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## **Group identification and political protest: farmers' protest in the Netherlands**

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### *Abstract*

*Social identity theory is employed to conceptualise the role of group identification in the conversion of discontent into participation in political protest. It is assumed that higher levels of group identification stimulate participation in protest on behalf of the group. Perceived characteristics of the intergroup situation such as the permeability of group boundaries, and the stability and legitimacy of intergroup relations are supposed to modify the role of group identification. Group identification is decomposed into an affective and a behavioural component. Furthermore, ingroup identification is distinguished from outgroup differentiation; and groups are defined at different levels of inclusiveness. In a longitudinal study among Dutch farmers (n = 168) the relationship between group identification and protest participation is investigated. Group identification, be it affective or behavioural, appears to influence action preparedness. People seem to enter the protest arena with some level of group identification. This level of group identification sets the level of action preparedness. Once set, the level of action preparedness remains fairly stable over time and appears to be a strong predictor of future action preparedness and participation. Action preparedness in its turn together with the behavioural component of group identification influences actual participation in collective action. Outgroup differentiation did not have any impact on protest participation. Identification with farmers in the European Union did not matter, but identification with farmers at the national or regional level did stimulate protest participation. Perceived characteristics of the intergroup situation did not have an impact on group identification, but permeability and stability did affect protest participation. Theoretical implications of the findings are discussed. Copyright © 1999 John Wiley & Sons, Ltd.*

In her *Lifetimes of Commitment*, Molly Andrews (1991) portrays fifteen people who for most of their lives have been political activists, committed to a cause and identifying strongly with the groups for whom they were fighting. Human history is full of

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examples of such people who sacrificed their wealth and sometimes even their lives for the common cause of a group with whom they identified. A strong identification with a group seems to make people prepared to engage in collective action in defence of that group when it is at threat, or treated unjust (Reicher, 1996). Indeed, Kelly and Breinlinger (1996) and Major (1994) in their work on the status of women in society concluded that group identification is indispensable for collective action in response to inequality. Kelly and Breinlinger (1996) arrive at a similar conclusion with regard to participation in industrial action. In that setting group identification is usually operationalised as union commitment, a factor which is proven to foster participation in industrial action over and again (Barling, Fullagar, & Kelloway, 1992).

It is not surprising that group identification has been proposed as a concept relevant for the study of collective action. After all, collective action can be defined as any action individuals undertake as group members rather than individuals, a definition which obviously implies some level of group identification. Indeed, group identification is akin to the collective identity concept as it features in the social movement literature, where most of the studies of politically motivated collective action are documented. In that literature, collective identity is usually discussed as one of the three components of so-called collective action frames (McAdam, McCarthy, & Zald, 1996; Klandermans, 1997), which are 'sets of action oriented beliefs and meanings that inspire and legitimate [collective action]' (Gamson, 1992, p. 7). On the other hand, in social psychology group identification is one of the key-concepts of social identity theory's approach to collective action (Tajfel, 1981; Tajfel & Turner, 1986). According to social identity theory, group identification is supposed to be an important determinant of collective action in response to inequality (Kawakami & Dion, 1995; Reicher, 1996; Brewer & Silver, 1997).

Social movement literature tries—*inter alia*—to understand how discontent transforms into collective action; while social identity theory specifies strategies to improve a negatively evaluated group status. In both literatures group identification is thought to play a significant mediating role between discontent and protest participation. In this paper we will explore that role by investigating the significance of group identification as a determinant of people's willingness to participate and actual participation in political protest. The basic assumption we start with is rather straightforward: the more people identify with a group, the more they will be prepared to participate in political protest on behalf of that group. In the remainder of this article we will employ the framework of the social identity theory to further elaborate on this assumption and test its implications with data collected in a study of farmer's protest in the Netherlands we conducted between 1993 and 1995.

### **SOCIAL IDENTITY, GROUP IDENTIFICATION, AND PARTICIPATION IN COLLECTIVE ACTION**

Participation in political protest is conceived here as participation in a specific form of collective action. Collective action we defined as any action individuals undertake as group members rather than individuals. In terms of Turner, Oakes, Haslam & McGarty's (1994) self-categorisation theory such participation necessarily implies that membership of the group in question is salient. In fact, these authors argue that collective conflict makes group membership highly salient. Note that the causal

direction in this reasoning goes from action participation to group identification, rather than the other way around. Indeed, it is not unusual to find heightened levels of group identification as a result of collective action participation. In this paper we are, however, interested in the reversed causal link, namely from group identification to participation, that is in group identification as a determinant of collective action participation or as a mediator between discontent and such participation. Social identity theory does hypothesise such a link.

Social identity is that part of someone's self-concept that relates to his or her awareness to belong to a specific group or category and that has a certain value and emotional meaning. Social identity requires that an individual breaks down his or her social environment into groups and categories and presupposes processes of self-categorisation as a member of some categories or groups. The evaluation of the status of these categories or groups results from processes of social comparison, that is, comparison of one's own group with other groups. A perceived favourable status of a category or group compared to that of other groups contributes positively to someone's self-concept. Social identity theory holds that a perceived negative group status motivates people to engage in identity improvement strategies. Three such strategies are distinguished (Tajfel & Turner, 1986; Ellemers, 1991, 1993): (a) individual attempts to leave the group and to become a member of a more positively evaluated group, (b) attempts to redefine the comparison process itself by choosing other reference groups or standards of comparison, and (c) collective attempts to improve the groups status. It is, of course, the last that interests us here.

Whether individuals prefer any of these strategies depends according to social identity theory on structural characteristics of the intergroup situation as perceived by group members, namely, (1) the stability versus instability of the status relations, and (2) the legitimacy versus illegitimacy of the relative status of the ingroup, and (3) the permeability versus impermeability of group boundaries. Laboratory studies (see Ellemers, 1993 for a summary) suggest that permeability of group boundaries reduces ingroup identification in low-status groups and makes individual mobility more likely. However, if the low status of one's own group is perceived as unstable and thus improvement of the group's position seems a viable option, ingroup identification remains high and collective strategies are preferred regardless of the permeability of group boundaries. Finally, the perception of status inferiority of the ingroup as illegitimate only seems to matter if the inferior status of one's own group is perceived to be unstable and thus the possibility of successful collective status improvement is given.

These assumptions of social identity theory have been tested in laboratory studies, but such studies have the limitation that it is difficult to simulate political protest realistically in a laboratory setting. Therefore evidence from field studies is badly needed. The few studies we are aware of are encouraging, however.

Mummendey, Mielke, Wenzel, Klink, Blanz, Kanning & Haeger (1995, unpublished manuscript) applied social identity theory in order to understand how East Germans react to their obviously disadvantaged position compared to the West Germans. The evidence these authors present on the East German case concerns the preferences for each of five identity management strategies.<sup>1</sup> Important for our

<sup>1</sup>Mummendey *et al.* add two more status-improvement strategies to the three distinguished above. But for our argument these strategies are irrelevant.

subject is the question of what makes *collective* identity management strategies more likely. The results on that score indicate that perceived legitimacy is the only factor that has a direct impact. Stability and permeability, on the other hand, have a strong indirect influence on the preference for collective strategies by impacting on ingroup identification. If people perceive their negative group status as stable and the group boundaries as impermeable their ingroup identification strengthens. In its turn, a strong ingroup identification together with the perceived illegitimacy of the group's status generates a preference for collective change strategies. The non-collective strategies, on the other hand, all go together with a weak ingroup identification resulting from a perception of the intergroup situation as unstable, and with permeable group boundaries. Interestingly, perceptions of legitimacy versus illegitimacy are irrelevant in this context. In other words, if they expect that the situation will change, people do not seem to care too much about the legitimacy or illegitimacy of a negative group status.<sup>2</sup> Mummendey *et al.* hypothesized—in line with social identity theory—a mediating role of ingroup identification between perceived characteristics of the intergroup situation, on the one hand, and the preference for identity management strategies, on the other. In fact, in the East German case ingroup identification turned out to be a much more important mediator than hypothesised and explained most of the differential preference for collective and non-collective strategies. These results seem to contradict the findings described above for laboratory studies. Mummendey *et al.* explains this by referring to the specific socio-political context. They suggest that perceived stability and impermeability in the East German case reflect an oppositional view. Against official politics, people felt that East and West would not and could not integrate. Group identification, that is, identification with East Germans, similarly expresses an oppositional view.

More recently, Simon, Loewy, Stürmer, Weber, Kampmeier, Freytag, Habig & Spahlinger (1998) applied social identity theory to participation in the elderly movement in Germany and the gay movement in the USA. These authors observe that net of cost–benefit calculations identification with the movement constitutes an independent pathway to movement participation, or at least to willingness to participate. The gay movement study is especially interesting in this respect because it includes a manipulation to make the common fate of gay people as a threatened minority more salient. This manipulation not only strengthened the identification with the gay movement but also translated into more willingness to participate in collective action organised by this movement.

In sum, there is evidence that group identification mediates the relationship between discontent and participation in political protest. However, structural characteristics of the situation seem to modify the mediating role of group identification. Figure 1 summarises the possible relations between the concepts we have discussed thus far. Mummendey *et al.* found only a direct influence on preference for collective action strategies for legitimacy and group identification, but in our study of protest participation among Dutch farmers we will explore the full model again to see whether the same or a different pattern emerges.

<sup>2</sup>This finding diverges from those stemming from laboratory studies within the social identity framework, but is in line with what one would predict on the basis of Folger's elaboration of relative deprivation theory (Folger, 1986; see Klandermans, 1997) for a detailed discussion of the injustice component of collective action frames).

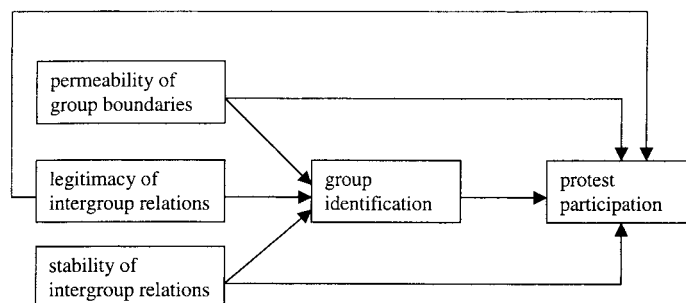


Figure 1. Identification and protest participation

The figure also implies causal relations, but as far as causality is concerned the two field studies are suggestive but inconclusive. Mummendey's *et al.*'s study is basically correlational. Causal relationships also remain unclear in the study of Simon *et al.* To be sure, the salience manipulation increased identification with the gay movement and willingness to participate, but since they increase simultaneously, it is not clear which of the two causes the other. On the basis of what we know from studies of commitment to organisations such as labour unions (Barling *et al.*, 1992, van Teeffelen & Klandermans, 1989) it is not unlikely that in fact the two are mutually dependent, so that identification stimulates participation and participation increases identification, but we are not aware of any field study demonstrating this state of affairs. Because our study has been longitudinal hopefully we are able to shed some light on this matter. But before we set out to do so one more matter needs clarification, namely the conceptualisation of group identification.

### THE CONCEPTUALISATION OF GROUP IDENTIFICATION

The conceptualisation of group identification is still an unresolved matter. Social identity theorists suggest distinguishing three components of social identity: a cognitive component which refers to the process of categorisation, an evaluative component which refers to the assessment of the group's position relative to that of other groups, and an affective component which refers to the degree of attachment to the group or category. Group identification is akin to the affective component of social identity. It is suggested that the affective component has the largest impact on someone's behaviour (Ellemers, 1993). We suggest adding a fourth, behavioural, component. In a discussion of social identity and political involvement Molly Andrews (1991) makes the distinction between voluntary and involuntary group membership. Gender, age, race, nationality, and social class are examples of involuntary groups. The awareness of belonging to such a group need not evoke any positive or negative feelings. Membership of a voluntary group, on the other hand, is self-chosen and these choices do tell us something about how someone sees himself. One can emphasise involuntary group memberships—for example, a Surinam in the Netherlands who becomes a member of a Surinam association—or negate or even deny it—for example, an old person who refuses to become a member of a union for

the elderly. Thus membership of a voluntary group may underscore or deny group identification.

Furthermore, Marilynn Brewer (1991; see also Brewer & Silver, 1997) has convincingly argued that group identification derives from two opposing forces: a need for inclusion and a need for differentiation. Ideally, an individual seeks an optimal level of distinctiveness, that is, to be different from others but not so different that he or she belongs to nowhere. Group identification has both the aspect of identification with the ingroup and differentiation from the outgroup. It will be highest for those groups that make members feel they are valued and representative members of an exclusive category, so Brewer's theory of optimal distinctiveness. Thus, both the degree of identification with the ingroup and the degree of differentiation from outgroups will inform us about the level of group identification. Related to this issue, groups can be more or less inclusive. A worker may identify with the workers in his or her own group, the workers in the company as a whole, the workers in the country, or even the workers of the world. Circumstances may make one of these levels more or less salient (cf. Turner *et al.*, 1994). It is assumed that identification is higher at the lower levels of inclusion because lower levels of inclusiveness are better able to provide a sense of 'optimal distinctiveness' (Brewer, 1991). In support of this hypothesis Brewer and Silver (1997) report evidence from a study among students of Ohio State University who identify more strongly with fraternity members than with OSU students. Similarly, Klandermans (1997) reports much higher levels of identification with one's local peace group than with the national peace movement among activists, and Simon *et al.* (1997) report stronger identification with the movement for the elderly and the gay movement than with old or gay people in general respectively.

Group identification as we conceive it thus consists of an affective and a behavioural component. Furthermore, we will distinguish ingroup identification from outgroup differentiation. Moreover, the constituents of identification can be more or less inclusive. Because group identification has these different aspects, and because there is scant evidence suggesting which element to focus on with regard to protest participation, we have tried to assess group identification in a variety of ways.

The group we will concentrate on are Dutch farmers. We are interested in the question of to what extent Dutch farmers identify with their professional group and whether such identification fosters participation in collective action on behalf of the farmers. More specifically, we are interested in the differential impact of the distinguished aspects of group identification. Moreover, because we conducted a longitudinal study we will be able to examine the causal relationship between group identification and protest participation.

The past years Dutch farmers—like farmers in most European countries—have suffered serious setbacks, either because of measures taken by their national governments, or of the agricultural policy of the European Union, or of both. Cuts in the European Union's agricultural funds, tensions between agricultural and environmental policy, governmental measures to confine manure surpluses, and so on have significantly increased social and political pressure on farmers. Our own research shows that farmers feel that they do not get what they deserve, that society does not appreciate their contribution, and that the future of their profession is at risk. In short, farmers feel that their professional group has acquired a negative status compared to that of other occupational categories and that they do not deserve such a status (Klandermans, De Weerd, Sabucedo, & Costa, 1998). In the years before and

during our field work Dutch farmers engaged in protest against various aspects of agricultural policy, be it European or national. Milk quota, cattle registration, enforcement to let land lie fallow, production limits, reduction of subsidies, manure regulation, and so on brought farmers time and again onto the streets and the doorsteps of the Ministry of Agriculture. Initially, when we started our research the arable farmers protested against European regulations. Later the stock-men protested against the attempts of the Dutch Ministry of Agriculture to control manure surpluses.

Thus discontent among Dutch farmers and our respondents was high. Some but not all expressed their discontent by taking part in political protest. The focal question of this paper is whether group identification has mediated between discontent and protest. More specifically, we seek to answer the questions as to what levels of group identification Dutch farmers demonstrate and whether a high level of group identification has stimulated participation in collective action. The remainder of the paper is devoted to our attempts to answer that question.

## METHODS

### Design

The research reported here is part of a larger study on farmers' protest. We interviewed a sample of 168 Dutch farmers three times, namely winter 1993/4, winter 1995 (1995/1) and fall 1995 (1995/2). During those two years several agricultural measures to be taken by the government or the European Union were imminent, varying on impact on the agricultural sector. The study was designed to investigate farmers' responses to these measures. In order to control for repeated measurement we additionally interviewed two separate samples in 1994 ( $n = 89$ ) and in 1995 ( $n = 75$ ) respectively) (Table 1).

Face-to-face, computer-assisted interviews were conducted by the trained interviewers at the respondents' homes. The interviews lasted, on average, three quarters of an hour.

Table 1. Design

	Autumn 1993	Winter 1995	Autumn 1995
$n = 168$	O <sub>1</sub>	O <sub>2</sub>	O <sub>3</sub>
$n = 89$		O <sub>1</sub>	
$n = 75$			O <sub>1</sub>

### Subjects

The samples interviewed resulted from random samples drawn by a commercial databank. The panel-group started with a response of 44.2 per cent; response rates for the next two interviews were 79.1 per cent and 87.4 per cent respectively. Response percentages were 49.5 per cent and 47.5 per cent for the two control groups. Although



these response rates are low, they are not really problematic as it is more important that the groups are equivalent. As far as the panel group is concerned, this group provides its own standard. As for the two control groups, we compared the panel-group with the control group on age, level of education and size of farm: no significant differences were found.

The mean age of the respondents was 46 years. Most respondents went to agricultural schools; the vast majority (70 per cent) completed secondary or higher agricultural education, some 20 per cent lower agricultural education. Most farmers had average to large size farms (70.7 per cent), the remaining 29.3 per cent had small farms.

### Control for Repeated Measurement

The design in Table 1 was chosen to be able to control for repeated measurement. We checked all our dependent variables to see whether, over time, the same pattern emerged in the panel design ( $O_1-O_2-O_3$ ) and the separate sample design ( $O_1-O_1-O_1$ ). As this was the case we concluded that repeated measurement as an alternative explanation can be ruled out. In our analyses we will restrict ourselves to the panel study.

### Measures

Field studies, especially longitudinal ones, must be a compromise between all kinds of practical constraints and methodological rigour. We have tried to combine a sophisticated design with careful measurement. The relationship between group identification and political protest, however, is complex and, at the same time, underinvestigated. Moreover, group identification itself is a multi-faceted construct. Under these circumstances, we have chosen to include a variety of more simple measures rather than a few elaborate scales. Although we appreciate the dangers of such an approach, we feel supported by public opinion experts who have argued that 'the actual choice of an instrument, where possible, should be dictated by decision-theoretic considerations. For assessing general levels of some attitude state, well-worded single items may do the job just as well as longer scales no matter how competently the scales are devised' (Nimmo and Bonjean, 1972, p. 110). Moreover, if kindred measures produce similar findings the net result may be robust withal.

The key variables have been measured in the following way:

- (1) *Group identification* was measured relying on the distinctions in the section on the conceptualisation of group identification:
  - (a) *Ingroup identification* (the affective component of group identification) was assessed by asking farmers whether they identified strongly with other farmers (yes/no).
  - (b) *Outgroup differentiation* was measured by asking our respondents whether they felt more committed to farmers than to any other occupational group (yes/no).

- (c) *Voluntary group membership* (the behavioural component of group identification) was assessed by asking farmers about their participation in a farmers' organisation. The answers to these questions were combined into a single measure of participation in farmers' organisations ranging from 0 (no participation) to 3 (office holder).
  - (d) *Level of inclusiveness of group identification* was assessed by asking our respondents to what extent they identified (1 = not at all, 4 = very much) with farmers at each of three levels of inclusion: regional, national or supranational (European).
  - (e) We assumed that identification with farmers as a group rather than identification with farming as an occupation matters in this context. In order to be able to test that assumption, we also measured *occupational commitment*. Two questions were included for this objective: whether respondents would become farmers again were they allowed to choose anew, and whether they would remain farmers even if the money they were making was hardly above subsistence level (on a scale from 1 'absolutely not' to 5 'absolutely'). The two questions were correlated at each of three points in time (0.51, 0.49 and 0.50 respectively). The answers to these questions were combined into a single measure of occupational commitment.
- (2) Perceptions of the three *structural characteristics of the intergroup situation* were measured as follows:
- (a) *Perceived permeability of group boundaries* by asking farmers whether it would be easy for them to find another job (on a scale of 1 'absolutely not' to 5 'absolutely').
  - (b) *Stability of group status* by including two questions regarding the future of farming. There was a question on future income levels ten years from now and another on whether the situation of farmers will improve in the five years to come. The two were correlated (0.44, 0.30 and 0.41 at the three points in time respectively). They were taken together into a measure of pessimism about the future (on a scale from 1 'optimistic' to 5 'pessimistic').
  - (c) *Illegitimacy of group status* by asking how just or unjust the income of farmers is compared to that of other groups in society (on a scale of 1 'very just' to 5 'very unjust').
- (3) *Protest participation* was registered in two different ways. We assessed the preparedness to take part in four forms of collective action which were part of the action repertoire available to farmers in those days—demonstrations, blockades, symbolic actions (such as dumping manure on the doorsteps of the Ministry of Agriculture), refusal to pay taxes. We asked for each of these forms of action whether respondents would participate if they were to disagree completely with an agricultural measure or with agricultural policy in general. For each action respondents could indicate on a scale ranging from 1 (not at all prepared) to 5 (very much prepared) to what extent they were prepared to participate. The answers to these questions were taken together into a scale of *action preparedness* ranging from 1 (not at all prepared to take part in any form of collective action) to 5 (very prepared to take part in all forms selected). Cronbach's alpha of the scale at the three points in time was satisfactory: 0.66, 0.63, and 0.73. In addition, we asked whether in the past year respondents took part in any collective action

directed at agricultural measures or policy (yes/no). The answers to this question was used as a measure of *action participation*.

- (4) In addition, *demographics* such as age, education, and size and type of farm were assessed.

We will start with a description of the levels of group identification that we assessed among our respondents. Subsequently, we will discuss a sequence of regression analyses conducted to answer the questions we formulated in our theoretical introduction.

## RESULTS

### Descriptive Results

#### *Group Identification, Occupational Commitment and Intergroup Situation*

Over 90 per cent of the farmers said that they identified with other Dutch farmers. This percentage remained fairly stable over the two-year period (see Table 2).

As for outgroup differentiation, 72 per cent of our respondents said that they felt more committed to farmers than to any other occupational group. In line with

Table 2. Group identification, occupational commitment, and intergroup situation: percentages

	1993	1995/1	1995/2
<i>Group identification</i>			
(a) Ingroup identification	94.6	— <sup>a</sup>	93.5
(b) Outgroup differentiation	72.0	— <sup>a</sup>	72.0
(c) Participation in farmers' organisations:			
No member	9.5	13.7	11.9
Member not active	38.1	39.3	44.0
Active member	31.5	25.6	28.0
Office holder	20.8	21.4	16.1
(d) Inclusiveness of identification			
Regional	92.8	95.8	97.0
National	85.1	88.7	89.9
European	45.3	54.8	58.3
<i>Occupational commitment</i>			
(a) Farmer again	62.5	61.9	61.3
(b) Stay farmer	54.8	58.4	56.5
<i>Intergroup situation</i>			
(a) Permeable group boundaries	32.1	31.5	32.1
(b) Pessimism about future	65.3	69.5	67.7
(c) Group's status unjust	— <sup>b</sup>	74.9	73.1

*Note:* Inclusiveness of identification 3 and 4 on a scale from 1 'not at all' to 4 'very much'; occupational commitment and permeability group boundaries 4 and 5 on a scale from 1 'absolutely not' to 5 'absolutely'; pessimism 4 and 5 on a scale from 1 'optimistic' to 5 'pessimistic'; group's status 4 and 5 on a scale from 1 'very just' to 5 'very unjust'.

<sup>a</sup>Ingroup identification and outgroup differentiation were not asked in 1995/1.

<sup>b</sup>Injustice was not asked in 1993.

Brewer's theory of optimal distinctiveness, ingroup identification and outgroup differentiation seem to be two separate aspects of group identification, as the correlations between the two factors are low (0.03 and 0.16). As far as membership of a farmer's organisation is concerned, the findings confirm our results regarding ingroup identification. Approximately 90 per cent of our respondents were members of a farmers' organisation. A much lower percentage (approximately 50 per cent) were active as members by taking part in meetings or by holding some office in the organisation. These activity levels were fairly stable. As expected, more inclusive categories generated lower levels of identification. This held especially for the most inclusive category, that is, farmers in the European Union. Over the years the levels of identification have risen for all three levels of inclusiveness, although, interestingly, those for the European Union have increased the most. Apparently, circumstances have made the European level more salient. A substantial proportion of the farmers (around 60 per cent) answered both questions regarding occupational commitment in the affirmative. That is, that they would become farmers again were they allowed to choose anew, and would remain farmers even if the money they were making was barely above subsistence level. These percentages did not change much over time. As for the structural characteristics of the intergroup situation we found that only one third of our respondents felt that they would be able to find another job (our indicator of perceived permeability of group boundaries; two thirds of our respondents were pessimistic about the future of farming, that is, they felt that the disadvantaged status of farmers in the Netherlands would not change over the next ten years; and approximately three quarters of our respondents felt that the income of farmers in the Netherlands was unjustly low compared to that of other groups in the country (our indicator of illegitimacy).

The picture that emerges from these findings suggests a strong and stable group identification among Dutch farmers, both affective and behavioural. This holds despite the fact that most of our respondents deemed the disadvantaged status of farmers to be stable over time. The findings also allude to a few distinctive patterns and interesting transformations. Although they all identify strongly with the ingroup, especially if it is defined at the regional or national level, it was also clear that when assessing behavioural identification not every respondent was equally active in farmers' organisations. It was also found that farmers differed in terms of the extent to which they distanced themselves from other occupations. Also in their estimates of the openness of other occupations in case they left farming our respondents showed a wide variation. Finally, over the two years that we have collected data a strengthening of ingroup identification seems to have taken place, especially as far as identification with European farmers is concerned.

In the following analyses we will not report separately on regional, national and European identification. Identification with farmers at the European level is virtually unrelated to action preparedness and participation. Apparently, European farmers as a category were irrelevant in the context of farmers' protest in those days. Identification at the regional and national levels revealed correlation patterns similar to those of ingroup identification. Regression analyses confirmed that identification at these two levels did not add to the variance already explained by ingroup identification. This is not so surprising because ingroup identification as we assessed it was very much akin to identification with farmers at the regional and national levels.

Table 3. Protest participation

	1993	1995/1	1995/2
(a) Preparedness to participate	2.85	2.74	2.79
(b) Protest participation	–	10.7%	16.7%
(1) Affected by manure policy ( <i>n</i> = 101)	–	11.0%	25.0%
(2) Not affected manure policy ( <i>n</i> = 67)	–	10.3%	4.4%
(c) Correlations <sup>a</sup>			
Preparedness in 1993	–		
Preparedness in 1995/1	0.69	–	
Preparedness in 1995/2	0.72	0.76	–
Participation in 1993/94	0.23	0.24	0.18
Participation in 1995/1–2	0.29	0.37	0.37

*n* = 168; <sup>a</sup>All correlation *p* < 0.01.

### *Protest Participation*

Throughout the three surveys about half of our respondents were prepared to take part in demonstrations, symbolic actions or tax refusals. Blockades were less popular but still a quarter to one third of our interviewees were prepared to participate in such actions. Figures like these suggest a fair level of action preparedness as a mean score somewhat below 3 on our scale from 1 to 5 confirms. In addition, we asked whether in the past year respondents took part in any collective action directed at agricultural measures or policy (Table 3).

Action preparedness remains reasonably high over the years. It is also fairly stable at the individual level, as the correlations between intention scores depicted in Table 3 indicate. In a way this is not surprising as our respondents were asked whether they would be prepared to take part in collective action 'if they were to disagree completely with an agricultural measure or with agricultural policy in general'. Such action preparedness does seem to predict action participation, even two years later. Action participation increased considerably between 1994 and 1995. This increase in participation is to a large extent due to the conflict between farmers and the Ministry of Agriculture over manure surpluses. Among those farmers who are involved in the manure problem an increase in protest participation from 11 per cent to 25 per cent was observed, whereas among the remaining farmers protest participation dropped from 10 per cent to 4 per cent. In other words, the protesting population changed in composition in response to a change in conflict matter. Interestingly, action preparedness as assessed in the previous years could in part predict which farmers would join these protests and which would not. This brings us to the core question of this article: the question of what role group identification plays in the explanation of action preparedness and action participation.

## TESTING HYPOTHESES

### **Permeability, Stability, Illegitimacy and Group Identification**

We conducted a set of regression analyses with group identification (affective and behavioural) as the dependent variable and the three structural characteristics as the

Table 4. Predicting action preparedness in 1993: regression analyses (OLS)

	<i>r</i>	$\beta$	
		Model 1	Model 2
Age	-0.34		-0.32***
Ingroup identification 1993	0.20***	0.16**	0.17**
Outgroup differentiation 1993	0.08	0.09	0.08
Part. in organisations 1993	0.17**	0.19**	0.19**
Occupational commitment 1993	-0.07	-0.04	-0.05
Permeability of boundaries 1993	0.20***	0.16**	-0.02
Pessimism about future 1993	-0.20***	-0.16**	-0.14**
Adjusted $R^2$		0.11***	0.18***

Note: Here and in Tables 5–9, unless noted otherwise, the entries are standardised regression coefficients for an equation in which all variables are entered simultaneously.

\* $p < 0.10$ , \*\* $p < 0.05$ , \*\*\* $p < 0.01$ .

$n = 168$ .

independent variables, which are not reported here. None of these analyses produced any significant effect. In terms of our model in Figure 1 this means that if the structural characteristics of the situation have an effect on action preparedness or participation at all, it will be a direct effect and not indirect through their impact on group identification.

### Predicting Action Preparedness

We conducted regression analyses to assess whether group identification, occupational commitment, and intergroup situation could account for variance in action preparedness. Moreover, as a result of our longitudinal design we are able to explore causal relationships. Successively, we will take as our dependent variable action preparedness and action participation at the three points in time.

#### *Predicting Action Preparedness in Wave One*

In 1993 higher levels of ingroup identification at both the affective and the behavioural levels produced higher levels of action preparedness (Table 4). Interestingly, outgroup differentiation does not have an impact on action preparedness. It is important to note that ingroup identification fosters action preparedness net of occupational commitment. In other words, it is identification with the group rather than identification with the profession that makes the difference. Equally interesting are the coefficients of permeability of group boundaries and pessimism about the future. In contrast to what social identity theory would predict, farmers are more prepared to take part in collective action, the *more* permeable group boundaries are in their perception, and the *less* pessimistic they are about the future. In other words, the easier it is in the views of our respondents to find another job, and the less stable they deem the disadvantaged situation of farmers, the *more* prepared they are to take part in collective action to improve the status of their group. These findings, however, may be due to sample characteristics. One obvious candidate is age. Young people would

probably answer that it would be easier for them to find another job and would perhaps also be less pessimistic about the future. However, young people also usually express higher action preparedness and, thus, the effect of permeability and pessimism on action preparedness might be spurious. Therefore, we ran the same regression analyses again, this time controlling for age (model 2). Note that younger farmers are in fact more prepared to take action but, more importantly, the effect of permeability disappears indeed. However, the effect of pessimism remains. The latter may be a habitual tendency towards optimism or pessimism. A person that is an optimist might be optimistic about finding another job and that the situation will improve and might also be more optimistic concerning his or her own action as causes for change and therefore be more prepared for action. We will return to these findings in our discussion. The variables in the equation explain only 11 per cent of the variance in action preparedness, but, as indicated, identity is only one of the factors involved in the explanation of action preparedness.

The variables included in this analysis are all measured at the same point in time therefore we cannot draw any causal inference from these findings. For the following analyses it is important, however, to keep in mind that action preparedness as it was assessed in 1993 incorporates key variables such as affective and behavioural ingroup identification, perceived permeability of group boundaries, and perceived stability of the situation.

#### *Predicting Action Preparedness in Winter 1995*

The three models in Table 5 take us through three steps in the analysis. Model 1 confirms that action preparedness in Winter 1995 can be predicted to a large extent from action preparedness as assessed in Fall 1993. In the next step we entered action participation in the period in between the interviews of Fall 1993 and Winter 1995. Actual participation appears not to have any unique influence on the preparedness to participate in future situations. Model 3 tests whether the identity variables as assessed in 1993 as a group and individually have a direct impact on action preparedness net of the indirect impact via action preparedness in 1993. This turns out

Table 5. Predicting action preparedness in 1995/1: regression analyses (OLS)

	<i>r</i>	$\beta$			
		Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4
Age	-0.38				-0.08
Action preparedness 1993	0.70***	0.70***	0.68***	0.63***	0.63***
Action participation 1993/94	0.22***		0.07	0.07	0.07
Ingroup identification 1993	0.18**			0.07	0.07
Outgroup differentiation 1993	0.11			0.07	0.06
Part. in organisations 1993	0.18**			0.05	0.05
Occupational commitment 1993	0.01			0.08	0.04
Permeability of boundaries 1993	0.27***			0.16**	0.15**
Pessimism about future 1993	-0.19**			0.00	0.00
Adjusted $R^2$		0.48***	0.48***	0.51***	0.53***
$R^2$ change			0.00	0.04**	0.01

\* $p < 0.10$ , \*\* $p < 0.05$ , \*\*\* $p < 0.01$ .  
 $n = 168$ .

to be the case. The model implies a significant improvement of the  $R^2$ . Inspection of the individual regression coefficients reveals that it is more specifically the perceived permeability of group boundaries that further impacts on the preparedness to participate as assessed one year later. Once again perceived permeability increases someone's willingness to participate in collective action. This time controlling for age did not make any difference (Model 4). Otherwise the identity variables influence action preparedness indirectly if at all via action preparedness in the year before as a comparison of the zero-order correlations and the beta's reveals.

#### *Predicting Action Preparedness in the Fall 1995*

The third set of regression analyses serves to test the direct and indirect influence of identity variables on action preparedness in the Fall of 1995 (1995/2). In six steps we regress action preparedness in Autumn 1995 on action preparedness and participation and on identity variables as measured in the previous periods (Table 6).

We start—in Model 1—with action preparedness half a year ago. Obviously, action preparedness in Winter 1995 is a strong predictor of the action preparedness some six months later in the Fall. Interestingly, however, the influence of the action preparedness in Winter 1995 can be decomposed into that of Winter 1995 and Fall 1993 (Model 4). This suggests that the two have significant common and unique components. While we discussed Table 3 we referred to the manure problem as the specific issue important with regard to the actions in 1995. These results confirm that action preparedness at the two points in time had in part different origins. The impact of identity variables has been predominantly indirect, via their influence on action preparedness in 1995/1 and in 1993 (Models 3 and 6), as indicated by the correlations in comparison to the betas in Models 3 and 6. Participation in farmer's organisations (the behavioural component of identification) is the only identity component which has a marginally significant direct effect on action preparedness. Actual participation in 1995/1 has a marginal effect on action preparedness (Model 2), but this effect disappears once the other 1995/1 variables are entered in the equation (Model 3). Participation in 1993/94 has no effect on preparedness in 1995/2 (Model 5). Again, controlling for age made no difference (Model 7).

In sum, identity variables such as those which were measured in our study *do* have a modest impact on actual preparedness. But because action preparedness is fairly stable over time, most of their impact is indirectly via the level of action preparedness as set from the outset. Actual participation does not seem to have much of an independent effect on future willingness to take part in collective action. We will return to these results in our discussion.

#### **Predicting Action Participation**

It is not unusual for studies of collective action to examine action preparedness rather than actual participation. In this study we have also collected information on actual participation, that is, on reported participation in farmers' protest in the months since the previous interview. This creates the opportunity not to only investigate whether preparedness to participate is converted into actual participation, but more



Table 6. Predicting action preparedness in 1995/2: regression analyses (OLS)

	<i>r</i>	$\beta$						
		Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4	Model 5	Model 6	Model 7
Age	-0.34***							-0.03
Action preparedness 1995/1	0.77***	0.77***	0.73***	0.73***	0.49***	0.49***	0.50***	0.48***
Action participation 1995/1-2	0.37		0.11*	0.08	0.07	0.08	0.07	0.07
Part. in organisations 1995/1	0.20**			0.09*	0.07	0.07	0.11*	0.13*
Occupational commitment 1995/1	0.09			0.05	0.06	0.06	0.04	0.02
Permeability of boundaries 1995/1	0.24**			0.00	0.01	0.01	-0.01	-0.04
Pessimism about future 1995/1	-0.02			0.00	-0.02	-0.02	-0.03	-0.02
Group's status unjust 1995/1	-0.10			-0.03	-0.03	-0.03	-0.03	-0.01
Action preparedness 1993	0.71***				0.35***	0.36***	0.36***	0.38***
Action participation 1993/94	0.20**					-0.03	-0.03	-0.04
Ingroup identification 1993	0.18**						0.02	0.02
Outgroup differentiation 1993	0.09						0.01	0.01
Part. in organisations 1993	0.20**						-0.06	-0.08
Occupational commitment 1993	0.03						0.03	0.04
Permeability of boundaries 1993	0.25***						0.02	0.04
Pessimism about future 1993	-0.18**						0.00	0.01
Adjusted $R^2$		0.59***	0.60***	0.60***	0.66***	0.66***	0.65***	0.66***
$R^2$ change			0.01*	0.00	0.06***	0.00	0.00	0.00

\* $p < 0.10$ , \*\* $p < 0.05$ , \*\*\* $p < 0.01$ . $n = 168$ .

Table 7. Predicting protest participation in 1993/94: Logistic regression analyses

	Model 1	Model 2
Action preparedness 1993	0.97 (0.32)***	0.95 (0.37)***
Ingroup identification 1993		-1.71 (1.28)
Outgroup differentiation 1993		0.88 (0.82)
Part. in organisation 1993		0.55 (0.34)*
Occupational commitment 1993		-0.10 (0.25)
Permeability of boundaries 1993		0.03 (0.22)
Pessimism about future 1993		-0.15 (0.42)
-2 Log Likelihood	87.27	81.43
Improvement	11.08***	5.84

\* $p < 0.10$ , \*\* $p < 0.05$ , \*\*\* $p < 0.01$ .  
 $n = 168$ .

importantly to explore whether ingroup identification contributes to the conversion process. As action participation is a dichotomous variable we applied logistic regression analysis.<sup>3</sup>

#### *Action Participation between Autumn 1993 and Winter 1995*

The two regression analyses presented in Table 7 concern action participation in the year between our first and second interviews, Autumn 1993 and Winter 1995 respectively. Action participation during those months can be predicted by the respondents' readiness to participate as measured in our first interview (Model 1). The identity variables do not improve the model significantly, although our measure of behavioural identification (participation in farmers' organisations), contributes marginally to the explanation of action participation (Model 2).

#### *Action Participation between Winter and Autumn 1995*

The level of action participation increased considerably between the second and third interviews. As mentioned, this increased participation was related to the conflict over manure, an issue which affected only part of our respondents. Therefore, we entered type of farm as a control variable in the equation (Table 8).<sup>4</sup> Indeed, farmers who were affected by the manure issue did participate more often in protest and newly developed action preparedness became more influential than previous participation. Net of participation on previous occasions and action preparedness, participation in farmers' organisations contributes to the explanation. Note that compared to the previous analyses for both action preparedness and action participation, the sign for future expectations is reversed: this time farmers who are more pessimistic about the future have participated more often in collective action (although the unique contribution of future expectations is not significant). This effect is net of the impact of future expectations on action preparedness, which implied higher preparedness for those who were *less* pessimistic about the future. In an analysis without type of farm

<sup>3</sup>We ran the same analyses while controlling for age and these analyses produced the same results.

<sup>4</sup>All other regression analyses have been conducted while controlling for type of farm as well, but type of farm was irrelevant in those analyses.

Table 8. Predicting protest participation in 1995/1–2: logistic regression analyses

	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3
Type of farm	–2.13 (0.68)***	–2.39 (0.71)***	–2.93 (0.78)***
Action participation 1993/94	2.20 (0.61)***	1.58 (0.65)**	1.26 (0.73)*
Action preparedness 1995/1		1.29 (0.33)***	1.52 (0.41)***
Part. in organisation 1995/1			0.78 (0.33)*
Occupational commitment 1995/1			–0.25 (0.26)
Permeability of boundaries 1995/1			–0.07 (0.20)
Pessimism about future 1995/1			0.71 (0.57)
Group's status unjust 1995/1			–0.63 (0.53)
–2 Log Likelihood	123.04	101.51	87.02
Improvement	13.45***	21.53***	14.48**

\* $p < 0.10$ , \*\* $p < 0.05$ , \*\*\* $p < 0.01$ .  
 $n = 168$ .

as a control variable the same effect reaches even marginal significance, which suggests that it is related to being affected by the manure issue.<sup>5</sup>

### Participation as Determinant of Identification

Thus far we have investigated to what extent identification affects participation. This, however, is only one of the two possible causal links between identification and participation. As discussed in our introduction, the hypothesis that participation affects identification is equally plausible. Our longitudinal research design allows us to investigate whether participation indeed, as suggested, strengthens identification. Hence, we conducted regression analyses with our two indicators of identification—ingroup identification and participation in farmers' organisations—as they were assessed in the last interview as the dependent variables. In the case of ingroup identification no effect of participation could be observed. However, as reflected in Table 9, participation in collective action did impact on identification at the behavioural level. Participation in farmers' organisations became higher among those who participated in collective action. These findings suggest that at least in the case of behavioural identification causality between identification and action participation goes in both directions. We will return to the issue of causality in our discussion.

## CONCLUSIONS

The main objective of this paper was to investigate whether group identification impacts on people's willingness to participate in policy protest and on actual

<sup>5</sup>This finding is confirmed by results from a regression analysis with action preparedness in Autumn 1995 (1995/2) as the dependent variable. In this analysis, which can be defined as a model added to those in Table 6, the identity variables as measured in Autumn 1995 were entered in the equation. Indeed, in this step pessimism about the future made farmers also less prepared to participate in future collective action (beta: 0.10,  $p < 0.10$ ). The effect is not strong, but it is the reversal of the sign (from –0.16 to 0.10) that interest us here. It suggests that, among those farmers who were already prepared to participate in collective action, those who were more pessimistic were more willing to participate in collective action in the future.

Table 9. Action participation as determinant of behavioural identification: regression analyses (OLS)

	<i>r</i>	Participation in farmers' organisations
		1995/2
Type of farm	0.00	0.00
Participation in farmers' organisations 1993	0.60***	0.21***
Participation in farmers' organisations 1995/1	0.70***	0.53***
Action participation 1993	0.16**	0.00
Action participation 1995/1	0.20***	0.14**
Adjusted $R^2$		0.53***

\* $p < 0.10$ , \*\* $p < 0.05$ , \*\*\* $p < 0.01$ .  
 $n = 168$ .

participation in such a protest. As it is not easy to simulate political protest in the laboratory, we designed a longitudinal study among Dutch farmers in a period when protest was imminent. In addition to this central goal we had two more aims, namely, to develop and compare measures that tap the various aspects of group identification which are relevant for protest participation and to shed light on the causal relationship between identification and protest participation. There is surprisingly little evidence on the subject and we hope that we have been able to add to the puzzle of identification and protest participation.

The evidence presented supports the assumption that group identification stimulates protest participation. Although the effects are modest, group identification does predict protest participation even eighteen months later and despite the fact that the manure issue changed the composition of the group protestors. However, the various aspects of identification we distinguished differ in their relationship to action participation. First, let us begin to conclude that identification with farmers as a group rather than farming as a profession seems to matter as far as protest participation is concerned. Second, ingroup identification appears to be more important for protest participation than outgroup differentiation. In a way this is not surprising. After all, the conflict is not so much between farmers as an ingroup and some other professional group but between farmers and political authorities. Third, the levels of inclusion we distinguished—rational, national and European—do matter to the extent that they revealed that farmers identify most with farmers at the regional level, somewhat less with farmers at the national level and the least with farmers at the European level. However, when it comes to protest these levels of identification did not add to the explanation of protest participation. As far as the European level is concerned this might be because within the period that we conducted our research no protest was staged at the European level. Had that been the case, identification at the European level might have been more salient and therefore more influential. Regarding the regional and national levels, this was to be expected as identification at these levels was akin to ingroup identification. Fourth, both affective and behavioural identification appeared to have an impact on protest participation. Interestingly, these two aspects of group identification differ in their relationship to intention and behaviour. While both the affective and the behavioural component impact on people's willingness to participate in political protest, the behavioural component is the only one of the two which also has an influence on actual participation.

Theoretically, this is significant because it suggests that in actual participation, being part of an organisation is more important than experiencing a strong emotional bonding to the collectivity. To be sure, both are sides of the same coin called group identification, but apparently the behavioural side of the coin matters more in the case of actual participation. That makes sense, of course. Being organised implies communication networks, access to resources, interpersonal control, information about opportunities when, where and how to act, and all those other things that make it more likely that intentions materialise.

It is important to note that none of the effects are strong. This is not surprising as the levels of identification assessed in this study were very high. All the farmers who participated in our study showed strong and stable levels of identification with their occupational group. However, even the limited variation in identification did make a difference as far as actual and intended participation in collective action were concerned. Moreover, group identification is only one of the determinants of action preparedness. Other factors are important as well, therefore its impact is necessarily limited. In the literature on protest participation, group identification is understood as a necessary but certainly not sufficient condition for participation and that is what our data seem to confirm.

Social identity theory presumes that the permeability of group boundaries, the stability of the group's status and the legitimacy of the intergroup relations have an impact on the selection of status-improvement strategies, indirectly via their influence on group identification and directly by influencing the preference for specific strategies. As we conducted a field study, we were not able to manipulate these characteristics of the situation. Hence, we measured our respondents' perceptions. None of the three perceived characteristics of the situation had an influence on group identification, but permeability and stability did affect action preparedness. Interestingly, however, in a direction opposite to what social identity theory made us expect. Farmers who perceived group boundaries as more open and who are less pessimistic about the future were *more* willing to participate in collective action. This is partly due to the fact that younger farmers are both more likely to perceive boundaries as permeable and are more prepared to take part in political protest. However, the fact that in the second and third interviews permeability continues to have an impact suggests that there is more than a spurious correlation between permeability and action preparedness. Indeed, these findings suggest that it is the ready and able who engage in protest. This is in line with the social movement literature, which states that protest evolves not so much because people are aggrieved but because aggrieved people have the resources and the courage to stage a protest. However, the story seems to be more complicated. In our third interview perceived stability *does* relate to action participation as predicted by social identity theory: farmers who are *more* pessimistic about the future have *more often* participated in collective action. This is net of the influence of the same variable on action preparedness and participation as measured in the previous interviews. This finding suggests that it were those among the respondents who were prepared to participate *but* who have become more pessimistic at the time of the last interview who choose to act collectively. The story could be as follows: obviously, none of the respondents have actually left the profession thus far. It can be expected that people who stay, even though they could leave, have a strong preference for collective action ('voice') relative to individual mobility ('exit'). But, then, as the situation worsens some of them lose faith and become more concerned. Apparently, those are the ones who in

1995 engaged more likely in actual collective action. The partial overlap with type of farm indicates that the manure conflict may have triggered this effect. But a warning is in place. After all, the effects are small. More research is needed to arrive at firm conclusions.

As far as causality is concerned, we were able to examine the causal relationships within the triangle of identification, action preparedness and action participation. Our respondents seem to have entered the arena with some level of group identification (both affective and behavioural). It is this level of identification that sets (with other factors we did not measure) the level of action preparedness. Once set, the level of action preparedness remained fairly stable over time and appeared to be a strong predictor of future action preparedness and of future action participation. Ingroup identification, the affective component of group identification, did not have a direct impact on actual participation. Only via its influence on action preparedness did it have an influence on actual action participation. Participation in farmers' organisation, the behavioural component of group identification, on the other hand, did have a direct influence on actual participation. This effect was net of the variance explained by participation in the past and by action preparedness and thus more relevant than its statistical significance *per se* suggests. Actual participation did not feed back into higher or lower levels of action preparedness. Nor did it produce stronger emotional identification with farmers as a group. Obviously, ingroup identification with other farmers was already at a very high level, hence, it would have been difficult to increase levels of identification even more. Levels of participation in farmers' organisations did not hit the ceiling and that might have been the reason why actual participation reinforced the behavioural component of group identification. In any event, the causal relations between identification, intention and participation as revealed by these data are fairly straightforward. Group identification, be it affective or behavioural, affects action preparedness. Action preparedness in turn together with the behavioural component of group identification influences actual participation in collective action. Action participation, finally, reinforces participation in farmers' organisations. This confirms the theoretical assumption that group identification stimulates participation in collective action. As for the opposite assumption, that participation strengthens group identification, our data suggests such a link between participation and behavioural identification.

Our study has some obvious flaws, the most obvious being the operationalisation of the several aspects of group identification and of the perceived characteristics of the intergroup situation. More reliable measures might have produced more robust effects. On the other hand, as for group identification the various kindred measures revealed identical results. Therefore, the demonstrated effects may be more robust than the tests with single measures suggest. Furthermore, the high levels of group identification made it more difficult to test our hypotheses. It would have been useful to compare high identifiers with low ones, but we had too few low identifiers for such an analysis. Similarly, better tests of our hypotheses would have been possible had levels of group identification or perceived structural characteristics changed significantly over time. We would then have had the opportunity to investigate changes in protest participation in relation to changes in the pattern of identification or perceptions of the intergroup situation.

Future research which, on the one hand, improves on the measures and, on the other, looks for settings which offer more variation in the key factors of our theory

would certainly be worth the effort. We hope, however, to have been able to demonstrate convincingly that such research should never abandon longitudinal designs.

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