"I know you expect me to favor my ingroup": Reviving Tajfel's original hypothesis on the generic norm explanation of ingroup favoritism

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ABSTRACT

The present research investigates the normative roots of ingroup favoritism, reviving Tajfel’s (1970) abandoned “generic norm” hypothesis according to which (1) most ingroups are perceived to promote ingroup favoritism and (2) people infer this normative prescription in newly assigned minimal groups. Anti-discrimination norms are also prevalent, but we propose that these originally emanate from external (and often supra-ordinate) entities that act as “moral referees” of the intergroup situation (e.g., the United Nations Organization). Two experimental studies using the self-presentation paradigm (Jellison & Green, 1981) supported these hypotheses in a naturalistic intergroup context (Study 1; N = 110) and in a minimal group paradigm (Study 2; N = 206). Moreover, the relationship between these norm perceptions and participants’ tendency toward ingroup favoritism was examined. Results revealed differences in the naturalistic and the minimal group contexts. In the naturalistic setting, the relationship between perceived norms and people’s actual tendencies was contingent on political orientation. In the minimal group paradigm, inferences of the ingroup norm were, overall, the best predictor of ingroup favoritism. These findings are discussed in the light of current models of intergroup behavior.

“America first!” This slogan was at the heart of Donald Trump’s campaign for presidency in the US. The idea is very straightforward: In the eyes of American people, their own country and citizens should be favored above all other nations and foreigners. This idea is hardly new: “charity begins at home” is a well-known saying after all. Indeed, far from being specific to the contemporary US context or even to national groups, this tendency to favor the ingroup is widespread in many intergroup contexts (see Bettencourt, Charlton, Dorr, & Hume, 2001). About half a century ago, Tajfel and his collaborators (e.g., Tajfel, 1970; Tajfel, Billig, Bundy, & Flament, 1971) noticed that ingroup favoritism also arises in minimal groups, in which people have no prior bonds with ingroup and outgroup members. Ingroup favoritism (or intergroup discrimination) thus appears as a very robust and general tendency. Understanding this phenomenon has significant societal implications. Indeed, intergroup discrimination can take the form of outgroup derogation and, in the most extreme cases, of genocide and mass murder. Research on this topic has thus been abundant, and several explanations of ingroup favoritism have been suggested. The present paper focuses on a normative perspective, reprising Tajfel’s original explanation and addressing some of the original concerns with this explanation in the process.

1. Normative perspectives: an overview of research

Many studies have focused on the moderating role of social norms on intergroup discrimination. Early evidence came from Minard’s (1952) classical research on White miners’ attitudes against Black miners in the Pocahontas coal field. He found that when miners were outside the mine, White miners conformed to the then general expectations by expressing prejudice against Black people. However, when working underground, White miners were influenced by the institutional norm that promoted a sense of community solidarity, and thus treated Black miners fairly. More recent studies on prejudice have shown that levels of prejudice toward an outgroup are lower when the ingroup norm is anti-discriminatory, than when the norm is pro-discriminatory (e.g., Crandall, Eschleman, & O’Brien, 2002) or when no mention of the norm is made (Monteith, Deneen, & Tooman, 1996). In the same vein, research has also shown that the normative context...
influences people’s implicit attitudes toward outgroups (Castelli & Tomelleri, 2008). Similar findings have been revealed in studies on ingroup favoritism in minimal groups (for an adult population, see Jetten, Spears, & Manstead, 1996; for children, see Nesdale, Maass, Durkin, & Griffiths, 2005). Finally, the prevailing normative context has been shown to bolster the emergence of populist movements (Portelina & Elcheroth, 2016).

Previous research has thus mainly investigated how social norms moderate the level of intergroup discrimination. But, in many cases, the roots of intergroup discrimination are assumed to be more deeply anchored in human nature and cognition. As an illustration, the justification-suppression model states that: “genuine” prejudices are not directly expressed but are restrained by beliefs, values, and norms that suppress them. (Crandall & Eschleman, 2003; p. 413). However few models have considered social norms themselves as being at the heart of intergroup discrimination in this fundamental sense, as the determining source so to speak. Here we thus make a distinction between normative explanations that consider social norms as adding to, counteracting or overlaying a basic drive for prejudice and discrimination (e.g., Crandall & Eschleman, 2003; Devine, 1989), and normative explanations that consider social norms as a fundamental source of discrimination (i.e., that explain its occurrence in the first place). According to this latter explanation, there is no need to refer or defer to some more basic drive or process: the basic process is itself social and normative (which is not to deny or defer further questions of why and how social norms might acquire this influence). One of the models that does take this stance is group norm theory (Sherif, 1936; Sherif & Sherif, 1953), according to which people learn to valorize intergroup discrimination throughout the socialization process with their surroundings. To quote Sherif and Sherif (1953): “Attitudes toward members of other groups are not determined so much by experiences while in contact with the groups in question as by contact with attitudes toward these groups, prevailing among the older members of the groups in which they develop” (p. 94). This perspective thus implies that intergroup discrimination is the prevalent norm in most natural groups.

So why are normative accounts of discrimination (as opposed to normative encouragements or constraints on discrimination) not more prevalent among current social psychology theories? Part of the skepticism about such a normative perspective probably stems from studies on minimal groups. Minimal groups are specifically characterized by a lack of knowledge about the intergroup context and the absence of socialization histories with the other ingroup members. Therefore, one may argue that there is little basis to the assumption that a group norm is an antecedent of intergroup discrimination. This objection was however overcome by Tajfel himself, in the early account of the minimal ingroup bias effect (see Tajfel, 1970; Tajfel et al., 1971). In line with group norm theory, Tajfel argued that (1) people have learned (through their socialization experiences) that ingroup favoritism is normatively prescribed by their ingroup(s), and that (2) this strong knowledge about group norms is then transferred into the new and uncertain intergroup situation (i.e., the minimal group paradigm). People therefore seem to make the default inference that the norm of the new ingroup promotes ingroup favoritism.

It is not completely clear why this assumption was abandoned in the later version of social identity theory (SIT; Tajfel & Turner, 1979), which focused on the need for positive group distinctiveness (and thus a positive social identity). One reason is potentially related to the debate about the multiplicity of norms prevailing in minimal group contexts (see Branthwaite, Doyle, & Lightbown, 1979; Turner, 1980). If the existence of a discriminatory norm is acknowledged, it is nonetheless assumed that a fairness norm is also present and influential. So, which of these norms is the most prevalent? As we will outline later in the introduction, the present paper seeks to provide answers to this question, by showing that these two kinds of norms exist in parallel but come from different sources.

Another potential reason for the dismissal of the normative perspective concerns the issue about the circularity of such hypothesis (e.g., Pettigrew, 1991), as in: “Why do we discriminate? Because it is normative. And why is it normative? Because we discriminate.” Accordingly, it would defer rather than explain the phenomenon: positing a norm for discrimination just begs the question of whether this norm actually explains rather than simply redescribes discrimination. In our opinion, the circularity issue applies to descriptive norms, but less so to injudicious norms, that invoke a clear motivational component. While descriptive norms refer to other people’s discriminatory behavior (i.e., what they do), injudicious norms refer to what other people think is the right thing to do (i.e., what we are encouraged to do). Rather than stating that people discriminate because others discriminate, our rationale based on injudicious norms states that people discriminate because they believe they would be praised for it (i.e., there is an independent reason and thus a mechanism that takes us beyond re-description). When it comes to perceptions of injudicious norms, circularity is thus no more an issue. The distinction between descriptive and injudicious norms was however not taken into account at the time the normative perspective was discarded, since it appeared some 20 years later (see Cialdini, Reno, & Kallgren, 1990). In sum, while this concern may raise interesting questions, we argue that it does not rule out the possibility that discrimination is the result of inferred (injudicious) norms and that this possibility may have been rejected prematurely.

It must be made clear that the present research aims at reviving Tajfel’s abandoned hypothesis, by setting the foundation for this normative hypothesis, and not to argue for the supremacy of this explanation. Obviously, this normative account does not dismiss other potential explanatory mechanisms, such as the social identity explanation (Tajfel & Turner, 1979), and reciprocity explanations (Gaertner & Insko, 2000), which we return to in the General Discussion (see also Spears & Otten, 2012, who state that the minimal group bias effect is most likely multiply determined or “overdetermined”). We simply argue that the normative hypothesis should not be dismissed simply because it was displaced by the social identity explanation (multiple explanations can co-exist and co-determine). Hereafter, we rely on research on ingroup favoritism to substantiate the assumption that intergroup discrimination is perceived to be the prevalent norm in natural groups, as well as in minimal groups.

2. Ingroup favoritism as a default ingroup norm

The hypothesis of a default ingroup norm that promotes ingroup favoritism finds support in many research areas. First, research on moral values shows that people highly valorize ingroup loyalty (i.e., being mainly driven by the ingroup’s interests; Graham, Haidt, & Nosek, 2009). Consistent with this, DeLamater, Katz, and Kelman (1969) highlighted that showing loyalty to the national ingroup and favoring its members is a way to respond to normative expectations in order to be well-accepted in the national group. Moreover, the literature on ingroup members’ evaluations has shown that members who favor the ingroup over the outgroup are judged as better group members than egalitarian members (Assimaréou & Testé, 2013; Castelli, Tomelleri, & Zogmaister, 2008; Platow, Hoar, Reid, Harley, & Morrison, 1997; Travalgino, Abrams, Randsley de Moura, Marques, & Pinto, 2014). People justify this lower leniency toward egalitarian members by the need for group cohesion and loyalty (Rutland, Hitti, Mulvey, Abrams, & Killen, 2015).

In the light of this evidence, we could be tempted to conclude that social norms resolutely encourage discrimination. However, such a conclusion is at odds with most people’s everyday experiences, and one would object that western societies are actually characterized by strong anti-discrimination norms. So, where does this egalitarian norm come from, if not from ingroups? We argue that the anti-discrimination norm, which is prevalent in western societies, originally comes from sources that are external, and often supra-ordinate to (or “above”) the (specific) intergroup situation and that act as “moral referees” of the relationship
between ingroup and outgroup(s).

3. Intergroup fairness as an external norm

As mentioned above, one critic of Tajfel's generic norm hypothesis pointed out that it fails to anticipate the equally plausible and prevalent norms for fairness (see Branthwaite et al., 1979; Turner, 1980). Many scholars indeed argue that people do not feel free to discriminate and express their prejudice straightforwardly, because of a strong societal norm prescribing such behaviors (e.g., Crandall & Eshleman, 2003; Devine, Plant, Amodio, Harmon-Jones, & Vance, 2002; Legault, Green-Demers, Grant, & Chung, 2007). We argue that this anti-discriminatory norm, usually generically framed as "social desirability" (e.g., Carver, Glass, & Katz, 1978), is propagated by external, and often supra-ordinate entities, that endorse and spread humanitarian values. Indeed, historical events and the growth of the globalization in the 20th century have contributed to the dissemination of human rights ideologies. External entities, such as international organizations (Ishay, 2004) and high-level education (Pascarella, Ethington, & Smart, 1988) have spread the idea that all human beings should be treated equally. Unlike ingroups, these external entities have a supra-ordinate "mindset" and they believe that people's social categories should not be taken into account when taking decisions. As a result of the propagation of this ideology in societies, fairness has become a core value of justice principles (see Rawls, 1971). Expressions of intergroup discrimination and prejudice toward outgroups that were once blatant (see Katz & Braly, 1933) have thus become restrained by this societal norm (Hafner-Burton & Tsutsui, 2005) and have taken more subtle forms (e.g., Pettigrew & Meertens, 1995).

4. Current research

Following Tajfel's (1970) original hypothesis, we postulate that people perceive ingroup favoritism to be a normative tendency promoted by the ingroup in naturalistic intergroup situations (H1a), as well as in a minimal group paradigm (H1b). Conversely, we argue that ingroup favoritism is perceived to be proscribed by entities external to the intergroup context, which act as "moral referees" of the naturalistic intergroup situation (H2a) and of the minimal intergroup setting (H2b). Study 1 took place in a naturalistic intergroup context (i.e., a national context); and tested H1a and H2a, whereas Study 2 employed the minimal group paradigm and tested H1b and H2b.

In order to test these hypotheses, we used the self-presentation paradigm (Jellison & Green, 1981), which is a useful tool for investigating normative contents. In this paradigm, participants are typically presented with an attitude scale (ingroup favoritism in the present research). They are first asked to answer the scale in such a way that they would be positively evaluated by an alleged reader (i.e., self-enhancement instructions). In a second step, they are asked to answer the same scale in such a way that they would be negatively evaluated (i.e., self-depreciation instructions). The rationale behind this methodology is that when the attitude score under the self-enhancement instructions is higher than under the self-depreciation instructions, this indicates that the specific attitudinal content is perceived as being normatively promoted. Conversely, a higher score under the self-depreciation instructions than under the self-enhancement instructions indicates that the attitudinal content is perceived as being normatively condemned. Research using the self-presentation paradigm has typically examined particular norms (often generic norms). For instance, it has been shown that internality (Dubois & Beauvois, 2005; Jellison & Green, 1981), attitudinal ambivalence (Pillada, Cavaza, & Butera, 2013) and pro-environmentalism (Félonneau & Becker, 2008) are perceived as societal norms (at least in Western societies). The present research slightly refines this procedure, by comparing norm perceptions of different sources (either the ingroup or an external entity). According to H1a and H1b, when the source is the ingroup, we expect the score of ingroup favoritism to be higher under self-enhancement instructions than under self-depreciation instructions. According to H2a and H2b, we expect the reverse tendency when the source is an external entity.

Across the two studies, we measured ingroup favoritism in two different ways. Study 1 examined attitudes toward ingroup favoritism and Study 2 focused on ingroup favoritism behavior itself (in terms of point allocations). In both studies, we also measured group variables (i.e., valorization of conformity, need to belong, groupness and identification), an ideological variable (i.e., political orientation) and demographic factors (i.e., gender and age). This allowed us to investigate potential variations of norm perceptions.

In the self-presentation paradigm, it is also possible to measure participants' own behavior or attitude (in this case, toward ingroup favoritism). Usually, this is done under standard instructions, which takes place before the self-enhancement and self-depreciation instructions. Therefore, we also investigated how the perceived norms (of the ingroup and the external entity) influence people's own tendency to favor the ingroup. Both Studies 1 and 2 examined the relationship between participants' norm perception and their own attitude (or behavior) toward ingroup favoritism. Though enlightening, this procedure raises obvious causality issues. Is ingroup favoritism affected by the perceived norm or the perceived norm affected by the fact of having (or not) favored the ingroup? In order to overcome this limitation, Study 2 assessed more directly the impact of the salience of the source of the norm on ingroup favoritism. In order to do so, we varied the order of presentation of the standard instructions (before vs. after the self-enhancement and self-depreciation instructions). We expect that ingroup favoritism is higher when the source of the norm is the ingroup than when it is the external entity, but only when ingroup favoritism is measured under standard instructions after the self-enhancement and self-depreciation instructions. Indeed, dependent on the source of the norm condition, answering under the self-enhancement and self-depreciation instructions should either make salient the ingroup (discriminatory) norm or the external (egalitarian) norm, and ingroup favoritism should vary according to the salient norm.

5. Study 1

The present study took place in a national context (i.e., the US) and was aimed at testing H1a and H2a. It also examined how perceptions of both the ingroup and the external norms are related to attitude toward ingroup favoritism. Finally, this study investigated how norm perceptions on the one hand, and attitude toward ingroup favoritism on the other hand, are contingent to group, ideological and demographic variables.

5.1. Method

5.1.1. Participants and design

Participants were American citizens recruited via Amazon's Mechanical Turk, which has been shown to be a valid and reliable source of data collection (e.g., Berinsky, Huber, & Lenz, 2012; Buhrmester, Kwang, & Gosling, 2011). They were compensated for their time with 0.30 US dollars. In order to determine the sample size, we consulted Richard, Bond, and Stokes-Zoota's (2003) meta-analysis, which revealed that the average effect size for ingroup favoritism is $r = 0.35$. Thus, based on a similar medium to large effect size ($r_p^2 = 0.10$), a power analysis using G-Power 3 indicated that we needed at least 82 participants to achieve 80% power. To make sure that we ran a well-powered study that minimized the risk of Type II errors and consistent with Simmons, Nelson, and Simonsohn (2011) guidelines, we decided to recruit about 100 participants (50 per
5.1.2. Procedure

We first measured group variables, which were: valorization of conformity, need to belong, groupiness and identification with the ingroup (i.e., the US). Then, we used the self-presentation paradigm to measure participants’ attitude toward ingroup favoritism and their perception of the norms regarding ingroup favoritism. They were thus presented with a scale measuring ingroup favoritism, and were first asked to answer the scale under the standard instructions (i.e., providing their own attitude toward ingroup favoritism). Afterwards, they answered the same scale under the self-enhancement instructions, and then under the self-depreciation instructions. The source of the norm was manipulated such that it was either the ingroup or an external entity. Before being fully debriefed about the purpose of the survey, participants provided their political orientation (from 1 = extremely liberal to 7 = extremely conservative; $M = 3.81$, $SD = 1.96$) and the demographics of gender and age. Unless otherwise mentioned, answers to all questions in this study were collected on 7-point scales ranging from 1 (“Completely disagree”) to 7 (“Completely agree”).

5.1.3. Measures of group variables

5.1.3.1. Valorization of conformity. We assessed the extent to which participants valued conformity by using two subscales of the Schwartz et al. (2012) values inventory, which tap dimensions related to compliance to social norms. More specifically, three items came from the “conformity-rules” subscale (e.g., “Obeying all the laws is important”), and three items came from the “conformity-interpersonal” subscale (e.g., “It is important to avoid upsetting other people”). A valorization-of-conformity score was created by aggregating the answers to these six items ($\alpha = 0.85$, $M = 4.48$, $SD = 1.27$).

5.1.3.2. Need to belong. The need to belong to social groups was measured with a 5-item sample of the Leary, Kelly, Cottrell, and Schreindorfer’s (2013) scale. Sample items were: “My feelings are easily hurt when I feel that others do not accept me” and “I seldom worry about whether other people care about me” (reversed coding). After recoding, a need to belong score was computed such as a higher score would indicate higher levels of need to belong ($\alpha = 0.81$, $M = 4.21$, $SD = 1.29$).

5.1.3.3. Groupiness. We measured participants’ tendency toward groupiness (i.e., people’s appreciation of being in groups) using a 5-item scale (see Kuppens, Manstead, Spears, & Sweetman, 2017). Example of items were: “I like building bonds with members of the same group” and “I don’t like it when I have to accept a collective or group decision” (reverse coded). After recoding, a groupiness score was computed such as a higher score would indicate higher levels of groupiness ($\alpha = 0.72$, $M = 4.27$, $SD = 1.02$).

5.1.3.4. Ingroup identification. Identification with the national ingroup was measured with a four-item scale. Sample items were: “I identify with the US” and “Being American is something that is important to me”. A score of identification was created by aggregating the answers to these four items ($\alpha = 0.94$, $M = 5.34$, $SD = 1.69$).

5.1.4. Independent variable

5.1.4.1. Source of the norm. When participants answered the ingroup favoritism scale according to the self-enhancement and the self-depreciation instructions, the source of the norm was either the national ingroup (i.e., other ingroup members) or an external entity. In this case, the external entity was the United Nations Organizations (UNO), since it is the main international organization supporting human rights and regulating international relationships. In the ingroup condition [external entity condition in bracket], the self-enhancement instructions were: “We would like you to complete the questionnaire in such a way to generate a good image of yourself in the eyes of other US citizens [the United Nations Organizations (UNO)]. More specifically, we ask you to answer as if you were attempting to get other US citizens [the United Nations Organizations (UNO)] to like and approve of you”. The self-depreciation instructions were: “We would like you to complete the questionnaire in such a way to generate a bad image of yourself in the eyes of other US citizens [the United Nations Organizations (UNO)]. More specifically, we ask you to answer as if you were attempting to get other US citizens [the United Nations Organizations (UNO)] to dislike and disapprove of you”.

5.1.5. Dependent variables

5.1.5.1. Attitude toward ingroup favoritism. Under the standard instructions, participants were asked to provide their attitude toward ingroup favoritism, which was measured with an 8-item scale. Examples of items were: “I am more concerned about the fate of US citizens living in precarious conditions than about the fate of political refugees” and “I would donate as much to international charities as I would to US charities” (reverse coded). After recoding, an ingroup favoritism score was computed such that a higher score indicates higher levels of ingroup favoritism ($\alpha = 0.89$, $M = 4.52$, $SD = 1.34$).

5.1.5.2. Perception of the norm regarding ingroup favoritism. The same ingroup favoritism scale was presented under the self-enhancement and the self-depreciation instructions. Two scores of ingroup favoritism were created, one for the self-enhancement ($\alpha = 0.94$, $M = 4.08$, $SD = 1.76$) and one for the self-depreciation instructions ($\alpha = 0.94$, $M = 4.16$, $SD = 2.18$). Perception of the norm was assessed through the discrepancy between the ingroup favoritism score under the self-enhancement instructions and the ingroup favoritism score under the self-depreciation instructions. A higher score under the self-enhancement instructions relative to the self-depreciation instructions would indicate that the norm is perceived as promoting ingroup favoritism. Conversely, a higher score under the self-depreciation instructions relative to the self-enhancement instructions would indicate that the norm is perceived as proscribing ingroup favoritism.

5.2. Results

We first analyzed results on the perception of norms, since they are directly relevant to our hypotheses, and we investigated how they depend on group, ideological and demographic variables. Then, we examined participants’ attitude toward ingroup favoritism and its relationship with group, ideological and demographic variables, as well as with norm perceptions.

5.2.1. Perception of the norm regarding ingroup favoritism

We first performed a full-factorial repeated measure ANOVA on the ingroup favoritism score, with instructions (self-enhancement vs. self-depreciation) as a within-participants factor and source of the norm (ingroup vs. external entity) as a between-participants factor. The analysis showed a main effect of the source of the norm, $F(1,108) = 20.78$, $p < .001$, $\eta^2_g = 0.16$, which was qualified by the expected Instructions × Source of the norm interaction, $F(1,108) = 86.75$, $p < .001$, $\eta^2_a = 0.45$. Supporting H1a, in the ingroup condition, the score of ingroup favoritism was higher under the self-enhancement instructions ($M = 5.05$, $SE = 0.20$) than under the self-depreciation instructions ($M = 2.62$, $SE = 0.21$), $F(1,108) = 41.56$, $p < .001$, $\eta^2_a = 0.28$, suggesting that ingroup favoritism was perceived as being promoted by ingroup members. In the external entity condition however, and consistent with H2a, the score of ingroup favoritism was higher under the self-depreciation instructions ($M = 5.64$, $SE = 0.21$)
than under the self-enhancement instructions ($M = 3.15, SE = 0.20$), $F (1,108) = 45.27$, $p < .001$, $\eta_p^2 = 0.30$, suggesting that ingroup favoritism was perceived as being proscribed by the external entity (the UNO). The main effect of instructions appeared non-significant, $F (1,108) = 0.01$, $p = .91$, $\eta_p^2 < 0.01$.

In order to examine if these norm perceptions were contingent on group, ideological and demographic variables, we then performed a series of full-factorial repeated measures ANCOVA on the ingroup favoritism score, with instructions (self-enhancement vs. self-depreciation) as a within-participants factor, source of the norm (ingroup vs. external entity) as a between-participants factor, and a range of additional variables, as a third between-participants factor. In each separate analysis, this additional variable consisted of a group variable (i.e., valorization of conformity, need to belong, groupiness and identification), an ideological variable (i.e., political orientation) or a demographic variable (i.e., gender and age; all these variables were mean-centered). The only analysis showing that the Instructions × Source of the Norm interaction depended on a third variable was the one including age as the additional variable. The Instructions × Source of the norm × Age interaction was indeed significant, $F(1,106) = 8.78$, $p = .004$, $\eta_p^2 = 0.08$. More specifically, when the source of the norm was the ingroup, we observed a marginally significant Instructions × Age interaction, $F(1,106) = 3.44$, $p = .07$, $\eta_p^2 = 0.03$, showing that the positive difference between the score of ingroup favoritism under the self-enhancement and under the self-depreciation instructions tended to be larger as age increased (see Fig. 1, left panel). When the source of the norm was the external entity, we observed a significant Instructions × Age interaction, $F(1,106) = 5.38$, $p = .02$, $\eta_p^2 = 0.05$, which showed that the negative difference between the score of ingroup favoritism under the self-enhancement and under the self-depreciation instructions increased as a function of age (see Fig. 1, right panel). These findings suggested that both tendencies to perceive the ingroup norm as promoting ingroup favoritism and to perceive the external norm as proscribing ingroup favoritism increased as a function of age.

All the other analyses testing the interaction between the kind of instructions, the source of the norm and an additional variable were non-statistically significant, all $ps > .38$.

5.2.2. Attitude toward ingroup favoritism

First, we examined the relationship between attitude toward ingroup favoritism and each of the intergroup, ideological and demographic variables. We thus performed a linear regression on the ingroup favoritism score with valorization of conformity, need to belong, groupiness, identification, political orientation, gender (coded −1 for woman and 1 for man) and age as predictors (all predictors were mean-centered). Results showed that groupiness was negatively related to ingroup favoritism, $\beta = −0.34$, $t(102) = −3.23$, $p = .002$, 95% CI $[−0.55, −0.13]$, while we observed a positive relationship with identification, $\beta = 0.30$, $t(102) = 4.08$, $p < .001$, 95% CI $[0.15, 0.45]$, age, $\beta = 0.02$, $t(102) = 2.13$, $p = .04$, 95% CI $[0.01, 0.03]$, and political orientation (the more conservative, the more positive the attitude toward ingroup favoritism), $\beta = 0.25$, $t(102) = 4.00$, $p < .001$, 95% CI $[0.12, 0.37]$. Valorization of conformity, need to belong and gender were not significantly related to ingroup favoritism, all $ps > .19$.

Second, we investigated the relationship between perception of the norms and attitude toward ingroup favoritism. We thus computed an index of norm perception by subtracting the score of ingroup favoritism under the self-enhancement instructions from the score under the self-depreciation instructions. Thus a positive score indicated that the norm is perceived to promote ingroup favoritism and a negative score indicated that the norm is perceived to proscribe ingroup favoritism. Then, we performed a linear regression analysis on the attitude toward ingroup favoritism, with the source of the norm, the index of norm perception (mean-centered) and their interaction as predictors. This analysis showed that the main effects of the norm perception, $\beta = 0.05$, $t(106) = 1.14$, $p = .26$, 95% CI $[−0.04, 0.15]$, and the source of the norm, $\beta = 0.02$, $t(106) = 0.10$, $p = .92$, 95% CI $[−0.32, 0.36]$, as well as the Source of the norm × Norm perception interaction, $\beta = −0.05$, $t (106) = −1.09$, $p = .28$, 95% CI $[−0.14, 0.04]$, were non-significant.

Because we found it reasonable to expect participants’ political ideology to be of crucial importance when examining how people comply with the ingroup and the external norms regarding ingroup favoritism, we performed the same regression analysis with the addition of participants’ political orientation (mean-centered) in the full-design. This analysis revealed a significant Source of the norm × Norm perception × Political orientation interaction, $\beta = −0.06$, $t (102) = −3.22$, $p = .002$, 95% CI $[−0.10, −0.03]$. Inspections of the simple effects showed that, among liberals (−1 SD), perception of the norm was not related to attitude toward ingroup favoritism when the source of the norm was the ingroup, $\beta = −0.03$, $t(102) = −0.45$, $p = .65$, 95% CI $[−0.18, 0.12]$, while perception of the norm was positively and marginally related to attitude toward ingroup favoritism when the source of the norm was the external entity, $\beta = 0.14$, $t (102) = 1.74$, $p = .09$, 95% CI $[−0.02, 0.32]$. Conversely, among conservatives (+1 SD), perception of the norm was positively related to attitude toward ingroup favoritism when the source of the norm was the ingroup, $\beta = 0.15$, $t(102) = 2.14$, $p = .04$, 95% CI $[0.01, 0.30]$, while perception of the norm was negatively related to attitude toward ingroup favoritism when the source of the norm was the external entity, $\beta = −0.16$, $t(102) = −2.36$, $p = .02$, 95% CI $[−0.29, −0.03]$. These findings suggest that attitude toward ingroup favoritism is congruent with the ingroup norm among conservatives, while it is not among liberals. Moreover, attitude toward ingroup favoritism tends to be congruent with the external norm among liberals, while it is at variance among conservatives.

Neither the Norm perception × Political orientation, $\beta = −0.02$, $t (102) = −0.77$, $p = .44$, 95% CI $[−0.05, 0.02]$, nor the Source of the norm × Political orientation, $\beta = −0.03$, $t(102) = −0.41$, $p = .69$, 95% CI $[−0.11, 0.04]$, were significant.

5.3. Discussion

The findings supported our hypotheses by showing that, in a naturalistic intergroup context, the ingroup norm is perceived as promoting ingroup favoritism (H1a), whereas the external norm is perceived as proscribing ingroup favoritism (H2a). Moreover, these

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**Fig. 1.** Score of ingroup favoritism as a function of the kind of instructions, the source of the norm and participants’ age (Study 1). Error bars represent ± 1 SE.
perceptions are quite consensual, since they appear not to vary as a function of group and ideological variables. The only exception is the variable age: Both perceptions of ingroup and external norms were more polarized among older people. In line with the normative perspective, this may be accounted for by the longer socialization experiences of older people. In other words, older people may have a more clear-cut perception of what different entities expect from them, because they have experienced many social clues indicating that ingroup favoritism is promoted by ingroup members and proscribed by external entities such as the UNO.

The findings on attitude toward ingroup favoritism showed that it increased as a function of ingroup identification, age and political orientation (being higher among conservatives). Attitude toward ingroup favoritism was however negatively related to groupiness. Valorization of conformity, need to belong and gender where not related to ingroup favoritism.

Investigation of the relationship between norm perceptions and ingroup favoritism showed that participants’ political orientation played a crucial role. Among liberals (who are more likely to endorse humanitarian values; see Caprara, Schwartz, Capanna, Vecchione, & Barbaranelli, 2006), ingroup favoritism varied according to the perception of the external norm, but not according to the perception of the ingroup norm. This may suggest that liberals are sensitive to the external norm, but not to the ingroup norm. Conversely, among conservatives (who are more likely to endorse values related to ingroup loyalty), ingroup favoritism varied according to the perception of the ingroup norm, and was at variance with the external norm. This could indicate that conservatives tend to adjust their attitude in accordance with the ingroup norm and in opposition to the external norm.

6. Study 2

Study 2 first aimed to extend the findings of the preceding study by testing H1b and H2b in a minimal group setting. Besides the nature of the intergroup context, a major difference with Study 1 is the measure of ingroup favoritism. In this study, we assessed ingroup favoritism behaviors. More specifically, we used matrices measures of point allocations to ingroup and outgroup members (see Bourhis, Sachdev, & Gagnon, 1994; Tajfel et al., 1971). This procedure has two major advantages. First, Study 1’s findings suggest that ingroup favoritism is proscribed by the external norm. However, it remains unclear what is promoted. Is it fairness, as we expect? Or is it outgroup favoritism? The matrices measure allows us to answer this question. Second, this measure is able to capture specific strategies that are usually confounded in most ingroup favoritism measures. In addition to ingroup favoritism, it is for instance possible to assess participants’ tendency toward parity (i.e., fairness) and maximum intergroup differentiation (MD). Parallelizing H1b, we expect the ingroup norm to be perceived as promoting maximum differentiation and as proscribing intergroup fairness. Parallelizing H2b, we expect however the external norm to be perceived as promoting intergroup fairness and as proscribing maximum differentiation.

As in Study 1, the present study also examined the relationship between norm perceptions and participants’ own tendency toward ingroup favoritism. In order to address causality issues, we investigated more directly the impact of the salience of the source of the norm on ingroup favoritism. This was done by varying the order of presentation of the standard instructions (before vs. after the self-enhancement and self-deprecation instructions). Answering under the self-enhancement and self-deprecation instructions should indeed make salient the ingroup (discriminatory) norm or the external (egalitarian) norm (depending on the source of the norm condition). The salient norm should in turn affect ingroup favoritism behavior (i.e., under standard instructions). We thus expect that ingroup favoritism is higher when the source of the norm is the ingroup than when it is the external entity, but only when ingroup favoritism is measured under standard instructions after the self-enhancement and self-deprecation instructions.

6.1. Method

6.1.1. Participants and design

Participants were recruited through the SONA-system of the University of Groningen and were asked to participate to an online survey “about people’s artistic taste and their opinion about various topics”. They were all first-year Bachelor students in the Faculty of Behavioral and Social Sciences. They participated to the survey in exchange for course credits. Since the experimental design was a 2 (source of the norm: ingroup vs. external entity) × 2 (order of presentation of the instructions: standard instructions before vs. after) and we aimed at recruiting approximately 50 participants per cell (see Study 1), we recruited a total of 206 participants (143 women and 63 men; M_age = 19.91 years, SD_age = 1.76). They were randomly assigned to one of the four experimental conditions.

6.1.2. Procedure

In the first part of the questionnaire, participants were asked to answer items on scales measuring valorization of conformity, need to belong and groupiness. The second part of the questionnaire assigned participants to minimal groups (see Tajfel et al., 1971). Participants were informed that they would be presented with five pairs of abstract paintings and were told that in each of these pairs, one painting had been created by a painter named Dusek and the other one by a painter named Tausig. Their task was to indicate, for each pair, the most preferred painting. Before receiving the feedback about their preference, participants were informed that previous research had identified two groups of people: the group Dusek (composed of people preferring Dusek paintings) and the group Tausig (composed of people preferring Dusek paintings). They also learned that these groups were quite similar in terms of size, age average and gender ratio. They then received the alleged preference feedback and were actually all assigned to the Dusek group. Right after the group assignment, participants provided their level of identification with the group Dusek. The third part of the questionnaire aimed at assessing participants’ tendency to behaviorally favor the ingroup and the perception of the norm regarding ingroup favoritism. Participants were asked to divide points between ingroup and outgroup members, using specific matrices. For each matrix, they were informed that they would divide points between another member of the group Dusek (ingroup) and a member of the group Tausig (outgroup). These points were to be considered as “having symbolic value (like cent coins for example)”. Participants saw an example of an allocation matrix and were instructed to use it to allocate money between two other participants who were described by a number and their group membership: one was a Dusek member and the other a Tausig member (we made clear that participants could not allocate money to themselves personally). Then, the point allocation task began. The task was performed on six different matrices that were adapted from Bourhis et al. (1994). They divided the points under the standard instructions, the self-enhancement instructions and the self-deprecation instructions. In line with the design, the order of presentation of these instructions was manipulated (standard instructions before vs. after), as well as the source of the norm (ingroup vs. external entity).

Before being fully debriefed about the purpose of the questionnaire, participants provided their political orientation (from 1 = extremely left wing to 7 = extremely right wing; M = 3.26, SD = 1.03) and their demographics, consisting of gender and age. Unless otherwise mentioned, answers to all questions in this study were collected on 7-points scales ranging from 1 (“Completely disagree”) to 7 (“Completely agree”).

6.1.3. Measures of group variables

6.1.3.1. Valorization of conformity. The six-item’s valorization-of-conformity scale was the same as the one used in Study 1 (α = 0.77, M = 4.19, SD = 1.03).
6.1.3.2. Need to belong. The five-item scale assessing need to belong was the same as the one used in Study 1 ($\alpha = 0.70$, $M = 4.96$, $SD = 0.96$).

6.1.3.3. Groupiness. Groupiness was also assessed with the same five-item scale used in the preceding study ($\alpha = 0.63$, $M = 4.63$, $SD = 0.84$).

6.1.3.4. Ingroup identification. After the group assignment, we assessed ingroup identification using a pictorial measure of the inclusion of the self within the ingroup (see Tropp & Wright, 2001). Participants were shown seven pairs of circles that increasingly overlapped. In each pair, a small circle represented them as an individual and a larger circle represented their ingroup. Participants were asked to choose the pair that best reflected their “level of identification with the members of the group Dusek”. The closer the circles, the greater the ingroup identification ($M = 2.95$, $SD = 1.45$). We chose this particular measure because items' scales often do not make sense in the context of minimal groups.

6.1.4. Independent variables

6.1.4.1. Order of presentation. The order of presentation of the standard instructions and of both the self-enhancement and the self-depreciation instructions was manipulated. The Standard before condition was similar as the procedure of Study 1. Participants first performed the point-allocation task under standard instructions, and then under the self-enhancement and then the self-depreciation instructions. In the Standard after condition, they first divided points under the self-enhancement followed by the self-depreciation instructions, and then under the standard instructions.

6.1.4.2. Source of the norm. In the self-enhancement and the self-depreciation instructions, the source of the norm was either the newly assigned ingroup (i.e., other members of the group Dusek) or an external entity. In this study, we decided to use “social scientists working on intergroup relations” as the external entity. This source seemed more ecologically valid in the context of the study. Social scientists should indeed be perceived as a neutral entity, though concerned by the intergroup relationship. Moreover, they are known to endorse liberal and humanitarian values (Rothman, Lichter, & Nevitte, 2005) and they play a significant role in promoting them (Moncada & Blau, 2006). Except for these changes regarding the source of the norm, self-enhancement and self-depreciation instructions were similar to Study 1.

6.1.5. Dependent variables

6.1.5.1. Ingroup favoritism behavior. Participants' ingroup favoritism behavior was assessed through their point allocations under standard instructions. We used two methods to compute ingroup favoritism scores (see Jetten et al., 1996). The first method (i.e., the mean scores method) consisted in averaging the points allocated to ingroup members and the points allocated to outgroup members (see also Diehl, 1990). The second method (i.e., the pull scores method) consisted in calculating the different strategies used by participants (see Bourhis et al., 1994, for the calculation method). We thus looked at two different strategies that could provide further information about ingroup favoritism: the parity strategy (measured through the pull of parity on favoritism) and the maximum intergroup differentiation strategy (measured through the pull of maximum differentiation on both maximum ingroup profit and maximum joint profit). The maximum differentiation (MD) strategy is of particular interest, because it indicates participants' willingness to create a positive difference between the ingroup and the outgroup, at the expense of the overall amount of points allocated to the ingroup.

6.1.5.2. Perception of the norm regarding ingroup favoritism. The procedure for assessing ingroup and external norms regarding ingroup favoritism is identical to Study 1’s. Perception of the norm was assessed by the discrepancy between the ingroup favoritism score under the self-enhancement instructions and the ingroup favoritism score under the self-depreciation instructions. A higher score in the self-enhancement instructions relative to the self-depreciation instructions indicates that the norm is perceived as promoting ingroup favoritism, while a higher score in the self-depreciation instructions relative to the self-enhancement instructions indicates that the norm is perceived as proscribing ingroup favoritism.

6.2. Results

We first analyzed results on the perception of norms and then examined ingroup favoritism and its relationship with group, ideological and demographic variables, as well as with the perception of norms.5

6.2.1. Perception of the norm regarding ingroup favoritism

6.2.1.1. Mean scores. We first examined the mean points allotted to ingroup and outgroup members. A full-factorial repeated measures ANOVA was thus performed on point allocations, with group membership (ingroup members vs. outgroup members) and instructions (self-enhancement vs. self-depreciation) as within-participants factors and source of the norm (ingroup vs. external entity) as a between-participants factor. The analysis showed a main effect of instructions, $F(1,204) = 29.89, p < .001, \eta^2_p = 0.13$, a significant Group membership × Instructions interaction, $F(1,204) = 44.09, p < .001, \eta^2_p = 0.18$, and a significant Group membership × Source of the norm interaction, $F(1,204) = 86.29, p < .001, \eta^2_p = 0.30$. More relevant for our hypotheses, these effects were qualified by the expected higher-order Group membership × Instructions × Source of the norm interaction, $F(1,204) = 86.29, p < .001, \eta^2_p = 0.30^6$ (see Fig. 2). Examination of the simple effects in the ingroup source condition showed a significant Group membership × Instructions interaction, $F(1,204) = 133.99, p < .001, \eta^2_p = 0.40$, which revealed that ingroup favoritism was more conspicuous under self-enhancement than under self-depreciation instructions. Under self-enhancement instructions, participants indeed allotted more points to ingroup than to outgroup members ($M = 16.18, SE = 0.22$, and $M = 12.51, SE = 0.18$, respectively), $F(1,204) = 104.94, p < .001, \eta^2_p = 0.34$. By contrast, under self-depreciation instructions, participants allotted more points to outgroup than to ingroup members ($M = 16.94, SE = 0.36$, and $M = 10.02, SE = 0.38$, respectively), $F(1,204) = 98.80, p < .001, \eta^2_p = 0.33$. Examination of the simple effects in the external source condition also showed a significant Group membership × Instructions interaction, $F(1,204) = 4.21, p = .04, \eta^2_p = 0.02$. This interaction revealed that, though the tendency to allot more points to ingroup than outgroup members was observed under both instructions, it was larger under self-depreciation ($M = 15.29, SE = 0.39$, for ingroup members, and $M = 12.03, SE = 0.37$, for outgroup members; $F(1,204) = 22.44, p < .001, \eta^2_p = 0.10$) than under self-enhancement instructions ($M = 14.86, SE = 0.23$, for ingroup members, and $M = 13.52, SE = 0.19$, for outgroup members; $F(1,204) = 13.44, p < .001, \eta^2_p = 0.06$). This last result suggests that the normative behavior promoted by the external norm is to tend toward fairness. The main effects of group membership, $F(1,204) = 2.60, p = .11, \eta^2_p < 0.01$, and source of the norm, $F(1,204) = 0.01, p = .93$,

5 We also looked at the ingroup favoritism strategy (measured through the pull of favoritism on parity), but since it was conceptually redundant with the mean score measure and that analyses on this strategy provided similar results as those on the mean scores, we decided not to mention it in the paper.

6 Slight differences of sample size across analyses are due to missing values.

The Group membership × Instructions × Source of the norm interaction was not affected by the order of presentation, $F(1,202) = 2.92, p = .09, \eta^2_p = 0.01$. 
of the source of the norm, $F(1,202) = 35.11, \ p < .001$, $\eta^2_p = 0.15$, which were qualified by the Instructions $\times$ Source of the norm interaction, $F(1,202) = 65.85, \ p < .001$, $\eta^2_p = 0.25$. As expected, in the ingroup source condition, the MD strategy score was higher under the self-enhancement ($M = 3.51$, $SE = 0.43$) than under the self-depreciation instructions ($M = -5.18$, $SE = 0.71$), $F(1,202) = 85.08, \ p < .001$, $\eta^2_p = 0.30$. Conversely, in the external norm condition, the MD strategy score was higher under the self-depreciation ($M = 3.20$, $SE = 0.72$) than under the self-enhancement instructions ($M = 0.97$, $SE = 0.44$), $F(1,202) = 5.39, \ p = .02$, $\eta^2_p = 0.03$.

6.2.2. Ingroup favoritism

6.2.2.1. Mean scores. The first analysis examined the relationship between ingroup favoritism behaviors and each of the group, ideological and demographic variables. We first computed an index of ingroup favoritism by subtracting points allocated to the ingroup from points allocated to the outgroup. Then, we performed a linear regression analysis on this ingroup favoritism index with valorization of conformity, need to belong, groupiness, identification, political orientation, gender (coded $-1$ for women and $1$ for men) and age (all the continuous variables were mean-centered) as predictors. The results revealed no significant effects, all $p$s $>.35$.

The aim of the second analysis was to investigate the relationship between perception of the norms and ingroup favoritism behavior. We thus computed an index of norm perception by subtracting the score of ingroup favoritism under the self-enhancement instructions from the score under the self-depreciation instructions. A positive score hereby indicates that the norm is perceived as promoting ingroup favoritism and a negative score indicates that the norm is perceived as proscribing ingroup favoritism. Then, we performed a linear regression analysis on ingroup favoritism, with the source of the norm, the order of presentation, the index of norm perception (mean-centered) and their interactions as predictors. This analysis showed a main effect of the source of the norm, $\beta = 0.41$, $t(198) = 2.77, \ p = .006$, $95\% CI [0.12, 0.70]$ and a main effect of norm perception, $\beta = 0.58$, $t(198) = 3.85, \ p < .001$, $95\% CI [0.28, 0.87]$, which were qualified by a Source of the norm $\times$ Norm perception interaction, $\beta = -0.62, t(198) = -4.13, \ p < .001$, $95\% CI [-0.92, -0.32]$.

In the ingroup source condition, ingroup favoritism was positively related to the perception of the norm, $\beta = 1.20$, $t(198) = 5.21, \ p < .001$, $95\% CI [0.74, 1.65]$. This relationship was however not significant in the external source condition, $\beta = 0.04$, $t(198) = -0.22, \ p = .83$, $95\% CI [-0.42, 0.34]$.

The Source of the norm $\times$ Order of presentation $\times$ Norm perception interaction was not significant, $\beta = 0.10$, $t(198) = 0.67, \ p = .51$, $95\% CI [-0.20, 0.40]$, suggesting that the positive relationship between ingroup favoritism and the perception of the norm group were not different according to the instructions’ order of presentation.

Since political orientation was a crucial moderator in the relationship between norm perception and ingroup favoritism in Study 1, we also performed a linear regression analysis on ingroup favoritism behavior, with the source of the norm, the index of norm perception, political orientation and their interactions as predictors. The results showed no Source of the norm $\times$ Norm perception $\times$ Political orientation interaction, $\beta = 0.18$, $t(196) = 1.42, \ p = .16$, $95\% CI [-0.07, 0.44]$, suggesting that political orientation played no significant role in the relationship between perception of the norms and ingroup favoritism behavior.

The third analysis aimed at examining the impact of the salience of a specific normative source (ingroup vs. external entity) on ingroup favoritism behaviors. We expected ingroup favoritism to be more prominent in the ingroup source condition than in the external condition, but only when participants performed the points-allocation task under
the standard instructions after the self-enhancement and self-depreciation instructions (i.e., when a particular norm had been made salient). We thus performed a full-factorial repeated measures ANOVA on point allocations, with group membership (ingroup members vs. outgroup members) as a within-participants factor, and source of the norm (ingroup vs. external entity) and order of presentation (standard before vs. standard after) as between-participants factors. Unsurprisingly, the analysis showed a main effect of group membership, \( F(1,202) = 14.17, p < .001, \eta^2_p = 0.07 \), revealing that participants allocated overall more points to ingroup members (\( M = 14.29, SE = 0.08 \)) than to outgroup members (\( M = 13.80, SE = 0.09 \)). This main effect was qualified by an unexpected Group membership \( \times \) Order of presentation interaction, \( F(1,202) = 4.32, p = .04, \eta^2_p = 0.02 \). Ingroup favoritism was more pronounced when the standard instructions were shown before (\( M_{\text{ingroup}} = 14.39, SE_{\text{ingroup}} = 0.12; M_{\text{outgroup}} = 13.64, SE_{\text{outgroup}} = 0.13 \)) than when they were shown after the other instructions (\( M_{\text{ingroup}} = 14.19, SE_{\text{ingroup}} = 0.12; M_{\text{outgroup}} = 14.00, SE_{\text{outgroup}} = 0.13 \)). However, the expected Group membership \( \times \) Source of the norm \( \times \) Order of presentation was not significant, \( F(1,202) = 0.95, p = .33, \eta^2_p < 0.01 \), nor were the main effects of the source of the norm (\( p = .20, \eta^2_p = 0.01 \)) and order of presentation (\( p = .59, \eta^2_p < 0.01 \)), or the Group membership \( \times \) Source of the norm interaction (\( p = .38, \eta^2_p < 0.01 \)), and the Source of the norm \( \times \) Order of presentation interaction (\( p = .65, \eta^2_p < 0.01 \)).

6.2.2.2 Pull scores. We first examined participants’ overall use of the two strategies: the parity strategy (i.e., pull of parity on ingroup favoritism) and the MD strategy (i.e., pull of maximum differentiation on both maximum ingroup profit and maximum joint profit). One-sample t-tests first revealed that all strategies’ scores were statistically higher than 0 (for the parity strategy: \( M = 9.14, SD = 4.71, t(203) = 27.68, p < .001, d = 3.89 \); for the MD strategy: \( M = 0.57, SD = 2.96, t(206) = 2.75, p = .006, d = 0.38 \)). This indicated that the two strategies were significantly used. A repeated-measures ANOVA on the pull scores with the kind of strategy as a within-subjects variable and the other in-group and the outgroup, as indicated by the maximum differentiation strategy. Findings showed that the parity strategy score was higher than the MD strategy score, \( p < .001 \), suggesting that the parity strategy was more prevalent than the MD strategy.

Second, we investigated the impact of the salience of the normative source (ingroup vs. external entity) on the use of these strategies. We thus performed two full-factorial ANOVAs on the two strategies separately, with source of the norm (ingroup vs. external entity) and order of presentation (standard before vs. standard after) as between-participants factors. The analysis on the parity strategy revealed a marginally significant Source of the norm \( \times \) Order of presentation interaction, \( F(1,199) = 3.81, p = .05, \eta^2_p = 0.02 \) (see Fig. 3). Simple slopes analyses showed that, when participants performed the point-allocation task under standard instructions after having done so under self-enhancement and self-depreciation instructions, the parity strategy score was higher in the external source condition (\( M = 10.22, SE = 0.63 \)) than in the ingroup source condition (\( M = 7.93, SE = 0.70 \)), \( F(1,199) = 5.92, p = .02, \eta^2_p = 0.03 \). By contrast, when participants performed the point-allocation task under standard instructions before the other instructions, there was no difference between the parity strategy score in the external source condition (\( M = 8.93, SE = 0.70 \)) and in the ingroup source condition (\( M = 9.22, SE = 0.61 \)), \( F(1,199) = 0.10, p = .75, \eta^2_p < 0.01 \). The main effects of source of the norm, \( F(1,199) = 2.28, p = .13, \eta^2_p = 0.01 \), and order of presentation, \( F(1,199) = 0.00, p = 1.00, \eta^2_p < 0.01 \), were non-significant.

The analysis on the MD strategy showed no significant effects, all \( ps > .05 \).

6.3 Discussion

The findings of the present study corroborated and extended those of Study 1 in a minimal group setting. Following Tajfel’s original hypothesis, participants (who have very limited knowledge about the intergroup context) infer that ingroup favoritism is the appropriate behavior when the goal is to be praised and accepted as an ingroup member. Consistent with H1b and H2b, results showed that the ingroup norm is perceived as promoting ingroup favoritism and the external norm as proscribing ingroup favoritism. Moreover, we observed that the ingroup norm is clearly perceived as proscribing outgroup favoritism, while the external norm as encouraging ingroup fairness (and not outgroup favoritism). Results on the parity strategy indeed showed that parity is perceived as being promoted by the external entity. Quite unexpectedly, parity was also perceived to be promoted by the ingroup (though to a lesser extent than the external entity). We may speculate that, for the ingroup, outgroup favoritism is the clearly proscribed behavior, while some degree of fairness is encouraged alongside ingroup favoritism (i.e., we should favor the ingroup, but not too much). It is also noteworthy that ingroup norms were perceived as promoting ingroup favoritism, but also the establishment of a positive gap between the ingroup and the outgroup, as indicated by the maximum differentiation strategy.

The findings on the relationship between norm perception and ingroup favoritism behavior revealed a positive relationship when the source of the norm was the ingroup. The more participants perceived the ingroup norm to promote ingroup favoritism, the more they actually displayed ingroup favoritism. Perception of the norm appeared to be the strongest predictor of ingroup favoritism, since all the group, ideological and demographic variables were not related to ingroup favoritism behavior. Unlike Study 1, this relationship did not depend on participant’s political orientation. Results also showed that there was no significant relationship between perception of the external norm and ingroup favoritism. This may suggest that, in minimal groups, people mainly rely on the ingroup norm, but not on external norms.

Investigation of the impact of the salience of the norm on ingroup favoritism showed that the parity strategy was more pronounced when the external norm was salient than when the ingroup norm was salient. However, results showed no reliable impact of the salience of the source of the norm on the MD strategy.

7. General discussion

The present research examined perceptions of ingroup and external norms in natural and minimal groups. The findings showed that, in both the naturalistic intergroup context (H1a) and the minimal group setting (H1b), ingroup favoritism is perceived as being normatively promoted by ingroup members. Furthermore, the results supported H2a and H2b.
by showing that ingroup favoritism is perceived as being normatively proscribed by an external entity, which acts as a “moral referee” of the intergroup situation. These norm perceptions were quite consensual, since they generally did not vary as a function of group, ideological and demographic variables. The only exception was a moderation by age in the natural intergroup context (Study 1). Indeed, both perceptions of the ingroup as promoting ingroup favoritism and of the external entity (i.e., the UNO) as proscribing ingroup favoritism increased as a function of age. In line with the normative perspective, this could suggest that common and consistent socialization histories contribute to polarized perceptions of both norms. Age however did not moderate norm perceptions in the minimal group setting (Study 2). One possible explanation of this discrepancy is that both ingroup and external norms have not been learned via socialization, since the intergroup context is new. However, it is also possible that the age moderation did not emerge in Study 2 because, unlike Study 1, the sample was very homogeneous in terms of age (participants were first-year students). Future research with a more diverse age range could thus provide further evidence about whether or not older people are more likely to generalize the socially learned norms to the minimal group context.

This research also investigated how norm perceptions influence ingroup favoritism. The findings were somewhat different across the two studies. In Study 1, political orientation played a crucial role. People who endorse humanitarian values (i.e., liberals) tended to match their attitude toward ingroup favoritism with the perceived external norm, but not with the ingroup norm. This suggests that liberals are more sensitive to the external norm than to the ingroup norm. Conversely, people who value protecting the ingroup (i.e., conservatives) tend to match their attitude with the ingroup norm and to go against the external norm. They thus seem to be sensitive to both norms, but with different outcomes. While they follow the ingroup norm, they react against the external norm. The external, egalitarian norm is indeed likely to threaten conservatives’ motive for protecting the ingroup (see Falomir-Pichaster, Gabarrot, & Mugny, 2009).

In Study 2, in which the intergroup setting was minimal, political orientation did not play a moderating role. This could be explained by the sample (participants were students, for whom involvement in political matters could be quite low) or by the fact that participants’ behavior is mainly driven by what they think is normatively expected from them in a minimal group (and less so by their ideological beliefs). In the real world, people have had a lifetime to develop bonds with their group. So, for those on the ideological right for whom nationality has especial importance (hence “America first”), it is perhaps understandable that this ideology should predict the endorsement of the ingroup (discriminatory) norm. By contrast, for minimal groups it is plausible there is no clear link yet established between political ideology and that particular new group identity. Therefore, just as time and experience can increase the link of the generic knowledge that we should favor our ingroups (the moderation by age), time in terms of socialization in national identity can also strengthen a specific and meaningful ideological link between favoritism and the ingroup.

Whereas perception of the external norm was not related to ingroup favoritism, perception of the ingroup norm appeared to be the best predictor of ingroup favoritism (better than all the group, ideological and demographic variables). This could suggest that people who are faced with a new and uncertain intergroup framework mainly rely on what they believe is normative for the ingroup. Study 2 also aimed at providing more straightforward evidence for the impact of the salience of the source of the norm on ingroup favoritism. Results showed that only the parity strategy (but not ingroup favoritism and the MD strategy) appeared to be affected by the salience of the norm, such that it was stronger when the salient norm was external than when it pertains to the ingroup.

7.1. Theoretical and methodological implications

The present research revived Tajfel’s (1970) abandoned hypothesis according to which: (1) most ingroups are perceived to promote ingroup favoritism and (2) people infer from their socialization histories that the norm of the newly assigned minimal group also promotes such a tendency. It provided consistent evidence in support of this hypothesis and tackled two of the main reasons why this explanation was (we argue, prematurely) discarded. First, by measuring people’s perception of the injunctive norm, the circularity issue was undermined. It is important to recall that when Tajfel first formulated the generic norm argument, the distinction between descriptive and injunctive norms had not yet come into currency but was only developed 20 years later by Galdini and his colleagues (Galdini et al., 1990; see also Reno, Galdini, & Kallgren, 1993). The circularity objection applies more to the descriptive norm argument (literally that the norm merely rediscovers the phenomenon without explaining it), which also leaves the issue of mechanism unaddressed. Injunctive norms have a clear motivational and moral basis that addresses this criticism. Ingroup favoritism is not merely the results of what they believe other people do, but rather what they infer is the appropriate behavior, strengthened by the commitment to their group. As suggested by Tajfel (1970), such inferences about the ingroup norm come from past experiences in which people have noticed that most of their ingroups promote ingroup favoritism: it is seen as good to be loyal to your group. Indeed, the very concept of loyalty implies some social limits and boundaries.

That being said, the question about why ingroup norms are usually pro-discriminatory remains a matter of speculation. It may be that group belonging and loyalty are specific features of humankind that developed as a result of natural selection (see Dunbar, Barrett, & Lycett, 2007; Sober & Wilson, 1998). We should nonetheless be aware that some societies seem to value equality, cooperation and non-violence (e.g., Bonta, 1997; Kurman & Sriram, 2002). It may be interesting to investigate why and how such egalitarian norms developed and whether they also apply to inter-group relations or only to intra-group dynamics.

The second main reason for the dismissing the normative account of ingroup favoritism is the argument that a norm of fairness is also prevalent. We suggest here that fairness is indeed a prevalent norm, but that it comes from a different source, that is, from external (and often supra-ordinate) entities that act as “moral referees” of the intergroup situation. Echoing an old debate (see Branthwaite et al., 1979; Turner, 1980), ingroup favoritism can thus be interpreted as a result of the struggle between the ingroup (discriminatory) expectations and the external (egalitarian) normative pressures.

These findings have important implications, as they (re-)emphasize the normative perspective on understanding and explaining intergroup discrimination. The aim of the present paper is therefore to raise awareness of social norms as one of the very sources of discrimination, rather than mere encouragements or constraints on discrimination, and to lay the foundation for researchers to consider this normative perspective along with other potential explanations of ingroup favoritism. In this plea, we are not denying a role of additional processes. In the absence of evidence suggesting otherwise, we believe that the phenomenon of ingroup bias is multiply or “over-” determined (see Spears & Otten, 2012). Future research might however attempt to measure these different mechanisms simultaneously and even try to assess the amount of variance explained by each, which of course may vary according to type of group and intergroup context.

However, instead of conceiving the normative perspective and other accounts of ingroup favoritism as distinct and competitive approaches, it is also possible to integrate them. For instance, explanations that emphasize (bounded) reciprocity grounded in interdependence approaches (e.g., Gaertner & Insko, 2000; Stroebe, Lodewijkx, & Spears, 2005; Yamagishi & Kiyonari, 2000) posit that one reason we favor the ingroup in our reward allocations is that we expect other ingroup
members to return the favor. It is thus rational to reward the ingroup in this way, in order to maximize the likelihood of being personally supported and favored by ingroup members later on. Nevertheless, we believe there is a conceptual difference between striving for social acceptance (i.e., the normative approach) and merely trying to maximize our access to material resources (i.e., the reciprocity approach), the former having a more social, collective grounding than the latter. That being said, these approaches can be seen as being complementary to each other, rather than as competing explanations. As a corollary, the position of some advocates of the reciprocity explanation have framed their perspective such that it becomes highly congruent with the normative perspective (see Durrheim, Quaye, Tredoux, Titlestad, & Tooke, 2016). For instance, Yamagishi and Mifune (2008) stated that:

The group heuristic induces people to behave in a way that minimizes the risk of exclusion from a system of generalized exchange. Being nice to other members of a system of generalized exchange helps to avoid acquiring the reputation of a free-rider (and eventually being ostracized from the system) is the basic principle for group living... Assuming the existence of generalized exchange, by default, when facing a group situation, is thus an ecologically rational strategy for those whose livelihood depends so much on generalized exchange. (p. 8)

One piece of evidence that provides some support to the normative account over a purely instrumental and materialistic view of the reciprocity argument is the evidence of the MD strategy. This strategy seems to go against ingroup as well as individual interests, and has a more symbolic social competition aspect (in line with the social identity distinctiveness explanation). The present research provides evidence about how the MD strategy can be integrated with the normative perspective. Study 2’s findings indeed showed that ingroup norms are not only perceived to promote ingroup favoritism, but also to encourage maximizing the ingroup differentiation (even if it happens at the expense of the total amount of resources allotted to the ingroup). They thus suggest that the motive to create and maintain positive intergroup distinctiveness has a normative basis. This contributes to conceiving the normative perspective and SIT’s motive for a positively distinctive social identity as complementary accounts of intergroup discrimination.

Our research also has valuable methodological implications. The self-presentation paradigm has been used in many instances to assess the normativeness of a specific attitude or behavior. However, these studies have usually examined perceptions of generic norms (e.g., Fémonneau & Becker, 2008; Jellison & Green, 1981), or specific norms (e.g., Dubois & Beauvois, 2005; Pillaud et al., 2013). By varying the source of the norm, the present set of studies has allowed us to compare norms associated with different entities (i.e., the ingroup and the external entity). We believe this procedure opens new prospects for research examining norm perceptions.

7.2. Limitations and future research

The present set of studies provided evidence about the fundamental role of ingroup and external norms in determining ingroup favoritism. Though the findings about the relationship between norm perceptions and ingroup favoritism are enlightening, their interpretation is limited by causality issues. Though Study 2 provided partial evidence about the impact of the salience of a specific source (and the normative content associated with it) on intergroup discrimination (more specifically, on the fairness strategy), future research should focus on experimental investigations of this effect.

A further issue concerns the precise nature of the external entities used in our studies. We have here conceptualized them as being superordinate (i.e., standing above the ingroup-outgroup context, as third parties). The United Nations and Social Scientists can indeed be seen as “moral referees” to their respective intergroup situations and promote harmony between groups. The critical feature here is that these entities endorse egalitarian and humanitarian values. We can however hypothesize that superordinate entities (i.e., which bound and include both ingroup and outgroup) could also be perceived as promoting equality between the sub-groups. In this case, this could be because they have to address the interests of both groups included and treat them as equals (e.g., The US government can be perceived as promoting harmony between its different States). Future research might therefore investigate whether a superordinate group, that has no a priori fairness norm associated with it, is also perceived to promote fairness between groups.

7.3. Conclusion

Muzaffer Sherif and Henri Tajfel are two key figures in the field of intergroup relations. Their theoretical contributions have often been contrasted. Sherif is mainly known for linking intergroup discrimination to competition over limited resources (Sherif, Harvey, White, Hood, & Sherif, 1961), whereas Tajfel is frequently cited for having shown that mere categorization actually causes discrimination (e.g., Tajfel et al., 1971). Our research allows us to theoretically reconcile these two eminent scholars by associating them with a normative perspective on intergroup discrimination. Indeed, both of them have focused, at various points of their scientific careers, on social norms as determining sources of intergroup discrimination. We believe that research and theories in social psychology would benefit from being re-minded of this heritage and the essential role of social norms in intergroup relations.

References
