

# How expressing anger elicits conformity in groups

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## Introduction

Deviance, whether intentional or not, is unavoidable in groups (Brewer, 1991). Often, deviance is conducive to group goal attainment. At other times, deviance frustrates these goals.

Understanding how deviant individuals are affected by emotions expressed in response to their deviance may help groups to regulate deviance effectively (Keltner & Haidt, 1999; van Kleef et al., 2011). Our theoretical model (central on this poster) predicts that expressing anger effectively resolves the threat of deviance:

1. The majority's anger leads the deviant to feel rejected.
2. Feeling rejected motivates conformity, if the individual is motivated to gain (re)acceptance in the group.

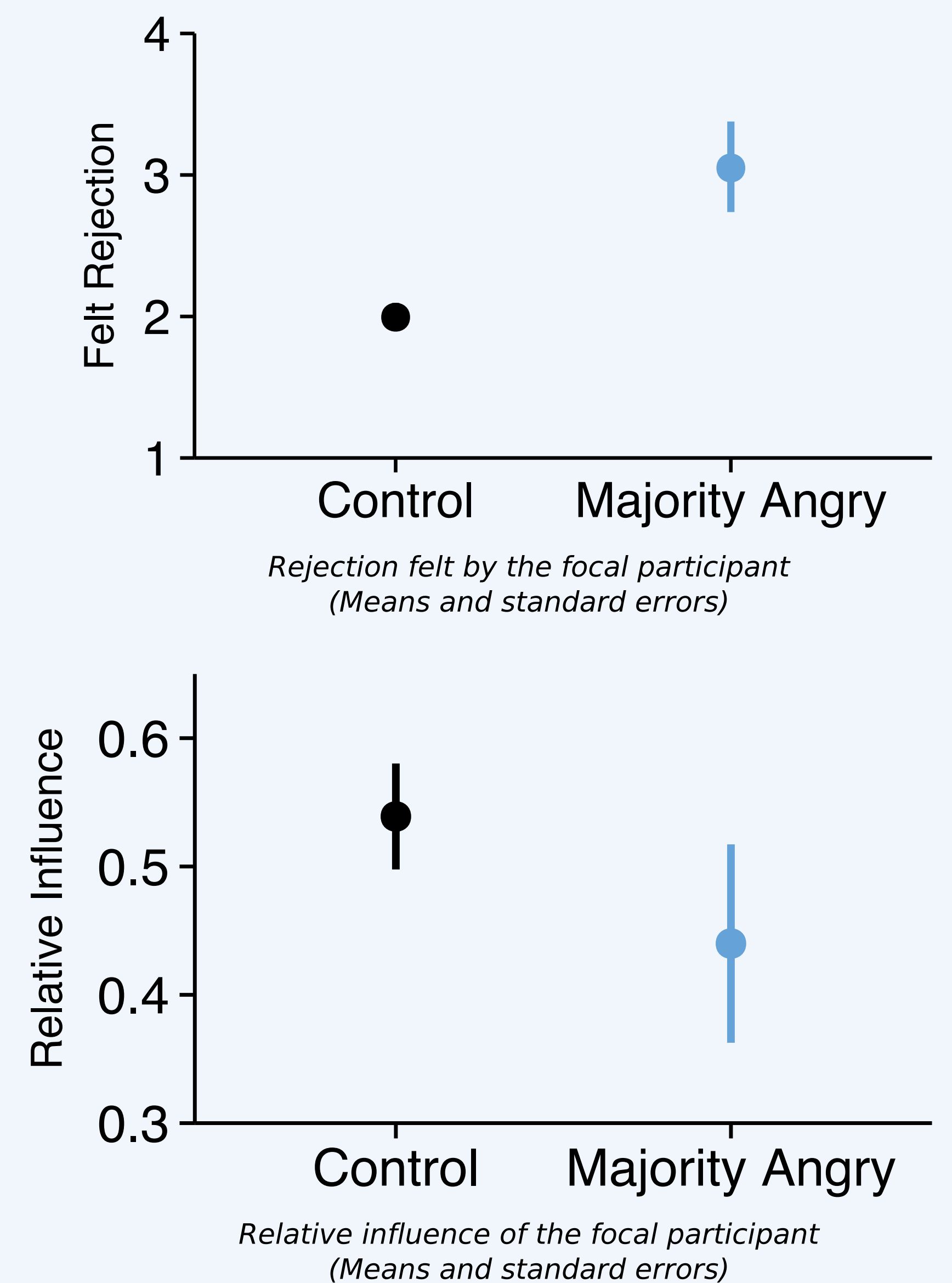
## Study 1

Thirty-three 3-participant groups completed a group creativity task. Participants first generated a list of ideas individually. Then, they selected the best ideas for their group list while interacting.

In the Majority Angry condition, two group members received instructions to express anger in the group task. In the Control conditions, two members were instructed to express happiness or no emotions.

The number of contributed ideas by the third (focal) participant relative to the other group members served as the measure of relative influence.

In line with the theoretical model, the focal participant in the Majority Angry condition felt more rejected and had marginally less influence than participants in the Control condition, indicating that they conformed more. Felt rejection mediated the effect of Majority Anger on relative influence.



Majority expresses Anger

Deviant feels Rejected

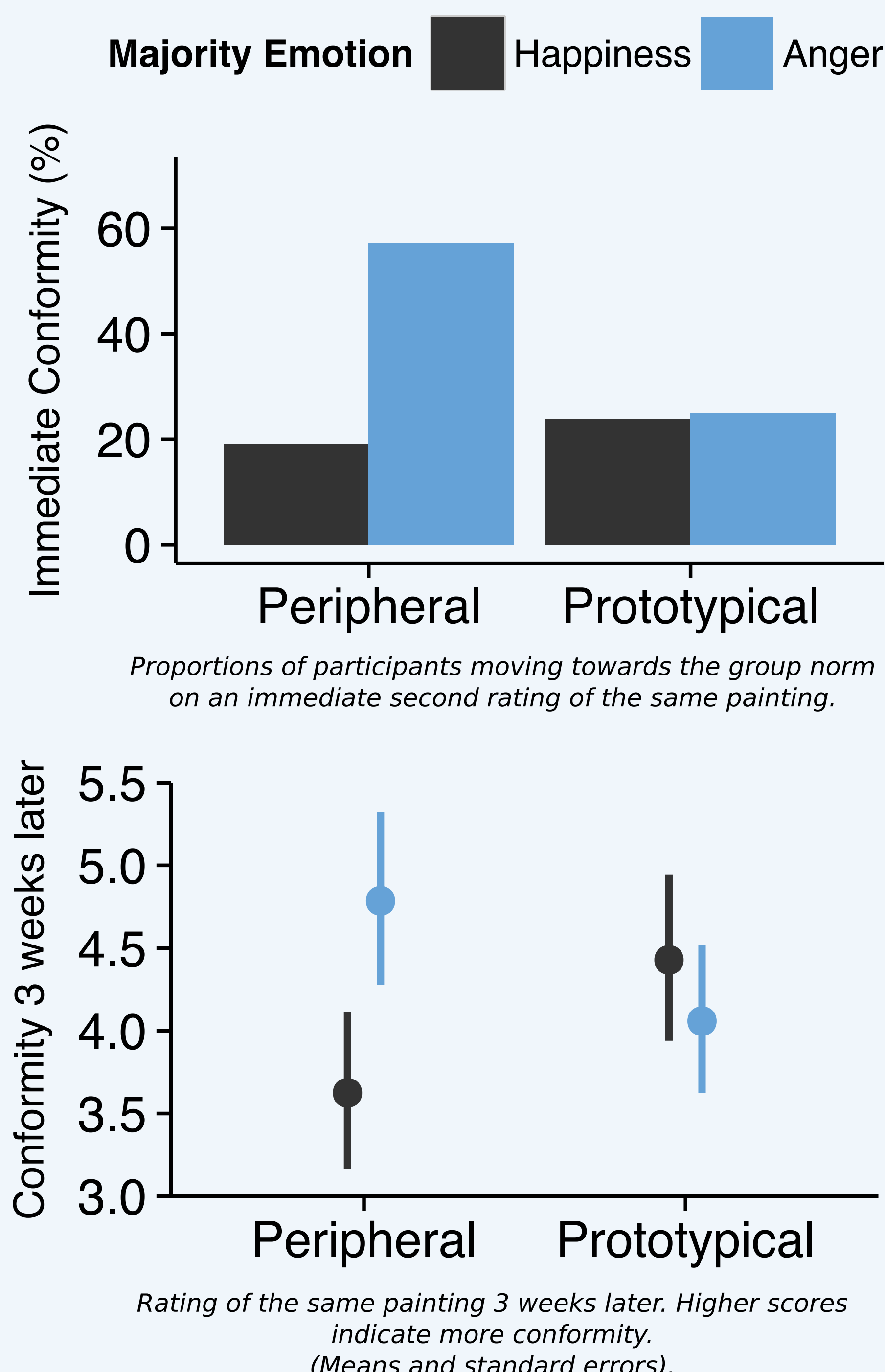
Conformity

## Study 2

Prototypical group members are less concerned about their acceptance in the group than peripheral members (van Kleef et al., 2007). Therefore, we predicted that feeling rejected would lead to conformity in peripheral members, but not in prototypical members.

Ninety-seven participants were manipulated to be Peripheral or Prototypical group members. In a simulated group interaction, all group members expressed Happiness or Anger about the participant's different opinion of a painting.

All participants felt more rejected after an Angry reaction than after a Happy reaction (not shown). The effect of the majority's emotion on conformity was stronger for peripheral members than for prototypical members, both on an immediate second rating, and on a third rating made three weeks later. At both time points, peripheral members' conformity after an angry reaction was mediated by felt rejection.



## Conclusion

In two studies, support was found for the idea that a majority can elicit conformity from a deviant group member by making the deviant feel rejected. Anger only leads to conformity if the deviant is motivated to be reaccepted.

Together, these findings indicate that emotions can be functional in changing individual group members' behavior, thereby helping groups attain their goals. Moreover, emotions can produce lasting changes in group members' opinion and behavior.

## References

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