Deviant but desirable: Group variability and evaluation of atypical group members

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Abstract

Two studies investigated how group variability affects reactions to atypical group members. In Study 1 ($N = 65$) we manipulated group variability and found that an atypical group member was evaluated more positively when the group was heterogeneous than when the group was homogeneous. In Study 2 ($N = 276$) we also manipulated group value and found a significant interaction whereby an atypical group member was evaluated more positively when the group was homogeneous and group members valued heterogeneity, but was evaluated more negatively when the group was heterogeneous and group members valued homogeneity. The results suggest that deviant or atypical members will not inevitably be rejected by the group, but rather that reactions to deviance are shaped and guided by the dynamic relationship between how the group is perceived by its members and their ideological beliefs about what is good for the group.

Highlights

Group variability moderates evaluation of atypical group members.

Group variability and group value interact to predict evaluation of atypical group members.

Reactions to deviance are contextually bound.

Researchers have long been interested in how groups respond to members who do not conform to the group majority position. In the social psychological literature such behavior is often referred to as deviance (e.g., Levine, 1989). Deviance has thus been defined as a departure from a group's norms or values resulting in behavior that is deemed atypical or unusual (Marques, Abrams, Paez, & Martinez-Taboada, 1998). When faced with the perceived deviance of a fellow ingroup member, groups often react by exerting conformity pressures which may even lead to the outright exclusion of the deviant from the group (e.g., Cartwright and Zander, 1968 and Schachter, 1951). It has been suggested that such responses may reflect a motivation to maintain a sense of uniformity around important group norms (Festinger, 1950) and thereby protect the social identity of ingroup members (Abrams et al., 2004, Hutchison et al., 2007, Marques and Paez, 1994 and Yzerbyt et al., 2000). In this article we argue that while some groups may value and strive to achieve uniformity among their members, this is certainly not true for all groups. For some groups it is the diversity among their members and the plurality of viewpoints that defines their identity and distinguishes them from outgroups — e.g., in multicultural societies or in groups with norms of independence or individualism (Hornsey et al., 2006, Jetten et al., 2001 and Salvatore and Prentice, 2011). We propose that in such groups, members who do not conform to the majority position are less likely to be rejected to the extent that disagreement and expression of divergent opinions are consistent with people's beliefs about how fellow group members should behave (see also Bettencourt, Dill, Greathouse, Charlton, & Mulholland, 1997). In such situations hostility towards deviant or dissenting group members should be attenuated: deviance may even be seen as desirable in such groups. We conducted two studies to test this prediction.

Conformity and deviance in groups

A common finding in research on small groups is that when an individual expresses an opinion that deviates from the opinion of the other members of the group, those others will exert pressure on the deviant to conform and will reject those who do not conform (for a review, see Levine, 1989). Festinger (1950) argued that pressure towards uniformity in groups arises for at least two reasons. One reason is that people need to validate their opinions by having others agree with them. Another reason is that groups often require consensus to reach important goals. When there is non-uniformity in the group, members will direct most of their communications towards deviants in an attempt to persuade them to conform (Schachter, 1951). Those who resist this persuasive pressure and maintain a deviant stance will ultimately be rejected by the group. This can take various forms ranging from derogatory attitudes and judgments to the outright exclusion of deviants from the group (Cartwright and Zander, 1968, Festinger et al., 1950, Jones and DeCharms, 1957 and Schachter, 1951).

Research informed by social identity theory (Tajfel & Turner, 1986) has investigated the role of group membership and group identification in people's reactions to deviance. According to social identity theory, an important part of a person's self-concept and self-esteem comes from their affiliations with different social categories or groups. When a group identity is salient, people who identify with the group are understood to be motivated to achieve and maintain a positive distinction between their own group and relevant outgroups on valued dimensions, and thereby view themselves in a positive light. Deviant or otherwise undesirable ingroup members can reflect negatively on the group as a whole. Distancing such members from the ingroup thus serves the important function of maintaining a positive and distinctive social identity (Marques and Paez, 1994 and Marques et al., 1988).

Support for these ideas comes from several studies showing that deviant ingroup members are derogated more extremely than deviant outgroup members even though they may be engaged in identical behaviors or hold similar attitudes or opinions (for a review, see Marques & Paez, 1994). Marques and Paez (1994) suggested that devaluation may serve to psychologically exclude undesirable members from the ingroup. In this view, the deviant is portrayed in such an extremely negative light that he/she can no longer be seen as a genuine ingroup member. Consequently, the overall image of the group is maintained or even enhanced (Castano et al., 2002, Hutchison and Abrams, 2003 and Hutchison et al., 2008). This interpretation is supported further by research

showing that deviants are evaluated more negatively on identity-relevant dimensions (Marques et al., 1988) and when the value of the group's identity is threatened (Branscombe, Wann, Noel, & Coleman, 1993). Moreover, rejection of deviants is more extreme when made by those who identify strongly with the group (Castano et al., 2002, Hutchison and Abrams, 2003 and Hutchison et al., 2008).

Group variability and evaluation of atypical group members

The preceding evidence is consistent with the idea that derogating deviants may serve to maintain a sense of uniformity around important group norms and thereby protect the social identity of ingroup members. Importantly though, in social identity theory, when a group identity is salient it is the perceived content of that identity and the beliefs and expectations attached to it that shape and guide group members' attitudes and behavior (e.g., Jetten and Hutchison, 2011, Jetten and Postmes, 2006 and Livingstone and Haslam, 2008). Some groups may feel that it is their uniformity that makes them a distinctive and entitative group (Campbell, 1958), whereas other groups may believe that it is the diversity among their members and the absence of a consensual viewpoint that defines their identity and distinguishes them from outgroups (Hutchison et al., 2006, Rink and Ellemers, 2007 and van Knippenberg and Haslam, 2003). This may be the case, for example, in multicultural societies or in groups with norms of independence or individualism (Hornsey et al., 2006, Jetten et al., 2001 and Salvatore and Prentice, 2011). In such groups, individuals who do not conform to the majority position are less likely to be rejected and may even be valued to the extent that disagreement and expression of divergent viewpoints are consistent with people's beliefs and expectations about how fellow group members should behave. We conducted two studies to test this prediction.

In Study 1 group variability was manipulated before participants evaluated either a typical or an atypical group member. It was predicted that an atypical group member would be evaluated more positively when the group is heterogeneous than when the group is homogeneous. In Study 2 we extended the analysis to additionally investigate how group variability interacts with group value to influence the evaluation of atypical group members. We use the term group value to refer to the extent to which homogeneity or heterogeneity is valued by the group. We reasoned that group members expressing deviant or dissenting opinions would be liked more in a heterogeneous group when the group values heterogeneity, but should be disliked when the group values homogeneity. By the same token an atypical group member should be met with extreme hostility in a homogenous group that values homogeneity, whereas hostility should be attenuated when the group values heterogeneity.

Study 1

The first study reported here investigated the impact of group variability on reactions to typical and atypical group members. Group variability was manipulated (homogeneous vs. heterogeneous group) before participants read about and evaluated a target group member who had supposedly expressed an attitude that was either consistent (typical group member) or inconsistent (atypical group member) with the group majority on a salient and controversial issue: the war in Iraq. The study was conducted in 2007 against a background of discontent over the war and the British army's involvement in it (BBC/ICM, 2007). Pilot testing indicated that the majority of students at the British university where the study was conducted were strongly against the war. A student expressing

a pro-war attitude would therefore be perceived as atypical. It was predicted that such a student would be evaluated less negatively when the group is heterogeneous than when the group is homogeneous, whereas a student expressing an anti-war attitude should be evaluated favorably regardless of the amount of variability in the group.

Method

Design and participants

The 2×2 design consisted of two manipulated variables: target (typical vs. atypical group member) and group variability (homogeneous vs. heterogeneous group). Participants were 72 students at the University of Leeds who participated on a voluntary basis. Data from seven participants were excluded from the analysis for reasons stated below. Of the 65 participants left for analysis, 42 were female and 23 were male. The age range was from 17 to 45 with a mean of 20.32 years (SD = 4.28 years). Gender or age had no effects in the analyses and are not considered further.

Materials and procedure

Students were approached on a university campus and asked to participate in a study about "the war in Iraq". Those who agreed were randomly assigned to conditions and received a questionnaire containing all instructions, manipulations and measures, which were presented in the same order as described below.

Attitude towards the war in Iraq

Participants first completed a single item measuring their attitude towards the war in Iraq: 'I am in favor of the war in Iraq'. Unless stated otherwise, responses to this and subsequent items were recorded on a 7-point scale (1 = strongly disagree, 7 = strongly agree). A higher score indicates a more pro-war attitude. Data from seven participants were excluded from the analysis because they expressed either a neutral or pro-war attitude (≥ 4). Thus, data from 65 participants who expressed an anti-war attitude (< 4) were analyzed ($M = 1.82, SD = .77$).

Group variability manipulation

Participants completed a series of questions about students at their university that were designed to make salient similarities within the group of Leeds students (homogeneous group condition) or that would make salient intragroup differences (heterogeneous group condition). Specifically, participants in the homogeneous group condition were asked to estimate what percentage of students at their university: 'Went to school in UK', 'Engage in sports', 'Prefer popular music over classical music', and 'Like to watch movies'. In contrast, those in the heterogeneous group condition were asked to estimate what percentage of students at their university: 'Went to school in Leeds', 'Engage in sports every day', 'Have the following music as their first preference: dance, rock, hip-hop, pop, classical', and 'Have the following types of movies as their first preference: sci-fi, love stories, comedy, martial arts, western'. We reasoned that by answering these questions participants would become aware of the high percentage of students at their university who have similar (homogeneous group condition) or different (heterogeneous group condition) backgrounds and preferences. This method has been used before to successfully manipulate the perception of intragroup variability (e.g., Hutchison et al., 2006).

Participants were also encouraged to focus on the amount of variability in their group by asking them to: "Describe in a few words or sentences what [how] University of Leeds

students have in common [differ from each other]." A single item was used to check the effectiveness of the group variability manipulation. Participants were asked to indicate on a scale ranging from 1 "very similar to each other" to 7 "very different from each other" how they perceived students at their university. A higher score indicates more perceived heterogeneity.

Target group member manipulation

Participants read one of two profiles of a target student from their own university. The profile began with some brief demographic information and continued to describe the student's purported attitude towards the war in Iraq. The student was described as being either strongly in favor of the war (atypical group member condition) or strongly against the war (typical group member condition). Examples of sentences used to describe the atypical student included: "I am in favor of the war in Iraq", "In the future people will look back on the war in Iraq as a good thing to have happened", and "The war in Iraq has made the world a much safer place to live". In contrast, sentences used to describe the typical student included "I am against the war in Iraq", "In the future people will look back on the war in Iraq as a bad thing to have happened", and "The war in Iraq has made the world a much more dangerous place to live".

A single item assessed the effectiveness of this manipulation: 'This student's attitude is typical of the students at my university'. A higher score indicates more perceived typicality.

Target evaluation measure

The target student was evaluated on three items: 'I do not like this person,' 'I feel favorable towards this person,' and 'I would be happy to have this person as a friend.' The items were scored such that a higher score indicates a more positive evaluation (Cronbach's α = .87).

Results

Responses were analyzed using a series of 2 (target: typical vs. atypical group member) × 2 (group variability: homogeneous vs. heterogeneous group) analyses of variance (ANOVA).

Group variability manipulation check

The group variability manipulation had the intended effect. Leeds students were perceived as a more heterogeneous group in the heterogeneous group condition ($M = 4.71, SD = 1.31$) than in the homogeneous group condition ($M = 3.55, SD = 1.54$), $F(1, 61) = 10.26, p = .002, \eta_p^2 = .14$ (all other $Fs < 1$).

Target manipulation check

The target group member manipulation also had the intended effect. The typical student was seen as more typical of Leeds students ($M = 5.22, SD = 1.29$) than the atypical student ($M = 2.61, SD = 1.12$), $F(1, 61) = 74.10, p < .001, \eta_p^2 = .54$ (all other $Fs < 1$).

Target evaluation

Analysis of the target evaluation scores revealed a significant main effect of target, $F(1, 61) = 44.21, p < .001, \eta_p^2 = .42$, indicating that the typical student ($M = 4.91, SD = 1.18$) was evaluated more positively than the atypical student ($M = 3.13, SD = 1.14$). The group variability × target interaction was also significant, $F(1, 61) = 4.32, p = .04, \eta_p^2 = .07$, and is displayed

in Fig. 1 (other $F < 1$). Simple effects tests confirmed that the atypical student was evaluated more positively in the heterogeneous group condition ($M = 3.53, SD = 1.09$) than in the homogeneous group condition ($M = 2.71, SD = 1.08$), $F(1, 61) = 4.70, p = .034, \eta_p^2 = .07$, whereas the typical student was evaluated equally positively in the homogeneous ($M = 5.07, SD = 1.08$) and heterogeneous ($M = 4.76, SD = 1.19$) group conditions, $F < 1$.

Figure 1. Mean target evaluation as a function of group variability.
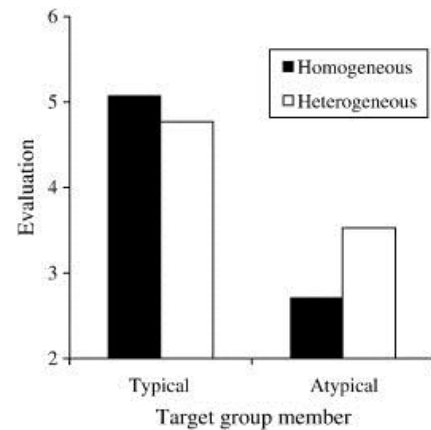
Discussion

Both manipulations had the intended effects. Compared to participants in the homogeneous group condition, those in the heterogeneous group condition perceived students at their university as a more heterogeneous group. Additionally, a pro-war student was judged as less typical than an anti-war student and the group variability manipulation did not affect the target typicality ratings. Moreover, as predicted, students with an anti-war attitude evaluated a pro-war student more positively in the heterogeneous group condition than in the homogeneous group condition whereas this difference was absent for ratings of the anti-war student, who was evaluated equally favorably in both group variability conditions. These results provide initial support for the idea that pressures towards uniformity in groups may not be as universal as is often assumed and that groups may be more tolerant and accepting of deviance when heterogeneity is a normative and expected feature of the group's identity.

Study 2

A second study was conducted to test the robustness of these findings. We also extended the analysis to additionally investigate how group variability interacts with group value to influence the evaluation of typical and atypical group members. In Study 1 we manipulated group variability and found that an atypical group member was evaluated more positively when the group was perceived by its members as heterogeneous compared to when the group was perceived as homogenous. It is important to note, however, that even though a group may be perceived by its members as heterogeneous, unless this feature of the group is internalized as a valued feature of the group's identity, it does not necessarily follow that greater tolerance and acceptance will inevitably be afforded to those who are deviant within the group. Indeed, in the absence of such a shared belief or when homogeneity is more valued, it may be especially when the group is heterogeneous that non-conformity is regarded as unacceptable. In this situation, deviant or dissenting opinions further undermine the amount of uniformity in the group and members expressing such opinions should therefore be met with extreme hostility (see also Marques, Abrams, & Serôdio, 2001).

In Study 2, therefore, as well as manipulating group variability we also manipulated group value by informing participants that in a previous phase of the study the students at their university indicated their belief that homogeneity (homogeneity value condition) or heterogeneity (heterogeneity value condition) was good for the university and its students. In a third condition no group value information was presented to participants (no value condition). This provided a baseline and allowed for comparisons with Study 1 in which group variability was manipulated but not group value. All participants then read about and evaluated a target student from their own university who had supposedly expressed an attitude that was either congruent (typical group member) or incongruent (atypical group member) with the majority of students at that university on a topical and controversial issue: environmental protection. Pilot testing indicated that the majority of students at the university where the research was conducted were strongly in favor of environmental protection. A student opposing environmental protection would therefore be perceived as atypical.

We also wanted to rule out an alternative explanation for the results: that the group variability manipulation may have reduced the perceived entitativity (Campbell, 1958) of the group for participants in the heterogeneous group condition. In other words, participants in this condition may have perceived the students at their university less as a coherent and entitative group and more as a collection of unconnected individuals. In such circumstances it may be expected that an atypical individual would be evaluated less negatively because the group's boundaries are less sharply drawn and deviance is less visible and therefore threatening for ingroup members. Thus our interpretation of the results would be strengthened by demonstrating that the group variability manipulation affected the perception of group variability in predicted ways but not entitativity.

As in Study 1, it was predicted that an atypical group member would be evaluated less negatively when the group is heterogeneous than when the ingroup is homogeneous. However, this preference was expected to emerge only to the extent that the group values heterogeneity, whereas a group that values homogeneity should be especially hostile to a fellow group member whose atypicality further undermines uniformity. By the same token, an atypical group member should be derogated when the group is homogeneous especially when the group values homogeneity, but should be tolerated more and perhaps even appreciated when the group values heterogeneity. In this situation, deviant or dissenting opinions contribute positively to the amount of variability in the group and hostility towards members expressing such opinions should therefore be attenuated.

Method

Design and participants

The $2 \times 2 \times 3$ design consisted of three manipulated variables: target (typical vs. atypical group member), group variability (homogeneous vs. heterogeneous group) and group value (homogeneity, heterogeneity, no value). Participants were 293 students from Anglia Ruskin University (ARU) who participated on a voluntary basis. Data from 17 participants were excluded from the analysis for reasons stated below. Of the 276 remaining participants, 236 were female and 40 were male. The age range was from 18 to 36 with a mean of 21.8 years ($SD = 5.23$ years). Gender or age had no effects in the analyses and are not discussed further.

Materials and procedure

Students were approached on a university campus and invited to participate in a study on "attitudes towards environmental protection". Those who agreed to participate were randomly assigned to conditions and received a questionnaire containing all instructions, manipulations and measures, which were presented in the same order as described below.

Attitude towards environmental protection

Participants first completed a single item measuring their attitude towards environmental protection: 'Protecting the environment is extremely important'. Unless stated otherwise, responses to this and subsequent items were recorded on a 7-point scale (1 = strongly disagree, 7 = strongly agree). A higher score indicates a more positive attitude towards environmental protection. Seventeen participants were excluded from the analysis because they expressed either a neutral or negative attitude towards environmental protection (≤ 4). Thus, data from 276 participants who expressed a positive attitude towards environmental protection (> 4) were analyzed ($M = 5.89$, $SD = .76$).

Group variability manipulation

As in Study 1, participants completed a series of questions about students at their university that were designed to make salient similarities within the group of ARU students (homogeneous group condition) or that would make salient intragroup differences (heterogeneous group condition). Whereas the group variability manipulation in Study 1 involved relatively innocuous dimensions of intragroup homogeneity or heterogeneity (e.g., musical preference), in Study 2 we included dimensions with greater potential for disagreement or even conflict and therefore with potentially greater social consequences. Specifically, we asked participants in the homogeneous group condition to estimate what percentage of students at their university: 'Has an interest in politics or political issues', 'Holds at least some beliefs about religion', 'Would consider joining a campaign about an issue that is important to them', 'Belongs to a university society', and 'Was born in Europe (including UK)'. In contrast, those in the heterogeneous group condition were asked to estimate what percentage of students at their university: 'Would define their political orientation as: left-wing, right-wing, centrist, liberal, conservative, progressive, any other political orientation', 'Belongs to one of the following religious groups: Christian, Muslim, Hindu, Jewish, Buddhist, Sikh, any other religion, atheist' 'Would be likely to campaign about each of the following issues: Government spending cuts, animal testing, race relations, environmental issues, civil liberties, gender issues, gay rights, any other issue', 'Belongs to one of the following types of university societies: political, environmental, religious, LGBT, sports, literary, debating', and 'Was born in: UK, France, Germany, Italy, Poland, any other European country, any non-European country'.

As in Study 1, participants were also encouraged to focus on intragroup homogeneity or heterogeneity by asking them to: "Describe in a few words or sentences what [how] ARU students have in common [differ from each other]." The same item from Study 1 was used to check the effectiveness of the group variability manipulation. A higher score indicates more perceived heterogeneity.

Entitativity measure

Entitativity was measured using four items adapted from established measures (Castano et al., 2003 and Lickel et al., 2000). 'I consider students at my university to be a group ("we") as compared with a bunch of unconnected individuals', 'Students at my university have strong ties with one another', 'Students at my university stick together', and 'If something good or bad happens to a student at my university, it can affect all students at my university'. A higher score indicates more perceived entitativity ($\alpha = .82$).

Group value manipulation

Group value was manipulated by informing participants that previous research indicated that the majority of students at their university strongly believe that homogeneity [heterogeneity] is good and valuable and that it has important benefits for the university and its students. This was conveyed to participants in a short paragraph:

"Previous research indicates that the vast majority of ARU students greatly value similarity and agreement [diversity and disagreement] among the students at their university because they feel that it can create an environment in which students are free to interact with others who hold similar [different] attitudes and opinions to their own and whose views they may agree [disagree] with, which can allow them to validate and feel more confident about [question and challenge] their own judgments".

To reinforce the manipulation participants in the homogeneity and heterogeneity value conditions were also asked to: "Describe in a few words or sentences why, in your view, similarity and agreement [diversity and disagreement] among ARU students might be important and beneficial for the university and its students". Participants in the no value condition did not receive the information in the paragraph and were not asked to comment on the value of intragroup homogeneity or heterogeneity.

Target group member manipulation

As in Study 1, participants read one of two profiles of a target student from their own university. The student was described as either strongly against (atypical group member condition) or strongly in favor of (typical group member condition) environmental protection. Examples of sentences used to described the atypical student included: "Economic interests must be ensured regardless of environmental costs", "There is too much regulation in the area of environmental protection", "I would oppose an increase in taxes if the money generated was used to prevent environmental pollution", and "Protecting the environment is not so important." In contrast, sentences used to describe the typical student included: "Environmental concerns should be the top priority even if economic growth and creating jobs suffer to some extent", "There is not enough regulation in the area of environmental protection", "I would support an increase in taxes if the money generated was used to prevent environmental pollution", and "Protecting the environment is vitally important."

Two items assessed the effectiveness of this manipulation. Participants rated the student's attitude on a scale ranging from 1 (anti-environmental protection) to 7 (pro-environmental protection) and indicated how typical they perceived the target to be of students at their university on the same item as used in

Study 1. Higher scores on these measures indicate a more pro-environmental protection attitude and more perceived typicality, respectively.

Target evaluation measure

The target student was evaluated on the same three items as used in Study 1 ($\alpha = .84$). A higher score indicates a more positive evaluation.

Results

Responses were analyzed using a series of 2 (target: typical vs. atypical group member) × 2 (group variability: homogeneous vs. heterogeneous group) × 3 (group value: homogeneity, heterogeneity, no value) ANOVAs.

Group variability manipulation check

The group variability manipulation had the intended effect. ARU students were perceived as a more homogenous group in the homogenous group condition ($M = 3.51$, $SD = 1.41$) than in the heterogeneous group condition ($M = 4.99$, $SD = 1.38$), $F(1, 264) = 32.51$, $p < .001$, $\eta_p^2 = .11$ (all other Fs < 1).

Entitativity

Entitativity scores did not differ across the homogenous ($M = 4.48$, $SD = 1.16$) and heterogeneous ($M = 4.38$, $SD = 1.17$) group conditions, indicating that the group variability manipulation did not affect perceived entitativity (all Fs < 1.29, ns).

Target manipulation checks

The target manipulation also had the intended effect. The typical group member was seen as being more in favor of environmental protection ($M = 5.40$, $SD = 1.31$) than the atypical group member ($M = 2.72$, $SD = 1.15$), $F(1, 264) = 216.21$, $p < .001$, $\eta_p^2 = .45$ (all other Fs < 1). The typical group member ($M = 4.85$, $SD = 1.12$) was also seen as more typical of ARU students than the atypical group member ($M = 3.60$, $SD = 1.08$), $F(1, 264) = 15.82$, $p < .001$, $\eta_p^2 = .04$ (all other Fs < 1).

Target evaluation

Analysis of the target evaluation scores revealed a significant target main effect, $F(1, 264) = 316.02$, $p < .001$, $\eta_p^2 = .44$, indicating that the typical student ($M = 5.12$, $SD = 1.34$) was evaluated more positively than the atypical student ($M = 2.98$, $SD = 1.32$). The target × group variability interaction, $F(1, 264) = 7.83$, $p = .01$, $\eta_p^2 = .03$, and the target × group value interaction, $F(2, 264) = 15.34$, $p < .001$, $\eta_p^2 = .10$, were also significant. These effects were qualified by a significant target × group variability × group value interaction, $F(2, 264) = 6.02$, $p = .003$, $\eta_p^2 = .04$ (all other Fs < 1.52, ns). [1] Further analyses confirmed that the group variability × group value interaction was significant for ratings of the atypical student, $F(2, 264) = 7.16$, $p = .001$, $\eta_p^2 = .10$, but not for ratings of the typical student, $F < 1$. Descriptive statistics are displayed in Table 1.

Table 1. Mean target evaluation as a function of group variability and group value

	Typical target		Atypical target	
	Homogeneous group	Heterogeneous group	Homogeneous group	Heterogeneous group
No value	5.07 (1.16)	5.22 (1.26)	2.52 (1.12)	3.29 (1.24)
Homogeneity value	5.22 (1.30)	5.97 (1.27)	2.94 (1.18)	2.06 (1.14)
Heterogeneity value	4.32 (1.21)	4.95 (1.14)	3.97 (1.22)	3.12 (1.25)

Notes: Standard Deviations are in brackets.

Simple effects tests confirmed that, consistent with the results from Study 1, the atypical student was evaluated more positively in the heterogeneous group condition than in the homogenous group condition when no group value was salient, $F(1, 264) = 4.46$, $p = .04$, $\eta_p^2 = .02$. Further analyses confirmed that the atypical student evaluation ratings were also moderated by group value such that when the group was heterogeneous, the atypical student was evaluated more negatively in the homogeneity value condition than in the no value ($p = .001$) and heterogeneity value ($p = .004$) conditions, whereas evaluation of the atypical student did not differ across the no value and heterogeneity value ($p = .63$) conditions, $F(1, 264) = 6.75$, $p = .001$, $\eta_p^2 = .05$. Moreover, when the group was homogeneous, the atypical student was evaluated more positively in the heterogeneity value condition that in the no value ($p < .001$) and homogeneity value ($p = .005$) conditions, whereas evaluation of the atypical student did not differ across the no value and homogeneity value ($p = .25$) conditions, $F(1, 264) = 8.41$, $p < .001$, $\eta_p^2 = .06$.

Discussion

The results are consistent with predictions. Participants in the heterogeneous group condition perceived the group as more heterogeneous than those in the homogenous group condition and the group variability manipulation did not affect the target typicality ratings or perceived entitativity. Additionally, a student opposing environmental protection was judged as less typical than a student supporting environmental protection. The manipulations therefore had the intended effects.

Moreover, as predicted, when group value was not manipulated, an atypical student was evaluated more positively when the group was heterogeneous than when the group was homogenous, whereas ratings of the typical student did not vary across the group variability conditions. This replicates the results from Study 1 in which group variability was manipulated but not group value. However, a different pattern emerged when group value was manipulated. When the group was heterogeneous, the atypical student was evaluated more negatively in the homogeneity value condition than in the no value and heterogeneity value conditions. In contrast, when the group was homogeneous, the atypical student was evaluated more positively in the heterogeneity value condition than in the no value and homogeneity value conditions.

These results extend those from Study 1 by confirming that deviant or atypical group members will not inevitably be liked in a heterogeneous group or disliked in a homogeneous group. Rather, the data suggest that reactions to deviance are shaped and guided by the dynamic relationship between how the group is perceived by its members and their ideological beliefs about what is good and valuable for the group in a particular context (see also van Knippenberg & Haslam, 2003). When the group is heterogeneous and homogeneity is valued, deviant or dissenting opinions further undermine uniformity and group members expressing such opinions are therefore disliked.

Conversely, when the group is homogeneous and the group values heterogeneity, deviant group members contribute positively to the amount of variability in the group and hostility towards such members is therefore attenuated.

General discussion

Previous research suggests that groups react unfavorably to members who do not conform to the majority position (e.g., Levine, 1989). It has been suggested that such responses may reflect a motivation to maintain a sense of uniformity around important group norms (Festinger, 1950) and thereby protect the social identity of ingroup members (Abrams et al., 2004, Marques and Paez, 1994 and Yzerbyt et al., 2000). The current research suggests that while some groups may value and strive to achieve uniformity among their members, not all groups are the same in this respect. For some groups it is the diversity among their members and the plurality of opinions that defines their identity and distinguishes them from outgroups (Hutchison et al., 2006, Rink and Ellemers, 2007 and Salvatore and Prentice, 2011). In such groups members who deviate from the majority position are less likely to be rejected to the extent that disagreement and expression of divergent opinions are in line with people's beliefs and expectations about how fellow group members should behave.

In Study 1 we manipulated group variability and asked participants to evaluate typical and atypical group members. We reasoned that deviant or dissenting viewpoints would be more in line with people's beliefs about how group members should behave in a heterogeneous group than in a homogeneous group. Therefore, group members expressing deviant or dissenting opinions should be tolerated more in a heterogeneous group than in a homogeneous group. Consistent with this prediction, results confirmed that an atypical group member was evaluated more positively in the heterogeneous group condition than in the homogeneous group condition, whereas the group variability manipulation did not influence the evaluation of a typical group member.

A second study was conducted to test the robustness of these effects and to additionally investigate the combined effects of group variability and group value on the evaluation of an atypical group member. We reasoned that deviant or dissenting group members would be tolerated and accepted in a heterogeneous group when the group values heterogeneity, but should be disliked when the group values homogeneity. By the same token, an atypical group member should be disliked in a homogenous group when the group values homogeneity, whereas hostility should be attenuated when the group values heterogeneity.

Results from Study 2 are in line with these predictions. An atypical group member was evaluated more positively in the heterogeneous group condition than in the homogeneous group condition when no group value was salient. This replicates the results from Study 1 in which group variability was manipulated but not group value. However, a different pattern emerged when both group variability and group value were manipulated. Results confirmed that when the group was

heterogeneous, an atypical group member was evaluated more negatively in the homogeneity value condition that in the no value and heterogeneity value conditions. In contrast, when the group was homogeneous, the atypical group member was evaluated more positively in the heterogeneity value condition than in the no value and homogeneity value conditions.

Finding that an atypical group member was evaluated more positively in the heterogeneous group condition than in the homogeneous group condition when no group value was salient (i.e., in Study 1 and the no value condition in Study 2) suggests that participants may have inferred from the information presented in the group variability manipulation that the amount of variability in the group was valued by the majority of group members — i.e., that it represented a 'prescriptive norm' (Abrams et al., 2004). The independent manipulation of both group variability and group value in Study 2 therefore allowed us to investigate and better understand how group variability and group value interact to influence reactions to deviance. The results extend those from Study 1 by demonstrating that deviant or atypical members will not inevitably be liked in a heterogeneous group or disliked in a homogeneous group. Rather, the results suggest that reactions to deviance are contextually bound and that evaluations of deviant or atypical group members are shaped and guided by the interplay between how the group is perceived by its members and their ideological beliefs about what is good for the group is a particular context (see also van Knippenberg & Haslam, 2003).

Study 2 also allowed us to rule out an alternative explanation for the results: that the group variability manipulation may have reduced the perception of entitativity in the heterogeneous group condition. In such circumstances it may be expected that an atypical target would be evaluated less negatively because the group's boundaries are less clear and deviance may be less visible and therefore threatening for ingroup members. Contrary to this alternative interpretation we found that the group variability manipulation affected the group variability ratings in predicted ways but did not affect the entitativity ratings: students at the university in question were perceived as an equally entitative group in both group variability conditions. The findings cannot therefore be attributed to reduced entitativity in the heterogeneous group condition, which adds further support to our interpretation of the results.

Although the results are consistent with predictions, a potential limitation with the present research is that no explicit reference was made to a particular outgroup. Previous research suggests that deviant or dissenting group members are often derogated more extremely in intergroup contexts than in intragroup contexts, especially when the groups in question are in conflict or have a history of antagonistic intergroup relations (e.g., Matheson, Cole, & Majka, 2003). It could reasonably be expected that pressures toward uniformity may be stronger in such hostile contexts and therefore strategies that exclude deviant or dissenting viewpoints more likely to be engaged. Future research should therefore investigate how the perceived nature of intergroup relations might interact with group variability and group value to influence reactions to deviant or dissenting group members.

Future research should also investigate whether there are conditions under which deviant or dissenting group members are not only tolerated by the group but are actually liked more than typical members. This may occur, for example, when there is widespread dissatisfaction with the current group position on an important or identity-relevant issue and/or when there is a desire for a change of direction (Morton, 2011, Randsley de Moura et al., 2011 and Salvatore and Prentice, 2011). In such situations intragroup heterogeneity may expose group members to alternative viewpoints and therefore potentially help the group to move in a new direction. Deviant or dissenting group members may not only be tolerated in such situations but also respected and valued as agents of social change (see also Jetten et al., 2010 and Moscovici, 1976). Future research should explore these possibilities.

In conclusion, results from two studies support the idea that reactions to deviance do not always reflect a motivation to maintain a sense of intragroup uniformity but rather suggest that evaluations of deviant or atypical group members are shaped and guided by the dynamic relationship between how the group is and group members' beliefs about how the group should be. In particular, the results suggest that although some groups may value and strive to achieve uniformity among their members by derogating those who are deviant within the group, other groups may be more tolerant and accepting of deviance if it potentially helps the group to move in a direction that is valued by its members. In some situations, deviance may even be seen as desirable in such groups.

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