They did it again! Social control responses to repeated incidences of deviance in small groups

Daniel Frings

London South Bank University

Isabel Pinto

University of Porto

Author note

Daniel Frings, Department of Psychology, School of Applied Science, London South Bank University; Isabel Pinto, Faculty of Psychology, University of Porto.

Correspondence concerning this article should be addressed to Daniel Frings, 103 Borough Road, London, SE1 0AA, London South Bank University. Phone: (+44)20 7815 5888. Email: fringsd@lsbu.ac.uk

**Abstract**

Deviant group members who break group norms often challenge social validity and group locomotion, invoking varying types of social control responses. The current study (*N* = 95) investigated changes over time in the use of four social control responses of varying severity (persuasion, embarrassment, temporary exclusion and permanent exclusion) employed in response to deviance. It also tested the role that perceived effectiveness of, and social support for, various responses play in response selection. Findings show severity of social control response selection is driven by both pragmatic and identity based concerns: Over time, responses become more severe, driven in part by effectiveness and social support.

*Keywords*: deviance, social control, groups, social identity

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**Deviance in groups**

Groups provide a sense of certainty in an uncertain world (Abrams, Marques, Bown, & Henson, 2000; Jetten, Hogg & Mullin, 2000), foster a sense of belonging and positive social identity (Tajfel, 1978; Tajfel & Turner, 1979; Turner, Hogg, Oakes, Reicher, & Wetherell, 1987) and allow access to resources unavailable to the individual (Pennington, 2002). They also create an assurance that favours will be reciprocated by other members (Fehr, Fischbacher, & Gachter, 2002). A key part of any groups’ existence is the adoption by group members of attitudinal and behavioural norms that support the group’s social reality (Abrams, Frings, & Randsley de Moura, 2005; Asch, 1952; Festinger, 1950; Jones & Gerard, 1967; Newcomb, 1956; Sherif, 1966; Turner, 1991). Group members who break such rules are termed *ingroup* *deviants* (Marques, Abrams & Serôdio, 2001). The aims of the present research are threefold. First, to compare actions group members engage in when encountering deviants and the situation offers a selection of behaviours rather than a single option. Secondly, to investigate how responses to deviance change over time. Finally, to explore the dual roles of how effective the responses are perceived to be, and the perceived support provided by other group members in deciding which type of reaction individuals chose. Drawing on existing research we propose that (a) social control responses which are more effective will be more likely to be used (the *effectiveness hypothesis*), (b) social control responses can vary in severity, and the failure of a less severe response will lead to a more severe one being more likely (the *escalation hypotheses*); and that (c) where on the scale of severity a group member begins to respond is dictated by perceived attitudes of other group members (the *social anchoring hypotheses*).

**Responses to ingroup deviance**

When group members fail to adhere to norms, then intragroup uniformity around their group’s social reality and group goals and, consequently, the benefits of group membership can be threatened (c.f. Jetten & Hornsey, 2010; Jiménez-Moya, Rodríguez-Bailón, Spears, & de Lemus, 2017; Packer & Miners, 2014, for situations in which deviance can be beneficial). Research has investigated how deviant group members are evaluated (e.g. Begue, 2001; Marques, Yzerbyt, & Leyens, 1988), and the conditions under which violation of norms have the most impact on groups (e.g. Abrams, Rutland, Cameron, & Marques, 2003; Branscombe, Wann, Noel, & Coleman, 1993; Wesselmann, Williams, & Wirth, 2014; see Jetten & Hornsey, 2014, for a comprehensive overview). However, little research has examined how groups respond over time to a deviant member that continues to misbehave in spite of group correction, and how members choose an appropriate response (c.f. Schachter, 1951; Wesslemann et al., 2014).

Responses to deviance can be relatively inclusive or exclusive (Forsyth, 1990; Moreland and Levine, 1988). Orcutt (1973) proposes that inclusive reactions consist of strategies to change deviant opinions —including overt hostility and persuasion—, whilst exclusive ones include exclusionary / avoidant strategies and covert hostility (for example, no interaction between group and deviant members). Groups display exclusive reactions more often when deviants do not cooperate with inclusive strategies (i.e. continue to behave in a deviant fashion). While these various responses (which we referred to as *social control responses*) have been studied in isolation, no research has empirically investigated them simultaneously, explored how groups decide which strategy to implement, nor how response vary depending on the persistence of deviance in groups. The current study explores the role of four responses, persuasion, embarrassment (a form of punishment) and temporary or permanent exclusion.

**Persuasion**

Normative group members may attempt to privately persuade deviant members through argument to become normative —a socializing response—. Schachter (1951) showed that as time progressed a greater proportion of communication was directed by normative members towards deviant members (see also Festinger, Gerard, Hymovitch, Kelley, & Raven, 1952). Additionally, group members appear to be more willing to persuade deviants in one’s own groups than deviants in other groups (Frings, Abrams, Randsely de Moura, & Marques, 2010; Marques, Abrams, & Serôdio, 2001). This is especially the case when deviants are perceived to be new members (Moreland, Levine, & Cini, 1993; Pinto, Marques, Levine, & Abrams, 2010, 2016) and when group members feel capable of persuading the deviant (Frings, Hurst, Cleveland, Blascovich, & Abrams, 2012).

However, this form of social control response depends upon deviants both complying and agreeing with the norms privately (Deutsch & Gerard, 1955; Turner, 1991). We propose that, once groups perceive that the deviant member misbehaves in spite of knowing what the normative expectations are, persuasion might no longer be perceived as effective, and the group may engage in more repressive reactions ­­ —in other words, they may attempt to “punish” the deviant (Levine et al., 2005; Moreland & Levine, 1982)—.

**Punishment**

An alternative social control response may be to punish group deviant members, while allowing them to remain in the group. Punishments are implemented when deviant members fail to conform to a norm they are aware of, but still, are expected to change towards the majority’s behaviour (Levine et al., 2005; Pinto et al., 2010; van Prooijen, 2009). Punishment can be corporeal (for instance physical assault or confinement), material (removal of resources) or symbolic (public embarrassment or loss of non-tangible resources such as status). Previous research has broadly shown that punishment occurs if it is believed to be effective, if group norms support it and others are willing to compensate for incurred costs (Fehr & Fischbacher, 2004; Horne & Cutlip, 2002; Kerr, 1992). This literature suggests that harsh responses are influenced by group norms and other members’ validation; that is, social control is a relevant component of group’s normative standards and social reality. Should punishments fail, group members may perceive inclusive reactions as ineffective, and may look to exclude group deviant members.

**Exclusion**

When inclusive reactions fail to make deviant member normative, group members may attempt to exclude them (Israel, 1956; Levine, Moreland, & Hausmann, 2005; Orcutt, 1973). Such measures may include ostracising or ignoring the member (e.g. Williams, 2007; see also works on the *cyberball* paradigm; Wesselmann et al., 2014) or actually excluding the deviant members from the group (Festinger & Thibaut, 1951). Exclusion as a social control response has the benefit that current group members are unlikely to become deviant in the future and encourages normative behaviour from other group members (Moreland & Levine, 1982). However, group members are important resources because they make up the group, providing security, support and access to otherwise unavailable resources (Pennington, 2002) and also affect the perceived entitativity and cohesion of the group (Abrams, Marques, Randsley de Moura, Hutchison, & Bown, 2004; Levine et al., 2005). Such an extreme response may also be very costly to produce (Kerr & Levine, 2007).

**What explains responses to deviance?**

Although each social control response described above has been documented separately, when and why one response is chosen over another has not been investigated under experimental conditions. The current work explores the role of three factors: the perceived effectiveness of social control responses and the effects of repeated deviance on escalation of response severity (both of which have been explored but not manipulated in the extant literature) and, novelly, the effect of other members’ perceived support on response choice.

**The role of perceived effectiveness and escalation**

One factor that may guide the choice of response is the perceived effectiveness of the choice, and how effective previous responses have proven to be. Game theory approaches and, to a lesser extent, evolutionary approaches to deviance (e.g. Kurzban & Leary, 2001) suggest that actors are rational, and should thus select the response that is most effective in reducing deviance. This leads us to state our effectiveness hypothesis—namely that responses perceived as more effective are more likely to be selected—. However, perceived effectiveness is likely to be dynamic (i.e. affected by the characteristics of the deviant and also by others behaviour). More motivational accounts of responses to deviance (such as the subjective group dynamics model; see Marques et al., 2001) suggest that a key aim of social control is to legitimate groups positive differentiation to others, by showing that the group can stand for its core values and norms. This legitimizes that punitive responses towards deviants supports the notion that the group is “correct” (Frings & Abrams, 2010; Marques, Abrams, & Serôdio, 2001). Traditional work on face-to-face groups suggests that awareness of the group norms by deviant members and their intragroup status explain the type of reaction enacted from other members. Unawareness of the norms (as is the case of new members) should predict socialization (softer) reactions. In contrast, consistency in diverging from the group norms after attempts at re-socialization may indicate an intention to deviate, precipitating more severe reactions (Levine, Moreland, & Hausmann, 2005; see also Pinto et al., 2010). Repeated violations of ingroup norms may signal to group members that the deviant is unwilling (rather than unable) to behave normatively, leading to the association of internal attributions to the deviant behaviour (Orcutt, 1973). In such circumstances, more severe reactions may again be preferred (van Prooijen, 2009). This escalation from softer to harder responses has the dual function of minimizing the initial risk of “social controllers” being seen as “abusive” (Braithwaite, 1989), and ensures that productive group members are not lost due to overly harsh responses. Taken together, these findings lead us to state the escalation hypothesis —namely that the severity of responses towards persistent deviants should escalate over time—.

The effectiveness and escalation hypotheses can be combined to predict responses in a more nuanced manner. In particular, one possibility is that sanctions perceived as effective will initially be more likely than those perceived as ineffective, but, as the number of incidences increase, sanctions which send a stronger signal to other group members (through their severity) may be chosen more often, even if perceived as less effective in terms of persuading the deviant to adopt the group norm. However, these factors are themselves also likely to interact with norms around social control the group itself holds, that is to say, it will be affected by social others.

**The role of social others**

Although the effectiveness and escalationhypotheses predict how behaviours towards deviants are selected and develop over time, it does not predict why one form of response is initially more popular. For instance, some cultural groups punish crime with criminal detention while others do so with executions, and the same culture can change its attitude toward punishment over time (see Jacobs & Kent, 2007). A likely factor which defines how group members initially react to deviants is the social norm(s) held by the group indicating what responses are appropriate in any given context.

Group norms are reference frameworks for group members’ behaviour (Sherif, 1966). When they are related to relevant group values (relevant components of group’s social reality; see Festinger, 1950), groups usually associate sanctions (social control responses) to behaviour that violates such normative expectations (Cialdini, Kallgren, & Reno, 1990; Forsyth, 1990; Thibaut & Kelley, 1959). As such, response selection should be calibrated in part by the action of other group members. For instance, Lee and Tedeschi (1996) observed that members of a dyad would punish partners who violated co-operation norms more severely when they thought previous dyad members had used more severe punishments. The present study thus also states the social anchoring hypothesis which predicts that individuals’ perceptions of how other group members will perceive social control responses as justified will influence their use. Specifically, if a group member thinks that others will see a given social control response as justified, they will be more likely to use it. Thus, we expect other members’ perceived support to influence how group members chose how to react to deviance.

These processes are likely to affect perceived effectiveness —i.e. effectiveness will itself relate to perceptions of other members support—. There are both theoretical and empirical reasons to hypothesize such a relationship: When group identities are active, group members both behave in line with group norms andsee themselves as being prototypical of the group (i.e. engage in self-stereotyping; see Leach et al., 2008). Believing a response to be effective is also likely to be related to an increase in feeling that such actions are correct in the eyes of others. For instance, Frings and Abrams (2010) show that engaging in effective communication with deviants increases group members’ belief that the group has higher levels of subjective validity (belief that the groups actions are veridical). We thus propose a mediation relationship between these three variables: The more effective a response is perceived to be, the more groups members will perceive that other members would validate their action; and this level of perceived support should, in turn, be linked to increased likelihood of the response being employed.

**The current research**

In the current study, group members were placed in a hypothetical situation in which they were (a) interdependent and (b) had to achieve a goal collectively —two key attributes used to define a group (Festinger, 1950)—. Participants were informed one member of the group deviated from a clear group norm on multiple occasions. Group members’ rating of how likely they would be to engage in a variety of social controls, the perceived effectiveness of each response and the perception of others perceptions of justification for each responses was then recorded. We tested the effectiveness hypothesis by examining the relationship between each social control strategy with the likelihood it would be employed. The escalation hypothesis was tested by examining how the likelihood of each social control changed over time. Finally, we tested the social anchoring hypotheses by examining the extent to which the perceived level of support from an action mediates the effectiveness-likelihood link.

**Method**

**Participants**

One hundred and seventy-three participants were recruited online from the UK and the US via online classified ads. Of these, 78 did not complete the Time 1, 2 and 3 measures and were excluded from analysis. The remaining 95 participants ages ranged from 18 to 57 years (*M* = 24.41, *SD* = 8.84). Twenty-three of the sample were male, 70 female, and 2 did not state their gender.

**Design**

A three-way (Time: 1, 2, 3) single factor within participants design was adopted. Measures comprised ratings of the perceived effectiveness, others perceived support for, and likelihood of employing, four social control responses (persuasion, embarrassment —a form of punishment— and temporary/permanent exclusion) at various time points (seebelow).

**Procedure**

After consenting to take part in the study participants were presented with the following scenario: “Imagine you are living in shared accommodation with four other people. You all earn about the same amount of money from your jobs, and have more or less the same expenses. Each of you pays an equal share of the rent and you split the bills equally. You agree that the rent should be paid to a shared bank account on the 1st of each month. One of you then takes all the money, and pays your landlord. If the rent is late too often, you risk your landlord throwing you all out”. Once participants had indicated they had read and understood the scenario they proceeded to the Time 1 situation which informed them: “One day you go to pay the rent, but find some of the rent money is missing from the account. Closer inspection shows that one of your housemates has failed to pay his rent on time”. At this point, the first set of measures (responses, perceived effectiveness and others perceived support scales) were presented (see below). Once these were completed the Time 2 scenario was displayed: “Two months later you go to pay the rent. Although there was enough last month, you find it is again missing money. Closer inspection shows that the same housemate has failed to pay his rent on time again”. The scales used at Time 1 were then repeated. Finally, the Time 3 scenario was presented: “Three months further on you go to pay the rent. Although there was enough last month, you find it is again missing money. Closer inspection shows that the same housemate has failed to pay his rent on time yet again”. After reading this, and completing the Time 3 social control responses scales, participants were given a written debriefing.

**Measures**

Responses were measured by asking participants “How likely is it that you would do each of the following responses towards the housemate that failed to pay the rent?” (items were displayed in the following order throughout the study): (a) Temporary exclusion was measured using the item “Force him to leave the house until he has paid the rent”, (b) embarrassment was measured using the item “Threaten to make it known to your other housemates”, (c) persuasion was measured using the item “Persuade him privately to pay the rent”, (d) permanent exclusion was measured using the item “Force him to leave the house for good”1. Pre-testing in a similar sample (*N* = 18, age range = 18–27 years, mean age = 24.89 years, 67% female) revealed persuasion was seen as the least severe social control responses, followed by embarrassment, temporary and finally permanent exclusion. Directly beneath each item, participants were presented with a slider which displayed a value of 0–100% as it was moved (0% = *Would definitely not do it*, to 100% = *Absolutely certain you would do it*).

Perceived effectiveness was measured at Time 1 and Time 2 for each social control response using the items “At this moment how effective would this be in getting the rent money” and “Do you think your housemates will pay their share of the rent as a result of this?” (1 = *Not at all*, 7 = *Absolutely*; Cronbach’s α were good —α > .77— for all dimensions at both times with the exception of Time 1 exclusion which was low but acceptable, α = .65)[[1]](#footnote-1).

Others perceived support was measured for each social control response, in Time 1 and Time 2, using two items: “Others would see this response as justified” and “How reasonable would your other housemates see this response to be?” (1 = *Not at all*, 7 = *Absolutely*; Cronbach’s α > .87 in both cases).

**Results**

**Effectiveness hypothesis**

**Relationship between perceived effectiveness and responses.**To test the effectiveness hypothesis, Pearson *r* coefficients were calculated to measure the association between the likelihood of the response, and the perceived effectiveness of the measure at the same time point (see Table 1). In almost all cases, higher levels of perceived effectiveness were positively linked with higher likelihood of the response, except for permanent exclusion. At Time 2, a pattern of associations occurred such that greater effectiveness of a response predicted higher likelihood of that response. Likelihood of a response was also linked to other, more severe, responses. Specifically, perceived effectiveness of persuasion, embarrassment and exclusive responses related to the likelihood of persuasion, embarrassment and both exclusion responses.

*\*\*\*Table 1 about here\*\*\**

**Escalation hypothesis**

**Response likelihoods over time.** To test the escalation hypothesis, an ANOVA was conducted upon likelihood of each social control response, with social control (persuade, embarrassment, temporarily exclude, and permanently exclude) and time (Time 1, Time 2, Time 3) as within participant factors. The pattern of means for each the likelihood of each response over time can be seen in Figure 1.

\*\*\* Figure 1 about here \*\*\*

There was a main effect of time, *F*(2, 188) = 99.62, *p* < .001, ηp2 = .52. Overall likelihood of engaging in a response was lower at Time 1 (*M* = 37.33, *SD* = 24.28) than at Time 2 (*M* = 51.71, *SD* = 32.77), *p* < .001, and Time 3 (*M* = 61.61, *SD* = 38.91), *p* < .001. The difference between Time 2 and 3 was also significant, *p* < .001. A main effect of social control was present, *F*(3, 282) = 108.32,  *p* < .001, ηp2 = .54. Persuasion was more likely (*M* = 73.51, *SD* = 3.55) to be undertaken than temporary exclusion (*M* = 28.02, *SD* = 27.82) or permanent exclusion (*M* = 26.15, *SD* = 29.19), *p*s < .001. Embarrassing the deviant was, overall, more likely (*M* = 73.18.29, *SD* = 33.38) than either exclusion response, *p*s < . 001. There was no difference in likelihood of persuasion and embarrassment, *p* = .94. There was no difference between the two exclusion responses, *p* = .45. The interaction between time and social control was significant, *F*(6, 564) = 29.52, *p* < .001, ηp2 = .24; see Figure 1. At Time 1, likelihood of all responses differed from all others, *p*s < .001. At Time 2, persuasion was significantly more likely than the exclusion responses, *p*s < .001, and equally likely as embarrassment, (*p* = .29). Additionally, embarrassing the deviant was more likely than either exclusion sanction, *p*s < .001. There was no difference between the exclusion responses, *p* = *.*99. At Time 3, likelihood of persuasion was significantly more likely than either exclusion behaviour, *p*s < .008 and significantly less likely than embarrassment, *p* < .001. Additionally, embarrassment was more likely than both exclusion responses, *p*s < .001. Likelihood of exclusion responses did not differ, *p* = .57.

There was no difference between likelihood of persuasion at Time 1 and Time 2, *p* = .47. At Time 3, likelihood of persuasion decreased significantly relative to both Time 1 and Time 2, *p*s < .01. The likelihood of embarrassing the deviant significantly increased between Time 1 and Time 2, *p* < .001. Likelihood of embarrassing the deviant did not change between Time 2 and Time 3, *p* = .42. Likelihood of embarrassing the deviant remained higher at Time 3 than Time 1, *p* = .006. Likelihood of temporary exclusion increased between Time 1 and Time 2, *p* < .001, and Time 2 and Time 3, *p* < .001. Likelihood of permanent exclusion increased between Time 1 and Time 2, *p* < .001 and between Time 2 and 3, *p* < .001.

In summary, persuasion tended to decrease over time. Embarrassment increased from Time 1 to Time 2 and then remained stable at Time 3. Exclusionary responses increased across all time stages. Overall, results show that the most severe responses (exclusionary responses) increased, whereas the softest response (persuasion) decreased through time. Although at Time 3 embarrassing the deviant was the response with highest likelihood of being implemented, nevertheless, exclusionary strategies increased their likelihood to be implemented, suggesting that the escalation would continue with further repetitions of the deviant behaviour.

**Links between effectiveness and escalation**

**Perceived effectiveness.**ANOVA was conducted upon effectiveness with social control and time as within participant factors. A main effect of social control was present, *F*(3, 279) = 33.51, *p* < .001, ηp2 = . 27. Overall, persuasion was seen as more effective (*M* = 3.52, *SD* = 1.16) than temporary exclusion (*M* = 2.81, *SD* = 1.13) and permanent exclusion (*M* = 2.37, *SD* = 1.19), *p*s < .001. Persuasion did not significantly differ from embarrassment (*M* = 3.44, *SD* = 1.08), *p* = .53. Embarrassment was perceived as significantly more effective than both exclusion responses, *p*s < .001. Finally, permanent exclusion was seen as significantly less effective than temporary exclusion, *p* < .001. A main effect of time was observed, *F*(1, 93) = 7.57, *p* = .007, η2 < .08. Overall evaluations of effectiveness were lower at Time 1 (*M* = 2.93, *SD* = 1.05) than Time 2 (*M =* 3.14, *SD* = 1.23). There was a significant Time × Social Control interaction, *F*(3, 279) = 5.99, *p* < .001 , ηp2 = .06. Mean levels of effectiveness for each response at each time can be seen in Table 2.

*\*\*\*\* Table 2 about here\*\*\*\**

At Time 1, persuasion was rated as more effective than both exclusions responses, *p*s < .001. Embarrassment did not differ significantly from persuasion, *p* = .09, but was seen as more effective than the exclusion responses, *p* < .001. Temporary exclusion was perceived as more effective than permanent exclusion, *p* < .001. At Time 2 persuasion and embarrassment did not differ, *p* = .55. Embarrassment was seen as more effective than both temporary and permanent exclusion, *p*s < .001. Temporary exclusion was seen as more effective than permanent exclusion. Finally, persuasion was seen as more effective than temporary (*p* = .007) and permanent (*p* < .001) exclusions. Across time, persuasion was seen as equally effective, the two exclusionary strategies as more effective —*p*s < .001— over time and embarrassment as marginally more effective over time (*p* = .075).

In sum, participants judged the softer responses (persuasion and embarrassment) as being more effective than the exclusionary responses. Persuasion remained perceived as equally effective over time, even though the participants observed that the deviant member repeatedly behaved in the same deviant manner. In contrast, more severe responses become perceived as increasingly effective after repeat infractions are observed.

**Social anchoring hypothesis**

**Others perceived support.** ANOVA was conducted upon others perceived support with social control and time as within participant factors. A main effect of social control was present, *F*(3, 279) = 124.27, *p* < .001, ηp2 = .58. Overall, persuasion was equally perceived as being supported by other members (*M* = 4.30, *SD* = 1.00) as embarrassment (*M* = 4.17, *SD* = 0.99), *p* = .31 and more supported than temporary exclusion (*M* = 2.79, *SD* = 1.12) and permanent exclusion (*M* = 2.37, *SD* = 1.19), *p*s < .001. Embarrassment was perceived as being supported significantly more than both exclusion responses, *p*s < .001. Finally, permanent exclusion was seen as significantly less well supported than temporary exclusion, *p* < .001. In brief, participants seem to perceive that inclusive responses are more supported by others than exclusive responses, especially the permanent exclusion response. A main effect of time was observed, *F*(1, 93) = 27.21, *p* < .001, ηp2 = .23. Overall levels of others support were perceived as lower at Time 1 (*M* = 3.20, *SD* = .98) than at Time 2 (*M* = 3.61, *SD* = 1.19). There was a significant interaction between time and social control, *F*(3, 279) = 22.78, *p* < .001 , ηp2 = .20. Mean levels of perceived support for each response at each time can be seen in Table 2. At Time 1, others perceived support was higher when rating persuasion than embarrassment (*p* = .023) and both exclusion responses, *ps* < .001. Embarrassment was also rated as better supported than the exclusion responses, *ps* < .001. Temporary exclusion was seen as being more supported than permanent exclusion, *p* < .001. At Time 2 persuasion and embarrassment did not differ in perceived support, *p* = .54. Embarrassment and persuasion were both seen as better supported than the exclusion responses, *p*s < .001. Temporary exclusion responses was seen as better supported than permanent exclusion, *p*s = .006.

Across time, persuasion was perceived as equally supported at Time 1 and Time 2, *p* = .312. Perceived support for embarrassment was higher at Time 2 than Time 1, *p* = .003, as were both temporary exclusion and permanent exclusion (*ps* < .001).

**Relationship between others support and likelihood of responses.** Pearson *r* coefficients of the relationship between likelihood of responses and others perceived support of each response by time are shown at Table 3. As expected, higher levels of perceived support were linked with increased likelihoods.

*\*\*\*Table 3 about here\*\*\**

**Mediation analysis**

To test the hypothesis that perceived effectiveness of responses predict likelihood of responses given perceived other group members’ support to such responses, we started by exploring the simple Product-Moment Pearson correlations between our measures (see Table 2 and Table 3). Results show significant correlations between the likelihood of each social control response and others’ perceived support for the corresponding social control response. These results encouraged us to proceed with the mediation analyses. We computed several scores, consisting in the average of the same measures at Times 1 and 2 (Time 3 was excluded as not all measures were taken at this point). That is, we computed likelihood of Persuasion as the mean score of responses regarding likelihood of persuasion at Time 1 and Time 2. We did the same regarding likelihood of each of the remaining responses. Cronbach’s α for these aggregated scales was deemed unacceptably low for a single dimension, permanent exclusion, Cronbach’s α = .46. Thus, no mediation was undertaken for this response. Reliability was low but acceptable for persuasion (Cronbach’s α = .59) and good for embarrassment and temporary exclusions (Cronbach’s α >.75 in both cases). We also computed the mean score regarding others’ perceived support (regarding each type of measure) and perceived effectiveness of each type of response (except for permanent exclusion). Reliabilities were good for both the effectiveness scales (Cronbach’s αs > .64) and for the perceived support scales (Cronbach’s αs > .66).

We finally conducted three mediation models analyses Hayes (2013; Model 4), one regarding persuasion, another regarding embarrassment, and another regarding temporary exclusion. All the models considered the likelihood of the response as the dependent variable, perceived effectiveness as the predictor and others’ perceived support as the mediator (see Figure 2).

*\*\*\*Figure 2 about here\*\*\**

As can be seen in Table 4 in all cases others’ perceived support was directly related to likelihood of each social control response. For persuasion, embarrassment and temporary exclusion, effectiveness was directly related to likelihood of response, but the indirect path via others’ perceived support also independently accounts for the likelihood of responses’ variance. These results are consistent with our expectations: Others’ perceived support is a relevant determinant of the strategies that participants chose to direct to deviance.

*\*\*\*Table 4 about here\*\*\**

**Discussion**

Ingroup deviance affects groups by limiting the potential for reciprocal co-operation, social reality validation and positive distinctiveness. Therefore, group members are often (but not always) highly motivated to correct deviant behaviour. How group members choose to respond to consistently deviant behaviour was the focus of the present paper. Our effectiveness hypotheses predicted that the more effective a social control response was perceived to be, the more likely it was to be used. Our escalation hypothesis argued that the severity of responses would increase as the number of incidences of deviance increased. Specifically, it was predicted that the likelihood of engaging in an inclusive / soft social control response (e.g. persuasion) would begin high and decrease over repeated incidences, whilst the likelihood of punitive (e.g. public embarrassment) and exclusionary (e.g. temporary and permanent exclusion) responses would begin low and increase over time. As responses to deviance are a social process, our social anchoring hypothesis argued that the relationship between effectiveness and likelihood would be mediated by how justified others perceived a given response to be.

In terms of the effectiveness hypotheses, in general, the more effective a social control response was perceived to be, the more likely it was to be used. However, these correlations were moderately sized, suggesting that other factors feature in social control response selection. Moreover, although likelihood of exclusionary behaviours increased over time, as well as perceived effectiveness, these strategies still maintain the lowest score of likelihood to be implemented. This suggests that social exclusion maybe a last resort of the group, not aiming at making the deviant behave normatively, but rather to purge the group of the deviant through expulsion.

Overall this escalation hypothesis was supported. Group members initially stated they were most likely to attempt to persuade the deviant member, less likely to publicly embarrass, and unlikely to exclude this member. At this timepoint group members felt both embarrassment and persuasion to be more effective than exclusion. After a second norm violation, the likelihood of persuasion (a low severity response) maintained, while the likelihood of embarrassment and exclusion (both seen as more severe) increased. Finally, after a third violation, embarrassment maintained, persuasion decreased further whilst exclusionary responses (most severe) increased. In line with the social anchoring hypothesis, the likelihood of a given social control response being selected was linked to the extent individuals thought other group members would perceive it as justified. As expected, individuals expressed their belief that the choice of strategy they would employ was supported by the other group members. Overall, this belief emerged as a significant mediator of the association between perceived effectiveness of those strategies on controlling deviance and agreement with each of strategies. These results strengthen the idea that social control strategies are a part of the group’s social reality and, in order to be legitimized as such, are subjectively perceived as being supported by other group members.

The current research presents a number of theoretical implications. It supports the notion that group members initially attempt inclusive options when faced with a deviance. This is in line with other research (e.g. Festinger, 1950; Frings & Abrams, 2010) suggesting that persuasion is a likely initial response. However, it advances that understanding by showing that group members who previously intended to persuade can also be encouraged to engage in more exclusionary strategies when the degree of deviancy remains consistent over time (Schachter, 1951). This suggests a re-evaluation of how other research (such as evolutionary psychology and game theory) operationalizes concepts of punishments. Two issues are of note. Firstly, from a methodological point of view, people’s willingness to punish depends significantly upon what selection of responses is offered. Second, our findings suggest prevalence of some forms of social control responses will decrease over time, while others will increase. Future research should be designed with these factors in mind. A second important observation was that the findings presented currently support this notion to the extent that the selection of exclusionary responses increased even though the perceived effectiveness remained lower than other responses. These responses (in particular, exclusionary ones) were not selected on the basis of how effective in changing deviant’s behaviour they would be (i.e. on a rational actor basis). Possible motivators for this action which could be further explored include the elimination of probable future deviance and the restoration of intragroup uniformity. An important mediator that emerged from results was how all responses to deviance were perceived to be supported by the other group members. These results are in line with other research (e.g. work on subjective group dynamics, and around contagion of deviancy; see Marques et al., 2001) that suggests that actions towards deviants may in part serve to maintain the validity of the groups social reality (see also Festinger, 1950). Our results extend this literature by showing that reaction to deviance also needs to rely on perceived consensus within the group. Although somewhat speculative, we may posit that reactions to deviance may be a component of a group’s social reality and not simply a cathartic emotional reaction from individuals.

Several limitations of the present research are acknowledged. The present study measured intentions to respond rather than actual behaviour and the array of responses used by groups clearly exceeds those explored here. Additionally, different types of deviance (e.g. voluntary vs. involuntary, moderate vs. extreme) may attract different initial responses. However, it can still be predicted that escalation will occur when initial responses fail, and the starting point for sanctions should be defined by how group members think others will perceive their actions. Neither does the present paper argue that the severity of a given response is fixed. For instance, in some cultures / groups public shaming may be considered more extreme than temporary exclusion. However, the present research does tap into how group members think they *ought* to behave, even if it may not entirely predict how they *actually* behave.

The present study represents an initial exploration of the various hypotheses presented and is proportionally limited in scope. A number of questions remain to be answered. The current study is limited to a group in which members are directly interdependent upon one another and deviance is induced as a violation to a relevant group goal (a threat to the group locomotion, in Festinger’s terms). Although the attainment of a collective goal either in face-to-face groups (as is rent payment in our study) or in social categories (as the case of positive social identity), implies a perception of intragroup uniformity (Turner, Hogg, Oakes, Reicher, & Wetherell, 1987), it would be interesting to examine if deviance to relevant group symbolic dimensions (such as ingroup values and identity) would trigger similar processes, since only prejudice to the group (and not also to the individual) would be highlighted. Indeed, in the present study, exclusion of the group member would lead to the need to provide extra resources to cover for their shortfall (at least temporarily). This could lead to lower initial rates of exclusion.

The current research also focuses on individuals’ responses to a deviation from group norms. Response selection (and perceived effectiveness) could differ if multiple group members were engaged in the action. For instance, Social Impact Theory (Latané, 1981) suggests multiple sources of social influences are more effective. This could act to increase the persistence of inclusionary responses, although escalation should remain (for instance, *I will persuade and, before I escalate, I will try and get my fellow group members to persuade also*). In terms of the current study, one interesting possibility is that the inclusionary responses in particular may be perceived as more possible to implement for a lone responder, whilst the exclusionary ones may only be effective if attempted by a collection of normative responders. Similarly, effectiveness, others’ perceived support, and severity were the focus of this initial work in this area. However, they may not be the only dimensions which responses vary upon. Other factors (for instance, social impact on other group members’ future deviance, the status of the deviant and responder, ease of implementation, the extent to which deviations threaten the group, etc.) may also play a role in these processes. A final limitation was that effectiveness and other social support was not measured at the final time point. This design decision (made as the key variable of interest was likelihood) limited our ability to use all three time points in mediation analysis and also to investigate the effects of prior attitudes on final levels of these variables. However, we would expect the relationships between effectiveness, perceived social control and likelihood to sustain through this final measurement.

The current study looks at situations where deviance is threatening (in an unambiguous way) to the group. In many real world situations, the threat to the group is less clear cut —deviants (in particular high identifying deviants) may challenge group norms to promote positive change for the group, attempt to improve the groups position in the social hierarchy, or prevent it from future harm (Jetten & Hornsey, 2010; Jiménez-Moya, Rodríguez-Bailón, Spears, & de Lemus, 2017; Packer, 2008; Packer, Fujita, & Chasteen, 2014; Packer & Miners, 2014). Future research should explore these contexts.

In conclusion, we found support for the effectiveness, escalation and social anchoring hypotheses. Participants tended to become more punitive in their response to ingroup deviance over time, to the extent that the deviant member remained resistant to become normative after facing softer reactions. When participants learned that a member from the group misbehaved, they agreed with persuasive strategies aiming at explaining, convincing and socializing the deviant member towards his/her obligations as a member of the group. Once they learned that the same member repeated the misbehaviour, agreement with punitive behaviour became more likely: public embarrassing became more likely to be chosen than persuasion, and exclusion strategies increased their likelihood of being implemented. Such escalation of social control was often tied to the perception that punitive responses would be effective. Nevertheless, social control responses towards the deviant member also seems to be dependent of the group’s normative guidelines, and consequently, normative support, to adopt such measures.

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Footnotes

1. Pre-testing using an identical scenario to that shown at Time 1 revealed that a separate undergraduate sample (*N* = 14), perceived responses as differing in severity (measured with four items, “Severe”, “Harsh” “Aggressive” and “Belligerent”, on 1–7 scales, Cronbach’s αs > .80), *F*(3, 39) = 20.78, *p* < .001, η*p*2 = .62. Persuasion was seen as least severe (*M* = 1.96, *SD* = 1.48), embarrassment as more severe (*M* = 5.21, *SD* = 2.68), temporary exclusion as still more severe (*M* = 7.09, *SD* = 2.79) and permanent exclusions as most severe (*M* = 7.96, *SD* = 3.11). Simple effects analysis revealed all means differed significantly from one another, *p*s < .01.

Table 1

*Correlations between the likelihood of responses and perceived effectiveness of each response by time.*

|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
|  | Time 1 effectiveness | | | | Time 2 effectiveness | | | |
| Likelihood of response | Persuasion | Embarrassment | Temporary exclusion | Permanent exclusion | Persuasion | Embarrassment | Temporary exclusion | Permanent exclusion |
| Persuasion | **.36\*\*\*** | .02 | -.11\* | -.19† | **.67\*\*** | -.11 | -.03 | .07 |
| Embarrassment | -.41\*\* | **.44\*\*\*** | .22\* | .31\*\* | -.21\* | **.33\*\*** | .31\*\* | .28\*\* |
| Temporary exclusion | -.12 | ..03 | **.30\*\*** | .10 | -.14 | .-.04 | **.50\*\*** | .48\*\* |
| Permanent exclusion | -.20† | .15 | .07 | **.10** | -.02 | .09 | .36\*\* | **.46\*\*** |

*Note:* Likelihoods of responses are correlated with effectiveness at the same time point (e.g. Persuasion likelihood T1 and persuasion effectiveness T1 and Persuasion likelihood T2 with persuasion effectiveness at T2).

\* = *p* < *.*05, \*\* = *p* < .01, \*\*\* = *p* < .001, † = *p* < .10.

Table 2

*Mean levels of effectiveness and others perceived social support, as a function of time and social control response. Standard deviations in parentheses.*

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Dependent variable | Social control measure | Time | |
| 1 | 2 |
| Perceived effectiveness | Persuasion | 3.59 (1.03)ab | 3.46 (1.29)fg |
|  | Embarrassment† | 3.34 (0.97)cd | 3.55 (1.18)hi |
|  | Temporary exclusion\*\* | 2.64 (1.07)ace | 2.98 (1.19)fhj |
|  | Permanent exclusions\*\*\* | 2.17 (1.12)bde | 2.57 (1.27)gij |
| Others social support | Persuasion | 4.36 (0.88)abc | 4.25 (1.13)gh |
|  | Embarrassment\*\* | 4.03 (0.96)ade | 4.33 (1.03)ij |
|  | Temporary exclusion\*\*\* | 2.50 (1.04)bdf | 3.09 (1.27)gik |
|  | Permanent exclusions\*\*\* | 1.94 (1.02)cef | 2.80 (1.37)hjk |

*Note:* Within the reporting of each social control response, means sharing a subscript differ at p < .05 level. Social control responses differ across time if marked with an \*\*(*p* < .01), \*\*\* (*p* < .001) or † (*p* < .10).

Table 3

*Relationship between how others perceived support and the likelihood of each response by Time.*

|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
|  | Others’ perception support | | | | | | | |
| Time 1 | | | | Time 2 | | | |
| Likelihood of response | Persuasion | Embarrassment | Temporary exclusion | Permanent exclusion | Persuasion | Embarrassment | Temporary exclusion | Permanent exclusion |
| Persuasion | **.38\*\*\*** | -.18† | -.12 | -.06 | **.59\*\*\*** | -.04 | -.01 | .18† |
| Embarrassment | -.23\* | **.68\*\*\*** | .20\* | .22\* | -.015 | **.64\*\*\*** | .28\*\* | .32\* |
| Temporary exclusion | -.13 | .26 | **.37\*\*\*** | .28\*\* | -.06 | .05 | **.45\*\*\*** | .48\*\*\* |
| Permanent exclusion | -.22\* | .23\* | .22\* | **.43\*\*\*** | -.01 | .17 | .52\*\*\* | **.66\*\*\*** |

*Note:* Likelihoods of responses are correlated with others perceived support at the same time point (e.g. Persuasion likelihood T1 and others perceived support for persuasion T1 and persuasion likelihood T2 with others perceived support for persuasion at T2).

\* = *p* < *.*05, \*\* = *p* < .01, \*\*\* = *p* < .001, † = *p* < .10.

Table 4

*Coefficient pathways for models (see Figure 2).*

|  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Social control response | Pathway | Coefficient value | UCI | LCI |
| Persuasion1 | a’1j | .46 | .32 | .61 |
|  | b1j | 3.15 | 5.76 | 18.28 |
|  | c’1 | 10.05 | 4.76 | 15.34 |
|  | Σj (a1jb1j) | 5.56 | 1.75 | 10.44 |
| Embarrassment2 | a’1j | .47 | .30 | .64 |
|  | b1j | 24.80 | 18.83 | 30.78 |
|  | c’1 | 1.26 | -4.36 | 6.88 |
|  | Σj (a1jb1j) | 11.62 | 6.01 | 18.41 |
| Temporary exclusion3 | a’1j | .47 | .29 | .65 |
|  | b1j | 6.51 | 2.37 | 10.65 |
|  | c’1 | 7.60 | 3.52 | 11.68 |
|  | Σj (a1jb1j) | 3.03 | .99 | 6.14 |

*Note:* 95% confidence intervals reported. Superscripts indicate overall model fit: 1 *R*2 = .41, *F*(1, 92) = .31.81, *p* < .001; 2 *R*2 = .51, *F*(2, 92) = 47.73, *p* < .001. 3 *R*2 = .33, *F*(2, 91) = 22.08, *p* < .001.

*Figure 1.*  Mean likelihood of persuasion, embarrassment and exclusion responses across time.

Perceived effectiveness

Likelihood of response

Others‘ perceived support of response

*a’1j*

*b1j*

*c’1*

*Figure 2*. Mediation model tested (see Table 4 for coefficient values). Coefficient names associated with each path shown. The co-efficient of the indirect effect between effectiveness and likelihood via justification is named Σj (a1jb1j).

1. Unfortunately, the electronic file containing full electronic dataset for the main study was corrupted after the aggregates were calculated, but before reliability analysis was performed. Cronbach’s α reported here represent those calculated from a sample of 86 participants from the main study sample (all of which could be recovered from the file). [↑](#footnote-ref-1)