

Individualist and collectivist norms: when it's ok to go your own way

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Abstract

We conducted two studies to investigate the influence of group norms endorsing individualism and collectivism on the evaluations of group members who display individualist or collectivist behaviour. It was reasoned that, overall, collectivist behaviour benefits the group and would be evaluated more positively than would individualist behaviour. However, it was further predicted that this preference would be attenuated by the specific content of the group norm. Namely, when norms prescribed individualism, we expected that preferences for collectivist behaviour over individualist behaviour would be attenuated, as individualist behaviour would, paradoxically, represent normative behaviour. These predictions were supported across two studies in which we manipulated norms of individualism and collectivism in an organizational role-play. Furthermore, in Study 2, we found evidence for the role of group identification in moderating the effects of norms. The results are discussed with reference to social identity theory and cross-cultural work on individualism and collectivism. Copyright © 2002 John Wiley & Sons, Ltd.

Numerous studies have been conducted to map out which countries and cultures tend to endorse values of collectivism, and which support values of individualism (e.g. Hofstede, 1980, 1991; Schwartz, 1994; Triandis et al., 1986). From this research, it is generally agreed that collectivism is prevalent in East Asia, Latin America, and parts of Eastern Europe. Individualism prevails in Australia, North America, and Western Europe. In collectivist cultures, people tend to define themselves in terms of their place in the larger collective. They place greater emphasis on maintaining group harmony, and are more ready to sacrifice their personal goals in order to further the goals of the group (Triandis, 1989; Triandis, Bontempo, Villareal, Asai, & Lucca, 1988). Behaviour in collectivist cultures is more strongly guided by group norms, and drives for uniqueness or independence are likely to be viewed as immature (e.g. Kim & Markus, 1999; Triandis, 1995). In contrast, members of individualist cultures tend to be more autonomous. In individualist cultures, personal goals are generally prioritized over collective goals, and people define themselves in terms of their independence from groups, and their individuality (Triandis,

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1989; Triandis et al., 1988). Consistent with this, recent research shows that internal or individual factors are more important than group norms in predicting life satisfaction for members of individualist cultures (Suh, Diener, Oishi, & Triandis, 1998), whereas norms and individual factors are equally important in predicting the life satisfaction for people in collectivist cultures.

Although individualism and collectivism are often associated with national cultures, they do not always obey geographical boundaries. In organizations and work groups, for example, norms of individualism or collectivism can emerge independent of the wider national culture. In individualistic countries, for example, it is common to find military, work, and sporting organizations that advocate norms of collectivism. Furthermore, even in strongly collectivist cultures, members of specific social groups such as university students and artists may experience pressures to differentiate themselves from others and to express their individual selves. Thus, the language of individualism and collectivism is just as relevant to smaller groups as it is to larger geographical categories.

In the present research, we draw on principles of social identity theory (Tajfel & Turner, 1986) and self-categorization theory (Turner, Hogg, Oakes, Reicher, & Wetherell, 1987) to investigate how evaluations of collectivist and individualist behaviour are influenced, sometimes in paradoxical ways, by group norms that endorse collectivism or individualism. We argue that, traditionally, collectivist behaviour is perceived as synonymous with what is considered to be 'good' and acceptable group member behaviour, whereas individualist behaviour is seen as deviation from group norms. However, we predict that preferences for collectivist behaviour will be attenuated, or even reversed, when group members are motivated to conform to group norms that prescribe individualism.

INDIVIDUALISM AND COLLECTIVISM: A SOCIAL IDENTITY PERSPECTIVE

Proponents of the social identity perspective assume that identification with a group shifts perception such that the self and other group members are seen less as distinct individuals and more as interchangeable exemplars of the group prototype (Turner et al., 1987). This process—referred to as 'depersonalization'—results in group members assimilating to the norm of the group and causes 'stereotypical social uniformities in behaviour, attitudes and perceptions' (Hogg & Turner, 1987, p. 148). Thus, there is a tendency in social identity and self-categorization theory research to view group behaviour as a process of people subsuming their individual identity to the norms and values of their group. Indeed, those who do not uphold normative expectations of the group can expect derogation by other group members. Interestingly, this derogation is more extreme than would be afforded an outgroup member who displays similar behaviour (e.g. Abrams, Marques, Bown, & Henson, 2000; Marques, Abrams, Paez, & Martinez-Toboda, 1998). From this perspective, it can be argued that those who seek individual differentiation are less committed to the group, and strong group identification militates against individual differentiation (e.g. Hogg & Turner, 1987; Turner, 1991).

In this sense, the language of social identity and self-categorization theory has a strong collectivist flavor and tends to focus predominately on the collective self (Hogg, 2001). This strong emphasis on collectivism is not surprising, however, when we consider that conformity and endorsement of the group's goals and norms are usually beneficial for the group's success and well-being. A group fares well when its members give preference to social goals over their personal goals and when they are generally concerned with maintaining harmony (Hofstede, 1980). In contrast, although individualism is generally valued in western society because of its association with freedom and uniqueness, it is likely to be less appreciated than collectivist behaviour within a group context. In fact, individualism within many groups and organizations may reasonably be interpreted as deviance because it threatens the unity and productivity of the group.

Nevertheless, individualism need not be inconsistent with social identity principles. The idea that individualism can be a legitimate part of group life is a concept that can be traced back to the work of Durkheim (1893/1984). Durkheim argued that, as a society becomes more individualised (i.e., everyone performs a different task), there will be a greater sense of community as everyone is dependent on each other performing their specific role for the continued success of society. More recently, the work of Deschamps (1982) and Lorenzi-Ciolodi (1995, 2001) suggests that members of dominant social groups will conceptualise themselves as a collection of unique and autonomous individuals, hence members can be described as having an individualist social identity.

Recently, Jetten, Postmes, and McAuliffe (2002) provided experimental evidence for the notion that individualist behaviours and attitudes can emerge as a result of conformity to an individualist group norm. It was found that in North America (an individualist culture) those who identified highly with their national identity endorsed individualism more strongly than did those low in identification. In contrast, in a collectivist culture (Indonesia), high identifiers were less individualist than were low identifiers. A second study, where collectivism and individualism were experimentally manipulated as specific group norms, confirmed this pattern of results; high identifiers were more likely to self-stereotype in a manner consistent with the group norm (individualist or collectivist) than were low identifiers. A third study revealed that this tendency for high identifiers to self-stereotype in line with salient group norms of collectivism or individualism was more pronounced when the group was threatened. In addition to demonstrating that not only collectivist behaviour, but also individualist behaviour can be the result of conformity to salient group norms, the Jetten et al. (2002) studies also demonstrate that collectivism and individualism can be successfully manipulated in the laboratory (see also Trafimow, Triandis, & Goto, 1991; Ybarra & Trafimow, 1998).

THE PRESENT RESEARCH

The present research builds in some important ways on the Jetten et al. (2002) findings by demonstrating that norms prescribing individualism or collectivism not only affect self-stereotyping, but also the evaluation of other group members. Specifically, we sought to investigate the influence of individualist and collectivist group norms on the evaluation of individualist and collectivist group members' behaviour. We build on two lines of research showing that normative group member behaviour is more positively evaluated than is non-normative behaviour (e.g. Abrams et al., 2000; Marques, Abrams, Paez, & Hogg, 2001; Marques et al., 1998), but also that group members conform to salient group norms prescribing individualism or collectivism (Jetten et al., 2002). Extending and combining these results with the current research we encounter an interesting paradox: when group norms are individualist, group favouring or collectivist behaviour now becomes non-normative, while individualist behaviour—traditionally viewed as deviance—becomes normative. By experimentally manipulating norms of individualism and collectivism in an organizational role-play, we examine how group norms of collectivism and individualism affect what is viewed to be appropriate group member behaviour.

STUDY 1

Traditionally, research on individualism and collectivism has been conducted by measuring attitudes and behaviours in various countries and by drawing contrasts between them. An advantage of

manipulating norms of individualism and collectivism is that it is possible to examine experimentally some of the insights and assumptions made in cross-cultural literature. In Study 1 we manipulated group norms and the behaviour of group members so that they reflected individualism or collectivism. We predict that there are two processes affecting the evaluation of a group member who acts in a collectivist or individualist manner. First, we hypothesized there to be an over-riding belief that collectivist behaviour in groups is preferable to individualist behaviour. Thus, we predicted that there would be a general tendency for collectivist behaviour displayed by a group member to be evaluated more positively than individualist behaviour. Second, we predicted this tendency to be affected by the content of the group norm. Thus, when the group norm was collectivist, we predicted that group members who displayed collectivist behaviour would be evaluated more positively than group members who displayed individualist behaviour. In contrast, when the group norm represented individualism, individualist behaviour would become norm consistent behaviour and therefore should be evaluated more positively than might normally be expected. Thus, when group norms prescribe individualism, the prevailing preference for collectivist behaviour should be attenuated or even reversed.

Method

Participants and Design

One hundred and thirty-seven first-year psychology students at a large Australian university participated in return for course credit. The sample consisted of 97 females and 40 males with a mean age of 18.93 years. The study was a 2(Norm: collectivist versus individualist) \times 2(Behaviour: collectivist versus individualist) between subjects design.

Procedure

The experiment was introduced to participants as an organizational role-play. Participants were informed that they were to be randomly categorized into one of two companies: Horizon Industries or Sun Shadz. In fact, all participants were categorized as Horizon Industries employees. To establish some identification with their company, participants were asked to break up into small groups of 4–5 people and were given 5 minutes to sketch a logo for the company. After this task, participants were then separated and asked to complete the questionnaire associated with the study.

Group Norm Manipulation. Group norms were manipulated by providing participants with an outline of the main characteristics of their company. A collectivist versus individualist group norm was manipulated by giving the following information:

The workplace environment and employees at Horizon Industries can be described as having a *collectivist* [an individualist] orientation. Employees focus on achieving *departmental* [their personal] production goals, and it is believed that maintaining the *group's* [individual's] well being is the best guarantee for individual success. The demands of the job require employees to *combine their strengths and skills* and they have to work closely with co-workers [rely on their individual strengths and skills]. The *collectivist* [individualist] workplace at Horizon Industries has been very beneficial in helping establish Horizon Industries as one of the leading companies in Australia. *Collectivism and cooperation* [Individuality and independence] undoubtedly have contributed to this success.

Following this information, participants were asked to write down behaviours they display that are in line with the general orientation of the company. The group norm manipulation was checked with a single semantic differential. Participants were asked to indicate on a 9-point scale which orientation—individualist (1) or collectivist (9)—best described their group.

Group Member Behaviour. Participants were then asked to evaluate a hypothetical employee of Horizon Industries on the basis of three statements ostensibly made by the employee during an interview. The statements were either of a collectivist nature ('I concentrate on achieving my group's goals'; 'I think it is important to give priority to group interests as much as possible'; 'When making a decision, I take into consideration the advice of others') or of an individualist nature ('I concentrate on achieving my own personal goals'; 'I think it is important to give priority to personal interests as much as possible'; 'When making a decision, I tend to trust my own judgment'). After reading these statements the behaviour manipulation was checked by asking participants to rate the behavioural orientation of the employee on a scale ranging from 'individualist'(1) to 'collectivist'(9).

The statements were selected on the basis of a pilot test ($N=23$). In the pilot study, participants were presented with seven matched pairs of statements. In each pair, one statement reflected an individualist orientation (e.g. 'I value my individuality') and one statement reflected a collectivist orientation (e.g. 'I value being part of a group'). It was explained that these statements were made by some of their fellow university students, and were made in response to being asked about how they relate to the groups they belong to. All statement pairs were judged by the pilot sample to be reliably different in the extent to which they reflected constructs of individualism and collectivism. They were further checked to determine if there were any differences in the perceived likeability of the person to which the statement was attributed. Three statement pairs did not show any reliable differences for the level of likeability, and it was these three statements that were included in the study.¹

Group Member Evaluations. Group member evaluations were measured with four items: 'What is your general attitude towards this employee?' (1 = very negative, 9 = very positive), 'How acceptable is this employee's behaviour?' (1 = not at all, 9 = very much), 'To what extent is this employee a good member of Horizon Industries?' (1 = not at all, 9 = very much), and 'I feel this employee is?' (1 = unlikable, 9 = likable; $\alpha = 0.90$).

Results

Manipulation Checks

A 2(Norm: collectivist versus individualist) \times 2(Behaviour: collectivist versus individualist) ANOVA on the group norm manipulation check revealed only a significant main effect for norm, $F(1, 135) = 317.11$, $p < 0.001$. In line with the manipulation, participants given the collectivist norm rated the group as more collectivist ($M = 7.66$) than did those who were presented with an individualist norm ($M = 2.51$). Furthermore, on the group member behaviour check, there was only a significant main effect for behaviour, $F(1, 135) = 610.72$, $p < 0.001$. Collectivist behaviour was perceived as more collectivist ($M = 7.66$) than was individualist behaviour ($M = 1.74$). Thus, the manipulations of norm and behaviour were successful.

¹The main purpose of the pilot study was to select statements that represent collectivist and individualist behaviours, keeping constant the positivity of the behaviours. We therefore decided to test these statements without a group context because of recognition that when behaviours are contextualised within the context of a group, it is difficult to distinguish the evaluation of the behaviour *per se* from the influence of the specific group identity.

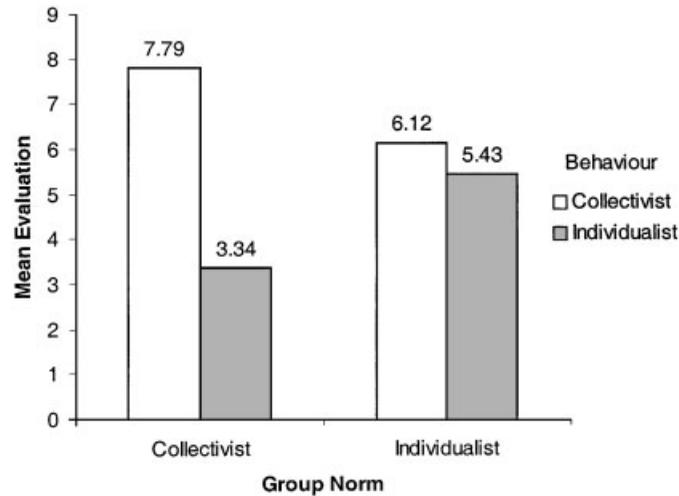


Figure 1. Group member evaluations as a function of group norms and group member behaviour: Study 1

Group Member Evaluation

Group member evaluations were analysed using a 2(Norm) \times 2(Behaviour) ANOVA. In line with predictions, a main effect for behaviour was found, $F(1, 135) = 111.14$, $p < 0.001$, indicating that group members displaying collectivist behaviour were more positively evaluated ($M = 6.96$) than were group members displaying individualist behaviour ($M = 4.39$). This main effect was qualified, however, by a significant norm by behaviour interaction, $F(1, 135) = 59.60$, $p < 0.001$ (see Figure 1).

Simple main effects analysis revealed that, when the norm was collectivist, group members displaying collectivist behaviour were more positively evaluated ($M = 7.79$) than were group members displaying individualist behaviour, $M = 3.34$, $F(1, 135) = 172.93$, $p < 0.001$. When the norm was individualist, the difference in evaluations of group members displaying collectivist ($M = 6.12$) or individualist behaviour ($M = 5.43$) was only marginally significant, $F(1, 135) = 3.85$, $p = 0.052$. Furthermore, group members displaying collectivist behaviour were less positively evaluated when the norm was individualist than when the norm was collectivist, $F(1, 135) = 23.63$, $p < 0.001$. It was also shown that group members displaying individualist behaviour were evaluated more positively when the norm was individualist than when it was collectivist, $F(1, 135) = 36.65$, $p < 0.001$.

Discussion

Consistent with predictions, collectivist behaviour in other group members was more positively evaluated overall than was individualist behaviour. However, the preference for collectivist behaviour over individualist behaviour was attenuated when the norm was individualist. This was evident from the fact that individualist behaviour was more positively evaluated when group norms prescribed individualism than when they represented collectivism. Interestingly, the evaluation of collectivist behaviour was also significantly lower when groups endorsed an individualist norm than when norms were collectivist. In short, the content of the norm significantly affected the meaning of what was considered to be appropriate group behaviour.

One methodological limitation of Study 1 is that participants were asked to interact for a brief period of time with each other before completing the questionnaire on their own. We tried to limit the

amount of time that participants had to interact, and subsequently separated participants so they could complete the questionnaire individually. Even so, questions remain about the independence of observations and the appropriate unit of analysis (e.g. Koomen, 1982).² Thus, in Study 2 we sought to replicate the observed effects using a methodology in which there was no interaction among group members. Furthermore, in Study 2, we wanted to strengthen our argument that conformity to individualist and collectivist group norms is a group process by demonstrating that the observed effects in Study 1 are stronger for high identifiers than for low identifiers.

STUDY 2

In Study 1 we found evidence that tolerance for individualist behaviour was significantly greater when there was a norm of individualism than when there was a norm of collectivism. As discussed previously, we interpret this effect as being the result of group members assimilating to an individualistic group norm, hence representing a group process. However, it could also be argued that the individualist norm reduced the salience of the group. In other words, rather than responding to a group norm of individualism, participants in the individualist condition might have decategorized altogether, resulting in purely interpersonal evaluations.

One way of teasing apart these two explanations is to examine the role of identification in influencing evaluations. From a social identity perspective, it can be argued that high identifiers are more likely to act in accordance with salient group norms than are low identifiers (e.g. Jetten, Spears, & Manstead, 1997; Turner, 1991). Thus, if people are responding to individualism as a *group* norm, high identifiers should be more likely than low identifiers to evaluate norm consistent behaviour (either collectivist or individualist) more favourably than norm-inconsistent behaviour. If, however, participants are decategorizing in the individualist condition, we would expect identification to have no effect on evaluations.

Another way of testing whether people in the individualist condition are responding to a group norm is to examine the extent to which participants believe that other group members would tolerate individualist or collectivist behaviours. The social identity perspective informs us that that norms represent shared definitions of acceptable and unacceptable group member behaviour (Turner, 1991). The shared nature of group norms means that individual group members who conform to the norm do so with the confidence that a majority of the other group members would behave in a similar fashion. In Study 2 we tested this by asking participants to indicate the extent to which they perceived that other group members would tolerate individualist or collectivist behaviour as displayed by another group member.

To summarize our main predictions, we expected that collectivist behaviour would be more positively evaluated overall than would individualist behaviour. However, we expected that the content of the group norm would influence evaluations, such that the preference for collectivist over individualist behaviour would be attenuated or reversed when there was an individualist group norm. Furthermore, on the basis of social identity theory, we predicted that the interaction between norms and behaviour would only occur for high identifiers. In contrast, group norms should have no effect for low identifiers. With respect to the perceived tolerance of other group members for individualist versus collectivist behaviours, we predicted a similar attenuation in the preference for collectivist behaviour over individualist behaviour when group norms prescribed individualism.

²Unfortunately, we did not keep a record of which participants formed a subgroup in the experimental sessions. It was therefore impossible to check whether the criteria for independence of individual observations was violated in this first study.

Because this measure reflects perceptions of other people's attitudes, and not the participants' attitudes *per se*, we did not expect identification to moderate the effects of norms on group tolerance.

Method

Participants and Design

Eighty-two first-year psychology students at a large Australian university participated in return for course credit. The sample consisted of 25 females and 57 males with a mean age of 19.07 years. The study was a 2(Norm: collectivist versus individualist) \times 2(Behaviour: collectivist versus individualist) \times 2(Identification: high versus low) between-subjects design. Norm and behaviour were manipulated variables, whereas identification was a measured variable.

Procedure

The methodology employed for this second study was slightly modified from that used in the first study. Unlike the first study, participants were not asked to interact and create a logo for the company; instead, participants completed the experiment on their own.

Group Norm Manipulation. Group norms were manipulated by providing participants with an outline of the main characteristics of their company (see Study 1). Following this information, participants were asked to write down behaviours they display that are in line with the general orientation of the company. The group norm manipulation was checked with the same item used in Study 1. Considering that we were not using a group with which participants could have had chronic and enduring levels of identification, we measured contextual identification; that is, identification was measured after the manipulation of group norms (Oakes, 1987). This method was chosen as participants categorized into such contextually salient groups need some time to internalize the group membership into their self concept (see self-categorization theory; Turner et al., 1987; see also Jetten, Spears, Hogg, & Manstead, 2000). We asked participants to complete a three-item identification scale (based on Jetten et al., 2002): 'Being an employee at Bright Ideas is important to me'; 'I identify with being an employee at Bright Ideas'; and 'I feel a sense of belonging with the group Bright Ideas employees'. Responses were given on a 9-point scale ranging from 'strongly disagree' (1) to 'strongly agree' (9), $\alpha = 0.92$.

Group Member Behaviour and Evaluations. An information sheet was given to participants explaining that, as an employee of Bright Ideas, they were required to evaluate other workers employed at Bright Ideas. The manipulation of group member behaviour was the same as that used in Study 1. Participants were presented with statements made by an employee that endorsed individualist or collectivist behaviour. A single item was used to check participants' understanding of the behaviour manipulation. Participants were asked to indicate on a 9-point scale the extent to which the employee's behaviour could be described as being 'individualist' (1) or 'collectivist' (9). Evaluations of the group member were measured with five statements: 'I have a positive attitude towards this Bright Ideas employee', 'this Bright Ideas employee's behaviour is acceptable', 'this employee is a good member of Bright Ideas', 'this Bright Ideas employee seems likeable', and 'my global impression of this Bright Ideas employee is positive'. Each statement was answered on a 9-point scale ranging from 'strongly disagree' (1) to 'strongly agree' (9), $\alpha = 0.94$.

Perceived Group Tolerance. Participants indicated on 9-point scales, ranging from 'not at all' (1) to 'very much' (9), the extent to which they perceived that other members of Bright Ideas would:

'tolerate'; 'stand for'; 'endorse'; and 'punish' the employee's behaviour. Responses for the last item were reverse scored. These items formed a reliable measure of perceived group tolerance for the employee's behaviour ($\alpha = 0.96$).

Results

All analyses were conducted using 2(Norm: collectivist versus individualist) \times 2(Behaviour: collectivist versus individualist) \times 2(Identification: high versus low) ANOVAs. Participants were categorized into high and low identifiers on the basis of a median split. The results of the ANOVA for identification indicated that the factor 'group identification' was able to successfully differentiate between high ($M = 7.38$) and low identifiers ($M = 4.27$), $F(1, 74) = 69.05$, $p < 0.001$. No other significant main or interaction effects emerged.

Manipulation Checks

The analysis of the single item used to check the participants' understanding of the information concerning employee's behaviour revealed a significant main effect for behaviour, $F(1, 74) = 292.20$, $p < 0.001$. This showed that participants perceived collectivist behaviour to be more collectivist ($M = 7.40$) than individualist behaviour ($M = 2.05$). No other main or interaction effects emerged. Furthermore, participants presented with the collectivist norm perceived the group to be more collectivist ($M = 7.48$) than did those presented with an individualist group norm, $M = 2.01$, $F(1, 73) = 139.34$, $p < 0.001$. No other main or interaction effects emerged, indicating that the manipulations of norms and behaviour were successful.

Evaluations of Group Member Behaviour

In line with predictions, there was a significant main effect for behaviour, $F(1, 74) = 21.50$, $p < 0.001$, such that group members displaying collectivist behaviour were evaluated more positively ($M = 6.66$) than were group members displaying individualist behaviour ($M = 4.87$). In addition, there was a significant main effect for group norm, $F(1, 74) = 4.10$, $p < 0.05$, such that evaluations were more positive when group norms endorsed individualism ($M = 6.15$) than when they endorsed collectivism ($M = 5.37$). These main effects, however, were qualified by a significant interaction between norm, behaviour, and identification, $F(1, 74) = 8.53$, $p < 0.01$.

We further explored this interaction by analysing the norm by behaviour interaction effects under conditions of low and high identification (see Figure 2). For low identifiers, there was a significant main effect for behaviour such that collectivist behaviour was more positively evaluated ($M = 6.42$) than was individualist behaviour, $M = 4.56$, $F(1, 74) = 15.23$, $p < 0.001$. Norms had no effect on evaluations either alone or as an interaction with behaviour.

For high identifiers, however, there was a significant interaction between norm and behaviour, $F(1, 74) = 97.85$, $p < 0.001$. Analysis of simple main effects revealed that collectivist behaviour was more positively evaluated when group norms were collectivist ($M = 8.05$) than when they were individualist, $M = 5.73$, $F(1, 74) = 33.43$, $p < 0.001$. In addition, individualist behaviour was more positively evaluated when group norms were individualist ($M = 6.90$) than when they were collectivist, $M = 3.45$, $F(1, 74) = 51.52$, $p < 0.001$. Thus, although collectivist behaviours were evaluated more positively than individualist behaviours when group norms prescribed collectivism, $F(1, 74) = 105.85$, $p < 0.001$, there was no difference in the evaluations of collectivist and individualist behaviour when the norm prescribed individualism, $F(1, 74) < 1$, *ns*.

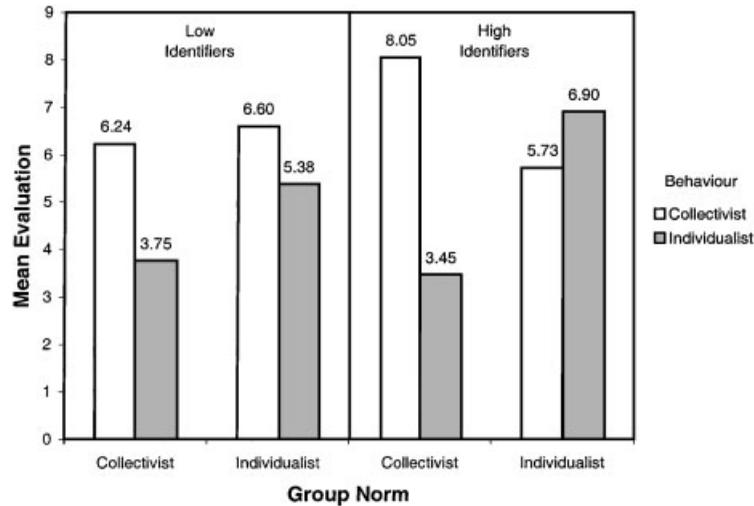


Figure 2. Evaluation of group members as a function of group norms for low and high identifiers: Study 2

Perceptions of Tolerance

Results of the analysis of the tolerance measure revealed a significant main effect for behaviour, $F(1, 74) = 5.66$, $p < 0.05$. Participants reported that they perceived other group members as being more tolerant of collectivist behaviour ($M = 6.40$) than they would be of individualist behaviour ($M = 5.26$). There was also a significant interaction between group norm and behaviour, $F(1, 74) = 58.20$, $p < 0.001$ (see Figure 3). Simple main effects revealed that participants perceived greater tolerance for collectivist behaviour when group norms were collectivist ($M = 7.83$) than when they were individualist, $M = 4.96$, $F(1, 74) = 23.21$, $p < 0.001$. In contrast, participants perceived greater tolerance for individualist behaviour when group norms were individualist ($M = 7.45$) than

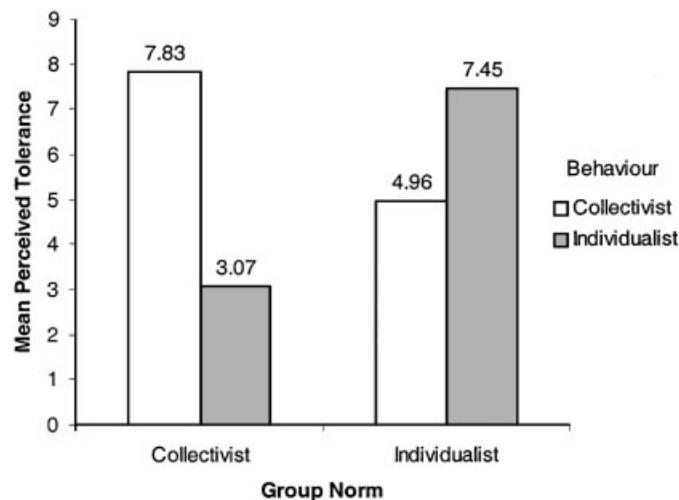


Figure 3. Perceived tolerance for group member behaviour as a function of group norms: Study 2

when they were collectivist, $M = 3.07$, $F(1, 74) = 34.99$, $p < 0.001$. In line with predictions, it was also demonstrated that participants perceived greater tolerance for collectivist behaviour than for individualist behaviour when group norms endorsed collectivism, $F(1, 74) = 76.43$, $p < 0.001$. Furthermore, participants perceived greater tolerance for individualist behaviour than for collectivist behaviour when group norms were individualist, $F(1, 74) = 10.24$, $p < 0.01$.

Discussion

This research examined how members evaluate individualist and collectivist behaviour within groups. Two main processes were identified that were predicted to affect the evaluation of group member behaviour. First, collectivist behaviour is assumed to be more beneficial to the functioning of a group than individualist behaviour so we predicted that the former behaviour would be more positively evaluated than the latter. In addition, the moderating effect of group norms prescribing collectivism or individualism was examined. We predicted, in line with the social identity perspective, that the preference for collectivist behaviour would be attenuated when it was normative to be individualist within the group. Furthermore, this effect was hypothesized to be more powerful the stronger members identified with their group.

In line with predictions and with Study 1, there was an overall preference for collectivist behaviour over individualist behaviour. In addition to this, individualist norms attenuated the preference for collectivist behaviour over individualist behaviour, but only for high identifiers. Such results provide evidence that those who identify strongly with their group are more likely to act in accordance with the salient norm, resulting in the tolerance for individualist behaviours that are traditionally seen as incompatible with group life. The fact that the effect of norms emerged only for high identifiers reinforces the notion that participants are responding to individualism as a *group* norm, and not as a trigger for decategorization. If participants had decategorized in the individualist condition, we would expect purely interpersonal evaluations, independent of participants' identification levels.

On our measures of the extent to which other group members would tolerate the behaviour, we found greater perceived tolerance for collectivist than for individualist behaviour when the norm prescribed collectivism, but a reversal of this effect when the group norm endorsed individualism. It is noteworthy that we found a full reversal of the preference for collectivist behaviour on measures of perceived tolerance, but only an attenuation when examining people's personal attitudes. This might be because the measures of perceived group tolerance tap more purely into cognitive processes with regard to matching behaviour and norms. In other words, the measures reflect whether another group member conforms to norms or not, unqualified by individuals' personal preferences for collectivist or individualist behaviour.

GENERAL DISCUSSION

Integrating the main findings from the two studies, we found support for the notion that group members displaying collectivist behaviour are more positively evaluated than group members displaying individualist behaviour. There was also evidence that group norms affected the evaluation of group members. Across both studies there was good support for the predicted attenuation of the preference for collectivist over individualist group member behaviour when group norms prescribe individualism. This attenuation seems to be driven by an upgrading of individualist group member behaviour and a downgrading of collectivist group member behaviour when the group norm represents

individualism. There was also evidence that these effects were stronger under conditions of high identification than under conditions of low identification.

The fact that high identifiers are more likely to evaluate individualism favourably within the group is paradoxical on one level because high identifiers have been found to be more concerned than low identifiers with maintaining high levels of group cohesion (Doosje, Ellemers, & Spears, 1995). Such concerns may explain the fact that there is merely attenuation in the preference for collectivist behaviour over individualist behaviour for high identifiers instead of a reversal. The findings probably reflect the balance between maintaining group cohesion and the endorsement of norm-consistent behaviour by another group member (see also Kelley & Shapiro, 1954).

Demonstrating the moderating role of identification is consistent with previous research (Jetten et al., 2002) showing that individualist behaviour can be motivated by conformity to group norms, when the emphasis on using norms as a guide for appropriate behaviour is strong. By demonstrating that the influence of norms is stronger under conditions of high identification as opposed to low identification supports the idea that assimilation of group members to the norm of the group is driving the behavioural outcomes of individualist norms, and not that the effects are a function of the individualist group norm reducing the clarity of the group boundary (deategorization).

The present research further demonstrated that individualist group norms are important in fostering acceptance of individualist group member behaviour. Previous research has demonstrated that there are strict limits on acceptable (in)group member behaviour (e.g. Abrams et al., 2000; Marques et al., 1998). However, when group norms actively encourage diversity and individual differentiation, definitions of acceptable group member behaviour might broaden to allow for individualistic and self-oriented behaviour (Brewer, von Hippel, & Gooden, 1999). Indeed, on a measure of the extent to which the group as a whole would tolerate certain behaviours, we found not just attenuation of the preference for collectivist behaviour when the group norm prescribes individualism, but the reversal: a preference for individualist over collectivist behaviour. This suggests that when conformity to group norms prevails, individualist group norms might not promote tolerance *per se*, but rather an acceptance of individualist behaviour and a downgrading of collectivist behaviour.

Questions remain concerning the extrapolation of the results of the present research to collectivist cultures. The power of individualist group norms to attenuate preferences for collectivist behaviour was demonstrated against a cultural background that endorses individualist behaviour. Whether individualist norms attenuate preferences for collectivist behaviour in collectivist cultures, where the dominant culture endorses group favouring behaviour, remains a question for future research.

Finally, the results provide evidence that individualism need not be inconsistent with ideas of group member behaviour and group processes outlined by the social identity perspective, or even with more general experiences with groups (see also Deschamps, 1982; Durkheim, 1893/1984; Lorenzi-Ciolodi, 1995, 2001). For example, some organizations might use individual incentives and individual enterprise bargaining agreements to promote a sense of interpersonal competitiveness within their culture. By actively promoting a norm of competitive individualism, such organizations reason that the collective output can be maximized through strong individualism. Furthermore, for members of specific social groups such as university students and artists, standing out and being different is often required and demanded in order to be successful within such groups. Members of such groups might collectively display individualist behaviour (Jetten et al., 2002).

In sum, the studies presented in this paper provide support for the idea that collectivist and individualist group norms influence the manner in which group members evaluate individualist and collectivist group member behaviour. Previous research has demonstrated that evaluations of non-normative group members are quite harsh (e.g. Abrams et al., 2000; Marques et al., 1998). Consistent with this, our studies suggest that when people evaluate individualist and collectivist behaviours of other group members, they not only consider the behaviour, but also the norm within the group in

which the behaviour occurred. When group norms endorse individualism, 'going your own way' may not only be tolerated but even expected by the group.

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