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Evaluations of Group Deserters and Defectors

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How Groups React to Disloyalty in the Context of Intergroup Competition: Evaluations of
Group Deserters and Defectors

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Abstract

Groups strongly value loyalty, especially in the context of intergroup competition. However, research has yet to investigate how groups respond to members who leave the group or join a competing outgroup. Three studies investigated groups' reactions to defectors (Experiment 1) and deserting members (Experiment 2 and 3). Experiment 1 used a minimal group paradigm to demonstrate that defectors trigger a stronger derogation of ingroup deviants than outgroup deviants vis-à-vis normative members. Experiments 2 and 3 compared group members' responses to defection versus desertion from minimal and self-assigned groups respectively. Experiment 3 also explored an explanation for the evaluations of disloyalty. Across studies, participants evaluated loyal ingroup members more positively than defectors and deserters. Outgroup deserting and defecting members were evaluated similarly. Derogation of ingroup as compared to outgroup targets emerged only for defectors. In addition, Experiment 3 demonstrated that negativity toward the outgroup was related to stronger derogation of disloyal targets. Negative outgroup attitudes trigger stricter criteria for responding to disloyalty. Directions for future research are discussed.

Keywords: desertion, defectors, black sheep effect, loyalty, intergroup relations, intragroup relations

Why do individuals react so negatively to group members who leave their group in a competitive intergroup context? On December 2010, Domenico Scilipoti, a politician of the party Italy of Values granted his vote of confidence to Berlusconi's opposing party. Later, Scilipoti crossed the floor. His actions proved decisive for the political equilibrium and allowed the opposing coalition to maintain power for two additional years. In 1999, Shaun Woodward, a member of the British Conservative party crossed the floor and switched toward the Labour party. The British Prime Minister Gordon Brown greatly benefitted from Woodward's first-hand knowledge of the Conservative party's strategies. Interestingly, in both these episodes there followed waves of public indignation against the politicians. Such was the outrage against Scilipoti that a new term was coined from his surname, *scilipotismo*, to designate political transformation and party-switching. In a similar vein, and in spite of his contribution to the Labour party, Woodward met strong resistance and resentment on both sides of the political spectrum.

These episodes suggest that individuals who are disloyal to their group may incur heavy social and material sanctions. But under what circumstances is disloyalty more consequential in the eyes of group members? Disloyalty may seem an obsolete concept in modern individualist, western cultures (Reichheld, 1996). These cultures promote and endorse values such as independence and authenticity (cf. Ditto & Mastronarde, 2009), flexibility and mobility in employment (e.g., Browning & McNamee, 2012), and change and constant personal improvement (cf. Rowley & Dawes, 2000). Nonetheless, from a group socialization perspective, disloyalty can have an important impact on group life (Levine & Moreland, 1994; Levine, Moreland, & Ryan, 1998). At an intragroup level, parties, organizations, and groups more in general depend on their members' loyalty in order to secure success and resources. At an intergroup level, established corporations face the threat

of employee poaching ([Sheldon & Li, 2013](#)), and the best sports teams vie to attract the same stellar players.

In spite of these dilemmas, and the importance of loyalty for competing groups, surprisingly few studies have investigated members' reactions to individuals who leave the group (for examples see Bown & Abrams, 2003; Charlton & Bettencourt, 2001; Mannetti, Levine, Pierro, & Kruglanski, 2010; Singer, Radloff, & Wark, 1963; cf. Tajfel & Turner, 1986). The present research presents three studies investigating how individuals evaluate two types of disloyal members, defectors and deserters, in the context of intergroup competition. While desertion merely implies the loss of a member, defection occurs when a group member join a competing outgroup. These two forms of disloyalty have different implications at each level. Desertion may weaken the group but does not strengthen an outgroup, whereas defection may have both effects.

Experiments 1 and 2 use a minimal group paradigm. Experiment 1 investigates how group members judge individuals who defect to join a competing outgroup. Experiment 2 compares reactions to members who defect with reactions to those who only desert. Finally, Experiment 3 replicates results from Experiment 2 in the context of meaningful, self-assigned categories and explores a possible explanation for members' appraisals of disloyalty.

Group Socialization Model

The Group Socialization Model (GSM) describes the relation between groups and individuals through four role transitions (entry, acceptance, divergence, and exit) crossed by five phases of group membership (investigation, socialization, maintenance, re-socialization, and remembrance) (e.g., Levine & Moreland, 1994). According to GSM, groups and individuals engage in a mutual process of evaluation for defining the respective levels of commitment (Moreland, Levine, & Cini, 1993). When the level of commitment reaches a

point where a decision must be taken, a role transition occurs where the member may approach or move away from the group's core positions.

Frequently, members or groups need to cope with instances of abandonment or exclusion (cf. Levine et al., 1998). For instance, members may decide that the group does not adequately satisfy their individual needs/goals, or conversely, the group may deliberate that the individuals' contribution is not sufficient to warrant membership (e.g., due to unproductivity) (Levine et al., 1998).

Despite the ubiquity of exit from groups, judgments of ex-members remain one of the least studied phenomena in social psychology (cf. [Mannetti et al., 2010](#)). In the case of disloyal exit, several variables may affect groups' reaction to the exiting member (Levine & Moreland, 2002). In addition, these reactions are likely to vary across different situations. In this paper, we focus on a situation in which group membership is mutually exclusive (i.e., individuals cannot belong to both groups at the same time; cf. Levine et al., 1998) and the group faces a decisive intergroup competition. As contended by Tajfel and Turner (1986, p. 35; cf. also Levine & Moreland, 2002), these conditions increase conflict of interest between two groups thus making disloyalty particularly challenging.

Social Identity, Subjective Group Dynamics and Group Loyalty

Social identity theory holds that group membership is an important component of the self-concept. When group membership is salient, individuals are not judged in terms of personal traits, but on the basis of their adherence to the group norms or prototype (Abrams, 2012). Subjective Group Dynamics theory (SGD; e.g., Abrams, Marques, Randsley de Moura, Hutchison, & Bown, 2004; Marques, Abrams, Páez, & Hogg, 2001; Pinto, Marques, Levine, & Abrams, 2010; Randsley de Moura & Abrams, 2013) further states that particular weight is placed on norms that prescribe how a group member should behave. Specifically, SGD holds that the salience of group membership is related to the emergence of a

prescriptive focus in judgments of deviants (Marques, Abrams, Páez, & Taboada, 1998; Pinto et al., 2010). Ingroup deviants who break prescriptive norms are perceived to threaten the positive valence of the ingroup's shared reality. Ingroup deviants are therefore derogated more than outgroup deviants, a phenomenon known as the black sheep effect (Marques, Yzerbyt & Leyens, 1988; see also Abrams et al., 2005; Marques & Páez, 1994; Marques, Robalo, & Rocha, 1992).

A prescriptive norm particularly consequential for group members is loyalty (Zdaniuk & Levine, 2001). In a competitive context, group loyalty may be conceptualized as a prescriptive oppositional norm (Abrams, 2011). The oppositional feature of loyalty refers to the fact that it implies opposite choices or preferences by members of the ingroup versus the outgroup (i.e., a group member cannot pledge allegiance to both groups simultaneously; Abrams, 2011; Abrams, et al., 2004; cf. Zdaniuk & Levine, 2001).

In the context of intergroup competition, loyalty is a highly valued norm because the group's success often depends on whether its members show solidarity in the face of a challenge (Levine & Moreland, 2002). In the case of attitudes breaching the loyalty norm, an important implication is that ingroup members who violate the norm by endorsing outgroup's attitudes may pose a challenge to the perceived positive valence of the ingroup (Marques et al., 1998).

But what features trigger negative evaluations when disloyalty entails leaving the group? Is it relative potential gain for the outgroup that generates unfavorable evaluations of disloyal ingroup members, or is the potential loss to the ingroup alone sufficient to explain such reactions? While a group experiences the loss of a member both in the case of desertion and of defection, only defection implies a potential (material or symbolic) gain for the opposing group. Thus, in this study we extend the literature on disloyalty by investigating

members' judgments of defectors (Experiment 1), and comparing those to evaluations of deserters (Experiments 2 and 3).

Overview of the Studies and Hypotheses

In Experiments 1 and 2, we investigate reactions to disloyal targets using a minimal group paradigm (MGP; Tajfel, Billig, Bundy, & Flament, 1971). An interesting feature of the MGP is that groups are novel and members do not interact with each other, so that they have no past history or interdependency among members. Testing group reactions to disloyalty in the context of minimal groups thus enables us to disentangle the impact of the nature of intergroup relations from the norms that might characterize pre-existing relationships among members and groups (cf. Tajfel & Turner, 1986). Previous research suggests that individuals value loyalty in ephemeral laboratory groups (Moreland & McMinn, 2009). However, no research to date has investigated individuals' reaction to defection under minimal conditions. We predict that participants will prefer normative over defecting members. In addition, in keeping with literature on the black sheep effect (e.g., Marques & Páez, 1994), we predict greater derogation against ingroup defectors than outgroup defectors, showing that the implications for the ingroup are particularly relevant for judges of defectors.

In Experiment 2 we examine reactions to either a deserter or defector. In both instances, a group suffers from an equivalent depletion of resources (i.e., the loss of a member). Nevertheless, compared with desertion, defection to a rival group more directly reduces the perceived value and distinctiveness of the leaver's group relative to the outgroup (Turner, Hogg, Oakes, Wetherell, & Reicher, 1987). This suggests that a member who defects to a competing outgroup should trigger harsher reactions than one who deserts the group but does not join a rival. Thus, we predict that derogation of ingroup defectors will be greater than derogation of ingroup deserters.

In contrast to predictions for ingroup defectors, two different hypotheses might be advanced for outgroup defectors. On the one hand, the act of outgroup defection brings valuable resources to and also enhances the positive valence of the ingroup (Marques et al., 1998; cf. also Abrams, Rutland, Ferrell, & Pelletier, 2008). This would imply that outgroup defectors should be evaluated more positively than outgroup deserters (Marques et al., 1998). On the other hand, and in spite of the advantages they might bring to the ingroup, outgroup defectors may be regarded with suspicion. Indeed, outgroup defectors may generate distrust due to their violation of the loyalty norm (cf. Robinson & Rousseau, 1994). They may also impair the clarity of the intergroup boundaries (Turner et al., 1987). This line of argument suggests there might be weaker differentiation between deserting versus defecting deviant outgroup members than between deserting and defecting deviant ingroup members (Marques & Páez, 1994). These competing predictions are tested in Experiment 2.

Experiment 3 replicates Experiment 2 using a different setting to establish the generalizability of the findings. Specifically, Experiment 3 examines judgments of disloyal members using self-assigned categories which are meaningful to participants. This methodological choice previously used in different contexts (see Shapiro, Boss, Salas, Tangirala, & Von Glinow, 2010; Waytz, Dungan, & Young, 2013) provides an opportunity to sample reactions to disloyalty across an array of different ingroup memberships. In addition, Experiment 3 directly investigates the role of prescriptive focus in judgments of deserting and defecting group members.

Experiment 1

Method

Participants and Design

Forty-five (42 female) university students participated in this experiment as a course requirement. Participants ($M_{\text{age}} = 18.60$, $SD = 1.20$) were assigned randomly to conditions in

a 2 (Group: ingroup vs. outgroup) x 2 (Target: normative, defector) mixed factorial design with repeated measures on the Target factor.

Procedure and Materials

Participants were invited to take part in a study on 'Perception Types and Internet Mediated Interaction' through Qualtrics. Participants were asked to play the role of observers in an ongoing study, ostensibly to determine the link between perception style and performance on a logic task. Participants were informed that the purpose of the study was to compare how people with either of two different perception styles performed when solving cognitive problems (for a similar paradigm see Abrams, Randsley de Moura & Travaglino, 2013, Study 3).

Participants were assigned (randomly) to one of the two categories (i.e., spherical/squared viewers), supposedly on the basis of their choices on a series of pairs of paintings. Following the selection of paintings, participants read a brief description of the two thinking styles: 'Recent studies have shown that people who are [Spherical/Squared viewers, randomized] are more prone to reflection. They like to analyze the details systematically before drawing conclusions. In contrast, people who are [Spherical/Squared viewers, respectively] type tend to be more spontaneous. They like to form global view of the events and to draw fast conclusions'. Subsequently, identification with the group was measured (5 items; Randsley de Moura, Abrams, Retter, Gunnarsdottir, & Ando, 2009; $\alpha = .93$).

Next, participants observed a chat room of either ingroup or outgroup members, depending on condition. The task for the chat room was to solve a logic puzzle. Participants were told that the chat room was composed either of members of the Spherical or members of the Squared group (depending on Group condition). The chat room contained four members identified with a numerical label (e.g., Participant 23). Participants were asked to select two of the four members upon which to focus their attention. Regardless of their choice, the

experimental software depicted one of the selected members as a normative target and the other as a defector. The selection procedure for the two targets was intended to ensure that participants believed they had freely selected (and then evaluated) the disloyal target.

Nevertheless, participants still observed all four members interacting in the chat-room.

At the start of the observation session, participants were presented with the logic puzzle that the chat room members were trying to solve. This consisted of three mutually exclusive statements made by three fictional characters. The task for the members was to determine which statement was true. Care was taken that each of the four group members contributed approximately equally to the chat-room interaction (in terms of number of statements and average statement length).

Toward the end of the interaction, while the group members were trying to solve the puzzle, the defector stated 'I'm getting out of this chat room... I'm gonna (sic) work with [Competing Group - either Square or Spherical group] in their chat room'. This was followed by a system-message (in red) stating 'Participant XX has left the chat room. Participant XX has joined [Competing Group]'. The normative target, in contrast, expressed their willingness to remain in the group 'Ok... let's go ahead with the challenge here! I am staying anyway'. Next, participants read another system-message stating that the allotted observation time was over and were asked to complete the dependent measures. After the dependent measures, and before the debriefing, participants were asked if they wished to express any comment on the study (using a textbox). Moreover, participants were provided with the email addresses of the researchers to ask questions. No comments were offered by participants, and participants did not contact the researchers.

Evaluations. Participants were asked to reflect on the chat room session and give their opinions about the other participants that they had selected. Similarly to previous research (e.g., Marques et al., 1988; see also Abrams et al., 2013), participants rated how

likeable, nice, generous, loyal and mean spirited, rude, devious, and selfish (reversed items) each target was, using 7-point scales (1 = not at all, 7 = extremely). These specific items were selected because they tapped non-specific evaluative traits, suitable for expressing appraisal of both ingroup and outgroup targets (cf. Marques et al., 1988). These items formed a reliable scale for both the judgments of the defector ($\alpha = .89$) and the normative target ($\alpha = .90$).¹

Results and Discussion

Evaluations were analyzed with a 2 (Group) x 2 (Target) ANOVA with repeated measure on the Target factor. There was no significant main effect of Group, $F(1, 43) = 1.43$, $p = .23$, $\eta^2 = .03$. There was a significant effect of Target, $F(1, 43) = 56.81$, $p < .001$, $\eta^2 = .57$, and a significant Group x Target interaction, $F(1, 43) = 10.69$, $p = .001$, $\eta^2 = .21$. Consistent with the black sheep effect, the simple effects of Target within Group showed much stronger differentiation among ingroup targets, $F(1, 43) = 75.08$, $p < .001$, $\eta^2 = .64$, than among outgroup targets, $F(1, 43) = 7.05$, $p = .01$, $\eta^2 = .14$. Moreover, the simple effects of Group within Target showed that while the ingroup normative target was evaluated more positively than the outgroup normative target, $F(1, 43) = 12.97$, $p = .001$, $\eta^2 = .23$, the ingroup defector was evaluated more negatively than the outgroup defector, $F(1, 43) = 4.20$, $p = .047$, $\eta^2 = .09$ (see Table 1). Thus, under these minimal conditions, participants were more negative toward defectors than normative members from both groups. However, in line with SGD theory, they showed substantially less favorable evaluations of the ingroup defector than the outgroup defector. Interestingly, despite of the fact that the outgroup defector was strengthening the ingroup's position, the outgroup defector was evaluated less positively than their normative counterpart. This suggests that individuals value loyalty per se (regardless of the target's group membership) and are inclined to derogate individuals from either group if those individuals display disloyalty.

Experiment 2

Experiment 2 was designed to extend and explore our understanding of group reactions to ingroup disloyal members. An important limitation of Experiment 1 was that it did not distinguish defecting (joining an outgroup) from merely leaving the ingroup. We addressed this issue in Experiment 2. If individuals are mainly concerned with the potential weakening of the ingroup caused by loss of an ingroup member, both types of disloyalty should attract a similar evaluation. If, however, it is the nature of intergroup relations (Abrams, 2013; Dovidio, 2013; Hogg & Terry, 2000) – and the potential consequences of strengthening an outgroup by joining the opposite ranks – that matters, ingroup defectors should trigger more unfavorable evaluations than ingroup deserters. We test these alternative possibilities in the present study.

In contrast, outgroup defectors may either be perceived as (symbolically and materially) enhancing the positive valence of the ingroup or as generating distrust due to the violation of the norm of loyalty. In turn, this might lead to two different predictions. On the one hand, they might be evaluated more favorably than outgroup deserters (cf. Marques et al., 1998). On the other, we may expect less differentiation between outgroup disloyal targets compared to ingroup disloyal targets because the different types of outgroup disloyalty have less distinct implications for the ingroup. We examine reactions to outgroup disloyal targets in Experiment 2.

Method

Participants and Design

One-hundred participants (29 females) from India were recruited through Amazon's MTurk ($M_{\text{age}} = 30.10$, $SD = 7.95$) and were randomly assigned to conditions in a 2 (Group: ingroup vs. outgroup) x 2 (Motive: desertion vs. defection) x 2 (Target: normative, disloyal) mixed factorial design with repeated measures on the Target factor.

Procedure and Materials

To test our hypotheses, we modified the procedure used in Experiment 1. Participants were invited to participate in a study about ‘the relation between thinking style and group decision making’ via *Amazon’s MTurk* on Qualtrics. Participants were instructed to play the role of observers in an ongoing study aimed at determining the effectiveness of decision-making processes among different thinking styles. They were informed that recent advances in psychology had determined the existence of two thinking styles. The two styles were described as being equally distributed in the population, and across genders, and equally effective at solving cognitive problems at the individual level. Participants were informed that this study was designed to determine how the two styles performed at the group level.

Participants were assigned (randomly) to one of two categories (i.e., Inductive Thinkers/Deductive Thinkers), allegedly on the basis of their performance on a brief cognitive test. This test included seven items (1 = Not at All Like Me, 5 = Completely Like Me) taken from the Thinking Style Inventory (e.g., I like to draw or doodle) and two graphic items from the Stencil Task. Following the test, participants were told they belonged to one of the two styles and read a brief description of the profiles: ‘Inductive thinkers prefer to inspect single facts before drawing general conclusions about social and material phenomena. Inductive thinkers approach new information carefully and systematically before making a decision. In contrast, Deductive Thinkers form a general picture of the events which inform their subsequent analysis of single episodes. Deductive Thinkers approach information in a scattered way and do not linger on particulars and details’. To check that participants valued their group membership, we measured identification with the group using three items (cf. Randsley de Moura et al., 2009, $\alpha = .89$).

Participants were then ‘randomly’ assigned to a chat room (in actuality, always chat room G). As in Study 1, the chat room contained members of either the ingroup or the

outgroup (according to the condition), each member signified with a numerical label. In order to increase the plausibility of our manipulation of exit, while participants were ‘waiting’ to join the chat-room, they were shown instructions ostensibly given to members of the chat room. They read: ‘These were the instructions shown to chat room participants. “You have volunteered to join a chat room of a group of people who share your thinking style. You will be asked to complete a series of games (tasks) and the chat room must arrive at a group solution for each one. The procedures for this research require us to make you aware that your participation is voluntary and you are free to withdraw at any time, or to choose another chat room. Please enter the chat room when instructed to do so”’.

Given that this study was conducted on Amazon’s Mturk and in order to engage participants’ attention, we followed suggestions from Oppenheimer, Meyvis, and Davidenko (2009). Specifically, we randomly presented participants with fictitious information about results from previous games concerning that chat room. Participants read that other matches had been already completed between chat room G (the one they were assigned to) and chat room E (another chat room), and were informed about the results. Later (before the manipulation of exit), participants were asked questions about these details. Participants who answered incorrectly were warned and reminded of the correct information. According to [Oppenheimer et al. \(2009\)](#) these procedures should increase the likelihood that participants read instructions more accurately.

As in Experiment 1, participants were asked to select two of the four members of the chat room upon which to focus their attention. One of the two members selected was the normative target, the other the disloyal target. Note that regardless of their selection participants observed all the four members interacting.

Participants were presented with the same logic puzzle used in Study 1. Care was taken that, independently from the choices of the participants, each member contributed

equally to the chat room interaction, proposing a (normative) solution to the logic puzzle.

Toward the end, while the group members were trying to solve the puzzle, the disloyal target stated a desire to leave the chat room. This was followed by a system-message (in red) stating that the target had either joined the respective outgroup (defector condition) or merely left the chat-room (deserter condition). In contrast, the normative target expressed a desire to remain in the chat room. Finally participants read another system-message stating that the allotted observation time was over (see supplemental material). They were asked to complete the dependent measures, and finally a manipulation check. Participants were debriefed in writing and compensated for their time.

Evaluations. Participants completed the same scale as in Study 1, using 7-point Likert scales (8 items, 4 reversed). The fourth item (To what extent do you think [target] is mean-spirited) lowered the reliability of the scale by more than .10, and is thus excluded from the following analyses. The remaining 7 items formed a reliable scale for both the normative ($\alpha = .82$) and disloyal target ($\alpha = .72$) and were averaged together.

Manipulation Check. Participants were asked ‘To what extent do you think [disloyal target] has left the group to join [the outgroup]’.

Results and Discussion

The engagement check presented randomly information about the previous matches in the chat room. To ensure that this information did not affect our results we dummy-coded the different variants and included this variable as a covariate. No effect of the engagement check was found. Twenty-five people failed the manipulation check and were excluded from the following analyses, leaving a final sample of $N = 75^2$. Individuals were excluded if they failed to report whether the disloyal target was defecting (i.e., answered less than the scale midpoint on the manipulation check item) in the defector condition or merely deserting (answered more than the scale midpoint) in the deserting condition.

Evaluations

A 2 (Group) x 2 (Motive) x 2 (Target) ANOVA with repeated measures on the Target factor revealed a significant main effect of Target, $F(1, 73) = 165.83, p < .001, \eta^2 = .70$. Normative targets ($M = 5.47, SE = .11$) were evaluated more positively than disloyal targets ($M = 3.64, SE = .10$). The main effects of Motive $F(1, 73) = 2.74, p = .10, \eta^2 = .04$ and Group, $F(1, 73) = 1.01, p = .32, \eta^2 = .01$ were not significant, nor was their interaction, $F(1, 73) = .14, p = .71, \eta^2 = .002$.

There was a marginal Target x Group interaction, $F(1, 73) = 3.10, p = .08, \eta^2 = .04$. These effects were further qualified by a significant Target x Motive x Group interaction, $F(1, 73) = 11.04, p = .001, \eta^2 = .13$. To probe our hypotheses, we tested whether ingroup defectors triggered the black sheep effect and whether they attracted harsher evaluations compared to ingroup deserters.

The simple effects of Group within Target and Motive showed that in the defector condition the normative ingroup target was evaluated significantly more positively than the normative outgroup target, $F(1, 73) = 8.18, p = .006, \eta^2 = .10$. The ingroup defector was evaluated significantly less positively than the outgroup defector, $F(1, 73) = 5.08, p = .027, \eta^2 = .07$. These comparisons were not significant in the deserter condition, $F_s(1, 73) < 2.06, p > .16, \eta^2 < .03$.

An inspection of the simple effects of Motive within Target and Group showed that ingroup defectors were evaluated significantly less positively than ingroup deserters, $F(1, 73) = 6.08, p = .016, \eta^2 = .07$. In contrast, participants did not differentiate between outgroup defectors and deserters, $F(1, 73) = 1.28, p = .26, \eta^2 = .02$. However, the outgroup normative target was evaluated significantly less positively in the defector condition compared to the deserter condition, $F(1, 73) = 6.12, p = .02, \eta^2 = .08$. This comparison was not significant for the ingroup, $F(1, 73) = .19, p = .67, \eta^2 = .003$.

Results from this experiment replicate and extend results from Experiment 1. Regardless of the group, normative targets were evaluated more positively than disloyal targets. Ingroup defectors were evaluated less positively than outgroup defectors and ingroup deserters, suggesting that they trigger stronger derogation compared to other disloyal targets. Outgroup defectors and deserters were not evaluated differently from each other. In keeping with SGD, individuals distinguished between types of ingroup disloyalty in a way that preserved the positive valence of their group image, but did not distinguish between types of outgroup disloyalty.

Experiment 3

Experiment 3 was designed to replicate and extend Experiments 1 and 2. First, we investigated whether our findings would generalize in the context of categories meaningful to participants. Furthermore, Experiment 3 examines the assumption that evaluations of disloyal targets reflect judgments of whether they are breaching an important norm, and we test whether this perception underlies the derogation of disloyal members.

To address the generalizability of previous findings, we compared reactions to defectors and deserters in the context of meaningful, self-assigned categories. In keeping with previous research that has used a similar methodology (Shapiro, et al., 2010; Waytz, et al., 2013), we tested our hypothesis that ingroup defectors trigger the black sheep more strongly than deserters using a fictitious scenario and authentic categories to which participants actually belonged.

Moreover, we empirically tested the assumption that disloyal targets from both groups were perceived as breaking a prescriptive norm of the group. Group loyalty is a powerful norm because it has two bases. First, it is a strong oppositional norm because members of a particular group should be loyal to that group but not to opposing or contrasting groups. In addition, loyalty also involves some features of generic norms (those that apply across groups

or society) in the sense that loyalty per se may be an important social value (Abrams & Rutland, 2008; Zdaniuk & Levine, 2001). For example, to some extent, disloyalty suggests untrustworthiness. Therefore, it might invite negative evaluations no matter who the disloyal person is. This may explain why, in Experiment 1 and 2, both ingroup and outgroup disloyal members were regarded negatively. However, in line with SGD, and consistent with previous studies, loyalty norms should be applied particularly strongly to ingroup members. Indeed, based on realistic group conflict theory (Sherif, 1966) members should value loyalty especially strongly in the context of intergroup competition (see Dovidio, 2013; Levine et al., 1998). This ‘prescriptive focus’ related with the endorsement of loyalty norms, is therefore examined in Experiment 3.

In addition, we investigate a potential motivation for evaluations of disloyal targets. Under circumstances of intense conflict of interests between groups, individuals tend to perceive the outgroup more negatively (Riek, Mania, & Gaertner, 2006; see also Tajfel & Turner, 1986), due to perceived threat (e.g., Langford & Ponting, 1992). Indeed, it has been demonstrated that negative outgroup attitudes are an important indicator of perceived intergroup threat (Riek, et al., 2006). It follows that participants with more negative outgroup attitudes may be more attuned to breaches of loyalty norms because disloyalty may have implications for the attainment of the group's goals and for sustaining a positive image (cf. Levine & Moreland, 2002). Thus, given the context of intergroup competition, we expect that participants who express more negative views of the outgroup will also perceive disloyalty more negatively (also when controlling for ingroup attitudes).

Another correlate of intergroup competition is the tightening of standards for defining transgressions (cf. Rabbie & Wilkens, 1971). Groups experiencing external threat (as in the case of intergroup competition) adopt more stringent criteria for defining the boundary of transgressive behaviour (see also Marques, Abrams & Serodio, 2001). Consistent with the

'social reactions' approach to deviance, these effects reflect a sharpening of focus on norms ('prescriptive focus'), which in turn relate to more negative reactions against deviants (Burnstein & McRae, 1962; Lauderdale, 1976; Lauderdale, Smith-Cunnien, Parker, & Inverarity, 1984; cf. Sherif & Sherif, 1969). Disloyalty should invoke a prescriptive focus. Therefore we expect that the link between outgroup negativity and evaluations of disloyalty should be mediated by prescriptive focus. By using self-assigned categories which are meaningful to participants we are able to measure pre-existing outgroup attitudes and investigate their effect on evaluations of disloyal targets in an imagined scenario.

Method

Participants and Design

Eighty participants (44 female) from the USA were recruited via MTurk ($M_{\text{age}} = 32.14$, $SD = 12.45$), with random assignment to conditions in a 2 (Group: ingroup vs. outgroup) x 2 (Motive: desertion vs. defection) x 2 (Target: normative, disloyal) mixed factorial design with repeated measures on the Target factor.

Procedure and Materials

Data were collected through Qualtrics and *Amazon's MTurk*. Participants were asked to name a group to which they belonged and its long-term main rival (cf. Shapiro, et al., 2010; Waytz, et al., 2013). Consistent with the previous experiments, we were interested in testing reactions to disloyalty in the context of intergroup competition and mutually exclusive membership. To hold the nature of intergroup relations constant, and at the same time allow for a wide array of participant ingroups, we provided participants with the following instructions: 'Please think about a group of which you are a member and which you care about. This should be a group you have belonged to for some time. This should also be a group that has to compete with other groups to gain recognition, status, resources, or opportunities. Think of a group that is involved in long term competition with other groups'.

Participants were then asked to write some reasons about why they enjoyed being part of the ingroup. Subsequently, participants imagined two targets for each group and wrote down their initials. Qualtrics automatically substituted the groups' names and the targets' initials throughout the study.

At this point identification with the group (5 items as in Experiment 1; $\alpha = .93$), and attitudes towards the ingroup and the outgroup were measured using a 7-point scales (1 = Very Unfavorable, 7 = Very Favorable). Next, participants were asked to imagine that their group was in the final decisive stage of the competition and was preparing to meet its main rival. As a check that participants were imagining of a plausible form of competition, they were asked to describe the kind of competition they were thinking of.

Next, participants read a scenario in which one of the targets (ingroup or outgroup) left the group, either without specifying any motivation (desertion) or to join the competing outgroup (defection). The other target was described as remaining normative and staying with the group. Specifically, participants read: “[Ingroup] is about to meet [Outgroup] in a decisive challenge. The result of the whole competition depends on the outcome of this challenge. If the team loses, its future prospects will be seriously damaged. On the other hand, a victory will greatly increase the group's prospects of long term success. There are few weeks remaining to meet this challenge and the whole group is preparing to the best of its ability. There is an air of great excitement and tension. Some days before this decisive challenge, [disloyal target] communicates to the rest of the group, including you, that [disloyal targets] has decided to leave the group. [In the defector condition participants read ‘and accept a position in the competing group, [Outgroup]. [Disloyal target] leaves the group and joins [Outgroup]’]. Both in the defector and deserter conditions, participants read “[Normative Target] remains in the group and continues to participate with the others in the group to deal with this decisive challenge.”

After reading the scenario, participants completed the dependent measures, were compensated and debriefed in writing. Note that both the type of challenge and the potential resource depletion for the group do not differ in the desertion and defection scenarios.

Prescriptive focus. Participants rated to what extent each target was ‘breaking the rules of the situation’. This question, answered using a 7-point scales (1 = not at all, 7 = completely), was intended to detect whether participants understood that the target had broken a prescriptive norm of loyalty, and hence whether participants were focusing on that norm.

Evaluations. Participants used the same item as in Experiment 1 and 2. Items were averaged to form reliable scales for the disloyal ($\alpha = .95$) and the normative ($\alpha = .93$) target.

Manipulation check. Participants were asked ‘To what extent do you think [disloyal target] has left the group to join [the outgroup]’

Results and Discussion

Seven participants failed the manipulation check (i.e., answered less than the scale midpoint on the manipulation check item in the defector condition, or answered more than the scale midpoint in the deserting condition) and were excluded from the analyses. Two scores on Evaluations and one on Prescriptive Focus were outliers at more than 2.5 SD from the mean and were deleted. An inspection of the groups named revealed that 27.4 % of participants selected sport groups (e.g., Eagles vs. Celtics), 28.8% selected leisure-related associations (e.g., competing books club, or gaming clubs), 20.5% selected a political group (e.g., Democrats vs. Republicans), and 23.3% selected an organization (competing companies, and universities).³ Further, we examined the type of competitions indicated by the participants. In keeping with the type of group, participants described different types of competition, including sport games, political elections, and game matches. Dependent

variables were analysed using a 2 (Group) x 2 (Motive) x 2 (Target) ANOVA, with repeated measure on the Target factor.

Evaluations

There was a significant effect of Group, $F(1, 67) = 5.91, p = .02, \eta^2 = .10$. Overall, ingroup targets ($M = 5.01, SE = .16$) were evaluated more positively than outgroup targets ($M = 4.45, SE = .16$). There was a significant main effect of Target, $F(1, 67) = 46.61, p < .001, \eta^2 = .41$. Normative targets ($M = 5.29, SE = .12$) were evaluated more positively than disloyal targets ($M = 4.18, SE = .16$). There was no main effect of Motive, $F(1, 67) = .09, p > .10, \eta^2 = .001$. All the two-way interactions were significant, $F_s(1, 67) > 5.64, p_s < .01, \eta_s^2 > .09$. These were further moderated by a significant Target x Group x Motive interaction, $F(1, 67) = 5.77, p = .015, \eta^2 = .09$.

The simple effects of Group within Target and Motive showed that ingroup normative targets were evaluated more positively than outgroup normative targets, $F_s(1, 67) > 14.98, p_s < .001, \eta_s^2 > .24$. Replicating results from Experiment 2, and in line with the black sheep effect, the ingroup defector was evaluated more negatively than the outgroup defector, $F(1, 67) = 8.83, p = .004, \eta^2 = .11$. However, ingroup and outgroup deserters were evaluated similarly, $F(1, 67) = 1.77, p = .19, \eta^2 = .03$.

As predicted, the simple effect of Motive within Group and Target, was only significant for the ingroup disloyal target, $F(1, 67) = 10.73, p = .002, \eta^2 = .14$. This target was evaluated more negatively when defecting than when deserting. All other simple effects were non-significant, $F_s < 2.38, p_s > .13$ (see Table 3).

Prescriptive Focus

There was a significant effect of Target, $F(1, 68) = 48.52, p < .001, \eta^2 = .42$. Not surprisingly, disloyal targets were perceived as breaking the rules more than normative targets. There were no main effects of Group or Motive, $F_s(1, 68) < .63, p_s > .42, \eta_s^2 < .009$.

The effect of Group x Motive was marginally significant, $F(1, 68) = 8.23, p = .07, \eta^2 = .05$.

There was a significant Target x Group interaction, $F(1, 68) = 5.06, p = .03, \eta^2 = .07$.

Ingroup normative targets ($M = 1.58, SE = .22$) were judged to have broken the rules less than outgroup normative targets ($M = 2.23, SE = .21$), $F(1, 68) = 4.58, p = .04, \eta^2 = .06$. The difference between ingroup and outgroup disloyal targets was, as expected, non-significant ($M = 4.05, SE = .31$ and $M = 3.49, SE = .29$, respectively for ingroup and outgroup), $F(1, 68) = 1.68, p = .20, \eta^2 = .02$. In addition, there was a significant Target x Motive interaction, $F(1, 68) = 18.93, p = .008, \eta^2 = .10$. Across groups, defectors ($M = 4.24, SE = .30$) invoked a stronger prescriptive focus compared to deserters ($M = 3.31, SE = .30$), $F(1, 68) = 15.54, p = .03, \eta^2 = .07$. The difference between normative targets in the two conditions ($M = 1.64, SE = .33$ and $M = 2.17, SE = .21$ respectively) was non-significant, $F(1, 68) = 2.96, p = .09, \eta^2 = .04$. Consistent with the idea that group loyalty is a strong prescriptive norm, Group did not further moderate this interaction, $F(1, 68) = 2.08, p = .37, \eta^2 = .01$.

Mediated Moderation Model

In order to test the hypothesis that negative attitude towards the outgroup impacted on judgments of deviants because of heightened prescriptive focus, Prescriptive Focus (PF) was entered as mediator of the relationship between feelings of unfavorability toward the outgroup and evaluations of disloyal targets. This process should account for evaluations of both deserters and defectors, since it is the extent to which the deviant is perceived as having broken the rules that should mediate between outgroup unfavorability and evaluations of disloyal targets. However, due to the fact that PF should be applied more strongly to ingroup members, we added Group as moderator of the path between PF and evaluations of disloyal targets. The analyses were conducted using the PROCESS macro with 5000 bootstraps (Hayes, 2012; Model 14)⁴. The model is summarized in Figure 1.

The joint effect of PF, Group, and feelings of unfavorability toward the outgroup on evaluations of disloyal targets was significant, $F(6, 64) = 10.28, p < .001$. The whole model accounted for 49% of the variance. Feelings of unfavorability toward the outgroup were significantly negatively related to PF, $b = -.35, SE = .12, t = -2.82, p = .006$. In other words, those who felt more negative toward the outgroup also were more attuned to the prescriptive loyalty norms.

Evaluations of disloyal targets were significantly affected by PF, $b = -1.03, SE = .21, t = -4.78, p < .001$. There was no direct effect of feelings of unfavorability toward the outgroup, $b = .06, SE = .08, t = .73, p = .47$ and no significant effect of Group, $b = -.98, SE = .57, t = -1.72, p = .08$. The interaction between Group x PF was significant, $b = -.42, SE = .13, t = 3.13, p = .002$. An inspection of the conditional indirect effect showed that there was a larger effect of PF for the ingroup, $b = .21, SE = .09, 95CI = .07$ to $.41$, compared to the outgroup $b = .07, SE = .05, 95CI = .002$ to $.19$.

General Discussion

These studies investigated how individuals evaluate group members who leave their group in a competitive intergroup context. We hypothesized that although individuals would prefer normative over disloyal targets, the effect would be stronger for ingroup members than for outgroup members. In addition, we predicted that defection (i.e., joining a competing outgroup) rather than desertion (i.e., merely leaving the group) would trigger more extreme judgments of ingroup versus outgroup targets. Across three studies, involving participants from three countries, several types of group membership, and two different paradigms, results supported our hypotheses.

Experiment 1 showed that while ingroup normative members were evaluated more positively than outgroup normative members, the reverse applied to evaluations of defectors. This pattern is consistent with SGD and the black sheep effect. Notably, this effect emerged

in the context of a MGP, showing the importance people may attach to applying the loyalty norm to ingroup members (Abrams et al., 2004; Levine & Moreland, 2002).

Experiment 2 extended those results showing that the black sheep effect emerged only for ingroup defectors but not deserters. In the context of a MGP, ingroup defectors were evaluated less positively than ingroup deserters, and the latter were not differentiated from outgroup deserters. This suggests that unfavorable evaluations are not necessarily directed at people who leave the ingroup, but may be reserved for those who directly blur the boundaries between groups (cf. Brewer & Silver, 2000). In Experiment 2 the outgroup normative target was evaluated more positively when paired with a deserter than when paired with a defector. This result was unexpected, tangential to our key hypothesis, and was not replicated in Experiment 3. A possibility is that in the context in which the Experiment 2 took place (India) the presence of a defector triggers a more negative appraisal of the outgroup. It remains a task for future research to further explore evaluations of normative targets across different contexts.

Experiment 3 replicated results from Experiments 1 and 2 in the context of self-assigned categories. Experiment 3 also investigated a possible explanation for the evaluations of disloyalty. Specifically, individuals who held more negative outgroup attitudes also perceived disloyalty more negatively (cf. Levine & Moreland, 2002). Consistent with the ‘social reaction’ approach to deviance literature (e.g., Lauderdale et al., 1984), this linkage was attributable to the application of a stronger prescriptive focus. Furthermore, while this process accounted for evaluations of both ingroup and outgroup disloyal targets, it was more pronounced towards ingroup members.

The findings are also consistent with the idea that intergroup competition sharpens a prescriptive focus, and it is this focus that determines the evaluative reactions to individuals who break the rules (e.g., [Lauderdale, 1976](#)). This is an example of the interdependence

between intragroup relations and intergroup processes (cf. [Abrams, 2013](#); [Dovidio, 2013](#)).

However, to understand whether competition per se or specifically ingroup-outgroup competition is sufficient to have these effects, a task for future research is to investigate whether defectors are negatively evaluated if they join a non-competitive outgroup. Future research should also focus upon differences in the psychological correlates for evaluations of defectors and deserters.

Another interesting feature of these studies is the analysis of evaluations of outgroup defectors. Across studies the outgroup defectors were joining the ingroup, but they were not evaluated particularly favorably. In Experiment 1 and 2, they were evaluated less positively than outgroup normative members. In Experiment 3, they were neither differentiated from an outgroup normative target nor from a deserter. Perhaps outgroup defectors are initially regarded with suspicion (due to their disloyalty) and with caution, owing to their negative impact on the clarity of intergroup boundaries (e.g., [Turner et al., 1987](#)). Indeed, when the UK Conservative MP Woodward crossed the floor and joined the Labour, in spite of the benefits the Labour party gained from his defection, he was sharply criticized by members of both parties on the ground that his actions would negatively impact on the general public's perception of politics. These observations are consistent with the idea that individuals who have newly defected to join the ingroup from the outgroup undergo a phase of marginality ([Levine & Moreland, 1994](#)) during which it becomes particularly important to show allegiances to the ingroup ([Moreland, 1985](#)) before they are fully accepted.

Across experiments, participants' identification with the ingroup did not moderate the findings (see Note 1). This might seem surprising because stronger identification with the ingroup could be expected to relate to more negative evaluations of disloyal targets (cf. [Levine & Moreland, 2002](#)). Identification may have been at sufficient levels that variation did not have such effects. Moreover, results from Experiment 2 and 3 suggest participants'

concern not to strengthen the outgroup, rather than exclusive concern with the ingroup, was important in these experiments. Ingroup defectors, but not deserters, caused the emergence of the black sheep effect. In addition, in Experiment 3, which used groups that mattered to participants, outgroup but not ingroup attitudes predicted evaluations of disloyal targets from both groups (see Note 4). Nonetheless, there are situations in which ingroup identification moderates individuals' assessment of attitudinal disloyalty (Abrams & Rutland, 2008) and therefore future research needs to address whether it can affect assessment of behavioral desertion and defection.

Future Directions and Conclusions

This series of experiments is the first to investigate people's reactions to individuals who leave their groups for different reasons in a competitive intergroup context. While disloyal targets were derogated across groups, the key finding is that ingroup defectors are subject to particularly strong derogation. In line with SGD and the black sheep effect, ingroup defectors are evaluated more negatively than ingroup deserters and outgroup defectors.

Questions of loyalty and disloyalty represent an inherently rich and complex set of problems for groups. This series of studies open the way to a set of interesting research questions. In particular, future research should investigate the different elements that may influence group members' reactions to disloyal targets.

Many factors at different levels of analysis are likely to influence reactions to disloyalty (cf. Levine & Moreland, 2002). Specifically, characteristics of the disloyal target, and of the context are likely to play a role in how group members react to deviants. All things being equal, groups are highly motivated to retain those members that contribute more to the group success and thus express harsher reactions against those who take the decision to leave (Levine et al., 1998). In addition, the centrality of the member is also likely to play a role in the assessment of desertion and defection because more central members are more likely to

trigger most extreme evaluations (Pinto et al., 2010). Centrality and quantity of contribution may interact in interesting ways, so that marginal but high-contribution members may spark greater group ire than central, but low-contribution members who leave the group (cf. Ellemers & Jetten, 2012). Moreover, the degree of perceived intergroup threat also might moderate individuals' appraisal of disloyal targets. Breaches of the loyalty norm may be perceived more negatively when the positive ingroup distinctiveness is threatened. Conversely, a non-threatening context might mitigate the appraisal of disloyalty. The development and origins of reactions to disloyalty are also of interest (Abrams, 2011b; Abrams & Rutland, 2008; Abrams, et al., 2008).

Finally, future research might investigate the effect of desertion and defection on groups. As contended by Levine and Moreland (1985), ex-members may still influence the course of action of a group as group members engage in the remembrance phase. For instance, evaluations of current members may change as a function of when/why other members left. A group may adopt either more lenient or stringent criteria to incorporate newcomers (cf. Moreland & McMinn, 2009). In addition, deserters and defectors may impact differently on individuals' and groups' need for optimal distinctiveness (Brewer & Silver, 2000). To conclude, our findings suggest that in both real and minimal groups people strongly value loyalty. Consequently, groups may be more inclined to derogate those who seek another's embrace than to those who merely leave their own.

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¹Across studies, we measured identification with the ingroup. In all the studies, the mean level of identification was significantly higher than the scale midpoint (4), $M_{\text{Study 1}} = 5.02$, $SE_{\text{Study 1}} = 0.14$, $t_{\text{Study 1}}(43) = 7.10$, $p_{\text{Study 1}} < .001$, $\eta^2_{\text{Study 1}} = .54$, $M_{\text{Study 2}} = 5.44$, $SE_{\text{Study 2}} = .14$, $t_{\text{Study 2}}(78) = 10.28$, $p_{\text{Study 2}} < .001$, $\eta^2_{\text{Study 2}} = .57$, and $M_{\text{Study 3}} = 6.24$, $SE_{\text{Study 3}} = 0.10$, $t_{\text{Study 3}}(79) = 23.04$, $p_{\text{Study 3}} < .001$, $\eta^2_{\text{Study 3}} = .87$, respectively. However, across studies no main effects or significant interactions involving identification were detected and because this measure was not affected by conditions, identification is not discussed further.

²To check that the failure on the manipulation check was independent from conditions, chi-square tests of independence were performed to examine the relation between the excluded cases and Group, and excluded cases and Motive. In both cases, the relation between these variables was not significant ($\chi^2(1, N = 100) = 1.70$, $p = .36$ and $\chi^2(1, N = 100) = 1.59$, $p = .25$, respectively) showing that exclusion was not systematically related to conditions.

³To test whether the type of group named affected the results, we dummy coded the four-level variable and added the set of dummies as covariates in the repeated measure ANOVA on evaluations, prescriptive focus and in the test of conditional indirect effect. The general pattern of results presented here is not affected (and sometimes even strengthen) when the dummy variables are added to the analyses. More details about these analyses are available at request by the first author.

⁴Individuals significantly favored the ingroup ($M = 6.40$, $SD = .98$) over the outgroup ($M = 3.36$, $SD = 1.81$), $t(72) = 12.80$, $p < .001$. To test whether ingroup attitude had an impact on evaluations of the defectors over and beyond outgroup attitudes, the variables were simultaneously entered as predictors in a multiple regressions model. Only attitudes towards the outgroup significantly predicted Evaluations, $\beta = .34$, $p = .004$, while attitude towards the ingroup were not significant related, $\beta = .10$, $p = .37$. The two variables together explained 13% of the variance in the DV. The model was significant, $F(2, 70) = 4.99$, $p = .009$.

Table 1. Effects of Group Membership on Evaluations of Normative and Disloyal Group Members (SE in parentheses).

	Ingroup (SE)	Outgroup (SE)
Target		
Disloyal	3.13 (.16)	3.66 (.20)
Normative	5.38 (.15)	4.51 (.19)

Table 2. Effects of Group Membership, and Motive on Evaluations of Normative and Disloyal Group Members (SE in parentheses).

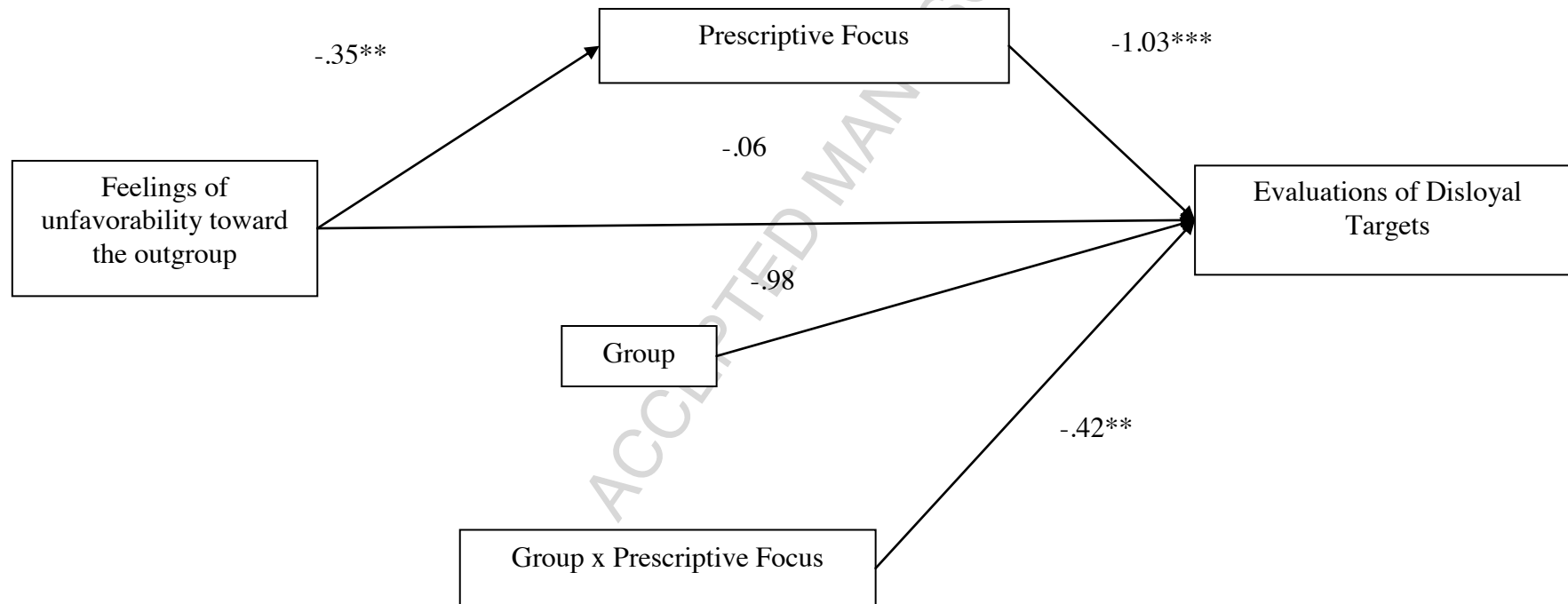
Measure	Group Motive	Ingroup		Outgroup	
		Desertion (SE)	Defection (SE)	Desertion (SE)	Defection (SE)
Evaluation	Disloyal	3.97 (.22)	3.22 (.21)	3.53 (.22)	3.84 (.18)
	Normative	5.61 (.22)	5.74 (.22)	5.62 (.21)	4.92 (.18)

Table 3. Effects of Group Membership, and Motive on Evaluations and Prescriptive Focus of Normative and Disloyal Group Members (SE in parentheses).

Measure	Group Motive	Ingroup		Outgroup	
		Desertion (SE)	Defection (SE)	Desertion (SE)	Defection (SE)
Evaluation	Disloyal	4.73 (.31)	3.26 (.33)	4.15 (.32)	4.56 (.29)
	Normative	5.89 (.24)	6.14 (.26)	4.30 (.25)	4.82 (.23)
Prescriptive Focus	Disloyal	3.22 (.43)	4.87 (.45)	3.39 (.42)	3.60 (.40)
	Normative	1.72 (.30)	1.43 (.32)	2.61 (.30)	1.85 (.29)

Figure 1.

Experiment 3: Mediated moderation model showing coefficients for the indirect effect of Feelings of Unfavorability toward the Outgroup on Evaluations of Disloyal Targets via Prescriptive Focus.



Note: * $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$, *** $p < .001$. Ingroup Favoritism and Normative Target Evaluations are covariates in the model.

Highlights

- The paper tests how people react to disloyal ingroup and outgroup members
- Compared to ingroup deserters, only ingroup defectors trigger a black sheep effect
- Reactions to disloyalty are explained by a focus on prescriptive norms
- Negative attitudes toward the outgroup motivate prescriptive focus on disloyalty