



Group cohesion benefits individuals who express prejudice, but harms their group



Daniel A. Effron^{a,*}, Hemant Kakkar^a, Eric D. Knowles^b

^a Organizational Behaviour Subject Area, London Business School, United Kingdom

^b Department of Psychology, New York University, United States of America

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ABSTRACT

When someone expresses prejudice against an outgroup, how negatively do we judge the prejudiced individual and his or her ingroup? Previous lines of research suggest that the answer depends on the ingroup's *entitativity*—i.e., how cohesive it is—but they make different predictions about whether entitativity should increase or decrease outside observers' negative reactions to prejudice. We resolve this tension by demonstrating divergent consequences of entitativity for prejudiced individuals versus their groups. Mediation and experimental data from six studies (two pre-registered; $N = 2455$) support two hypotheses: Entitativity increases how responsible the group seems for its member's prejudice, which in turn *decreases* how unacceptable observers find the member's behavior and how much they condemn her (H1), but which also *increases* how much they condemn the group (H2). Thus, entitativity can grant individuals a license to express prejudice but can damage their group's reputation.

1. Introduction

In May of 2018, actress Rosanne Barr, a vocal Trump supporter, publicly compared Valerie Jarrett, a former Obama advisor, to an ape. Given that Jarrett is African American, the comment was widely labeled as racist. In the ensuing social media storm, commentators argued about how much condemnation Barr deserved, and how much to blame other Trump supporters who were not involved in the incident (Chow, 2018; Flood, 2018).

When an individual expresses prejudice, how harshly do observers judge the individual and the group to which he or she belongs? Research on intergroup relations suggests that the answer depends on how much of a cohesive, unified entity these observers believe the individual's ingroup is—that is, how *entitative* it seems (Campbell, 1958; Hamilton & Sherman, 1996). However, it is unclear exactly what effect these entitativity perceptions will have. One line of research suggests that group entitativity invites censure from outsiders when some group members commit transgressions (see Lickel, Hamilton, & Sherman, 2001). Another line of research suggests that group entitativity reduces censure when group members express prejudice (Effron & Knowles, 2015). The present research seeks to resolve this tension, and does so by offering a new perspective on when and how entitativity benefits versus harms groups and their members (Castano, Sacchi, & Gries, 2003; Dang, Liu, Ren, & Gu, 2017; Dasgupta, Banaji, & Abelson, 1999; Newheiser &

Dovidio, 2015; Newheiser, Sawaoka, & Dovidio, 2012). We begin by outlining the two existing perspectives in more depth.

1.1. Entitativity invites more negative reactions to prejudice

There is reason to believe that entitativity will invite censure when a member of a group expresses anti-outgroup prejudice. Groups that appear more entitative are held more *collectively responsible* when a subset of members transgresses (e.g., Lickel & Onuki, 2015; Waytz & Young, 2012). In other words, the group is assumed to have caused or allowed the transgression directly or indirectly (Lickel et al., 2001), in part because observers think members of entitative groups readily influence each other's behavior (Denson, Lickel, Curtis, Stenstrom, & Ames, 2006). For example, the more cohesive people viewed a high school clique as being, the more responsible they held it for a school shooting committed by two of its members (Lickel, Schmader, & Hamilton, 2003). Extrapolating from existing research, it seems likely that more-entitative groups would be held more responsible for prejudice expressed by an individual member. Being held responsible for prejudice could damage the group's reputation and even invite retribution against the group (Gaertner, Iuzzini, & O'Mara, 2008; Sjöström & Gollwitzer, 2015; Stenstrom, Lickel, Denson, & Miller, 2008). So according to this perspective, when a group member expresses prejudice, entitativity invites more negative reactions from observers outside the group.

* Corresponding author at: London Business School, Regent's Park, London NW1 4SA, United Kingdom.
E-mail address: deffron@london.edu (D.A. Effron).

1.2. Entitativity invites less negative reactions to prejudice

In contrast to the collective-responsibility perspective, there is also evidence that a group's entitativity can reduce censure when a group member expresses prejudice by providing a license for the prejudice. The term *license* describes the degree of legitimacy someone has to do or say something that would otherwise be discrediting (Miller & Effron, 2010). The more license people have, the less unacceptable their behavior seems to the broader community (Effron & Knowles, 2015), and the less moral condemnation they receive (Effron & Monin, 2010). Prejudice rarely receives a complete pass (Fiske, 1998), but some people are afforded greater license for prejudice than others (Effron & Monin, 2010; Hornsey, Oppes, & Svensson, 2002; Thai, Hornsey, & Barlow, 2016). Suggesting that the appearance of group entitativity can license prejudice, participants estimated that their peers would find the same acts of racial, national, and religious bias less unacceptable when committed by members of more-entitative versus less-entitative outgroups (Effron & Knowles, 2015). The authors argued that observers tend to attribute prejudice in an entitative group to a “rationalistic” desire to defend or advance group interests rather than to irrational hatred, because entitative groups have better-defined collective interests than less-entitative groups. Because this prejudice seems rationally motivated, observers judge it to be less socially unacceptable. So according to this perspective, when a group member expresses prejudice, entitativity invites less negative reactions from observers outside the group.

1.3. Resolving the tension

1.3.1. Judgments of prejudiced individuals versus their group

Two different streams of work in the intergroup relations literature—one on collective responsibility, and the other on prejudice licensing—appear to make conflicting predictions about how negatively outside observers will respond to expressions of prejudice from more-versus less-entitative groups. Resolving this tension, we propose, requires distinguishing judgments of the specific member observed expressing prejudice from those of the group to which he or she belongs. The work on collective responsibility measures how people judge groups as a function of their entitativity when a member transgresses, but does not assess judgments of the transgressing member him or herself (e.g., Lickel et al., 2003). By contrast, the work on prejudice licensing measures how people judge an individual for expressing prejudice as a function of whether he or she belongs to an entitative group, but does not assess how people judge the individual's group as a whole (Effron & Knowles, 2015).

We suggest that entitativity will have different effects on an individual observed expressing prejudice versus the rest of his or her group. Consistent with the prejudice-licensing work, we argue that group entitativity makes an individual's prejudice seem more socially acceptable and less deserving of condemnation to outside observers. Simultaneously, consistent with the collective-responsibility work, group entitativity makes the group as a whole seem more responsible for an individual member's prejudice. Thus, when a group member expresses prejudice, entitativity may help get that member off the hook while putting the rest of the group on the hook.

1.3.2. How collective responsibility benefits the prejudiced individual

Further integrating and extending the collective-responsibility and prejudice-licensing perspectives, we argue that entitativity grants individuals a prejudice license precisely because entitativity makes the group seem more responsible for the individual's behavior. In other words, we propose collective responsibility as a novel mechanism explaining why entitativity licenses individuals' prejudice.

There are two reasons to expect that people afford greater license to

a prejudiced individual when they hold his or her group collective responsible. First, the prejudiced individual may seem less responsible in light of others' responsibility. This diffusion of responsibility from individual to group (cf. Darley & Latané, 1968; Mynatt & Sherman, 1975) would make the individual's behavior seem less unacceptable because people are judged less harshly when they bear less responsibility for wrongdoing (Shaver, 1985; Weiner, 1995). Second, collective responsibility may seem to justify the prejudice by implying other group members feel the same way. Expressing prejudice may seem less problematic when “everyone is doing it,” even if the individual is still viewed as causally responsible for expressing those views (cf. Tedeschi & Reiss, 1981). Both these reasons point to our central claim: that outside observers hold highly entitative groups more responsible than less-entitative groups for an individual member's prejudice, and that these collective responsibility judgments make the individual's behavior seem more socially acceptable and less deserving of condemnation. Stated formally, we hypothesize the following indirect effect:

Hypothesis 1 (H1). Group entitativity increases how collectively responsible the group is held for individual members' prejudice, which in turn increases the license afforded to these specific individuals.

The process through which collective responsibility licenses individuals' prejudicial acts is conceptually distinct from the collective-interest mechanism identified in previous research (Effron & Knowles, 2015). The collective-interest mechanism involves judgments about an individual's reasons for acting (Malle, Knobe, O'Laughlin, Pearce, & Nelson, 2000)—whether he or she thinks expressing prejudice will advance or protect the group's interests. In contrast, the collective-responsibility mechanism involves judgments concerning the group's causal relationship to the act—whether the group caused or allowed the expression of prejudice (Lickel et al., 2001; Lickel & Onuki, 2015). Conceptually, collective interests can motivate prejudice without the group bearing any responsibility. For example, a White American could refuse to shop at stores owned by Asian Americans, despite the protests of his White friends, because he thinks Asians are putting White-owned stores out of business. Conversely, a group could bear responsibility for prejudice that is motivated by concerns other than collective interests. The White American could refuse to patronize Asian-owned stores, not because he thinks this will help Whites, but because his White friends convinced him all Asian stores sell poor-quality goods.

1.3.3. How collective responsibility harms the individual's group

We have argued that the collective responsibility pinned on entitative groups benefits the individual expressing prejudice. However, it may also harm the rest of the individual's group. People often condemn and punish those they hold responsible for a wrongdoing (Lickel, Miller, Stenstrom, Denson, & Schmader, 2006; Weiner, 1995). By increasing how responsible the group seems, entitativity could therefore increase how much observers condemn the group for a member's prejudice.

In this sense, entitativity may deprive groups of *collective license* for an individual member's prejudice, even as it grants the individual herself a license. Whereas individual license lets people off the hook for their own actions (Effron & Monin, 2010), collective license—a term we introduce here—lets groups off the hook for a member's actions. Like collective responsibility, collective license is a judgment about how an individual's behavior reflects on the rest of his or her group. But whereas collective responsibility is about causation (i.e., did the group directly or indirectly bring about the individual's behavior?; Lickel et al., 2001), collective license is about moral culpability (i.e., should the group be morally condemned for the individual's behavior?). To further investigate our claim that the appearance of entitativity benefits an individual who expresses prejudice while harming his or her group, we tested whether entitativity increases the degree of license afforded

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