



## Reports

## Rebels with a cause: A goal conflict approach to understanding when conscientious people dissent

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## HIGHLIGHTS

- Highly conscientious people engage in more active goal pursuit than others.
- We posit that dissent decisions involve competing group stability vs. change goals.
- The former are often local/short term, the latter more broad/long-term.
- Change goals should therefore be fostered by high- (vs. low-) level construal.
- As predicted, high-level construal increased dissent among conscientious people.

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## ABSTRACT

Highly conscientious people are more likely than others to actively pursue their goals, but whether their goals support the status quo and result in conformity, or are pursuant of social change and result in dissent is likely to depend on other factors, including how they subjectively construe dissent decisions. We propose a goal conflict approach to dissent, positing that dissent (vs. conformity) is motivated by concern for broad/long-term (vs. local/short-term) group outcomes: a preference for change and improvement as opposed to stability and group enhancement. Two experiments employed a construal level manipulation to shift the goals of group members varying in conscientiousness. As predicted, high-level (vs. low-level) construal promoted greater willingness to articulate (Study 1) and actually express (Study 2) non-normative ingroup criticism among highly conscientious individuals.

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## Introduction

Dependable, committed, careful, focused, thorough, and self-disciplined are not necessarily the characteristics that one would expect to typify a rebel. Such a person could probably organize a good charity auction, might run a small bank, and would definitely submit their tax return on time – but start a revolution? Surely not!

The current research challenges this assumption. We investigate how the personality trait that subsumes these characteristics – conscientiousness – predicts dissent regarding collective problems. In particular, we are interested in the relationship between conscientiousness and non-normative expressions of ingroup criticism, a key contributor to and instigator of collective change (Hornsey, 2005). We argue that in order to understand this association, it is important to treat as

independent the *content* of a person's goals and the *intensity of motivation* with which they pursue them. Although trait conscientiousness has sometimes been equated with conformity relevant goal content (e.g., the desire to fit in and to follow social norms; see Loevinger, 1993), we believe that this trait is better understood as content-free. Highly conscientious individuals are more likely than others to work hard to achieve their goals and may also possess the sorts of abilities (e.g., organizational skills) to succeed (Judge & Ilies, 2002; Kurtz & Tiegreen, 2005). However, whether their goals are supportive of the status quo and result in conformity, or are pursuant of social change and result in dissent is likely to depend on other factors, including how people subjectively construe dissent decisions.

## What is conscientiousness?

Conscientiousness captures the extent to which people “actively plan, organize and carry out tasks. Conscientious individuals are goal driven...and exhibit high commitment to goal achievement” (Stewart,

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1999, p. 960; see also Digman, 1990; McCrae & Costa, 1987). This trait may not seem to be an intuitively promising predictor of dissent, and some theorists have argued that conformity is inherent in the way that trait researchers define and measure conscientiousness (Block, 2002; Loevinger, 1993; see Kurtz & Tiegreen, 2005). Loevinger (1993) contends, for example, that by focusing on industriousness and organization, trait researchers have conceptualized conscientious people as driven by a desire to fit in by following external rules and social norms. There is, however, little empirical evidence that trait conscientiousness equates to conformity. Instead, what conscientiousness appears to predict above all is performance and goal pursuit. A positive relationship between conscientiousness and performance holds across domains, including work (e.g., Barrick & Mount, 1991; Barrick, Mount, & Strauss, 1993), school (e.g., Conard, 2006; O'Connor & Paunonen, 2007), and relationships (e.g., Nofhle & Shaver, 2006). The robust positive relationship between conscientious and performance can be explained in large part by motivation. In a study of sales representatives, for example, high (vs. low) conscientious individuals were more likely to autonomously set goals, were more committed to those goals and had higher performance outcomes (Barrick et al., 1993). A meta-analysis of 65 studies from work and academic contexts confirmed this pattern, finding consistent relationships between conscientiousness and indices of motivation, including goal setting, expectancies and self-efficacy (Judge & Illies, 2002; see also Gellatly, 1996).

As such, highly conscientious individuals differ from people low in this trait in the extent to which they set and pursue goals: these are dutiful employees, students and relationship partners. The facts (a) that highly conscientious people do not just adopt the goals of others but also *autonomously* set their own (Barrick et al., 1993), and (b) that this trait predicts performance in jobs where independence of mind is presumably an important asset (e.g., among managers and professionals; Barrick & Mount, 1991) suggest that conscientiousness is not inherently conformist. This leads us to hypothesize that in certain circumstances the goals that animate highly conscientious individuals may shift from maintaining the status quo and supporting extant norms to instigating group change. The key question, then, is what are these circumstances?

#### *Conscientiousness within a goal conflict approach to dissent*

To function well, groups must attain a balance between stability and change. Although members may generally prefer to focus on positive aspects of their group and to maintain stability (e.g., Crocker & Luhtanen, 1990; Hogg, 2000; Tajfel & Turner, 1979), correcting collective problems requires that at least some subset of group members be willing to consider and publicly articulate group problems (e.g., Hornsey, 2006; Packer, 2008; Reicher & Haslam, 2006). Norms that discourage ingroup criticism, however, can pose significant barriers to group change. Groups generally react negatively to deviant opinions and collective critique (e.g., Marques & Yzerbyt, 1988; Noelle-Neumann, 1974; Schachter, 1951; Tata et al., 1996), and minority opinions face an uphill persuasive battle (Wood, Lundgren, Ouellette, Busceme, & Blackstone, 1994). Thus, although deviant opinion expression may be necessary to advance change, would-be dissenters must often be willing to endure significant costs when they articulate it (Packer, 2011; Sunstein, 2006). As a result, group members looking to promote change through non-normative criticism must resolve a motivational conflict. Conformity to norms and minimization of criticism advance group stability goals (e.g., cohesion, efficacy) and are more pleasant to deal with in the short-term; however, these behaviors hinder group change and improvement in the long-term. Dissent and criticism, on the other hand, advance the goals of group change and improvement in the long-term, but at the cost of short-term group stability and positive group images (Packer, 2011; Packer, Fujita, & Chasteen, in press; Packer & Miners, in press).

Conscientious individuals in particular are likely to experience acutely the conflict between group stability versus group change motives.

These people are especially goal-oriented, and are thus likely to find themselves caught in a tension whenever there are competing goals. Individuals low in conscientiousness, in contrast, are less goal-oriented and are thus less likely to experience competing motives with regard to group change vs. stability. For this reason, factors that tip the balance one way or the other are more likely to affect the decisions of highly conscientious people. In previous research, we have taken an individual differences approach to this hypothesis. Packer (2010) investigated how the relationship between conscientiousness and dissent varies as a function of openness to experience. Highly open people can be described as imaginative, curious, esthetic, creative, unconventional and broadminded (George & Zhou, 2001; McCrae, 1996; Prabhu, Sutton, & Sauser, 2008), characteristics likely to orient people toward change rather than stability. Consistent with our analysis, conscientious individuals dissented from group norms when they were also high, but not low, in openness to experience.

#### *Subjective construal and dissent*

The current research adopted a situational rather than an individual differences approach. Decades of research indicate that how people subjectively construe events systematically impacts how they make decisions (e.g., Griffin & Ross, 1991; Vallacher & Wegner, 1989). We examined one fundamental difference in subjective construal, namely level of abstraction, and investigated its impact on whether conscientious people choose to conform or dissent when the articulation of ingroup criticism is non-normative. Construal level theory posits that the same choices and events can be represented at different levels of abstraction (Lieberman & Trope, 2008; Liberman, Trope, & Stephan, 2007; Trope & Liberman, 2003). For example, drafting a manuscript can be construed in higher level terms as “engaging in the research enterprise” or in lower level terms as “writing this introduction of this paper.” High-level construal entails the process of extracting the global and core features that capture an object or event’s essential or invariant meaning. In contrast, low-level construal entails the process of highlighting the secondary and incidental details that render a particular event unique and idiosyncratic. Engaging in high-level vs. low-level construal changes the experience and meaning of events, and thus has a profound influence on decision-making (Lieberman & Trope, 2008; Liberman et al., 2007; Trope & Liberman, 2003). Research suggests that low-level construal leads people to make choices on the basis of more concrete and immediate considerations, whereas high-level construal causes people to make decisions in light of broader and longer-term concerns.

Of particular relevance to the current work are findings that demonstrate the role of construal level in self-control decision-making. Self-control dilemmas are goal-conflict situations that pit short-term versus long-term goals against each other (Fujita, 2011; Metcalfe & Mischel, 1999; Mischel, Shoda, & Rodriguez, 1989; Rachlin, 2000; Thaler & Shefrin, 1981). Although people are attracted to immediate gratification, the pursuit of such proximal rewards can threaten the attainment of more distal ends. Research suggests that high-level construal helps people avoid the temptation of immediate rewards, sacrificing them in favor of more distal gains (Fujita & Han, 2009; Fujita, Trope, Liberman, & Levin-Sagi, 2006).

A goal-conflict approach to dissent suggests that conformity and dissent may involve a similar trade-off between short-term and long-term group goals, particularly among highly conscientious individuals. In the current research, we hypothesized that whereas low-level construal would push conscientious individuals toward conformity, high-level construal would push conscientious individuals toward dissent. Participants in two experiments identified what they believed was a problem in a group to which they belonged. Participants were then randomly assigned to an unrelated high-level vs. low-level construal level manipulation. Prior research has shown that differences in construal level can be triggered by a variety of tasks (see Trope & Liberman, 2010, for review) and result in a ‘processing shift’ (Gollwitzer, Heckhausen, &

Steller, 1990; Schooler, 2002; Smith & Branscombe, 1987), such that the construal processing triggered by one task persists and influence processes in subsequent tasks (Förster, Friedman, & Liberman, 2004; Förster et al., 2004; Fujita et al., 2006). Participants subsequently rated their intentions (Study 1) or had an actual opportunity (Study 2) to publicly express opinions regarding the problem they had identified.

## Study 1

### Method

#### Participants

One hundred and eight undergraduates at The Ohio State University completed this pencil and paper experiment for course credit. Six did not report demographic information; the mean age of the rest of the sample was 19.96 years ( $SD = 3.26$ ), and consisted of 56 males and 46 females.

#### Materials and procedure

Given time constraints, participants completed a shortened version of the Big Five Inventory (John, Donahue, & Kentle, 1991). Current analyses focused on conscientiousness<sup>1</sup>, measured with two items: “I persevere until a task is done,” and “I do a thorough job” (1 = strongly disagree to 6 = strongly agree;  $r(107) = .66, p < .001; M = 4.72, SD = 0.84$ ).<sup>2</sup> All participants were then asked to identify and write about a problem that they perceived at their university. Instructions read: “In a couple of sentences, please describe a problem that you have noticed at OSU – a problem facing the university and its students. What is the problem, and what negative effects does it cause (or have the potential to cause)?”

Participants were then randomly assigned to one of two conditions that manipulated construal level (low-level vs. high-level). Construal level was varied using an established category/exemplar task (Fujita et al., 2006). Participants were given a list of 30 nouns, and in the low-level construal condition were asked to identify an example of each (e.g., \_\_\_\_\_ is an example of a book). In the high-level construal condition, participants were asked to identify a category to which each noun belonged (e.g., a movie is an example of \_\_\_\_\_).

After the construal level manipulation, all participants were asked to indicate their willingness to publicly express their opinion to other group members regarding the collective problem they had identified earlier. Following Packer and Chasteen (2010), willingness to publicly express opinions regarding the group problem was measured with four items. Participants were asked about their willingness to express their opinion in a small discussion group, in a letter to a campus newspaper, in a speech to a large audience, and to the OSU student government (e.g., “If you had the opportunity to give a 5 minute speech to a group of about 100 OSU students expressing your opinion about the problem, how willing would you be to do so?”; 1 = not at all to 6 = very;  $\alpha = .90; M = 3.53, SD = 1.41$ ).

### Results

Hierarchical linear regression analysis predicting opinion expression was used to test hypotheses; condition was effects-coded (−1 = low-level construal, 1 = high-level construal), and conscientiousness was mean-centered. Neither construal level nor conscientiousness exerted main effects on opinion expression ( $\beta_s < .15, t_s < 1.55$ ,

$p_s > .10$ ; Step 1  $R^2 = .03, p = .16$ ). However, there was a two-way interaction between construal and conscientiousness ( $\beta = .21, t = 2.22, p < .03; \Delta R^2 = .04, p < .03$ ) – see Fig. 1. We initially decomposed the interaction by examining the effect of construal level among individuals low and high in conscientiousness (at points 1 SD below and above the mean on this trait, respectively). As predicted, high-level compared to low-level construal caused highly conscientious participants to report significantly greater willingness to publicly articulate ingroup criticism ( $\beta = .32, t = 2.42, p < .02$ ). In contrast, there was no difference between the high-level and low-level construal conditions among participants low in conscientiousness ( $\beta = -.10, t = -.073, p > .40$ ).

We also examined the relationship between conscientiousness and opinion expression within each condition. In the low-level construal condition, these variables were unassociated ( $\beta = -.04, t = -.031, p > .70$ ). In contrast, there was a positive relationship between conscientiousness and opinion expression among participants in the high-level construal condition ( $\beta = .38, t = 2.86, p < .01$ ), such that highly conscientious people engaged in high-level construal were more willing than individuals low in this trait to publicly express their opinion regarding a group problem to fellow group members.

#### Follow-up analysis: effects hold when criticism is non-normative

Although group members are motivated to maintain a positive sense of collective identity and often react negatively to criticism of the group, articulating a group problem is not inherently non-normative. In some cases, people might expect there to be widespread agreement among other group members that an issue represents a problem. To test more directly our prediction that high-level construal prompts highly conscientious individuals to articulate criticism when it is non-normative, we asked participants to indicate the extent to which they thought other group members also believed that the issue was a problem. Participants responded to a single item that read: “How harmful do you think other OSU students believe this problem is?” on a 6-point scale from 1 (not at all) to 6 (very;  $M = 3.78, SD = 1.22$ ).

A test of the three-way construal level  $\times$  conscientiousness  $\times$  others' opinions interaction predicting opinion expression was not significant ( $\beta = .02, t = 0.24, p > .80; \Delta R^2 = .00, p > .80$ ), indicating that the two-way interaction between conscientiousness and construal level reported above was not moderated by perceptions of others' opinions. To more directly examine the key hypothesis that high-level construal increases non-normative opinion expression among conscientious people, we then conducted a targeted follow-up analysis. This analysis examined the simple effect of construal level among highly conscientious individuals (i.e., at points 1 SD above the mean) who perceived that others did not believe the problem was harmful (i.e., at points 1 SD below the mean; following Jaccard & Turrisi, 2003). The effect of construal was significant among these participants, such that opinion expression was greater at high-level than low-level construal ( $\beta = .51, t = 2.51, p < .02$ ). The effect of construal was in the same direction but not

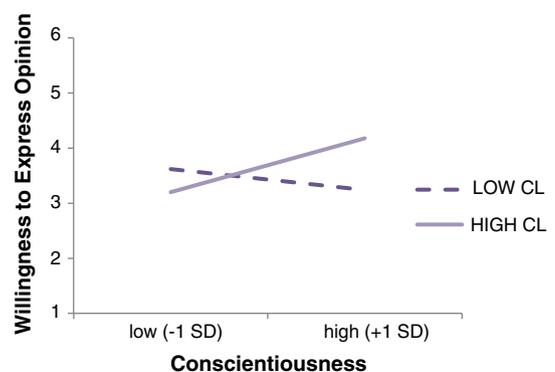


Fig. 1. Construal level  $\times$  conscientiousness interaction predicting willingness to express opinion (Study 1).

<sup>1</sup> Conscientiousness shares variance with other Big Five traits, some of which – particularly agreeableness – could conceivably also predict opinion expression/dissent regarding group problems. Controlling for agreeableness in both studies revealed that the reported effects of conscientiousness were not accounted for by this trait.

<sup>2</sup> The shortened BFI contained a third item (“I make plans and follow through on them”), which correlated much less well with the two ( $r_s = .29$  and  $.38$ , respectively). We computed conscientiousness from the two highly correlated items in order to create more internally consistent index ( $\alpha = .79$  vs.  $.69$ ). Analysis using scores computed from all three items revealed non-significant results, although the overall pattern of effects was the same.

significant among highly conscientious individuals who perceived that others agreed with them that the problem was harmful (1 SD above the mean;  $\beta = .12$ ,  $t = 0.76$ ,  $p > .40$ ), but this difference should not be over-interpreted in the absence of the three-way interaction.

## Study 2

Although non-normative opinion expression in Study 1 can be considered deviant in the sense that it was at odds with participants' perceptions of consensual opinions, it is not clear that these expressions necessarily violated group norms. The degree to which these expressions were truly dissenting is ambiguous because there are multiple reasons why participants might have thought that other group members would not perceive an issue as harmful. Participants might have expected that a majority of others would actively disagree that the identified issue was problematic; in this case, opinion expression represents dissent. However, participants might also have expected that most others would not see something as a problem because they were uninformed about the issue; in this case, there is no clear group norm, and opinion expression might be better characterized as an attempt to educate.

In order to provide a clearer test of the prediction that conscientious individuals at a high level of construal are more likely than others to dissent, in Study 2 we structured the situation so that publicly expressing opinions about a group problem – any problem – was itself an act of dissent. This study also went beyond assessment of behavioral intentions, and measured responses in what participants believed was an actual online group interaction. Study 2 further advanced on the first study by administering a full personality inventory, and by measuring personality at the aspect, as well as the overall trait level. Personality can be conceptualized as a hierarchical structure (DeYoung, 2006; Digman, 1997). Below the big five traits, researchers have posited a large number of facets; however recent research suggests that in between facets and traits resides an aspect level, and that each of the big five traits can usefully be subdivided into two components (DeYoung, Quilty, & Peterson, 2007). Conscientiousness divides into a proactive 'industrious' aspect, which reflects the goal setting and pursuit characteristics we have posited as relevant to conformity and dissent, and an 'order' aspect, which reflects organization. By using a scale that assessed conscientiousness at the aspect level we were able to conduct a more fine-grained analysis of which component(s) of this trait are associated with dissent. Given our analysis, it is only the aspect related to motivational intensity – industry – that should differentially predict opinion expression as a function of goal content (as manipulated by construal level).

## Method

### Participants

Eighty-two undergraduates at Lehigh University participated for course credit. Three did not provide demographic information; the mean age of the rest of the sample was 19.13 years ( $SD = 1.20$ ), and consisted of 51 males and 28 females.

### Materials and procedure

This experiment was run in groups of up to six, with participants separated into cubicles where they completed the study on computers (implemented in MediaLab). Participants first completed DeYoung et al.'s (2007) 100-item aspect-level scale, a full personality inventory assessing aspects of the Big Five. Current analyses focused on the industry and order aspects of conscientiousness. Ten items assessed the industry aspect (e.g., "I carry out my plans," "I always know what I am doing"; 1 = strongly disagree, 5 = strongly agree;  $\alpha = .83$ ;  $M = 3.33$ ,  $SD = 0.64$ ) and the order aspect (e.g., "I like order," "I dislike routine";  $\alpha = .77$ ;  $M = 3.45$ ,  $SD = 0.59$ ). The subscales were moderately correlated with one another ( $r = .42$ ,  $p < .001$ ). As in

Study 1, participants were then asked to identify and write about a problem that they perceived at their university. Afterwards, they were randomly assigned to high vs. low level construal conditions using the same category/exemplar tasks from Study 1.

Following Packer (2009) and Packer et al. (in press), participants then entered an ostensible online chat room with five fellow students to "discuss issues relevant to the Lehigh community." After logging in, participants were presented with two statements, one in favor of expressing criticism within groups and one in favor of refraining from criticism:

"In order to remain successful, groups should welcome the expression of critical opinions. Although it is sometimes difficult to hear, criticism of one's own group is important when it comes to solving problems and remaining strong."

"In order to remain successful, groups should be careful about allowing the expression of critical opinions. Although it sometimes sounds good on the surface, talking about all the problems in a group can undermine and weaken it."

Participants selected which of these two statements best represented their own view. Participants then saw the ostensible responses of their interlocutors, and learned that all of the other group members endorsed the argument in favor of refraining from ingroup criticism.

Participants were then asked to describe the previously identified problem in a few words to the other members of the chat room (under the premise that they had randomly been selected to go first). Participants subsequently provided ostensibly public ratings (i.e., visible to the others) of their concern regarding the issue on four items (e.g., "Please rate how concerned you are about this problem?" "Please rate how urgent you think this problem is"; 1 = not at all to 6 = very;  $\alpha = .91$ ;  $M = 4.01$ ,  $SD = 1.09$ ). These were averaged to form an index of the extent to which they were willing to publicly assess the issue as problematic for the group – that is, to frame it as a serious problem in violation of the local norm proscribing ingroup criticism.

Finally, to verify the norm manipulation, participants indicated whether a majority of the members of their chat room favored or opposed expression of opinions critical of the ingroup.

## Results

### Preliminary analyses

A large majority (93.9%) selected the statement in favor of expressing ingroup criticism as representative of their opinion. Rates did not vary as a function of construal level ( $\chi^2(1) = 0.21$ ,  $p > .60$ ), and analyses that included vs. excluded the minority who endorsed refraining from criticism yielded the same effects. As such, we included these participants in reported analyses. Most participants (84.1%) also correctly identified the normative view regarding ingroup criticism among their interlocutors. Eleven participants answered this question incorrectly and were excluded from reported analyses. Tests that included these participants revealed the same effects, however.

### Construal level by industry and order aspects of conscientiousness

Hierarchical linear regression analysis predicting opinion expression was used to test hypotheses; condition was effects-coded ( $-1 =$  low-level construal,  $1 =$  high-level construal), and individual differences in industry and order were mean-centered. The key condition  $\times$  industry and condition  $\times$  order interaction terms were entered simultaneously in Step 2. There were no significant main effects of construal level, order or industry ( $\beta$ s  $< .05$ ,  $t$ s  $< 0.50$ ,  $p$ s  $> .60$ ; Model 1  $R^2 = .00$ ,  $p > .90$ ). There was, however, a significant two-way interaction between construal level and industry ( $\beta = .40$ ,  $t = 3.19$ ,  $p < .01$ ; Model 2  $\Delta R^2 = .20$ ,  $p = .001$ ) – see Fig. 2. Mirroring Study 1, highly industrious individuals

(1 SD above the mean) expressed more critical opinions when engaged in high-level compared to low-level construal ( $\beta = .49, t = 3.10, p < .01$ ). Unexpectedly and in contrast, high-level (vs. low-level) construal decreased opinion expression among individuals low in industry (1 SD below the mean;  $\beta = -.40, t = -2.51, p < .02$ ). Examining the relationship between industry and dissent within condition showed opposite relationships as a function of construal level. Industry positively predicted opinion expression in the high-level construal condition ( $\beta = .40, t = 2.47, p < .02$ ), but negatively predicted expression in the low-level construal condition ( $\beta = -.51, t = 3.31, p < .01$ ).<sup>3</sup>

The order aspect of conscientiousness did not interact with construal level ( $\beta = .11, t = 0.89, p > .30$ ), indicating that it was the industry aspect alone that bore a meaningful relationship with critical opinion expression as a function of construal level.

## Discussion

The current research challenges the assumption that the characteristics associated with conscientiousness – particularly, dependability, self-discipline and industriousness – mitigate against dissent and are contrary to what it means to be rebellious. Certainly, some rebels are of the James Dean, anomic variety; but most of the time, rebels are more likely to have a cause than to be without. As such, the types of people we might expect to be the most likely to conform to social norms can also be the people most likely to dissent. These include highly conscientious group members (see also Packer, 2010), as well as members who identify with the group (Crane & Platow, 2010; Hornsey, 2006; Packer, 2008, 2009; Packer & Chasteen, 2010).

We hypothesized that low-level construal would enhance group stability goals and thus motivate conformity among conscientious people; in contrast, we expected that high-level construal would enhance group change goals and thereby orient conscientious individuals toward dissent. Consistent with hypotheses, high-level construal increased critical opinion expression among conscientious individuals. In both studies, highly conscientious people expressed more critical opinions at high vs. low-level construal, and within the high-level construal conditions, conscientiousness positively predicted opinion expression. Furthermore, analyses at the aspect level of conscientiousness in Study 2 confirmed that it was the motivational component of this trait (industriousness) rather than the organizational component (order) that predicted conformity versus dissent as a function of construal level.

Study 2 also provides evidence that low level construal increases conformity among conscientious individuals – in the low-level construal condition, there was a negative relationship between conscientiousness and dissent. In contrast, there was not a negative relationship between conscientiousness and opinion expression in this condition in Study 1. We cannot be sure why this was the case, but suspect it may have something to do with the lack of a clear (or uniform) norm against raising group problems in Study 1. Without a clear norm, there is nothing in particular for conscientious individuals to conform to. Overall, then, these studies provide clear evidence that high-level construal increases dissent among conscientious individuals, and promising evidence that low-level construal increases conformity.

### Future directions

In Study 2 high-level construal exerted an unexpected suppressive effect on dissent among individuals low in conscientiousness. This was

<sup>3</sup> Analysis only of participants who endorsed the value of expressing critical opinions revealed the same interaction ( $p < .001$ ), such that industry positively predicted dissent in the high level construal condition ( $p < .01$ ) and negatively predicted dissent in the low level construal condition ( $p < .01$ ). Further, analysis of the entire sample (including participants who failed the manipulation check) revealed the same effects – a significant interaction ( $p < .001$ ) in which dissent was predicted positively by industry in high level construal condition ( $p < .05$ ) and negatively in the low level construal condition ( $p < .01$ ).

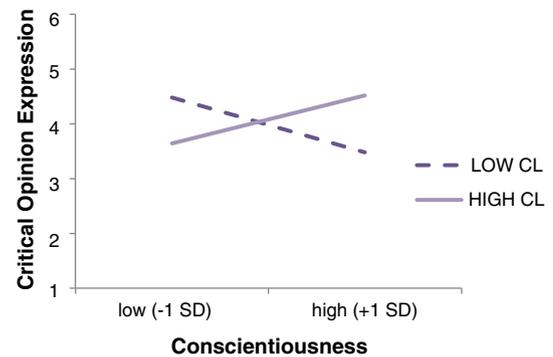


Fig. 2. Construal level  $\times$  conscientiousness interaction predicting critical opinion expression (Study 2).

not predicted and we are, therefore, cautious about over-interpreting it. One possibility is that when relatively unconscientious people take a step back when engaged in high-level construal, they may come to the conclusion that dissent is not in their interest. Challenging group norms and articulating criticism require effort and are often met with rejection – to individuals who are weakly goal oriented, keeping a low profile and maintaining the status quo may seem like their longer term interest. In contrast, low-level construal may lead individuals low in conscientiousness to become less sensitive to longer term considerations and thus free them to publicly express their opinion regarding the group problem they had identified minutes earlier. These are tentative thoughts, however, and further research will be required to replicate the effect among low conscientious individuals and to better understand their reactions to changes in subjective construal.

The breadth of our conclusions is bounded by our paradigms. Study 2 moved beyond assessment of behavioral intentions to measure what participants believed were actual expressions of opinion in an online chat-room. Nevertheless, this setting was not face-to-face, and participants were free to remain anonymous. Examining dissent in real group interactions is an important future step. An additional limitation of the chat-room paradigm is that it does not measure dissent to the full group – rather, participants expressed their opinion to a subset of members who had indicated an aversion to criticism of the full group. That said, the fact that we observed analogous effects when participants were asked about their willingness to articulate criticism to a much wider audience (Study 1) bolsters our confidence in the generalizability of these effects. We also suggest that in large groups individuals rarely have the opportunity to express criticism to the entire collective; instead, most dissent likely takes place on a local level, and it is the reactions of people in the immediate context that typically matter most.

### Conclusion

We have argued that a key to understanding when conscientious people are likely to conform vs. dissent lies in how they resolve conflict between competing group stability and change goals. The current research provides a test of the goal conflict approach by manipulating a psychological factor – construal level – that is known to affect self-control and goal selection (Fujita & Han, 2009; Fujita et al., 2006). As predicted, among people who tend to engage in vigorous goal pursuit, high-level construal (which orients people toward longer-term, change goals) was associated with greater dissent than a low-level construal (which orients people toward shorter-term, stability goals).

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