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Keeping it to Ourselves: Effects of Audience Size and Composition on Reactions to Criticisms of the Ingroup

Tracey J. Elder, Robbie M. Sutton and Karen M. Douglas
Keele University

Criticism is an important aspect of communication within and between groups, but reactions to criticism of groups have been little studied. Past research has shown that criticism elicits greater sensitivity when made by an outgroup member, compared to an ingroup member. Two experiments were conducted to examine how this *intergroup sensitivity effect* (ISE) is affected by the context of the criticism. Experiment 1 showed that the ISE occurs in a private context, but disappears when it is clear that the criticism is made to a large public audience. Experiment 2 investigated intragroup criticism and manipulated both audience size and audience composition. Results showed that ingroup criticism elicited greater sensitivity and less favorable evaluations of the speaker when made to an outgroup rather than an ingroup audience. The results highlight strategic considerations and tacit protocols governing the criticism of groups.

KEYWORDS   audience, context, criticism, intergroup relations, reactions

COMMUNICATION is central to intergroup relations. Stereotypes are largely refined and propagated through it (Lyons & Kashima, 2003; Maass, 1999; Maass, Salvi, Acruri, & Semin, 1989). Indeed new stereotypes may emerge from communication (Douglas & Sutton, 2003; Higgins & Rholes, 1978). Aspects of intergroup relations such as conflict, conflict resolution, and negotiation are intrinsically communicative. In this paper, we explore some of the strategic considerations surrounding an important communicative aspect of intergroup relations: criticism of groups. Extending recent research on how this criticism is received, we investigate the impact of the communicative context in which criticisms are made.

Social identity theory (Tajfel, 1978; Tajfel & Turner, 1979) and self-categorization theory (Turner, Hogg, Oakes, Reicher, & Wetherell, 1987) state that people's identity partly derives from their membership in social groups.

Author's note
Address correspondence to Tracey Elder, School of Psychology, Keele University, Keele, Staffordshire, ST5 5BG, UK
[email: t.j.elder@keele.ac.uk]

Similarly, individuals' self-esteem derives partly from their success in establishing and maintaining a positive distinction between their own group and others' (Tajfel & Turner, 1986). Therefore, it is reasonable to infer that people will employ a range of strategies to establish and preserve this positive distinction. The welfare of groups themselves, and not just their constituent members, also depends critically on the esteem in which they are held (Van Vugt & Hart, 2004).

Explicit criticism of the ingroup is a very direct and potent threat to the image of the group. However, until very recently researchers have largely ignored the important issue of how people respond to criticisms of their group. Theoretically, a key determinant of how group criticism is received ought to be its source: specifically whether it comes from an ingroup member (i.e. *intra*group criticism) or an outgroup member (i.e. *inter*group criticism). Intragroup criticism, although painful, helps the group to identify and rectify its weaknesses, facilitating growth, change, and improvement (see also Nemeth & Owens, 1996). This kind of communication is analogous to intra*psychic* processes such as considered reflection and self-criticism (Carver & Scheier, 1999; Kurman, 2003). Subjecting one's group to reasonable criticism therefore may be a valuable means of furthering its interests. In kind, fellow ingroup members may be willing to entertain intragroup criticisms, regarding them as probably well-informed and well-intentioned. On the other hand, criticism from an outgroup member is more likely to be seen as a malicious attack, perhaps aimed at bolstering the outgroup's relative status, and as such is likely to arouse hostility (e.g. Bourhis, Giles, Leyens, & Tajfel, 1979; Grant, 1992).

There are other grounds to expect that ingroup criticisms will be preferred to outgroup criticisms. For example, leaders who are more prototypical of their group find it easier to achieve influence over their fellow group members, as they are seen to have their group's interests at heart (Hogg & van Knippenberg, 2003). By analogy, ingroup members also tend to be more prototypical of the group than

outgroup members. Also, when evaluating persuasive messages (Eagly, Wood, & Chaiken, 1978; Wood & Eagly, 1981) and attempts at ingratiation (Vonk, 1998, 2002), observers are strongly affected by what they perceive to be the target person's motives. Indeed these findings are consistent with contemporary theories of communication in which the perception of speakers' motives is crucial for successful comprehension and evaluation of their messages (Albright, Cohen, Malloy, Christ, & Bromgard, 2004; Douglas & Sutton, 2004; Higgins, 1981).

Hornsey, Oppes, and Svensson (2002) conducted the first empirical investigation of these issues. They presented criticisms of ingroups (Australians, students), manipulating the source to which those criticisms were attributed —specifically, an ingroup member (i.e. *intra*group criticism) or an outgroup member (i.e. *inter*group criticism). Hornsey et al. found that intragroup criticisms were tolerated rather graciously; indeed ingroup speakers were judged as favorably when they criticized the group as when they praised it. However, whereas speakers who praised the ingroup were rated equally as favorably whether or not they belonged to the group, outgroup critics were judged more harshly than their ingroup equivalents. In short, criticisms were welcomed when made by ingroup members but met with sensitivity and defensiveness when made by outgroup members. Hornsey et al. (2002) found this *intergroup sensitivity effect* (ISE) (p. 299) to be mediated by perceptions that intragroup criticism is better informed and intentioned than intergroup criticism.

These findings were mirrored by those published more or less simultaneously by O'Dwyer, Berkowitz, and Alfeld-Johnson (2002). These revealed greater hostility towards the critic, higher levels of anger, and less agreement with the criticism when the critic was a member of the outgroup rather than an ingroup member. Subsequently Hornsey, Trembath and Gunthorpe (2004) have shown that criticisms are only welcomed from ingroup members who are highly identified with or committed to their group. This result underscores the importance of the motives that are perceived to underlie

criticisms. Similarly, Hornsey and Imani (2004) found that outgroup critics were not tolerated even when they were as knowledgeable about the group as ingroup members, suggesting that motives and not experience are strongly predictive of sensitivity.

The importance of the context of communication

Although internal criticism can be a valuable aspect of group functioning, it carries with it certain risks. Hornsey et al. (2002) suggest that 'ingroup criticism will be tolerated to the extent that it is not making the group vulnerable to attack from other groups' (p. 305). This suggests that if ingroup criticism is perceived to make the group susceptible to outgroup derogation, then it could evoke as much sensitivity as outgroup criticism. Such an instance might occur when the criticism appears *in public* to a large audience. The criticism is then available not only to ingroup members, who might make constructive use of it, but is also available to members of other groups whose impression of the ingroup may be adversely affected, and who may use the comments to their advantage.

This distinction between public and private communication has generated considerable research in the domain of individuals' presentations of themselves (e.g. Schlenker & Wowra, 2003; Sedikides, Herbst, Hardin, & Dardis, 2002; Tice, 1992). This research has shown that individuals are acutely aware of the strategic implications of communicating publicly as opposed to privately, and adjust their self-presentations accordingly (e.g. Baumeister, 1982; Schlenker, 1980). For instance, individuals consider the group membership of the audience before expressing prejudiced views or opinions (Crandall, Eshelman, & O'Brien, 2002; Klein, Licata, Azzi, & Durala, 2003). Furthermore, Tetlock (1981) showed that participants' public attributions for their actions seemed tailor-made to create favorable impressions in others. In the group domain, group members represented themselves as less important than their colleagues in causing the group to succeed while privately they believed

themselves to be just as important (Miller & Schlenker, 1985).

Recent research suggests that as well as managing impressions of themselves, people manage impressions of their group, responding to the communicative context in doing so (Douglas & McGarty, 2001; Lambert, Cronen, Chasteen, & Lickel, 1996; Reicher, Spears, & Postmes, 1995). One reason for this might be that people are aware of the representations of their group held by relevant outgroups; namely 'meta-stereotypes' (Vorauer, Main, & O'Connell, 1998, p. 917). Individuals have a vested interest in these 'meta-stereotypes', because if they are negative, they threaten one's valued social identity, self-esteem, and the material interests of the group. Individuals may also find it harder to create and maintain a positive public presentation of themselves when they are a member of a devalued group (Cialdini & Richardson, 1981; Eidelman & Biernat, 2003). Consistent with these concerns, Klein and Azzi (2001) found that when meta-stereotypes were salient and when individuals thought that their responses would be available to outgroup members, they selected more positive traits and fewer negative traits as descriptors of the ingroup.

These findings raise an interesting and thus far unanswered question. Given the collective interest of members in the image of the group, does the tendency to present one's group favorably in public settings take on something of the status of a prescriptive norm? That is, do people react adversely to criticism of their group by fellow group members when it occurs publicly? In sociological field studies of groups such as hotel workers, Goffman (1959) noted a norm of refraining from criticizing each other in front of outgroup audiences such as hotel guests. He attributed this to a collective desire to cooperate in a dramaturgical presentation of the group to outsiders. According to Goffman, when intragroup criticisms were made publicly, one effect was 'to provide the audience with a back-stage view', and another was 'to leave the feeling that something is surely suspicious about a performance when those who know best do not agree' (p. 185).

Analogously in social psychology, we have indirect evidence that by refraining from endorsing negative stereotypes before outgroup audiences, people exhibit at least a tacit awareness that their words and deeds will affect the image of their group (cf. Klein & Azzi, 2001). They are likely to perceive that public criticism adversely affects the valued meta-stereotype (Vorauer et al., 1998). Therefore when people publicly criticize their group, fellow ingroup members may respond harshly.

In the present research, we examine the importance of the context of communication in shaping reactions to intragroup and intergroup criticisms. To date, no research has addressed this issue; manipulations have addressed the group membership of the speaker (Hornsey et al., 2002), the extent to which the speaker identifies with the group (Hornsey et al., 2004), and the extent to which the speaker has personal experience of the group (Hornsey & Imani, 2004). In these studies by Hornsey and colleagues, the context of criticisms has been ambiguous, described as taking place in an interview, but where the audience privy to the interview was not made explicit. In the study by O'Dwyer et al. (2002), stimulus criticisms had allegedly been published in the critic's school newspaper. This meant that the criticisms were made publicly but to an inclusive ingroup audience (relative to the critic). Although the only intended manipulation was the source of the criticism, the audience differed across conditions as well. The current research aims to systematically examine the role of context in moderating reactions to criticism from ingroup and outgroup members. Specifically, Experiment 1 manipulates the context of the audience (criticism appears in private versus public domains) and the source of the criticism (ingroup or outgroup member). Experiment 2 breaks down the context of the criticism by separating the size of the audience and the composition of the audience.

Experiment 1

Here we manipulate both the source of the message (ingroup/outgroup) and the context of the message (public/private) in a single, between-groups design.[1] We reasoned that individuals may tolerate or even value intragroup criticism when it is not available to outsiders, but may resent it when the image of the group is potentially harmed by public criticism. Thus we expect that the ISE will occur for criticisms made in private but not in public contexts.

Method

Participants and design   Participants were 203 undergraduate students recruited on Keele University campus while at leisure (64 males, 139 females, $M = 19.09$ years of age, $SD = 1.42$). The experiment consisted of a 2 (source: ingroup/outgroup) $\times$ 2 (context: private/public) between-groups design. Participants were randomly assigned to conditions.

Materials and procedure   As in Hornsey and colleagues' research (2002), participants were informed that the study was designed to examine people's perceptions of personality types. On the first page participants received identical instructions in all four conditions, except for one line that was specific for the condition assigned, which read 'these comments were spoken by an undergraduate [someone who didn't go to university], in a private conversation [and appeared in a national newspaper]'.

The first line of the second page outlined the group membership of the critic and the context in which the comments were spoken. For example, for the ingroup private condition participants read: 'David Sanderson is a 20-year-old second year undergraduate student [office manager who decided against going to university]. *In a private conversation [in a national newspaper]*, he made these comments about students' (alternative wording for outgroup critic and public context appears in parentheses).

Participants were then presented with comments attributed to the speaker which were based on negative press comments from the media concerning students' activities while at university. This criticism was used because of the likelihood that it would tap a salient and

commonly held stereotype. Comments from the ingroup member were presented as coming from a 20-year-old undergraduate student called David Sanderson, who said:

> 'Most of us are from privileged, middle-class backgrounds, but we expect the taxpayer to support us. Many of us just drift into university because of parental pressure or simply because we want to get drunk and party. About 50% of students show up to the average lecture and seminar; much of the absenteeism is down to the fact that we're either spending our time and money in the pub, or we're hungover from the night before.'
>
> Speaking about the current controversy on fees, Mr Sanderson said, 'I strongly support top-up fees. We benefit from our education, and so should pay for it. If fees were increased only those who are really serious about their studies would go to university. The universities would also be able to put on better classes'.

For the outgroup condition David Sanderson used third-person pronouns ('them' and 'they') instead of first-person pronouns ('us' and 'we'). The outgroup critic was allocated the status of office manager in order to try and match his status with that of a university student. If his title would have been office worker or office cleaner then ingroup members may perceive the comments as 'sour grapes' because his position in society is lower than what they would hope to achieve, making his criticism easier to dismiss.

Once participants read the comments, they were presented with Hornsey et al.'s (2002) sensitivity scale. Participants were asked 'to what extent do you think the comments were': (followed by the words) 'threatening', 'disappointing', 'irritating', 'offensive', 'insulting', 'hypocritical', 'judgmental' and 'arrogant'. Participants responded on a Likert scale (1 = *not at all*, 7 = *very much*). The sensitivity scale was reliable α = .82.

In addition we also measured the anger felt by the participants after reading the comments, using the four-item scale by O'Dwyer et al. (2002), for example: 'How annoyed do you feel after reading these comments?' (α = .88). A single item was also included to assess participants' agreement with the speaker's comments. This was measured by asking: 'how much do you agree with the comments?' (Hornsey et al., 2002).

Questions were then asked to tap into participants' perceptions of the speaker. These questions related to the morality of the critic, the critic's motive, competency of the critic, and the effect of the critic's comments. *Morality* was measured because it may be possible that participants believe that by going public with criticism of their ingroup the speaker is breaking some form of moral code. The morality items were: 'the speaker should make comments like these', 'it was wrong of the speaker to make these comments' (reverse coded), and 'by making these comments the speaker was doing the right thing' (α = .68). *Motive* was assessed because when an ingroup member criticizes their group publicly their intentions may be seen as less honorable. Motive was measured using the following four questions: 'this speaker had students' interests at heart', 'this speaker's intentions were honorable', 'this speaker's comments were intended to benefit students' and 'this speaker was trying to be constructive' (α = .75). *Competency* was included because previous research has shown critics' group membership to affect perceptions of how qualified they are to comment on the group. Competency was measured with the following items: 'the speaker's comments were well-informed', 'the speaker was qualified to make these comments' and 'this speaker has enough experience of students to make these comments' (α = .80). The first two items were adapted from Hornsey et al.'s legitimacy scale. The final scale was included to measure the perceived *effect* of the comments, given that public criticism could be perceived as having a more negative effect on the group than private criticism. The *effect* items were: 'this speaker's comments will positively affect students' image', 'this speaker's comments will have a positive impact on university education', and 'this speaker's comments will benefit students' (α = .69). These scales appeared together, in random order, and participants responded on a Likert scale (1 = *strongly disagree*, 7 = *strongly agree*). Once participants completed these questions they were thanked and debriefed.

Results and discussion

Preliminary analyses To verify that our dependent measures assessed separate constructs, and to identify any problematic cross-mappings, we subjected our measures to factor analyses. To verify that sensitivity (Hornsey et al., 2002) and anger (O'Dwyer et al., 2002) are different constructs, we entered all items from both scales into a factor analysis. As these two constructs were interrelated ($r = .516$), we used oblique rotation. This produced a two-factor solution, with the first factor comprising the anger items (eigenvalue = 5.05, 42.10% of the variance explained) and the second factor including the sensitivity items (eigenvalue = 1.65, 13.75% of the variance explained). Therefore, these scales were treated as separate constructs.

A similar analysis was used to determine whether motive, effect, competency, and morality scales assessed the intended constructs. Once more oblique rotation was used given that these constructs tended to be interrelated ($r = .003$ to .517 with the average correlation approximately .30). This revealed a three-factor solution, with the first factor comprising the motive and effect items (eigenvalue = 4.30, 33.09% of the variance explained) and the second factor the competency items (eigenvalue = 1.91, 14.72% of the variance explained). Because both effect and motive loaded on the same factor, we combined these scales into a single scale we labelled *consequences*. This new scale combined the effect of the comments as estimated by the participants and as perceived to be intended by the speaker ($\alpha = .80$). This close correspondence in motives and effect suggests that participants believe the speaker to have intended or at least to have been aware of the likely effect of his or her comments. The third factor comprised the morality items (eigenvalue = 1.30, 9.29% of the variance explained). We therefore analyzed results for consequences, competency, and morality.

Main effects and interactions for evaluations of the comments Results were entered into a 2 (source: ingroup/outgroup) $\times$ 2 (context: public/private) between-groups analysis of variance (ANOVA). Means and F values are presented in Table 1. Consistent with the ISE, ingroup members were more sensitive to comments if made by an outgroup critic ($M = 4.94$) than an ingroup critic ($M = 4.66$) ($p = .047$, $\eta^2 = .020$). As we predicted, this main

Table 1. Experiment 1: Means (standard deviations) and F values for effects of source and context on reactions

	Means				F		
	Ingroup critic		Outgroup critic				
Measures	Public	Private	Public	Private	Source	Context	Interaction
Sensitivity	4.87$_a$	4.46$_b$	4.78$_{ab}$	5.12$_a$	3.99*	0.07	6.76*
	(0.86)	(1.08)	(1.05)	(1.10)			
Anger	3.90$_a$	3.72$_a$	3.98$_a$	4.60$_b$	5.46*	1.15	3.72
	(1.46)	(1.60)	(1.43)	(1.39)			
Agree	2.18$_{ab}$	2.52$_a$	2.28$_{ab}$	1.84$_b$	2.49	0.79	4.67*
	(1.19)	(1.30)	(1.45)	(1.25)			
Consequences	2.70$_a$	2.75$_a$	2.36$_b$	2.06$_c$	20.61***	1.31	2.37
	(0.90)	(0.84)	(0.82)	(0.70)			
Morality	3.55$_a$	4.82$_b$	3.25$_a$	4.42$_b$	4.95*	58.80***	0.73
	(1.26)	(1.06)	(1.09)	(1.22)			
Competency	3.18$_a$	2.95$_a$	2.15$_b$	1.75$_c$	53.48***	4.27*	0.32
	(1.32)	(1.09)	(1.13)	(0.70)			

*$p < .05$; **$p < .005$; ***$p < .001$.
Notes: Numbers in parentheses are standard deviations.
Means with different subscripts are reliably different ($p < .05$).

effect was qualified by an interaction between source and context (p = .010, η^2 = .033). Planned comparisons revealed that the ISE occurred in private contexts ($F(1, 99)$ = 9.43, p = .003, η^2 = .09), but not in public contexts ($F(1, 99)$ = .21, p = .65). Planned comparisons also revealed that the ingroup critic's comments evoked greater sensitivity when spoken in public than in private ($F(1, 99)$ = 4.65, p = .033, η^2 = .045). There was no such context effect for the outgroup critic, although the means were, if anything, in the opposite direction (p = .121, η^2 = .024). These results suggest that the context of the comments is unimportant when the criticism is from an outgroup member but important when the criticism is from an ingroup member.

For agreement with the critic, there was an interaction between source and context of the comments (p = .03, η^2 = .023). Follow-up analyses revealed that in the private context, ingroup criticism received greater agreement than outgroup criticism ($F(1, 97)$ = 7.13, p = .009, η^2 = .068). For anger, the interaction between context and source was only marginally significant (p = .055, η^2 = .018). Follow-up analyses revealed that for the outgroup critic, participants were more angry when the criticism was presented in private than in public ($F(1, 100)$ = 4.91, p = .029, η^2 = .047). Perhaps ingroup members are angrier when outgroup members say negative things about their group in private than in public because it does not allow them to refute, retort, or retaliate.

Main effects and interactions for evaluations of the speaker For *morality*, there was no interaction between context and source, showing that the context did not differentially affect responses to ingroup versus outgroup criticisms. However, there was a main effect such that private criticisms (M = 4.62) were perceived as more moral than public criticisms (M = 3.40) ($F(1, 201)$ = 58.41, p < .001, η^2 = .225). Also, there was a main effect of source such that the ingroup critic (M = 4.18) was perceived as more moral than the outgroup critic (M = 3.81) (p = .027, η^2 = .024). Similarly, there was no interaction between context and source for

competency, but there were main effects for context where public critics (M = 2.66) were seen to be more competent than private critics (M = 2.36) (p = .040, η^2 = .021); and outgroup critics (M = 1.96) were seen as less competent than ingroup critics (M = 3.07) (p = .001, η^2 = .212). For *consequences* there was also no interaction between context and source. There was a main effect for source, such that the consequences of the ingroup critic's comments were perceived to be more positive (M = 2.73) than the outgroup critic's comments (M = 2.22) (p = .001, η^2 = .094).

Experiment 2

The first experiment highlights the importance of context for people's reactions to criticism. It seems that when the comments are spoken in a small private setting, people prefer the criticism to come from within the group. However, when the criticism is aired publicly, preference for ingroup criticism is no longer evident.

Our research shows clearly that public versus private contexts are important in shaping reactions to criticism, but leaves open the question of whether this happens because of *who* public criticism reaches (i.e. probably outgroup as well as ingroup members), or *how many people* it reaches (i.e. the sheer size of a public versus a private audience). Research suggests that when people rate the perceived level of influence on others they respond to the *composition* of the audience and not the *size* of the audience. Groups that were most dissimilar to the self (i.e. outgroups) rather than groups that were largest (i.e. society) are seen to be the most influenced by threatening, persuasive messages (Elder, Douglas, & Sutton, 2004). The importance of audience composition was also revealed by Klein and Azzi (2001), who manipulated audience by varying the alleged nationality of the researchers conducting the experiments. They found that even when the audience consisted of only this very small group of researchers, participants still presented their group more favorably to the ostensibly outgroup audience than the ingroup audience.

In many instances the communicative context and the composition of the audience are naturally confounded. Private comments are often accessible only to ingroup members, whereas comments made publicly tend to be accessible to people from different groups. However context and composition are conceptually separable, and are separable in practice too. Given that we tend to belong to a multitude of social groups, it is probably quite common for people to talk about their own group, in private, to outgroup members. To illustrate, it is quite likely that students talk about other students when at home with their families. Further, some communicative settings are importantly public, but at the same time unlikely to be scrutinized by outgroup members. For example, internet sites for special interest groups are available to the public but not likely to be regularly inhabited by outgroup members. Comments made in such contexts are public but may well find a purely ingroup audience. So public communication does not always entail intergroup communication, even if public communication entails the *possibility* that outgroup members will receive the message.

It is the aim of this experiment to tease apart the variables of audience size and composition, which are somewhat confounded in the first experiment. Therefore, it manipulates both the *size* of the audience (context is public or private) and *composition* of the audience (audience consists of ingroup or outgroup members), in a fully between-groups design. As there was no effect of context for the outgroup critic in the first experiment, all criticism in the next experiment will be presented as *intra*group criticism.

There are also other methodological changes in this experiment. In both the pilot study[1] and the first experiment the critic advocated increased tuition fees as part of their criticism of students. This issue of 'top-up' fees was particularly topical at the time and helped to contextualize the criticism. However, we were concerned that this suggested implementation of a policy that would hurt students' interests could be responsible for increased sensitivity in

public contexts. Therefore, the current experiment manipulated whether or not the comments about top-up fees were included in the criticisms. We also included an additional scale by Hornsey et al. (2002) to examine whether perceptions of the speaker's personality would differ depending on the context of the criticism.

Method

Participants and design Participants were 200 undergraduate students (70 male, 130 female, $M = 19.80$ years of age, SD = 3.31). Of these, 100 were psychology students who participated to fulfill course credits and the remainder recruited on Keele University campus while at leisure. The experiment consisted of a 2 (audience composition: ingroup/outgroup) × 2 (audience size: small/large) between-subjects design. Participants were randomly assigned to the four conditions.

Materials and procedure Participants received identical instructions in all conditions except those specific to the condition assigned. For example, in the large ingroup audience condition it stated that: '*These comments were spoken by an undergraduate student interviewed on student radio [Radio 2] where less than 1% of listeners are non-students [students]*'. Alternatively, for the smaller ingroup audience condition the instructions were: '*These comments were spoken by an undergraduate student, in a private conversation with only other students [non-students] present*'.

Participants then turned the page and were informed of the audience size and composition. For example, in the small audience condition participants were informed that: '*Whilst in a private conversation in his halls of residence with only other students present [with his family and friends who are not students], he made these comments about students*'. In the large audience condition this read: '*Whilst being interviewed on student radio [Radio 2], he made these comments about students*'.

Participants then proceeded to read the same negative script about students as in Experiment 1, except that for half the participants, the commentary concerning top-up fees was deleted from the criticism. Measures were also identical

to Experiment 1 except for the inclusion of Hornsey et al.'s (2002) personality evaluation scale. This asked 'to what extent do you think the speaker is': (followed by the words) 'intelligent', 'trustworthy', 'friendly', 'open-minded', 'likeable', 'nice', 'respected', and 'interesting' (α = .88). Participants completed the same sensitivity (α = .90), anger (α = .96), motives (α = .77), morality (α = .70), competency (α = .78), and effect (α = .66) scales, as well as the agreement item.

Results and discussion
Preliminary analyses Initial factor analyses also replicated the factor structures observed for Experiment 1 and showed Hornsey et al.'s (2002) personality evaluation scale to be distinct from other measures. In order to rule out the possibility that commentary concerning top-up fees in the script was altering reactions to the criticism, we also conducted initial ANOVAs including this factor (top-up fees: included/excluded). For sensitivity, there was no main effect of top-up fees ($F(1, 192)$ = 3.29,

p = .079), nor crucially any interaction with audience composition ($F(1, 192)$ = .73, p = .39); or audience size ($F(1, 192)$ = .11, p = .74); and no three-way interaction between top-up fees, audience composition, and size ($F(1, 192)$ = .001, p = .98). Similarly, for personality evaluations, there was no main effect of top-up fees ($F(1, 192)$ = .10, p = .75), nor any interaction with audience composition ($F(1, 192)$ = 1.42, p = .24); or audience size ($F(1, 192)$ = .002, p = .96); and no three-way interaction between top-up fees, audience composition, and size ($F(1, 192)$ = 2.02, p = .16). Therefore, top-up fees as a variable was dropped from further analyses.

Main effects and interactions for evaluation of the comments Results were then analyzed with 2 (audience composition: ingroup/ outgroup) $\times$ 2 (audience size: private/public) between-groups ANOVAs. Means and F values are presented in Table 2. As predicted, a significant main effect of audience composition was found for sensitivity. Participants were more

Table 2. Experiment 2: Means (standard deviations) and F values for effects of audience and context on reactions

Measures	Means				F		
	Ingroup audience		Outgroup audience		Audience composition	Audience size	Interaction
	Public	Private	Public	Private			
Sensitivity	4.32$_a$ (1.14)	4.33$_a$ (1.19)	4.42$_a$ (1.44)	4.92$_b$ (0.89)	4.27*	2.38	2.19
Personality	3.67$_a$ (0.70)	3.71$_a$ (0.94)	3.39$_{ab}$ (1.12)	3.34$_b$ (0.89)	6.00*	0.002	0.14
Anger	3.52$_a$ (1.55)	3.56$_a$ (1.70)	3.69$_{ab}$ (1.95)	4.38$_b$ (1.58)	4.31*	2.34	1.86
Agree	2.98$_a$ (1.63)	3.08$_a$ (1.70)	3.24$_a$ (2.03)	2.68$_a$ (1.11)	0.09	0.32	2.02
Consequences	3.02$_a$ (0.87)	3.03$_a$ (1.08)	2.80$_{ab}$ (1.00)	2.62$_b$ (0.85)	5.72*	0.40	0.49
Morality	3.58$_a$ (1.11)	4.57$_b$ (0.88)	3.45$_a$ (1.30)	4.19$_c$ (1.03)	2.76	31.25***	0.71
Competency	3.76$_a$ (1.13)	3.73$_a$ (1.09)	3.37$_{ab}$ (1.41)	3.23$_b$ (1.21)	6.61*	0.23	0.84

*p < .05; **p < .005; ***p < .001.
Notes: Numbers in parentheses are standard deviations.
Means with different subscripts are reliably different (*p* < .05).

sensitive to criticism of their group when there was an outgroup audience ($M = 4.67$) than when there was an ingroup audience ($M = 4.32$) ($p = .040$, $\eta^2 = .022$). Ingroup members do not want the group's shortcomings to be heard by outsiders. However, for sensitivity there was no main effect of audience size. This suggests that the composition of the audience, and not its size, affects sensitivity. The results also show, as in Experiment 1, sensitivity is greatest when the outgroup critic speaks to a small outgroup audience, perhaps because ingroup members are not able to respond to the criticism.

Participants were also more angered by the critic's comments when they were spoken to the outgroup audience ($M = 4.04$) than to the ingroup audience ($M = 3.54$) ($p = .039$, $\eta^2 = .022$). For agreement, there were no main effects or interactions for audience composition and audience size. Thus, although the source of otherwise identical messages affects agreement (Experiment 1; also see Hornsey et al., 2002), characteristics of the perceived audience do not. Clearly, source and context have different effects on evaluative reactions to comments.

Main effects and interactions for evaluations of the speaker As suggested by our factor analyses, motive and effect were combined into a single scale we labeled *consequences* ($\alpha = .83$). For *consequences* of the criticism, there was a main effect of audience composition, with more positive consequences perceived when the speaker addressed an ingroup audience ($M = 3.03$) compared with an outgroup audience ($M = 2.71$) ($p = .018$, $\eta^2 = .029$). In addition, when the critic spoke to the ingroup audience he was perceived as more moral ($M = 4.07$) than when he spoke to the outgroup audience ($M = 3.82$), although this effect was marginal ($p = .09$, $\eta^2 = .014$). For *morality* there was also a main effect of audience size with participants perceiving the speaker as possessing greater morality when speaking to a small audience ($M = 4.38$) than when speaking to a large audience ($M = 3.52$) ($p = .001$, $\eta^2 = .140$). This supports the suggestion that the moral rules or norms governing intragroup communication

are dependent on the social context in which the comments are expressed. If the speaker goes 'on the record' and speaks to a large audience then they may no longer be perceived as doing what is right for the group. The ingroup speaker was also perceived as more competent when criticizing the group to an ingroup audience ($M = 3.74$) than to an outgroup audience ($M = 3.30$) ($p = .011$, $\eta^2 = .033$). This suggests that although the criticisms presented were identical, the speaker was perceived as having greater experience and qualifications to make these negative comments about their own group when they kept the criticism 'in house'. As predicted, there was a significant main effect of audience for ratings of personality evaluations. Finally, participants evaluated the ingroup critic's personality more favorably when he criticized the group before ingroup members ($M = 3.69$) rather than outgroup members ($M = 3.37$) ($p = .015$, $\eta^2 = .030$). Again, this is consistent with our rationale that participants will not perceive the speaker favorably when the criticism is taken beyond the confines of the ingroup.

General discussion

The current research is the first to assess the impact of communicative context on reactions to intergroup and intragroup criticism. Our first experiment manipulated both the source of the criticism (ingroup versus outgroup speaker) and the context of the criticism (public versus private) and showed that the ISE only occurred when criticisms were made in private. When the comments appeared in public they were no more welcomed from an ingroup member than from an outgroup member. The second experiment aimed to clarify whether the preference for private ingroup criticism was due to the smaller size of the audience or the fact that it was composed of ingroup rather than outgroup members. The findings demonstrated that increased sensitivity and derogation of the speaker was associated with taking the criticism to outsiders. Therefore, it seems that an ingroup critic speaking to an ingroup audience is seen as 'clearing the

air' by highlighting the group's weaknesses, thereby promoting growth and improvement (see Nemeth & Owens, 1996), but when speaking to an outgroup audience, he or she is perceived to be 'airing the group's dirty laundry'.

Our replication of the ISE supports theoretical claims that there are norms governing intergroup criticism (Hornsey et al., 2002; see also Franco & Maass, 1996). Our demonstration that this effect disappears in public, where ingroup critics are less well received, suggests that there are also norms governing intragroup criticism. The norms governing each kind of criticism appear to be somewhat different; while reactions to intergroup criticism were not greatly affected by the context in which it appeared, participants were clearly more piqued by intragroup criticism that could reach an outgroup audience. Indeed, intragroup criticism was judged to be less moral when made in public, showing that people are perceived to be less entitled to criticize their group in public than in private. Furthermore, intragroup criticism before an outgroup audience was perceived as having more negative consequences and the speaker was judged to be less competent than when the criticism was made to an ingroup audience.

These findings are consistent with a normative expectation that group members should collaborate to foster a desired public image of their group (Goffman, 1959; Klein & Azzi, 2001). Criticizing one's own group in public may affirm negative meta-stereotypes to the detriment of the group (Vorauer et al., 1998). These findings also suggest that when people speak to outgroup members about their ingroup's weaknesses, this can change our perceptions of the speaker's motivations and personality. In this context we no longer see them as well-intentioned and well-informed.

The effects of context and source on reactions to criticism found in the present experiments demonstrate the impact of specifically communicative variables on reactions to group criticism. For example, people's tolerance of criticism may differ depending on whether the critic is *identifiable*. Identifiability

has a range of implications for how ingroup and outgroup members are perceived and treated. Intuitively, one might expect greater tolerance of identifiable critics on the grounds that they are prepared to be accountable for their comments, but in fact this may interact with source and context (Douglas & McGarty, 2001; Reicher & Levine, 1994a, 1994b; Reicher et al., 1995).

Another potential moderating variable is the status of the outgroup speaker. In Experiment 1 we described the ingroup critic as a 20-year-old undergraduate student and the outgroup critic as a 20-year-old office manager who decided against going to university. The aim was to try and match the two critics in terms of both age and status. However, recent research suggests that speakers' perceived status can moderate the ISE (Tarrant, 2005). We therefore acknowledge that it may have been advantageous in the first experiment to use multiple outgroup speakers of different status randomized across conditions.

To conclude, the present findings show that reactions to intragroup and intergroup criticism depend importantly on the context in which criticism appears. Criticisms seem to be preferred from ingroup members rather than outgroup members, but not when taken into the intergroup domain. This preference strikes us as being, to a large degree, rational; making criticisms of one's group in public contexts where they are available to outgroup members would indeed appear to put the group's image at risk, with little benefit to the ingroup relative to more discreet forms of communication. Our results point to a rather subtle set of norms governing the criticism of groups, and highlight the interaction between communicative factors such as source and context. In doing so, they underscore the essentially communicative nature of group processes and intergroup relations.

Note

1. Before conducting this study we ran a pilot using these materials and an ambiguous context as in Hornsey et al. (2002) where the extent to which

comments were public or private was not specified. The purpose of this was to ensure that our different intergroup and national context produced the same results as in the original ISE studies. Participants were 84 undergraduate students at Keele University (26 male, 58 female, M = 19.27 years of age, SD = 1.95). Results were analyzed as a two-group between-subjects design (source: ingroup/outgroup critic). As predicted, criticisms from an outgroup member resulted in greater sensitivity (M = 4.87) than when the same comments were made by an ingroup member (M = 4.34) (F(1, 82) = 4.76, p = .032, η^2 = .06). This result shows that the present materials produce an ISE in ambiguous communicative contexts as found by Hornsey et al. (2002).

Acknowledgments

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Biographical notes

TRACEY J. ELDER is a doctoral student in psychology at Keele University. Her research examines people's responses to intergroup and intragroup messages, and the norms and rules that govern individual and group communication.

ROBBIE M. SUTTON received his PhD in psychology from Victoria University, New Zealand in 2000, and is now a lecturer at Keele University. His research interests include social cognition, strategic communication, and lay people's concerns with social norms and justice.

KAREN M. DOUGLAS received her PhD in psychology from The Australian National University in 2000, and is now a lecturer at Keele University. Her research interests lie broadly in the area of communication. Current research projects include: examining the influence of goals on language use, language abstraction and inferences about describers, communicator's capacity to inhibit biases and stereotypes, communication on the Internet, and intra/intergroup communication.