



How groups react to disloyalty in the context of intergroup competition: Evaluations of group deserters and defectors[☆]



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HIGHLIGHTS

- Three studies investigate groups' reactions to disloyal ingroup and outgroup members.
- Compared to ingroup deserters, only ingroup defectors trigger the black sheep effect.
- Reactions to disloyalty are explained by a focus on prescriptive norms.
- Negative attitudes toward the outgroup motivate prescriptive focus on disloyalty.

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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 (Experiments 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 normative 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.

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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. 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 & Mastrorade, 2009), flexibility and mobility in employment

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(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 joins 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, 2013). 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 that is 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, 2011a). 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, 2011a,b; 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 the 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 cases 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, Reicher, & Wetherell, 1987). This suggests that a member who defects to a competing outgroup should trigger harsher

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