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## **Deviance Credit: Tolerance of Deviant Ingroup Leaders is Mediated by Their Accrual of Prototypicality and Conferral of Their Right to Be Supported**

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*Leaders often deviate from group norms or social conventions, sometimes innovating and sometimes engaging in serious transgressions or illegality. We propose that group members are prone to be more permissive toward both forms of deviance in the case of ingroup leaders compared to other ingroup members or outgroup members and leaders. This granting of “deviance credit” is hypothesized to be underpinned by perceptions of an ingroup leader’s prototypicality of the group (“accrual”) and belief that occupancy of the role confers a right to be supported (“conferral”). Analyses of data from four studies demonstrate that both accrual and conferral (1) mediate evaluations, inclusion and punishment of deviant leaders, and (2) they make independent contributions to deviance credit. Implications for leadership, marginalization, corruption, innovation, and transformation are discussed.*

Social change arises if and when people are persuaded to embrace an alternative to the prevailing social reality, a process often spearheaded by group leaders.

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But when and why are leaders given license to deviate from group norms or social conventions? Some try to promote progressive change, or their election may itself symbolize such change (e.g., Barack Obama's election as U.S. president), but other leaders may have exploitative, self-serving or criminal ambitions. Reckless leadership of the world banking system leading to the 2008 financial crisis and corrupt leadership in FIFA illustrate the dangers of such ambitions. Both admirable and despicable examples of deviant leadership raise the question of why groups release the usual normative constraints that bind other members.

Group members value conformity to norms, which makes achievement of collective goals and the subjective validation of social reality possible (Festinger, 1950; Shaw, 1976; Turner, 1991). Consequently, deviants trigger negative reactions from other members, including derogation and ostracism (see Levine & Kerr, 2007, for a review). This is especially true when the deviants are ingroup members, giving rise to the "black sheep effect" (Marques & Páez, 1994), in which ingroup deviants are judged more harshly than comparable outgroup deviants. However, groups frequently face challenges that require them to innovate or adapt to novel circumstances (Abrams, Randsley de Moura, Marques, & Hutchison, 2008; Barone & Jewell, 2013; Levine & Marques, 2016), and leaders are required to direct or defend such innovative strategies.

We contend that both innovation and transgression by leaders may be enabled through psychological processes that create "deviance credit," which refers to group members' willingness to forego the obligations and social contracts of group membership and to give ingroup leaders the autonomy to diverge from group norms. We do not assume that ingroup leaders are completely free to deviate; they merely meet less resistance than do deviant nonleaders. In this article, we summarize previously published evidence for deviance credit and present new evidence for two hypothesized underlying processes—accrual and conferral.

### **Subjective Group Dynamics Theory and Leadership**

Our account is rooted in subjective group dynamics theory (Marques, Paez, & Abrams, 1998), which assumes that individuals respond toward each other based on their ingroup/outgroup membership, their within-group status, and their conformity to salient prescriptive norms (Marques, Abrams, Paez, & Martinez-Taboada, 1998; Pinto, Marques, Levine, & Abrams, 2010, 2016; Travaglino, Abrams, Randsley de Moura, Marques, & Pinto, 2014). According to the theory, individuals have a basic need to confirm the subjective validity of norms which legitimate their ingroup membership as a source of positive social identity (Marques & Páez, 1994; cf. Tajfel & Turner, 1979). Hence, group members are vigilant regarding whether other members contribute positively or negatively to ingroup

positive distinctiveness by conforming to or by violating such norms (Marques et al., 1998). By derogating ingroup deviant members, and endorsing ingroup normative members, individuals subjectively validate the ingroup's positive value.

### *Status, Leadership and Reactions to Deviance*

The severity of responses elicited by deviant ingroup members depends on their centrality in the group. For example, Pinto et al. (2010, Experiment 3) found that negative evaluations of deviants who are new ingroup members (those with probationary status in the group; see Levine & Moreland, 1994) were associated with socialization strategies, whereas negative evaluations of deviants who are full ingroup members (who have maximum rights and responsibilities in the group) were associated with punishment strategies (see also Pinto, Marques, Levine, & Abrams, 2016). In the context of leadership, however, two theoretical perspectives—idiosyncrasy credit and social identity theory—suggest that groups may allow leaders (who typically are ingroup full members) enhanced rather than reduced license to deviate compared to the license given to nonleaders (Coser, 1962).

*Idiosyncrasy credit and leadership.* Hollander (1958) proposed that leaders gain trust from their followers based on their positive contributions to the group over time. Although idiosyncrasy credit has no clear operational definition (Yukl, 2006), it has been viewed as arising from leaders' displays of knowledge, intelligence, competence, conformity to group norms, group loyalty, and group-oriented motivation (Hackman, 1992; Winkler, 2010). According to Hollander (2006), once sufficient idiosyncrasy credits have been accumulated, a leader is permitted to introduce nonconformist actions—innovation—consistent with his or her leadership role and contribute to group welfare (Hollander, 2006). Curiously, the theory makes no predictions regarding intergroup contexts and does not consider when a leader's actions might harm the group (see Abrams et al., 2008; Abrams, Randsley de Moura, & Travaglino, 2013).

*Social identity and leadership.* The social identity perspective (e.g., Haslam, 2001; Hogg, 2001) proposes that leadership emerges to the extent a member is seen to embody the group prototype—those features that differentiate the ingroup from relevant outgroups. More prototypical ingroup leaders better represent the group's identity and are evaluated more positively (see Hains, Hogg, & Duck, 1997; Haslam & Platow, 2001).

Central members who deviate receive harsher social evaluations than more peripheral deviants (cf. Pinto et al., 2010). Therefore, it might be assumed that ingroup leaders who deviate from prescriptive ingroup norms are perceived to violate expectations very strongly. Therefore, they might be valued more *negatively*

than comparably deviant ingroup members. However, because group prototypes are malleable depending on the circumstances (Haslam, Reicher, & Platow, 2011) and because leaders are regarded as exemplifying the group prototype *sine pare*, group members' only option may be to give their leader opportunities to flex their normative muscles and behave in non-normative ways (cf. Pinto et al., 2016).

#### *Prior Work on Leaders' Innovation Credit and Transgression Credit*

Abrams et al. (2008) conducted seven experiments demonstrating the award of "*innovation credit*" to leaders. Students judged either psychologists (ingroup members) or customs and immigration officers (outgroup members) whose attitudes toward asylum policies were either normative, pro-normative (extreme) or anti-normative (deviating towards the opposing group's norm). They also varied whether the deviants were members or leaders and whether the leaders were established (current) leaders, ex-leaders, or incoming (future) leaders. These studies revealed that ingroup deviant future leaders were evaluated more positively, granted more freedom to innovate and rewarded more than other deviants.

More recently, in nine studies, Abrams et al. (2013) investigated reactions to group members who transgressed (acted illegally or act that broke rules binding both the ingroup and the outgroup). In one paradigm, a player or the captain of participants' own or rivals sports teams transgressed by shouting and swearing at the referee following a decision that risked the ingroup's outcomes. In another paradigm, minimal groups were used and the leader cheated to win a competition for the group. Other parallel studies involved scenarios in which university committees or regional representatives proposed bribery or blackmail in order to achieve a desired outcome (Randsley de Moura & Abrams, 2013). Across these studies, we found that transgressive ingroup leaders were evaluated and punished less harshly than identically transgressive ingroup members or outgroup leaders or members. We also established various boundary conditions for this "*transgression credit*," namely that the leader must be seen to want to serve the group's interests (cf. Packer, Miners, & Ungson, 2018), not to cross significant moral boundaries, such as expressing racist sentiment (Abrams, Travaglino, Randsley de Moura, & May, 2015; cf. Brescoll, Okimoto, & Vial, 2018), and to be part of a relatively small group (Travaglino, Abrams, Randsley de Moura, & Yetkili, 2016; cf. Martin, Thomas, Hewstone, & Gardikiotis, 2018).

#### *The Accrual and Conferral Hypotheses*

Abrams et al. (2008) drew on Fielding and Hogg's (1997) social identity analysis of leader prototypicality to propose two mechanisms involved in innovation credit, which we believe also apply to transgression credit (see also Randsley

de Moura, Abrams, Marques, & Hutchison, 2011). The first is prototypicality accrual—the extent to which leaders are perceived as having accrued, or gained, greater prototypicality than other group members. Group members may reasonably assume that an incumbent or elected leader provides a good representation of the group prototype and may resist imagining that their leader does not do so. Indeed, to view a leader as nonprototypical would imply a negative evaluation of the group as a whole, which risks imperiling positive social identity.

The second mechanism is conferral—group members' willingness to concede that the right to be supported as leader is invested in the leadership role itself. We expect that, owing to attributional biases and heuristics, people are also likely to infer that mere occupancy of the leadership role (i.e., regardless of whether the leader has been designated or elected, or even was self-appointed) means that the leader is likely to have greater expertise or commitment to the group than do other members. Moreover, even without full information about the leader's prototypicality, members may draw on leadership stereotypes to assume that the leader is somehow more knowledgeable or charismatic or strong than other members (Lord & Hall, 2003), and perhaps more prototypical too. Consequently, in a form of anticipated idiosyncrasy credit, members are willing to support the leader to make decisions on the group's behalf.

### **Empirical Evidence**

To date, the roles of accrual and conferral processes in transgression credit have not been demonstrated empirically. In this article, we present data that were collected as part of our studies on transgression credit (Abrams et al., 2013, 2015) but were not published earlier due to journal editorial preferences and space limitations. Because the original studies were reported in detail, the present article provides only a summary of their methodology and findings, focusing instead on new analyses examining mediational processes. These data provide important evidence relevant to our theory and have implications for application and practice.

#### *Study 1*

*Design, measures and hypotheses.* In Abrams et al. (2013, Experiment 2), 81 university students who belonged to a range of sports associations at the University of Kent (e.g., Netball, Soccer, Rugby) read a description of an incident just before the end of a highly competitive game. Two players (the captain and a player, either from the ingroup or outgroup team) were frustrated by an event on the field. One of the targets (either the captain or a player) became irate and transgressed the rules of the game by arguing vehemently with the referee and acting offensively toward opposing players (deviant target). The other target remained calm and polite and obeyed the referee's instructions (normative target).

The design was a 2 (Group: ingroup vs. outgroup) x 2 (Role of transgressor: captain vs. player) x 2 (Target: transgressive, normative) mixed factorial design with repeated measures on the Target factor. Responses to dependent measures were recorded using 7 point scales (1 = not at all, 7 = extremely)

Participants' ratings of how friendly, likeable, warm, and approachable each target was, were averaged on an *evaluation* score for each target ( $\alpha_s = .97$ ). In addition, participants' ratings of how strongly each target represented his team and how much his actions reflected the overall feelings of the team ( $r = .60, p < .001$ ) were averaged to create a *prototypicality accrual* score for each target.

The accrual hypothesis predicts that evaluations of the targets should be associated with accrual and hence there should be significant Group x Role x Target interaction on both accrual and evaluations. Centrally, transgression credit, expressed through relatively positive evaluations of transgressive ingroup leaders should be at least partially explained (mediated) by leaders' accrual of ingroup-prototypicality.

*Results.* We performed a Group x Role x Target ANOVA on the dependent variables with repeated measures on the Target factor. The significant main effects and the three way interaction on evaluations reported in Abrams et al. (2013), were matched by a similar interaction on accrual (see Table 1 for means and standard errors). Specifically, the main effects of Group,  $F(1, 77) = 15.47, p < .001, \eta^2 = .17$ , Target,  $F(1, 77) = 22.21, p < .001, \eta^2 < .22$ , and Role,  $F(1, 77) = 5.41, p = .023, \eta^2 = .07$  were all significant. Captains' accrual was judged to be higher ( $M = 4.51, SE = .13$ ) than was players' ( $M = 4.10, SE = 0.12$ ). The significant Group x Role interaction,  $F(1, 77) = 4.98, p = .029, \eta^2 = .06$ , and Role x Target interaction,  $F(1, 77) = 5.60, p = .020, \eta^2 = .07$  were qualified by a significant Group x Role x Target interaction,  $F(1, 77) = 4.58, p = .036, \eta^2 = .06$ .

As shown in Table 1, consistent with an accrual process for transgression credit, simple effects tests confirmed that the transgressive ingroup captain had higher accrual than the transgressive ingroup player,  $F(1, 77) = 17.04, p < .001, \eta^2 = .18$ , or the transgressive outgroup captain,  $F(1, 77) = 17.33, p < .001, \eta^2 = .18$ . Moreover, accrual for transgressive versus normative ( $M = 4.97, SE = 0.28$ ) ingroup captains did not differ significantly,  $F(1, 77) = 0.163, p = .168, \eta^2 < .01$ .

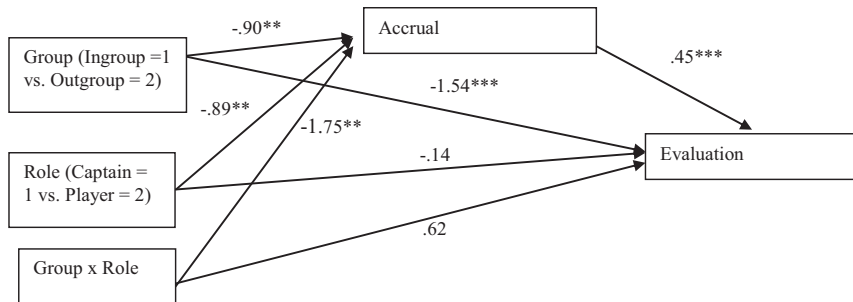
Transgression credit should apply only to ingroup targets. Therefore, accrual should mediate the effect of Role on evaluations of transgressors targets in the Ingroup but not in the Outgroup condition and in the Captain, but not in the Player condition. To test this idea we conducted a mediated moderation test using Hayes' (2012) PROCESS macro (Model 7, 5000 bootstrap samples). In reporting this and all subsequent analyses using PROCESS we report unstandardized regression coefficients.

**Table 1.** Means and Standard Errors (in Parentheses) for Measures across Studies 1 to 4

Study	Measure	Group Role	Ingroup		Outgroup	
			Leader ( <i>SE</i> )	Member ( <i>SE</i> )	Leader ( <i>SE</i> )	Member ( <i>SE</i> )
1 (CP)	Evaluation	Transgressor	4.68 (.25)	3.62 (.25)	2.35 (.24)	2.36 (.23)
		Normative	5.18 (.27)	4.74 (.27)	4.96 (.26)	4.15 (.24)
	Accrual	Transgressor	5.16 (.31)	3.34 (.31)	3.35 (.30)	3.28 (.28)
		Normative	4.97 (.28)	5.16 (.28)	4.58 (.27)	4.61 (.25)
2 (LM)	Evaluation	Transgressor	5.40 (.33)	4.21 (.32)	4.13 (.33)	4.65 (.32)
		Normative	5.35 (.22)	5.15 (.23)	5.23 (.22)	4.83 (.23)
	Punitiveness	Transgressor	22.67 (6.78)	2.44 (6.78)	-6.59 (6.98)	7.10 (6.60)
		Normative	31.28 (3.59)	22.28 (3.59)	32.89 (3.49)	21.41 (3.69)
	Conferral	Transgressor	5.39 (.42)	3.63 (.41)	3.19 (.45)	4.32 (.41)
		Normative	5.52 (.28)	5.06 (.29)	5.47 (.28)	5.38 (.31)
3 (CP)	Evaluation	Transgressor	4.66 (.25)	2.49 (.22)		
		Normative	5.26 (.20)	5.38 (.18)		
	Inclusion	Transgressor	5.16 (.32)	3.50 (.29)		
		Normative	5.84 (.24)	5.91 (.21)		
	Punishment	Transgressor	12400 (1109)	9194 (996)		
		Normative	20806	17600		
	Accrual	Transgressor	3.98 (.33)	2.41 (.29)		
		Normative	6.04 (.19)	5.81 (.17)		
	Conferral	Transgressor	4.20 (.33)	3.47 (.29)		
		Normative	4.80 (.36)	5.06 (.31)		
4 (C)	Evaluation	Racial	2.13 (.84)		2.01 (.53)	
		Nonracial	4.75 (.85)		2.45 (1.09)	
	Accrual	Racial	2.96 (1.38)		3.51 (1.57)	
		Nonracial	5.48 (1.34)		4.13 (1.49)	
	Conferral	Racial	1.62 (.85)		2.27 (1.60)	
		Nonracial	5.52 (1.33)		3.07 (1.15)	

*Note.* C = Captain P = Player, L = Leader, M = Member. All measures are scored on a scale from 1 = *not at all/lowest* to 7 = *very much/highest*, except punishment/punitiveness. In Study 2 punitiveness was scored from -50 to +50 in steps of 10. In Study 3, where punishment is scored from 0 to 30,000 in steps of 5000. Punitiveness to the transgressor in one role is interdependent with the normative target in the other. Due to this interdependence, standard errors are only provided for transgressors.

For normative targets, accrual and evaluations were positively related,  $b = 0.37$ ,  $SE = 0.10$ ,  $t = 3.54$ ,  $p < .001$ , but there were no significant interactive effects of Role and Group on accrual,  $b = -.15$ ,  $t = 0.28$ ,  $p = .78$ , ruling out the possibility of mediated moderation. For evaluations of transgressors (see Figure 1), Group, Role and accrual together accounted for 52% of the variance,  $F(1, 76) = 20.14$ ,  $p < .001$ . We tested whether the interactive effect of Group and Role on transgressor accrual mediated their interactive effect on transgressor



**Fig. 1.** Study 1: Mediated moderation model showing coefficients for the indirect effect of group and role on evaluation of the transgressive target via accrual.

*Note.* Independent variables are centered. \* $p < .05$ , \*\* $p < .01$ , \*\*\* $p < .001$ .

evaluations. The effect of accrual,  $b = 0.26$ ,  $SE = 0.09$ ,  $t = 3.01$ ,  $p = .004$ , as well as the direct effect of Group,  $b = -1.54$ ,  $t = 3.36$ ,  $p < .001$ , significantly predicted evaluation. However, the direct effects of Role and of the Group x Role on evaluation were nonsignificant,  $bs = -0.26$ ,  $0.62$ ,  $SE = 0.24$ ,  $0.48$ ,  $t = -1.09$ ,  $1.28$ ,  $p = .28$ ,  $.20$ , respectively, indicating that the Group x Role effect on evaluations was fully mediated by accrual.

To test whether the mediation was indeed focused on ingroup captains we inspected the conditional indirect effect of Group within each level of Role (captain or player). The conditional indirect effect of Group was significant for the captain,  $b = -0.57$ ,  $SE = 0.23$ , 95% CI  $(-1.11, -0.20)$ , but not the player,  $b = -0.02$ ,  $SE = .16$ , 95% CI  $(-0.34, 0.30)$ . We also examined conditional effects of Role within each level of Group. The conditional indirect effect of Role was significant in the ingroup condition,  $b = -0.83$ ,  $SE = 0.27$ , 95% CI  $(-1.49, -0.40)$ , but not the outgroup condition,  $b = -0.03$ ,  $SE = 0.20$ , 95% CI  $(-0.43, 0.37)$ .

In summary, only when the transgressor was a captain did accrual mediate the effect of Group on evaluations of the transgressor, and only when participants judged ingroup members did accrual mediate the effect of Role on evaluations of the transgressor. Thus, the transgression credit which is uniquely granted to the ingroup transgressive captains is reflected in perceptions that this person is more prototypical of the team than is the transgressive ingroup player. This finding is consistent with the idea that accrual may explain why participants judge transgressive ingroup leaders more leniently.

## Study 2

*Design measures and hypotheses.* The second study (Abrams et al., 2013, Experiment 3) used the minimal group paradigm (Tajfel, Billig, Bundy, & Flament,

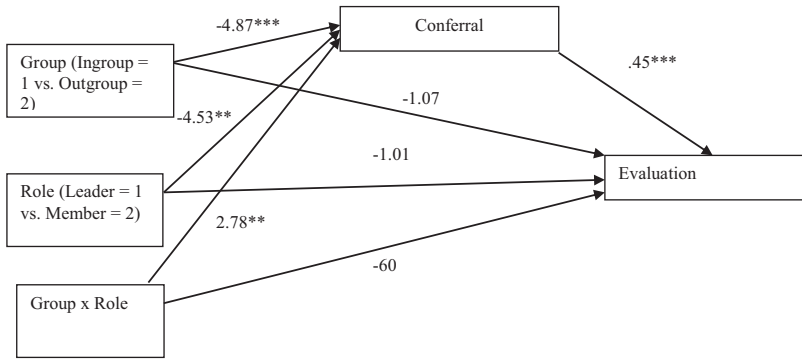


1971) to test the idea that transgression credit is spontaneously generated in subjective group dynamics. This study also enabled us to test the distinctive role of conferral without any potential confound with accrual. Specifically, we assigned the leadership role randomly, thereby ensuring that participants could not infer prototypicality from prior evidence about the leader. The transgressive act involved cheating on a group task, and we observed transgression credit in the evaluations and punishments given to the ingroup leader.

Seventy-five Mechanical Turk workers were categorized as exhibiting either deductive or inductive thinking on the basis of a (bogus) cognitive test. Next, they observed a prerecorded chat room interaction among either four ingroup or outgroup members and were informed that there was a randomly appointed leader for a logic puzzle task. During the interaction, either the leader or a member cheated by using the internet to find the solution. The design was a 2 (Group: ingroup vs. outgroup)  $\times$  2 (Role of the Transgressor: leader vs. member)  $\times$  2 (Target: transgressive, normative) mixed factorial design with repeated measures on the Target factor.

Participants rated how likeable, warm, and nice each target was, using seven-point scales (1 = *not at all*, 7 = *completely*), and these ratings were averaged on *evaluation* measures for both the leader ( $\alpha = .90$ ) and the member ( $\alpha = .87$ ). Participants' expressed *punitiveness* by indicating how much the targets should be punished versus rewarded for their actions, using a slider from  $-50$  (punished) to  $+50$  (rewarded). Finally, we measured *conferral* by asking participants to indicate how much the [target] "should be supported by the [target's] group" (1 = *not at all*, 7 = *completely*). We predicted that participants would apply conferral only to ingroup leaders. Therefore, in the present analysis we test whether the interactive effect of Group and Role on evaluations and punitiveness is mediated by conferral.

*Results.* On both Target  $\times$  Role  $\times$  Group interactions on the evaluation and the punitiveness measures (Abrams et al., 2013), the transgressive ingroup leader received more favorable responses than the remaining targets. For conferral, there was a significant main effect of Target,  $F(1, 68) = 19.67, p < .001, \eta^2 = .22$ . Normative targets were perceived to deserve more support ( $M = 5.36, SE = 0.15$ ) than transgressive targets ( $M = 4.13, SE = 0.21$ ), but this was qualified by a significant Target  $\times$  Role  $\times$  Group interaction,  $F(1, 68) = 8.67, p < .01, \eta^2 = .11$  (Table 1). No other effects were significant,  $F_s < 2.60$ . Simple effects tests revealed more conferral of support for the transgressive ingroup leader ( $M = 5.39, SE = 0.42$ ) than the transgressive ingroup member ( $M = 3.63, SE = 0.41$ ),  $F(1, 68) = 8.93, p < .01, \eta^2 = .12$ . Conferral for the ingroup transgressive leader was larger than for the outgroup transgressive leader,  $F(1, 68) = 12.85, p = .001, \eta^2 = .16$ . No other simple effects were significant.



**Fig. 2.** Study 2: Mediated moderation model showing coefficients for the indirect effect of group and role on evaluation via conferral.  
*Note.* \* $p < .05$ , \*\* $p < .01$ , \*\*\* $p < .001$ .

We predicted that the mediating role of conferral for transgressors would apply to evaluations only of ingroup leaders. Consistent with this prediction, the conditional indirect effect of Group was significant for the leader,  $b = -0.94$ ,  $SE = 0.31$ , 95% CI  $(-1.72, -0.45)$ , but not for the member  $b = 0.30$ ,  $SE = 0.26$ , 95% CI  $(-0.16, 0.89)$ . Moreover, the conditional indirect effect of Role on evaluations was significant within the ingroup condition,  $b = -0.78$ ,  $SE = 0.25$ , 95% CI  $(-1.41, -0.37)$  but not the outgroup condition,  $b = 0.19$ ,  $SE = 0.38$ , 95% CI  $(-0.08, 1.10)$ . Therefore, conferral only accounted for the evaluations of the ingroup leader (see Figure 2).

A parallel mediated moderation analysis with punitiveness as the dependent variable revealed similar effects (not displayed owing to space limitations). Tests of conditional indirect effects revealed that these were only significant for the leader within Group,  $b = -24.57$ ,  $SE = 8.03$ , 95% CI  $(-41.19, -9.96)$ , and for ingroup within Role,  $b = -20.20$ ,  $SE = 7.01$ , 95% CI  $(-35.06, -7.26)$ .

*Discussion of study 1 and study 2.* In Study 1 accrual (perceived prototypicality) mediated the effects of a transgressive leader's group membership on evaluations of that leader in a sports context. That is, accrued prototypicality associated with ingroup leaders inhibited derogation when that leader deviated. Study 2 revealed that even when the roles of group members had been determined explicitly randomly, precluding the possibility of accrual, transgression credit to the (minimal) ingroup transgressive leader was associated with the conferral process. That is, responses to the transgressive ingroup leader were associated with members' beliefs that the leader's role required that the leader should be supported. Importantly, conferral also seems to protect the transgressive ingroup leader from punishment.

### Study 3

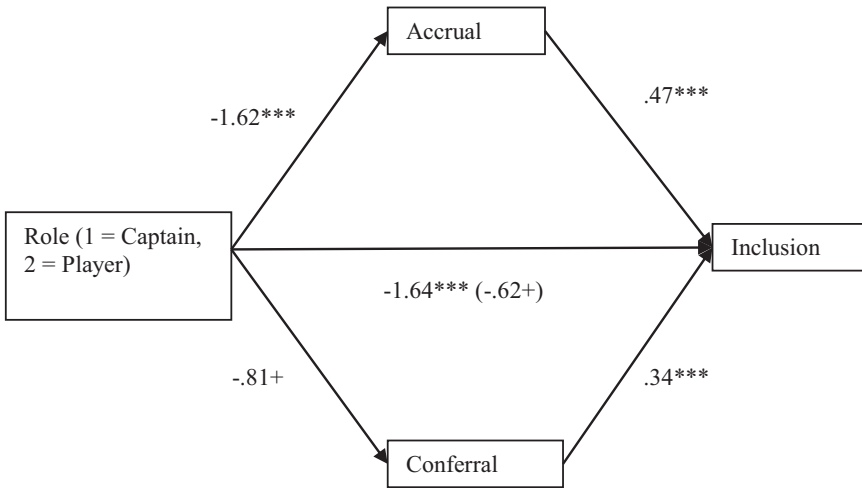
*Design, measures and hypotheses.* Study 3 (from Abrams et al., 2013, Experiment 4) investigates the potential mediating roles of both accrual and conferral in willingness to retain (include) versus exclude and to reward/punish ingroup transgressive leaders. Financial punishment is a penalty from which a deviant may recover, and which is routinely imposed on transgressive individuals only by authorities (e.g., governing bodies). In contrast, exclusion may be inflicted by any group member and has potentially serious psychological consequences for an individual's future opportunities and prospects (Abrams & Christian, 2007; Kerr & Levine, 2008; Williams, 2007). Moreover, exclusion of a leader implies rejection of that leader's prototypicality and is an informative index of member's willingness to nullify the target's membership.

The procedure in Study 3 matched that of Study 1, except that only ingroup targets were presented. The design was a 2 (Role of transgressor: Captain vs. Player) x 2 (Target: Normative, Transgressive), with Target as a within-participants factor. Fifty eight university students completed the evaluation measures as in Study 1. *Inclusion* was measured by asking participants how much the target should be included in the team in the future (1 = *not at all*, 7 = *very much*). *Punitiveness* was measured by having participants allocate a £30,000 bonus (if their team won) between the captain and the player (using steps of £5000). *Accrual* was measured by asking participants to indicate the extent to which the target was "good for the image" of their team, and "represented their team well" (1 = *not at all*, 7 = *very much*). The two items ( $r = .84$  for transgressive targets and  $r = .68$  for normative targets) were averaged to create a composite score for each target. *Conferral* was measured by asking participants to what extent, during a game, they thought they "should support [target's] decisions whatever they are" (1 = *not at all*, 7 = *very much*).

*Results.* Role x Target ANOVAs revealed significant interactions for evaluations, inclusion and punitiveness (see Abrams et al., 2013). The transgressive captain received significantly more favorable responses than the transgressive player.

For accrual, significant main effects of Target,  $F(1, 55) = 101.00, p < .001, \eta^2 = .65$ , and Role,  $F(1, 55) = 5.07, p < .001, \eta^2 = .22$ , were qualified by a significant Role x Target interaction,  $F(1, 55) = 6.13, p = .016, \eta^2 = .10$ . Simple effects tests revealed a significant effect of Role for the transgressive targets,  $F(1, 55) = 12.88, p < .001, \eta^2 = .19$  (captain  $M = 3.98, SE = 0.33$ , player  $M = 2.41, SE = 0.29$ ), but not for the normative targets,  $F(1, 55) = 0.82, p = .37, \eta^2 = .02$  (captain  $M = 6.04, SE = 0.19$ ; player  $M = 5.81, SE = 0.17$ ).

For conferral, the main effect of Role was nonsignificant,  $F(1, 55) = 0.33, p < .568, \eta^2 < .01$ , and the effect of Target,  $F(1, 55) = 27.78, p < .001, \eta^2 = .34$ ,



**Fig. 3.** Study 3: Mediation of the effect of transgressor role on inclusion through accrual and conferral. Note. \* $p < .05$ , \*\* $p < .01$ , \*\*\* $p < .001$ .

was qualified by a significant Role  $\times$  Target interaction,  $F(1, 55) = 5.70$ ,  $p = .02$ ,  $\eta^2 = .09$ . Conferral was lower for transgressive than for normative players ( $M = 3.47, 5.06$ ,  $SE = 0.29, 0.31$ , respectively),  $F(1, 55) = 33.43$ ,  $p < .001$ ,  $\eta^2 = .38$ , whereas conferral was similarly high for transgressive and normative captains ( $M = 4.20, 4.80$ ,  $SE = 0.33, 0.36$ , respectively),  $F(1, 55) = 3.70$ ,  $p = .06$ ,  $\eta^2 = .06$ .

We tested whether accrual and conferral mediated effects of Role on evaluations, inclusion, and punitiveness towards the transgressors. As hypothesized, both potential mediators were significantly correlated with the three dependent variables (all  $r_s > .28$ ,  $p < .05$ ), as well as with each other ( $r = .32$ ,  $p = .015$ ).

We conducted three multiple mediation analyses (Hayes, 2012, Model 4, 5000 bootstraps), considering Role as the predictor, accrual and conferral as the mediators, and evaluations, punitiveness and inclusion (shown in Figure 3 for illustrative purposes) as the dependent variables. Role affected accrual significantly,  $b = -1.62$ ,  $t = 3.72$ ,  $p < .001$ , but conferral only marginally,  $b = -0.81$ ,  $t = 1.82$ ,  $p = .074$ .

For evaluations, the role of transgressor (captain or player) and the mediators together accounted for 52% of the variance,  $F(3, 54) = 19.87$ ,  $p < .001$ . There was a significant total effect of Role,  $b = -2.22$ ,  $t = 6.70$ ,  $p < .001$ , and a significant direct effect of Role,  $b = -1.74$ ,  $t = 4.95$ ,  $p < .001$ , on evaluations. Accrual affected evaluations directly ( $b = 0.26$ ,  $t = 2.64$ ,  $p = .011$ ) but conferral did not ( $b = 0.07$ ,  $t = 0.76$ ,  $p = .453$ ). Importantly, the total indirect effect of

Role through accrual and conferral was also significant,  $b = -0.48$ ,  $Z = 2.41$ ,  $p = .016$ , 95% CI  $(-1.06, -0.10)$ . The specific indirect effects were significant via accrual,  $b = -0.42$ ,  $SE = 0.22$ , 95% CI  $(-0.96, -0.07)$  but not conferral,  $b = -0.06$ ,  $SE = 0.00$ , 95% CI  $(-0.34, 0.04)$ . This shows that accrual partially mediated between role and evaluations, consistent with the results from Study 1.

For inclusion of the transgressor (see Figure 3), role and the mediators together accounted for 56% of the variance,  $F(3, 54) = 22.51$ ,  $p < .001$ . There was a significant total effect of Role,  $b = -1.64$ ,  $t = 3.87$ ,  $p < .001$ , whereas the direct effect of Role was nonsignificant,  $b = -0.62$ ,  $t = 1.69$ ,  $p = .097$ , 95% CI  $(-1.35, 0.12)$ . Both accrual and conferral affected inclusion directly,  $bs = 0.47$ ,  $.34$ ,  $ts = 4.53$ ,  $3.37$ ,  $ps < .001$ ,  $= .001$ , respectively). Importantly, the total indirect effect of Role via accrual and conferral was also significant,  $b = -1.03$ ,  $Z = 3.20$ ,  $p = .001$ , 95% CI  $(-1.61, -0.53)$ . There was a significant separate indirect effect through accrual,  $b = -0.75$ ,  $SE = 0.24$ , 95% CI  $(-1.31, -0.35)$ . The indirect effect of Role through conferral was also significant  $b = -0.27$ ,  $SE = 0.18$ , 95% CI  $(-0.77, -0.02)$ . In summary, accrual and conferral independently and fully mediated between Role and inclusion.

For punitiveness, bonus allocation to the transgressor was scaled to the same metric (1–7) as the mediators (cf. Preacher & Hayes, 2004). Role and the mediators together accounted for 31% of the variance in punitiveness,  $F(3, 52) = 7.91$ ,  $p < .001$ . There was a significant total effect of Role,  $b = -0.64$ ,  $t = 2.15$ ,  $p = .036$ , whereas the direct effect of Role was nonsignificant,  $b = -0.15$ ,  $t = 0.48$ ,  $p = .632$ . Both accrual and conferral affected punitiveness,  $bs = 0.22$ ,  $0.21$ ,  $ts = 2.68$ ,  $2.55$ ,  $ps = .010$ ,  $.014$ , respectively). The total indirect effect of Role via accrual and conferral was also significant,  $b = -0.51$ ,  $Z = 2.57$ ,  $p = .01$ , 95% CI  $(-0.92, -0.18)$ . There was a significant separate indirect effect of accrual,  $b = -0.34$ ,  $Z = 2.17$ ,  $p = .030$ , 95% CI  $(-0.76, -0.09)$ , but not by conferral,  $b = -0.16$ ,  $Z = 1.42$ ,  $p = .156$ , 95% CI  $(-0.44, 0.01)$ . This pattern of findings shows that accrual fully mediated between Role and punitiveness.

In sum, accrual (representativeness) mediated between Role and inclusion, evaluation and punitiveness, while conferral (support) mediated between Role and inclusion. Moreover these two mediators fully accounted for the effects of Role on both inclusion and punitiveness.

#### Study 4

*Design, measures and hypotheses.* Study 4 provides a further test of the joint roles of accrual and conferral in the context of a boundary condition for transgression credit. This study (see Abrams et al., 2015, for details) adapted the sports transgression paradigm from Studies 1 and 3 with a moral twist in which half of the participants judged a transgression that included a racist aside, “why don’t you go back to your own country?.” All targets were leaders, either from the

ingroup or outgroup team. Transgression credit in evaluations disappeared when the ingroup transgressive captain additionally showed racist intent.

Here we examine unexplored subset of data that measured participants' conferral and accrual judgments of captains. We expected that accrual and conferral would be affected by the captain's group membership and form of transgression. We also expected that accrual and conferral would mediate the effect of conditions on evaluations of the captain.

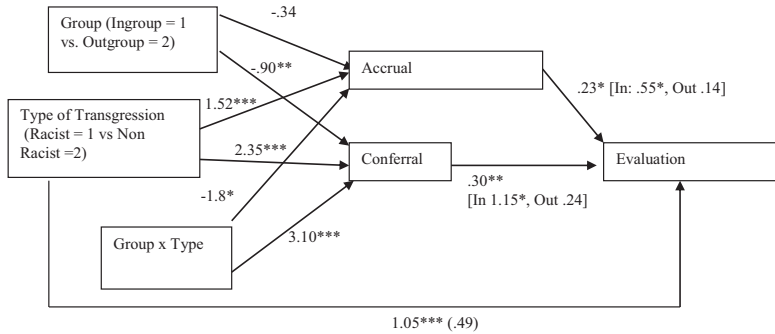
Sixty undergraduate students at the University of Kent thought about the captain of their soccer team or their main rival soccer team and then read a scenario involving a crucial game in which winning was essential. The design was a 2 (Group: ingroup vs. outgroup)  $\times$  2 (Type of Transgression: nonracist vs. racist) full between-participants.

Participants were told that the (ingroup or outgroup) captain 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 Nonracism 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." Finally, the transgressor was described as refusing to engage in the customary handshake with opposing team players at the end of the game.

*Evaluation* was similar to the previous studies ( $\alpha = .95$ ). To measure *accrual*, participants rated (1 = *not at all*, 7 = *completely*) the extent to which the transgressor "has the characteristics and qualities that are highly shared by all members of your team and most distinctive and different from the other team," "is representative of your team," and "typical of your team" ( $\alpha = .89$ ). To measure *conferral*, participants rated (1 = *not at all*, 7 = *extremely*) the extent to which the transgressor was "entitled to behave as he did," "should be supported by the team," "has a role that allows that behavior," and "behaves as you would expect a leader of this team to behave" ( $\alpha = .93$ ).

*Results.* ANOVAs revealed significant Group  $\times$  Type of Transgression interactions on evaluations, and on both accrual,  $F(1, 54) = 5.48, p = .023, \eta_p^2 = .092$ , and conferral,  $F(1,54) = 21.37, p < .001, \eta_p^2 = .284$  (see Table 1). Simple effects analyses revealed that evaluations, accrual, and conferral, respectively, were all significantly lower for the racist captain than the nonracist captain in the ingroup condition ( $F_s 1,54 \geq 19.93, p_s < .001$ ) but not in the outgroup condition ( $F_s \leq 2.67$ , lowest  $p > .1$ ), and higher for the ingroup than the outgroup captain when the transgression was nonracial ( $F_s \geq 5.17, p_s \leq .001, <.05, <.001$ ), but not when it was racial ( $F_s \leq 2.09$ , lowest  $p > .15$ ).

Conferral and accrual were related ( $r = .66, p < .001$ ). We tested how they separately mediated the effect of the interaction on evaluations using PROCESS Model 7, 5000 bootstraps. The model, shown in Figure 4, accounted for 55% of the



**Fig. 4.** Study 4: Mediated moderation model showing coefficients for the indirect effect of group, type of transgression and their interaction on evaluation via accrual and conferral.  
*Note.* Independent variables are centered. \* $p < .05$ , \*\* $p < .01$ , \*\*\* $p < .001$ . Direct effect is in round brackets, conditional effects are in square brackets.

variance in evaluations,  $F(3, 56) = 22.94, p < .001$ ). There were significant effects overall for both accrual,  $b = 0.23, SE = 0.10, t = 2.28, p = .03$ , and conferral,  $b = 0.30, SE = 0.10, t = 3.03, p = .004$ . The conditional indirect effect of type of transgression remained significant in the ingroup condition for both accrual,  $b = 0.55, SE = 0.32, 95\% CI (0.06, 1.32)$ , and conferral,  $b = 1.15, SE = 0.55, 95\% CI (0.18, 2.31)$ , whereas in the outgroup condition the conditional indirect effects of type of transgression were nonsignificant via both accrual,  $b = 0.14, SE = 0.21, 95\% CI (-0.05, 0.60)$  for accrual and conferral  $b = 0.24, SE = 0.21, 95\% CI (-0.04, 0.78)$ . Moreover, the direct effect of type of transgression was nonsignificant when the mediators were included in the model,  $b = 0.49, SE = 0.32, t = 1.54, p = .13$ . Finally, the direct effect of the interaction on evaluation,  $b = -2.17, SE = 0.44, t = 4.94, p < .001$ , decreased when accrual and construal were included as mediators,  $b = -1.59, SE = 0.48, t = 3.35, p = .002$ . In summary, both accrual and conferral mediated the interactive effect of the captain's group membership and type of transgression on evaluations.

## General Discussion

The social identity approach to leadership emphasizes that leaders emerge and survive to the extent that they embody the group's norm. Members who have the highest representativeness (prototypicality) are most valued as leaders (Hogg, 2001). Our deviance credit hypothesis proposes that ingroup leaders benefit from both accrual of prototypicality and conferral of the right to depart from existing norms, or to orient to new norms. Studies 1, 3, and 4 demonstrated that accrued prototypicality mediated effects on evaluation of transgressors, and (in Study 3) on the extent to which they are included or punished. Studies 2, 3 and 4 demonstrated

that deviant leaders can benefit from a conferral process—the belief that ingroup leaders should be supported by their members. Study 2 revealed that conferral even affected evaluation and punitiveness to a randomly appointed leader in an entirely novel and minimal group. Studies 3 and 4 also supported the theoretical proposition that accrual and conferral can independently and jointly contribute to deviance credit.

### *Theoretical Contribution, Limitations and Implications for Policy and Research*

Previous theory suggests that deviance and innovation are permitted or effective when (1) the deviant has built up sufficient idiosyncrasy credit within the group (Hollander, 1958) or (2) the deviant can demonstrate strong motivation to help or enhance the group (Abrams et al., 2013). Moreover, previous theory and research indicated that leaders can act as entrepreneurs of identity and new group norms (Reicher, Haslam, & Hopkins, 2005). The present research extends that work by drawing on subjective group dynamics theory to address *why* particular group members have scope both to innovate and to transgress. In particular, we highlighted how two processes, the accrual of prototypicality and conferral of the right to lead, independently and jointly can explain why *ingroup* leaders are granted deviance credit. We acknowledge that the present evidence focuses entirely on transgression credit. More research is needed to test whether accrual and conferral also mediate innovation credit (Abrams et al., 2008). Indeed, we do not assume that innovation and transgression are necessarily orthogonal; some transgressions may be highly innovative, and some innovations may be quite transgressive. The distinction may be partly in the eye of the beholder. However, we believe our evidence is consistent with a general process of deviance credit that can facilitate leaders' innovation as well as transgression.

Further research is also needed to consider how best to measure conferral. Studies 2 and 3 used a single item measure, and Study 4 showed that this item converges well with two others to form a reliable scale. However, the scope and distinctiveness of this construct warrants further exploration, as do the situational factors that may limit or accentuate conferral.

Relatively unconstrained by their group, leaders may be prone to extreme and contrary actions, taking advantage of deviance credit. Recent decisions by political leaders spring to mind, for example, Donald Trump's first 100 days have been marked by completely unexpected decisions, such as dropping a Massive Ordnance Airblast Bomb (MOAB) bomb on Syria on April 13th 2017. On April 18th 2017, the U.K.'s new Prime Minister, Theresa May, announced that she was calling an immediate general election, despite having promised not to do so less than a month earlier. Her justification was her wish to bolster her mandate to pursue Brexit—a policy which she had opposed prior to the U.K. Referendum on EU membership.



Deviance credit clearly has limits, as revealed by Abrams et al. (2015), and we expect that most forms of leader deviance begin in moderate forms which progress to extremes if left unchecked. Thus, deviance credit plays a role in enabling both positive and negative social change. Archival evidence may prove useful in tracking these progressions. Deviance credit may also have unexpected negative effects for a group. If group members do not limit transgressive leadership, the group may become increasingly vulnerable to criticism and attack from observers and outgroups. These effects may exacerbate intergroup tension and conflict, particularly if an extremist leader is viewed by outsiders as prototypical of that group (cf. Hogg & Blaylock, 2012). Likewise, innovation credit might ironically reduce group members' appreciation of their leaders' creativity, making the group vulnerable to poaching of its leader by other groups. Importantly, however, we do not believe that deviance credit is an inherent benefit of leadership per se. Rather, as emphasized by subjective group dynamics theory, the intergroup context strongly frames which leaders are granted deviance credit, and by whom.

Future research should investigate cultural effects on deviance credit. For example, collectivist communities might be reluctant to derogate deviant ingroup leaders but might place tight constraints to prevent them from breaching rules in the first place (Blair & Bligh, 2018). The social developmental antecedents of deviance credit also deserve to be explored. Young children's reliance on morality based reasoning (right vs. wrong, fair vs. unfair) might prevent deviance credit, whereas adolescents may accept ingroup leaders' deviance and justify it in terms of the importance of preserving group functioning (Abrams, Rutland, Pelletier, & Ferrell, 2009).

Accrual, conferral, and deviance credit have implications for the way teams, organizations, and countries respond to leaders' creative and innovative behavior, as well as to their illegal and corrupt behavior (Ashforth & Anand, 2003; Near & Miceli, 2011; Van de Vyver, Travaglino, Vasiljevic, & Abrams, 2015). Deviance credit may be a decisive enabler for leaders to generate constructive social change, but also to establish destructive, extremist and morally questionable norms in the name of the group. Understanding both the opportunities and risks arising from deviance credit therefore presents an important challenge for research, policy and practice.

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