

## ORIGINAL RESEARCH ARTICLE

# 'We're All Sinners Here': A Microhistorical Exploration of the Deviance-Identification Nexus

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## Abstract

Extant research shows that deviance as a departure from established norms is influential to innovation and change. However, challenging the embedded assumptions and practices renders deviance subject to heavy stigmatization, compelling the identification of deviance to ensure that deviance can be balanced or controlled for the good of the organization. Yet, this focus often ignores the dynamics between the deviants and their audiences, which also impacts the spread of deviance, since deviance is best understood through actions as well as responses. Because deviance is likely to provoke deep introspection, identification with deviance is an essential, yet underexplored aspect of its spread. This article takes a micro-historical approach to analyze Dogme95, a highly controversial filmmaking movement, where identification with deviance influenced its spread. It elucidates symbolic disruption, straddling identification, and limiting the duration as three stages through which deviance can spread in and around organizations through identification. The article thus contributes to the extant literature by reconciling some theoretical contradictions regarding the spread of deviance despite its negative connotations and provides a novel perspective on the deviance-identification nexus.

**Keywords:** *Deviance; Identification; Identity; Films; Creative industries*

Handling editor: Helene Delacour; Received: 5 July 2021; Accepted: 8 December 2022; Published: 15 March 2024

Deviance, broadly defined as a departure from established norms (Warren, 2003), is an important topic in organizational studies. From art markets (Khaire & Wadhvani, 2010) and films (Zhao et al., 2013) to culinary practices (Rao et al., 2003) and winemaking (Negro et al., 2010), the literature is replete with examples of how organizations identify deviance and consequently derive new products and practices from it. Yet, despite its empirical and theoretical pertinence, deviance is predominantly treated as something for organizations to 'regulate' (Blanton & Christie, 2003) or 'balance' (Berg, 2016) to capture its potential for innovation and productivity (e.g., Bureau, 2013; Lin et al., 2016; Mainemelis, 2010). Such focus on the identification of deviance diverts attention from the heterogeneous trajectories through which deviance may spread in and around organizations. This is especially the case when the spread of deviance does not necessarily follow the established path of gradually gaining social approval and longevity, and when deviance goes *untamed*.

One way to understand such heterogeneous possibilities is to focus on the individuals whose interpersonal dynamics are central to the spread of ideas, deviant or otherwise, in and

around organizations (Van Grinsven et al., 2020). In this sense, identification with deviance, whereby individuals show their approval of an idea and help it spread, is of the essence. Generally understood as taking some qualities as self-defining, identification reflects the perceived similarity between the individuals and the target entity (Chattopadhyay et al., 2004). Facing deviance is ripe with opportunities for heightened identification, as it creates critical or unsettling moments that compel introspection and concentrated reflection for individuals (Michel & Ben-Slimane, 2021), in turn influencing whether and how the deviance spreads and disperses. Thus, positioned at the intersection of identification and deviance, this article explores 'how does deviance spread in organizations through identification?'

Addressing this question is important for two main reasons. Firstly, even though the understanding of deviance has shifted from entirely negative (e.g., Bordia et al., 2008; Lawrence & Robinson, 2007) to a prerequisite for innovation and change (e.g., Jones et al., 2016; Leigh & Melwani, 2019; Mainemelis, 2010), scholars tend to explore how to improve the identification of deviance to harness its potential while minimizing its

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risks (e.g., Narayanan & Murphy, 2017). Therefore, acknowledging both its positive potential and the risks that deviance involves, the literature remains dominantly concerned with the identification of deviance. However, given dynamism of deviance that involves both enacting the deviance and responses to it (Becker, 1973; Mainemelis, 2010), exploring the spread of deviance in its path instead of at its end merits further exploration.

Relatedly, second, identification *with* deviance remains particularly controversial and invisible, as deviance threatens the interests of those in power, and deviants face tremendous pressures to be 'good' to themselves and the organization (Maguire & Hardy, 2009). Nevertheless, it remains difficult to reconcile the presumed aversion to identification *with* deviance at individual and organizational levels with its demonstrated role in spreading ideas. Therefore, given the potential of deviance to instigate reflection on 'who we are' (Michel & Ben-Slimane, 2021; Pratt et al., 2000), exploring the deviance-identification nexus can uncover hitherto underexplored ways in which deviance can impact organizations.

Aiming to address these theoretical contradictions, I take a microhistorical approach (Hargadon & Wadhvani, 2023; Vaara & Lamberg, 2016) to explore the case of Dogme95, a highly controversial, deviant, and subversive filmmaking movement. This case provides ample opportunity for a multifaceted, nuanced understanding of the deviance-identification nexus (e.g., Galois-Faurie et al., 2021): Possibly the last significant movement in cinema (Raskin, 2000), Dogme95 provides an exemplary case of deviance in its provocation, polarized reception, and its unexpected spread within the film industry and beyond through identification (Simons, 2005). The microhistorical approach enables zooming in and out to explore contextualized interactions among the deviants, the presentation of deviance, and the audiences, as well as accounting for the unintended consequences of the movement (Hargadon & Wadhvani, 2023; Maclean et al., 2016; Vaara & Lamberg, 2016).

The findings are discussed in their context and narrate the role of identification in the unconventional spread of Dogme95. Focusing on understanding deviance beyond an anomaly, stunt, or the necessary evil for innovation, the findings show how, at an appropriate moment, deviance that includes alienating and familiar elements can incite early identification with deviance, and later maintain the provocation and pave its way forward through polarized (as opposed to gradual) identification. Moreover, the findings show how limiting the duration of deviance can counterintuitively enhance its spread by enabling symbolic identification.

Challenging the dominant assumptions about the neatly organized, controlled, and balanced ways in which deviance unfolds to serve the good of organizations (refer to Maguire & Hardy, 2009), the article contributes to the extant literature in two main ways. Firstly, rather than being concerned with the

identification of deviance, valorizing or pathologizing it (Bordia et al., 2008; McKimman, 1980), this study sheds light on identification *with* deviance through a micro-historical approach to reveal an alternative way in which deviance and its heterogeneous possibilities for identification can propagate. Secondly, it offers a contextual understanding of identification *with* deviance in its specific context to provide a fine-grained, situated view of how identification *with* deviance contributes to its spread despite the negative connotations that it carries. Together, by focusing on the deviance-identification nexus, this article aims to theorize alternative ways in which deviance may spread in and around organizations.

## Theoretical background

Deviance, generically conceptualized as a departure from norms (Warren, 2003) has been a subject of speculation and interest. Focusing on the identification of deviance, positive or negative, researchers have shown numerous ways in which organizations propagate a carefully controlled deviance with goal-oriented implications (Bordia et al., 2008; Jones et al., 2016; Mainemelis, 2010; Narayanan & Murphy, 2017), leaving the various possibilities of deviance that result from social interactions underexplored. In conceptualizing deviance as socially constructed, this article aims to uncover alternative ways in which deviance may spread in and around organizations despite its negative connotations, a key aspect in which is identification *with* deviance. Below I explore the literature that pertains to these two issues to clarify the position of the article at the deviance-identification nexus.

### Conceptualizing deviance: Beyond the (un) necessary evil?

Any understanding of deviance necessitates a reference group (Warren, 2003) that specifies the norms from which deviance transgresses (Cropanzano et al., 2017), thus impacting identification. However, what seems to be deviant from one vantage point may not appear as such from another angle (Linstead et al., 2014). Becker (1973, p. 10) emphasizes the role of judgment in conceptualizing deviance, contending that 'social groups create deviance by making the rules whose infraction constitutes deviance'. In this sense, deviance is necessarily understood within its social context, as it shapes and is shaped by the deviant-audience dynamics, calling for attention to the context where actions and behaviors take place.

Despite this framing of deviance as a situated social phenomenon, the literature on deviance shows a marked focus on outcome-based valorization and judgment from the organizational, managerial, or authoritative standpoint. For instance, Vaughan (1999, p. 273) considers deviance as anything that deviates from standards or goals and generates a 'suboptimal

outcome', and thus contends that deviance 'encompasses mistake, misconduct, and disaster'. Similarly, Warren (2003) defines deviance both as a behavior and a label, where to label a behavior as deviant one must define the reference group, and valorizes deviance based on the 'assumed benefit to the organization' (2003, p. 629). The same negative perspective can be observed in the empirical treatment of deviance. While some scholars unequivocally condemn deviance (Belmi et al., 2015; Cropanzano et al., 2017; Ferris et al., 2012; Linstead et al., 2014), others view deviance and its causes from a more impartial perspective (e.g., Spreitzer & Sonenshein, 2004) or as a means for resistance and change (e.g., Leigh & Melwani, 2019).

Nevertheless, while the counterproductivity of deviance is still lurking in the background, such studies are often justified due to the costly nature of deviance (Lawrence & Robinson, 2007; McKirnan, 1980; Narayanan & Murphy, 2017), and explore how its threats can be utilized. For instance, some studies show that deviants can gain social legitimacy to neutralize their perceived threat to the social structure and order (e.g., Baba et al., 2021; Hampel & Tracey, 2017). What is often taken for granted, however, is that gaining social legitimacy is in and of itself a product of social interactions and therefore involves deviance and the response to it. The same holds even when the norms are highly codified. For instance, Ouriemi and colleagues (2021) show how judges enable or hinder retaliation against whistleblowers by applying normative logic. Even though the norms (i.e., legislative laws) against which deviation occurs are highly formalized and entrenched, the study shows that responding to deviance remains an intersubjective process based on the interpretation of those who observe it.

To summarize, by focusing on valorizing deviance from the organizational standpoint, the extant research often underplays this social aspect and does not sufficiently explain how provocative or untamed deviance spreads. Conceptualizing deviance as a situated social phenomenon, as this article assumes, avoids framing deviance as inherently positive or negative (e.g., Lin et al., 2016). This conceptualization takes into account the various groups of actors to reveal the hitherto unexplored dynamic possibilities that arise from introducing deviance in a social context, regardless of whether and how the authorities identify it as such. Specifically, the implication of deviance for the *recipient* individuals merits further exploration, as their identification *with* deviance is crucial to its spread, but often goes unnoticed due to the scrutinies of social approval.

## Going against the grain: Identification *with* deviance

Given the potential negative contingencies of deviance and the subsequent ambiguities (e.g., Bordia et al., 2008; Lawrence & Robinson, 2007), the preoccupation of extant research with the outcome, regulation, or balancing of deviance to harness its

potential for innovation (Berg, 2016; Blanton & Christie, 2003; Lin et al., 2016; Mainemelis, 2010) is not surprising. However, as the 'heat' of deviance can trigger introspection and reflection upon 'who we are' at different levels (e.g., Howard-Grenville et al., 2013; Michel & Ben-Slimane, 2021; Pratt et al., 2000), facing deviance is ripe with possibilities for identification. Whereas explicitly or implicitly, the literature implies that deviance is unlikely to survive the early unstable phases, empirical anecdotes imply otherwise. Exploring identification *with* deviance, then, can help resolve this contradiction.

One side of the contradiction is the role of social approval in the spread of deviance. Knowledge on deviance predominantly originates in the studies that explore the institutionalization (or eradication) of deviance-driven changes and stigma for the good of the organization. Ruebottom and colleagues (2022), for instance, explore how organizations can create value from voyeurism, a highly polarizing and stigmatized social practice. In another example, Helms and Patterson (2014) show that a stigmatized organization can persuade audiences to reconsider their negative evaluations to become more accepted. Lastly, Hampel and Tracey (2017) illustrate how, by reducing the stigma and proving the positive value of organizations, deviance can become normal. However, these studies and numerous others focus on the longevity and institutionalization of deviance, ignoring how *untamed* deviance may spread (refer to Khaire & Wadhvani, 2010). Therefore, capturing more complex and ambiguous identification processes observed through deviance remains important (Galois-Faurie et al., 2021). While socially approved processes often seek stability and longevity (e.g., Ashforth et al., 2008; Galois-Faurie et al., 2021), the increasing frequency of short bursts of deviance (Hay et al., 2021; Heracleous & Bartunek, 2021; Leigh & Melwani, 2019) makes it essential to explore the possibilities arising in unconventional situations regardless of their 'success'.

The other side of the contradiction is the connotations of identification *with* deviance, which influence its spread. The dominant emphasis on the identification *of* deviance not only distracts from the heterogeneity of deviance, but also diverts attention from the individuals whose perspectives shape the various trajectories through which it can spread (Hay et al., 2021). While facing deviance prompts reflection and identification, the ways in which individuals identify with a polarizing deviance remain a matter of debate and require further investigation (e.g., Ruebottom et al., 2022). Central to how ideas travel in and around organizations (Van Grinsven et al., 2020), individuals vary greatly in their susceptibility to identification (Crowley, 2008), which involves being different from some while being similar to others. Given that deviance is bound to receive strong reactions from the system (Bureau, 2013), deviance and identification with it leave individuals in a very precarious position.

Navigating this phase proves to be even more delicate when considering that deviance that is too severe is more likely to be penalized (Jones et al., 2016). Moreover, if we view deviance as a situated social phenomenon, deviance then would have the potential to alienate or captivate individuals and thus impact their identification. For instance, while the translation of ideas influences their spread (Maguire & Hardy, 2009), innovative ideas are not solely cognitive or practical. Their multifaceted presentation paves the way for their spread in different ways (Dechamp & Szostak, 2016; Van Iterson et al., 2017), and provides many possibilities for identification with deviance. Yet, the extant research does not sufficiently explain or theorize identification *with* deviance, as some deviant initiatives may be prematurely sanctioned by their audiences and therefore hinder advancements that those very audiences could potentially benefit from (Lin et al., 2016). For instance, studies on 'successful' deviance-driven change, explicitly or implicitly, suggest increased acceptance as an essential part of the process. Yet, while nascent deviance requires minimum acceptance to instigate broad changes, escalation in the number of people who identify with the deviance is not always desirable (Wry et al., 2011) because this may defeat the purpose of the deviance.

While the above-mentioned arguments each highlight areas for further research, put together, the contradictory claims that the extant literature holds about how individual identification influences the spread of deviance call for a more contextualized understanding of the deviance-identification nexus to reveal alternative trajectories through which deviance may unfold. In investigating 'how does deviance spread in organizations through identification?' this article aims to provide a novel understanding of the intricacies of the deviance-identification nexus and resolve the abovementioned contradictions.

## Research setting, data and methods

Dogme95 was a filmmaking movement started in 1995 by two Danish filmmakers later referred to as *The Dogme Brothers*. They issued 10 rules devised to encourage filmmakers to (re) focus on the core value of storytelling and purify the landscape of the cinema. Summarized in a document entitled *The Vow of Chastity*, these rules were deemed a 'rescue action' to purify the state of filmmaking, inviting filmmakers to avoid common devices such as artificial lighting, special effects, added music, and director credits. While the movement maintained its provocative and subversive nature from its rise to its demise, The Dogme Brothers and their films sparked varied identifications in critics, audiences, and peers, with some praising the new style, some vehemently disavowing it, and some replicating it in their work. In 2005, The Dogme Brothers officially announced Dogme95 as 'dead', while it remained an inspiration and guideline within and outside the realm of filmmaking.

The case is salient for understanding the deviance-identification nexus as conceptualized here, as it is decidedly distant from goal- and utility-focused studies, enabling a neutral exploration of deviance and attending to the interactions between the deviants and their audiences during the process rather than at its end. Moreover, while films serve as underexplored yet important phenomena for organizational research (e.g., Debenedetti & Perret, 2022; Zhao et al., 2013), the relative openness of creative domains provides interesting opportunities for theory development. It is noteworthy that, while the *Dogme films* are referenced in this article, phenomenology is not of focal interest: rather than being concerned with the artistic aspects of this movement or valorizing Dogme95 or its founders, this article explores its social and organizational aspects and provides insights into how the findings can be translated into broader theoretical insights concerning the deviance-identification nexus.

## A microhistorical approach

Following the present conceptualization of deviance as a situated social phenomenon, this article is inspired by microhistorical approaches (Hargadon, 2016; Hargadon & Wadhwani, 2023; Maclean et al., 2016) in analysis and theory development. Rooted in anthropology and cultural studies, microhistorical approaches study the history of a unique event by attending to the micro-level actions and behaviors, which enables zooming in and out to understand how various factors relate to one another in their context and beyond (Vaara & Lamberg, 2016). As an approach 'based on the close examination of empirical sources of the lived experiences of individuals with the aim of identifying previously unnoticed patterns' (Hargadon & Wadhwani, 2023, p. 4), it allows for acknowledging particularities in social life as well as their longer-term effects and unintended consequences (Hargadon & Wadhwani, 2023; Vaara & Lamberg, 2016). Therefore, this approach helps illustrate 'a completely different picture of the past from the investigations about nations, states, or social groupings, stretching over decades [or] centuries' (Magnússon & Szijártó, 2013, p. 22).

While microhistorical methods are scant in organizational studies (refer to Adorisio, 2014; Popp & Holt, 2013), this approach is particularly suited for the present framing of deviance, as it helps capture the social dynamics embedded in the context (Vaara & Lamberg, 2016) and enables understanding how small events unfold (Hargadon, 2016; see also Suddaby, 2016). Therefore, it provides an opportunity to uncover processes and implications of deviance since, as 'an antidote to hegemonic metanarratives' (Maclean et al., 2016, p. 623), a microhistorical approach can reveal how deviance is shaped by, shapes, and spreads in its context.



### Data collection

The data consist of over 2,900 pages of archival material (e.g., Kennedy, 2008; Khaire & Wadhvani, 2010), covering both deviants' and audiences' sides (Table 1). While multiple groups of actors were influential in the trajectory of Dogme95, most notably the founders, other filmmakers, audiences, critics, and press, this research mainly takes the press articles as a representation of the interactions and exchanges that occurred during and around Dogme95.

The majority of the data on the deviants was collected from sources that entailed direct insights on them. In doing so, I collected the contents of the official Dogme95 website through internet archives and its tribute website. These archives provided an unexpected opportunity to track the changes to the communications from The Dogme Brothers throughout the years and provided unmediated knowledge of the deviants' perspective, their progress, and the evolution of Dogme95. I added interviews with and profiles of the Dogme founders to this mix.

In the same vein, the data on the audiences comprised the articles, essays and other publications by the recipients of the deviance. Considering the press as a medium that encapsulated how the deviance was received and perceived through time (e.g., Kennedy, 2008; Khaire & Wadhvani, 2010), I conducted a comprehensive search on the media aggregator website Factiva using the common spelling variations of Dogme95, removing accidental duplicates and entries that merely mentioned

Dogme95 as a qualifier (e.g., news articles outlining the program for a film festival, interviews with actors with a stint in a Dogme film). This yielded 745 unique entries that were used in the data analysis. Moreover, to better make sense of the existing data, I collected additional material through snowballing (e.g., searching a relevant book mentioned in a press article) to the point of saturation, arriving at three major publications that were mainly used to triangulate the inferred relationships.

### Data analysis

Data analysis was abductive and reflexive (Grodal et al., 2021), evolving at every step according to the insights from the data as explained next.

### Step 1: Timeline and overview

I began by reading through the collected data to obtain a general sense of Dogme95, identifying the key moments in its trajectory (Figure 1). Next, I juxtaposed the frequency of the articles that mentioned the term Dogme95 with the year in which such key moments happened. While for the reasons mentioned earlier, a correlation between the frequency of articles with key moments in the trajectory of Dogme95 cannot be established, this comparison helped to amend the timeline of the movement and gain a general understanding of how, if at all, the actions and perceptions of deviants and audiences corresponded. At the end of this step, the story appeared to

**Table 1.** Data description.

Side	Source	Type of data	Count/Length
<b>Deviants</b>	<b>Dogme95 website</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The Dogme95 Manifesto</li> <li>The Vow of Chastity</li> <li>FAQ</li> <li>News</li> <li>Dogme films list and details</li> <li>Instructions for Dogme filmmakers</li> <li>Official press releases</li> </ul>	Archives of 1998–2018 67 pages <sup>1</sup>
	<b>Interviews and profiles</b>	Interviews with and profiles of the two founders of Dogme96	26 counts, 135 pages <sup>2</sup>
<b>Audiences</b>	<b>Press articles</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Dogme film reviews</li> <li>opinion pieces</li> <li>reactions</li> <li>news related to Dogme95</li> <li>...</li> </ul>	745 counts, 2,050 pages <sup>3</sup>
	<b>Books and journals</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>'POV: A Danish Journal of Film Studies', special issue on Dogme95, December 2000</li> <li>'The Name of this Book is Dogme95' by Richard Kelly, 2001</li> <li>'Playing the Waves: Lars von Trier's Game Cinema' by Jan Simmons, 2003</li> </ul>	194 pages <sup>4</sup> 208 pages <sup>5</sup> 256 pages <sup>6</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Text length in single-spaced, font size 12, A4 page size format.

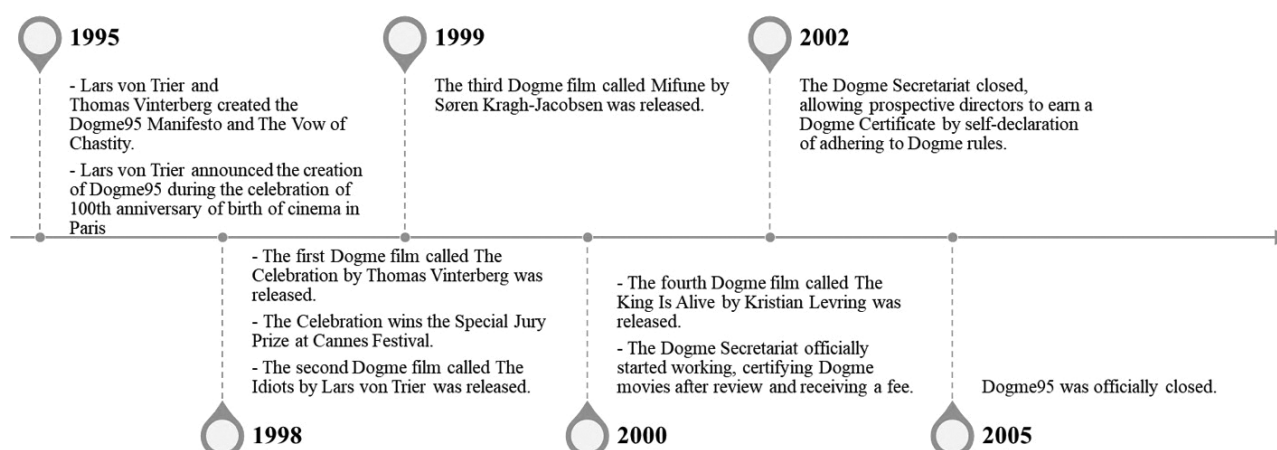
<sup>2</sup> Text length in single-spaced, font size 12, A4 page size format.

<sup>3</sup> Approximation of text length in the standardized, single-spaced, font size 12, A4 page size format.

<sup>4</sup> Text length in the original format (PDF, physical, etc.)

<sup>5</sup> Text length in the original format (PDF, physical, etc.)

<sup>6</sup> Text length in the original format (PDF, physical, etc.)



**Figure 1.** Key moments in Dogme95.

be about the failure of Dogme95 as a filmmaking movement (e.g., Rao & Giorgi, 2006; Wry et al., 2011).

## Step 2: Identifying the different sides of deviance

I coded the data in Atlasti, labeling sentences, paragraphs, or articles with simple descriptive phrases in the 'content\_side' format, depending on the density, relevance, and depth of the contents. While for the most part, the *deviants* and *audiences* sources (Table 1) corresponded to deviants and audiences codes, several passages of the press articles and books that directly described or quoted Dogme films and founders were considered as a *deviants'* code. This step yielded 179 first-order codes that provided a rough sketch of what the extensive data held about Dogme95.

## Step 3: Developing the themes

After reflecting on the theoretical background (Grodal et al., 2021), Step 2 revealed the surprising insight that a remarkable portion of the first-order codes represented the influence of Dogme95 far beyond the realm of filmmaking after it had ended, while frequently mentioning the social nature of its spread. Therefore, after consulting the literature, I continued the research to find out how the audiences' identification with Dogme95 contributed to its spread. With the social conceptualization of deviance in mind, I separated the first-order codes of each *side* and, based on the literature, I grouped the first-order codes around the inception, process, and outcome, roughly following the temporal unfolding of the data. Eventually, this step yielded four themes that connected the data to the literature. Moreover, given the breadth of first-order codes, to maintain the focus of the analysis, I eliminated some redundant themes (e.g., the upbringing of Dogme brothers) (Grodal et al., 2021) and combined highly specific codes (e.g., 'ugly aesthetics'

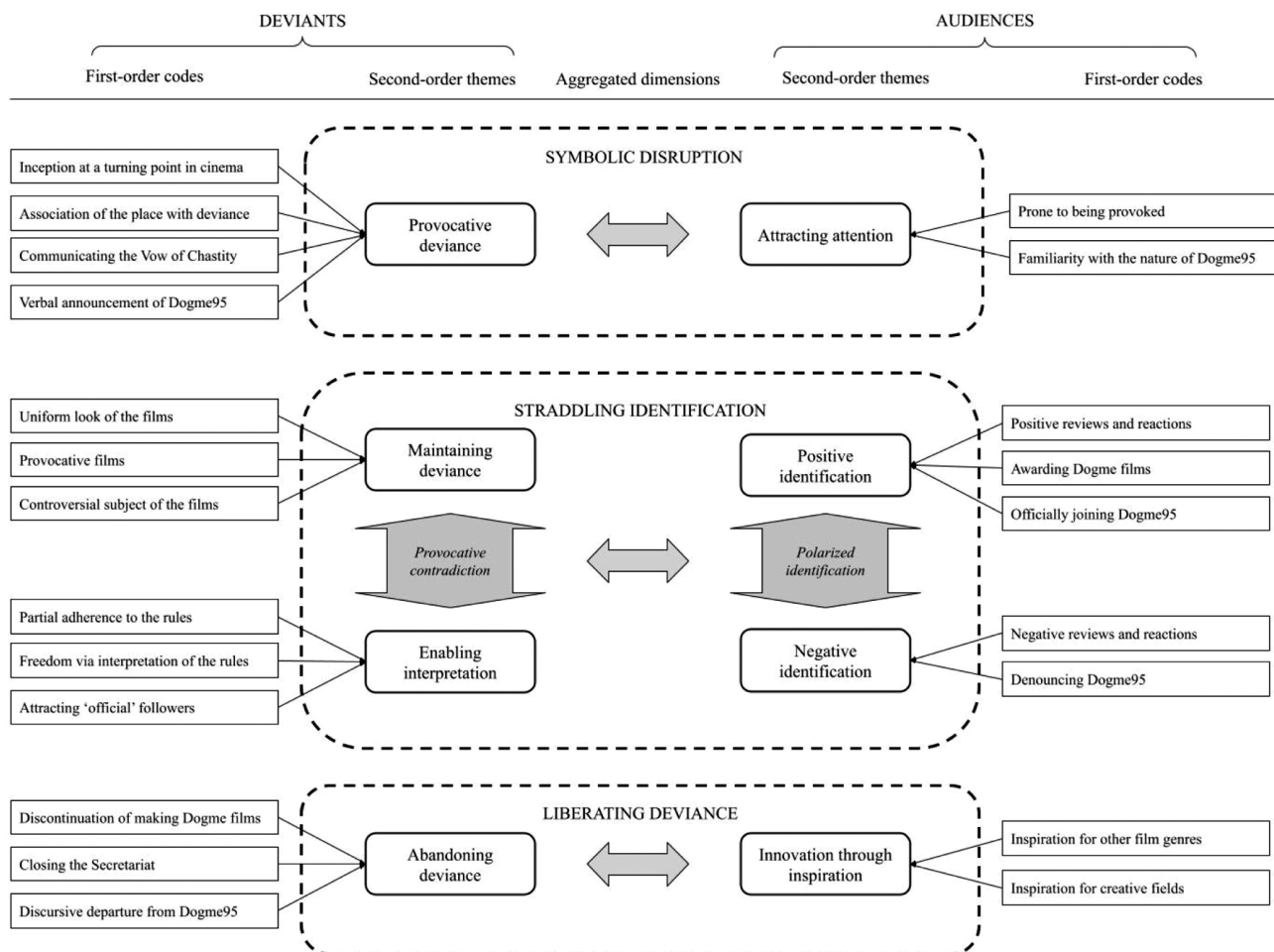
and 'violence' on the deviants side to 'provocative films'). Furthermore, to develop the aggregated dimensions that informed the theoretical contributions, I connected the themes of each *side* (e.g., comparing the contents under 'rules\_deviants' with 'rules\_audiences') based on the temporal trajectory, arriving at a two-sided data structure (Figure 2).

## Step 4: Elucidating the relationships

While the intersection of the two sides of data structure encompassed the deviant-audience connections, to better elucidate the relationships between the dimensions, I paid specific attention to the thematic and temporal similarities to identify, for instance, a theoretical understanding of the correspondence between abandoning Dogme95 and its legacy. To further make sense of the connections, I cross-checked the said dimensions by iterating between data and theory and against evidence from the data. This was done either via documents that discussed the interpretation of a code, as well as triangulating the trajectory of Dogme95 with the books and journals that explored it in a more neutral way. While the data globally indicated a surge, balance and divergence in identification with Dogme95, extant theory suggested a correspondence between the themes of each side in holding, for instance, that the product of deviance influences identification with it. Nevertheless, the data analysis revealed whether these relationships were reinforcing or contradictory. Juxtaposing the general pattern of identification, the significant milestones in Figure 1 and the phases elucidated in Figure 2 resulted in a theoretical model that shows how deviance may spread through identification (Figure 3).

## Findings

The findings present the trajectory of Dogme95 in a narrative format (e.g., Galois-Faurie et al., 2021) against the historical



**Figure 2.** Data structure.

context and follow the data structure. I describe the stages of the deviance from the inception to the process and outcome, and explain how they pertain to identification with it. In each sub-section, I first introduce the deviants' side and then, the audiences' responses to them, focusing on how these interactions were related to the spread of Dogme95 in relation to identification. Tables 2–5 provide further evidence for the findings.

### **Symbolic disruption: Beginning identification with provocative deviance**

For the first time, anyone can make movies. But the more accessible the medium becomes, the more important the avant-garde. It is no accident that the phrase 'avant-garde' has military connotations. Discipline is the answer ... because the individual film will be decadent by definition!

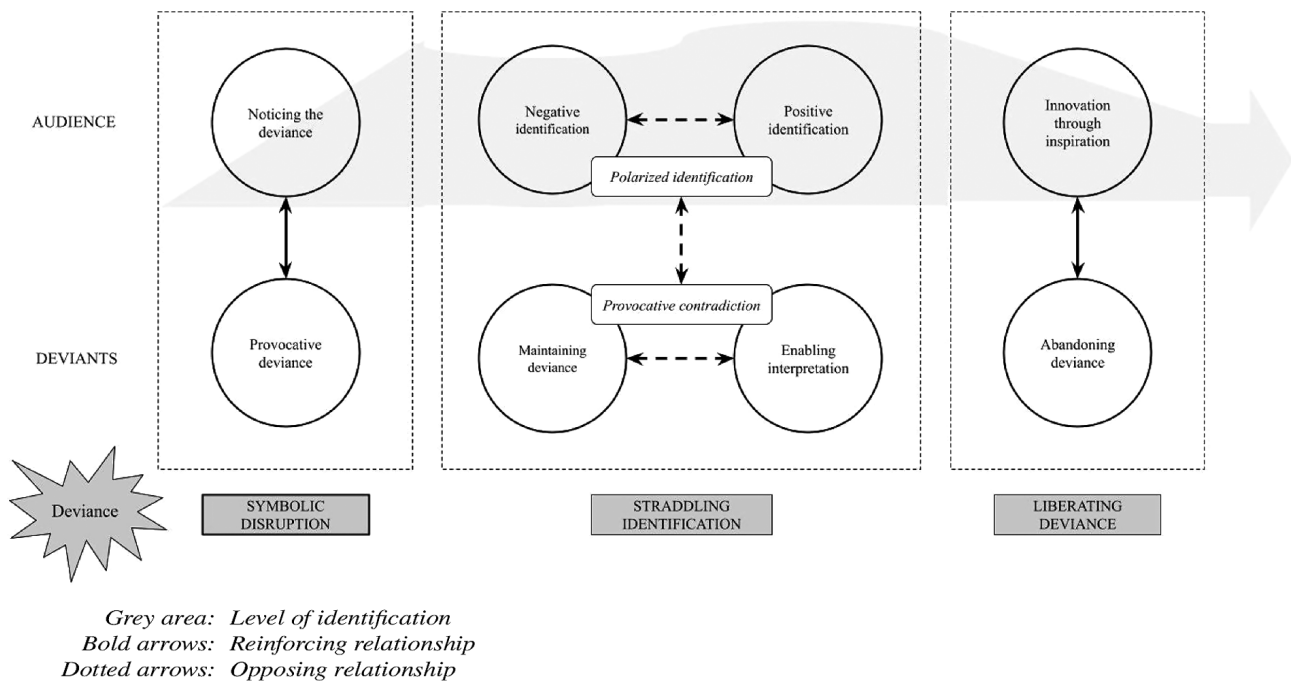
- *The Dogme Manifesto*

This section describes how the deviants' actions and discourse related to identification with Dogme95 in the beginning (Table 2).

### **Provocative deviance**

Dogme95 was highly deviant in the historical context of its announcement in terms of time and place, how it was announced, and its rules. All of these contributed to provocative deviance that compelled identification. Firstly, the time and place of the Dogme95 announcement had the potential to serve as a turning point for cinema, making it rife with possibilities for reflection and identification.

Dogme95 was announced on 22 March 1995, during an event named *Cinema towards its second century* that celebrated the 100th year of the birth of cinema that took place at Odéon Theater in Paris: a place historically associated with social uprisings ('The Guardian', 2005). While the place provided a historical



**Figure 3.** The spread of deviance through identification.

association with deviancy, the time also provided ample opportunity to make a statement about the future of cinema. While the event gathered the most prominent names in the film industry, the year 1995 saw the prominence of blockbuster films that heavily used special effects to attract audiences and sales. In this context:

Dogme95 was perceived as an alternative to mainstream cinema that was dominated by the star- and special effects-driven blockbusters of Hollywood. [...] The Dogme95 Manifesto rejects the 'illusions' the contemporary cinema produces with 'trickery' and by 'using new technology' which enables 'anyone at any time (to) wash the last grains of truth away in the deadly embrace of sensation'. (Simons, 2005)

As the quote shows, The Dogme Brothers felt that the direction of the filmmaking industry required a radical change, benefiting from the event to make a statement and be heard.

In addition to time and place, secondly, the announcement of Dogme95 was very provocative. During the event, Lars von Trier, one of the original Dogme Brothers, was invited to speak. A fairly known Danish director by then:

... Trier stepped to the front of the stage to deliver his contribution. He started by asking permission to speak on a topic outside the ambit of the debate. He then announced that he represented the Dogma95 group, read their manifesto aloud, and after he had finished, he cast red pamphlets featuring the manifesto text into the audience. He then left the theatre. (Schepeleyn, 1999)

The 'red pamphlets' mentioned here, as well as the accompanying rules, included the third instance of provocative deviance, which provided more recognizable elements. While the message of Dogme95 was highly provocative, it was framed in surprisingly familiar ways, potentially enabling identification with a highly alienating message. The pamphlets stated the aversion of The Dogme Brothers to the current state of cinema and their call for the purification of meanings, authenticity, and a radical change in the trajectory of the film industry using Dogme95 rules. For instance, the 'low-tech' approach to filmmaking was meant to help:

forget the heavy load of the modern film production machinery for a while and instead develop and exercise their creativity. (Dogme95 FAQ)

The 10 rules followed the style of religious decrees such as the Ten Commandments, which is highly symbolic in and of itself and potentially familiar to the audiences of the celebratory event ('The Guardian', 1999). Therefore, the third axis of deviance was rather paradoxical, including both alienating and familiar contents.

Together, the aforesaid elements instantiated intentional provocative deviance since:

It gets people thinking. You start seeing things in a new way. Maybe you'll get angry, maybe you'll feel great. But some process gets going. (von Trier)

As this quote summarizes, the symbolic time and occasion of the event, as well as the highly provocative way in

**Table 2.** Symbolic disruption.

Theme	First-order codes	Evidence
Provocative deviance	Inception at a turning point in cinema	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• ‘Cinema is becoming one of the most conservative art forms and I believe that a provocation of cinema as an art form was very much in its place. It was an obvious idea: To shake off the automatic patterns of action and force yourself into a situation where you show some courage’. (Vinterberg, 1999)</li> <li>• ‘Where the aesthetics of the blockbuster films of the day have underpinned the fact that the medium most certainly has the ability to create new-never-seen-before reality, the limited nature of the Dogma techniques enhances quite another sense of the real reality. Our own world of social interaction as it is’. (Christensen, 2000)</li> </ul>
	Association of place with deviance	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• ‘The sentence “Today a technological storm is raging...” paraphrases the first line of the Communist Manifesto of Marx and Engels. Moreover, all these texts were first published in Paris, where the conference at which von Trier launched the Dogma95 Manifesto had gathered to celebrate the fact that 100 years earlier the city had hosted the world’s first ever public film viewing. The Odeon Theatre, where the Manifesto was launched, was the very place that the Paris student revolts had ignited in’. (Simons, 2003).</li> <li>• ‘They launched the manifesto in a Paris theater with a bombardment of leaflets, just like the visionary loonies of many an art movement gone by’. (‘The Evening Standard’, 2000)</li> </ul>
	Communicating the vow of chastity	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• ‘I have been asked about that rule many times. The idea behind it is of a very symbolic nature – that we renounce our roles as artists, as aesthetes. Focus should not be on our personal works; it is the registration of what goes on in front of us that is important’. (Vinterberg, 1999)</li> <li>• ‘All the media hype surrounding the project has had the effect that we desired – to send out a provocation’. (Vinterberg, 2001)</li> <li>• ‘It is this irony that allows the directors to believe in both the solemnity of Dogma and in its irony as an act of provocation. Moreover, it seems that the rhetorical provocation within the public sphere brought on by the writing of a “manifesto” is as much about opening up a critical discussion about the state of the cinema as it is about following rules while producing films’. (MacKenzie, 2000)</li> </ul>
Noticing the deviance	Prone to being provoked	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• ‘No one laughed in Paris when Von Trier read the manifesto from a podium 10 years ago last March 20. The occasion was the “100th Anniversary of the Birth of Film,” and Von Trier had been invited to hold forth on the medium’s first century from the prestigious stage of the Odeon-Theater de l’Europe. No one was expecting what came next’. (‘Toronto Star’, 2005)</li> <li>• ‘If the stunt was meant to piss people off, it worked, even in the same city where similarly provocative anti-bourgeois art declarations – from the Surrealists to the New Wave – were an established part of civic cultural history’. (‘Toronto Star’, 2005)</li> </ul>
	Familiarity with the nature of Dogme95	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• ‘The Dogme [...] contains 10 rules, a la Moses: Location shooting only. Sound and image must be simultaneously recorded. Hand-held cameras only. Color film only. No special lighting, no optical work or filters. No “superficial action” (murders, weapons, etc.). Film must take place here and now. Genre movies are a no-no. Academy 35 mm format only. Directors must not be credited’. (‘The News’, 2000)</li> <li>• ‘In 1995, coming to grips with his mother’s deathbed revelation of his real father, Von Trier decided on a clean break with his past: he became a Catholic and adopted what he and his fellow director, Thomas Vinterberg, called “chastity”’. (‘The Hindu’, 2005)</li> </ul>

which Dogme95 was announced, appears to have contributed to identification with this provocative deviance, as described next.

### Attracting attention

The provocatively deviant Dogme95 indeed required attention from the audiences to gain initial traction. The data implies that the elements mentioned here contributed to identification by the audiences with Dogme95 in several specific ways. The symbolic time and place were influential. As observed by a reviewer:

Dogme arrived at exactly the right moment: it was all in the timing. Filmmaking seemed to have gotten very sophisticated and complicated – it was provocation to the industry as a whole. (‘The Evening Standard’, 2000)

While this quote confirms the role of the context in compelling identification with Dogme95, the rules of Dogme95 influenced identification in two main ways. The concise and clear statement of the rules was strikingly replicated in the press (over 130 counts in data), which appears to have facilitated identification.

In the same vein, the religious connotations of Dogme95 also attracted considerable attention (Kolstrup, 2009). For instance, a commentator stated that ‘they climbed a tall mountain and returned 45 minutes later with a pair of stone tablets on which were chiseled the new Laws of Film’ (‘The Times’, 2005), which implies that the religious connotation enabled recognizing the deviance and helped it resonate with some audiences.

Finally, while different aspects of Dogme95 at its inception appear paradoxical, putting them together in the context explains how they functioned. According to a commentator:



**Table 3.** Provocative contradiction.

Theme	First-order codes	Evidence
Maintaining Deviance	Uniform look of the films	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 'And if that is the only thing that comes of these rules, then I think it's fantastic – that people in countries like Estonia or wherever can suddenly make films, you know? Because they look at Dogme and think, "If that's a film, then we can make films too." Instead of just thinking, "Oh, if it doesn't look like Star Wars, then we can't make a film"' (Von Trier, 2001)</li> <li>• 'Regarding the rule about color... I have always felt it difficult to accept the way a color film looks. I have always spent a lot of energy changing it one way or other, so I could bear looking at it, and therefore it was a wonderful rule for me. That's the great thing about entering a convent: There are things that you simply can't do, so you don't have to worry about them'. (Von Trier, 1999)</li> </ul>
	Provocative films	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 'Let's show these Dogme-guys what you can do with aesthetics. That would have taken Danish cinema away from the middle of the road so we wouldn't be getting all these mid-budget films. That's what it's provoked me to do'. (Vinterberg, 1999)</li> <li>• 'The Idiots is a more complex, far weirder film, a film you ought to be amused and moved by, but also a bit disturbed by. The film contains a dangerousness'. (Von Trier, 2001)</li> </ul>
	Controversial subjects of the films	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 'Again, the most provocative thing to do is to include something that had been abandoned by people for a long time'. (Raskin, 2000)</li> <li>• 'This Lars von Trier Dogme95 film about social deviance and indulgence is both perplexing and uncomfortable [...] ostensibly to gain insights into the behavior and treatment of mentally unstable or intellectually disabled people'. ('Sydney Morning Herald', 2005)</li> </ul>
Enabling interpretation	Partial adherence to the rules	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 'Everyone sort of agrees now that the wording was fatally flawed. You can never take a director out of a picture, it's impossible to separate the ego from the auteur. The sacred rules were bent and broken. Certain "sins" were allowed and forgiven if the director owned up to them'. ('The Times', 2005)</li> <li>• 'Well, I myself have violated that rule to a much greater extent [...] – but at the same time I do find that there is a kind of logic in that transgression'. (Von Trier, 1999)</li> </ul>
	Enabling improvisation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 'We renounce our roles as artists, as aesthetes. Focus should not be on our personal works; it is the registration of what goes on in front of us that is important'. (Von Trier, 2001)</li> <li>• 'We reach what for me has been one of the most interesting aspects – rule number two which states that the sound must never be produced apart from the images or vice versa. What makes it interesting is the fact that you have to make all the decisions on the spot. It is as if you were shooting the very first talk movies'. (Von Trier, 1999)</li> </ul>
	Attracting 'official' followers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 'The purely formal production rules freed the Dogma film from any given national, cultural or ideological context, and Dogma95 had become a top export article even before a single Dogma film had gone into production. Because the rules of the Vow of Chastity are not linked to any specific time, place or content but do make it clear that – in von Trier's words – a film does not have to look like Star Wars, they were soon followed by young filmmakers from other countries where to produce a film would normally have been a difficult undertaking for economic or political reasons'. (Simons, 2003)</li> </ul>

Trier has often been criticized for having made the manifesto as a gimmick! Yes, maybe, but it attracted the press. [...] the press did not conceive DOGMA, but it was a mighty midwife. (Kolstrup, 2001, p. 126)

Together, these findings illustrate the symbolic characteristics of the inception of Dogme95 that, paired with the propensities of the audiences, created a symbolic disruption that enabled initial identification with Dogme95. The symbolic disruption of Dogme95, consisting of the provocative deviance met with audiences with the propensity to recognize it, and therefore it enabled identification through a mix of familiarity and alienation.

### Straddling identification: Polarized spread of deviance

As never before, the superficial action and the superficial movie are receiving all the praise. The result is barren. An illusion of pathos and an illusion of love. To DOGMA95 the movie is not illusion!

- The Dogme Manifesto

This section describes how identification with Dogme95 developed during its lifetime. It shows how the deviants maintained the deviance while enabling wider interpretation (Table 3). Met with extremely positive and negative identification by the audiences, this section illustrates how straddling identification with Dogme95 influenced its spread (Table 4).

### Provocative contradiction

In later years, Dogme95 progressed by both maintaining and deviating from the deviance itself in discursive and material formats, creating a curious mix pertaining to identification.

### Maintaining deviance

The Dogme films, the first of which was released in 1998, exhibited an aesthetically peculiar look: grainy, dark, poorly lit, and sometimes 'ugly', inspired by the low-tech approach advocated in the movement. As a Dogme director explained:

**Table 4.** Polarized identification.

Theme	First-order codes	Evidence
Positive identification	Positive reviews and reactions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 'The wonderfully timed and eloquently written provocation of defining the scope of the low-budget films in question and adding a number of both technical and creative limitations is a result of the remarkable film-theoretical approach'. (Christensen, 2000)</li> </ul>
	Awarding Dogme films	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 'Elsewhere, the achievement in world cinema award went to Danish directors Lars von Trier, Thomas Vinterberg, Søren Kragh-Jacobsen and Kristian Levring, co-founders of the Dogme95 manifesto. At times it seemed Dogme's anarchic approach had infected the ceremony as a whole'. ('The Guardian', 2008)</li> <li>• 'Needless to say, no one took a blind bit of notice until the preternaturally handsome Vinterberg scooped the Prix du Jury at Cannes in 1998 with his left field hit, <i>Festen</i>, the first film to be officially awarded a Dogme certificate' ('The Times', 2005)</li> </ul>
	Officially joining Dogme95	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 'The movie has used the innovative filmmaking technique, Dogme95 for the first time in Tollywood. The technique launched by renowned Danish filmmakers Lars von Trier and Thomas Vinterberg in 1995, avoids the use of expensive and spectacular special effects and postproduction modifications'. ('The Times of India', 2018)</li> <li>• 'I'm a believer in Dogme95. I wanted Lars von Trier's insane theory to go. I wish all movies weren't edited at all – just whatever came out the camera was it'. ('Times', 2015)</li> </ul>
Negative identification	Negative reviews and reactions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• "'Dogme had a huge effect on Scandinavian film, but let's face it: After a while, you get tired of seeing all those dark rooms and shaky pictures,' Norwegian Film Institute managing director Vigdis Lian says.' ('Hollywood Reporter', 2005)</li> <li>• 'Dogma95 has attracted and divided critical opinion. This code of filmmaking has been described as a gimmick, a form of self-ironization, and as a provocative challenge to dominant cinematic conventions'. (Cornich &amp; Tinknell, 2000)</li> <li>• 'Audiences were astounded that what looked like a home movie had gotten away. This was due not only to its story of incest and a dysfunctional family but also to its assaultive style, characterized by unsteady camera-work and shock-cuts – a result of following the 10 filmmaking rules in the Dogma95 Manifesto'. (Chaudhuri, 2005)</li> </ul>
	Denouncing Dogme95	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 'Von Trier was jeered, dismissed and denounced, but all the claims of self-promotional grandstanding tended to conceal in the moment what would happen in the long run: Dogme95, conceived in laughter and delivered as a form of post-punk agitprop theater, would prove one of the most influential challenges to conventional moviemaking'. ('The Toronto Star', 2005)</li> <li>• 'Dogme95's intentional anti-sophistication was intriguing at first. But the novelty is wearing off, and what was once a serious artistic statement seems like just another cinematic gimmick'. ('Star', 2000)</li> </ul>

We live in a world in which people are begging to cross the line of fiction in Big Brother reality shows. Even in a so-called documentary, we're playing with lights, music, emotions, it's a fiction. I made the film to explore the line where fiction begins. ('The Guardian', 2000)

As this quote shows, the provocation, inspired by the initial deviance and the time, trickled down from the form to the content, increasing the deviant provocativeness of Dogme95. Increasing its curious alienation (Christensen, 2000), the Dogme films predominantly explored psychological traumas and crises, a theme that was:

only logical. No artificial lighting, no genre, no guns – take away the frills of **mainstream** cinema, and what's left but characters ripping each other to emotional shreds? ('The Guardian', 2001)

Together, the rules, aesthetics, and temporal context resulted in maintaining the provocative deviance. A reporter quoted von Trier to have said "a film should be like a stone

in your shoe," meaning that it should provoke' ('The Independent', 2005).

In summary, inspired by time, social context, and rules, Dogme films were somewhat uniform in form and content. While this uniformity crystallized the message, it also enabled wider interpretations, as explained below.

### Enabling interpretations

The uniform appearance may appear as a limitation of the rules. However, The Dogme Brothers explained how Dogme95 could liberate the filmmakers and therefore increase identification. Inviting a 'no-frills filmmaking' approach, the rules encouraged improvisation and creativity:

Many of the rules are, after all, designed to rob the director of his power over these things, to make him concentrate on other things. To get something from the surroundings instead of forcing it out of them [...]. Dogme rules have been designed to remove the safety net. (von Trier)

**Table 5.** Liberating deviance.

Theme	First-order codes	Evidence
Abandoning deviance	Discontinuation of making Dogme films	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 'If you see it as an attempt to renew the film business, I think it is too late – after all Dogme95 in my eyes has become convention in itself. There is, of course, the moderation that the various countries around the world have discovered Dogme at different rates'. (Vinterberg, 1999)</li> <li>• 'I found that the moment Dogme95 became fashion, it was no longer a revolt, and it was no longer us being daring, and it was even stylish. And by that time, it was over. You then have to pursue new ways of getting under the skin of your film'. (Vinterberg, 2015)</li> </ul>
	Closing the Secretariat	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 'When we formed the committee of priests to approve or reject the films, we realized that when the approval procedure is external – that is when it is not done by the director of the film – it quickly ends up being a question of cheating the committee, which really serves no purpose'. (Von Trier, 1999)</li> <li>• 'In case you do desire to make a dogmefilm, you are free to do so; you do not need to apply for a certificate anymore. "The Vow of Chastity" is an artistic way of expressing a certain cinematic point of view, it is meant to inspire filmmakers all over the world'. (Dogme Secretariat Announcement, 2001)</li> </ul>
	Discursive departure from Dogme95	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 'I don't think there's anyone still working based on those rules [...]. The intention was to create a space for actors where they could do their best work'. (Von Trier, 2015)</li> <li>• 'I know that in the advertising business they are now lighting in a special way to make it as ugly and as Dogme-like as possible. And I can see that we now have a different kind of auto pilot – you simply press a Dogme-button, and in a way that disappoints me a little. The idea in my eyes was to provoke some people into saying: Look at what you can get out of a lamp. Look at what you can do with a big set. In a way I feel that a lot of people have just fallen into line without really thinking about what they are doing – I must admit I had hoped that the provocation would have the opposite effect'. (Vinterberg, 1999)</li> </ul>
Innovation through inspiration	Inspiration for other film genres	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 'The goal is still to make low-cost features quickly and with a focus on acting and storytelling' ('Hollywood Reporter', 2005)</li> <li>• 'In 2001, he issued a Dogme95-inspired manifesto entitled eARthouse Declaration of Spurious Intent that not only urged "All filmmakers to have spent time with their arms or feet inside another sentient being, alive or dead," but also that "The film should show signs of the berserk or slightly psychotic, an attempt to reflect the human condition"'. ('The Guardian', 2011)</li> </ul>
	Inspiration for creative fields	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 'Film critic Monggaard has no doubt there is a link between Von Trier's 1995 pamphlet-hurling and the ambition shown by today's young go-getters. "It was a very brash statement from Von Trier," he says. "You could say the same about [chef Rene] Redzepi when he makes his food in Noma. It's very, "Here I am, this is what I do, I'm a very good cook." It's a kind of bravado – a very forward, almost aggressive way of marketing yourself'. ('The Guardian', 2012)</li> <li>• 'I suppose I respond to very direct, soulful art. I am aware that things can be highly produced these days and I hate that. Musically, I love early Michelle Shocked or Suzanne Vega: singer-songwriters who communicate something real via a single instrument and who aren't trying to ape the Beatles. I like Dogme95 films, too, for the same reason. I loved Lars von Trier's <i>The Kingdom</i>. And I thought that <i>Breaking the Waves</i> was worrying. There's something creepy about von Trier. But I guess creepiness can make for beautiful art'. ('The Times', 2001)</li> </ul>

The given quote shows how the prescriptive rules of Dogme95 could instigate creativity in the medium. While this is one reason for identification with Dogme95, the data show that some rules appeared to be unattainable, providing an opportunity for improvisation by potential followers. Nevertheless, the existence of rules was intended to liberate filmmakers:

We are now by definition sinners due to the fact that the rules cannot be kept. Our position must be that the perfect Dogme-film has not been made and probably never will be. The Manifest and The Vow of Chastity are the holy rules and this is my interpretation of the text. I am not saying it is worth more than other people's thoughts and that's the whole point of these rules – they are a tool to be used freely. (von Trier)

As this quote implies, making Dogme Films served identification in two ways: the rules crystallized the deviance, enabling making films with a particular aesthetic and subject, while simultaneously allowing the recipients for improvisation and creativity. This contributed to the identification with Dogme95 in its process, as described next.

### **Polarized identification**

Similar to the deviance, the identification with it was contradictory and polarized (Table 4). Discussions about Dogme95 first appeared in the press only when the first two Dogme films were released in 1998 ('The Guardian', 2005). This points to the essential role of the *product* of deviance in identification

with it because it can clearly communicate the content of the deviance. Dogme films would:

disrupt the viewer's unproblematic identification with the director's gaze, precisely by undercutting that gaze in ways that both draw attention to its artifice, and retain the pleasurable fascination of cinematic narrative realism. ('Philosophy Today', 2001)

This quote emphasizes how the provocative deviance was better crystallized through the Dogme films. Nevertheless, the reception of Dogme95 was highly polarized.

### **Positive identification**

Some recipients saw Dogme rules as liberating, inspiring creativity, and imagination, as explained in the previous section. This particularly contributed to positive identification in the creative realm since:

Creative limitation differs from censorship. Unlike a government decree or an economic system, it is not pervasive. It is not enforced outside of the specific course of assignment to which it applies and can be deviated from in any work. ('Journal of Film and Video', 2001)

Dogme films were awarded and praised in prominent film festivals, receiving praise from some critics. The retrieved archives of the Dogme95 website show that at this time, to become a part of the movement, filmmakers needed to submit their film to the Dogme secretariat and declare their adherence to the rules in a written statement. After scrutiny by the movement board, the films that were deemed adherent to the Dogme rules received an official certificate. Between 1995 and 2002, 31 films were awarded an official Dogme certificate. Despite such positive identification with Dogme95, however, it evoked extremely negative identification as well, as described below.

### **Negative identification**

The peculiar aesthetics of Dogme films provoked, alienated, and shocked viewers to draw attention to the *stories*, inspiring self-reflecting, subversive and deviant films. For instance, during the screening of a Dogme film, the most memorable reaction was a cry of disgust by a critic once the film was over ('The Guardian', 2012). In retrospect, a film critic mocked Dogme95:

The only good thing to come out of Copenhagen is ice cream. I'm sorry, but using erratically moving hand-held cameras isn't a treat for the audience, it's just rudeness. ('The Sydney Morning Herald', 2005)

The strong reactions that Dogme films provoked contributed to extreme alienation and negative identification with

Dogme95. Moreover, disseminating rules alienated some others. While some press referred to Dogme95 as a 'tongue-in-cheek' provocation or marketing stunt, the idea of being bound by rules caused some negative identification, who thought:

It's fun, and seems to have liberated a lot of energy in some of these filmmakers' work. But I would never... submit myself to collective rules. ('The Boston Globe', 2005)

However, since The Dogme Brothers had no control over how others would see their films, the responses were diverse and polarized. Lastly, the release of Dogme films led to an undesired replication and imitation of Dogme-style films. This identification, again, was attributed to a liberal interpretation of the rules. Aside from the films and directors who received an official Dogme certificate to make their affiliation with the movement visible, many other directors either claimed they were influenced by it or were compared to Dogme films. Reports from the last years of Dogme95 point to this convention:

Seven years on, Dogme's shaky handycam style has been co-opted by the very group von Trier and company appeared to be denouncing in the first place: big-budget Hollywood. ('The Hollywood Reporter', 2002)

While the above quote provides an example of the spread of Dogme95, a counterintuitive effect of this spread was some negative identification. For instance, some Hollywood filmmakers and prominent figures in blockbuster cinema stated their intention to make Dogme films, defeating the purpose of the movement. Therefore, while the number of followers grew, the Dogme Brothers were concerned that the unintended members would corrupt the movement and that Dogme had become a brand rather than provocative deviance.

Juxtaposing the deviants' and audiences' sides during Dogme95 lifetime shows that the discursive and material positioning of Dogme95 contributed to identification. These seemingly incongruent aspects were mutually reinforcing, as they:

disrupt the viewer's unproblematic identification with the director's gaze, precisely by undercutting that gaze in ways that both draw attention to its artifice, and retain the pleasurable fascination of cinematic narrative realism. ('Philosophy Today', 2001)

While this quote indicates how a contradicting deviance may have contributed to the polarized reception of Dogme95, some retrospective accounts speculated why this came about:

Once a game has already been decided, as is the case in the rebroadcast of a soccer game, the strategies, choices and moves of the players can be assessed and interpreted retrospectively from the perspective of the outcome of the game, just as an historical episode can become the object of a narrative once a certain event can be identified as the outcome of previous events, and prior events can be identified as significant with regard to later events and especially with regard to the conclusion of a sequence of events. (Simons, 2003)

While the above-mentioned quote neatly summarizes why the reaction to Dogme95 was intensely polarized, together with the rest of the findings it implies that identification with Dogme95 during its lifetime did not develop gradually but in opposing directions, thereby making the deviancy spread through straddling negative and positive identification. The next section describes the official end of Dogme95 and how it relates to identification.

### *Liberating deviance: divergent identification for a broad spread*

The anti-bourgeois cinema itself became bourgeois, because the foundations upon which its theories were based was the bourgeois perception of art. The auteur concept was bourgeois romanticism from the very start and thereby... false!

- *The Dogme Manifesto*

While the previous sections show how Dogme95 remained highly deviant and provocative with a polarized (as opposed to gradual) appeal, this section describes the official ending of Dogme95 and its relation to identification (Table 5).

### **Abandoning deviance**

The Dogme Brothers abandoned the movement at two main points. Firstly, in 2002, they closed the Dogme secretariat, and any filmmaker was free to claim to follow the Dogme rules. Eventually, however, The Dogme Brothers announced the official death of Dogme95 at the end of March 2005, contending that it had become too generic ('The Guardian', 2012). The major reason for limiting the duration appeared to be overidentification with Dogme95 and therefore the creation of too many Dogme films, as explained before. Further explaining this limited duration, Vinterberg compared Dogme95 to a 'fast' that needed to be only temporary:

... one of the basic ideas in all this is to create renewal. And if you just repeat that renewal then you're really back where you started. So I wouldn't be able to make a Dogme film now. I would find it claustrophobic and repetitive – I know how it is done. My way of combatting that is making something extravagant and spectacular next time.

As the quotes above and in the opening imply, The Dogme Brothers believed that any provocative act would lose its momentum and impact if it stayed in its initial form for too long. This quote is parallel to a line in The Dogme Manifesto that condemned the previous avant-garde movements in cinema. An interview excerpt from Vinterberg illustrates this point:

Dogme95 became fashion, it was no longer a revolt, and it was no longer us being daring, and it was even stylish. And by that time, it was over.

As this quote shows, while the core of Dogme95 was a symbolic call for purity, simplicity, and traditional values, its varied identification coincided with its abandonment. This, however, was also influential in future identification, as presented next.

### **Innovation through inspiration**

Dogme95 had an intentionally transient lifespan and 'effectively died when the rules were appropriated by mediocrities' ('The Times', 2005). Nonetheless, even though there were no more official Dogme films, its influence lived beyond its lifespan. While these were mostly a direct imitation and application of Dogme95 rules, a popular genre named *mumblecore* was frequently mentioned as a direct legacy of Dogme95 principles. Having its peak in the 2000s to early 2010s, mumblecore films were more generally appealing than Dogme films and were considered the US reminiscent of Dogme95 ('The New York Sun', 2007):

a far less cohesive cousin of the Dogme95 movement, initiated in Denmark by Lars von Trier and Thomas Vinterberg with a fussy manifesto about purging cinema of its artifices. ('The New York Times', 2014)

In this sense, many outside of the film industry identified with Dogme95's message, including those involved with music, photography, theatre, and video games ('The Guardian', 2010; 'York Press', 2014). In Danish architecture, Dogme inspired a newfound focus on the human and the idea of the human being:

It took everyone outside their normal bubble and got them to say, 'Is this the direction we want to go in?' These young designers were the Dogme of architecture. They got the human being back. ('The Guardian', 2012)

However, perhaps the most surprising influence of Dogme95 was on New Nordic Kitchen. Founded in 2004, this culinary movement was partially inspired by the Dogme95 movement (Byrkjeflot et al., 2013): the commandments in The Vow of Chastity, which advised against using props and



required using only what is found on set, inspired a set of rules for the New Nordic Kitchen, which called for purity, freshness, and simplicity. According to the leaders of this culinary movement:

Dogme95's manifesto called on the region to be original and to go local. Something similar happened with food: chefs began to eschew imported ingredients in favour of local and seasonal produce. Going local enabled the Scandinavians to stand out globally. ('The Sydney Morning Herald', 2013)

According to this quote, although Dogme95 was a filmmaking movement, the symbolic, provocative nature of Dogme95 facilitated its translation across different domains. In this example, Dogme95 encouraged 'getting something from the surroundings instead of forcing it out of them' (von Trier), which helped transfer it to the culinary realm. This contributed to a divergent identification with the change of direction that the deviant Dogme95 encouraged in different disciplines increasing its spread in different domains beyond its 'endpoint' in 2005.

The story that the findings depict that the initial deviance of Dogme95, while on face value appeared extremely restrictive, was in essence meant to liberate and inspire, and 'to shake the dust off yourself' – or maybe 'dust yourself off' sounds too easy; 'cast off the burdens' is more like it. (von Trier)

Such duality and contradiction that persisted in the continuation of the movement, received equally contradicting and paradoxical identification, reflecting in the unconventional spread of Dogme95-inspired innovation. Even though Dogme95 was officially closed in 2005, its appeal and influence on creative domains contributed to a divergent identification and spread. As a reporter recounted:

It is irrelevant whether there will be any more Dogme films [...]. The sorcerers have worked their magic: cinema once again amounted, albeit briefly, to something savage and substantial – something actually worth arguing about. ('The Guardian', 2005)

The findings are summarized in Figure 3. The figure sketches identification with deviance vis-à-vis its lifespan: the initial provocation caused many to reflect on and revise their core values, guided future action and resulted in an unanticipated spread through identification within the filmmaking industry and beyond. While a limited lifespan was essential for the deviance of Dogme95 to be noticed and made sense of, it also influenced identification with it: in the absence of any control over who would claim to be a part of Dogme95, announcing the movement as dead appeared to be the only way to preserve its spirit and limit identification. Nevertheless, Dogme95 had caused the awakening that it aimed for, an important achievement of a short-lived movement intertwined with provocation and extreme reactions.

## Discussion

Exploring 'how does deviance spread in organizations through identification?', this study takes a microhistorical approach to analyze Dogme95, a deviant and provocative filmmaking movement. In focusing on deviance-identification nexus, then, the article contributes to the extant literature by providing empirically grounded arguments to address two main contradictions in the literature. Maintaining a predominantly prohibitive and negative view on deviance, the extant literature affirms that deviance can contribute to change in different fields (e.g., Jones et al., 2016) while understanding the spread of deviance through gradual institutionalization or prohibition (e.g., Hampel & Tracey, 2017; Maguire & Hardy, 2009). In contrast, the trajectory depicted in Figure 3 shows that deviance can also spread through a straddling process, involving contradictory and polarized elements that influence how it can be identified with, while also showing how such ostensible contradictions can in turn be mutually reinforcing in identification with deviance that contributes to its spread.

Having explored deviance by juxtaposing the dynamics between deviants and audiences at different moments while avoiding valorization, this article thus sheds light on the subtle ways through which deviance can provoke changes and spread in and around organizations (refer to Jones et al., 2016; Warren, 2003). In doing so, the article delineates an alternative trajectory, involving symbolic disruption, straddling identification, and liberating deviance, through which deviance can spread in and around organizations, while providing some theoretical understanding of why this may happen, as discussed next.

## Deviance as a situated social phenomenon

The first contribution of this article is to shed light on alternative ways in which deviance can spread in and around organizations despite obstacles by exploring the dynamics between deviants and audiences. Contrary to the majority of extant research concerned with the identification of deviance, the present article investigates deviance as a satiated, social phenomenon, for the value it may hold for widespread change (Lawrence & Robinson, 2007; Mainemelis, 2010; Warren, 2003), enabling a highly contextualized perspective on deviance and identification beyond the spectrum of failure or stunt (e.g., Heracleous & Bartunek, 2021).

Taking a microhistorical approach to the study of deviance, by investigating the interactions around pivotal moments in their context, this article aims to extend the literature by revealing new insights into deviance as a situated social phenomenon. The extant research tends to look back to understand something significant enough that it is worthy of academic exploration (Maclean et al., 2016) from the 'vantage point of the unfolded

future' (Popp & Holt, 2013, p. 10). While this perspective has revealed invaluable insights into how deviance can be managed, it inadvertently limits the gained insights, as it binds the research to a predetermined finish line. The microhistorical approach, however, allows for looking at the interactions and intentions in their time and context, as well as inferring broader implications (Hargadon & Wadhvani, 2023; Vaara & Lamberg, 2016).

By conceptualizing deviance as a situated social phenomenon, then, this article contributes to the understanding of deviance and its spread by observing the dynamics of how deviance unfolds in and by various actors. For instance, I argue that both social approval and dismissal can contribute to the spread of deviance. This contribution complements studies on socially approved processes and goals often leaves the subversive features of identification with deviance underexplored (Linstead et al., 2014; Vaughan, 1999). For instance, while some scholars argue that reducing hostility with audiences, creating value, and emphasizing the positive role of deviance can help harvesting its potential (Hampel & Tracey, 2017; Ruebottom et al., 2022), they ignore what may happen to deviance when formal approval is not sought. Departing from such perspectives and exploring deviance as a social phenomenon (e.g., Becker, 1973), this article finds that the failure to meet a specific goal can be simultaneous with changes in areas that are out of the spotlight (Heracleous & Bartunek, 2021). As explained in the data analysis section, all of these would be understood differently with a decided backward-looking and static perspective (refer to Rao & Giorgi, 2006; Wry et al., 2011).

### **The deviance-identification nexus**

The second contribution of this article is in revealing some interactions around deviance by focusing on identification with deviance (e.g., Lin et al., 2016) at its inception, process and end, and thereby extending what current literature assumes and asserts about identification with deviance. Affirming the high potential of the deviance 'heat' for various identifications (e.g., Howard-Grenville et al., 2013; Michel & Ben-Slimane, 2021; Pratt et al., 2000), this study offers an alternative, grounded understanding of why and how various attributes of deviance may influence identifications to complement extant frameworks in several ways.

The article shows how identification with highly provocative deviance can be increased via more familiar framing. While the capacity of deviance in identification to invoke extrospection (Howard-Grenville et al., 2013; Michel & Ben-Slimane, 2021; Pratt et al., 2000) is well established, identification of individuals with it is often undesirable (Belmi et al., 2015; Cropanzano et al., 2017; Ferris et al., 2012; Linstead et al., 2014; McKirman, 1980). This study shows that, while provocative deviance can

potentially alienate others and reduce identification with it, it can be framed in more familiar terms to reach wider appeal.

Furthermore, complementing the studies that assume a linear, gradual pathway for the spread of deviance through social approval (e.g., Ashforth et al., 2008; Hampel & Tracey, 2017; Maguire & Hardy, 2009), this article contends that deviance can also spread through polarized identification. The article affirms that materialization from ideas to concrete projects is vital for identification with deviance (Dechamp & Szostak, 2016; Van Iterson et al., 2017; refer to Brown & Starkey, 2000). However, in the absence of formal controlling or taming the deviance (e.g., Berg, 2016; Blanton & Christie, 2003), deviance can be perceived in myriad ways, leading to polarized identification. This article thus shows that deviance can benefit from extremely positive and negative identification to spread in non-linear ways, with the proponents negating the influence of dismissal. In this way, the article shows how straddling polarized identification on the positive and negative extremes can be navigated for deviance to spread.

Lastly, the findings suggest that limiting the duration of deviance can help mitigate the associated risks. The literature shows that the absence of leaders can lead to fissures in how the remaining members identify with them (Galois-Faurie et al., 2021). While this supports the varying identification observed here (Blanton & Christie, 2003), this article explores this relationship in reverse, suggesting how identification can vary due to a limited duration of deviance that enables liberation, and therefore contribute to its spread. In conclusion, exploring deviance regardless of its valuation or eventual utility, the article reveals distinctive insights into underexplored aspects of the spread of deviance by exploring the deviance-identification nexus.

### **Conclusion**

To extend the understanding of deviance and explore how individuals shape and inform its spread, this article investigates the complex intersection of identification and deviance. Given that deviance and stigma are increasingly prevalent in and around organizations, provocative movements that call for deep change can also be labeled deviant and therefore treated as such (e.g., Lindblom & Jacobsson, 2014). Therefore, this article carries implications for managing, understanding, and harnessing the potential of similarly radical deviances in theory and practice. Furthermore, zooming out via this microhistorical approach reveals that Dogme95 is by no means a standalone case of its sort. However, I speculate that deconstruction, self-discovery, and internal reflection in Dogme95 made it particularly pertinent for uncovering alternative ways in which deviance can spread through identification.

Several boundary conditions and limitations of this study reveal promising avenues for future research. Firstly, while Dogme95 emerged as an artistic medium, and an undeniable aspect of the movement is the films themselves, this article is not a study of films. Rather, by remaining impartial to the purely artistic aspects of Dogme95, this is a study of a social phenomenon for its capacity to reveal interesting insights into the dynamics of deviance. Secondly, while this article aims to explore deviance beyond an arbitrary finish line, it includes frequent mentions of the end of Dogme95. The distinction is that while the end of Dogme95 is an important event, it does not necessarily end the influence of deviance and its spread. Yet, future research can explore such unraveling of deviance in real time to provide a more comprehensive theoretical framework for understanding untamed deviance and its implications for societal changes. Lastly, while the relationships between deviance and response, and the interpretations of these relationships, are mostly corroborated in the data, as discussed earlier in the article, the concurrence of the interactions cannot be assumed to imply causation. Therefore, future research can test causal relationships concerning identification with deviance using methods such as natural experiments.

## Data availability statement

Further details on the informal (non-academic) literature/references can be provided upon reasonable request.

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