



No reliable evidence of a 'moral credential' effect

A recommendation by [Chris Chambers](#) based on peer reviews by [Marek Vranka](#) and [Štěpán Bahník](#) of the STAGE 2 REPORT:

Qinyu Xiao, Lok Ching Li, Ying Lam Au, Wing Tung Chung, See Ngueh Tan, Gilad Feldman (2024) Licensing via credentials: Replication Registered Report of Monin and Miller (2001) with extensions investigating the domain-specificity of moral credentials and associations with trait reputational concern. OSF, ver. 7, peer-reviewed and recommended by Peer Community in Registered Reports. <https://doi.org/10.17605/OSF.IO/PHYM3>

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Chambers, C. (2024) No reliable evidence of a 'moral credential' effect. *Peer Community in Registered Reports*, 100726. [10.24072/pci.rr.100726](https://doi.org/10.24072/pci.rr.100726)

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Does being good free people up to be bad? A large literature in social psychology suggests that it might, with evidence that *moral licensing* gives people a perception that actions deemed morally questionable, or socially undesirable, will be tolerated more readily if they have demonstrated a past history of praiseworthy, moral behaviour. In a formative study, Monin and Miller (2001) reported that having a track record of moral credentials as being nonprejudiced (e.g. non-sexist or non-racist) increased the willingness of participants to later express a prejudiced attitude. For example, in their Study 2 they found that participants who built up their moral credit by selecting a Black woman in a hypothetical recruitment task were then more willing to prefer a White man for a second job, compared to participants who did not have the opportunity to initially recommend a Black woman. These results have prompted a burgeoning literature on moral licensing, albeit one that is mixed and has been found to exhibit substantial publication bias. In the current study, Xiao et al. (2024) undertook a large online replication of Study 2 in Monin and Miller (2001), asking whether previous moral behaviours that furnish participants with moral credentials make them more likely to then engage in morally questionable behaviours (N=932). The authors also extended earlier work by testing whether moral credentials license immoral behaviours more effectively in the same domain (e.g. within sex) than in a different domain (e.g. across sex and race), asking whether there is a negative relationship between expression of prejudice and *trait reputational concern* (fear of negative evaluation), and whether moral credentials attenuate any such observed relationship. The results constitute a resounding non-replication, revealing no reliable evidence of a moral credential effect, no evidence that higher trait reputational concern predicts the expression of potentially problematic preferences, and no evidence that moral credentials moderate any such association. In discussing

the implications of their findings, the authors call for further replication attempts and investigations of the effectiveness of experimental manipulations of moral licensing. The Stage 2 manuscript was evaluated over one round of in-depth review. Based on detailed responses to the reviewers' comments, the recommender judged that the manuscript met the Stage 2 criteria and therefore awarded a positive recommendation. **URL to the preregistered Stage 1 protocol:** <https://osf.io/uxgrk> **Level of bias control achieved:** Level 6. *No part of the data or evidence that was used to answer the research question was generated until after IPA.* **List of eligible PCI RR-friendly journals:**

- [Collabra: Psychology](#)
- [Experimental Psychology](#)
- [F1000Research](#)
- [International Review of Social Psychology](#)
- [Meta-Psychology](#)
- [Peer Community Journal](#)
- [PeerJ](#)
- [Royal Society Open Science](#)
- [Social Psychological Bulletin](#)
- [Studia Psychologica](#)
- [Swiss Psychology Open](#)

References:

1. Monin, B., & Miller, D. T. (2001). Moral credentials and the expression of prejudice. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 81, 33-43.
<https://psycnet.apa.org/doi/10.1037/0022-3514.81.1.33>
2. Xiao, Q., Ching Li, L., Au, Y. L., Chung, W. T., Tan, S. N. & Feldman, G. (2024). Licensing via credentials: Replication Registered Report of Monin and Miller (2001) with extensions investigating the domain-specificity of moral credentials and associations with trait reputational concern [Stage 2]. Acceptance of Version 7 by Peer Community in Registered Reports. <https://osf.io/zgf8y>

Reviews

Evaluation round #1

DOI or URL of the preprint: <https://osf.io/xqu7e>

Version of the preprint: 6

Authors' reply, 29 March 2024

Revised manuscript: <https://osf.io/zgf8y>

All revised materials uploaded to: <https://osf.io/phym3/>, updated manuscript under sub-directory "PCIRR Stage 2\PCI-RR submission following R&R"

[Download author's reply](#)

[Download tracked changes file](#)

Decision by [Chris Chambers](#) , posted 25 March 2024, validated 25 March 2024

Minor Revision

Two of the reviewers from Stage 1 kindly returned to evaluate your Stage 2 submission. As you will see, the reviewers are broadly satisfied with the manuscript and offer some minor suggestions for presentational clarifications, as well as a potential issue to address in the Discussion. Following submission of your revision and response, I anticipate being able to issue a final positive recommendation of your Stage 2 manuscript without further in-depth review.

Reviewed by [Marek Vranka](#), 22 March 2024

Dear all,

I have just finished going through the Stage 2 submission of "Licensing via Credentials: Replication of Monin and Miller (2001)," and I must say, I'm thoroughly impressed! The authors have done a commendable job and fully adhered to the preregistered plan.

I have only minor comments and suggestions, which are detailed in the enclosed Word document.

Great work to everyone involved!

Best regards,

Marek Vranka

[Download the review](#)

Reviewed by [Štěpán Bahník](#) , 07 March 2024

The report generally follows the pre-registered procedure and any possible deviations are sufficiently justified. Therefore, I have just a few minor comments:

1) I believe that according to the APA style commas should be included before and after statistics (e.g. "... and $t(868) = -3.01, p = .006$ for the gender..." should be "... and, $t(868) = -3.01, p = .006$, for the gender...").

2) The results were quite hard to follow for me. This might be a matter of preference, so feel free to ignore the recommendation, but I believe that the results would be easier to understand if they used more concrete language. For example, "Also, domain-inconsistent credentials did not show support for an effect compared with controls..." could be something like "Also, participants who had domain-inconsistent credentials did not significantly differ in their hiring preferences from participants without credentials..." or even "Also, participants presented with a Black (or female) star applicant did not significantly differ in their hiring preferences of males (or Whites)—that is, in the different domain—from participants presented with a White male star applicant...".

3) I wonder whether a possible explanation for the lack of the credential effect might be a different perception of choosing the star applicant now and 20 year ago. It is possible that 20 year ago participants were more likely to feel that they are choosing the applicant "despite" their race or sex and now, they might be more likely to feel that they are choosing the applicant "because" of their race or sex. This would be partly suggested by the higher proportion of participants selecting the black/female star applicant than white male star applicant in the current study, while there was no significant difference in the original study (even though the study does not report the proportion of participants choosing the star applicant in each condition). Unfortunately, we

do not have data about the perception of morality of choosing the star applicant in the original study, but is there some result that would suggest against this explanation? The discussion now mentions the possibility of cultural change as well as of the effectiveness of the manipulation, but I think this is a slightly different point than the one already made in the discussion. That is, it relates to the change in the effectiveness of the manipulation rather than of the change in the perception of the dependent variable.

Signed,

Štěpán Bahník