The power of talk: Developing discriminatory group norms through discussion

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Research has shown that group discussion can increase intergroup prejudice and discrimination. However, we know little about the process by which discussion has this effect. Therefore, four studies were conducted in a real-world context to investigate this process. Results suggest that discussing a negative societal stereotype (relative to individual rumination in Studies 1 and 3 and alternative discussions in Studies 2 and 3) increases intentions to engage in discrimination against the out-group target of the stereotype. This is mediated by the formation of an in-group norm which supports discrimination (Study 1) and the extent to which the discussion validates the stereotype (Study 2). A fourth study manipulated the extent to which consensus on the negative stereotype was reached through discussion. When the discussion ended in consensus, participants have greater intention to undertake collective action against the stereotyped out-group, mediated by a congruent in-group norm. These results provide evidence that the process by which discussion increases intergroup discrimination is via the formation of discriminatory local group norms.

Group discussion can have profound behavioural consequences (e.g., Lewin, 1953). It can lead individuals to accept higher levels of risk (Fraser, Gouge, & Billig, 1971; Stoner, 1968), and polarize their opinions and attitudes (e.g., Moscovici & Zavalloni, 1969; for a review, see Turner, 1991). Alarmingly, research has shown that group discussion can also increase intergroup prejudice (Myers & Bishop, 1970) and discrimination (Smith & Postmes, 2009). However, we have limited understanding of why discussion had this effect in these studies. Accordingly, it is important to examine the processes by which discussion increases discriminatory behaviour in the real world. In this article, we draw upon insights from the social identity tradition and small group research to demonstrate that the process by which discussion changes behavioural intentions is via the formation of local group norms. Moreover, we aim to demonstrate that these norms form if the discussion supports the perception that others share similar views of the out-group, making them subjectively valid world-views.

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Understanding intergroup behaviour and in-group norms has been central to the social identity approach since social identity theory (SIT) was first articulated in the 1970s (Tajfel & Turner, 1979). Building on SIT, self-categorization theory (Turner, Hogg, Oakes, & Reicher, 1987) argued that group members' behaviour is driven by their collective understanding of the intergroup context. It appears therefore that norms form if group members make common deductions about appropriate social behaviour in a particular context. Sherif's (1956) boys' camp studies are often cited as an example of this type of norm formation, whereby a competitive intergroup context nurtured norms for intergroup competition and conflict. For many years, this has been central to our understanding of how collective behaviour originates. However, individually deducing in-group norms from the intergroup context may not be the only method by which these norms develop. Research demonstrates that group discussion can also significantly change attitudes and behaviour. This suggests that norms for collective behaviour may also develop through small group interaction (Postmes, Haslam, & Swaab, 2005). Of course, the only way in which group members can know that their deductions about the intergroup context are shared within the group is through some form of communication. Discussion is thus necessary for the coordination of group behaviour.

Evidence for the impact of discussion on group behaviour is compelling. For example, Myers and Bishop (1970) divided participants into groups based on their pre-measured racial attitudes. They found that participants who were already inclined towards prejudice became more so through discussion (and vice versa). This provides a dramatic demonstration of the power of talk to produce a group shift in attitudes. Although Myers and Bishop (1970) did not measure the subsequent behaviour of their participants, findings from recent research suggest that a group change in attitude after discussion may lead to a change in associated group behaviour. For example, Smith and Postmes (2009) found that discussion led to an increase in discrimination that could be explained by an increase in a hostile intergroup norm. In other words, discussion impacted on the group norm, and the group norm impacted on the group's behaviour. It appeared that the norm thus constituted the driving process by which discussion achieved its impact on group behaviour.

However, there is currently a paucity of research which examines how these norms for intergroup discrimination may develop through interaction. One interesting insight into this process arose from Stott and Drury's (2004) research. They found that discussing an *out-group stereotype* increased participants' support for collective protest. Therefore, it appeared that discussing the stereotype had a direct impact on collective behaviour. Indeed, many authors have argued that stereotypes ignite intergroup discrimination because they reflect values, ideologies, and a particular world view (e.g., Jost & Banaji, 1994). For example, historians have named the anti-Semitic stereotype as a contributing factor of German complicity with the Nazi regime (see Gregor, 2005). Although Stott and Drury (2004) report no evidence that discussion had this effect because it changed in-group norms, it seems that discussing stereotypes may be an important part of the psychological machinery which coordinates group behaviour. As we describe below, the discovery that group members share opinions about the out-group can result in the perception that those opinions are a *valid* basis for behaviour. The communication of stereotypic traits (which is guided by multiple processes; for reviews, see Kashima, Fiedler, & Freytag, 2008) is an important way in which this group consensus can emerge.

On their own, individuals may feel uncertain that a societal stereotype of the out-group is valid. However, discussion provides an opportunity for those individuals to assess the extent to which their individual beliefs are similar to those of other group members and often leads to an increase in group consensus on the stereotypical traits (e.g., Haslam, 1997; Haslam, Oakes, Reynolds, & Turner, 1999; Ruscher, Hammer, & Hammer, 1996; Thompson, Judd, & Park, 2000). If discussion results in a high degree of consensus about the out-group, this can increase individuals' confidence about the validity of the stereotype (as argued by Festinger, 1950, 1954; and in a different way by McGarty, Turner, Oakes, & Haslam, 1993; Turner, 1991). The group's increased perceptions of the validity of the stereotype may provide a basis for subsequent intergroup behaviour (Haslam, Turner, Oakes, McGarty, & Reynolds, 1998; Reicher, Hopkins, & Condor, 1997; Stangor, Sechrist, & Jost, 2001). Therefore, discussion of a negative out-group stereotype could lead to an increase in negative intergroup behaviour targeted towards that out-group. Importantly, this would represent a *group* shift, and therefore indicate a change in the local group norm.

In sum, there is a growing body of research which suggests that sharing individual opinions and stereotypes can influence wider group processes (e.g., Haslam, 1997; Postmes, Haslam, *et al.*, 2005; Postmes, Spears, Lee, & Novak, 2005), but we are as yet unclear on how this occurs. Unravelling this process may enable us to examine in greater detail how group action develops from the meeting of individuals. The present research was designed to provide evidence for the process in a real-world context by systematically examining the effects of the small group discussion of a wider societal stereotype. This research is distinguishable from previous research on norm formation (such as Sherif, 1956) because it includes individual rumination as an experimental control. This allowed us to compare the consequences of discussion to those of individual rumination and demonstrate the unique impact that discussion has on norms and collective behavioural intentions.

The present research
In four studies, we examined consequences of in-group members (Britons) discussing out-group (immigrant) stereotypes. At the time of the present research, immigration was at the centre of an ongoing debate in Britain. There was a popular concern about numbers of immigrants in Britain (Ipsos MORI, 2008). Support for the UK Independence Party and the British National Party had increased in recent years, and these parties' call for zero net immigration was widely publicized. The politically conservative media tended to focus on the supposed economic and cultural threats of immigration for Britain (e.g., Daily Mail, 2009).

STUDY 1

Study 1 was an exploratory study that examined the impact of group discussion about immigrants on endorsement of pro- or anti-immigration policies. Using British citizens as the target in-group and face-to-face interaction, the first study simply compared the products of an in-group discussion about the out-group (immigrants) with a no discussion control condition in which individuals reflected about the out-group alone. We hypothesized (a) that if norms form through dialogue, then group discussion would have a different effect on behavioural intentions than individual reflection, when the

same identity and context is salient. We predicted (b) that the emergent norm would be positively related to intergroup behaviour, and would mediate the difference between the two experimental conditions on behavioural intentions. We assumed that if the majority of participants in our samples were opposed to immigration in line with the societal stereotype described above, participants would become more prejudiced following group discussion. The first study tested this assumption.

Method

Participants and design
Participants were 39 British students (mean age = 17.0, 56% female) from a state school in the UK, recruited during an educational visit to their establishment. The study had a two-condition (type of reflection: group discussion vs. individual reflection) between-subjects design. Participants were randomly allocated to $N = 7$ groups of three in the discussion condition and $N = 6$ groups of three in the individual rumination condition. All were unpaid volunteers and naive about the purpose of the study. Parental/guardian (opt-out) consent was requested in advance.

Procedure
For 5 minutes, participants either engaged in a group discussion in their small group of three people, or individually reflected, on the out-group (immigrants). The instructions were either 'As a group' or 'On your own', 'Formulate an impression of immigrants. What do you think immigrants are like as a group of people? What do they do? Who are they? Where do they come from? What is their relation to British people?' The wording of this instruction required participants to think in general group terms, so that their subsequent responses were driven by their pre-existing cultural knowledge of the out-group stereotype. Each participant was asked to individually record the top five points that arose during discussion or during their individual rumination. They were then asked to complete a questionnaire individually and in silence. After completing the standardized scales, participants were debriefed in person by the experimenter and provided with a full written debriefing.

Dependent measures[1]
Participants' written description of the out-group was used as a measure of qualitative stereotype content. The main quantitative dependent measure was a three-item support for intergroup discrimination scale ($\alpha = .67$), which asked, 'How much social security money should immigrants get?', 'How much free healthcare should be provided for immigrants?', and 'How much should immigrants get in benefits?'. Items were answered on a seven-point Likert type scale (1 = Much more than British people, 4 = Equal, 7 = Much less than British people). This scale was designed to measure support for discrimination towards the out-group, but was able to capture support for both pro- and anti-out-group policies. All other scales consisted of statements with which participants

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[1] *Space constraints prevent us from reporting all dependent variables here. All four studies included measures of collective efficacy, social support, and anger. There were no significant condition effects or significant mediation for these variables, with one exception: In Study 1, anger mediated the condition effect together with group norm. However, this effect was not replicated in subsequent studies.*

indicated agreement (1 = 'strongly disagree', to 7 = 'strongly agree'). A four-item scale measured perceptions of the in-group norm (α = .72): 'We believe that keeping Britain British is the right thing to do'; 'For students like us it is normal to favour our own kind'; 'Students like us believe that it's right to treat immigrants better than British people' (reverse coded); and 'The average sixth form student believes that immigration enriches British society' (reverse coded).

To gauge the perception of consensus with the other group members, shared cognition was measured via a four-item scale (α = .77). This scale included the instruction, 'When the statement refers to "we", this means you and the other students'. Items were, 'We agree with each other about the issues'; 'We have similar ideas', 'We are on the same wavelength', and 'We are aware of the differences between our views' (reverse coded).

An adaptation of Guimond and Dambrun's (2002) generalized prejudice scale (10 items, α = .83) measured attitudes towards immigrants. Items included, 'The entry of foreign families into Britain should be more stringent' and 'Immigrants should not be given responsibility or positions of authority over the British'. A seven-item adaptation of Ellemers, Kortekaas, and Ouwerkerk's (1999) measure of identification was included (α = .51) to measure identification with the other students who participated in the discussion groups or individual rumination, with sample items, 'I identify with the other students' and 'I feel good about these students'. Identification was included to examine whether group discussion increased social identification and thereby galvanized social identity. Inter-scale correlations suggested that the discriminant validity of the scales was acceptable (Table 1).

Table 1. Mean individual-level scores and scale intercorrelations in the group discussion (N = 21) and individual reflection conditions (N = 18), Study 1

		Group discussion	Individual reflection	1	2	3	4	5
1. Intergroup discrimination	M	4.97$_a$	4.47$_b$	(.67)	.45*	.67**	.00	.16
	SD	0.77	0.58					
2. Norm perception	M	4.35$_a$	3.00$_b$	.51**	(.72)	−.05	.10	.36
	SD	1.68	1.77					
3. Prejudice	M	4.34$_a$	3.87$_a$	.64**	.54**	(.83)	.07	.33
	SD	0.92	1.15					
4. Identification	M	4.47$_a$	4.23$_a$	.09	.10	−.03	(.51)	.06
	SD	0.85	1.41					
5. Shared cognition	M	4.26$_a$	3.14$_b$	.29	.44**	.34*	.17	(.77)
	SD	1.46	1.05					

Note. A higher number indicates a higher propensity on each measure. Means in the same row with different subscripts differ significantly at p < .05. Cronbach's alphas are reported in parentheses. Zero-order inter-scale correlations are reported below the diagonal, and partial correlations (controlling for the effects of the manipulation) are reported above the diagonal; *p < .05; **p < .01.

Analytic strategy

In Studies 1–3, analyses were conducted with hierarchical linear modelling (HLM) in HLM 6.03 (Raudenbush & Bryk, 2002). This is appropriate when individuals are nested within groups. *A priori* predictions were tested by means of dummy and contrast variables, following the procedure outlined by Cohen, Cohen, West, and Aiken (2003).

In Study 1, we tested two hypotheses: (a) whether group discussion increased support for intergroup discrimination relative to individual reflection and (b) whether the group norm mediated this condition effect.

Content analyses were performed on each individual's written descriptions of the out-group and identified (1) whether the participants stereotyped the out-group and/or explicitly rejected the notion of stereotyping them; (2) the content of the stereotype; (3) the affective tone of the stereotype; and (4) perceptions of the intergroup context. Iterative inductive and deductive coding procedures were followed by the primary coder, who was not blind to the hypotheses (Miles & Huberman, 1994). A blind second coder independently coded the data. Inter-rater agreement was 95%, and inter-rater reliability was excellent: Cohen's (1960) kappa ranged from $\kappa = .71$ to 1.00 across codes. Codes are described in Table 2. The frequency with which each code occurred in the data was recorded and the frequency count in each condition was compared across individuals nested within groups using a Bernoulli sampling HLM analysis with a logit link function.

Results

Content analysis

Participants in both conditions almost universally stereotyped the out-group (Table 2). Notably, there was a significant difference between the conditions in the frequency with which the welfare fraud code was mentioned, $\gamma = -2.35$, log-odds $= .10$, $p = .05$; and marginal differences were found on the codes for racial categorization, $\gamma = -2.43$, log-odds $= .09$, $p = .06$; and intergroup tensions, $\gamma = -1.94$, log-odds $= .14$, $p = .06$. A relatively greater number of participants mentioned these codes after discussion than individual rumination (Table 2). Beliefs about welfare fraud and intergroup tension appeared to be related. The opinions that, 'They think they could live over this country and take our money' and similarly, 'Some immigrants are merely here to deal drugs and rake money off the state', illustrated the intergroup tension that appeared to arise for participants who articulated the argument that immigrants engaged in welfare fraud. Welfare fraud appeared to be a focal aspect of the out-group stereotype in the discussions, with 88% of the participants mentioning the issue, compared to 30% of participants in the individual rumination condition. No other codes differed significantly in frequency between the two conditions (all p's $> .08$).

Analysis of standardized scales

Analyses showed that there was significantly more support for intergroup discrimination in the discussion condition than the individual rumination condition, $\gamma = .50$, $p = .04$ (Table 1). There was also a significant group norm main effect, $\gamma = 1.35$, $p = .03$, with more normalization of intergroup discrimination in the discussion condition than the individual condition. There was a main effect for shared cognition, with a perception of more shared cognition after discussion than individual reflection $\gamma = 1.10$, $p = .024$. Condition had no effect on generalized prejudice ($p > .20$), although prejudice, discrimination, the norm, and shared cognition were significantly positively correlated (Table 1). There was no difference in overall social identification or on the subscales between the two conditions.

Table 2. Content analysis in the discussion (*N* = 21) and individual rumination (*N* = 18) conditions, Study 1

Research Question	Description of code	Example quote	Frequency of occurrence (%)	
			Discussion	Individual Rumination
1. Does the participant stereotype the out-group?	1.1 Stereotyping	'Some do nothing and live off English benefits. Others do work hard, as doctors, but only a select few'	100_a	95_a
	1.2 Resisted stereotyping	'We cannot generalise what immigrants are like as a group of people'	25_a	35_a
2. What is the content of the stereotype?	2.1 Welfare fraud	'They sponge off our economy'	88_a	30_b
	2.3 Racial categorization	'Large proportion come from Middle East and Asia'	38_a	5_b
	2.4 Come from developing countries	'A lot come from less economically developed countries'	63_a	30_a
	2.5 Seek employment	'They come round to get jobs [...] to stay in the country'	38_a	35_a
	2.6 Seek a better life	'They come over from their home for a better life, or a chance of a better life'	38_a	60_a
	2.7 Are refugees	'People from countries where they have been forced to move out, as a result of war or drought'	38_a	65_a
	2.9 Hold religious beliefs	'Private and enclosed people with strong religious beliefs'	25_a	5_a
	2.12 They are exploited by employers with low remuneration	'Work long hours and live in squalid conditions with terrible pay'	38_a	35_a
3. What is the affective tone of the out-group stereotype?	3.1 Contemptuous prejudice	'They are moving to a country to where they do not belong…immigrants are unfriendly and not pleasant to speak to…they serve no purpose in our country'	50_a	10_a

Table 2. (*Continued*)

Research Question	Description of code	Example quote	Frequency of occurrence (%)	
			Discussion	Individual Rumination
	3.2 Empathetic	'Some immigrants are merely here to deal drugs and rake money off the state'
'They must be scared to come over from a foreign country, to be so scared to have to leave home…just ordinary people like you and me who are desperate'	25$_a$	60$_a$
4. How is the intergroup context perceived?	4.1 There are intergroup tensions	'They are not accepted and don't integrate into the British society'
'Their relationships to the British people are generally fairly edgy, especially in urban areas where clusters of different ethnicities are found. This causes conflict'
'They think they could live over this country and take our money'	75$_a$	30$_b$

Note. Frequencies in the same row with different subscripts differ significantly at $p < .06$.

Mediation²

In order to test whether the norm mediated the effect of the conditions on support for intergroup discrimination, we entered the norm into the multi-level model, predicting endorsement of intergroup discrimination alongside the condition variable. The slope for the group norm was significant $\gamma = .20$, $p < .001$. On entering this mediator into the model, the difference between the discussion condition and the individual condition became non-significant, $\gamma = .23$, $p = .33$ suggesting that the norm mediated the condition effect, Sobel $z = 2.01$, $p = .04$ (Figure 1).

Discussion

This exploratory study showed that group discussion (relative to individual rumination) focused more on specific prejudiced elements of the out-group stereotype and inter-group tension, and led to more support for discrimination against the out-group. This result was mediated by perceptions of an in-group norm which supported intergroup discrimination. There was also a greater perception of shared cognition within the group after discussion compared to individual rumination, indicating more consensus on the issue of immigration. Therefore, it appeared that discussion uniquely contributed to the formation of local norms, and it was through these norms that discussion impacted on support for intergroup discrimination.

An alternative explanation for the findings of Study 1 was that discussion increased identity salience, and this salience led to an increase in intergroup hostility. This seems unlikely, as participants in both conditions were instructed to think or discuss the same topic. Therefore, the salience of British and immigrant identities should have been constant across the conditions. This alternative explanation was explored in Study 2.

STUDY 2

The effects we found in Study 1 may be accounted for by two distinct processes. First, norm formation may have occurred because the out-group stereotype was validated through discussion. Alternatively, norm formation may have occurred because the discussion increased identity salience (cf. Postmes, Spears, *et al.*, 2005). To test whether group discussion *per se* may increase identity salience which leads to the inference of shared norms, groups also interacted in the control condition in Study 2, but on an unrelated topic.

We had limited control over the content of discussions in Study 1. It is possible that participants may have discussed potential actions or policies towards the out-group in addition to the out-group stereotype. Therefore, in Study 2 we added a condition in which participants were explicitly asked to discuss intergroup actions. This meant we could assess the degree to which discussing the out-group stereotype in particular or the out-group plus intergroup actions was the driving process behind the results of Study 1. As identity salience should be equal in the two conditions in which participants discussed

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²*We used the multi-level first-order Taylor series approximation to estimate the standard error of the mediated effect as is recommended for multi-level mediation with a Level-2 predictor, Level-1 mediator, and Level-1 outcome (see Krull & MacKinnon, 1999).*
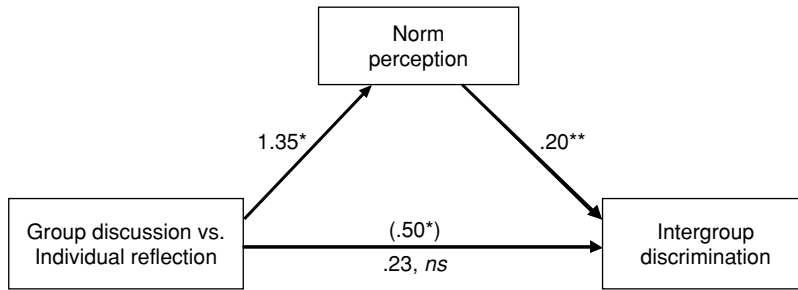
Figure 1. Coefficients for the mediation model, Study 1 ($^*p < .05$; $^{**}p < .01$).

the out-group, these conditions provided a further test of the alternative explanation for the Study 1 results.

Based on the above analysis, three conditional hypotheses were tested: (1) if reaching consensus on discriminatory intergroup policies was the driving process behind an increase in support for discriminatory policies, then the discussion of actions would be likely to increase action intentions relative to the conditions in which participants did not discuss action. However, (2) if discussing the stereotype was the driving process, then discussing the stereotype may be equally or more likely to increase action intentions than discussing actions themselves. Furthermore, (3) if salience was the driving process, then there should be no difference between the conditions. Finally, (4) if norm formation occurred via a process of social validation, the effects of condition on action intentions would be mediated by subjective social validation.

Method

Participants and design
Participants were 78 White British sixth form students who volunteered from a different state comprehensive school to Study 1, and were recruited during an educational visit. The mean age was 17.0 years, 31 participants were female. The study had a three-condition (topic of interaction: out-group stereotype vs. out-group stereotype plus a plan for social action vs. irrelevant control) between-subjects design. Participants were randomly allocated to groups of three people within each condition ($N = 10$ groups in the stereotype condition, $N = 11$ in the stereotype plus action condition, and $N = 5$ in the irrelevant control condition[3]). All were unpaid and naive as to the purpose of the study. Consent and debriefing arrangements were identical to Study 1.

Procedure
Participants engaged in a 5-minute discussion. In the out-group stereotype condition, instructions were identical to the discussion condition of Study 1. In the stereotype plus action condition (hereafter referred to as the action condition), instructions included, '[Formulate] a plan to combat any problems immigration causes'. In the control condition, participants discussed an irrelevant topic (whether or not the British monarchy is outdated).

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[3] *Groups were distributed unequally across conditions due to logistical constraints in recruiting participants.*

Dependent measures

Intergroup action intentions were measured with a four-item scale that asked whether or not participants were prepared to engage in concrete and direct action about immigration ($\alpha = .76$). Participants responded either $1 = $ 'No', or $2 = $ 'Yes' to the questions, 'I agree to participate in a demonstration about immigration policy in Britain', 'I agree to have my name added to a petition to make the government listen to my group's views', 'I would do something with fellow group members to address the problems that immigration brings to Britain', and 'I would participate in raising our collective voice to address the problems that immigration brings to Britain'.

A three-item scale measured subjective social validation ($\alpha = .79$): 'The discussion made me feel that my views are more legitimate'; 'My beliefs about immigration are justified'; and 'I feel that my views on immigration are well-founded'. The purpose of including this scale was to compare the extent to which individuals perceived social validation of their views about the out-group across conditions. Participants indicated agreement with these and all subsequent items on seven-point Likert-type scales ($1 = $ 'strongly disagree', $7 = $ 'strongly agree'). A single item measured participants' certainty about future courses of action: 'I have a clear idea about where things need to go with immigration in this country'. The generalized prejudice scale was the same as in Study 1 (10 items, $\alpha = .88$). A single item measured social identification: 'I identify with the other members of my group'. Inter-scale correlations (Table 3) suggested that the discriminant validity of scales was acceptable.

Table 3. Mean individual-level scores and inter-scale correlations in the stereotype ($N = 30$), action ($N = 33$), and control ($N = 15$) conditions, Study 2

		Stereotype	Action	Control	1	2	3	4	5
1. Intergroup	*M*	6.96$_a$	6.11$_b$	5.27$_b$	(.76)	.17	$-.11$	.18	.16
action intentions	*SD*	1.23	1.57	1.49					
2. Social validation	*M*	4.71$_a$	4.26$_a$	3.69$_b$	.26**	(.79)	.06	.34**	.53**
	SD	1.09	1.35	.95					
3. Prejudice	*M*	4.40$_a$	5.10$_a$	4.79$_a$	$-.02$	$-.04$	(.88)	$-.03$	.24*
	SD	1.36	1.23	0.81					
4. Identification	*M*	5.03$_a$	4.94$_a$	5.64$_a$	.07	.20*	$-.05$		.43**
	SD	1.09	1.52	1.39					
5. Action certainty	*M*	4.79$_a$	3.85$_b$	4.60$_a$	.21	.52**	.16	.43**	
	SD	1.50	1.68	1.40					

Note. A higher number indicates a higher propensity on each measure. Means on the same row without the same subscripts differ significantly at $p < .05$. With the exception of single items, Cronbach's alphas are in parentheses. Zero-order inter-scale correlations are reported below the diagonal, and partial correlations (controlling for the effects of the manipulation) are reported above the diagonal; *$p < .05$; **$p < .01$.

Results

The effects of experimental condition on action intentions were explored in the initial model, $\chi^2(24) = 49.71$, $p < .001$. Action intentions were significantly lower in the irrelevant discussion condition compared to the out-group stereotype condition, $\gamma = 0.93$, $p < .001$ (Table 3) but significantly higher after discussion of the stereotype, than after discussion of the stereotype plus courses of action, $\gamma = 1.13$, $p = .01$. Intentions in
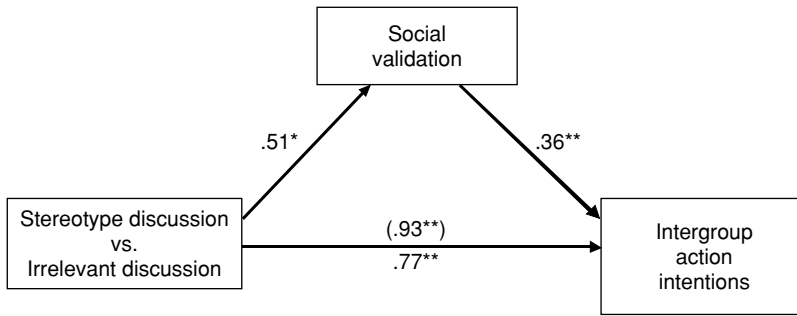
Figure 2. Coefficients for the mediation model, Study 2 ($*p < .05$; $**p < .01$).

the irrelevant discussion condition were not significantly different to those in the action condition $\gamma = 0.52, p = .37$.

The effects of condition on social validation were then explored, $\chi^2(24) = 37.93$, $p = .03$. Participants felt more validated in the stereotype condition than the irrelevant condition, $\gamma = 0.51, p < .01$, and in the action condition than the irrelevant condition $\gamma = 0.57, p = .04$. Although the mean was higher in the stereotype condition than the action condition, the difference was not quite significant, $\gamma = 0.47, p = .11$. As in Study 1, there were no condition effects for identification or generalized prejudice (all p's > .08). There was somewhat more certainty about action in the stereotype condition than the irrelevant condition, although not significantly so, $\gamma = 0.38, p = .10$. Notably, there was significantly less certainty in the action condition than in the irrelevant condition, $\gamma = 0.57, p = .04$. There was also less certainty in the action condition than when groups discussed the stereotype, $\gamma = 0.95, p = .03$. Examination of intra-class correlations between groups in each condition indicates that there was less variability in action intentions between groups in the stereotype condition ICC1 = 15.87 than the action condition ICC1 = 26.86 (and the highest variability was found in the irrelevant condition ICC1 = 37.14).

Mediation

Validation showed the same pattern of between-condition differences as action intentions, and the relationship between validation and action intentions was marginally significant, $\gamma = 0.29, p = .06$. Thus, validation was included in the model as a mediator. On entering this mediator into the model, the slope for validation was significant, $\gamma = 0.36, p < .001$. The difference between the stereotype and the irrelevant discussion conditions reduced from $\gamma = 0.93, p < .001$ to $\gamma = 0.77, p = .01$. Thus, validation partially mediated the effect of experimental condition on action intentions; Sobel $z = 2.24, p = .03$ (Figure 2).

Discussion

In Study 2, the topic of interaction was varied to distinguish the effects of interaction *per se* from the effects of discussing out-group stereotypes only, or discussing out-group stereotypes as well as potential action towards that group. The lowest action intentions scores occurred in the irrelevant (control) condition compared with the experimental conditions. Participants in the control condition also scored lower on

validation. Therefore, we concluded that interaction with group members *per se* did not lead to greater action intentions.

It was also hypothesized that if reaching consensus on discriminatory intergroup policies was the driving process behind an increase in support for discriminatory policies, then the discussion of actions would be likely to increase action intentions relative to the conditions in which participants did not discuss action. However, discussing actions resulted in lower action intentions, and lower levels of social validation than discussing only the out-group stereotype. Instead, the results supported the argument that social validation of the out-group stereotype was the driving process behind the effects. It seems unlikely that an increase in identity salience could have significantly affected the results, as this was constant across the conditions in which participants discussed the out-group.

The data suggested that there was greater action certainty and less within-condition variability on action intention when the groups discussed an out-group stereotype than a concrete plan of action. Therefore, it appeared that discussions about courses of action reduced certainty about action compared with discussion of only the stereotype. Retrospectively, as with any real-world situation, there may have been difficulties in reaching an explicit, consensual plan for action in this context in this condition. Participants may have been unwilling to explicitly endorse the political position of taking action against a lower status out-group.

Social validation appeared to be an important psychological product of intragroup interaction and mediated the effects of condition on action intentions. Thus discussions that validated participants' individual views on the out-group stereotype appeared to provide a firmer foundation for their intentions to engage in intergroup action. This result provides support for the argument that group discussion can be a source of validation and action confidence (Baron *et al.*, 1996; Luus & Wells, 1994; Petty, Briñol, & Tormala, 2002). Overall, these results provide further support for the idea that discussions about an out-group stereotype can aid the development of intentions for collective behaviour.

STUDY 3

This study combined the designs of the previous two studies, by independently manipulating the type of reflection on the out-group (group discussion vs. individual reflection) and the topic of reflection (out-group stereotype only vs. out-group stereotype plus action). The aim was to replicate the previous findings with a behavioural measure of hostile social action. We hypothesized that (a) overall, there would be more hostile action after group discussion than after individual reflection and (b) there would be a simple main effect between the two discussion conditions: participants would show more hostility towards the out-group when they discussed the out-group stereotype than when they discussed the stereotype plus specific actions.

Method

Participants and design
Participants were 78 British students (mean age = 16.7 years; 77% female) recruited during an educational visit to a different state school to Studies 1 and 2. The study had a

2 (type of reflection: group discussion vs. individual reflection) $\times$ 2 (topic of reflection: out-group stereotype vs. out-group action) between-subjects design. Participants were randomly allocated to groups of three. There were $N = 7$ groups in each of the stereotype conditions, and $N = 6$ groups in each of the action conditions. Consent and debriefing arrangements were the same as for the previous studies.

Procedure

Participants were asked to either undertake a 5-minute discussion in small groups or reflect on the specified topic alone for 5 minutes, using the same feedback for each condition as Studies 1 and 2. They then completed the dependent measures individually and in silence.

Dependent measures

The main dependent variable was a behavioural measure. Participants were asked to vote in a fictitious 'UK Youth Parliament Election'. They placed a vote for a candidate of one of the following political parties: Labour, Conservative, the Liberal Democrats, or the UK Independence Party (UKIP). Fictional male candidates were presented as candidates for each party. A paragraph described each party's immigration policy. The policies described were genuine party statements taken from the respective parties' programmes, and represented a continuum of political ideologies, from left- to right-wing. The Liberal Democrats were relatively pro-immigration. Labour and Conservative policies were roughly equivalent centrist ones, stating the need for balancing the benefit of immigration with control of the country's borders. The UKIP policy was explicitly anti-immigration. We emphasize that these are actual policies of the main political parties in Britain – the only aspects of the feedback that were fictional were the names of the candidates and the election in which they were featured. Votes were subsequently classified as hostile towards the out-group (UKIP vote: coded '1') or not hostile towards the out-group (not a UKIP vote: coded '0').

The social validation scale used in Study 2 was expanded to six-items ($\alpha = .88$), 'I feel that my opinions on immigrants are valid'; 'I feel that my views on immigrants are well-founded'; 'My beliefs about immigrants are justified'; 'I am certain that my views on immigration are right'; 'I feel that my opinions about immigration are shared by many'; and 'I feel that I have a justified opinion on immigration'. The same measure of identification was included as in Study 1 (seven items, $\alpha = .77$), alongside the 10 item generalized prejudice scale ($\alpha = .92$).

Results and discussion

A Bernoulli sampling HLM analysis using a logit link function was conducted to assess the magnitude of variation in UKIP votes (a binary measure) between conditions. This analysis provides the probability that participants cast an anti-immigrant vote (i.e., the odds of voting UKIP rather than another party). Overall, the analysis showed marginally significant between-condition differences, $\chi^2(25) = 36.84, p = .06$. Contrary to Hypothesis (a), the main effect for type of reflection was not significant, $\gamma = 0.11$, log-odds $= 1.12, p = .85$. There was however a main effect for topic of reflection, with more UKIP votes overall when participants reflected upon the stereotype than when actions

were also considered, $\gamma = 1.18$, log-odds $= 3.27$, $p = .05$. The two-way interaction was not significant $\gamma = 0.94$, log-odds $= 2.55$, $p = .12$.

Contrasts then tested the second hypothesis and other between-condition effects. The topic of reflection main effect appeared to be driven by a highly significant increase in probability of voting UKIP after the out-group stereotype discussion, which had the most UKIP votes overall (54.5%) compared to the action discussion, which had the least (10.5%; Table 4), $\gamma = 2.12$, log-odds $= 8.33$, $p = .01$, confirming Hypothesis (b) and replicating the results of Study 2. There was no difference between the two individual reflection conditions $\gamma = 0.25$, log-odds $= 1.28$, $p = .78$. There were no simple main effects for type of reflection in the stereotype only $\gamma = 1.05$, log-odds $= 2.84$, $p = .18$, or stereotype plus stereotype plus action conditions $\gamma = -0.83$, log-odds $= .44$, $p = .35$.

Table 4. Frequency of UKIP votes, mean individual-level scores, and scale intercorrelations, in the stereotype discussion ($N = 21$), action discussion ($N = 18$), stereotype reflection ($N = 21$), and action reflection ($N = 18$) conditions, Study 3

		Group discussion		Individual reflection					
		Stereotype	Stereotype + action	Stereotype	Stereotype + action	1	2	3	4
1. UKIP votes (%)		54.5$_a$	10.5$_b$	35.0$_{ab}$	26.3$_{ab}$		.17	.29*	.42**
2. Identification	M	5.25$_a$	5.32$_a$	5.72$_a$	5.15$_a$	.18	(.77)	.28*	.09
	SD	1.10	0.91	0.78	0.81				
3. Social validation	M	4.59$_a$	4.61$_a$	4.83$_a$	4.58$_a$	.28*	.30**	(.88)	.18
	SD	1.16	1.04	1.50	1.32				
4. Prejudice	M	4.59$_a$	4.42$_a$	4.73$_a$	4.81$_a$	.39**	.11	.18	(.92)
	SD	1.24	1.21	1.26	1.38				

Note. A higher number indicates a higher propensity on each measure. Cronbach's alphas are in parentheses. Means on the same row without the same subscripts differ significantly at $p < .05$. Full-scale intercorrelations are reported below the diagonal, and partial correlations (controlling for effects of the manipulation) are reported above the diagonal; $*p < .05$; $**p < .01$.

Identification, generalized prejudice, and social validation scores were then analysed using HLM. Neither main effects nor two-way interactions were significant for identification, social validation, or generalized prejudice (all p's $> .20$), although prejudice and validation were both significantly positively correlated with voting UKIP (Table 4). Like in Study 2, an examination of the intra-class correlations between groups in each condition indicates that there was least variability in UKIP votes between groups in the stereotype only discussion condition ICC1 $= 15.97$. The stereotype plus action discussion condition ICC1 $= 57.87$ and the stereotype only individual condition ICC1 $= 50.12$ were similar. The highest variability was found in the stereotype plus action individual condition ICC1 $= 99.01$.

Therefore, the results supported the second hypothesis, but not the first hypothesis. In contrast to Hypothesis (a), although there were somewhat more UKIP votes when participants engaged in a group discussion than when they reflected individually, this was not a significant difference. The results did support the second hypothesis, however. As in Study 2, discussion of the out-group stereotype over discussing of specific courses of action produced an increase in anti-immigrant voting behaviour. There was least

variability across groups within the stereotype discussion condition on the UKIP votes, and far more variability when groups were asked to discuss action. However, in none of the studies conducted so far could we control the content of the discussions. The content is a key factor to control because groups could polarize merely on the basis of the content of the information conveyed, irrespective of the group dynamic involved. Study 4 was designed to investigate this possibility.

STUDY 4

This study examined whether or not the process of reaching a validating consensus on the out-group stereotype is critical for formation of local discriminatory group norms. The objective was to keep the information conveyed constant, whilst manipulating whether or not a validating consensus on the out-group stereotype was achieved. Therefore, participants watched a film of a scripted group discussion. There were two versions of this discussion, both with the same arguments. However, the order in which arguments were presented was varied, so that in one condition the discussion appeared to converge, whilst in the other the discussion diverged. To our knowledge, this is the first time that the process of reaching consensus has been manipulated. This design enabled us to test whether the effect of social interaction on action intention and identity content is driven by exposure to persuasive arguments alone, or by the perception of the process of reaching a validating group consensus on the out-group stereotype.

Hypotheses

We hypothesized that when the discussion ended in consensus (compared to the discussion which ended in dissent), participants would (a) have greater intention to participate in collective action and (b) this would be mediated by the extent to which they perceived the discussion as normative.

Method

Participants and design

Participants ($N = 63$) were recruited via university e-mail lists and a social networking website. Mean age was 26.79 years, and 47 participants were female. 90.5% stated their nationality as British.[4] This study used a one-factor (direction of consensus: consensus to dissent vs. dissent to consensus vs. collective action base-rate) between-subjects design. Participants were unpaid and naive as to the purposes of the study, and were randomly assigned to either the consensus to dissent ($N = 21$), dissent to consensus ($N = 20$), or control ($N = 22$) condition.

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[4]*All participants were included in the analyses regardless of their nationality. As removing non-British participants did not make a qualitative difference to the results, their data were retained in order to avoid the reduction in statistical power that comes from decreased sample size (22 participants for each cell is recommended to achieve sufficient power ($\beta > 0.8$) to detect large effects; Faul, Erdfelder, Lang, & Buchner, 2007).*

Stimuli and procedure

The study was conducted on-line. After informed consent was obtained, participants were asked to state whether or not they were British, in order to help make national identity salient. In the control condition, participants were informed that they were taking part in a study on opinions towards immigration and simply answered the questionnaire (which included only the relevant scales). In the experimental conditions, participants were asked first to watch a 5 minute film of a group of British people (i.e., in-group members) ostensibly discussing their opinions on immigration, and then answered the questionnaire.

The film consisted of six British actors (three male, three female) who held a scripted discussion about immigration in the UK. The statements in this script were based upon the qualitative data reported in Study 1, therefore each explicit statement about immigration was volunteered by previous participants. This meant that participants were not exposed to any arguments that they could not potentially encounter in their everyday lives, and the experimenter's only involvement was to select a coherent and representative set of statements about immigrants and order them so that they appeared to progress logically. Although both films contained the same set of statements, the order in which they were presented was systematically varied so as to show a discussion either from consensus to dissent, or from dissent to consensus. There were two parts to the discussion. In one part (X), the group was in dissent: both pro-immigration arguments (e.g., economic stability, asylum) and anti-immigration arguments (e.g., welfare fraud, cultural clashes) were forwarded in equal measure. Vocal and body language cues indicated disagreement within the group. In the other part (Y), there was apparent consensus: only anti-immigration arguments were forwarded and vocal and body language cues indicated majority consensus and social validation. In the dissent to consensus condition, the film was edited to show (X) then (Y). In the consensus to dissent condition, the film showed (Y) then (X). This gave the impression that the group either did or did not reach consensus, respectively.[5] Participants then completed the questionnaire which consisted of standardized scales.

Dependent measures

Intergroup action intentions were measured with eight items ($\alpha = .86$), 'I would participate in raising our collective voice to address the problems that immigration brings'; 'Immigration policy should be allowed to continue as it is now' (reverse scored); 'I would do something to address the problems that immigration brings'; 'I would encourage others to do something about immigration'; 'I agree to have my name added to a petition to raise awareness of the problems that immigration brings'; 'I would participate in a demonstration against immigration'; and 'I want to help to decrease immigration'. A four-item scale measured to what extent participants were able to perceive in-group norms form through the discussion ($\alpha = .83$). We argued that participants would be more able to infer norms from the discussion if it ended in consensus relative to dissent. Items were, 'The people on the film seem to hold normal views'; 'The views expressed in the film seemed excessive' (reverse coded); 'The people

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[5] *This study was designed to be congruent with the previous studies which investigated the formation of norms for discriminatory intergroup action. Therefore, we did not also manipulate reaching consensus on pro-immigration norms. Moreover, if the design had included a positive consensus condition, we would no longer have been able to include exactly the same content in each condition, introducing a confound.*

on the film hold the views of someone like me'; and 'The views expressed in the film seemed extreme' (reverse coded). Finally, a six-item scale was included to measure participants' identification with the discussants on the film ($\alpha = .90$; Ellemers *et al.*, 1999; see Study 1).

Results

A one-way analysis of variance (direction of consensus: dissent to consensus vs. collective action base-rate vs. consensus to dissent) was conducted on action intention scores. The condition effect was significant, $F(2, 60) = 3.62$, $p = .03$, $\eta_p^2 = .11$. Contrasts showed that there was significantly more action intention after watching the discussion which ended in consensus ($M = 4.25$, $SD = 1.45$) than the discussion which ended in dissent ($M = 3.21$, $SD = 1.07$) $F(1, 60) = 7.24$, $p < .001$, $\eta_p^2 = .11$, as predicted. The base-rate level of action intentions ($M = 3.73$, $SD = 1.19$) fell in the middle of the means in the two experimental conditions, and it was not significantly different to either (both p's > .16).

A one-way ANOVA comparing two conditions (direction of consensus: consensus to dissent vs. dissent to consensus) was conducted on scores from each of the additional standardized scales. There was a significant condition effect on the norm scale, $F(1, 39) = 6.00$, $p = .02$, $\eta_p^2 = .13$. Participants considered the views expressed in the discussion to be more normative when the group reached consensus ($M = 4.74$, $SD = 1.22$) than when the discussion ended in dissent ($M = 3.79$, $SD = 1.26$). The condition effect on social validation was not significant, however $F(1, 60) = 0.43$, $p = .52$, $\eta_p^2 < .001$ (Table 5).

There was a main effect of experimental condition on identification with the group members in the discussion, $F(1, 39) = 6.04$, $p = .02$, $\eta_p^2 = .13$, with significantly more social identification after watching the discussion to consensus ($M = 4.21$, $SD = 1.26$) than to dissent ($M = 3.33$, $SD = 1.10$). There was also a trend towards more endorsement of the views expressed in the film when the discussion ended in consensus ($M = 3.64$, $SD = 1.26$), compared to when it ended in dissent ($M = 2.94$, $SD = 1.15$), although the main effect was marginal $F(1, 39) = 3.44$, $p = .07$, $\eta_p^2 = .08$. These results together, suggested that the process of reaching consensus informed identification and identity content.

Table 5. Mean scores and inter-scale correlations in the consensus to dissent ($N = 21$) and dissent to consensus ($N = 20$) conditions, Study 4

		Consensus to dissent	Dissent to consensus	1	2	3
1. Intergroup action intentions	M	3.21ₐ	4.25_b	(.86)	.30	.31
	SD	1.07	1.45			
2. Norm perception	M	3.79ₐ	4.74_b	.40**	(.83)	.76**
	SD	1.26	1.22			
3. Identification	M	3.33ₐ	4.24_b	.40**	.79**	(.90)
	SD	1.10	1.26			

Note. Cronbach's alphas in parentheses. Means in rows with different subscripts differ at $p < .05$. Zero-order inter-scale correlations are reported below the diagonal, and partial correlations (controlling for the effects of the manipulation) are reported above the diagonal; **$p < .01$.
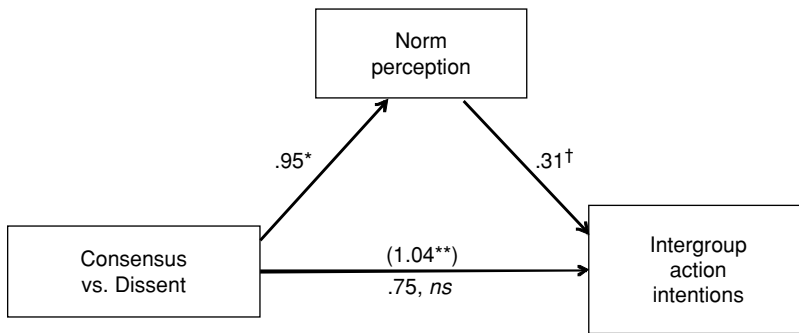
Figure 3. Coefficients for the mediation model, Study 4 ($^\dagger p = .06$; $^*p < .05$; $^{**}p < .01$).

Mediation

There were positive correlations between the results of the action intention scale and perceptions of the norm $r = .40$, $p < .001$. In order to examine whether perceptions of the norm could account for the effect of condition on action intentions, we conducted a mediation analysis using Preacher and Hayes' (2004) macro (Figure 3). The norm was a marginally significant covariate, $F(1, 38) = 3.84$, $p = .06$, $\eta_p^2 = .09$, reducing the difference between the experimental conditions on action intention from $F(1, 39) = 6.96$, $p = .01$, $\eta_p^2 = .09$ to $F(1, 38) = 3.34$, $p = .08$, $\eta_p^2 = .08$, bootstrap confidence interval $= .02$ to $.74$, number of samples $= 1,000$.

Discussion

The results of Study 4 show that, as hypothesized, (a) participants exhibited more action intention after listening to the discussion which ended in consensus than the discussion which ended in dissent; and (b) this was mediated by the extent to which participants perceived the discussion as normative. Therefore, the results of Study 4 further suggest that it was not the content of the group discussion *per se* that was driving the effect of the manipulation, but the perception that the group reached a validating consensus on the out-group stereotype. Furthermore, participants identified more with the discussants when their discussion reached consensus than when it ended in dissent. Therefore, it appears that a sense of shared identity with the discussants emerged as well as group norms, that was premised upon the shared opinions that the discussants communicated.

GENERAL DISCUSSION

We conducted four studies to investigate the impact of discussing the societal stereotype of a minority out-group on intergroup behavioural intentions. Overall, (a) group discussion was more likely than individual rumination to focus on certain negative aspects of the out-group stereotype, (b) participants were more likely to support discriminating against the out-group when they discussed the out-group stereotype than in other conditions, and (c) interaction had these profound effects because it validated negative stereotypical perceptions of the out-group, contributing to the formation of a norm which supported discriminatory behaviour.

The power of talk: The implications

Although the studies were clearly framed within the intergroup context in Britain at the time of the research, we argue that additional processes, over and above the effect of the intergroup context, were occurring in these studies. The intergroup context and topic (and therefore, arguably identity) salience was constant across the discussion and individual reflection conditions. Therefore, we argue that the research presented here demonstrates that group discussion uniquely impacted upon norm formation.

This contributes to the social identity literature by highlighting the important role of group communication (contextualized within the intergroup context) in the development of norms for intergroup behaviour. Therefore, when investigating intergroup behaviour, not only must the intergroup context be taken into account, but also how and why social reality may be channelled through in-group dialogue (Reicher *et al.*, 1997; see also Postmes, Haslam, *et al.*, 2005; Smith & Postmes, 2009). The present data also unify past research which argued that (1) group discussion can increase group consensus on stereotypes (e.g., Haslam, 1997); (2) group members' agreement can increase individuals' confidence in their beliefs (Festinger, 1950, 1954; McGarty *et al.*, 1993); and (3) shared stereotypes can provide a basis for intergroup behaviour (e.g., Stott & Drury, 2004).

Our focus on the role of intragroup processes in the development of norms does not underplay the importance of historical and ideological factors (e.g., Subašić & Reynolds, 2009), the intergroup comparative context (e.g., Turner *et al.*, 1987), or individual cognitive processes (e.g., Greenwald & Banaji, 1995). Indeed, all of these aspects contribute uniquely to an individuals' subjective psychological 'life space' (Lewin, 1936). The purpose of this research was to explore in particular the influence of intragroup dynamics, not least because this issue tends to be underrepresented within this literature (Paluck & Green, 2009, p. 354).

By exploring the issue of intragroup dynamics, we have shown that even a relatively brief discussion can have a significant impact on participants' responses. However, future research should provide evidence that the effects could be a long-term normative shift, rather than a temporary, contextual effect. After all, people may tune their communications to their audience (e.g., Clark & Murphy, 1982) and the content of that tuned communication can subsequently bias their memories of the message topic (Echterhoff, Higgins, & Groll, 2005; for a review see Higgins, 1999). The mediating effect of social validation (Study 2), increased shared cognition (Study 1), and the effect of reaching consensus (Study 4) suggests that a normative shift was indeed occurring in this research, rather than simply audience tuning. However, longitudinal evidence would add weight to this claim.

One of the interesting features of the present research was that validating individuals' views of the out-group was more easily achieved than reaching agreement on intergroup actions. It may be that agreeing upon appropriate actions was more difficult than agreeing on an out-group stereotype. Articulating support for what may be considered intergroup discrimination may be constrained by self-presentational or additional identity concerns. For example, discussion of action in relation to migrants may have invoked other identities, such as political identities, which then highlighted the political problems with endorsing action towards members of lower status groups. Increasing the salience of political identities may have produced and emphasized disagreement within the discussion group on appropriate actions. Consequently, this may have led to less consensus and thereby undermined the general intergroup bias that resulted from discussing only the stereotype. Discussing only the stereotypes may have been more 'effective' in promoting discriminatory norms because stereotypes (unlike specific

courses of action) are to some extent societally shared, and hence easier upon which to reach consensus.

The study of the effect of in-group discussion on intergroup behaviour is relatively embryonic. Perhaps inevitably at this stage, the research raises many questions. A further challenge for future research is to determine whether the group dynamics documented here can also contribute to improvements in intergroup relations. In theory, there is no reason why the same principles operating to increase intergroup hostility could not also be mobilized to reduce it. Thus, discussions among members of deprived groups could equip them with the social solidarity and cognitive equipment to better resist discrimination (see also Stott & Drury, 2004). Furthermore, discussion within higher status groups could be equally productive, provided that a significant minority within that group has to courage to voice dissent and undermine perceptions of social consensus.

Conclusion

The present research examines the consequences of group discussion for intergroup discrimination. Discussion may validate negative out-group stereotypes and this could contribute to hostile intergroup behaviour. This implies that the in-group provides a forum within which the perceived appropriateness of intergroup behaviour is negotiated. However, although the findings demonstrate that such debates may have problematic social consequences, they simultaneously show that debates may only have such consequences to the extent that the discussion is allowed to focus on the narrow range of xenophobic prejudices upon which a majority can agree. The moment that more nuanced and complex issues of intergroup relations are discussed, intragroup debate may cease to be such a problem. Indeed, future research should explore the conditions under which such nuanced discussions can provide integrative solutions for intergroup relations.

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