

The Nature of Collective Reactions to Potential Transgressions

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**ABSTRACT**

**Purpose:** To motivate efforts within the ethics, fairness, and justice literatures to address some largely unexamined questions regarding how reactions to potential transgressions might depend on the group context.

**Design/Approach:** We draw on prior literature on ethics, fairness, and justice to develop a framework that highlights gaps in the literature. We develop a section on future work that provides suggestions to researchers on how to address these gaps.

**Findings:** Although it's important to understand how to prevent transgressions from being committed, we start from the point of view that they are likely to remain an unfortunate aspect of organizational life. Thus, it's important to consider how people not only interpret transgressions, but how they might respond after such transgressions occur. Through a review of the prior literature, we highlight the relative lack of research on such responses, particularly at a collective level, by considering 1) the types and implications of attributions made for transgressions in a group context and 2) how collective reactions to potential transgressions may ultimately differ from those of individuals.

**Originality/Value:** We attempt to spur greater understanding of how groups understand and collectively react to potential transgressions. By doing so, we motivate greater attention toward an important, though underexplored, area in the literature.

**Category:** conceptual paper

**Keywords:** *transgressions, group, reactions, ethics, fairness, justice*

## INTRODUCTION

Research on ethics, fairness, and justice has received considerable attention by management scholars. At the group level, this attention is well documented (e.g., Volume 8 and 13 of the Research on Managing Groups and Teams (RMGT) series) and considers a wide array of questions that offer many important insights for how group and inter-group considerations may influence these judgments. Still, the nature of collective reactions to potential transgressions remains underexplored. Potential transgressions, which concern incidents that would violate the trust of another, may have already occurred, may occur in the future, or may arise from overt action as well as failures to act. Considerations of such potential transgressions in groups can encompass a host of research topics, particularly when one takes into account the mixed motives and potential targets (e.g., in-group versus out-group members) that become relevant for groups. Our goal for this chapter is to incite further research on these issues. To achieve this goal, we first organize previous research in this domain with a framework to provide a basis for identifying two major gaps in the literature. We then highlight future directions for this research by exploring ways both to fill those gaps and take to steps towards developing a broader understanding of how potential transgressions are interpreted and dealt with in group settings.

## LOOKING AT THE PAST

In this section, we present a basic framework that organizes past research and highlights the unintended consequences of efforts to promote ethics, fairness, and justice in groups. Building off of the work done in previous RMGT volumes, we categorize past research based on their focus on four major forms of transgressions, by taking into account both the self and group motives that individuals often act upon while operating in groups as well as the targets the potential transgression would primarily affect. We focus on these different motives (self-interest

vs. group-interest) and targets (intra-group vs. inter-group) based on their combined ability, via the 2 x 2 matrix depicted in Figure 1, both to encompass and differentiate the ways in which potential transgressions might be understood from the perspective of groups. This section introduces each major category and briefly explores past research within each cell. In doing so, we identify important omissions in the literature that we explore in the following section.

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### **Free-Riding**

When a transgression arises from self-interest and primarily affects one's own group, the resulting pattern may be considered a form of free-riding. Often associated with cases in which an individual reaps benefits from a group without personally contributing, the problem of free-riding is worsened when such behavior is masked by organizational practices. Dana (2006), for example, has suggested that organizational structures can encourage individuals to remain "strategically ignorant," by turning a blind eye to questionable ethics and fairness practices in the workplace in order to benefit for those practices while avoiding responsibility. In such cases, it becomes increasingly difficult to attribute blame to these self-interested individuals, even if that behavior poses risks for the collective.

Groups may recognize such problems and attempt to implement practices to protect themselves and the group from free-riding, but these efforts can often backfire. Mulder, van Dijk, and De Cremer (2006) examined efforts to mitigate noncooperation, a common symptom of individuals taking advantage of the group's efforts, through sanctioning systems. However, they observed that sanctioning systems that are designed specifically to discourage noncooperation sometimes actually *increase* it, by systematically undermining members' trust in others. When trust is consistently undermined, they argue, predictability and faith in the group itself falters and

results in individuals cooperating less than before due to concerns that others would fail to reciprocate.

Even further, whereas Mulder et al. (2006) reported how sanctioning systems can actually encourage individuals to take advantage of their group's efforts, others have examined how this unintended consequence can arise from encouraging individuals to personally relate to the group. Caruso, Epley, and Bazerman (2006), for example, considered this possibility by looking at the role of perspective taking in a group context. They argued that, although taking another group member's perspective may often reduce self-centered judgments, it can also produce cynical theories of how others will act and thereby increase self-interested behavior. Such self-interested behavior, particularly when maintained by cynical theories and expectations for how others will act, can in turn ultimately lead individuals to engage in actions that might be considered unfair, unjust, or unethical by the group.

### **Disruption**

When a transgression arises from self-interest but primarily affects another group, this may be considered a form of disruption. This disruption may occur intentionally, such as when an individual stands to personally benefit, either materially or psychologically, from impeding the goals of an out-group. One might associate this notion, for example, with certain forms of overt discrimination or out-group derogation, as a substantial literature has documented (e.g., Tajfel, 1970). However, the disruption of another group's goals may also arise unintentionally, due to the self-interested efforts of individuals affecting those groups in ways that may be less salient to the offending individual.

Loyd and Phillips (2006) offer at least one illustration of how unintentional forms of disruption can occur. These authors considered two common evaluation biases, out-group

discrimination and in-group favoritism, which can affect efforts to increase diversity in organizations, and described how organizations may often involve minority members in hiring decisions to address the potential for these biases to reduce the likelihood of minorities being hired. They argue, however, that minority members may adjust to correct for these biases, often going to great lengths to do so based on their own self-interested motivation to fit in with the majority, and that this may make them less likely to express viewpoints that could increase minority hiring (i.e., the very purpose for which they had been asked to participate in the hiring process in the first place). Thus, whereas the category of free-riding concerns self-interested behavior that can be considered unfair or unethical from an intra-group perspective, Loyd and Phillip's (2006) chapter provides an illustration of how self-interested behaviors may be seen in similar terms by those outside one's immediate group, in this case by minorities outside the organization.

### **Collusion**

Transgressions can also arise from a group-interested motive that targets one's own group. This may be considered a form of collusion in which group members attempt to advance their collective interests irrespective of the implications for others. Warren (2006), for example, examined how this can occur with respect to ethics initiatives in organizations that are intended to align individual behavior with organizational values. In particular, they observed that groups might sometimes have greater influence on the ethical decision-making of individuals than the broader organization and, ultimately, interfere with the effectiveness of ethics initiatives if the values espoused by those initiatives differ significantly from their own.

Narayanan, Ronson, and Pillutla (2006) provide a similar story wherein they examine the social cohesion of a group. Groups often strive for increased social cohesion, but the authors

argue that such efforts can promote unethical behavior that ends up favoring the group. Cohesion influences unethical behavior, they argue, by supplying group members with social support, providing a diffusion of responsibility, and allowing for available justifications.

### **Domination**

Finally, when a transgression is based on a group-interested motive yet targets another group, one might think of this scenario as an attempt at domination (i.e., an attempt to advance one's own group's goals at the expense of another's). Dunn and Schweitzer (2006) describe the potential for such behavior by taking research on social comparison and envy from the individual to the group level. They suggest that the group context can lay the groundwork for more blatant forms of social undermining than individuals because favorable norms for doing so may increase with the average intensity of group envy.

Wiltermuth (2011), furthermore, provides a different example of how group-interested motives can lead members to behave in ways that harm other groups by reporting that people are often willing to act less ethically when the benefits from doing so are shared with others rather than simply awarded to themselves. This suggests that, to the extent that groups expect their agents to do their "dirty work" and those agents fulfill such expectations when acting out their role, the group's interest may drive transgressions that harm another group.

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The foregoing discussion identifies four important areas of ongoing research. Yet the categorization depicted by Figure 1 also helps reveal two major gaps in the literature that seem a matter of more widespread neglect.

The first major gap this categorization reveals is the need to investigate the types and implications of attributions that may be made when potential transgressions occur across each of the categories noted above. Most of the work on attributions has traditionally been approached from an individual person perception perspective, absent significant group involvement and considerations. However, there are many factors that we noted above that may alter, if not completely change, one's interpretation of transgressions in a group setting. This possibility deserves particular attention, given that the type of attribution (such as whether the violation is considered a matter of competence or integrity) has been found to exert such a dramatic influence on people's reactions after a potential transgression has occurred (e.g., Kim, Ferrin, Cooper, & Dirks, 2004). It would, therefore, be useful to consider when attributions of competence or integrity (or other key determinants of trust, such as benevolence) might be made for each of the aforementioned categories of transgressions and how that might affect people's reactions.

The second major gap that this categorization helps underscore is the need to think about how reactions to such transgressions might differ depending on whether observers/victims evaluate these incidents as individuals or groups. Of course, research on how people respond to potential transgressions has been rapidly growing, particularly in the domain of trust repair (for a review, see Kim, Dirks, & Cooper, 2009). However, most of this work has been conducted at the individual level, with far less attention to how the reactions of collectives might compare. Yet just as greater insight can be gained into the different types of potential transgressions from a group perspective, as we have so far attempted to show, so too can we better understand their likely consequences by considering how groups might react to efforts to address those



transgressions after they occur. Indeed, to the extent that groups rather than individuals are in the position of evaluating such offenses, the study of such collective responses is long overdue.

In sum, the literature has paid very little attention to both the types and implications of attributions that would be made for the kinds of group transgressions described above as well as how group reactions to potential transgressions might differ from those of isolated individuals. The relative lack of attention to these areas represents important gaps in the literature that we believe needs to be addressed. In the following section, we begin to examine each of these gaps with the goal of spurring scholarly thinking in these directions.

### **LOOKING AT THE FUTURE**

As we look at the future, we see a good deal of promise in efforts to understand how reactions to potential transgressions might be influenced by the group context. In the last section, we organized past research into four broad categories of transgressions, which brought to light two major gaps when considering current research on ethics, fairness, and justice at the group level. First, we still don't know much about the types and implications of attributions that may be made for each of the four categories of potential group transgressions described above. Second, irrespective of attributions made, we still don't know much about how groups would collectively respond to potential transgressions (either as observers or victims) and how those reactions might differ from those of individuals. In this section, we delve into these two areas, suggest ways to begin addressing these gaps, and by doing so, highlight how truly open these areas are for future research.

#### **Attributions in a Group Context**

One gap that Figure 1 reveals is that the kinds and implications of attributions that might be made for these different categories of transgressions, and how this might extend previous research on the attributions made in individual settings. To highlight this new direction, we begin by drawing attention to the importance of certain types of attributions (i.e., competence and integrity) and how their respective implications can depend on hierarchically restrictive schemas. We then move into a discussion of how these two types of attributions may differ in a group context, highlighting possible causes and open questions. We close by proposing a third type of attribution (i.e., benevolence) and pose questions as to its role in understanding interpretations of potential transgressions in group contexts.

In 1979, Reeder and Brewer drew stark attention to the fact that “little attention has been paid to how the inference processes involved in dispositional attribution may be affected by characteristics of the particular dimension of judgment being utilized.” This comes into play most directly when interpreting potential transgressions and more specifically, with respect to the attributions of competence and integrity that are frequently made when reacting to such transgressions. These types of attributions, they argue, are highly influenced by hierarchically restrictive schemas, which assume that being at one end of a continuum for a given attribute will restrict one’s behavior, whereas being at the other end of that continuum will not. For example, most people intuitively believe that people with high competence are capable of exhibiting performance at many levels, whereas those with low competence can only perform at levels that are commensurate with or lower than their level of competence. For this reason, a single example of good performance is considered to offer a reliable signal of high competence, whereas a single example of poor performance is typically discounted as a signal of low competence.

Similarly, people intuitively believe that those with high integrity will refrain from dishonest behaviors in any situation, whereas those with low integrity may exhibit either dishonest or honest behaviors depending on their incentives and opportunities. For this reason, a single example of honest behavior is typically discounted as a signal of high integrity, given that those who are honest or dishonest can each behave honestly in certain situations (e.g., when there are benefits for behaving honestly or sufficient surveillance to prevent dishonest acts). However, a single example of dishonest behavior is considered to offer a reliable signal of low integrity, given the belief that only persons of low integrity will perform in dishonest ways.

These basic intuitions toward attributions of competence and integrity ultimately raise an important question. Would the types of attributions that are made for potential transgressions in a group context differ depending on the type of motive (self versus group) and target (one's own group versus another)? Next, we discuss potential factors that may lead to such differences, and also consider a third attribution that may deserve greater attention, namely benevolence.

***Potential Differences.*** One factor that could affect the type of attributions made (particularly with regard to attributions of competence and integrity) by observers and victims of the types of transgressions in Figure 1 may be the perceived alignment (or misalignment) of parties' interests. It's possible that those who perceive their interests to be aligned with the interests of the transgressor would be inclined to assume that the incident was not intended to cause harm and, thus, be more likely to consider it a mistake (i.e., attribute it to a lack of competence). In contrast, those who perceive their interests to be misaligned may be more inclined to assume that the incident *was* intended to cause harm and, thereby, consider the transgression intentional (i.e., attribute it to a lack of integrity).

This consideration suggests that both the type of motive for and target of the potential transgression may significantly influence the type of attribution made. It implies that self-motivated transgressions that primarily affect one's own group (i.e., free-riding) are more likely to be attributed by members of that group to a lapse of integrity than to a lapse of competence. Self-motivated transgressions that primarily affect another group (i.e., disruption), in contrast, may be less likely to be seen as a lapse of integrity than competence by members of one's in-group, whereas out-group members whose goals are hindered by the transgression may be more likely to attribute the incident to a lapse of integrity than competence. Group-motivated transgressions that primarily affect one's own group (i.e., collusion) may not be considered an offense at all by members of one's in-group, and perhaps even be given attributions of high integrity, given that these behaviors may be considered signs of group loyalty. Finally, whereas group-motivated transgressions that primarily affect another group (i.e., domination) may elicit similar reactions to those arising from collusion by members of the in-group, out-group members may be particularly inclined to attribute the behavior to a lapse of integrity.

These tendencies are critical, given that the decision to attribute a transgression to matters of competence or integrity has been found to alter quite dramatically the ways in which people are likely to respond to the transgressor's efforts to address it. One of the most robust findings in the trust repair literature is that the effect of a given trust repair tactic can depend on the type of violation (Dirks, Kim, Cooper, & Ferrin, 2005; Ferrin, Kim, Cooper, & Dirks, 2007; Kim, Dirks, Cooper, & Ferrin, 2006; Kim, Ferrin, Cooper, & Dirks, 2004). This research is based on the schematic model of dispositional attribution (Reeder & Brewer, 1979), which was noted earlier. The trust repair literature has drawn on this schematic model to predict and find support for a two-fold effect (Ferrin, et al., 2007; Kim, et al., 2004). It has observed that whereas apologies

(Kim, et al., 2004), efforts to assume full blame with an internal attribution (Kim, et al., 2006; Tomlinson, Dineen, & Lewicki, 2004), and voluntary substantive actions involving penance, regulation, and monetary compensation (Desmet, De Cremer, & Van Dijk, 2011; Dirks, Kim, Ferrin, & Cooper, 2011), for example, may repair trust when the violation concerns matters of competence, they are either ineffective or harmful for trust repair when the violation concerns matters of integrity. Indeed, for integrity-based violations, studies have found that trust is repaired far more effectively when trustees instead deny, or at least mitigate, their culpability (Ferrin, et al., 2007; Kim, et al., 2006; Kim, et al., 2004).

These findings underscore how the type of attribution made for a transgression may play a decisive role in determining whether a given effort to repair it is likely to work. By doing so, they also highlight the potential for different reactions to the same trust repair efforts in each of Figure 1's four cells. For example, to the extent that in-group members are more likely to attribute transgressions that concern free-riding to matters of integrity than transgressions that concern disruption, collusion, or domination (as described above), one might expect that they would in turn be less receptive to apologies and efforts to assume blame for the transgression in the former than the latter cells. By the same token, to the extent that out-group members are more likely to attribute transgressions to a lack of integrity when they involve disruption or domination than when they are not as directly harmed, one might expect that they would be relatively less receptive to apologies and efforts to assume full blame for the transgression than when the transgression concerns free-riding or collusion.

*Attributions of Benevolence.* The significance of the type of attributions made for the ways in which people may respond to trust repair attempts also highlights the need to investigate additional types of attributions. In particular, one might argue that the collective context makes

increasingly relevant concerns about benevolence (i.e., the extent to which one believes a person wants to do good for another), given that both self- and group-oriented motives can drive potential transgressions.

Perceived benevolence is particularly important for trust repair because competence, integrity, and benevolence have been reported to be the three most important determinants of trustworthiness (e.g., Mayer, Davis, & Schoorman, 1995). Yet prior research on trust repair has focused virtually all of its attention on considerations of competence and integrity, while considerations of benevolence have been largely ignored. Might benevolence considerations become more important when considering the multi-faceted motives and parties involved in a group setting? Research on group categorization (Tajfel, 1970) raises the possibility, for example, that individuals would have higher expectations of benevolence from in-group than out-group members. If so, this attribution might play a more important role in determining how the former rather than the latter respond to the kinds of potential transgressions depicted by Figure 1. Expectations of benevolence might also differ among members of one's in-group to the extent that some in-group members are expected to be more benevolent than others due to their seniority, relative power and influence, or role. Even further, cross-cultural differences have been found in people's expectations of benevolence, such as been U.S. and Japanese cultures (Behrens, 2004). These considerations highlight the potential for greater insight into how people might respond to potential transgression by unpacking expectations of benevolence via both finer-grained analyses that can account for one's position in the group and broader analyses that can account for the cultural context in which transgression occurs.

To address these questions, it also becomes essential to determine how the nature and implications of benevolence-based transgressions would compare to those of competence and

integrity. The prevailing assumption in the literature has been that competence-, integrity-, and benevolence-based transgressions should be treated as three distinct categories, each with its own set of implications for trust repair. Yet it's possible that the distinctions that researchers have made with regard to a person's trust-relevant characteristics (e.g., Mayer, et al., 1995) might differ when people make inferences about a transgression. We have already begun to explore certain aspects of this question, and our findings suggest that the relationships among competence-, integrity-, and benevolence-based transgressions are not as simple as prior research might lead us to assume. Rather, it appears that our natural construals of such transgressions may be highly confounded and that the relationships among competence-, integrity-, and benevolence-transgressions may depend on whether we consider people's lay inferences about what they entail or conceptually cleaner delineations based on a more systematic analysis of their underlying dimensions.

Further consideration of the kinds of attributions people are inclined to make for the kinds of potential transgressions we've described will be critically important for understanding how they might ultimately be addressed. Common attributions, such as those of competence and integrity, have historically been limited to individual considerations, often removed from group sources of influence. Furthermore, other important attributions that may be relevant in a group context, such as benevolence, have been underexplored in general. Overall then, we believe that the first way to move this literature forward is to focus on developing a more nuanced understanding of how attributions operate in groups. The second way, which involves a focus on collective reactions, is discussed next.

### **Collective Reactions to Potential Transgressions**

Irrespective of the attributions individuals might make for the kinds of transgressions that can occur in a group setting, the literature would benefit from greater attention to how people would respond to such transgressions as a collective. A collective response might be construed as any number of things, but to provide a starting point, this section examines several issues that may be pertinent to this phenomenon. We will begin by exploring polarization effects, building off preliminary evidence from a recent study that provides some clues for how groups collectively respond to transgressions. We then move on to consider other potential mediators that likely influence collective reactions but have not been explored. Finally, we close this section by considering the types of responses available to those committing a transgression and how these factor into our overall push for more research on the nature of collective reactions to potential transgressions.

***Group Polarization Illustration.*** The potential benefits of research investigating the nature of our collective reactions to potential transgressions can be illustrated by a recent study that has attempted to explore these issues. Kim, Cooper, Dirks, and Ferrin (2011) investigated how the social context would affect the repair of trust by focusing on differences that might arise when alleged transgressors attempted to regain the trust of groups as opposed to individuals. This effort was based on the recognition that research on group judgments has been largely limited to the phenomenon of group polarization (i.e., the notion that groups tend to be more extreme in their judgments than individuals) and this literature's inability to offer clear guidance on what this group polarization might actually entail for trust repair. Does the manifestation of group polarization imply, for example, that groups would be more risk seeking than individuals in how they respond to alleged transgressors (and, thus, more likely to make themselves vulnerable following a violation), as suggested by that literature's frequent reports of groups exhibiting a



“risky shift”? Or would it imply that groups would be more risk averse than individuals (and, thus, less willing to make themselves vulnerable following a violation), given that groups have, at times, been found to be more cautious than their members? Are there particular conditions under which such differences are more likely to occur? Moreover, what mechanisms might underlie the differences that are found?

Careful examination of the groups literature reveals that even the most thorough accounts of how group judgments might differ from those of individuals are unable to address these questions. For example, in their review of the literature comparing the judgments of individuals and groups, Kerr, MacCoun, and Kramer (1996) completely excluded from their analysis judgments in which normative standards of accuracy could not be established (see p. 690), such as the kinds of trust judgments Kim et al. (2011) were investigating. Moreover, even for the research Kerr et al. (1996) did review, they concluded that, “the relevant empirical literature reveals no clear or general pattern.” These authors make an important contribution by identifying a number of factors that may generally affect the relationship between these individual and group judgments, but their work (as well as more recent observations by Kerr and Tindale, 2004) also ultimately makes clear that it is only through closer scrutiny of the specific mechanisms underlying trust repair that we can develop clear predictions about how groups may differ from individuals after a trust violation.

Kim et al. (2011) were able to gain some insight into these issues by combining insights from the group polarization and the trust repair literatures. They found that repairing trust is generally more difficult with groups than individuals and that both groups and individuals were less trusting when trustees denied culpability (rather than apologized) for a competence-based violation or apologized (rather than denied culpability) for an integrity-based violation. However,

the interaction of violation type and response type also affected the relative difficulty of repairing trust with groups versus individuals, with the relative harshness of groups dissipating after optimal responses were offered. Moreover, although two major explanations have been offered for group polarization (Isenberg, 1986) – social comparison processes (i.e., the altering of opinions to be seen more favorably by other group members) and persuasive argumentation (i.e., exposure to convincing arguments expressed by others in the group) – only persuasive argumentation mediated Kim et al.'s (2011) findings. As a result, the sequence of individual vs. group assessments mattered, whereby individuals performing an initial individual judgment shifted their assessments when subsequently responding as part of a group, but individuals who initially responded as part of a group tended to anchor on their group's level of trust when subsequently responding on their own.

This study highlights a number of important ways in which group judgments can differ from those of individuals after an alleged transgression. It makes clear that people's reactions to transgressions are not context free, but instead are influenced by the social processes through which they are generated. However, this research also leaves open the potential for other factors to mediate these collective reactions to potential transgressions and for other types of responses that may be particularly pertinent to the group context to be used.

***Other Mediators.*** Although Kim et al.'s (2011) results generally support the notion that persuasive argumentation would mediate the observed differences between individuals and groups, this mediation was only partial and mediation by social comparison processes was not found. Hence, it may be useful to investigate whether any additional mechanisms might explain the individual vs. group differences that arise. Although a wide variety of alternative mediating mechanisms may be identified, we focus our attention on just two possibilities that we believe

could be fruitful to explore: 1) different types of normative influences and 2) emotional contagion.

Axelrod (1986) highlighted two powerful mechanisms that may plausibly mediate how collectives react to transgressions. The first are norms, which concern principles of appropriate action that may provide a common way of regulating conflict in groups, particularly when there aren't clear hierarchies or central authority. The second related mechanism concerns metanorms, or the awareness that others may be willing to punish someone who did not enforce a norm (Axelrod, 1986). This entails that if an individual is aware that they might be allocated some blame and be the target of punishment if they are unable or unwilling to enforce a norm, they may be induced to exhibit even harsher reactions to an alleged transgressor than if they had not been aware of this possibility. Together then, norms and metanorms provide a combination of mechanisms that may mediate group judgments of potential transgressions. Thus, even though Kim et al.'s (2011) study did not find support for normative influences on trust repair through their assessment of social comparison processes (which are specifically concerned with the mediating role of such normative pressures on group polarization), future research may be able to offer greater insight into this possibility through finer grained analyses that consider whether different norms or metanorms would play a role.

A second mechanism that may be worth investigating in this domain is the potential for emotional contagion. Schoenewolf (1990, p. 50) defined emotional contagion as "a process in which a person or group influences the emotions or behavior of another person or group through the conscious or unconscious induction of emotion states and behavioral attitudes."

Transgressions can often result in not just cognitive reactions, but also emotional reactions that may affect the extent to which trust is repaired. Thus, it may be useful to explore the extent to

which such emotions would affect the emotions of others in a group and the implications of such contagion for their collective sentiments. Even further, it may be worth considering what types of emotions are likely to be triggered by different types of transgressions as well as which emotions are likely to be spread more than others.

In sum, given that persuasive argumentation only partially mediated the differences Kim et al. (2011) observed between individuals and groups, much of what drives group reactions to potential reactions remains unknown. Attention to different types of normative influences and emotional contagion may help offer greater insight into these individual differences. However, they also represent just two of a variety of potential mechanisms that future research might fruitfully explore.

*Responses and Rationales from the Violator.* Beyond greater attention to the potential mechanisms that may help explain the nature of collective reactions to potential transgressions, it may be useful to consider the potential implications of the group context for the kinds of repair efforts that might be used. The importance of doing so is underscored by the fact that responses provided by the violator can frame the transgression, influencing both the attributions of the situation and the collective reaction itself by the group. Although prior research on trust repair has offered insight into the implications of a number of different responses, including apologies (Kim et al., 2004), justifications (Kim, Dirks, Cooper, & Ferrin, 2006), no response (Ferrin, Kim, Cooper, & Dirks, 2007), financial compensation (Desmet et al., 2011) and punishment and regulation (Dirks, Kim, Cooper, & Ferrin, 2011), the implications of most of these responses for groups remain largely unexplored.

Even further, transgressions that occur in group contexts may allow for an even wider array of responses to be used. For example, one category of responses that may be considered in

the group context might be drawn from the distributive justice literature, specifically the rationales of equity, equality, and need. Though prior research has investigated the implications of social accounts for trust repair (Kim et al., 2006), this work focused on excuses (which differed only by the degree of blame assumed) rather than the implications of accounts that seek to justify the transgression by referencing alternative distributive justice concerns. Moreover, whereas the distributive justice literature has investigated the relative importance people place on equity, equality, and need rationales for their resource allocations (e.g., Mannix, Neale, & Northcraft, 1995), these efforts have focused almost entirely on ex ante considerations of distributive justice, and it's unclear whether the relative priorities people place on these rationales prior to a transgression would persist after a transgression is perceived to have occurred. It would, therefore, be useful to investigate the implications of responses to transgressions that attempt to justify the violation via equity, equality, or need rationales to see how the relative value of these distributive justice rationales might differ after trust has been violated and how these relationships might depend on whether the transgression concerns one of the four categories detailed by Figure 1 or another.

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Thinking about the future of research on collective reactions to potential transgressions, we believe there is great promise. In this section, we highlighted two major gaps that provide substantial opportunity to contribute to the broader progression of the literature as a whole. We first suggested that taking a deeper look into the types and implications of attributions made when a potential transgression occurs would open up a number of differences between individual and group processes. We then suggested that even after setting aside attributions made based on transgressions, further consideration of the *collective reactions* to such transgressions is needed.

## CONCLUSION

Our goal for this chapter was to highlight the need for further research on the nature of collective reactions to potential transgressions. Whereas prior research on ethics, fairness, and justice has focused on understanding the considerations of individuals and groups prior to a transgression with an eye toward reducing the likelihood that such transgressions would occur, relatively few studies have considered how people respond when these transgressions do arise. Moreover, although a growing body of research on trust repair has begun to tackle this question, this work has focused almost entirely on the individual as the unit of analysis. Thus, increased attention to how collectives might respond to potential transgressions is needed, particularly in light of how ineffective efforts to promote greater ethics, justice, and fairness in organizations have been.

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Figure 1. Four major categories of transgressions in groups

		Motive	
		<b>Self-Interest</b>	<b>Group-Interest</b>
Target of Transgression	<b>Intra-group</b>	Free-Riding	Collusion
	<b>Inter-group</b>	Disruption	Domination