

Responses to within-group criticism: Does past adherence to group norms matter?

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Abstract

Two studies tested the hypothesis that responses to within-group criticism are influenced by perceptions of a critic's prior adherence to ingroup norms. Participants responded to criticism which originated from ingroup members who either had previously adhered to or deviated from a group norm. Across both studies, criticising the ingroup yielded more negative group evaluations for antinormative members than it did for normative members. Participants also reported highest levels of sensitivity overall to communication (whether critical or praising of the ingroup) which came from antinormative members. Mediation analyses (Study 2) indicated that these effects were driven by perceptions of whether the communication violated a group expectation, and also perceptions of the critic's identification with the group. Study 1 also provided evidence that reactions to criticism are made in response to social identity concerns: the effects of prior norm adherence were observed only in participants who were highly identified with the ingroup. The research integrates previous work on group deviance and responses to criticism by elaborating the conditions under which criticism originating from within a group is most and least likely to be tolerated by its members. Copyright © 2007 John Wiley & Sons, Ltd.

Numerous studies have detailed the benefits conferred upon individuals who adhere to the norms of their group. Relative to members deemed to have deviated from group norms, normative group members are viewed as having better prospects for advancement within the group (Abrams, Marques, Bown, & Henson, 2000; Hollander, 1958), are believed to convey a more positive image of the group (Marques, Abrams, & Serôdio, 2001) and are more likely to be categorised psychologically as group members (Abrams, Rutland, Cameron, & Marques, 2003). Ultimately, members who adhere to group norms are evaluated more positively by their fellow members than are those who are group deviants (Marques et al., 2001; Marques, Yzerbyt, & Leyens, 1988). Much less understood, however, is how adherence to group norms influences groups' reactions to members' *subsequent* behaviour: does knowledge of a member's past adherence to (or deviance from) group norms affect the way the group

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responds to that member's later actions? To address this question the current contribution investigated groups' responses to members who engage in behaviours which, while potentially being in the long-term interests of the group might nevertheless be psychologically painful for its members in the short term. Specifically, we examined groups' reactions to normative and antinormative members who criticise their group.

RESPONSES TO CRITICISM OF GROUPS

Recent research has shown that group members' responses to open, critical communication about their group vary depending on the source of the communication. Hornsey, Oppes, and Svensson (2002) first demonstrated the intergroup sensitivity effect which refers to the tendency for individuals to react to criticism from ingroup members with less sensitivity, and to evaluate these members more favourably, than to the same criticism from outgroup members. The effect has been replicated several times (e.g. Hornsey & Imani, 2004; Hornsey, Trembath, & Gunthorpe, 2004; O'Dwyer, Berkowitz, & Alfeld-Johnson, 2002; also Sutton, Elder, & Douglas, 2006).

On first inspection, such findings seem to conflict with those obtained in studies of the black sheep effect (Marques & Yzerbyt, 1988; Marques et al., 1988), where ingroup members who violate a group norm are evaluated more negatively than ingroup members, and outgroup members, who do not violate a group norm. The black sheep effect has been described as a 'sophisticated' form of ingroup favoritism to reflect the idea that group members distance ingroup deviants from the group in order to protect the overall positivity of the ingroup stereotype (e.g. Coull, Yzerbyt, Castano, Paladino, & Keemans, 2001). Consistent with this idea, several tests of the effect have demonstrated that it emerges most strongly when that stereotype is threatened (e.g. Marques et al., 2001) and in members who are particularly motivated to protect it (i.e. high group identifiers: Branscombe, Wann, Noel, & Coleman, 1993; Castano, Paladino, Coull, & Yzerbyt, 2002).

How might these two literatures be reconciled? A key factor seems to be the attributions that group members make for the 'deviant's' behaviour. Deviants in traditional black sheep effect research have clearly undermined the group in some way, either by underperforming on a group task (e.g. Biernat, Vescio, & Billings, 1999; De Cremer & Vanbeselaere, 1999; Marques & Yzerbyt, 1988) or engaging in behaviours which violate the ingroup stereotype (e.g. Castano et al., 2002; Hutchison & Abrams, 2003; also Marques et al., 2001). By contrast, while criticism of the ingroup might be psychologically painful for ingroup members in the short term, it is also recognised as being important for the long-term advancement of the group (Janis, 1982; Nemeth & Owens, 1996). The question for group members therefore becomes one of *why* someone would criticise their group. Since outgroups *in general* are assumed to act against the interests of the ingroup, criticism from outgroup members is less likely to be attributed to positive intentions than is criticism from ingroup members (Hornsey, 2006; Vivian & Berkowitz, 1993).

Research on the intergroup sensitivity effect supports this idea and has reported evidence for a mediating role of the perceived intended *constructiveness* of the communication: criticism from ingroup members tends to be received with less sensitivity than criticism from outgroup members *because* it is viewed as driven by more constructive motives (Hornsey & Imani, 2004; Hornsey et al., 2002, 2004). Moreover, these perceptions of motive themselves seem to be influenced by assumptions concerning the critic's commitment to (or psychological investment in) the ingroup: ingroup critics are perceived to be driven by more constructive motives to the extent that they are seen to be strongly *identified* with the group (Hornsey et al., 2004).

THE PRESENT CONTRIBUTION

Does this mean that ingroup members will always be received positively when they criticise the ingroup? While ingroup members *on the whole* might be afforded greater latitude than outgroup members to engage in this form of communication, we argue here that there is also likely to be variation in the extent to which criticism is tolerated *within* a group and that there are likely to be rules governing its expression (see also Hornsey et al., 2004).

Although drawn upon most frequently to explain the influence of leaders, Hollander's (1958) notion of idiosyncrasy credits offers a useful theoretical framework for the integration of the literatures on group deviance and criticism. Idiosyncrasy credits refer to 'positively disposed impressions' which determine the extent to which group members are permitted to deviate from the group's norms before being sanctioned by the group (p. 120). According to Hollander, the more credit an individual has within a group the greater latitude he or she is afforded to engage in idiosyncratic behaviours. Notably, Hollander argues that the same behaviour might be interpreted differently by the group depending on the number of credits the perpetrator of the behaviour has previously accrued.

Our central prediction is that a group's response to within-group criticism will be influenced by perceptions of the critic's previous adherence to group norms, and that criticism from normative members will be tolerated more readily than that from antinormative members. In the same way that outgroup members are assumed to work against the interests of the group, ingroup members who have deviated from a group norm may also be seen as having worked against the group. For this reason we suggest that criticism from antinormative members will not be seen as motivated by positive intentions (e.g. to help the group develop), but rather treated with suspicion and regarded as a further example of their deviance. In other words, we argue that however well-intentioned it is in reality, in practice criticism from antinormative members will be tainted by the critic's prior deviance from the group (as expressed in the idiom: 'a leopard can't change its spots'), and as such will elicit sensitivity.

In addressing these questions, we aimed to offer a unique and logical extension of both the group deviance and criticism literatures. More precisely, we aimed to contribute an understanding of *when* and *why* an ingroup member will be granted the latitude to potentially influence their group through the expression of critical communication. In addition to documenting these processes, however, the research is important because of its potential contribution to the debate concerning how group members can strategically manage the way in which they are perceived by their group (e.g. Jetten, Hornsey, & Adarves-Yorno, 2006). For example, the research has the potential to say something about the stability of a group's differential evaluation of normative and antinormative members and whether members are able to change the way they are viewed by the group through the things they say about it.

A final goal for the current research was to explore a motivational basis for the hypothesised relationship between a member's normativeness and group responses to criticism. Like the black sheep effect (e.g. Branscombe et al., 1993), the intergroup sensitivity effect has been commonly interpreted in terms of an identification mechanism, and it has been suggested that groups are especially sensitive to external criticism because it is perceived as identity threatening (Hornsey & Imani, 2004; although see Sutton, Douglas, Elder, & Tarrant, 2007). Since highly identifying group members are more sensitive than low identifiers to acts of deviance performed by ingroup members (Branscombe et al., 1993), then we might reasonably expect that they will also be more sensitive to the subsequent actions of those deviants. That is, we might expect that high identifiers will be especially likely to take account of an ingroup critic's prior deviance from group norms when interpreting their communication, and would perceive their behaviour as being a further example of their deviance. In contrast, since low identifiers are less likely than high identifiers to be concerned with the image of the ingroup, these members should be least influenced by the normativeness of the critic: criticism should be received with similar

sensitivity by low identifiers, and critics evaluated equally positively, irrespective of whether they have previously deviated from the group's norms.

STUDY 1

Method

Participants and Design

Participants were 97 undergraduate students recruited from the campus of Keele University. They were randomly assigned to a high ($n = 47$) or a low ($n = 50$) identification condition and were exposed to criticism of the ingroup (their university) from an ingroup member (the target) who was described either as group normative ($n = 51$) or antinormative ($n = 46$). The design was thus a 2 (participant identification) \times 2 (target normativeness) between participants design.

Materials and Procedure

Target normativeness was manipulated by varying the target's adherence to a group performance norm. We made the assumption that doing well academically was normative for our student group and therefore that a student who performed poorly in university assignments would be regarded as antinormative (see also Fielding, Hogg, & Annandale, 2006). To orientate them to the task, participants were first provided with information concerning their own position in relation to this norm. They were presented with a test which required them to construct as many new words as possible from a set of five 10-letter words: all participants received the same score on this task (50/100). The perceived importance of this test as an indicator of normativeness was reinforced by informing participants that the test had been shown in previous research to be predictive of university-level academic ability. Participants were then told that, after making their comments about the group (see below), the target had also taken the test. Those in the normative condition were told that the target achieved a score of 80/100 on the same test and those in the antinormative condition were told that the target achieved a score of 20/100 on the test.

Group identification was manipulated using the 'linguistic manipulation' task developed by Jetten, Spears, and Manstead (1997) and involved participants indicating whether they agreed or disagreed with each of five positive and five negative statements about the ingroup. As in Jetten et al., for participants in the high identification condition, the positive statements were *moderately positive* (e.g. 'students here are friendly and sociable') and the negative statements were *very negative* (e.g. 'students here have nothing in common with each other'). For participants in the low identification condition, the positive statements were *very positive* (e.g. 'in terms of how I define myself this university is crucial to my identity') and the negative statements were *moderately negative* (e.g. 'when you really think about it, this university is less prestigious than some universities'). It was anticipated that participants in the high identification condition would agree with most or all of the positive statements while disagreeing with most or all of the negative statements, thereby leading them to believe that they were strongly identified with the ingroup. The opposite pattern was expected for participants in the low identification condition. To further reinforce the manipulation, participants were asked to write the number of positive and negative statements that they had agreed with on the response sheet.

After this, participants were provided with information about the target (a fellow student). They were informed that as part of a routine meeting with their tutor the target had described their experiences of university. Participants were told that in response to the tutor's question, 'how are you getting on with other students here?', the target said the following:

Well, whenever I think of other students here I tend to think of them as far too critical. They always believe themselves to be the expert even when they know nothing. I think students here are some of the most closed-minded people I've met.

The negativity of this statement was confirmed with a group of pilot participants ($N = 10$) who were asked to read the statement and indicate how positive or negative they thought it was using a 0–10 scale (0 = *very negative*, 10 = *very positive*). The mean response was $M = 1.80$.

Participants' responses to the statement were assessed across two dependent measures (adapted from Hornsey et al., 2002). First, *sensitivity* to the comments was determined by asking participants how 'threatening', 'disappointing', 'irritating', 'offensive', 'insulting', 'hypocritical', 'judgemental' and 'arrogant' they found the comments ($\alpha = .88$). Next, participants reported the extent to which they thought the target was 'intelligent', 'trustworthy', 'friendly', 'open-minded', 'likeable', 'nice', 'respected' and 'interesting' (*evaluation* $\alpha = .76$). All responses were made on 11-point scales where 0 = 'not at all' and 10 = 'very much'. Testing took place in small groups with a maximum of five participants. After completing the questionnaire, participants were provided with the study debrief and given the opportunity to ask questions about the study.

Results

As expected, participants in the high identification condition agreed with more positive statements than did participants in the low identification condition ($M_s = 4.04$ and 0.74 : $t(95) = 21.65$, $p < .001$, $\eta_p^2 = 0.832$), and agreed with fewer negative statements than participants in the low identification condition ($M_s = 1.34$ and 4.08 : $t(95) = 13.84$, $p < .001$, $\eta_p^2 = 0.668$). The manipulation of identification was therefore deemed to be successful. To test the main predictions, a 2 (participant identification) \times 2 (target normativeness) factorial ANOVA was performed on participants' responses to each dependent measure. For sensitivity to the target's comments, there was a main effect of participant identification ($F(1, 93) = 62.97$, $p < .001$, $\eta_p^2 = 0.404$): high identifiers expressed greater sensitivity to the target's comments than did low identifiers ($M = 5.21$ and 3.14 for high and low identifiers, respectively). There was also an interaction between participant identification and normativeness ($F(1, 93) = 6.84$, $p = .010$, $\eta_p^2 = 0.069$). Simple main effects analysis revealed that high identifiers reported greater sensitivity to criticism from the antinormative than normative target ($M_s = 5.80$ and 4.65 ; $F(1, 93) = 9.18$, $p = .003$, $\eta_p^2 = 0.090$). This effect was non-significant for low identifiers ($M_s = 3.01$ and 3.25 ; $F(1, 93) = 0.41$, $p = .526$, $\eta_p^2 = 0.004$; Figure 1).

These effects were also reflected in participants' evaluations of the target. Here, there was a main effect of participant identification ($F(1, 93) = 5.04$, $p = .027$, $\eta_p^2 = 0.051$) such that low identifiers evaluated the target more favourably than did high identifiers ($M_s = 3.57$ and 3.16 , respectively). Participants overall also evaluated the normative target more favourably than they evaluated the antinormative target ($F(1, 93) = 7.44$, $p = .008$, $\eta_p^2 = 0.074$; $M_s = 3.62$ and 3.11 , respectively). These effects were qualified by an interaction between participant identification and normativeness ($F(1, 93) = 5.50$, $p = .021$, $\eta_p^2 = 0.056$): the effect of normativeness on participants' evaluations was significant for high identifiers ($M_s = 3.63$ and 2.69 ; $F(1, 93) = 12.51$, $p = .001$, $\eta_p^2 = 0.119$) but not for low identifiers ($M_s = 3.61$ and 3.54 ; $F(1, 93) = 0.08$, $p = .784$, η_p^2 : Figure 2).

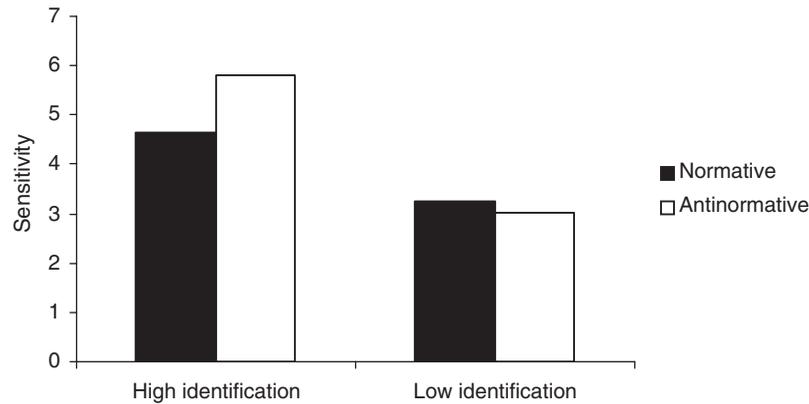


Figure 1. Interaction between participant identification and target normativeness on sensitivity to criticism (Study 1)

Discussion

In contrast to their reactions to criticism from the antinormative target, participants were relatively tolerant of criticism stemming from the normative target: the criticism was met with lower levels of sensitivity and the target was evaluated more positively, as expected. The results also provide support for the hypothesised moderating role of social identification: participants who were assigned to the high identification experimental condition were most sensitive to the normativeness manipulation. This finding indicates that responses to criticism from normative and antinormative members are guided by concerns about the group's image. It also makes intuitive sense: to the extent that high identifiers are more concerned with protecting the image of the ingroup than low identifiers (e.g. Branscombe et al., 1993), it follows that high identifiers should be particularly sensitive to the behaviour of members who have previously threatened that image (i.e. group deviants).

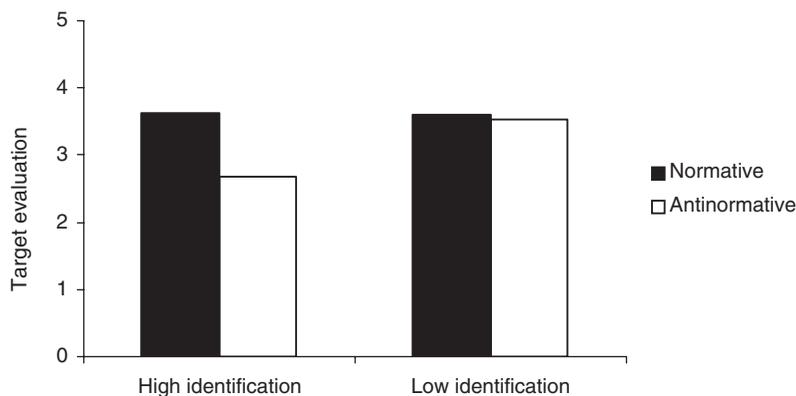


Figure 2. Interaction between participant identification and target normativeness on evaluation of the target (Study 1)

STUDY 2

In addition to testing the robustness of the above effects, Study 2 offered several methodological improvements to Study 1. First, Study 2 sought to test our hypotheses in a different group context using a different group norm. While our decision in Study 1 to present targets who had deviated from a performance-based norm was not out of line with previous research (e.g. Fielding et al., 2006), we may have inadvertently created a context in which participants' reactions to criticism were guided by perceptions of the critic's intellect rather than their normativeness. Additionally, we cannot be certain that participants were not responding to their own performance in relation to that norm. Demonstrating that the observed effects emerge in a different context with a different norm would therefore help strengthen our argument that perceptions of deviance do play an important role in guiding responses to criticism.

Second, by soliciting ratings only after exposure to the target's criticism it is possible that the more negative responses to antinormative targets in Study 1 were driven by the *evaluative* consequences of their deviance from group norms rather than by their normativeness *per se*. That is, it is possible that criticism from antinormative members is received more negatively because antinormative members are simply less likeable than normative members (see Hornsey et al., 2004). Therefore, in addition to changing the group context and norm, Study 2 had participants rate the target at two time points, before and after exposure to their communication. Controlling for Time 1 ratings in the analysis enabled us to assess the effects of normativeness more directly.

A third goal for the study was to establish whether or not the effects observed in Study 1 were specific to acts of criticism, or whether target normativeness would similarly affect responses to more positive communication. Research on the intergroup sensitivity effect has shown that praise from outgroup members is received no differently than is praise from ingroup members (e.g. Hornsey et al., 2002) and so we might expect that responses to praise similarly will not be influenced by target normativeness. However, research on self-fulfilling prophecy effects in social perception (e.g. Madon, Jussim, & Eccles, 1997) might suggest that normativeness will also influence responses to praise. Briefly, research in this field has demonstrated that negative information about an individual's character is regarded by perceivers as more diagnostic than is positive information (Kim, Diekmann, & Tenbrunsel, 2003; Martijn, Spears, Van der Plicht, & Jacobs, 1992; Skowronski & Carlston, 1989), and that 'people tend to believe that such character flaws, once present, are very difficult to change' (Kim et al., 2003, p. 240). Following this line of reasoning, antinormative group members (those perceived essentially to have a character flaw) who praise the ingroup might continue to be met with a certain amount of suspicion.

The final goal of Study 2 was to examine two variables which theoretically might be expected to drive responses to criticism within groups. First, we examined participants' perceptions of whether the target had violated a group norm (or group expectancy: Biernat et al., 1999) by making their comments. It is possible that communication from normative members is received more positively because that communication is itself perceived to have deviated less from group norms than the same communication from antinormative members. Including a measure of the extent to which the target had violated a group expectancy therefore enabled us to test the idea that groups have different expectations concerning how different members should behave (Hollander, 1958). Second, we tested whether perceptions of the target's commitment to (or identification with) the group might drive the group's responses to their criticism. On the basis that high identifiers go further than low identifiers to uphold the positivity of the group (e.g. Coull et al., 2001), we might reasonably expect that critics who are *perceived* by others to be highly identified with the group will similarly be assumed to be contributing positively to it (see also Branscombe et al., 1993). This idea also finds some support in Hollander's (1958) theorising. According to Hollander, a group member's latitude to engage in idiosyncratic

behaviour will be influenced by the group's perception that the member is motivated to belong to the group: if the member is not seen to be motivated to belong, their position in the group is likely to be threatened (see also Hornsey et al., 2004).

Method

Participants and Design

Given that the effects of target normativeness on responses to criticism were observed in Study 1 only amongst high identifiers, Study 2 utilised a group context containing only participants who were likely to be highly identified with the group. To this end, British participants were recruited from an on-line discussion group for members of a national youth marching band 'community' following a request posted to the group by the experimenter. Eleven participants were removed from the dataset because of failure to complete successfully a manipulation check requiring them to identify the behaviour of the target; the final sample thus contained 174 participants. Participants were exposed either to a normative ($n = 60$) or antinormative ($n = 58$) target, or to a target whose normativeness was not specified (control $n = 56$). Orthogonal to this, participants read a transcript in which the target either praised ($n = 86$) or criticised ($n = 88$) the group. The design was thus a 3 (target normativeness: normative vs. antinormative vs. control) \times 2 (comment valence: positive vs. negative) between participants design.

Materials and Procedure

Consenting participants were directed automatically via a web link to the on-line questionnaire. After completing a four-item measure of identification ($\alpha = .80$), participants were presented with some background information (e.g. age and leisure interests) about the target ('Scott'). For participants in the control condition this was the only information provided about the target. Participants in the normative (antinormative) condition received the following additional information:

At marching band shows, Scott always waits [does not always wait] until the end of a band performance before giving an opinion about the performance—he never [often] makes comments out loud while a band is performing.

The decision to manipulate the target's normative behaviour in relation to that exhibited during a marching band performance was informed by a pre-test in which marching band fans were asked via an on-line discussion forum to list behaviours of other fans which they found most annoying. During a 5-day period, more than 2000 people accessed the message and 96 people offered a response to it: overwhelmingly, the type of fan which other fans found most annoying was the fan who talked out loud during a performance rather than waiting until the end to offer an opinion. Given the volume of people viewing the message and the consensus of responses, we were confident that a norm had been identified which would be salient to the participants in the main study.

Participants then evaluated the target using a set of five trait adjectives based on those employed in Study 1 (*Time 1 evaluation* $\alpha = .89$). The second independent variable, comment valence, was then introduced. Participants were told that the target had made the following positive [negative] comments about marching band fans during a recent conversation with friends:

When I think about marching band fans I think about them as being fairly friendly and encouraging [unfriendly and critical]. I also believe that marching band fans are very supportive [not very

supportive] of the activity. I sometimes think marching band fans are more cultured than [not as cultured as] fans of other activities.

Immediately following presentation of this information, participants evaluated the target again using the same set of adjectives as before (*Time 2 evaluation* $\alpha = .94$). All participants then completed a manipulation check which measured the degree to which they thought the target's comments about the group were positive, before reporting how sensitive they were to the target's comments (*sensitivity* $\alpha = .88$).

After this, participants completed a series of items tapping the two candidate mediators. *Expectancy violation* was assessed with a single item measuring the degree to which the target had violated an expectation participants had concerning how group members should behave by making the comments. Participants' perceptions of the target's level of identification with the ingroup was assessed with four items (e.g. 'To what extent do you think Scott is strongly identified with the marching band community?': *target identification* $\alpha = .90$). Ratings were made on seven-point scales where 1 = 'not at all/not positive at all' and 7 = 'very much/very positive'. Testing took place over a 2-week period at the end of which participants were provided with the study debrief and given the opportunity to ask questions.

Results

The effectiveness of the manipulation of target normativeness was tested by comparing participants' evaluations of the target at Time 1: $F(2, 171) = 49.46, p < .001, \eta_p^2 = 0.366$ ($M_s = 5.41, 4.93, 3.68$, for participants in the normative, control and antinormative conditions, respectively). Planned comparisons indicated that all means were significantly different ($p < .05$), and so the manipulation was deemed to be successful. The manipulation of comment valence was also successful: participants assigned to the positive valence condition reported that the comments were more positive than did participants assigned to the negative valence condition: $t(172) = 17.33, p < .001, \eta_p^2 = 0.636$ ($M_s = 5.56$ and 2.22 for positive and negative comments, respectively). An assessment of responses to the participant identification measure confirmed the importance of this group context to the participants ($M = 5.51$); levels of identification did not differ across the experimental conditions ($F_s < 1$). We first checked for any effects involving identification using multiple regression. None of the effects emerged as significant and so identification was dropped from the subsequent analyses.

A 3 (target normativeness) \times 2 (comment valence) factorial ANCOVA was performed on participants' responses to each dependent measure (entering Time 1 evaluation as a covariate). There was a main effect of target normativeness on *sensitivity* ratings: $F(2, 167) = 5.17, p = .007, \eta_p^2 = 0.058$. Planned comparisons indicated that participants were less sensitive overall to comments made by normative targets than by antinormative targets ($M = 3.58$ and 4.55 : $F(1, 115) = 6.35, p = .013, \eta_p^2 = 0.052$). Comments by antinormative targets also elicited marginally greater sensitivity than did control targets ($M = 3.81$: $F(1, 111) = 3.84, p = .052, \eta_p^2 = 0.012$). The main effect of comment valence was also significant: participants reported greater sensitivity to criticism ($M = 4.65$) than to praise ($M = 3.29$: $F(1, 167) = 44.29, p < .001, \eta_p^2 = 0.210$).

For *Time 2 evaluation*, there was a main effect of comment valence ($F(1, 167) = 110.52, p < .001, \eta_p^2 = 0.398$): participants evaluated the target more positively when they praised the group ($M = 4.89$) than when they criticised the group ($M = 3.42$). There was also an interaction between normativeness and comment valence: $F(2, 167) = 4.30, p = .015, \eta_p^2 = 0.049$ (Figure 3). Simple main effects analysis indicated that the effect of normativeness was significant for participants in the negative valence condition ($F(2, 167) = 5.69, p = .004, \eta_p^2 = 0.064$): normative targets who criticised the ingroup

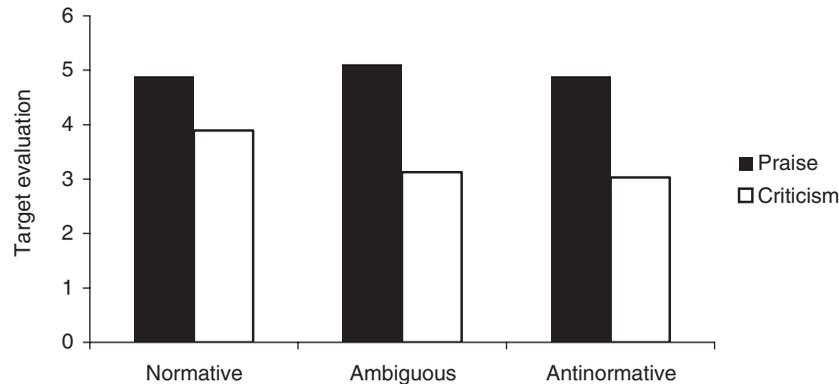


Figure 3. Interaction between target normativeness and comment valence on evaluation of the target (Study 2)

($M = 3.89$) were evaluated more positively than were either antinormative targets ($M = 3.02$), or control targets ($M = 3.13$). The effect of normativeness on evaluation of targets who praised the group was non-significant (M s = 4.88, 4.88 and 5.11 for normative, antinormative and control targets, respectively : $F(2, 167) = 0.483, p = .618, \eta_p^2 = 0.064$).

Mediational Analysis

The final analysis focussed on whether the effects of target normativeness and comment valence on the two outcome variables, sensitivity and Time 2 evaluation, were mediated by either of the two candidate mediators. The procedure outlined by Baron and Kenny (1986) was followed for this analysis. Time 1 evaluation was included in the analysis throughout and we included responses from participants in the normative and antinormative conditions only. Since the effect of normativeness on sensitivity to the comments was not differentiated across levels of comment valence, comment valence was not included in the mediational analysis of this effect. However, the effect of normativeness on evaluation was significant only for negative comments and so mediation was tested for negative comments only for this effect.

For *sensitivity*, expectancy violation emerged as a significant mediator and there was evidence that this fully mediated the effect of target normativeness. Thus, there was an effect of normativeness on both sensitivity ($\beta = -.30, t(115) = 2.52, p = .013$) and expectancy violation ($\beta = -.39, t(115) = 3.34, p = .001$), but when normativeness and expectancy violation were entered simultaneously into the equation the effect of normativeness on sensitivity was rendered non-significant ($\beta = -.11, t < 1.1$), while the effect of the mediator remained significant ($\beta = .47, t(114) = 5.66, p < .001$: Figure 4). A Sobel (1982) test confirmed that the reduction in the strength of the effect was significant ($z = 2.85, p = .004$).

For target *evaluation*, perceptions of target identification emerged as a partial mediator of the effect of normativeness. Thus, there was an effect of normativeness on both evaluation ($\beta = .48, t(56) = 3.43, p = .001$) and target identification ($\beta = .52, t(56) = 2.46, p = .017$), but the effect of normativeness on evaluation was weakened when normativeness and target identification were entered together ($\beta = .34, t(55) = 2.50, p = .015$), and target identification continued to affect evaluation ($\beta = .34, t(55) = 3.36, p = .001$; Sobel $z = 1.92, p = .05$: Figure 5).

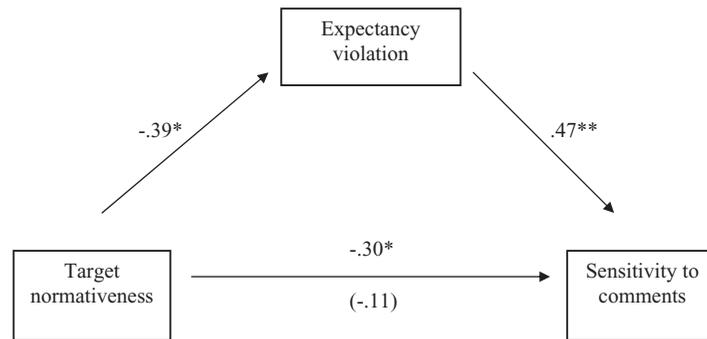


Figure 4. Mediation analysis (Study 2): Effects of target normativeness and expectancy violation on sensitivity to target's comments. Coefficients appearing above lines are β weights for uncorrected paths. Coefficients appearing below lines are β weights for corrected paths. * $p < .05$, ** $p < .001$

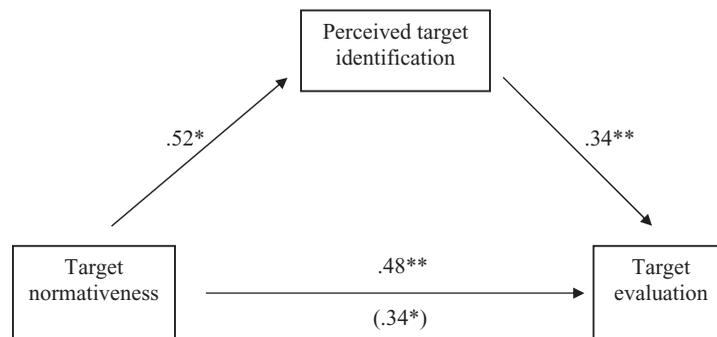


Figure 5. Mediation analysis (Study 2): Effects of target normativeness and perceived target identification on target evaluation. Coefficients appearing above lines are β weights for uncorrected paths. Coefficients appearing below lines are β weights for corrected paths. * $p < .05$, ** $p < .001$

Discussion

In line with participants in Study 1, participants in Study 2 reacted more negatively to antinormative targets who criticised the group than they did to normative targets who criticised the group. Importantly, this effect emerged after controlling for baseline evaluations of the targets, thereby ruling out the possibility that responses were driven by the evaluative consequences of the targets' deviance as opposed to their deviance *per se*. However, the study also revealed that sensitivity to the comments was not differentiated across levels of comment valence: comments, both positive and negative, from antinormative targets were received with greater sensitivity than were those from normative targets. This generalised sensitivity effect did not extend to direct evaluations of the target's behaviour, however: while normative targets were evaluated more positively than antinormative targets when they criticised the group, antinormative targets did not appear to be disadvantaged in this way when they praised the group.

The mediational analysis provided insight into why group members take a member's past adherence to group norms into account when responding to their subsequent behaviour. First, the effect of target normativeness on sensitivity to the target's comments was found to be fully mediated by perceptions of

the degree to which the target had violated an expectation concerning how group members should behave, and the more participants believed the target had violated a group expectancy the more sensitive they were to his comments about the group. Second, the effect of target normativeness on evaluations of the target was found to be partially mediated by perceptions of target identification such that the more highly identified with the group the target was perceived to be, so the more positively that target was evaluated (see similar findings by Hornsey et al., 2004).

Lastly, data from participants in the control condition offered insight into how group members respond to criticism when the normativeness of critics is unclear. On both the dependent measures of sensitivity and target evaluation, ratings for the control target were more favourable than they were for the antinormative target, and for ratings of sensitivity the control target was evaluated no differently from the normative target. This pattern of responses helps explain why participants in previous group criticism research reported relative tolerance towards ingroup critics: in the absence of evidence to the contrary, participants appear to assume that ingroup critics are acting somewhat normatively (cf. De Cremer & Vanbeselaere, 1999). In relation to the current study, it seems that knowledge of a member's adherence to group norms does not necessarily help critics as much as knowledge of a member's deviance from norms hurts them.

GENERAL DISCUSSION

Previous research into deviance within groups has focussed mainly on groups' evaluative reactions to members who deviate from group norms (e.g. Marques & Paez, 1994; Marques et al., 1988). The current contribution uniquely extends this research by documenting how a member's past adherence to norms influences the group's reactions to their *subsequent* actions. In this respect, we believe the work has also gone some way to reconcile the literature on group deviance with that on responses to criticism. Most pertinently, the research presented here has demonstrated that reactions to criticism stemming from within a group are influenced by whether or not the member making the criticism has previously adhered to the group's norms. When that member has previously deviated from a group norm their criticism is received with greater sensitivity and the member is evaluated more negatively compared to when the member has previously upheld that norm.

Importantly, the results from the mediational analysis in Study 2 help explain why perceptions of normativeness influence responses in this way. Reflecting findings obtained in studies of group criticism (e.g. Hornsey & Imani, 2004; Hornsey et al., 2002, 2004), it seems that perceptions related to a critic's *motive* are important determinants of responses; and normative members are attributed more positive motives than antinormative ones. One such perception concerns the degree to which the critics are believed to be psychologically committed to the group (Hornsey et al., 2004): normative members here were perceived to be more strongly identified with the ingroup than antinormative members, and these perceptions partially mediated the effect of normativeness on target evaluation. This finding also resonates with Hollander's (1958) idea that a member is granted greater latitude to engage in idiosyncratic behaviour when they are perceived to be motivated to belong to (i.e. are identified with) the group: if a member is not seen to care about the group in this way, then the group is likely to take steps to remove that member (at least psychologically) when they undermine the group.

Beyond this, Study 2 indicated that whether or not communication will elicit sensitivity amongst the group will depend upon the perception that the communication itself has or has not violated a group norm. We found that the effect of target normativeness on sensitivity to comments was fully mediated by perceptions that the target had violated a group expectancy, and comments from normative members were *less* likely than were those from antinormative members to be viewed in this way. In line with

Hollander's (1958) theorising, this finding points strongly to the possibility that different norms operate for different members of the group: in short, what is normative for one member seems to be antinormative for another.

However, it also seems that some group members are more concerned than others about who is permitted to criticise the group and the pattern of results obtained here suggests that responses to criticism are motivated by social identity concerns (cf. Sutton et al., 2007). This was powerfully demonstrated in Study 1 where the effects of the target normativeness manipulation were only observed in participants assigned to the high identification condition. This said, we cannot categorically state that participants in Study 2 were also responding to social identity needs since the study deliberately targeted a group whose members were likely to be high identifiers. Accordingly, the generally high levels of identification reported by participants in Study 2 may have worked against finding a moderation effect of identification in that study (as may have the fact that this variable was measured in Study 2, rather than manipulated as in Study 1: e.g. Ellemers, Spears, & Doosje, 1997). When looked at as a whole, though, we believe that a social identification mechanism is the most plausible explanation of our findings: we outline below the basis of this argument.

First, an examination of the responses to the dependent measures makes it clear that participants in Study 2 responded to the target normativeness manipulation in much the same way as did participants in the high identification condition in Study 1. While it might be argued that a comparison of the two studies is difficult because Study 1 did not solicit evaluative ratings of targets prior to presentation of their criticism, if we repeat the analysis from Study 2 without controlling for baseline evaluations, the pattern of effects remains unchanged. Second, the results of the mediational analysis in Study 2 make it clear that participants were responding to a violation of a *group expectancy*. As previous research has shown, it is high identifiers who are particularly concerned about such violations (Biernat et al., 1999).

We turn now to the question of how members who have previously deviated from group norms might in the future make a positive contribution to the group. In discussing responses to criticism in intergroup contexts, Hornsey and Imani (2004) suggested that outgroup members might be able to overcome the intergroup sensitivity effect by pre-empting a critical message with a more positive one (so-called 'buttering up': p. 380). The current findings suggest that this strategy might be of only limited use to antinormative ingroup members: while antinormative members who praised the group were *evaluated* similarly to normative targets, at an *affective* level their comments—whether praising or criticising—evoked greater sensitivity than did those from normative targets. Ironically, these two sets of findings seem to offer support for both theoretical accounts outlined earlier. On the one hand, and consistent with the self-fulfilling prophecy account (Kim et al., 2003), communication from antinormative members is met with sensitivity regardless of its valence (see also Vonk, 1998). Yet, on the other hand, and in line with work on group criticism (e.g. Hornsey et al., 2002), group members do not appear to act on these emotions when it comes to directly evaluating such individuals when they praise the group.

We suspect that part of the answer to this paradox lies in the social acceptability of expressing negative emotional reactions to a member's behaviour versus directly evaluating that member. Despite holding suspicions about antinormative members' motives for praising the group, it is possible that group members resist expressing negative attitudes towards such members since to do so could violate a societal norm dictating the expression of social judgements without clear justification (Yzerbyt, Schadron, Leyens, & Rocher, 1994). Therefore, it might not be until such members have demonstrated the veracity of their (positive) motives that the group's suspicions of them are reduced. Although the current data can only speak indirectly to this idea since participants here were only exposed to a single set of comments, it is possible that if antinormative members repeatedly praise the group the group's suspicion of them might be reduced, and this in turn could pave the way for their fuller contribution to it.

Lastly, while our data indicate that praising the group is one way in which antinormative members can change the esteem in which they are held by the group, it might be suggested that this change occurs as a result of a shift in the group's perceptions of their normativeness. In other words, antinormative members in the current research may have been evaluated more positively when they praised the group because they came to be regarded as group normative. This said, however, if change in perceived normativeness of the deviant was responsible for the more positive evaluations, then we would have expected to see similar responses on both the dependent variables of sensitivity and evaluation. That praise from antinormative members continued to be received with greater sensitivity implies that perceptions of normativeness had not changed. Nonetheless, future research should seek to confirm our interpretation by comparing perceptions of target normativeness before and after exposure to group praise. Along similar lines, future research might also benefit from an examination of how far groups allow normative members to go in criticising the group before taking action. In the current research we have shown that normative members who criticise the group are received more positively than are antinormative members, but we do not know how the group would respond to normative members if they repeatedly criticised the group. We suspect that repeated criticism without an accompanying strategy for resolving the problems expressed therein might eventually come to be regarded by the group as norm violating.

In conclusion, the current research has demonstrated that groups take account of member normativeness when responding to criticism, and has shown that normative ingroup members are afforded considerable latitude to engage in this important form of communication. The research represents a first empirical step towards bridging the group deviance and criticism literatures by revealing when criticism from within a group will be tolerated and when it will be met with sensitivity. Our finding that heightened sensitivity to communication from antinormative members does not always translate into negative evaluations may offer some hope for such members that they might in the future make a positive contribution to the group. Understanding the circumstances which promote this is important not least because of the tangible benefits that can be gained by the group from embracing critical feedback from a range of group members.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The authors are grateful to affiliates of the British Youth Band Association and Drum Corps United Kingdom for their contribution to this research. We are also grateful to the Editor and two anonymous reviewers for their helpful comments on an earlier draft of this article.

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