Abstract

Prior research established that when ingroup leaders commit serious transgressions, such as breaking enforceable rules or engaging in bribery, people treat them leniently compared with similarly transgressive regular group members or outgroup leaders ('transgression credit'). The present studies test a boundary condition of this phenomenon, specifically the hypothesis that transgression credit will be lost if a leader's action implies racist motivation. In study 1, in a corporate scenario, a transgressive ingroup leader did or did not express racism. In study 2, in a sports scenario, an ingroup or outgroup leader or member transgressed rules with or without a racist connotation. Both studies showed that ingroup transgressive leaders lost their transgression credit if their transgression included a racial connotation. Wider implications for constraining leaders' transgressions are discussed.

A step too far? Leader racism inhibits transgression credit

In contemporary societies, expressions of racism are perceived as a moral taboo (Fiske, 1998; Monin & Miller, 2001; see Haidt, Rozin, McCauley, & Imada, 1997). Individuals go to great lengths in order to avoid signaling racism (Crocker, Major, & Steele, 1998; Effron, Cameron, & Monin, 2009). When confronted with ambiguous choices involving race, individuals act in a way that affirms their moral standing (Merritt et al., 2012).

At the intergroup level, the presence of racist ingroup members may tarnish the group's reputation. Specifically, van Leeuwen, van den Bosch, Castano, and Hopman (2010) showed that when an outgroup failed to reject a member who had made racist comments, the group was perceived as more racist. Ingroup members' expressions of racism are therefore likely to represent a threat to the group's reputation because they break a taboo that most groups might wish to avoid (Dovidio, 2001). Consequently, it seems plausible that groups may wish to distance themselves from members who express racism.

Consistent with this research, central members of political parties seem subject to harsh and swift reactions if they are suspected of racism, in spite (or because) of their role. For example, Don Yelton, a North Carolina GOP chair, was forced to resign following a racist comment during an interview. The Republican Party was quick to issue a statement claiming that 'in no way are [Yelton's] comments representative of the local or state Republican Party'. The same fate befell Godfrey Bloom, a member of the European Parliament representing the UK Independence Party, when he made pronouncements that were judged to be racist.

The 2014 European Parliament elections revealed a notable shift in public support towards far right leaning political parties, such as the Front National in France and the UK Independence Party (UKIP) in the UK. Despite the clear policy focus of Front National and UKIP on restricting or eliminating immigration and on prioritizing 'true' members of the country (defined in rather essentialist terms), leaders of both parties were careful during their campaigns to insist that they—and hence their party—were not racist. It seems plausible that this reflected the leader's desire to demonstrate commitment to the group's (potentially racist) ideology while at the same time ensuring s/he maintained credibility within the larger intergroup context by avoiding being labeled racist.

On the other hand, examples of corrupt or immoral leader- ship abound (Kellerman, 2004; cf. Ludwig & Longenecker, 1993). Such leadership can have catastrophic consequences (e.g. the 2008 banking crisis). Nevertheless, individuals may tolerate questionable leaders (Shapiro, Boss, Salas, Tangirala, & Von Glinow, 2011) or their transgressions from general rules of conduct (Karelaia & Keck, 2013; Sutton & Jordan, 2013). Indeed, group leaders who deviate from norms may be tolerated more than deviant members. For example, new ingroup leaders who championed counter-normative attitudes were evaluated more

favorably than comparable members—these leaders were granted 'innovation credit' (Abrams, Randsley de Moura, Marques, & Hutchinson, 2008). Moreover, recent research spanning different sport and business contexts, and different domains (e.g. team captains, leaders of ad hoc minimal groups, university chairs), showed that leaders who transgressed established rules or laws were evaluated less harshly than members who com- mitted the same transgressions (Abrams, Randsley de Moura, & Travaglino, 2013; Randsley de Moura & Abrams, 2013). Importantly, like innovation credit, this 'transgression credit' was only granted to ingroup leaders. Note that transgression is distinct from non-conformity. Transgression involves contravention of formal rules, whereas non-conformity may only involve divergence from salient norms (Abrams et al., 2013).

According to subjective group dynamics theory (SGD; e.g. Marques, Abrams, Páez, & Hogg, 2001), people's evaluations of group members reflect their motivation to sustain the subjective validity (including coherence and value) of the ingroup relative to the outgroup. Therefore, they endorse well-established (e.g. long serving) normative members (Pinto, Marques, Levine, & Abrams, 2010), derogate ingroup deviants, and, under some circumstances, even praise outgroup deviants (e.g. Abrams, Marques, Bown, & Henson, 2000).

When judging transgressive ingroup leaders, however, members face a dilemma. Given the centrality of a leader for defining the group image (Haslam, Reicher, & Platow, 2011; Hogg, 2001; Hogg, van Knippenberg, & Rast, 2012), members who withhold approval of a leader might risk seeming disloyal. Failing to support a leader might also disrupt the group's functioning and hence disadvantage the group (van Knippenberg, van Knippenberg, & Bobbio, 2008). Consistent with these ideas, a necessary condition for transgression credit is that members must not perceive the leader's action to be motivated by concern for personal gain and self-interest (Abrams et al., 2013; study 5). Research has yet to demonstrate whether other variables can moderate transgression credit.

In this paper, we depart from previous research by examining how individuals respond to leaders' transgressions that have the potential to reflect negatively on the group and damage its social standing and reputation. Specifically, we propose that the transgression credit to leaders might be withheld if the leaders' actions could be perceived as racist. Thus, we test an important boundary condition for transgression credit.

Previous research has demonstrated that leaders (as distinct from members) appear to be granted transgression credit for immoral acts as long as these acts are clearly not self-interested. However, be- cause racism creates a moral taint that affects the group's position not just vis-à-vis an outgroup but vis-à-vis society in general and because leaders are highly salient representatives of their groups, we expect that members will withhold transgression credit if the transgression is associated with racist sentiment.

Overview and Pilot Studies

Experiments 1 and 2 examined individuals' evaluations of transgressive leaders in a business and sport scenario, respectively (for further details see Abrams et al., 2013; Randsley de Moura & Abrams, 2013). We tested whether including a racist innuendo affected individuals' evaluations of transgressive leaders.

To test the effectiveness of the racism manipulation, we conducted two pilot studies (*N*=23 and *N*=25) with British non-psychology students recruited at the university library and café. In both pilot studies, participants were assigned randomly to conditions in a between-subject design (transgression: racism versus non-racism). Participants were asked whether a statement was racist and to what extent the speaker was being loyal to the group/team on a 7-point scale (1 = *not at all* to 7 = *completely*).

In the first pilot, participants read a brief scenario asking them to imagine that some public organizations were competing for important funds to pay for a swimming pool. Participants were informed that there was a board meeting between the members of one of the organizations in order to discuss a proposal to be presented to a grant funding agency [called local enterprise partnership (LEP)]. Participants were also informed that the members of the organization were aware that the wife of one of the members shared the same art appreciation group as the LEP's president.

In the non-racism condition, participants read: "Ok, now a bit off the record please, I know it is against the rules, but I think what we should do is to send a convincing 'gift' to the president of the LEP panel. You know, just to help to make his mind up. To facilitate things. We all know that we have this connection between one of our members and the panel president. Why shouldn't we take advantage of it?" In the racism condition, participants read an identical statement but with the following additional sentence: "After all, most of the members of the other organization are foreigners from who-knows-where. They've got plenty of swimming pools in their own countries". As expected, the statement was perceived as more racist in the racism condition (M = 5.30, SD = 1.54), than in the non-racism condition (M = 1.80, SD = 1.03), $t(21) = 6.17$, $p < .001$. However, no differences were found concerning the perceived loyalty of the speaker (M = 4.53, SD = .97, and M = 4.10, SD=1.20), $t(21)=.97$, $p=.34$.

In a second pilot, participants were asked to imagine a competitive soccer game between two teams. They read that during the game, there was a clash between two players of two different nationalities. They were then informed that one of the players (the speaker) involved in the clash was quoted as saying: "You idiot, watch yourself and go to hell" (non-racism condition). In the racism condition, the (almost identical) statement was "You idiot, watch yourself and go the hell back to your country". As expected, the statement was perceived as being more racist in the racism condition (M = 6.21, SD = 1.21), compared with the non-racism condition (M = 1.36, SD = 1.67), $t(23) = 11.13$, $p < .001$. However, perceptions of the speaker's loyalty (M = 3.71, SD = 1.73, and M = 3.60, SD = 0.47) did not vary across conditions, $t(23) = .18$, $ps = .86$.

In sum, those two pilot studies showed that individuals correctly distinguished between the racist and non-racist statements designed for use in the two experiments that follow. However, no differences were found between speakers' perceived loyalty.

Experiment 1

Method

Participants and Design

Fifty introductory psychology students participated as part of a course requirement and were assigned randomly to judge a leader who transgressed either with or without racist sentiment.

Procedure and Materials

Based on a similar paradigm in previous research (Randsley de Moura & Abrams, 2013), using the Qualtrics online platform, participants read about an interuniversity competition for a 'LEP' government investment that could ultimately generate substantial revenues and important services for students and faculty, specifically a (highly desired) university swimming pool. After a tough selection procedure, their university (Kent) and a similarly ranked outgroup university [Royal Holloway University of London (RHUL)] had been shortlisted. Representatives from both universities were about to have a series of meetings with the LEP. The LEP's chief executive had recently been profiled in the Business Section of The Times Newspaper, reporting that the chief executive had a designer house containing an impressive collection of modern art and that the chief executive's wife and the spouse of a member of Kent's senate happened to share the same art appreciation group.

Participants were then told that they would be reading some (anonymized) relevant transcriptions from an informal pre- meeting discussion conducted by the members of the ingroup delegation. They were asked to select any two of four people (named A, B, C, D) so that they could be shown randomly selected statements from an individual from the beginning, middle, and end of the discussion. These statements were generally simply positive suggestions about how to be persuasive. In fact, all participants were informed that they had selected the leader of the delegation. Embedded among the leader's statements was the manipulation of transgression. According to condition, participants read the statements from pilot 1, specifying the ingroup and outgroup university, and referring to 'students' rather than members. The statement either included or did not include a racist component.

Participants used a _50 to +50 slider scale to indicate how they felt towards the leader and used a 7-point scale (1 = *strongly disapprove*, 7 = *strongly approve*) to show how much they approved of the leader.

Results and Discussion

Both feelings (M = -11.46, SD = 22.49) and approval (M = 3.04, SD = 1.35) towards the leader were below the scale midpoints (t (49) = 18.92, 5.01, respectively, ps < .001), indicating negative evaluations. Because the two measures were highly correlated (r =.80), we standardized both scores and computed a mean. Evaluations of the transgressive leader were significantly harsher in the racism condition than in the non-racism condition, D = .60, SE = .27, t (48) = 2.18, p = .034. This is consistent with our hypothesis that, other things being equal, a transgressive ingroup leader is evaluated less positively if the transgression involves a racist component.

Experiment 2

Experiment 1 provided a first test of our hypotheses in a corporate scenario. Experiment 2 extended the test, contrasting a transgression that either included or did not include a racist sentiment in a sport scenario. Experiment 2 also presents a full test of transgression credit by including evaluations of other relevant targets including outgroup targets. Transgression credit occurs if the transgressive ingroup leader is judged more favorably than a similar outgroup leader and transgressive members from either group (Abrams et al., 2013). We predict that transgression credit will arise in the non-racism condition but not in the racism condition.

The sports context is well suited for testing our hypotheses because it provides a simplified (yet reliable) context for the investigation of larger organizational processes, both in terms of structural similitude and of sociopsychological mechanisms implied (Day, Gordon, & Fink, 2012). We adapted a paradigm from Abrams et al. (2013) in which a soccer captain (versus player) in a team transgresses the rules of the game by hurling abuse at an opposing player.

Method

Participants and Design

Members of sports teams at University of Kent sports clubs were invited to participate in a study of perceptions of sports situations (N = 120, 92 male, M_{age} = 30.2 years), all of whom expressed an interest in soccer. Analyses revealed no effects of age or gender, so these were not considered further. Participants were assigned randomly to conditions in a mixed- model factorial design 2 (team: in-group versus out-group) × 2 (transgressor: captain versus player) × (type: non-racism versus racism) × (target: normative, transgressive). Target was a within-participants factor.

Procedure and Materials

Participants identified the soccer team they supported and named their team's main rival, as in Abrams et al. (2013). This method ensures salience of the intergroup competition and samples across multiple ingroup–outgroup pairs, thereby widening the generalizability of the evidence.

Participants thought of the captain and a player from their soccer team or their main rival team, then read a scenario involving a crucial game against the rival team where winning was essential. Either the ingroup (or the outgroup) captain (or player) clashed with an opposing player and then 'advanced aggressively against the opposing player and, while the referee was distant, shouted at the opposing player'.

In the non-racism condition, the transgressor shouted: "you idiot, watch yourself and go to hell". In the racism condition, this was modified to, "You idiot, watch yourself and go the hell back to your country". Participants then read that when the referee came into earshot, the transgressor stopped the abusive language. The story concluded by stating that while the other target disagrees with what he saw, he did not say any- thing and continued to play normally. Finally, the transgressor was described as refusing to engage in the customary handshake with opposing team players at the end of the game.

Participants completed the evaluation measure from Abrams et al. (2013). They were asked to rate (from 1 = *not at all*, 7 = *completely*) the extent to which each target was likeable, friendly, warm, approachable, and nice (αs > .92). The questionnaire included additional non-evaluative measures as part of a wider validation study and which are beyond the scope of the present paper.

Results and Discussion

Across participants, 31 different teams were supported, and 29 different main rivals were nominated, all from the same country. A group (ingroup versus outgroup) × transgressor (captain versus player)×type (non-racism versus racism) × target (transgressive, normative) ANOVA was performed with repeated measures on the target factor (Table 1).

There were significant main effects of Group, $F (1, 112) = 52.85$, $p<.001$, η2=.27; transgressor, $F (1, 112)=7.39$, $p=.008$, η2 =.04; and type, $F (1, 112)=11.13$, $p<.001$, η2 =.05. Ingroup targets were judged more favorably ($M = 3.65$, $SE = .088$) than outgroup targets ($M = 2.74$, $SE = .088$), $p < .001$). Targets were judged more favorably when transgressors were captains (M = 3.36, SE = .088) rather than players ($M = 3.02$, $SE = .088$), p = .004. Targets were judged more favorably when there was a non-racial transgression ($M=3.40$, $SE=.088$) than when there was a racial one ($M = 2.99$, $SE = .088$), $p < .001$.

Target interacted significantly with transgressor, $F (1, 112) = 107.80$, $p < .001$, η2 = .39, and with type, $F (1, 112) = 17.59$, $p < .001$, η2 = .07. There were significant three-way interactions for target × group × type, $F (1, 112) = 9.47$, $p = .003$, η2 =

.03, and target × transgressor × type, $F (1, 112) = 22.43$, $p < .001$, $\eta2 = .08$ and group × transgressor × type, $F (1, 112) = 7.24$, $p = .008$, $\eta2 = .04$. All these were qualified by a target × group × transgressor × type interaction, $F (1, 112) = 5.20$, $p = .024$, $\eta2 = .02$. Consistent with the predicted differences in transgression credit, the simple group × transgressor × target interaction was significant in the non-racism condition, $F (1, 112) = 5.09$, $p = .03$, $\eta2 = .01$ but not in the racism condition, $F (1, 112) = 3.27$, $p = .07$, $\eta2 = .01$. Note that these two interactions differ in form. In the non-racism condition, a transgressive ingroup captain was favored more than a transgressive player. In the racism condition, the transgressive ingroup captain was favored less than an ingroup transgressive player. Moreover, the simple group × type × target interaction was significant in the captain condition, $F (1, 112) = 14.36$, $p < .001$, $\eta2 = .05$ but not in the player condition, $F (1, 112) = .32$, $p = .57$, $\eta2 = .001$ (Figure 1). In the player condition, all transgressive players were judged less favorably than normative players. In the captain condition, all transgressors except the non-racist ingroup captain were judged less favorably than normative captains.

Our focal prediction was that the non-racist ingroup captain would be evaluated more favorably than other transgressors. As predicted, the pairwise difference between evaluations of the non-racist and racist transgressor was significant only when the transgressor was the ingroup captain ($F (1, 112) = 57.33$, $p < .001$, $\eta2 = .28$. All other transgressive targets received unfavorable evaluations whether or not the transgression involved racism (largest $F = 2.93$, $p > .09$).

General Discussion

Previous research showed that transgression credit is given to an ingroup team captain who breaks the rules of the game and to an organizational leader who proposes serious illegal acts such as bribery or blackmail (Abrams et al., 2013; Randsley de Moura & Abrams, 2013). However, we have now shown an important qualification of the transgression credit effect. If ingroup leaders express racist sentiment, they contravene a salient moral taboo that may bring the whole group into societal disrepute, and consequently, they no longer benefit from transgression credit.

Experiment 1 showed that such a leader receives significantly less favorable responses if the transgression is accompanied by racist sentiment. Notably, in both the racist and non- racist condition, the leader was seeking to gain an advantage over an outgroup, but it seems that an implication of racist motive is sufficient to quell favorability towards the leader.

Experiment 2 used a different paradigm, context and type of participants to test whether transgression credit would be denied to a racist ingroup leader. Consistent with findings by Abrams et al. (2013), an ingroup soccer captain who transgressed the rules of the game was evaluated more favorably than either an ingroup player or outgroup captains or players who acted similarly. However, when the ingroup captain also expressed racist sentiment, the transgression

credit disappeared. In fact, this maps to a real world example. The captain of Chelsea soccer team, John Terry, was fined and banned for four games after making racist remarks to an opposing player. To demonstrate the validity of his repentance, Terry was required to wear an anti-racist armband in order to retain the captaincy of the team.

Might it be that, beyond being non-racist, leaders are not expected to derogate outgroups? This possibility could be addressed in future research, along with the broader question of whether leaders are expected to avoid all forms of prejudice. However, we note that ingroup leaders may sometimes be condoned rather than criticized for negative treatment of out- groups (Platow, Hoar, Reid, Harley, & Morrison, 1997). Moreover, the racism expressed in the present studies was not directed at the outgroup category as a whole. Indeed, in both studies the ingroup and outgroup shared the same nationality. Therefore, when both transgression and racism are clearly non-normative (as evidenced by responses to all transgressive members), the distinctive feature that eliminated transgression credit to the ingroup leader was whether that leader expressed racist sentiment during the transgression.

These findings are consistent with the idea that people use multiple criteria for judging the acceptability of transgressions (Haidt et al., 1997), and we have shown that leadership is a special case. Our evidence shows that group members' responses to others' transgressions depend not only on the transgression itself but also on the role and the group membership of the transgressor and the implications for the group's image. These findings on reactions to racism have particular relevance for the strategies used by leaders that aim to promote xenophobic beliefs and attitudes. The wider implication is that invoking standards for judgment that are societal (such as the racism taboo), rather than group-specific (such as group-serving motivation), can be a vehicle for constraining transgressive leadership.

As well as complementing and extending previous research on the prejudice taboo to address the way it affects evaluations of leadership, these studies also established that expressing counter-normative racism sets a boundary condition for transgression credit to ingroup leaders. We are, however, conscious that some groups actively and explicitly promote racism, and so, an important future research question is how they, and their leaders, manage to sustain their own value even if they are aware that such views are likely to attract highly negative societal reactions.

Given the present findings, it is interesting to consider whether and how a racist subgroup or extremist faction that wishes to actively promote racism or xenophobia may try to insulate itself against external criticism. It is notable that even leaders of far right political parties may choose to tread carefully—perhaps aiming to benefit either from 'innovation credit' or even some transgression credit (e.g. flouting procedural

and other rules) from their ingroup but yet carefully rejecting any accusations that they are 'racist' (see Verkuyten, 2013). Clearly, however, there do exist political and other groupings that are explicitly racist. Therefore, if society is to find ways to challenge such groups, an important line of inquiry is to investigate how they sustain such positions in the context of external pressure.

A further question is how extreme a leader's expression of prejudice has to be to precipitate efforts to depose the leader. In the present study, the racist expressions were fairly mild, but we might assume that a more blatant and direct form of racial abuse or racist attitude may be enough to force a leader's resignation because a leader, being a unique and central group member, cannot readily be reformed. It may be that the thresh- olds for removing racist members would be higher because they can more easily be 'resocialised' to conform to more acceptable limits (Levine & Moreland, 1994). Compared with leaders, members are also more readily substitutable, and therefore, an individual member who expresses racism may pose less of a threat to the group's credibility.

Finally, although we have identified one important boundary condition for transgression credit, further research is clearly needed to test other potential moderators of the effect. These might include other actions that elicit disgust or moral outrage, other factors affecting the reputation of the group, the degree of potential threat to the group such as its relative status (Tajfel & Turner, 1979), its size relative to other groups (cf. Mullen, 1991); the degree of conflict with other groups (Sherif, 1966); and factors relating to the particular characteristics of the leader and members (Levine & Moreland, 1994), or leader member exchange (Shapiro et al., 2011).

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