AN ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION OF

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TITLE: WHAT I ACHIEVED VERSUS WHAT I WILL ACHIEVE: THE EFFECT OF FRAMING ON MORAL BEHAVIOR LICENSING

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In moral behavior licensing, affirming moral credentials subsequently licenses a person to act in immoral or less virtuous ways. Applied to the domain of discrimination, studies show that affirming egalitarian or non-prejudiced credentials subsequently licenses people to express prejudice. This raises the question of when to expect consistency in egalitarian behavior over time. In the current study participants, all male, took part in an experiment. They were initially given the opportunity to affirm their non-prejudiced credentials by selecting a qualified female applicant out of a pool of applicants. The meaning of this non-prejudiced behavior was framed such that one-half of participants were encouraged to focus on their selection as a past accomplishment. Another half focused on their selection decision with future accomplishments in mind. Following this, all participants were presented a hiring scenario in which the target of evaluation was a female applicant. In two out of three experiments, participants in the past condition evaluated the female applicant less favorably compared those in the future condition. The third study found group differences in the hypothesized direction but the difference was not statistically significant. These findings suggest that the type of frame (or reference point) which people adopt will determine whether or not they proceed to engage in moral behavior licensing. Other relevant variables were also examined in this dissertation. Framing of past and future accomplishments was effective only when the target of evaluation was ambiguously qualified. There was no effect of framing when the target was unambiguously qualified. Individual differences in sexism did not moderate the effect of framing. Replicating the moral licensing
effect, male participants who had the opportunity to establish credentials as being non-prejudiced toward females were subsequently less favorable toward a female applicant compared to a control group who did not have the opportunity to establish credentials. Overall, this study contributes to efforts to understand and promote gender equality in the workplace.