When Is It Okay to Exclude a Member of the Ingroup? Children’s and Adolescents’ Social Reasoning

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Abstract

Social exclusion of those who challenge group norms was investigated by asking children and adolescents, adolescents, age 9–13 years (N = 381), to evaluate exclusion of group members who deviated from group norms. Testing predictions from social reasoning developmental theories of group-based exclusion, children and adolescents evaluated exclusion based on group norms involving allocation of resources and group traditions about dress code. Exclusion of deviant members was viewed as increasingly wrong with age, but also varied by the type of norm the deviant challenged. Participants who reported disliking a deviant member who wanted to distribute money unequally also found it acceptable to exclude them. Those who disliked deviants who went against norms about dress codes did not think exclusion was warranted. These findings are discussed in the context of children’s social-cognitive development regarding peer rejection as well as the role played by moral judgment and group dynamics.

Keywords: social exclusion; group dynamics; moral judgment; group norms

Introduction

Does the violation of group norms warrant exclusion from peer groups? Group affiliations can emerge as early as the age of five (Dunham, Baron, & Carey, 2011), and such affiliations are maintained throughout childhood and adolescence. One way group members express their group affiliation is by conforming to group norms (Prinstein & Dodge, 2008). Yet norms vary substantively and can include shared hobbies, activities, or appearance (Rubin, Bukowski, & Parker, 2006). Some groups
have norms that reflect not just conventions, but also inter-individual treatment, such as norms about sharing, gossiping, or bullying. The question remains whether children believe that violation of these group norms warrants exclusion. Although many studies have shown that children and adolescents recognize the negative consequences of exclusion (Bolling et al., 2011; Gazelle & Druhen, 2009; Killen, Lee-Kim, McGlothlin, & Stangor, 2002), much remains unknown about how exclusion is conceptualized by children and adolescents. There may be times when exclusion is justified, such as when a group member challenges a norm to do something that has negative moral implications. To further understand the conflicts that arise between maintaining group affiliations and excluding a non-conforming group member, we investigated how children evaluate the exclusion of deviant group members who challenge ingroup norms.

Knowledge about peer groups and how they work develops as children gain social-cognitive competencies and experience with groups (Abrams, Rutland, Pelletier, & Ferrell, 2009; Brown, 1990). Beginning in middle childhood, group identity becomes salient (Ruble et al., 2004). By preadolescence conformity to group norms is weighed in group decisions as evidenced by findings that show, with age, 5–12-year-olds begin to prefer individuals who conform to their group norms, even if they do not belong to the group, over peers who deviate from group norms (Abrams et al., 2009). However, what has not been studied is whether children as well as adolescents think that violating group norms is grounds for exclusion from one’s group and if this depends on the type of group norm.

Research with adults has documented that individual behavior can be influenced by the type of norms made salient in certain situations, such as norms about what ‘is’ and what ‘ought’ to be (Cialdini, Reno, & Kallgren, 1990). In children, recognition of social norms and rules occurs as early as the age of three (Smetana, 2006). Three-year-olds can learn about such norms without evident cues from adults, but rather through incidental observation (Schmidt, Rakoczy, & Tomasello, 2011). However, recognition that conforming to social norms is voluntary begins around the age of five (Kalish, 1998). At around the same age, children are also able to distinguish between moral and social-conventional norms.

The difference between moral and social-conventional norms has been documented by researchers working from social domain theory (Turiel, 1983), which posits that children construct knowledge about their social world using three domains of social knowledge: (1) the moral domain, which involves issues of welfare, justice, and other’s well-being; (2) the societal domain, which involves issues related to authority sanctioned social conventions about how groups and institutions work; and (3) the psychological domain, which reflects issues of autonomy and individual choice (Nucci, 1981). Extensive research has shown that morally relevant norms are viewed as generalizable and unalterable, in contrast to social-conventional rules or norms that are viewed as contextual (not generalizable), alterable, and a matter of consensus (Smetana, 2006). Thus, the two types of norms examined in the present study were those that have been consistently found to be evaluated as moral (e.g., fair allocation of resources) and social-conventional (e.g., dress code expectations for a group) (Damon, 1977; Turiel, 1983).

Research has shown that children and adolescents reason about moral norm violations citing concerns for others’ welfare, fairness, and justice whereas they reason about social-conventional violations using references to authority sanctions, traditions, and group functioning (Smetana, 2006). When reasoning about multifaceted issues,
such as social exclusion, children use both moral reasons (e.g., ‘it’s unfair to exclude someone because of their skin color’) and social-conventional reasons (e.g., ‘it’s okay to exclude her from the track team if she’s a slow runner’). Although individuals recognize the psychological harm and injustice caused by exclusion, there are also contexts in which individuals justify exclusion to preserve optimal group functioning or personal choice (Killen et al., 2002).

Previous research has shown that adolescents begin to consider multiple types of reasoning in group contexts, including fairness and group functioning, whereas younger children tend to focus on issues related to fairness and equal treatment (Horn, 2003). What has not been tested is whether maintaining smooth functioning of groups, and specifically adhering to group norms, is reason enough to exclude members who challenge their groups and whether the moral relevance of the norms they challenge is related to their decisions. One of the aims of the current study was to demonstrate what factors are weighed when groups decide to exclude deviant group members who challenge norms that are morally relevant (e.g., fair and equal allocation of resources) or related to social conventions (i.e., traditions about clothing).

Focusing on the type of group norm that a member violates is important because when making a decision to exclude that member, one must consider the benefits or losses to the group resulting from the deviant behavior. Studies from developmental subjective group dynamics (Abrams & Rutland, 2008) have revealed that, with age, children prefer loyalty, as defined by adherence to a group norm even if it comes from outgroup members. However, ingroup members who deviate from group norms could also show loyalty. For example, a deviant member may want to wear an assigned group shirt as an expression of his/her group membership when the rest of the group does not. In this case, a deviant can be viewed as disloyal for challenging the group’s norm of not wearing the shirt but also as loyal for wanting to wear a shirt that represents the group. How do children weigh competing factors when evaluating group members who exhibit disloyalty, but may be doing something that could be beneficial for the group? In particular, what is not known, and is the focus of the present study, is whether deviating from a norm of equal allocation of resources or from conventions about dress warrants exclusion from the group.

Intergroup research has demonstrated that children often exclude others for reasons based on their membership in specific groups (Killen, Mulvey, & Hitti, 2013). Although it has been demonstrated that children express, and expect peers to express, different evaluations of individuals who deviate from or adhere to group norms (Abrams & Rutland, 2008), no explicit assessment of whether children and adolescents view exclusion of deviant members as legitimate has been conducted. Moreover, to our knowledge no research has explicitly investigated the relation between children’s favorability toward group members and their evaluations of group decisions to exclude those group members, which can provide insight into the inter-play of affect and emotions in group dynamics.

Thus, the current study examined children’s and adolescents’ judgments and reasoning about exclusion of group members who deviated from group norms (moral and social-conventional) as well as their affective evaluations of these members. Four experimental conditions were tested using gender-based groups. Gender-based groups were chosen because children develop a sense of gender group membership very early, ensuring that they will affiliate with the groups used (Liben & Bigler, 2002). Therefore, participants evaluated members of ingroups (who share their gender group membership) as well as members of outgroups (who are the opposite gender). Both 9-
13-year-olds were sampled, given that around the age of nine children begin to have more experiences with peer groups and upon entering middle school place increasing importance on peer groups, group identity, and group functioning (Horn, 2003).

Based on social domain theory, it was expected that, overall, exclusion of a group member would be viewed negatively given the harm inflicted on the excluded child (Smetana, 2006). However, given that children differentiate between moral and social-conventional norms (Smetana, 2006), it was expected that participants would differentiate between exclusion of deviants who violate morally relevant norms and those who violate social-conventional norms. It was also predicted, based on previous findings regarding evaluations of deviant acts (Abrams & Rutland, 2008; Killen, Rutland, Abrams, Mulvey, & Hitti, 2013), that both children and adolescents would view exclusion of a deviant member who espouses positive goals as more wrong than exclusion of deviant members who espouse negative goals.

Given previous research showing stronger preferences to strict adherence to equal allocation of resources in nine-year-olds than adolescents (Almås, Cappelen, Sørensen, & Tungodden, 2010), it was expected that younger participants would be more accepting of exclusion of peers who advocate unequal distribution than adolescents. Stemming from previous studies on exclusion, it was expected that different forms of reasoning would be used by those who view exclusion as acceptable and those who view it as unacceptable (Killen et al., 2002). In addition, adolescents will express diverse forms of reasoning to justify their responses whereas nine-year-olds will focus more on fairness issues when judging the unacceptability of exclusion.

Intergroup research often documents ingroup preferences (Nesdale, 2008), but research from developmental subjective group dynamics (Abrams & Rutland, 2008) has shown that, with age, children become more attuned to group norms and attend to individuals’ adherence to these norms more than to ingroup/outgroup distinctions. Therefore, it was an open question as to whether participants would evaluate exclusion of ingroup members more negatively than exclusion of outgroup members. There is some evidence that emotions can be used as evaluative information when making moral judgments (Arsenio, Gold, & Adams, 2006; Malti, Gasser, & Gutzwiller-Helffenfinger, 2010). Previous research shows that responses to both ingroup and outgroup deviants are likely to be affect laden (Abrams & Rutland, 2008); therefore, it was expected that participants’ favorability ratings will be related to their judgments about exclusion of deviant members. Those who like a deviant member will likely judge exclusion as more wrong than those who report not liking the deviant member.

**Method**

**Participants**

The sample included 381 participants from the suburbs of a metropolitan US Mid-Atlantic city. Two age groups were sampled from the fourth and eighth grades of three elementary schools and two middle schools: 122 (73 female) fourth graders [mean proportions $(\bar{M}) = 9.76$ years, standard deviation $(SD) = .35$, range $= 9.00–11.58$]; and 259 (141 female) eighth graders $(\bar{M} = 13.56$ years, $SD = .39$, range $= 12.88–15.14$). The fourth graders will be referred to as nine-year-olds and the eighth graders will be referred to as 13-year-olds, to reflect their mean ages. The participants attended public schools serving a middle-low- to middle-income population. Ethnicity was reflective of the US population, with approximately 30 percent ethnic minority participants (10 percent African-American, 15 percent Latino, and 5 percent Asian-American).
Participants assessed four conditions that referenced deviant members who challenged their group’s norms, which were either morally relevant or about social conventions. The conditions were (1) *equal deviant*, dividing $100 equally between one’s own group and another group when the ingroup wanted more money; (2) *unequal deviant*, dividing $100 unequally between one’s own group and another group ($80/$20) when the group wanted to divide the money equally; (3) *traditional deviant*, wearing an assigned club shirt when the group did not; and (4) *non-traditional deviant*, not wearing an assigned club shirt when the group did.

Participants were randomly assigned to one of two versions of the protocol. The order of the presentation of the norms within each version varied (for instance, in version 1 participants received the stories in the order: *non-traditional deviant*, *traditional deviant*, *unequal deviant*, and, *equal deviant*, and in version 2 the stories were in this order: *traditional deviant*, *non-traditional deviant*, *equal deviant*, and *unequal deviant*). The type of norm assigned to either a girls’ group or a boys’ group also varied by version (version 1: The girl’s groups had non-traditional and equal norms, and the boy’s group had traditional and unequal norms; these were reversed in version 2). Thus, for example, depending on the version, female participants responded to an ingroup (girls’ group) with equal norms (e.g., version 1) or an ingroup with unequal norms (e.g., version 2), and so did male participants. No order effects were found during piloting, so for ease of administration, the social-conventional conditions were presented first, followed by the moral conditions. Brightly illustrated pictures depicted the group and icons representing the norms.

A warm-up measure was administered to familiarize participants with the 6-point Likert-type scale used with (1 = really not okay or not much) and (6 = really okay or a lot) and the descriptors for each number on the scale. This was followed by a group assignment task where participants were told that they belonged to a group of same-gender children as portrayed by a picture of eight same-gender children (Abrams & Rutland, 2008; Nesdale, 2008). To enhance group identity, participants were asked to give their group a name, select an end-of-year event for the group to have (e.g., pizza party or ice cream party), and to select a group symbol (e.g., star or lightning bolt).

In each condition (two moral and two social-conventional), children’s ingroup norm was identified and they were introduced to their outgroup (defined by gender), which had an opposite norm. Ingroup norms were described as: ‘Your group does X’ and outgroup norms were ‘The other does Y’ (for each pictures displaying four group members and the norm were shown). In each condition, they were introduced to a group member who deviated from the group norm.

Below is an example of a social-conventional condition with a non-traditional deviant member:

These are groups that . . . are given special shirts that they wear to the school assembly. This way everybody knows which group people belong to. In the past, your group has worn their green and white club shirts. In the past the other group has not worn their red and black club shirts because they think it’s not ‘cool’. . . . Stephanie, who is also in your group, wants to be different from the other members of your club. She does not wear her green and white club shirt to the first big assembly of the year.

Below is an example of a moral condition with a deviant member who advocates for unequal allocation of resources:
The Student Council . . . [has] $100 to give out to the groups. . . . In the past, when your group has talked about it they have voted to give $50 to your own group and $50 to the other group. In the past, when the other group has talked about it they have voted to give $80 to their own group and $20 to your group. . . . Sally, who is also in your group, wants to be different from the other members of the club. She says that your group should get $80 and the other group should get $20.

Sections with italics were reversed depending on the condition. Note that the traditional norm of wearing a club shirt was established as a norm endorsed by the school. Participants were told the school provides shirts for the groups to wear to the school assemblies. After asking participants for their affective evaluations of the deviant member, they were then presented with the group’s decision to exclude the deviant. Here is an example of exclusion of the non-traditional deviant (statements in italics differed depending on the deviant condition):

The next week the group met and decided they didn’t want Stephanie in the club anymore. It was because she didn’t wear her red and black shirt. Stephanie was at the meeting.

Measurement Items
For each condition, children responded to three dependent measures: (1) favorability of deviant, Likert-type scale (‘How much do you think you like X?'; 1 = not much to 6 = a lot); (2) evaluation of exclusion, Likert-type scale (‘Would it be okay or not okay for X’s group to decide that he/she cannot be in their club?’; 1 = really not okay to 6 = really okay); and (3) justification for evaluation of exclusion: an open-ended justification for exclusion judgment (‘Why?’).

Procedure
Institutional review board approval was obtained, as well as approval from school districts and school principals. Only participants with signed parental consent were interviewed and surveyed. The protocol was administered as an interview to nine-year-olds and as a survey to 13-year-olds. The interview and survey were identical and measured participants’ evaluations about a group’s decision to exclude a group member who deviated from a group’s norm. Trained research assistants individually interviewed nine-year-olds in a quiet room, with sessions lasting approximately 25–30 min. Surveys also lasted 25–30 min and were administered by trained research assistants to groups of 20–25 13-year-olds at a time in a classroom environment. Pilot testing revealed no difference for administration of the instrument in survey or interview format.

Coding and Reliability
Participants’ justifications were coded using categories drawn from social domain theory (Smetana, 2006) as well as based on a content review of pilot data. Consistent with previous research on exclusion, participants referenced moral reasoning related to fairness, social-conventional reasoning related to group functioning and school norms, as well as personal reasoning related to autonomy (Killen et al., 2002). Four categories that reflected participants’ justifications about exclusion judgments were identified: (1) fairness (e.g., ‘She was not splitting the money equally so she was not being fair’ or ‘It is not fair to kick people out’); (2) group functioning (e.g., ‘He’s not doing what the
others like to do’); (3) school norm (e.g., ‘The school said you’re supposed to wear something so they know the difference’); and (4) Autonomy (e.g., ‘He can have his own opinion’). For each condition, analyses were conducted on justifications that had frequencies exceeding 10 percent.

Less than 5 percent of the participants used two codes so inter-rater reliability of use of double codes was not analyzed. Justification responses were analyzed with a previously established data analytic procedure in which codes were weighted depending on how many justifications were used by a given participant: justifications were coded as 1 = full use of the category, .5 = partial use, 0 = no use of the category. The coding was conducted by three coders blind to the hypotheses of the study. On the basis of 25 percent of the interviews (n = 96), there was strong inter-rater reliability (Cohen’s κ = .87).

Data Analysis

One-sample t-tests and analyses of variances (ANOVAs) with repeated measures were used to test hypotheses pertaining to evaluation and justification responses to the assessment. In cases where sphericity was violated, the Huynh–Feldt adjustment was used to interpret results. Follow-up analyses included pairwise comparisons for between-subjects effects (univariate ANOVAs) and interaction effects (Bonferroni t-tests). Analyses included gender of participant and age of participant. The repeated-measures factors were condition (equal deviant, unequal deviant, traditional deviant, and non-traditional deviant) or justifications (fairness, group functioning, school norm, autonomy). To simplify interpretation of findings, ‘condition’ reflects the deviant member’s behavior that was opposite to the group norm. For example, the ‘equal deviant condition’ involved a member who was deviating by advocating equal resource distribution when the group had a norm of unequal distribution.

Results

No ingroup versus outgroup deviant member effects (in reference to the participants’ gender) were found throughout the analyses. Results are presented collapsed for the ingroup and outgroup deviant member conditions. There were no gender of the participant differences; thus, gender findings are not reported.

Evaluations of Exclusion

To test our expectation that children would not accept a group’s decision to exclude a deviant group member, four one-sample t-tests were performed on the exclusion judgments for each deviant condition (equal, unequal, traditional, and non-traditional). Participants’ judgments were tested against a neutral score of 3.5. Tests indicated that judgments were statistically significantly below the neutral rating of 3.5 for each condition: equal deviant; t(377) = -14.31, p < .001, d = -.74; unequal deviant; t(378) = -2.30, p < .05, d = -.12; traditional deviant; t(377) = -16.63, p < .001, d = -.86; and non-traditional deviant; t(377) = -5.18, p < .001, d = -.27. In all conditions, participants did not support a group decision to exclude deviant members (M_Equal Deviant = 2.30, SD = 1.64, M_Unequal Deviant = 3.30, SD = 1.69, M_Traditional Deviant = 2.22, SD = 1.50, M_Non-traditional Deviant = 3.06, SD = 1.67).

Deviance Regarding Allocation of Resources: Moral Conditions. Hypotheses about differences in evaluations of exclusion based on whether the deviant was challenging
a norm of equal distribution or a norm of unequal distribution were tested using repeated-measures ANOVAs. A 2 (age group: 9-year-olds, 13-year-olds) × 2 (gender: female, male) × 2 (deviance condition: equal, unequal) ANOVA with repeated measures on the last factor was conducted on exclusion evaluations for the equal vs. unequal deviant conditions. A main effect was found for condition, \( F(1, 372) = 100.67, p < .001, \eta_p^2 = .21 \), showing that participants were less accepting of exclusion of an equal deviant than an unequal deviant. Additionally, there was a condition × age interaction effect, \( F(1, 372) = 8.76, p < .01, \eta_p^2 = .02 \), revealing that younger participants were less negative about excluding a member who deviated by advocating for unequal distribution of resources than were older participants, \( p < .05 \) (equal deviant: \( M_{9\text{-yr-olds}} = 2.07, SD = 1.31, M_{13\text{-yr-olds}} = 2.4, SD = 1.76 \); unequal deviant: \( M_{9\text{-yr-olds}} = 3.56, SD = 1.54, M_{13\text{-yr-olds}} = 3.18, SD = 1.74 \), see Figure 1). Findings confirmed that participants would view exclusion of members who deviated from norms about equality to be more acceptable than exclusion of those who deviated from a norm about unequal distribution, and that younger participants would focus on strict equality more so than 13-year-olds.

**Deviance Regarding Dress Codes: Social-conventional Conditions.** As in the moral conditions, a 2 (age group: 9-year-olds, 13-year-olds) × 2 (gender: female, male) × 2 (deviance condition: traditional, non-traditional) ANOVA with repeated measures on the last factor was conducted on exclusion evaluations for the traditional and non-traditional deviant conditions. When comparing evaluations of exclusion of a traditional deviant versus a non-traditional deviant, a main effect for condition was found, \( F(1, 371) = 59.66, p < .001, \eta_p^2 = .14 \). Participants viewed it as less acceptable to exclude a member who deviates by wearing the club shirt than a member who deviates by not wearing the shirt (\( M_{\text{Traditional Deviant}} = 2.22, SD = 1.50, M_{\text{Non-traditional Deviant}} = 3.06, \eta_p^2 = .14 \).
SD = 1.67). Thus, as hypothesized, exclusion of a deviant member who advocated for not wearing the group shirt was viewed as more acceptable than exclusion of a deviant member who advocated for wearing the group shirt.

**Moral vs. Social-conventional Deviant Conditions.** To test hypotheses related to differentiation between deviance from morally relevant norms and social-conventional norms, two different 2 (age group: 9-year-olds, 13-year-olds) × 2 (gender: female, male) × 2 (deviance condition: moral, social-conventional) ANOVAs with repeated measures on the last factor were conducted on participants’ exclusion evaluations. Exclusion evaluations about equal vs. traditional deviants were compared, and no significant effects were found for condition, gender, or age.

However, when comparing exclusion of an unequal deviant with a non-traditional deviant, there was a main effect for condition, \(F(1,372) = 10.54, p = .001, \eta_p^2 = .03\), and a condition × age interaction effect, \(F(1,372) = 9.77, p < .01, \eta_p^2 = .03\). Thus, participants viewed exclusion of the unequal deviant as less negative than they did exclusion of the non-traditional deviant (\(M_{\text{Unequal Deviant}} = 3.30, SD = 1.69\), \(M_{\text{Non-traditional Deviant}} = 3.05, SD = 1.66\)). Children viewed it as more okay to exclude someone who deviated by not wanting to divide resources equally than by not wanting to wear the group shirt (\(p < .001\)) whereas adolescents did not differentiate (unequal deviant: \(M_{9\text{-yr-olds}} = 3.56, SD = 1.54, M_{13\text{-yr-olds}} = 3.18, SD = 1.74\); unconventional deviant: \(M_{9\text{-yr-olds}} = 2.82, SD = 1.47, M_{13\text{-yr-olds}} = 3.17, SD = 1.75\); see Figure 1).

In summary, although participants generally did not approve of excluding a member who deviated from a group norm, they were more positive about exclusion of a deviant who advocated for unequal allocation of resources than for one who advocated for ignoring dress codes, with nine-year-olds showing the highest ratings of approval for exclusion.

**Justifications for Evaluation of Exclusion**

References to fairness, group functioning, and autonomy were the top three justifications used by participants to reason about their exclusion judgments in the unequal, equal, and non-traditional deviant conditions. References to the larger school norm about dress codes were used in addition to the former three types of reasoning only in the traditional deviant condition. Analyses for justifications were conducted as a function of exclusion judgments (whether participants viewed the group decision to exclude the deviant as okay or not okay), age, and gender. Okay or not okay exclusion judgments were based on a midpoint split of 3.5 for responses to a Likert-type scale ranging from 1 = really not okay to 6 = really okay. Repeated-measures ANOVAs were used for analyses, and follow-up tests were conducted with pairwise comparisons.

**Equal and Unequal Deviant Conditions.** Two separate 2 (age group: 9-year-olds, 13-year-olds) × 2 (gender: female, male) × 2 (exclusion judgment: okay, not okay) × 3 (reasoning: fairness, group functioning, autonomy) ANOVAs with repeated measures on the last factor were conducted on reasoning for the two deviance conditions (equal and unequal). Participants who stated that it was okay for the group to exclude the equal deviant reasoned about it differently from those who said it was not okay for the group to exclude the equal deviant member, \(F(2, 641) = 57.42, p < .001, \eta_p^2 = .14\) (see Table 1). Participants who judged that exclusion was not okay used more fairness reasoning than group functioning or autonomy (both \(ps < .001\)). Those who thought
Table 1. Proportion of Reasoning Used by Judgment of Exclusion and Age in the Moral Conditions

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Reasoning by condition</th>
<th>Not okay to exclude</th>
<th>Okay to exclude</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>9 years M (SD)</td>
<td>13 years M (SD)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Deviant member: equal</td>
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<td>(Group norm: equal)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Fairness</td>
<td>.75 (.40)</td>
<td>.63 (.49)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Group functioning</td>
<td>.08 (.26)</td>
<td>.17 (.37)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Autonomy</td>
<td>.10 (.26)</td>
<td>.22 (.41)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Deviant member: unequal</td>
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<tr>
<td>(Group norm: unequal)</td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Fairness</td>
<td>.31 (.45)</td>
<td>.24 (.41)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Group functioning</td>
<td>.41 (.46)</td>
<td>.39 (.47)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Autonomy</td>
<td>.19 (.37)</td>
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<td>(Group norm: unequal)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Fairness</td>
<td>.14 (.35)</td>
<td>.19 (.40)</td>
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<td>Group functioning</td>
<td>.57 (.49)</td>
<td>.63 (.50)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Autonomy</td>
<td>.04 (.18)</td>
<td>.05 (.20)</td>
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<td>Deviant member: unequal</td>
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<tr>
<td>(Group norm: equal)</td>
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<td>Fairness</td>
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<tr>
<td>Group functioning</td>
<td>.22 (.41)</td>
<td>.23 (.41)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Autonomy</td>
<td>.13 (.32)</td>
<td>.16 (.36)</td>
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Note: M = mean proportions; SD = standard deviation.
that it was okay for the group to exclude an equal deviant member focused on group functioning (e.g., ‘She’s going against what the group wants.’) rather than fairness or autonomy (both ps < .001). A reasoning × judgment × age interaction effect was found, $F(2, 641) = 4.02, p < .05, \eta^2_p = .01$ (see Table 1), showing that when judging exclusion as not okay, nine-year-olds referenced fairness significantly more than adolescents (Fairness$_{9\text{-yr-olds}} = .75$; Fairness$_{13\text{-yr-olds}} = .56$, $p < .001$) whereas adolescents used significantly more autonomy (e.g., ‘He’s free to have his own opinion.’) reasoning than did nine-year-olds (Autonomy$_{9\text{-yr-olds}} = .10$; Autonomy$_{13\text{-yr-olds}} = .22$, $p < .01$). In the condition when an equal deviant was being excluded, nine-year-olds overwhelmingly used fairness over any other type of reasoning (see Table 1, ps < .001) when justifying how unacceptable exclusion was and only used group functioning ($M = .63, \text{and} \ .00$ proportions of fairness and autonomy, $ps < .001$) when justifying exclusion as okay, thus focusing on one type of reasoning for each type of judgment. Although adolescents showed similar patterns as nine-year-olds in justifying the acceptability of exclusion, they showed more diversity in the types of reasons to explain why it was not okay to exclude a deviant who advocated equality. They used significantly more autonomy reasoning than group functioning (Group Functioning = .11, Autonomy = .22 $p < .01$), although they maintained fairness as the primary reason not to exclude (Fairness = .56, $ps < .001$). These findings confirmed our hypothesis that adolescents would use diverse forms of reasoning when judging exclusion.

When a group decided to exclude an unequal deviant, participants used different forms of reasoning when they evaluated the exclusion as okay and not okay; $F(2, 682) = 17.94, p < .001, \eta^2_p = .04$ (see Table 1); revealing a reverse pattern from exclusion of an equal deviant. Participants who thought that it was not okay to exclude an unequal deviant referenced group functioning ($M = .39$; e.g., ‘She’s giving more money to help the group.’) more often than autonomy ($M = .21$; $p < .01$) and fairness ($M = .26; p < .05$). Those who thought that it was okay to exclude the unequal deviant referenced the unfairness of advocating unequal distribution of money more often than group functioning or autonomy (both $ps < .001$). No age effects were found.

**Traditional and Non-traditional Deviant Conditions.** A 2 (age group: 9-year-olds, 13-year-olds) × 2 (gender: female, male) × 2 (exclusion judgment: okay, not okay) × 4 (reasoning: fairness, group functioning, autonomy, school norm) ANOVA with repeated measures on the last factor was conducted on reasoning for the traditional deviance condition. Participants who evaluated exclusion of the traditional deviant used four forms of reasoning. Those who evaluated it as okay used different justifications from participants who evaluated the group’s decision to exclude as not okay, $F(2, 963) = 12.17, p < .001, \eta^2_p = .03$ (see Table 2). Those who thought that excluding a traditional deviant was not okay used more group functioning (e.g., ‘He’s helping the group’) reasoning than all other forms of reasoning (fairness, autonomy and school norm, all $ps < .001$). In addition, when reasoning about the unacceptability of excluding a deviant who wears the shirt, participants used more fairness ($p < .05$) (e.g., ‘kicking some out for wearing the shirt is not fair’) and references to the school norm ($p < .01$) (e.g., ‘He’s doing what he’s supposed to do by wearing the shirt.’) than those who thought that exclusion was okay. Participants who said that it was all right for the group to exclude the traditional deviant (who wanted to wear the shirt when the group did not do it) referenced group functioning reasoning (e.g., ‘it’s okay to exclude her because she is wearing the shirt and this is not what the group does’) more than
Table 2. Proportion of Reasoning Used by Judgment of Exclusion and Age in the Social-conventional Conditions

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Reasoning by condition</th>
<th>Not okay to exclude</th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th>Okay to exclude</th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th>Total</th>
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<th></th>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>9 years</td>
<td>13 years</td>
<td>Total</td>
<td></td>
<td>9 years</td>
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<td>Total</td>
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<td></td>
<td>M (SD)</td>
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<td>Deviant member: traditional</td>
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<td>(Group norm: non-traditional)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Fairness</td>
<td>.13 (.32)</td>
<td>.13 (.33)</td>
<td>.13 (.33)</td>
<td>.00 (.00)</td>
<td>.00 (.00)</td>
<td>.00 (.00)</td>
<td>.00 (.00)</td>
<td>.11 (.30)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Group functioning</td>
<td>.37 (.47)</td>
<td>.42 (.48)</td>
<td>.40 (.48)</td>
<td>.81 (.38)</td>
<td>.70 (.46)</td>
<td>.73 (.45)</td>
<td>.45 (.49)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Autonomy</td>
<td>.12 (.32)</td>
<td>.17 (.37)</td>
<td>.15 (.35)</td>
<td>.04 (.14)</td>
<td>.15 (.36)</td>
<td>.13 (.33)</td>
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<tr>
<td>School norm</td>
<td>.23 (.41)</td>
<td>.17 (.36)</td>
<td>.19 (.38)</td>
<td>.00 (.00)</td>
<td>.02 (.15)</td>
<td>.02 (.13)</td>
<td>.16 (.35)</td>
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<td>Deviant member: non-traditional</td>
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<td>(Group norm: traditional)</td>
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<td>Fairness</td>
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<td>.12 (.32)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Group functioning</td>
<td>.51 (.47)</td>
<td>.58 (.49)</td>
<td>.56 (.48)</td>
<td>.83 (.37)</td>
<td>.81 (.38)</td>
<td>.82 (.38)</td>
<td>.66 (.46)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Autonomy</td>
<td>.20 (.37)</td>
<td>.16 (.36)</td>
<td>.18 (.36)</td>
<td>.04 (.18)</td>
<td>.02 (.15)</td>
<td>.03 (.16)</td>
<td>.12 (.31)</td>
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Note: M = mean proportions; SD = standard deviation.
fairness, autonomy, and school norm (all $ps < .001$), and more than participants who said exclusion was not okay ($p < .001$).

A 2 (age group: 9-year-olds, 13-year-olds) $\times$ 2 (gender: female, male) $\times$ 2 (exclusion judgment: okay, not okay) $\times$ 3 (reasoning: fairness, group functioning, autonomy) ANOVA with repeated measures on the last factor was conducted on reasoning for the non-traditional deviance condition. An effect for judgment (not okay versus okay) was also found for reasoning about exclusion of the non-traditional deviant, $F(2, 646) = 26.11, p < .001, \eta^2_p = .06$ (see Table 2), revealing that participants who thought that it was not okay to exclude the deviant member who did not wear the shirt when the group did referenced fairness ($p < .001$) and autonomy ($p < .01$) more than those who thought that it was okay to exclude the non-traditional deviant. However, those who thought that it was okay to exclude the non-traditional deviant used references to group functioning (e.g., ‘She’s acting like she’s in another group’) more than those who thought that it was not okay ($p < .001$).

Although participants mostly used fairness to justify not excluding an equal deviant, they also used it most often to justify excluding an unequal deviant. Adolescents’ reasoning responses were diverse and revealed the use of autonomy reasoning to reject excluding an equal deviant. Regarding deviance related to clothing customs, group functioning dominated participants’ justifications. In contrast, fairness and autonomy reasoning was used more often when judging exclusion as not okay, in particular for exclusion of the non-traditional deviant.

Relation between Evaluation of Exclusion and Favorability Evaluations

To test our hypothesis that those who did not like a deviant were more likely to support a group’s decision to exclude the deviant, participants’ favorability evaluations were used as factors in four separate 2 (age group: 9-year-olds, 13-year-olds) $\times$ 2 (gender: female, male) $\times$ 2 (favorability evaluation: like, not like) univariate ANOVAs; one for each condition (equal, unequal, traditional, non-traditional) were conducted on participants’ exclusion evaluations. Whether participants liked or did not like a deviant was based on a midpoint split of 3.5 for responses to a Likert-type scale ranging from 1 = not much to 6 = a lot. Our hypothesis was confirmed given that main effects for favorability evaluations were found for all conditions; equal deviant, $F(1, 367) = 23.66, p < .001, \eta^2_p = .06$; unequal deviant, $F(1, 369) = 29.90, p < .001, \eta^2_p = .07$; traditional deviant, $F(1, 368) = 22.94, p < .001, \eta^2_p = .05$; non-traditional deviant, $F(1, 369) = 29.20, p < .001, \eta^2_p = .07$. No age effects were found.

Participants who reported not liking the deviant judged a group’s decision to exclude the deviant as more okay than those who reported liking the deviant (see Figure 2). One-sample $t$-tests were conducted to assess whether those who reported not liking the deviant judged the group’s decision to exclude significantly differently from the 3.5 midpoint neutral judgment. In other words, we tested whether participants who did not like the deviant actually condoned a group’s decision to exclude a deviant member. Findings showed that judgments were significantly different from a neutral judgment of 3.5 for the unequal deviant, $t(239) = 2.14, p < .05, d = .14$, and the traditional deviant, $t(83) = -2.27, p < .05, d = -.25$. Those who did not like an unequal deviant ($n = 240, 63$ percent) did approve of the group’s decision to exclude this member, but those who did not like a traditional deviant ($n = 84, 22$ percent) still did not think that it was acceptable for the group to exclude someone for wearing the club shirt despite their feelings toward that deviant. Although 80 (21 percent) participants...
reported not liking the equal deviant and 213 (56 percent) reported not liking the non-traditional deviant, both groups of participants were ambivalent about excluding these deviant members because their evaluations did not significantly differ from the 3.5 midpoint rating (see Figure 2).

Discussion

Peer groups play an important role in children’s social development (Rubin et al., 2006). Children affiliate with peer groups early, share group norms, and express group loyalty. Research shows that group norms can vary substantively from those that are governed by moral issues as well as conventional issues (Smetana, 2006). In this study, we investigated whether children think that it is okay to exclude a member who deviates from group norms, whether it depends on the type of norm, and whether their feelings about the deviant play a role. The novel findings were that, overall, children did not support a group’s decision to exclude a member who deviated from a group norm. However, their preference to keep deviant ingroup members in the group did not extend to norms about equal allocation of resources; members who deviate from equal allocations are candidates for exclusion. Thus, there are contexts in which children and adolescents view exclusion as consistent with moral principles, such as when a deviant member of a group rejects norms about the equal allocation of resources.

Although research on exclusion has frequently shown that children reject exclusion (Killen et al., 2002), other research on intragroup dynamics (Abrams & Rutland, 2008) reveals just how important loyalty to the group is for children. This study was the first to assess whether children will view a group’s decision to exclude a disloyal member as legitimate. Despite evidence that children often do not like members who are disloyal (Kwon & Lease, 2009), participants in this study thought that it was wrong to exclude them. The exception, as mentioned, was when disloyalty included depriving

![Figure 2. Exclusion Judgments by Favorability Evaluation.](image)

Note: Likert responses range from 1 = really not okay to 6 = really okay.
others of resources. Despite research showing that children (seven- to eight-year-olds) are likely to allocate more resources to their ingroup than an outgroup (Fehr, Bernhard, & Rockenbach, 2008), the current findings provide new evidence that 9- and 13-year-olds are likely to exclude a member for holding non-egalitarian beliefs. Children may recognize the benefits of having someone in the group who advocates for more money for the ingroup as shown by Fehr et al. (2008); however, in the context of group dynamics, in which an outgroup is identifiable, their preference for egalitarianism takes priority. The pattern of findings was different for the conventional norms about dress codes. Nine-year-olds did not support exclusion of a disloyal member who did not wear the group shirt.

Further, for the first time it was revealed that participants’ own affective evaluations were related to their evaluations of exclusion, providing further evidence for the inter-play of emotions and moral judgments (Arsenio et al., 2006). These findings provided new support for the relation between affect and judgments about exclusion, extending both peer rejection (Rubin et al., 2006) and intergroup attitudes (Abrams & Rutland, 2008) research. Peer rejection is often measured using peer nomination methods without favorability evaluations, and intergroup attitudes are often measured using favorability ratings for ingroup/outgroup members without exclusion judgments.

Exclusion of group members was related to individuals’ favorability toward that member. A novel finding included those who reported not liking the unequal deviant approved of their exclusion, with ratings exceeding neutral evaluations. Thus, in this case they were willing to support excluding a person who is committing a moral violation of unfair allocation of money. This is consistent with findings that assess group-based emotions in bullying contexts, where feelings of anger about a bully’s actions increased 10–11-year-olds’ tendencies to act against the bully (Jones, Manstead, & Livingstone, 2011). Those who reported not liking deviants who violated conventional norms, however, were not willing to exclude them. This finding can be explained by children’s differentiation of rules and their understanding about the underlying criteria that make moral violations different from conventional ones (Smetana, 2006). Moral violations result in a victim who is deprived of a resource; in contrast, conventional violations result in group disruption or disorder rather than negative intrinsic consequences to individuals. The consequence of not wearing the group shirt may be that the group is not readily identifiable by others; there is no clear victim, only group disruption, in this case.

Surprisingly, there were no intergroup differences for evaluations of excluding ingroup deviant members (boys or girls) and outgroup deviant members (boys or girls). This finding indicates that children and adolescents did not let ingroup favoritism dictate their judgments. This is important and novel given the preponderance of research identifying the many ways ingroup biases manifest in children, especially with groups based on arbitrary assignment rather than meaningful social categories such as gender (Dunham et al., 2011). Given that previous research shows that children who highly identify with their groups exhibit ingroup bias (Nesdale, 2008), future research could test the direct relation between levels of social identity and judgments about exclusion of ingroup members.

Developmental findings on allocation of resources show that children’s understanding of fair distribution develops from strict egalitarianism in nine-year-olds to a focus on merit in middle adolescence and then to considering the role of effort in late adolescence (Almås et al., 2010). In the current study, the nine-year-old sample showed more support for a group decision to exclude a member who violated a moral
norm of equal distribution than did adolescents. Although surprising in light of previous research on exclusion that shows that young children reject exclusion (Killen et al., 2002), this is consistent with previous research that shows nine-year-olds emphasize egalitarianism whereas adolescents begin to consider merit and circumstance in thinking about fair distribution of resources (Almås et al., 2010). In this context, children placed a greater priority on the harm caused by inequitable distribution than on the consequences resulting from the exclusion of the deviant member.

Another novel aspect of this study was to examine social-conventional and moral distinctions in the context of group dynamics. Participants differentiated between violations of a social-conventional norm and moral norm. Nine-year-olds were more supportive of a group’s decision to exclude an unequal deviant than a group’s decision to exclude a non-traditional deviant. In the context of intragroup exclusion, adolescents factored group dynamics into their decision making. Adolescents did not differentiate between decisions to exclude an unequal or non-traditional deviant, suggesting that they may have been more attuned to the advantages of giving more money to one’s own group and the disadvantage of not wearing the group shirt. Further research should be conducted to understand these age-related findings.

In addition, novel findings pertained to how children reasoned about their judgments. In previous research on intergroup exclusion based on race or gender, it was found that children who justified exclusion used reasons related to optimizing group functioning, but those who rejected exclusion make references to fairness and harm (Killen et al., 2002). This study was different as it was based on intragroup exclusion in which deviating group members were going against social-conventional and morally relevant group norms. The differences found between children’s and adolescents’ reasoning about exclusion of deviants who advocate equality support the notion that adolescents consider diverse factors in their group decision making (Abrams et al., 2009). When adolescents thought that it was not okay to exclude an equal deviant member, some did so by considering fairness whereas others focused on autonomy (‘She can have her own opinion’). In contrast, nine-year-olds focused mainly on fairness (‘He wants to be fair so they shouldn’t kick him out’). Adolescents’ concerns with autonomy are consistent with previous research documenting their desires for increased autonomy over personal and multifaceted issues (Daddis, 2011). These findings also extend the subjective group dynamics research by documenting adolescents’ concerns for autonomy as well as group loyalty when reflecting on exclusion of deviant members.

The minority of participants who condoned exclusion of a group member who advocated equal allocation used group functioning reasoning. In their view, espousing equal allocation when the group did not meant that the deviant was not conforming, and this was not supported. In contrast, participants who said that exclusion of an equal deviant was not alright referenced both the fair nature of allocating resources equally as well as the unfair nature of exclusion.

Assessments of how children reason about excluding a group member who wants to allocate resources unequally provided a new vantage point on the understanding of social exclusion. In this condition, the focus was on the norm that was being violated. Therefore, the findings revealed a different pattern of reasoning from what has been previously documented. In contrast to previous research on exclusion based on group membership (e.g., gender and race), this study focused on exclusion based on group norms (e.g., moral and conventional). When focusing on group norms, children viewed deviating from some norms to be wrong, and in these cases they viewed exclusion as
justifiable for moral reasons. When participants rejected exclusion of the unequal deviant, they referenced both group functioning and fairness, thus recognizing the unfairness that exclusion inflicts on the deviant member and the benefits to the group when advocating for allocating more money to one’s own group. Those who supported exclusion of the unequal deviant justified this evaluation by referencing fairness, focusing on the injustice in the unequal allocation of money. Thus, the unfairness inflicted on one individual (e.g., the excluded) was subordinated when considering injustice inflicted on a group of individuals for not being allocated equal resources.

This was not the case when evaluating exclusion of those who deviated from social-conventional norms. As expected, group functioning reasoning was prevalent when thinking about exclusion of traditional (wears the shirt) and non-traditional (does not wear the shirt) deviant members. Consistent with previous research on social exclusion, participants who viewed exclusion as wrong used fairness reasoning (Killen et al., 2002). A novel finding in this study was that participants who rejected exclusion of deviant members who wanted to wear the group shirt made more references to the school norm (e.g., ‘The school gave the groups shirts to wear’) than to unfairness. This is consistent with research showing that children are sensitive to school norms, which are found to influence their intergroup evaluations (Nesdale & Lawson, 2011). These reasoning results reveal the complexity of children’s and adolescents’ cognition about group dynamics and deviance from groups. Exclusion results from both contexts involving a focus on group membership as well as a focus on group norms.

Other norms could be explored in future research to further understand the tension between group loyalty and social exclusion. Social-conventional norms that have higher salience to different social categories, such as the norm about dress held by Muslim women wearing the headscarf, can be investigated. It would also be fruitful to investigate evaluations of group members who challenge exclusive group norms, stereotype-laden group norms (e.g., boys cannot do ballet), or gang-related norms. Understanding the extent to which children and adolescents condone or reject exclusion of disloyal members and how they reason about it will further contribute to our understanding of what factors are relevant when social exclusion occurs.

As these findings reveal, the dynamics involving group affiliations and conformity to groups are complex. The negative consequences incurred by exclusion deter children and adolescents from excluding someone who challenges a group. Developmental findings show that younger children are more supportive of excluding an unequal deviant than adolescents because of their focus on strict egalitarian principals. In contrast, adolescents’ more extensive experience with groups (Abrams et al., 2009; Brown, 1990) and concerns for autonomy (Daddis, 2011) enables them to consider other aspects of group dynamics, such as what benefits group functioning but also members’ individual opinions. As with studies in which many statistical tests are conducted, we acknowledge that the multiple tests conducted have the potential of increasing the chance of a type I error.

The current findings extend prior research on both social exclusion and group dynamics, revealing the complexity of children’s and adolescents’ reasoning about members of their peer groups who disagree with the group. Children and adolescents will, at times, condone exclusion of a peer who deviates from the group for positive moral reasons, not for negative antisocial reasons. This is important as it changes the way that researchers have studied social exclusion, which has typically been to focus on the negative motivations and consequences. There are times when exclusion may be necessary, such as when members of groups reject moral norms that involve
inter-individual treatment. The implications of this study are that it is necessary not only to investigate the consequences of social exclusion, but also the group dynamics, group norms, and basis for exclusion in order to provide a comprehensive picture about the role of peer rejection in children’s lives.

References


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