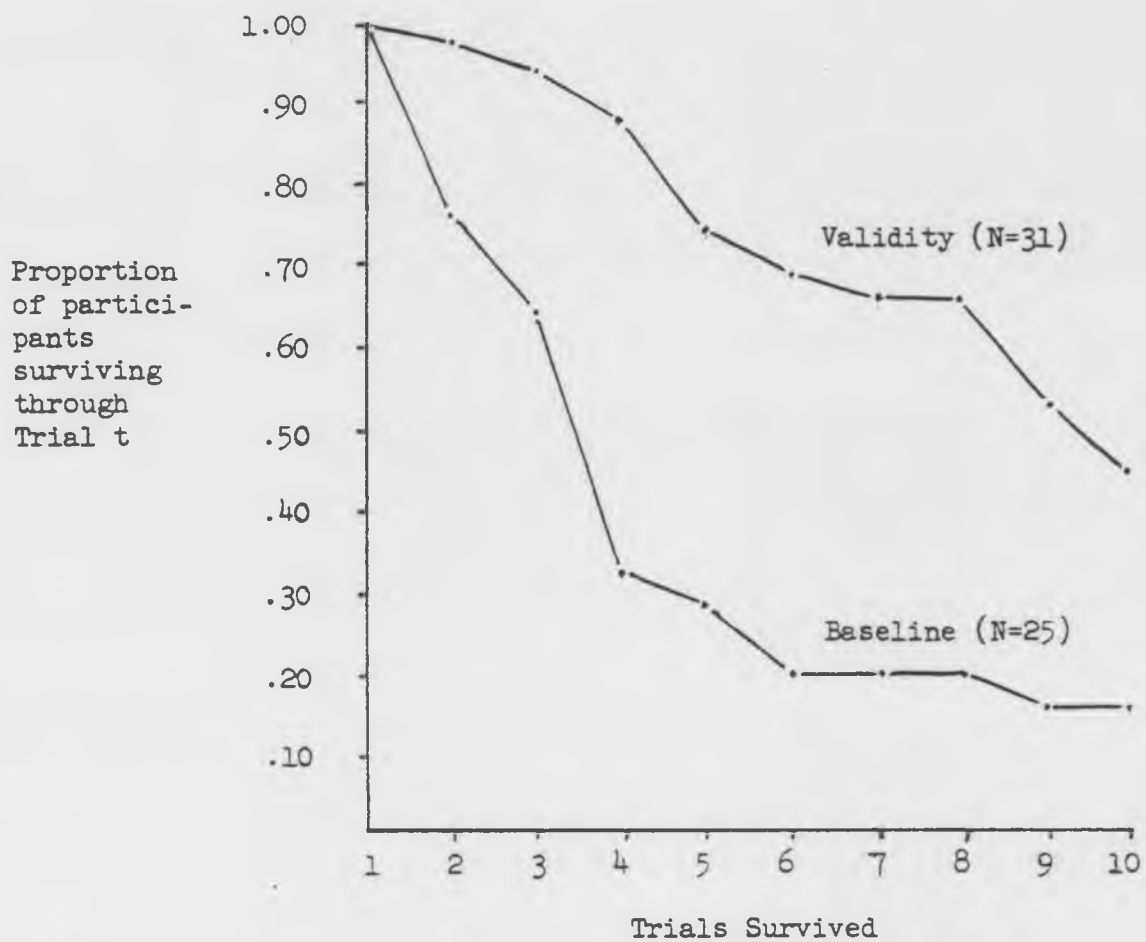


Figure 1: Survival Curves for All Subjects. The proportion of participants surviving through Trial t, plotted against trial number for baseline and validity conditions for all participants.



Proportion  
of partici-  
pants  
surviving  
through  
Trial t

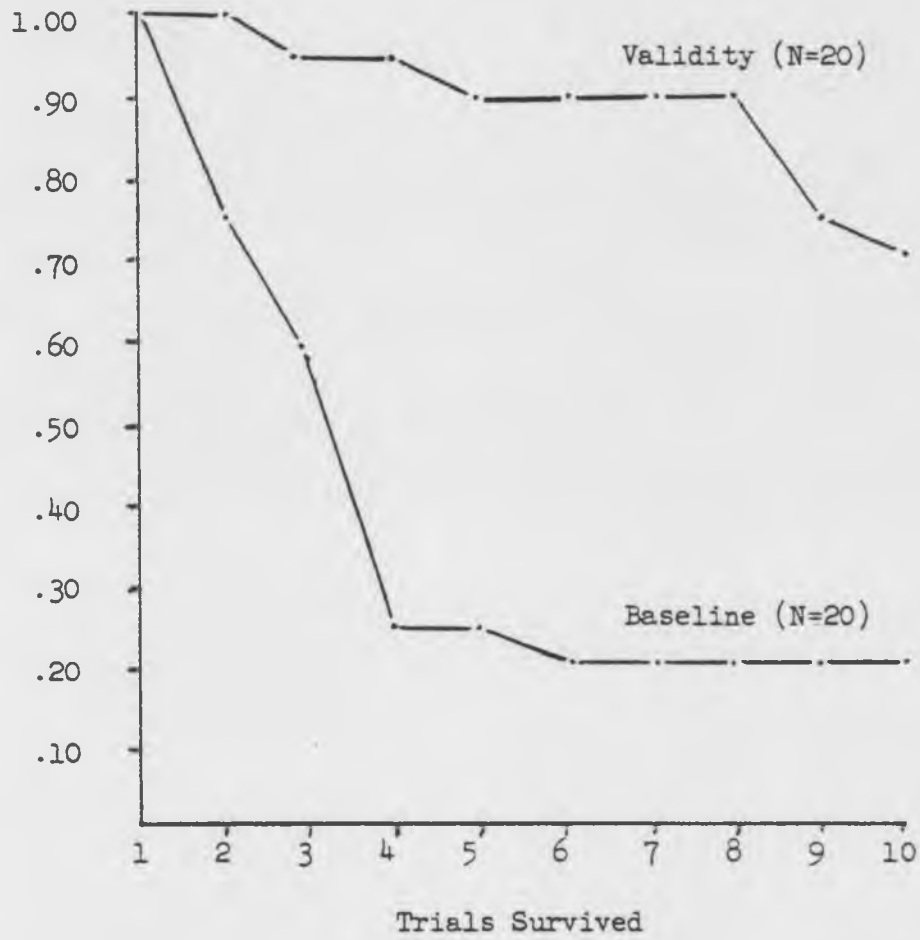


Figure 2: Survival Curves for Collective Action. The proportion of participants surviving through Trial t, plotted against trial number for baseline and validity conditions, excluding non-mobilizing responses.

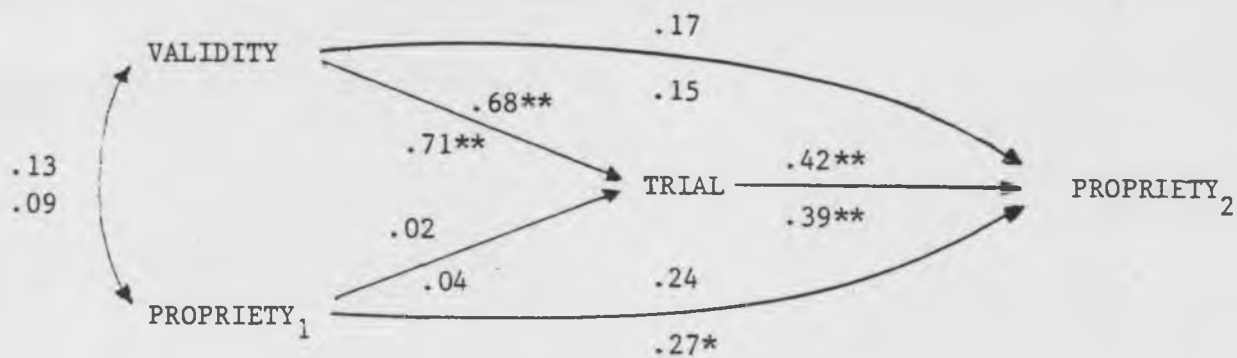


Figure 3: Causal Model of Collective Action: Validity, Behavior and Propriety. Standardized regression coefficients: Top coefficient using approval for propriety; Bottom coefficient using efficiency for propriety.  
 \*,  $p < .05$ ; \*\*,  $p < .01$ .