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Stamkou, E.; van Kleef, G.A.; Homan, A.C.

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## Feeling entitled to rules: Entitled individuals prevent norm violators from rising up the ranks<sup>☆</sup>



Eftychia Stamkou<sup>a,\*</sup>, Gerben A. van Kleef<sup>a</sup>, Astrid C. Homan<sup>b</sup>

<sup>a</sup> University of Amsterdam, Department of Social Psychology, PO Box 15900, 1001 NK Amsterdam, the Netherlands

<sup>b</sup> University of Amsterdam, Department of Work and Organizational Psychology, PO Box 15919, 1001 NK Amsterdam, the Netherlands

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### ABSTRACT

Social norms regulate group processes and ensure group survival. Despite the pivotal role of norms in social life, norm violations are widespread. It is therefore crucial to understand what motivates people to reinforce norms and prevent norm violators from gaining influence. Here we examine how psychological entitlement modulates observers' tendencies to reject norm violators' claims to higher rank. On the one hand, entitled individuals behave loosely themselves, which may render them tolerant of others' norm violations. On the other hand, entitled individuals are concerned about their standing, which may fuel negative reactions to norm violators' claims to higher rank. We tested these competing hypotheses in three studies. Participants read vignettes of an organizational meeting (Study 1) or a political debate (Studies 2–3) during which a protagonist either followed or violated social norms. We measured participants' trait entitlement (Study 1) or manipulated entitlement with a writing prompt task (Studies 2–3). The results showed that participants generally rejected norm violators' claims to higher rank. However, the rejection of norm violators was stronger among high-entitlement participants, who were less willing to support norm violators as leaders (passive rejection; Studies 1–2) and more willing to punish them (active rejection; Study 3). When confronted with norm violators, high-entitlement participants experienced greater threat to their social position, which mediated their rejection of norm violators (Studies 2–3). Entitled individuals' tendency to reprimand norm violators highlights the potentially adaptive benefits of entitlement as a social-regulatory mechanism in organizations and society at large.

Social norms are guiding principles that constrain behavior to generate appropriate conduct (Cialdini & Trost, 1998). Norms thus keep anarchy at bay and create order in societies. Despite their critical role in regulating social life, norm violations are ubiquitous. It is therefore important to understand the factors that promote norm enforcement and prevent norm violators from gaining influence. Here we propose that psychological entitlement – an individual differences characteristic that propels individuals to break rules to enhance their status – moderates observers' tendencies to reject norm violators who aspire to positions of influence. Extant work suggests contradictory predictions regarding entitlement's effect on reactions to norm violators. On the one hand, theories of norm compliance predict that individuals with a higher sense of entitlement (henceforth, “entitled individuals” for brevity) react less negatively to norm violators, due to entitled individuals' loose attitudes toward norms (Campbell, Bonacci, Shelton, Exline, & Bushman, 2004). On the other hand, theories of status threat

predict that entitled individuals react more negatively to norm violators, whose behavior radiates power and is therefore perceived as antagonistic to entitled individuals' interests to enhance their status (Levine, 2005). We tested these competing predictions about the moderating role of entitlement in a first study, and then we replicated the observed moderation effect in two follow-up studies where we also tested an underlying mechanism. The studies involved a range of daily norm violations, alternative operationalizations of entitlement, and active as well as passive forms of rejection. Below, we first elaborate on the benefits of following norms and individuals' reactions to norm violators, and then we explicate how entitlement enhances both rule breaking and status concerns, which may differentially impact individuals' tendencies to prevent norm violators from rising up.

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\* Corresponding author.

E-mail addresses: [e.stamkou@uva.nl](mailto:e.stamkou@uva.nl) (E. Stamkou), [g.a.vankleef@uva.nl](mailto:g.a.vankleef@uva.nl) (G.A. van Kleef), [a.c.homan@uva.nl](mailto:a.c.homan@uva.nl) (A.C. Homan).

## 1. The benefits of following social norms

Social norms create a clear and well-defined paradigm of behavior that facilitates the functioning of individuals across multiple levels. On the interpersonal level, norms prevent one from embarrassment and increase the predictability of others' behavior (Cialdini & Goldstein, 2004). On the group level, norms capture groups' central values, help coordinate activities, and ensure group survival (Kiesler & Kiesler, 1970). Since groups distribute resources in response to members' adherence to group norms, acceptance or rejection by the group is the primary reinforcer available to the group for shaping members' behavior (Hackman & Oldham, 1976). On the societal level, norms promote conformity by regulating individuals' socialization process early on. Young children understand the rules governing many social interactions and enforce the rules by punishing violators (Schmidt, Butler, Heinz, & Tomasello, 2016). Furthermore, norms dictate the interactions of people in all social encounters by clarifying social roles that are commensurate with individuals' social standing (Parsons, 1964). Karl Marx, for instance, suggested that distinct social roles across social classes maintain certain patterns of relating and behaving, which in turn reinforce social stratification (Avineri, 1971). Consequently, social norms create a sense of common ground that make societies run smoothly, help preserve the social order, and protect the hierarchical status quo (Friesen, Kay, Eibach, & Galinsky, 2014).

In light of the instrumental value of social norms, it stands to reason that people should favor norm-following rather than norm-violating behavior. Indeed, research indicates that members who follow the norms are strongly endorsed and likely to emerge as leaders because they are considered more trustworthy (van Knippenberg & van Knippenberg, 2005). Furthermore, norms create a clear model of behavior, which reduces uncertainty (Friesen et al., 2014). Given that uncertainty reduction is a fundamental human motive, members who obey the rules should be viewed in a positive light and those who break the rules should be degraded (Hogg, 2000). Considering that norm violators pose a potential threat to smoothly functioning groups and societies, it comes as no surprise that negative reactions to norm violations are common (Jetten & Hornsey, 2014; Van Kleef, Wanders, Stamkou, & Homan, 2015). For instance, norm violations evoke anger and blame, and they are met with gossip, rumors, pillory, and derision, which are all powerful means to correct group members' behavior (Baumeister, Zhang, & Vohs, 2004; Beersma & Van Kleef, 2012; Keltner, Van Kleef, Chen, & Kraus, 2008). Furthermore, norm violators are more likely to be punished, to be considered uncommitted to the group, and to lose their leadership positions, compared to norm abiders (Boyd & Richerson, 1992). These reactions suggest that violating norms is perceived as disruptive and harmful to the group and society at large. Negative reactions to norm violations are therefore vital because well-functioning groups and societies depend not only on people's willingness to follow the norms but also on people's readiness to reinforce the norms when someone violates them (Henrich & Henrich, 2007). Thus, it is important to understand what motivates people to enforce the norms by rejecting norm violators.

Despite the intuitive expectation that norm violators should be universally rejected, several strands of theorizing and research describe a more nuanced view of reactions to norm violations (Van Kleef et al., 2015). In fact, norm violations can bring about positive outcomes for the transgressor because they signal autonomy and freedom to act at will – qualities that are valued in certain cultures. For instance, norm violators were perceived as more powerful than norm followers in a broad range of individualistic cultures (Bellezza, Gino, & Keinan, 2014; Stamkou et al., in press; Stamkou & Van Kleef, 2014; Van Kleef, Homan, Finkenauer, Gündemir, & Stamkou, 2011). Moreover, research in marketing and psychology showed that norm violators who benefited the group were more likely to be given power (Popa, Phillips, & Robertson, 2014; Van Kleef, Homan, Finkenauer, Blaker, & Heerdink, 2012). These theoretical and empirical accounts point to norm

violators' potential to rise to up the ranks, a potential that is further illustrated by historical and recent examples of norm violators rising to positions of influence in the political arena. Therefore, understanding what makes people enforce norms by challenging rather than supporting norm violators becomes all the more important when violators aspire to gain influence.

## 2. Entitlement, rule breaking, and status enhancement

Here we examine whether psychological entitlement – an individual differences characteristic – moderates observers' tendencies to reject norm violators' claims to higher rank. It is important to note that there exist two distinct variants of entitlement: a pathological and a non-pathological one (Crowe, LoPilato, Campbell, & Miller, 2016; Miller et al., 2016). The pathological variant is associated with emotional vulnerability, low self-esteem, negative affect, childhood abuse, maladaptive parenting, substance use, and conventionalism, whereas the non-pathological variant is associated with emotional stability, high self-esteem, positive affect, antagonism and a tendency to enhance one's status as well as antisocial behavior and a tendency to break rules (Crowe et al., 2016; Gibson-Beverly & Schwartz, 2008; Lessard, Greenberger, Chen, & Farruggia, 2011; McDermott, Schwartz, & Trevathan-Minnis, 2012; Schwartz & Tylka, 2008; Tomlinson, 2013). Non-pathological entitlement is an interesting moderator because its associated rule-breaking behavior and status-enhancement tendencies lead to contradictory predictions regarding entitled individuals' reactions to norm violators, as we explain below. We therefore focused on the non-pathological variant of entitlement (henceforth, "entitlement" for brevity) to shed light on these paradoxical reactions.

Entitlement refers to a sense of unconditional deservingness and inflated self-importance (Exline, Baumeister, Bushman, Campbell, & Finkel, 2004; Grubbs & Exline, 2016).<sup>1</sup> Entitled individuals' sense of deservingness makes them more likely to violate social norms that stand in the way of obtaining desired outcomes. A plethora of studies shows a strong association between entitlement and norm-violating behavior across different domains. Entitlement is related to research misconduct (Tamborski, Brown, & Chowning, 2012), minor acts of theft (Campbell et al., 2004), endorsement of unethical tactics in negotiation (Neville & Fisk, 2018), failure to follow instructions (Zitek & Jordan, 2017), deviant behavior in the classroom (Taylor, Bailey, & Barber, 2015), cheating (Brown, Budzek, & Tamborski, 2009), politicking at work (Harvey & Harris, 2010), and organizational deviance (Harvey, Harris, Gillis, & Martinko, 2014). Furthermore, entitled individuals anticipate special treatment without feeling the need to reciprocate, thereby violating most established norms of social exchange (Hochwarter, Meurs, Perrew, Royle, & Matherly, 2007). Thus, entitled individuals have a looser attitude toward norms that predisposes them to violate norms when doing so can further their goals.

It is conceivable that entitled individuals' freewheeling behavior

<sup>1</sup> Entitlement (i.e., the non-pathological variant) is conceptually and empirically distinct from other constructs. First, the attribute of feeling entitled to outcomes regardless of one's effort or merit differentiates entitlement from deservingness, which reflects the expectation to receive benefits contingent on just outcomes (Feather, 2003). Second, entitlement differs from narcissism, because, even though they correlate, narcissism describes a combination of other-exploitation, self-sufficiency, exhibitionism, superiority, and vanity (Krizan & Herlache, 2017). Finally, entitlement positively correlates with self-esteem, which is a key aspect of non-pathological entitlement because it reflects individuals' evaluation of their self-worth (i.e., non-exploitive entitlement according to Lessard et al., 2011). Importantly, entitlement measures that tap the pathological aspect of entitlement and assess the belief that one can exploit others to achieve one's goals negatively correlate with self-esteem (i.e., exploitive entitlement according to Lessard et al., 2011). Exploratory correlations between self-esteem and measures of exploitive and non-exploitive entitlement are reported in the Supplement.

renders them more tolerant toward other individuals who break rules. Consistent with this argument, cross-cultural studies showed that people in “loose” cultures – cultures that have weaker social norms and greater tolerance to deviance – afford a wider range of permissible behavior, show weaker neurobiological reactions to norm violations, and are less prone to sanction violators than people in “tight” cultures (Gelfand et al., 2011; Mu, Kitayama, Han, & Gelfand, 2015). Conversely, individuals in tight cultures are more likely to support norm-following leaders than individuals in loose cultures (Stankou et al., in press). These findings imply that individuals who have a loose attitude toward rules would also be less willing to enforce the rules by renouncing norm violators. This argument is also consistent with people's general tendency to respond more favorably to similar rather than dissimilar others (Byrne, 1971). For instance, research on consumer behavior shows that individuals who tend to buy nonconforming clothing to assert their differentness ascribe higher status to other individuals who violated the conventional dress-code in a formal setting than to individuals who followed the dress-code (Bellezza et al., 2014). Therefore, high-entitlement individuals, who tend to behave more loosely and unconventionally themselves, may be expected to show less negative reactions to norm violators compared to low-entitlement individuals.

It is important to consider, however, that entitled individuals often break rules to obtain outcomes that enhance their social position. This association between entitlement and status-enhancement bears on entitled individuals' inflated self-importance (Levine, 2005; Zitek & Jordan, 2016). Entitled individuals should be especially concerned about social status because status fuels self-esteem and engenders privileges and recognition desired by the entitled person (Fournier, 2009). Accordingly, recent studies show that entitlement fosters motivation to use both dominance and prestige behavioral strategies to enhance one's social status (Lange, Redford, & Crusius, in press). Moreover, entitlement relates to self-promoting values, such as power and achievement, which focus on improving one's social position (Redford & Ratliff, 2018). Further evidence suggesting that entitled individuals seek to advance their social position comes from research showing that they allocate more unearned money to themselves (Zitek, Jordan, Monin, & Leach, 2010), behave unethically to advance themselves at the expense of others (Ackerman & Donnellan, 2013), claim higher salaries than well-matched colleagues (Campbell et al., 2004), and try to receive more output for the same level of input as others (Huseman, Hatfield, & Miles, 1987).

In light of entitled individuals' chronic status-enhancement interests, any threats to their social standing are likely to provoke negative responses. Research shows that, under conditions of threat, entitled people respond aggressively. For instance, they are more likely to reject unfair offers in an ultimatum game to punish the other player (Ding, Wu, Ji, Chen, & Van Lange, 2017), to take revenge in response to perceived snubs (Bishop & Lane, 2002), and to support retribution against lawbreakers (Redford & Ratliff, 2018). Criminological accounts of punishment suggest that the endorsement of retributive justice depends on the symbolic meaning of the transgression (Morris, 2002). People who perceive a transgression as threatening the status quo and who are motivated to maintain it endorse retribution more (Wenzel, Okimoto, & Cameron, 2012). For instance, individuals who have vested interests in the maintenance of the status quo due to their higher-standing positions are more likely to reject norm violators (Stankou, Van Kleef, Homan, & Galinsky, 2016). Indeed, previous research found that entitled individuals' support for retribution against rule breakers correlated with their view that violations threaten the status quo, and with their motivation to re-establish the status quo through punishment (Redford & Ratliff, 2018). These instances of antagonistic reactions suggest that entitled individuals are very defensive of their resources and feel threatened when their interests are hurt. Given that norm violators radiate an aura of power and their behavior threatens to undermine the status quo (Bellezza et al., 2014; Stankou et al., in press;

Van Kleef et al., 2011), entitled individuals may view norm violators' behavior as antagonistic to their status interests. In contrast, entitled individuals may view a norm follower's behavior as allowing them more space for pursuing their status interests. Based on this logic, high-entitlement individuals may be expected to react *more* negatively toward norm violators compared to low-entitlement individuals out of status concerns.

In sum, the aforementioned theoretical arguments suggest that entitlement may either decrease or increase individuals' tendencies to reprimand norm violators. This impartial theoretical standpoint allows testing the possibility that entitlement may have positive effects on norm enforcement, thereby extending previous work that has largely focused on entitlement's negative effects (Campbell et al., 2004).

### 3. The present studies

Given that norm violations obstruct smoothly functioning groups and societies, it stands to reason that people are generally motivated to prevent norm violators from gaining influence. Thus, we hypothesized that observers would reject norm violators' claims to higher rank to a greater extent than norm followers' claims. We derived competing hypotheses regarding the moderating role of entitlement. On the one hand, given entitled individuals' looser approach to norms, they may respond relatively *less* negatively to norm violators' claims to higher rank compared to low-entitlement individuals. On the other hand, because of entitled individuals' vested interest in enhancing their status, they may respond relatively *more* negatively to norm violators' claims to higher rank compared to low-entitlement individuals. We tested these competing hypotheses in a first study, and then conducted two follow-up studies to replicate the observed effect and to examine the underlying process.

The studies employed manipulations of norm violation in the workplace (Study 1) and the political arena (Studies 2 and 3), and included alternative operationalizations of entitlement as a stable trait (Study 1) and a transient state (Studies 2 and 3).<sup>2</sup> Furthermore, we assessed the tendency to reject norm violators' claims to rank by tapping two types of responses that denote rejection. First, connecting with research that has demonstrated links between norm violations and power dynamics (for a review, see Van Kleef et al., 2015), we examined a passive form of rejecting norm violators that consists of refraining from supporting them as leaders (Studies 1 and 2). Second, extending previous research to more active forms of rejection, we examined the intention to punish norm violators (Study 3).

All studies were conducted in accordance with APA regulations and were approved by the local Ethics Review Board. Sample sizes were determined prior to each study based on power analysis. Data collection continued until the prospecting sample size was reached. No statistical analyses were performed until all data were collected. We used G\*Power 3\* (Faul, Erdfelder, Lang, & Buchner, 2007) to calculate the required sample size of our studies. In the power analyses we used the cumulative effect size of previous studies to compute the required sample of each follow-up study in order to achieve statistical power of at least 0.80, given an alpha level of 0.05. When there was no previous study available or no indication in the literature of the size of the hypothesized effect, we used contemporary conventions regarding number of participants per condition (Lakens & Evers, 2014). All measures, manipulations, and exclusions in each study are disclosed in the article and the Supplement.

<sup>2</sup> Entitlement can be both a trait that remains stable across time as well as a state that waxes and wanes depending on the situation (Zitek & Vincent, 2015). For instance, people's sense of entitlement increased when they were reminded of an unfair treatment (Zitek et al., 2010), felt ostracized (Poon, Chen, & DeWall, 2013), and were exposed to entitlement-related messages (O'Brien, Anastasio, & Bushman, 2011).

## 4. Study 1

### 4.1. Method

#### 4.1.1. Sample

Since existing literature provided no indication of the size of the effect we could expect in Study 1, we aimed for a large sample to ensure we would achieve sufficient statistical power (about 100 participants per condition). The final sample consisted of 201 participants (28 men, 172 women, and 1 transgender;  $M_{\text{age}} = 19.78$ ,  $SD = 2.63$ ) who were randomly assigned to the norm violation or norm adherence condition. Participants were Dutch students who were recruited through an online university participant pool ([www.lab.uva.nl](http://www.lab.uva.nl)) and were compensated with course credits.

#### 4.1.2. Measuring entitlement

We measured participants' trait entitlement using five items from a validated non-exploitive Entitlement scale (Lessard et al., 2011). Sample items are "I deserve the best things in life", "I am entitled to get into the career that I want", and "I deserve to be treated with respect by everyone" ( $\alpha = .83$ ).<sup>3</sup>

#### 4.1.3. Manipulating norm violation

We manipulated violation of or adherence to three norms that are typical for organizational meetings, that is, the punctuality, discretion, and talk-in-turns norms (Allen, Lehmann-Willenbrock, & Rogelberg, 2015). In the norm violation vignette, the focal employee, named Peter, arrived late to the meeting, caused some commotion while getting a cup of coffee midway through the meeting, and interrupted his colleague to express his opinion regarding how the company should deal with a particular organizational issue. In the norm adherence vignette, Peter arrived well on time, waited until the end of the meeting to get his coffee since he considered it inappropriate to do so midway, and expressed his opinion regarding the policy the company should follow only after his colleague had rounded off. Importantly, the focal employee encapsulated his norm-violating or norm-adhering behavior at the end of the vignette by stating "...rules are there to be broken" or "...rules are there for a reason", respectively (see Appendix SA for the full vignettes). Each of these violations has been examined separately in previous research and has been proven effective (Stankou et al., 2016; in press; Van Kleef et al., 2011, 2012).

#### 4.1.4. Measuring dependent variables

After the norm violation manipulation, a brief scenario described that the focal employee applied for a leadership vacancy in his organization. The scenario was followed by four questions measuring leader support that were based on the Leader Support scale (Rast, Gaffney, Hogg, & Crisp, 2012). Sample items are "I would...vote for this employee" and "...trust his decisions as leader" ( $\alpha = .94$ ). Finally, to check the norm violation manipulation, we assessed participants' perceptions of the employee's norm violation versus adherence with a validated 4-item scale (Van Kleef et al., 2011). Sample items are "I think this employee...behaves inappropriately" and the reverse-coded "...complies with the rules" ( $\alpha = .98$ ).

<sup>3</sup> The items we used from Lessard and associates' scale measure non-exploitive entitlement, which is consistent with the non-pathological variant of entitlement and focal to our theorizing. Additionally, we included seven items that measure exploitive entitlement, which reflects the notion that one can exploit others to achieve one's ends (the pathological variant of entitlement). Because non-exploitive entitlement was not focal to our theorizing, we did not include the additional items in the analyses we present here. However, we explored whether exploitive entitlement moderates the effects of norm violation and reported the results in the Supplement.

### 4.2. Results

Complete inferential statistics for all analyses appear in Table 1 and descriptives in Table S1. The analyses indicated that the focal employee was perceived as more norm violating in the norm violation condition than in the norm adherence condition (*Mean Difference, MD* = -4.11, 95% CI [-4.33, -3.89],  $d = -5.30$ ),  $b = -2.05$ ,  $SE = 0.05$ ,  $t(197) = -37.74$ ,  $p < .001$ , 95% CI [-2.16, -1.95],  $\eta_p^2 = .10$ .<sup>4</sup> No main effect of entitlement and no interaction emerged. Thus, the manipulation was successful.<sup>5</sup>

In line with expectations, a main effect of norm violation indicated that leader support was higher in the norm adherence than in the norm violation condition ( $MD = 1.69$ , 95% CI [1.36, 2.02],  $d = -5.30$ ),  $b = 1.41$ ,  $SE = 0.08$ ,  $t(197) = 9.99$ ,  $p < .001$ , 95% CI [0.64, 0.96],  $\eta_p^2 = 0.34$ . No main effect of entitlement emerged. Importantly, there was a significant Norm violation  $\times$  Entitlement effect on leader support,  $b = 0.23$ ,  $SE = 0.09$ ,  $t(197) = 2.68$ ,  $p = .008$ , 95% CI [0.06, 0.40],  $\eta_p^2 = .04$ . The pattern of the interaction indicated that the tendency to prefer norm abiders to norm violators was stronger among high-entitlement participants,  $b = 1.02$ ,  $SE = 0.11$ ,  $t(197) = 8.95$ ,  $p < .001$ , 95% CI [0.79, 1.24],  $\eta_p^2 = .29$ , than among low-entitlement participants,  $b = 0.59$ ,  $SE = 0.11$ ,  $t(197) = 5.16$ ,  $p < .001$ , 95% CI [0.36, 0.81],  $\eta_p^2 = .12$  (see Fig. 1). These results suggest that high-entitlement individuals respond more rather than less negatively to norm violators as compared to low-entitlement individuals. Additionally, a Johnson-Neyman analysis showed that the effect of norm violation on leader support was significant when entitlement was  $> 1.91$  standard deviations below the mean (96.52% of values) but not significant with lower values of entitlement (3.48% of values).

### 4.3. Discussion

The results of Study 1 suggest that norm violators are less likely to be supported as leaders than norm followers. Furthermore, Study 1 indicates that entitlement amplifies rather than attenuates rejection of norm violators. These findings suggest that, when confronted with transgressors who aspire to rise in the hierarchy, entitled individuals may feel threatened about their social position, which should increase their tendency to punish norm violators (Redford & Ratliff, 2018). We therefore hypothesized that the interaction between norm violation and entitlement would be mediated by entitled individuals' experienced threat to their status.

In the next two studies we aimed to replicate the interaction between entitlement and norm violation in a different context, while manipulating entitlement to establish causality. Additionally, we examined whether status threat accounts for the moderating role of entitlement on rejection of norm violators' claims to higher rank.

## 5. Study 2

### 5.1. Method

#### 5.1.1. Sample

A power analysis based on the effect size we observed in Study 1 ( $f = .20$ ) indicated that the required sample was 191. We obtained data

<sup>4</sup> We report two kinds of effect size measures, partial eta squared ( $\eta_p^2$ ) for main and interaction effects, and Cohen's  $d$  for comparisons between two means. Partial eta squared is the variance explained by a given predictor after excluding variance explained by other predictors. Partial eta squared values of 0.01, 0.06, and 0.13 represent small, medium, and large effect sizes, respectively. Cohen's  $d$  is a standardized group mean difference measure. Cohen's  $d$  values of 0.2, 0.5, and 0.8 represent small, medium, and large effect sizes, respectively (Cohen, 1988).

<sup>5</sup> Furthermore, the manipulation of norm violation did not influence participants' self-reported entitlement,  $F(199) = 0.24$ ,  $p = .629$ ,  $\eta_p^2 < .01$ .

**Table 1**  
Inferential statistics for the effects of norm violation and entitlement on perceived norm violation and leader support in Study 1.

	Norm violation					Entitlement					Norm violation × Entitlement				
	b (SE)	95% CI	t	p	$\eta_p^2$	b (SE)	95% CI	t	p	$\eta_p^2$	b (SE)	95% CI	t	p	$\eta_p^2$
Perceived norm violation	-2.05 (0.05)	[-2.16, -1.95]	-37.74	< .001	.88	0.10 (0.06)	[-0.02, 0.21]	1.68	.095	.01	-0.10 (0.06)	[-0.21, 0.02]	-1.66	.100	.01
Leader support	0.80 (0.08)	[0.64, 0.96]	9.99	< .001	.34	0.10 (0.06)	[-0.07, 0.27]	1.12	.263	.01	0.23 (0.09)	[0.06, 0.40]	2.68	.008	.04

Note. CI = confidence interval. Degrees of freedom (df) = 197. Norm violation was contrast-coded (-1 for norm violation and 1 for norm adherence) and entitlement was centered at its mean. Significant interaction effects were probed at ± 1SD about the mean of entitlement (Aiken & West, 1991).

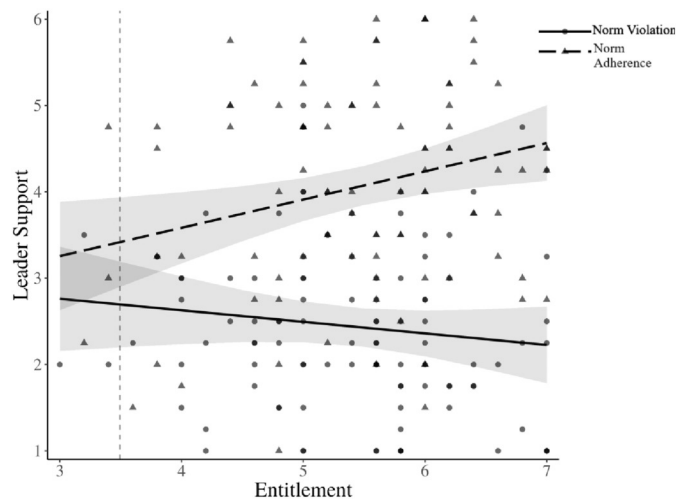


Fig. 1. Leader support as a function of entitlement and norm violation in Study 1. The dashed vertical line indicates the Johnson-Neyman significance region.

from 231 participants, out of whom 189 completed the study. Participants (93 men, 94 women, and 2 transgender;  $M_{age} = 37.44$ ,  $SD = 15.98$ ) were randomly assigned to a 2(low vs. high entitlement) X 2(norm violation vs. norm adherence) between-subjects experimental design. Participants were Dutch citizens who were recruited in public spaces and were compensated with a chocolate bar or the opportunity to win one of two €25 lottery tickets that were raffled off at the end of the study.

5.1.2. Manipulating entitlement

We manipulated entitlement using a writing task that has been successfully used in previous studies (Redford & Ratliff, 2018; Vincent & Kouchaki, 2016; Zitek & Vincent, 2015). The task was presented as a survey that examines how people view themselves in relation to other people. Although people respond to surveys based on their personal beliefs, this method can also be used to temporarily induce specific beliefs when people are directed to think in a certain way (Salancik & Conway, 1975). The task required that participants write three reasons to support each of three statements that aimed at inducing feelings of entitlement (i.e., 9 reasons in total). The content of the writing task was based on three key statements from the entitlement scale we used in Study 1 (Lessard et al., 2011). Specifically, participants in the high-entitlement condition were asked to write three reasons each why they should (a) demand the best in life, (b) get into the career they want, and (c) be treated with respect by others. Participants in the low-entitlement condition were prompted to argue the opposite. The goal of the low-entitlement condition was to make participants feel that they did not deserve everything, rather than that they deserved nothing. They were therefore asked to write three reasons each why they should (a) not demand the best in life, (b) not necessarily get into the career that they want, and (c) not always expect to be treated with respect.

5.1.3. Manipulating norm violation

We manipulated violation of or adherence to constitutional rules by a political candidate. The candidate allegedly participates in a political debate where he is asked to express his core values. The candidate states that he strongly believes that rules are there to be broken or that rules should be followed at all times. Furthermore, the candidate sets forth that he is ready to break all the rules that prevent the nation from achieving its goals or follow all the rules that allow the nation to achieve its goals (see Appendix SA for the full vignettes). This manipulation has been successfully employed in previous studies (Stankou et al., 2016).

5.1.4. Measuring dependent variables

A brief scenario described that the political candidate was running for prime minister in the participant's country. The scenario was followed by the same leader support scale we used in Study 1, which was adjusted to fit the political context of Study 2 ( $\alpha = .93$ ). We then assessed perceived threat to status using items from a validated scale measuring Perceived Threat and Opportunity (Zhou, Shin, & Cannella Jr., 2008). The items were "If this candidate was elected, I...would feel that my social position is precarious and unstable", "...am afraid that he would introduce policies that would take benefits away from me", and the reverse-coded "...would see opportunities to advance my social position" ( $\alpha = .82$ ). Finally, we checked the norm violation manipulation using the same scale as in Study 1 ( $\alpha = .93$ ) and the entitlement manipulation using the scale we used to measure entitlement in Study 1 ( $\alpha = .91$ ).<sup>6</sup>

5.2. Results

Complete inferential statistics for all analyses appear in Table 2 and descriptives in Table S2. The analyses showed that the political candidate was considered more norm violating in the norm violation than in the norm adherence condition ( $MD = -2.63$ , 95% CI[-2.35, -2.91],  $d = -2.72$ ),  $F(1,185) = 348.80$ ,  $p < .001$ ,  $\eta_p^2 = .65$ . No main effect of entitlement and no interaction on perceived norm violation emerged. Additionally, participants felt more entitled in the high-entitlement than in the low-entitlement condition ( $MD = -1.25$ , 95% CI[-1.63, -0.87],  $d = -0.94$ ),  $F(1,185) = 41.92$ ,  $p < .001$ ,  $\eta_p^2 = .19$ . No main effect of norm violation and no interaction on experienced entitlement emerged. Thus, the manipulations were successful.

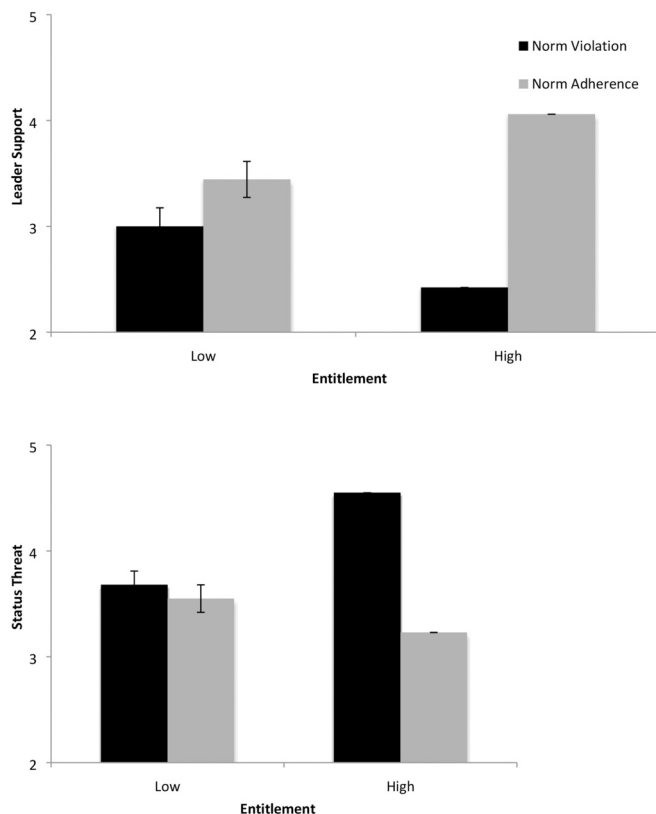
<sup>6</sup> The analyses reported in the main text include all participants who completed the study (i.e., participants who provided at least one response in the entitlement manipulation and filled out all other study variables). We explored whether participants' compliance with the entitlement manipulation instructions influenced the results. We coded participants' responses on the writing task for content according to a pre-specified categorization system. In the absence of agreed-upon a-priori exclusion criterion, we explored the effects of various exclusion criteria. Effects became progressively weaker as more participants were excluded due to decreased statistical power, yet the exclusions did not change the conclusions. See the Supplement for details on the coding procedure for both Studies 2 and 3 (which employed an entitlement manipulation).

**Table 2**

Inferential statistics for the effects of norm violation and entitlement on perceived norm violation, experienced entitlement, leader support, status threat, and punishment intention in Studies 2 and 3.

	Norm violation			Entitlement			Norm violation × Entitlement		
	<i>F</i>	<i>p</i>	$\eta_p^2$	<i>F</i>	<i>p</i>	$\eta_p^2$	<i>F</i>	<i>p</i>	$\eta_p^2$
	Study 2								
Perceived norm violation	348.80	< .001	.65	0.24	.624	< .01	1.84	.177	.01
Experienced entitlement	0.40	.527	< .01	41.92	< .001	.19	0.04	.850	< .01
Leader support	36.19	< .001	.16	0.01	.908	< .01	11.89	< .001	.06
Status threat	30.86	< .001	.14	4.40	.037	.02	21.61	< .001	.10
	Study 3								
Perceived norm violation	602.21	< .001	.77	2.53	.114	.01	0.35	.553	< .01
Experienced entitlement	0.13	.717	< .01	5.61	.019	.03	0.60	.438	< .01
Punishment intention	53.10	< .001	.23	1.46	.229	< .01	7.04	.009	.04
Status threat	8.87	.003	.05	0.73	.396	< .01	4.05	.046	.02

Note. Degrees of freedom (*df*) = 185 in Study 2 and *df* = 177 in Study 3.



**Fig. 2.** Leader support (top panel) and status threat (bottom panel) as a function of entitlement and norm violation in Study 2. Error bars represent standard errors of the mean.

In keeping with expectations, a main effect of norm violation indicated that leader support was lower in the norm violation than in the norm adherence condition ( $MD = 1.07$ , 95% CI[0.72, 1.42],  $d = 0.88$ ),  $F(1,185) = 36.19$ ,  $p < .001$ ,  $\eta_p^2 = .16$ . There was no main effect of entitlement. As predicted, there was a significant Norm violation × Entitlement effect,  $F(1,185) = 11.89$ ,  $p < .001$ ,  $\eta_p^2 = .06$ . Within the low-entitlement condition, leader support was somewhat lower in the norm violation condition than in the norm adherence condition ( $MD = 0.44$ , 95% CI[-0.03, 0.91],  $d = 0.39$ ),  $F(1,185) = 3.18$ ,  $p = .076$ ,  $\eta_p^2 = 0.02$ , but this difference was significantly larger in the high-entitlement condition ( $MD = 1.64$ , 95% CI [1.14, 2.14],  $d = 1.33$ ),  $F(1,185) = 46.50$ ,  $p < .001$ ,  $\eta_p^2 = .25$  (see Fig. 2, top panel).

Regarding the proposed mediator, a main effect of norm violation

indicated that participants reported more status threat in the norm violation than in the norm adherence condition ( $MD = -0.74$ , 95% CI [-1.01, -0.47],  $d = -0.78$ ),  $F(1,185) = 30.86$ ,  $p < .001$ ,  $\eta_p^2 = .14$ . A main effect of entitlement showed that participants felt more threatened in the high-entitlement than in the low-entitlement condition ( $MD = -0.27$ , 95% CI[-0.02, 0.56],  $d = -0.27$ ),  $F(1,185) = 4.40$ ,  $p = .037$ ,  $\eta_p^2 = .02$ . Additionally, we found a Norm violation × Entitlement interaction on status threat,  $F(1,185) = 21.61$ ,  $p < .001$ ,  $\eta_p^2 = .10$ . Participants in the low-entitlement condition did not differ in how threatened they felt in the norm violation and norm adherence conditions ( $MD = -1.32$ , 95% CI[-1.68, -0.96],  $d = -1.48$ ),  $F(1,185) = 0.43$ ,  $p = .514$ ,  $\eta_p^2 < .01$ , but as predicted, participants in the high-entitlement condition felt more threatened in the norm violation than in the norm adherence condition ( $MD = -0.12$ , 95% CI[-0.26, 0.49],  $d = -0.13$ ),  $F(1,185) = 53.44$ ,  $p < .001$ ,  $\eta_p^2 = .29$  (see Fig. 2, bottom panel).

To test for mediation, we specified a bootstrapped moderated mediation model (Hayes, 2013; Model 8 in PROCESS®, 5000 reiterations). In support of our hypothesis, the interactive effect of norm violation and entitlement on leader support was mediated by status threat ( $b = -0.44$ ,  $SE = 0.12$ , 95% CI[-0.70,-0.23]). Specifically, high-entitlement participants felt more threatened in the norm violation than in the norm adherence condition, and this experience of threat decreased their support for the norm-violating candidate ( $b = 0.50$ ,  $SE = 0.12$ , 95% CI[0.29,0.74]). As expected, the indirect effect was not significant for low-entitlement participants ( $b = 0.06$ ,  $SE = 0.07$ , 95% CI[-0.06,0.21]).

### 5.3. Discussion

The results of Study 2 replicate the results of Study 1 in a different context and with an alternative operationalization of entitlement. Additionally, they suggest that high-entitlement individuals are more willing to reject norm violators' claims to gain rank because they experience status threat. Together, the findings of Studies 1 and 2 indicate that high-entitlement individuals refrain from supporting norm violators as leaders, but it remains an open question whether they would advocate active ways to reject norm violators, such as punishment. In Study 3 we tested this possibility, and we examined whether the same underlying mechanism, status threat, mediates the effects of norm violation and entitlement on punishment intentions.

## 6. Study 3

### 6.1. Method

#### 6.1.1. Sample

Based on the cumulative effect size of Studies 1 ( $f = .20$ ) and 2 ( $f = .25$ ), a power analysis indicated that the required sample was 165. However, since data were collected through an online platform ([www.prolific.ac](http://www.prolific.ac)), we increased the required sample by 10% (187) to make sure we would end up with a sufficient sample after excluding participants who were not attentive to the study instructions. Six participants failed an attention check question and were therefore excluded from the analyses, leaving a final sample of 181 participants.<sup>7</sup> The design was the same as in Study 2. Participants (66 men, 112 women, and 3 participants with unknown gender;  $M_{\text{age}} = 32.83$ ,  $SD = 11.20$ ) were randomly assigned to four conditions. The sample consisted of 78 American and 103 British citizens who were compensated with money.

#### 6.1.2. Manipulating entitlement and norm violation

Participants completed a writing task that was similar to the one we used in Study 2 and identical to a manipulation that has been commonly used in previous studies (Redford & Ratliff, 2018; Vincent & Kouchaki, 2016; Zitek & Vincent, 2015). Specifically, participants in the high [low] entitlement condition were asked to write three reasons each why they (a) should [not] demand the best in life, (b) [do not] deserve more than others, and (c) should [not] get their way in life. Then, they read the same vignette manipulating norm violation as in Study 2.

#### 6.1.3. Measuring dependent variables

After the norm violation manipulation, we measured punishment intention with a validated 4-item scale that was adjusted to fit the current context (Bowles & Gelfand, 2010). Sample items are "I think that...some kind of formal action should be taken against this candidate (e.g., formal reprimand)" and "...his political attitude should be punished" ( $\alpha = .79$ ). We then measured status threat using the same scale as in Study 2 ( $\alpha = .75$ ). Finally, we checked the manipulation of norm violation using the same scale as in the previous studies ( $\alpha = .92$ ), and the manipulation of entitlement using a commonly used validated 9-item scale (Campbell et al., 2004). Sample items are "I honestly feel I am just more deserving than others" and the reverse-coded "I do not necessarily deserve special treatment" ( $\alpha = .91$ ).

### 6.2. Results and discussion

Complete inferential statistics for all analyses appear in Table 2 and descriptives in Table S2. The analyses showed that the political candidate was considered more norm violating in the norm violation than in the norm adherence condition ( $MD = -3.66$ , 95% CI[-3.96, -3.37],  $d = -3.64$ ),  $F(1,177) = 602.21$ ,  $p < .001$ ,  $\eta_p^2 = .77$ . No main effect of entitlement and no interaction emerged. Additionally, participants felt more entitled in the high-entitlement than in the low-entitlement condition ( $MD = -0.45$ , 95% CI[-0.82, -0.08],  $d = -0.36$ ),  $F(1,177) = 5.61$ ,  $p = .019$ ,  $\eta_p^2 = .03$ . No main effect of norm violation and no interaction emerged. Hence, the manipulations were successful.

As expected, a main effect of norm violation indicated that punishment intention was higher in the norm violation than in the norm adherence condition ( $MD = -1.29$ , 95% CI[-1.65, -0.94],

$d = -1.07$ ),  $F(1,177) = 53.10$ ,  $p < .001$ ,  $\eta_p^2 = .23$ . There was no main effect of entitlement. Importantly, there was a significant Norm violation  $\times$  Entitlement interaction,  $F(1,177) = 7.04$ ,  $p = .009$ ,  $\eta_p^2 = .04$ . Consistent with hypotheses, the tendency to punish the norm-violating candidate more than the norm-following candidate was significantly stronger among high-entitlement participants ( $MD = -1.76$ , 95% CI[-2.20, -1.32],  $d = -1.67$ ),  $F(1,177) = 50.31$ ,  $p < .001$ ,  $\eta_p^2 = .23$ , than among low-entitlement participants ( $MD = -0.82$ , 95% CI[-1.37, -0.27],  $d = -0.63$ ),  $F(1,177) = 9.98$ ,  $p = .002$ ,  $\eta_p^2 = .06$  (see Fig. 3, top panel).

A main effect of norm violation showed that participants felt more status threat in the norm violation than in the norm adherence condition ( $MD = -0.12$ , 95% CI[-0.26, 0.49],  $d = -0.13$ ),  $F(1,177) = 8.87$ ,  $p = .003$ ,  $\eta_p^2 = .05$ . No main effect of entitlement emerged. Furthermore, we found a Norm violation  $\times$  Entitlement interaction,  $F(1,177) = 4.05$ ,  $p = .046$ ,  $\eta_p^2 = .02$ . Participants in the low-entitlement condition did not differ in how threatened they felt in the norm violation and norm adherence conditions ( $MD = -0.18$ , 95% CI[-0.33, 0.69],  $d = -0.15$ ),  $F(1,177) = 0.55$ ,  $p = .459$ ,  $\eta_p^2 < .01$ , but as hypothesized, participants in the high-entitlement condition felt more threatened in the norm violation than in the norm adherence condition, ( $MD = -0.92$ , 95% CI[-1.45, -0.39],  $d = -0.73$ ),  $F(1,177) = 12.46$ ,  $p < .001$ ,  $\eta_p^2 = .07$  (see Fig. 3, bottom panel).

To test for mediation, we specified a bootstrapped moderated mediation model (Hayes, 2013; Model 8 in PROCESS®, 5000 reiterations). In line with expectations, the interactive effect of norm violation and entitlement on punishment was mediated by status threat ( $b = 0.25$ ,  $SE = 0.14$ , 95% CI[0.03,0.58]). High-entitlement participants felt more threatened in the norm violation than in the norm adherence condition, and the experience of threat increased their intention to punish the norm-violating candidate ( $b = -0.31$ ,  $SE = 0.12$ , 95% CI[-0.58,-0.11]); the indirect effect was not significant for low-entitlement participants ( $b = -0.06$ ,  $SE = 0.09$ , 95% CI[-0.28,0.09]).

These results extend Studies 1 and 2 by showing that high-entitlement observers are not only more willing to refrain from supporting norm violators as leaders (passive rejection) but also more willing to punish them (active rejection). Furthermore, these results demonstrate that the same underlying mechanism (status threat) mediates the interactive effect of entitlement and norm violation on both outcome variables, which substantiates the argument that the tendencies to withhold support from norm violators and to punish them constitute two alternate strategies of rejecting violators' claims to higher rank.

## 7. General discussion

In the current paper we examined how psychological entitlement modulates observers' tendencies to reject norm violators' claims to rise up the ranks. Building on previous evidence about entitled individuals' loose attitudes to norms and motivation to enhance their status, we developed two competing hypotheses suggesting that entitled observers could react either less or more negatively toward norm violators. The results of three studies support the latter hypothesis: Entitled observers are less likely to support norm violators as leaders (Studies 1 and 2) and more likely to advocate punishment of norm violators (Study 3). This effect emerged with norm violations across two types of context (organizations in Study 1; politics in Studies 2 and 3) as well as with trait (Study 1) and state (Studies 2 and 3) operationalizations of entitlement. Furthermore, we demonstrated that norm violators who vie for influence engender status threat among high-entitlement observers, which in turn increases their tendency to reject norm violators (Studies 2 and 3). Fig. 4 summarizes the main findings across studies.

The current findings extend research on contextual influences on responses to norm violators by highlighting the hitherto underexplored role of entitlement. Recent empirical accounts suggest that the contextual contingencies of responses to norm violators operate across multiple levels that range from the violator's prosocial intention (Van

<sup>7</sup> To check participants' attention we included a question that consisted of long instructions and eleven answer options, out of which ten described popular hobbies and one was an open-ended answer option. The instructions explained that participants should type in "Art" in the open-ended answer option and ignore all other answer options. Six participants did not comply with these instructions, indicating that they were not attentive.



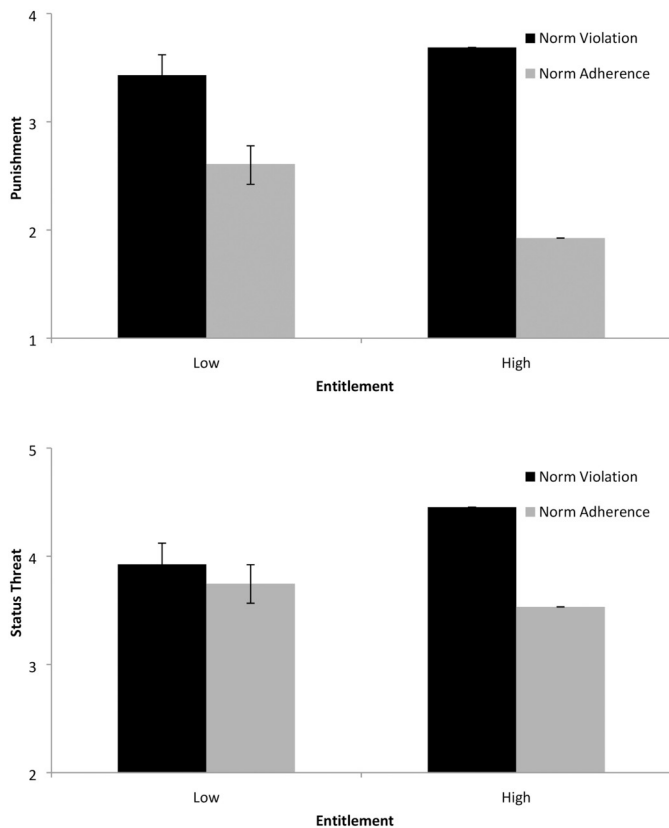


Fig. 3. Punishment intention (top panel) and status threat (bottom panel) as a function of entitlement and norm violation in Study 3. Error bars represent standard errors of the mean.

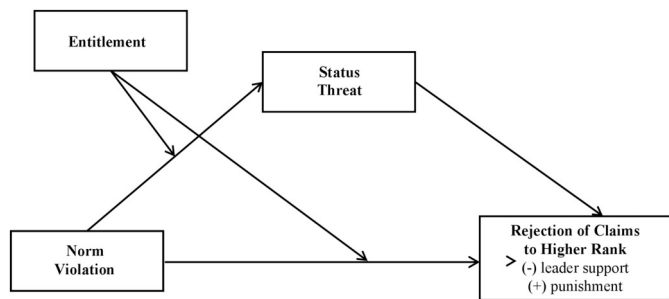


Fig. 4. Summarizing research model illustrating that individuals reject norm violators who claim higher rank by means of reduced leader support (Studies 1 and 2) and increased punishment intention (Study 3). These reactions are stronger among high-entitlement individuals and they are mediated by status threat.

Kleef et al., 2012) and the observer's social rank (Stankou et al., 2016) to the situational strength of the domain where the violation occurs (Stankou, Van Kleef, & Homan, 2018) and the prevalent cultural values (Gelfand et al., 2011; Stankou et al., in press). Cultural tightness theory suggests that people in tight cultures are more likely to punish deviants, because norm violations pose a threat to the social order (Gelfand et al., 2011). The notion that threat to social order underpins negative reactions to norm violators dovetails with our finding that status threat underlies entitled individuals' rejection of norm violators, since both mechanisms serve to uphold the status quo.

Our findings also contribute to research on entitlement and prosociality. The dominant view in the literature is that entitlement's effects are negative, maladaptive, and antisocial (Grubbs & Exline, 2016). However, the current research points to a positive effect: Despite their

selfish motivations, entitled people's rejection of deviants sustains social norms and helps to preserve healthy societies. Punishing norm violators can be seen as a prosocial action, because punishment often comes with a cost to the punisher (Fehr & Gächter, 2002). Literature suggests that what motivates positive prosocial behavior (e.g., helping) may be different from what motivates negative prosocial behavior (e.g., punishing). For instance, idealism and moral elevation increased helping behavior but not one's tendency to punish offenders (Schnall, Ropper, & Fessler, 2010). Our findings contribute to this literature by unravelling how entitlement motivates reprimanding rule breakers. From an applied perspective, organizations and societies could instill among their members a sense of (adaptive) entitlement that emphasizes respect and fairness to increase informal social control, thereby reducing the prevalence of maladaptive norm violations, such as workplace deviance and public littering (Jost, 1997; Lessard et al., 2011; Meyer, 1991). Yet, entitled individuals' motivation to enforce the rules is hypocritical in that they are more likely to break the rules themselves (e.g., Campbell et al., 2004). Future research could investigate whether entitled individuals use higher ethical standards in judging others' behavior than their own (cf. Lammers, Stapel, & Galinsky, 2010).

Future research could also explore conditions that neutralize the moderating effect of entitlement on reactions to norm violators. For instance, entitlement might be less relevant under stable hierarchical systems that do not allow the violator to aspire for higher positions or when the violator helps observers attain status. Furthermore, although status threat reliably mediated entitled individuals' rejection of norm violators, there may be other mechanisms at play (Fiedler, Harris, & Schott, 2018). Further research could examine alternative mediators, such as perceived competition and antagonism.

One limitation of the current research is that participants were uninvolved observers in the situations described in the scenarios, and therefore their interests were not directly at stake. Although previous studies that employed more involving manipulations of norm violations (e.g., face-to-face interactions) produced parallel effects with studies that employed less involving manipulations (Van Kleef et al., 2011, 2012), an experimental setting where participants interact with a norm violator may be more impactful due to the spatial and temporal proximity to possible costs of the norm-violating act. However, these high-stake situations could also sabotage some psychological processes that pertain to the denunciation of status concerns. When status concerns become salient, people react against them because striving for or being concerned about status is a stigmatized behavior that people actively conceal (Kim & Pettit, 2014). We therefore recommend that future research employ manipulations that vary in their degree of participant involvement to compensate for the drawbacks of each method.

Given the rapid rise in entitlement over the past few decades (Greenberger, Lessard, Chen, & Farruggia, 2008; Twenge & Campbell, 2008; Twenge & Foster, 2010; Twenge, Konrath, Foster, Campbell, & Bushman, 2008), it is crucial to understand how entitlement affects social-regulatory processes. Despite the corrosive effects of entitlement, the current research points to its potential adaptiveness in addressing the age-old question of norm enforcement: Entitled individuals uphold social norms by undermining norm violators.

Appendix A. Supplementary data

Supplementary data to this article can be found online at <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jesp.2019.03.001>.

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