Motivation to Maintain a Nonprejudiced Identity

The Moderating Role of Normative Context and Justification for Prejudice on Moral Licensing

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Abstract: In the context of nationals’ attitudes toward immigrants, three studies investigated the moderating role of normative context and justification for prejudice on licensing effects. Justification for prejudice was either assessed (Studies 1 and 2) or experimentally induced (Study 3). The normative context (egalitarian vs. discriminatory) and the possibility to obtain (or not) credentials as a nonprejudiced person were manipulated in all studies. A licensing effect (i.e., greater prejudice in the credentials as compared to the no-credentials conditions) was observed only in the egalitarian norm condition when justification for prejudice was high. Thus, credentials appear to provide a way for establishing a normative self-image as nonprejudiced when justification for prejudice is high, which reduces conformity to an egalitarian norm.

Keywords: moral licensing, conformity, egalitarian norm, discrimination, prejudice

Over recent decades, a wealth of evidence suggests that, in Western societies, a powerful and pervasive cultural climate opposes prejudice and motivates people to maintain a nonprejudiced identity (e.g., Crandall & Eshleman, 2003; Dovidio & Gaertner, 1986). Despite the pervasiveness of this egalitarian norm, negative intergroup attitudes still endure. For instance, attitudes toward immigration and immigrants appear to be fairly negative and relatively constant both in the USA and in Europe (e.g., Fetzer, 2011). In addition, support to extremist right-wing populist parties, which are overtly hostile toward immigration, has recently increased (e.g., Greven, 2016; Ignazi, 2006). The present research focuses on the possibility that people may express prejudice because, rather than despite, they have previously conformed to the egalitarian norm (thereby illustrating a “moral licensing effect”). We investigated this issue as a function of the combined moderating role of two factors that remain relatively underexplored in the field of moral licensing effects: the normative context and justification for prejudice.

Moral Licensing Effects

Past research suggests that people are motivated to fulfill normative expectancies regarding the egalitarian cultural norm prevailing in Western Societies, and therefore suppress prejudiced tendencies in order to maintain a positive and nonprejudiced identity (e.g., Crandall & Eshleman, 2003; Dovidio & Gaertner, 1986). However, prejudice expressions can be released when people have acquired moral credentials from their past behavior as nonprejudiced persons (e.g., Monin & Miller, 2001; see also Dutton, 1976). Indeed, past egalitarian behavior may set a precedent and help people infer that they have already conformed to the egalitarian cultural norm, which may create a sense of identity-goal completeness (Gollwitzer, Wicklund, & Hilton, 1982; see also Longoni, Gollwitzer, & Oettingen, 2014). As a result, people who are inclined to express prejudice in a given situation might do so more easily once they have acquired moral credentials. An illustration of this moral licensing effect was for instance observed among White American participants who firstly had the opportunity to select an African American for a given job: Following this seemingly nonprejudiced behavior, they were more likely to reject another African American (and favor a White American) for another job (Monin & Miller, 2001).

Licensing effects have been observed in different domains in which intolerant and undesirable behaviors are inhibited because of strong social norms (see Merritt, Effron, & Monin, 2010, for a review). Although these
effects are now widely documented and appear to be reliable (e.g., Blanken, van de Ven, & Zeelenberg, 2015; Effron, 2016), past research has also shown that people do not systematically engage in licensing effects, and may even tend to act consistently with their past behavior (e.g., Bem, 1967; Festinger, 1957; Kiesler, 1971). These conflicting theoretical perspectives suggest we need to better understand the necessary (and boundary) conditions of licensing effects and, to date, only a few studies have investigated the moderators relevant to this issue (see Blanken et al., 2015; Mullen & Monin, 2016).

Interestingly, Mullen and Monin’s (2016) literature review identified factors that would lead to licensing or consistency effects. For instance, it appears that licensing effects emerge particularly when past behavior is construed concretely rather than abstractly (e.g., Conway & Peetz, 2012) or when it is framed as evidence of progress rather than commitment (Susewind & Hoelzl, 2014). Of particular relevance for the present research, licensing effects appear when a given behavior helps to infer a positive self-image, even though such a behavior does not reflect individuals’ actual identity or current motivations. For instance, licensing effects regarding pro-environmental attitudes and behavior appear to a greater extent when the initial behavior is freely chosen (Clot, Grolleau, & Ibanez, 2016) or unpaid (e.g., Clot, Grolleau, & Ibanez, 2013), but only among participants less intrinsically motivated regarding environmental issues (Clot et al., 2016; see also Meijers, 2014, as cited by Mullen & Monin, 2016).

Social Norms and Justification for Prejudice

A close consideration of past theorization of licensing effects suggests that two factors are essential to the understanding of licensing effects’ boundary conditions. Indeed, past research suggests that people inhibit counter-normative behaviors, but release them when their past behaviors help them infer their conformity to social norms (e.g., Monin & Miller, 2001). Put differently, moral credentials might increase prejudice specifically when the egalitarian cultural norm inhibits prejudice expression and preexisting beliefs, values, attitudes, or ideologies justify it. If such a contention is sound, then two moderators of self-licensing effects appear to be of particular relevance: the normative context and justification for prejudice.

Regarding the normative context, licensing effects have often been investigated regarding counter-normative behaviors including sexism and racism, which counter a widespread egalitarian norm in Western cultures (Effron, Cameron, & Monin, 2009; Monin & Miller, 2001). Thus, an egalitarian normative context would constitute a necessary condition for licensing effects to occur. However, to our knowledge, the moderating role of the egalitarian (vs. discriminatory) normative context has never been directly investigated. This lack of research is particularly surprising given that social norms do not exert influence at all times and in all situations, but only when they are made salient (Cialdini, Kallgren, & Reno, 1991). Consequently, despite the widespread egalitarian cultural norm, a licensing effect should not be observed (or should be observed to a lesser extent) when discriminatory local norms are made salient. Indeed, one would have less reason to inhibit prejudice expression in prejudiced normative contexts. This contention is consistent with past findings indicating that prejudice is also more easily expressed toward those groups (e.g., rapists or terrorists) that fall outside the protection of an egalitarian cultural norm than toward those who are protected by this norm (e.g., ethnic minorities; Crandall, Eshleman, & O’Brien, 2002), or when local norms condone or even support it (e.g., Stangor, Sechrist, & Jost, 2001). Moreover, people require some justification to express prejudice when the normative context values egalitarianism, but not when it values discrimination (such as meritocratic norms do; Pereira, Vala, & Costa-Lopes, 2010).

Regarding justification for prejudice, a justification may be any belief, value, or ideology allowing prejudice without suffering external or internal sanction (Crandall & Eshleman, 2003). People’s beliefs and values can motivate prejudice, but these factors may serve as justifications specifically when prejudice is otherwise suppressed. To date, the moderating role of justification for prejudice on licensing effects has barely been investigated, and evidence is rather mixed. On the one hand, some studies indirectly support the idea that licensing effects may be stronger when dispositional or situational factors justify prejudice. For instance, the procedures used by Monin and Miller (2001) were specifically designed to make participants believe there were legitimate reasons to consider that a job environment hostile to the stereotyped outgroup was better suited for an ingroup member (a man or a White, depending on the studies) over an outgroup member (a woman or an African American). Since this prejudice-legitimating context was kept constant, these studies prevent examination of the role of justification for prejudice. Relatedly, licensing effects appear to a greater extent among individuals who are not intrinsically motivated to perform a pro-normative behavior (e.g., Clot et al., 2016; Mullen & Monin, 2016). Brown et al. (2011) showed that moral credentials increased cheating when this immoral behavior could be rationalized, but not when cheating was unambiguously immoral and difficult to rationalize. Finally, Effron and colleagues (2009; Experiment 3) showed that the opportunity to endorse Barack Obama for the US presidency increased the amount of money allocated to an organization serving Whites (at the expense of an organization serving...
Blacks), but only for those Obama supporters with higher initial levels of racial prejudice. Taken together, these studies suggest that licensing effects may be stronger when people’s beliefs (e.g., stereotypes) and values (e.g., prejudiced values) justify prejudice.

On the other hand, some studies challenge this expectation and suggest licensing effects can also be observed when people lack justification for prejudice (e.g., when people’s beliefs or values make prejudice unacceptable or not desirable). For instance, Dutton and Lennox (1974; see also Dutton & Lake, 1973) observed a licensing effect among egalitarian rather than prejudiced participants. More specifically, participants with egalitarian values were initially led to believe they were probably (and unconsciously) prejudiced and were then provided with an opportunity to help a black (or white) confederate (a control condition was also included in the study). Two days later, participants were asked to donate their time to an interracial brotherhood. Results indicated that egalitarian participants who had initially helped a black confederate were less willing to spend some time for the interracial brotherhood than participants in the control condition (i.e., a licensing effect), and that the control condition did not differ from the condition in which participants had helped a white confederate. That said, other studies showed that motivation to respond without prejudice (Effron, Miller, & Monin, 2012; Monin & Miller, 2001) or prejudice (Effron et al., 2012) simply had no moderating role on licensing effects.

In sum, prior research examining (indirectly) the moderating role of justification for prejudice showed mixed evidence, and it is possible that the effect of prejudice on licensing effects might itself depend on other moderating factors. We argue that one of the most relevant factors moderating the effects of justification for prejudice would precisely be the salience of social norms inhibiting prejudice. Indeed, people’s beliefs and values might serve as a justification for prejudice only when they are needed – that is, when prejudice is suppressed (see Crandall & Eshleman, 2003). Given that past theorizations of licensing effects suggest these effects depend critically on both these variables, we aimed at investigating their joint effect on moral licensing dynamics.

Overview of the Studies

We reasoned that the provision of moral credentials (i.e., the opportunity to appear as a nonprejudiced person) should only increase the expression of prejudice if such expression is constrained by egalitarian social norms, and people’s preexisting beliefs and values may function as a justification for prejudice. Conversely, licensing effects should be weaker (or nonexistent) either when a discriminatory norm is salient in a specific social context or when justification for prejudice is low. Indeed, in such cases, prejudice expression is either not suppressed or not justified, and moral credentials would be of no use in the relief of prejudice.

In order to test this hypothesis, we conducted three studies examining licensing effects in the context of nationals’ ingroup preference over immigrants (national preference; Studies 1 and 3) or anti-immigrant prejudice (Study 2). The egalitarian (vs. discriminatory) normative context was experimentally manipulated across the three studies. We operationalized justification for prejudice as an individual difference, and also manipulated it experimentally. More specifically, we assessed whether participants’ internalized values (Study 1), as well as attribution of responsibility to the immigrants for the discrimination they endure (Study 2), could justify prejudice. Finally, we experimentally manipulated the perceived threat posed by immigrants to nations’ interests as a justification for prejudice (Study 3). The possibility for participants to make inferences about themselves as egalitarian and nonprejudiced persons (credentials vs. no-credentials conditions) were manipulated by adapting Monin and Miller’s (2001) moral credentials paradigm (Study 1) or by using a bogus feedback paradigm (Studies 2 and 3). On the whole, we expected a three-way interaction indicating that a licensing effect (i.e., greater prejudice or national preference in the credentials vs. no-credentials condition) only appears when an egalitarian norm is salient and justification for prejudice is high.

Study 1

Method

Participants and Procedure

Participants, all Swiss nationals, were recruited in the university campus of a Swiss city and participated on a voluntary basis in a study on their opinions concerning immigration. The experiment was conducted on personal computers in a research lab. Participants were randomly assigned to one of the four conditions within a 2 (social norm: egalitarian vs. discriminatory) × 2 (moral credentials: credentials vs. no-credentials) experimental design that additionally included a continuous independent factor (justification for prejudice). In line with common practices at the time of the data collection, we aimed to recruit 50 participants per condition (see Simmons, Nelson, & Simonsohn, 2013). Thus, 200 participants were invited to...
take part in the study, but we excluded 28 participants who favored immigrants rather than Swiss nationals in the national preference measure (see below). The final sample therefore comprised 172 valid participants (85 women and 87 men; $M_{age} = 22.68, SD_{age} = 3.24$). Unless otherwise indicated, all scales ranged from 1 (= not at all) to 9 (= absolutely). Participants were informed that the aim of the study was to investigate the different opinions on immigrants that exist in Switzerland. Immigrants were defined as nationals of other countries who live in Switzerland and have a residence permit but not a Swiss passport. At the end of all three studies, participants were thanked and thoroughly debriefed.2

**Justification for Prejudice**

We initially assessed justification for prejudice by adapting Plant and Devine’s (1998) 5-item subscale of internal motivation to respond without prejudice within the Swiss context (see Monin & Miller, 2001; Effron et al., 2012). The items were:

- “According to my personal values, discriminating against immigrants is ok”,
- “Not discriminating against immigrants is personally important to me” (reversed score),
- “I am personally motivated by my values to be unprejudiced against immigrants” (reversed score),
- “Because of my personal values, using stereotypes about immigrants is wrong” (reversed score), and
- “Being unprejudiced toward immigrants is important to my self-concept” (reversed score).

We averaged the responses to these items in order to compute a score of justification for prejudice (i.e., higher scores mean more internalized values that may serve as justification for prejudice; $\alpha = .80; M = 3.15, SD = 1.72$).3

**Social Norm**

After assessing justification for prejudice, we experimentally manipulated the social norm as in Falomir-Pichastor, Muñoz, Invernizzi, and Mugny’s studies (2004). Participants were informed about the results of a survey carried out on a representative sample of the Swiss population providing both descriptive and injunctive norm information regarding four questions: (1) “Do you favor Swiss people rather than immigrants?,” and “Can a person who favors Swiss people rather than immigrants be considered... (2) fair, (3) equitable, (4) respectful of Human Rights?”. Responses of the Swiss population to these questions had been already collected on a scale with three answer options: “Yes,” “I don’t know,” and “No.” Depending on the experimental condition, participants read that, across the four questions of the survey, about 80% of Swiss people either opposed (egalitarian norm condition) or supported (discrimination norm condition) national preference over immigrants.

**Moral Credentials**

We adapted the moral credentials paradigm (Monin & Miller, 2001) in order to manipulate the availability of credentials as an egalitarian person. After the norm induction, we asked participants to help another experimenter who was allegedly conducting a short yet unrelated study. All participants agreed to participate in this study, in which they had to imagine they worked in a company and were in charge of the selection of a “financial analyst.” We provided them with a brief description of four applicants’ names, nationalities, and qualifications. Participants had to indicate which of these applicants they would retain for the job. In all conditions, one applicant was clearly the most qualified.4 In the credentials condition the most qualified applicant was one of Polish nationality while the three others were Swiss. In the no-credentials condition all applicants were Swiss, and thus the most qualified applicant was Swiss.

**Dependent Measures**

**Manipulation Check**

Directly after the norm induction, two items assessed the perception of the social norm: “In your opinion, does the majority of the Swiss population favor Swiss people rather than immigrants?” (reversed score), and “Does the majority of the Swiss population favor an equal treatment of Swiss people and immigrants?” Both items were significantly correlated, $r(171) = −.48, p < .001$, and an average score of the perceived norm was computed such as higher scores indicate the perception of an egalitarian (rather than a discriminatory) norm ($M = 5.15, SD = 2.15$).

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2 For all studies, we provide detailed results regarding the main dependent variable in the Electronic Supplementary Material, ESM 1. All data and materials are available upon request from the first author.

3 In Study 1 we also adapted and included the Plant and Devine’s (1998) subscale of external motivation to respond without prejudice ($\alpha = .78, M = 2.82, SD = 1.56$). Given that external motivation is not the focus of the present research, that this scale did not moderate the investigated processes in Study 1, and that we used different operationalizations of justification for prejudice in Studies 2 and 3, in the main document we only report analyses regarding the internal motivation subscale (reversed score) as an indicator of justification for prejudice. Analyses regarding external motivation are presented in ESM 1.

4 Four participants did not choose the most qualified applicant, but we did not exclude them from the analyses. Results did not vary as a function of whether they were excluded or not.
National Preference

The main dependent variable was assessed at the end of the study with a resource allocation task (Falomir-Pichastor, Chatard, Selimbegovic, Konan, & Mugny, 2013; Study 2). We asked participants to what extent they approved of improving (in percentages) four social welfare policies regarding both nationals and immigrants. These policies regarded social security benefits (e.g., health insurance, retirement pension, or disability pension), minimum salary (e.g., in case of unemployment), aid to education (e.g., grants), and accommodation allowance (e.g., subsidies provided by the State). For each policy, 100 points had to be divided between the Swiss and the immigrants. The four allocations (α = .79) were averaged separately for nationals (M = 56.36) and immigrants (M = 43.64, SD = 9.17), and a national preference score was computed by calculating the difference between both (M = 12.72, SD = 18.35; positive values indicate greater national preference). Overall, the scores were different from 0, t(171) = 9.09, p < .001, indicating that participants significantly favored nationals over immigrants.

Results

The correlation between justification for prejudice and national preference was significant, r = .37, p < .001. Dependent variables were regressed on justification for prejudice (standardized scores), social norm (−1 = discriminatory and +1 = egalitarian), moral credentials (−1 = credentials and +1 = no-credentials), and all the possible interactions between these three factors.

Social Norm

The regression analysis on the perceived norm, F(7, 164) = 12.06, p < .001, R² = .34, only showed a significant main effect of the norm condition (B = 1.20), t(164) = 8.85, p < .001, ηp² = .32. Participants perceived a more egalitarian national context in the egalitarian norm condition (M = 6.35, SD = 1.70) than in the discriminatory norm condition (M = 3.94, SD = 1.87). No other main or interaction effects were significant, ts < 1.43, ps > .15.

National Preference

The regression analysis, F(7, 164) = 6.27, p < .001, R² = .21, showed a significant main effect of justification (B = 6.47), t(164) = 5.06, p < .001, ηp² = .13. Participants relatively high in justification for prejudice showed more national preference. This analysis also revealed as significant the Justification × Credentials interaction (B = −3.04), t(164) = 2.38, p = .018, ηp² = .03, and the predicted Justification × Norm × Credentials interaction (B = −3.03), t(164) = 2.37, p = .019, ηp² = .03. The latter interaction is illustrated in Figure 1.

In the discriminatory norm condition, the effect of justification was significant (B = 7.84), t(164) = 4.29, p < .001, ηp² = .10, but the Justification × Credentials interaction was not, t(164) < 0.01, p = .99. Thus, the credentials manipulation had no effect, regardless of the level of justification, ts(164) < 0.60, ps > .54. In the egalitarian norm condition, both the effect of justification (B = 5.10), t(164) = 2.85, p = .005, ηp² = .04, and the Justification × Credentials interaction (B = −6.07), t(164) = 3.39, p = .001, ηp² = .06, were significant. Planned comparisons indicated that national preference was higher in the credentials condition than in the no-credentials condition (i.e., a licensing effect was observed) when justification was high (+1 SD), t(164) = 3.37, p = .001, ηp² = .06. Conversely, the credentials effect was not significant when justification was low (−1 SD), t(164) = 1.41, p = .16.

Discussion

Overall, these findings provide empirical support for our hypothesis. A licensing effect (i.e., greater national preference in the credentials condition, as compared to the no-credentials condition) was observed only in the egalitarian norm condition when justification for prejudice was high. In itself, this study illustrates the boundary conditions of licensing effects by showing the joint importance of social norms and justification for prejudice.

Study 2

Study 2 aimed to replicate and increase the generalizability of Study 1’s findings. We operationalized the relevant factors in different ways, and several changes were therefore introduced. Firstly, the main dependent variable was
participants’ prejudice against immigrants (instead of their national preference). Secondly, we chose one of the most stigmatized immigrant groups in Switzerland as a target group – that is, people from countries belonging to the former Yugoslavia – instead of the general category of immigrants. Thirdly, because prejudice may be based on attributions of responsibility (such as holding group members responsible for the discrimination they endure; e.g., Crandall et al., 2001), we assessed justification for prejudice through the blame attributed to immigrants for the prejudice they are facing. Fourthly, in order to manipulate moral credentials, we used a bogus feedback procedure (Dutton & Lake, 1973) in order to provide participants with explicit information about the meaning of their past behavior (instead of the inferential task used in Study 1). Finally, the social norm was operationalized in reference to the participants’ ingroup – that is, students with the same age and background, instead of the whole national group.

**Method**

**Participants and Procedure**

We recruited 261 high school students from two small cities in Switzerland. However, we had to exclude 72 foreign participants and 21 Swiss nationals with foreign origins. The final sample comprised 168 participants (61 women and 107 men; \( M_{\text{age}} = 18.04, SD_{\text{age}} = 1.97 \). The experiment was conducted in computer classrooms. Unless otherwise indicated, the procedure was similar to that used in Study 1. Participants were told that the study aimed to understand the different opinions that currently exist in Switzerland on immigrants from countries belonging to the former Yugoslavia in the Swiss context, these immigrants are commonly referred to as “ex-Yugoslavs,” and all the materials were adapted toward this target group. Participants were randomly assigned to one of the four conditions within a 2 (social norm: egalitarian vs. discriminatory) \( \times \) 2 (moral credentials: credentials vs. no-credentials) experimental design, which additionally included a continuous independent factor (justification for prejudice). Scales ranged from 1 (\( = \text{strongly disagree/not at all} \)) to 7 (\( = \text{strongly agree/absolutely} \)).

**Pretest**

At the beginning of the study, we asked the participants to work on a judgmental task that allegedly measured their implicit attitudes toward ex-Yugoslavs through uncontrolled parameters such as response time. Although this task did not actually allow us to assess implicit attitudes, we used it to manipulate the personal feedback (see below). Thus, participants were informed that their responses to this task would be analyzed while they continued their participation in the study.

**Justification for Prejudice**

After the pretest task, we used a 4-item scale measuring prejudice against ex-Yugoslavs in terms of how responsible they are for the discrimination they face: “The ex-Yugoslavs are themselves responsible for Swiss’ prejudice against them,” “It is mainly the fault of the ex-Yugoslavs if Swiss people don’t like them in Switzerland,” “Different reasons can justify that someone has prejudice against ex-Yugoslavs,” and “People are prejudiced against ex-Yugoslavs because they have good reasons” \( (\alpha = .79, M = 4.24, SD = 1.30) \).

**Moral Credentials**

After the measure of justification for prejudice, we informed participants about their personal scores in the bogus pretest task. The computer informed participants that their responses provided in the initial task were either nonprejudiced (credentials condition) or prejudiced (no-credentials condition) against ex-Yugoslavs.

**Social Norm**

Afterwards, we informed participants of the average responses to the initial judgment task (see Pretest) of a representative sample of students with the same age and background who had already participated in the same study. The alleged results showed that a majority of 71% was either prejudiced (discriminatory norm condition) or nonprejudiced (egalitarian norm condition) against ex-Yugoslavs. At the end of the study, one item assessed the perception of the norm (“According to these results, the majority of the students with the same age and background are prejudiced against ex-Yugoslavs”; \( M = 4.18, SD = 2.13 \)).

**Prejudice Against Immigrants**

We finally measured prejudice against immigrants with an 8-item scale adapted from Akrami, Ekehammar, and Araya’s (2000) scale to the Swiss context and to the specific group of ex-Yugoslavs. The items are:

- “In Switzerland, ex-Yugoslavs are discriminated against” (reversed score),
- “There have been enough programs designed to create jobs for ex-Yugoslavs,”
- “It is right that ex-Yugoslavs demand the same rights as Swiss” (reversed score),

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5 Note that the Akrami et al.’s (2000) scale includes nine items, but in the present study the item “Racist groups are no longer a threat toward ex-Yugoslavs” correlated negatively with the overall prejudice scale, which is contrary to the original scale. Therefore, we decided to exclude this item from the overall score. Note that the results are similar when including this item.
“Ex-Yugoslavs get too much attention in the media,”
“Ex-Yugoslavs should demand the same rights as Swiss” (reversed score),
“It is important to invest money so that ex-Yugoslavs know their mother tongue” (reversed score),
“Special programs are needed to create jobs for ex-Yugoslavs” (reversed score), and
“A multicultural Switzerland would be good” (reversed score).

An average score of prejudice was computed (α = .83, M = 3.84, SD = 1.12).

Results and Discussion

The correlation between justification for prejudice and prejudice against immigrants was significant, r = .65, p < .001. We regressed dependent variables on justification for prejudice (standardized scores), norm (−1 = discriminatory, +1 = egalitarian), credentials (−1 = credentials, +1 = no-credentials), and all the interactions between these three factors.

Perceived Social Norm

The regression analysis on the perceived social norm, F(7, 160) = 78.49, p < .001, R² = .77, revealed a significant main effect of the norm manipulation (B = −1.79), t(160) = 22.03, p < .001, n² = .75. The majority of the ingroup was perceived as more prejudiced in the discriminatory norm condition (M = 5.97, SD = 0.94) than in the egalitarian norm condition (M = 2.30, SD = 1.22). The analyses also revealed a significant main effect for justification (B = 0.36), t(160) = 4.45, p < .001, n² = .11, indicating that participants with higher justification perceived the majority of the ingroup as more prejudiced. No other main or interaction effects were significant, ts < 1.70, ps > .09.

Prejudice Against Yugoslavs

The regression analysis, F(7, 160) = 24.75, p < .001, R² = .52, showed three significant main effects: justification was positively related with prejudice (B = 0.72), t(160) = 11.45, p < .001, n² = .45; prejudice was lower in the no-credentials condition (M = 3.58, SD = 0.98) than in the credentials condition (M = 4.13, SD = 1.19) (B = −0.23), t(160) = 3.81, p < .001, n² = .08, and lower in the egalitarian norm condition (M = 3.57, SD = 1.03) than in the discriminatory norm condition (M = 4.10, SD = 1.14) (B = −0.15), t(160) = 2.55, p = .012, n² = .03.

The Justification × Norm × Credentials interaction was only marginally significant (B = −0.11), t(160) = 1.77, p = .079, n² = .019 (see Figure 2). In the discriminatory norm condition, the effect of justification was significant (B = 0.85), r(160) = 9.28, p < .001, n² = .35, and the effect of credentials was marginally significant (B = −0.16), t(160) = 1.85, p = .065, n² = .02. More importantly, the Justification × Credentials interaction was not (B = .07), t(160) = 0.77, p > .43. Thus, the licensing effect was not significant in the discriminatory norm conditions, regardless the level of justification, ts(160) < 1.71, ps > .09. In the egalitarian norm condition, the justification and the credentials main effects were significant (B = 0.58), t(160) = 6.83, p < .001, n² = .22, and (B = −0.31) t(160) = 3.52, p = .001, n² = .07, respectively. Finally, the Justification × Credentials interaction effect was marginally significant (B = −0.15), t(160) = 1.76, p = .079, n² = .019. We performed planned comparisons derived from our hypothesis in order to test for our prediction (Rosenthal & Rosnow, 1985). Prejudice was higher in the credentials condition, as compared to the no-credentials condition (i.e., a licensing effect was observed), when justification was high (+1 SD), t(160) = 3.53, p < .001, n² = .07. However, this effect was not significant when justification was low (−1 SD), t(160) = 1.41, p = .15.

The results of this study were consistent with those observed in Study 1 while operationalizing all factors in a different way. Thus, a licensing effect was observed only in the egalitarian norm condition when justification for prejudice was high: Prejudice was higher when participants were told they were nonprejudiced (credentials condition) than when they were told they were prejudiced (no-credentials condition). As such, this indicates once again how social norms and justification for prejudice are of crucial importance in licensing effects.

Study 3

Before concluding, we conducted a third study in order to address two remaining issues. Firstly, in the previous
studies, we assessed justification for prejudice as an individual difference. In this last study, we aimed to provide a last test for the main hypothesis by manipulating justification for prejudice experimentally. We relied on research showing that a threatening perception of immigrants not only motivates prejudice (e.g., Stephan & Stephan, 2000), but can also serve as a justification for prejudice specifically in egalitarian normative contexts (Pereira et al., 2010; see also Falomir-Pichastor et al., 2004). We therefore experimentally manipulated intergroup threat. Secondly, the previous studies tested our main hypothesis without a control condition or a baseline measure of national preference (Study 1) and prejudice (Study 2), which makes it difficult to interpret the observed results in terms of conformity toward a specific social norm. Accordingly, in this last study, we used a pretest-posttest design allowing a more detailed examination of conformity effects.

Method

Participants and Procedure

Participants were university students of Swiss nationality, and were recruited on the university campus as part of a class exercise. We aimed at recruiting a sample similar to those used in the previous studies. However, due to constraints related to the class exercise, we were only able to recruit an initial sample of 190 participants, from which we had to exclude 24 participants who initially favored foreigners over Swiss (see Study 1). The final sample comprised 53 men and 113 women ($M_{\text{age}} = 21.61$, $SD_{\text{age}} = 2.35$). They volunteered to participate in an opinion survey about immigrants in Switzerland consisting of three paper-and-pencil questionnaires: the first included the pretest measure, the second included the experimental manipulations, and the third included the posttest measure. Participants were randomly assigned to one of the eight conditions within a 2 (justification for prejudice: low vs. high) × 2 (social norm: egalitarian vs. discriminatory) × 2 (moral credentials: credentials vs. no-credentials) experimental design. Unless otherwise indicated, scales ranged from 1 (= strongly disagree/not at all) to 9 (= strongly agree/absolutely).

Pretest

The first questionnaire included an allocation task that was also used to introduce the bogus feedback procedure. Participants accomplished an allocation task similar to that used in Study 1, but this time the allocation was made independently for nationals (from 0 to 100 points) and for immigrants (from 0 to 100 points; see Falomir-Pichastor et al., 2004, 2013, Study 1). We averaged allocations separately for nationals ($\alpha = .64$, $M = 83.13$, $SD = 14.77$) and for immigrants ($\alpha = .65$, $M = 77.63$, $SD = 16.46$). We computed a score of national preference by subtracting allocations for immigrants from allocations for nationals ($M = 5.50$, $SD = 8.44$). Overall, participants significantly favored nationals over immigrants (i.e., the national preference score was different from 0), $t(165) = 8.39$, $p < .001$. Participants were then informed that the experimenter would analyze their responses to this initial task while they pursued their participation in the study by responding to the second questionnaire.

Justification for Prejudice

Justification was manipulated through the activation of an intergroup threat (Stephan & Stephan, 2000). We informed participants about the results of a socioeconomic study allegedly carried out recently showing immigrants represented a threat (or not) to Switzerland (see Falomir-Pichastor et al., 2004, 2013). In the low justification condition, a chart illustrated a negative correlation between the increasing proportion of immigrants in Switzerland and the unemployment rate of Swiss nationals; as the percentage of immigrants increased, the proportion of Swiss nationals who were unemployed decreased. In the high justification condition, the figure showed a positive correlation between the two indicators; as the percentage of immigrants increased, the proportion of unemployed Swiss nationals also increased. Right after the induction, four items were used to assess perceived threat:

“Immigrants take the jobs of Swiss people,”

“Immigrants bring jobs to Swiss people” (reversed score),

“Immigrants and Swiss people are in competition for jobs,” and

“Immigrants and Swiss people benefit equally from the economic situation” (reversed score; $\alpha = .73$, $M = 4.35$, $SD = 1.86$).

Social Norm

After the experimental induction of threat, we manipulated the norm as in Study 1. However, in the present study the ingroup referred to Swiss university students instead of the entire Swiss population.

Moral Credentials

As in Study 2, and after the norm induction, we used a bogus feedback procedure to manipulate the possibility of obtaining moral credentials from past behavior. While participants responded to the second questionnaire, the experimenter simulated a data analysis of their responses to the

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pretest. Participants were then informed that, compared to the responses of the other participants, their responses were relatively nondiscriminatory (credentials condition) or discriminatory (no-credentials condition) against immigrants.

**Posttest**

At the end participants filled in the same allocation task as that used at the pretest. Again, we averaged posttest allocations separately for nationals ($\alpha = .65, M = 81.96, SD = 15.51$) and for immigrants ($\alpha = .69, M = 77.62, SD = 17.09$), and computed a posttest national preference score ($M = 4.33, SD = 9.49$). Participants still significantly favored nationals over immigrants, $t (165) = 5.88, p < .001$. However, a change analysis indicated an overall reduction of national preference between the pretest and posttest measures, $t (166) = 2.78, p = .006$. We computed a change score of national preference ($M_{\text{diff}} = -1.16$, $SD = 5.39$), obtained by subtracting pretest scores from posttest scores. Initial analyses indicated that change scores were not distributed normally (Skewness $= -1.45$, $SE = 0.18$; Kurtosis $= 13.17$, $SE = 0.37$), and that variance was not equal across conditions (Levene’s test), $F (7, 158) = 2.38, p = .024$. Thus, we computed a square root transformation on change scores ($M = -0.40, SD = 1.54$), which increased the normality of the distribution (Skewness $= -0.21$; Kurtosis $= 1.83$) and the homogeneity of the variances across conditions, $F (7, 158) = 1.94, p > .05$. The results for raw and transformed scores were similar, and we report here the analyses and means on the transformed scores. We also computed pretest versus posttest comparisons within experimental conditions in order to identify significant changes.

**Results and Discussion**

We ran a 2 (justification: low vs. high) $\times$ 2 (norm: egalitarian vs. discriminatory) $\times$ 2 (credentials: credentials vs. no-credentials) full factorial analysis of variance (ANOVA) on dependent variables.

**Perceived Threat**

Immigrants were perceived as more threatening in the high justification condition ($M = 5.46, SD = 1.78$) than in the low justification condition ($M = 3.30, SD = 1.21$), $F (1, 158) = 78.21, p < .001, \eta_p^2 = .33$. Unexpectedly, the main effect of the norm was also significant: perceived threat was higher in the discrimination norm condition ($M = 4.66, SD = 1.88$) than in the egalitarian norm condition ($M = 4.02, SD = 1.79$), $F (1, 158) = 4.02, p = .047, \eta_p^2 = .02$. Given that perceived threat was assessed before norm manipulation, this effect reflects a sample bias.

No other main effect or interaction effects were significant, $F s < 2.12, ps > .14$. Thus, the credential effect was not significant, regardless the level of justification. In the egalitarian norm condition, both the main effect of credentials, $F (1, 158) = 8.24, p = .005, \eta_p^2 = .05$, and the Justification $\times$ Credentials interaction, $F (1, 158) = 4.79, p = .03, \eta_p^2 = .029$, were significant. In the high justification condition, participants decreased national preference in the no-credentials condition as compared to the credentials condition, $F (1, 158) = 10.52, p = .001, \eta_p^2 = .068$ (i.e., a licensing effect was observed), and pretest versus posttest comparisons within conditions showed a significant decrease of national preference in the no-credentials condition, $F (1, 158) = 9.65, p = .002, \eta_p^2 = .05$, but not in the credentials condition, $F (1, 158) = 2.28, p = .13, \eta_p^2 = .01$. In the low justification condition, the simple effect of credentials was not significant, $F (1, 158) = 0.26, p = .61$, and pretest versus posttest comparisons showed an overall decrease of national preference.
preference for both conditions [credentials: $F(1, 158) = 3.26$, $p = .073$, $\eta^2_p = .02$; no-credentials: $F(1, 158) = 4.56$, $p = .034$, $\eta^2_p = .02$].

As compared to the two previous studies, the present study introduced two major changes. We experimentally manipulated justification for prejudice through perceived ingroup threat, and the main dependent variable was the change (pretest vs. posttest) in national preference. Again, a licensing effect was observed only in the egalitarian norm and high justification condition: Participants conformed to this norm when they were told that their previous responses were discriminatory (no-credentials condition), but not when these responses were nondiscriminatory (credentials condition). This effect was not observed in the discriminatory norm or in the low justification conditions.

Small-Scale Meta-Analysis

Despite the fact that the three studies provided consistent evidence in support of our main hypothesis, it is worth noting that samples were somewhat too small given the complexity of the experimental designs, and that the present studies were accordingly underpowered. Furthermore, the predicted overall interaction did not reach the significance level in Study 2. Therefore, we conducted two small-scale meta-analyses on the findings of the three studies (Cohen, 1988). We chose Cohen’s $d$ as the effect size indicator, and studies were weighted according to their sample size. Firstly, we computed $d$ for the Justification $\times$ Norm $\times$ Credentials interaction for each study. Using R and the metafor package (Viechtbauer, 2010), we ran a random-effect model with the Sidik-Jonkman method on the data and obtained an average Cohen’s $d = .33$, 95% CI [.17, .49], $SE = .08$, $z = 4.05$, $p < .001$. Studies were found homogeneous, $Q(2) = .30$, $p = .86$, $I^2 = 1\%$. Secondly, we computed $d$ for the specific predicted contrast between the credential and no-credentials conditions when justification for prejudice was high and the social norm was egalitarian. Results showed an average Cohen’s $d = .52$ [.36, .68], $SE = .08$, $z = 6.33$, $p < .001$. Again, studies were found homogeneous, $Q(2) = .04$, $p = .98$, $I^2 = 0\%$. Thus, despite the fact that each study separately might be underpowered, we can conclude with a certain confidence in the reliability of our present findings.

General Discussion

Three studies investigated moral licensing effects in the context of nationals’ attitudes toward immigrants as a function of the normative context (egalitarian vs. discriminatory) and justification for prejudice. We assessed justification for prejudice as an individual difference in Studies 1 and 2, and experimentally manipulated it in Study 3. In all studies we experimentally manipulated the normative context and the presence (or not) of moral credentials as nonprejudiced. Results showed a licensing effect only in the egalitarian norm condition when justification for prejudice was relatively high. This finding was consistent across three studies while using different methodologies.

We would like to stress that the effects observed in the bogus feedback paradigm used in Studies 2 and 3 could be considered as the reflection of a compensation effect in the no-credentials condition (driven by telling participants they were biased), rather than a licensing effect in the credentials condition (Zhong, Liljenquist, & Cain, 2009). However, the no-credentials condition in Study 1 represented a control condition in which participants were not told they were biased, and the credentials condition nevertheless increased prejudice. Accordingly, the overall findings observed in the present research cannot merely be understood as a compensation effect, and should rather be interpreted as the result of true licensing effects.

The present results are consistent with the current theorizing of moral licensing effects (Merritt et al., 2010; Miller & Effron, 2010). They show that licensing effects emerge when a conflict occurs between an egalitarian norm motivating people to suppress prejudice and people’s beliefs and values that serve as a justification for prejudice (see Crandall & Eshleman, 2003). More specifically, in the absence of moral credentials, individuals conform to egalitarian norms in order to maintain a positive and normative self-image even when their beliefs and values may justify prejudice. However, this strategic conformity is no longer required if they obtain moral credentials as nonprejudiced.

Licensing Effects and Prejudice

These results are of importance for several theoretical issues, one of which is the role of prejudice in the emergence of licensing effects. Indeed, the present findings are consistent with research suggesting that moral credentials...
result in a licensing effect among racially prejudiced people (Effron et al., 2009), or when misconduct is highly rationalizable (Brown et al., 2011). That said, past research has shown inconsistent findings regarding the moderating role of prejudice (Monin & Miller, 2001; Effron et al., 2009, 2012), and licensing effects have also been observed among egalitarian individuals (e.g., Dutton & Lennox, 1974). As such, this suggests that different mechanisms could be simultaneously at work among prejudiced and nonprejudiced individuals. While the present studies suggest that the normative context constitutes an important factor in determining when licensing effects appear among prejudiced people, further research is needed to better understand the conditions under which nonprejudiced individuals may also show licensing effects.

Another related concern regards the strength (or intensity) of justification for prejudice. Indeed, in the present research participants’ beliefs and values did not provide strong justifications for prejudice but rather low to moderate levels of justification. Thus, one could argue that the present research showed that people with moderate levels of justification could be more influenced by the presence of moral credentials and the normative context, whereas people with strong levels of justification for prejudice would rather act more consistently with such a justification, and be less sensitive to the presence of moral credentials. Indeed, ambivalent people are often more sensitive to the normative context (e.g., Cavazza & Butera, 2008; Maio, Bell, & Esses, 1996; Mugny, Sanchez-Mazas, Roux, & Pérez, 1991). One could also speculate that licensing effects might even be observed in discriminatory normative contexts when justification for prejudice is really high, but people nevertheless inhibit it in order to maintain a positive image as nonprejudiced that is consistent with the egalitarian cultural norm (see Muñoz-Rojas, Falomir-Pichastor, Invernizzi, & Leuenberger, 2000). These issues provide important directions for future research.

Licensing Effects and Conformity

The present results are also of particular relevance to our understanding of conformity processes. Indeed, a great deal of research has shown the strong and pervasive influence of group norms across a variety of contexts including intergroup prejudice and discrimination (e.g., Crandall et al., 2002; Stangor et al., 2001). However, people do not always blindly conform to social norms. For instance, people do not conform or even show counter-conformity when norms challenge their personal values (e.g., Hornsey, Majkut, Terry, & McKinnie, 2003) and interests (e.g., Rios, Wheeler, & Miller, 2012), or when norms challenge the collective interests of their group (e.g., Crane & Platow, 2010; Falomir-Pichastor et al., 2004, 2013; Jetten & Hornsey, 2011; Packer, 2008). The present research increases our understanding of the boundary conditions under which people conform to social norms by showing that moral credentials might foster people’s noncompliance with an egalitarian social norm.

These studies also add to our understanding of group conformity and loyalty. Past research has shown that group deviance is an unpleasant experience, in particular among members with strong group ties (Williams, 2007), and deviants often engage in post hoc compensatory strategies in order to reaffirm their group membership and group loyalty (e.g., Falomir-Pichastor, Gabarro, & Mugny, 2009; Gabarro & Falomir-Pichastor, 2017; see also Gómez, Morales, Hart, Vázquez, & Swann, 2011; Hornsey & Jetten, 2005). The present results suggest that obtaining moral credentials may work as a beforehand compensatory strategy allowing the expression of dissent without perceiving oneself as deviant. Indeed, past behavior may provide group members with the opportunity to prove their normativity as egalitarian, which in turn minimizes the costs associated to subsequent counter-normative behaviors. Further research is needed in order to examine more deeply the complex relation between conformity and compensatory strategies, be they anticipatory or post hoc.

Finally, these findings are also consistent with research on the different levels of normative influence. Conformity to social norms may result in internalized and enduring responses (e.g., Alwin, Cohen, & Newcomb, 1991; Sherif, 1936), as well as strong attitudes that are associated to a systematic processing of the normative information (e.g., Erb, Bohnier, Schmälzle, & Rank, 1998; Mackie, 1987). That said, people also conform to social norms in order to avoid social deviance (Moscovici, 1980) or to avoid undesirable ways of deviating from social norms (Blanton & Christie, 2003), and they would conform to a greater extent to valued groups that promote positive self-views (e.g., Mugny & Pérez, 1991; Pool, Wood, & Leck, 1998; Tajfel & Turner, 1986). As a consequence, social norms can result in a strategic conformity (i.e., in compliance) often evidenced immediately, in public settings, and limited to the issue-relevant information (Maass & Clark, 1983; Moscovici, 1980). Accordingly, consensual positions are not systematically processed when recipients hold strongly opposing attitudes (Erb, Bohnier, Rank, & Einwiller, 2002), and may lead to weaker attitudes that are more vulnerable to counter-persuasion, less persistent over time, and worse predictors of behavior (Martin & Hewstone, 2008). The present findings suggest that egalitarian norms may lead to an unwilling yet strategic conformity when justification for prejudice is high, and that these weaker attitudes vanish once people have fulfilled identity and normative goals (e.g., when they obtain moral credentials as nonprejudiced).
Conclusion

We would like to conclude regarding the potential applications of these studies. These findings might help better understand the apparent contradiction between pervasive egalitarian norms and the rise of discriminatory behaviors in every-day life. Indeed, despite the existence of a pervasive egalitarian cultural norm opposing prejudice and discrimination, people still show anti-immigrants prejudice. Even more concerning is the recent resurgence of nationalism, leading to local norms of national preference and the perception of immigrants as threatening nationals’ prerogatives and identity. The present research illustrated a paradoxical property of conformity to a valued egalitarian norm when nationals’ beliefs and values serve as justifications for prejudice: Mere conformity may be a sufficient, superficial, and strategic way to respond to the discrepancy with the norm — that is, to maintain a nonprejudiced valued identity, which subsequently licenses for normative deviation. People may express prejudice because (not despite) having previously conformed to the egalitarian cultural norm (i.e., a moral licensing effect). These findings suggest that token and costless gestures (e.g., slacktivism; Schumann & Klein, 2015) in support of immigrants may have as a consequence a backlash effect. A better understanding of the reasons underlying these dynamics may help to find ways to oppose such a strategic conformity providing moral credentials as an egalitarian person.

Acknowledgments

This research was supported by the Swiss National Science Foundation (No. 100011-100283). We are grateful to Ines Irle, Daniel Muñoz-Rojas, Céline Buchs, Maria Colangelo, and Timothée Brutsch for their help in collecting data. We also wish to thank Joel Anderson for his helpful comments on a previous version of the manuscript.

Electronic Supplementary Materials

The electronic supplementary material is available with the online version of the article at https://doi.org/10.1027/1864-9335/a000339

ESM 1. Text (.doc)

Additional analyses for Studies 1-3.

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