Egalitarianism, Moral Obligation, and Prejudice-Related Personal Standards

Margo J. Monteith
Gina L. Walters

Reprinted from Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin
Volume 24, No. 2, February 1998, pp. 186-199
© 1998 by the Society for Personality and Social Psychology, Inc.
Reprinted by Permission of Sage Publications, Inc.
Egalitarianism, Moral Obligation, and Prejudice-Related Personal Standards

Margo J. Monteith  
University of Kentucky  

Gina L. Walters  
Texas Tech University

Many high-prejudice individuals' personal standards suggest that they should be less prejudiced toward Blacks than they actually are. The present research revealed that these standards are derived from a sense of personal moral obligation to temper prejudice rather than from pressure from others to moderate prejudice. The authors also investigated the influence of egalitarian values on feelings of moral obligation and, ultimately, on personal standards. Although participants viewed themselves as highly egalitarian, they differed in how they conceptualized the meaning of egalitarianism. Path analysis results were consistent with the notion that high-prejudice individuals who defined egalitarian in terms of equality of opportunity feel morally obligated to temper their prejudice, which, in turn, is associated with establishing relatively low-prejudice personal standards for responding to Blacks.

A number of theorists have conceptualized contemporary forms of racism as entailing a conflict between negative and positive tendencies in relation to Blacks. That is, rather than having uniformly negative or positive reactions to Blacks, many people in today's society appear to have conflicting tendencies (Gaertner & Dovidio, 1986; Katz & Hass, 1988; Katz, Wackenhut, & Hass, 1986; McConahay, 1986; see also Monteith, 1996b). One form of prejudice-related conflict involves the experience of what has been called prejudice-related discrepancies: Across a variety of studies, approximately 78% of the sampled populations indicated that they should respond with less prejudice than is apparent in their actual responses (Devine, Monteith, Zuwerink, & Elliot, 1991; Monteith, 1996a, 1996b; Monteith, Devine, & Zuwerink, 1993; Zuwerink, Monteith, Devine, & Cook, 1996). Such discrepant responses are common among both low- and high-prejudice individuals (i.e., among people who espouse relatively low- and high-prejudice attitudes alike). The theoretical explanation for why many low-prejudice persons are prone to discrepancies stems from Devine's (1989) dissociation model, which posits that stereotypes continue to exist as well-learned and highly accessible cognitive constructs even after people have developed low-prejudice attitudes. Thus, stereotypes may be automatically activated and influence low-prejudice individuals' responses toward Blacks, resulting in actual responses that violate these individuals' personal beliefs or standards regarding what constitutes appropriate behavior in relation to Blacks. A fair amount of research has been conducted with the aim of understanding why low-prejudice persons are prone to discrepancies and what implications their discrepancies have for subsequent behavior in relation to the target group (for summaries, see Devine & Monteith, 1993; Monteith, Zuwerink, & Devine, 1994).

Less emphasis has been placed on understanding high-prejudice persons who are prone to prejudice-related discrepancies. These individuals strongly agree that they would have negative responses to Blacks but only moderately agree that they should have such responses. In contrast, other high-prejudice individuals appear to experience no desire to temper their prejudice, in that their personal standards for responding to

Authors' Note: Thanks are extended to Jon Berger, Robert Lovett, Stephanie Moore, Veronica Roberts, Mary Sciaraffa, Bill Taylor, and Zachary Rosenthal for their help with data collection. The authors also thank Rick Hoyle, Mark Peffley, and Don Lynam for their comments on a previous draft of this article. Portions of this research were presented at the May 1996 Midwestern Psychological Association meeting, Chicago. Address correspondence to Margo J. Monteith, Department of Psychology, 115 Kastle Hall, University of Kentucky, Lexington, KY, 40506-0044, e-mail mjmonte1@pop.uky.edu.

© 1998 by the Society for Personality and Social Psychology, Inc.
Blacks and their actual responses are both highly prejudiced. The difference between the two groups, therefore, is that one has less prejudiced personal standards for responding to Blacks than the other. In testament to the paucity of research concerning discrepancies among prejudiced persons, existing research does not even explain why some high-prejudice individuals have established personal standards suggesting that they should moderate their prejudice, whereas other high-prejudice individuals have not. Thus, the primary goal of the present research is to examine the basis of high-prejudice individuals’ standards. In pursuing this goal, the present research not only fills a theoretical gap in the literature but, in the end, extends the current understanding of the relation between egalitarian values and prejudice-related standards.

### Possible Bases of Personal Standards Among High-Prejudice Persons

Personal standards for how people believe they should respond to Blacks, like other “ought” standards, may be derived from two different sources or standpoints (see Higgins, 1987). We describe these sources below and then summarize the results of past research and an initial investigation that we conducted to gain insight into the basis of high-prejudice individuals’ standards.

**Standards based on feelings of personal moral obligation.** A variety of researchers have described standards for how one should respond that involve a sense of personal moral obligation, and such an obligation may underlie the feeling that some high-prejudice persons apparently have that they should moderate their prejudice. For example, Higgins’s (1987) self-discrepancy theory holds that people feel a personal moral obligation to respond in particular ways when they have established standards for how they ought to respond that are based on the “own” standpoint. Likewise, Schwartz (1973, 1977; Schwartz & Tessler, 1972) discussed “personal norms,” which he defined as self-expectations or standards for conduct that involve a sense of personal moral obligation. Such morality-based standards presumably stem from one’s internalized values (Ausbubel, 1955; Schwartz, 1977), so that breaches of such standards are self-threatening (Feather, 1979; Rokeach, 1973) and give rise to feelings of guilt and self-criticism (Ausbubel, 1955; Higgins, 1987; Higgins, Bond, Klein, & Strauman, 1986; Strauman & Higgins, 1987).

The notion that high-prejudice persons hold certain values that encourage them to establish less prejudiced standards than they otherwise would establish is consistent with both classic and contemporary work on prejudice. Myrdal’s (1944) seminal writings on the “American dilemma” depicted White Americans as experiencing an “ever raging conflict” between an image of themselves as being decent, tolerant individuals and their actual prejudiced behavior. Allport (1954) expressed similar ideas in his writings on “inner conflict.” Rokeach (1973; Ball-Rokeach, Rokeach, & Grube, 1984) likewise maintained that socialization in a democratic society causes even high-prejudice individuals to think of themselves as tolerant and egalitarian, and this self-concept conflicts with prejudiced values, attitudes, and behaviors. Finally, at the heart of a number of theories concerning contemporary forms of racial prejudice is the idea that people view themselves as fair and egalitarian, which, in turn, encourages attempts to avoid appearing or being prejudiced (Gaertner & Dovidio, 1986; Katz et al., 1986; Katz & Hass, 1988; McConahay, 1986). Thus, high-prejudice individuals may have the requisite values for developing an internal moral obligation to respond in fair and egalitarian ways. The values may, in turn, prompt the development of morality-based standards suggesting that one’s prejudice should be tempered.

**Standards based on pressure from important referents.** Perhaps high-prejudice persons do not feel any personal obligation to temper their prejudice but, instead, experience pressure from others to do so. The influence of others thus may encourage the development of relatively low-prejudice personal standards in self-discrepancy theory (Higgins, 1987), such standards involve the “other” standpoint, meaning that they are based on the views of friends, relatives, or societal norms. The notion that people may internalize standards that are imposed by others also figures importantly in Schwartz’s (1977; Schwartz & Tessler, 1972) discussion of social norms. Violation of standards that involve pressure from important referents potentially results in sanctions from others, rather than sanctions anchored in the self. Thus, failing to live up to standards imposed by others results in agitation and possibly resentment (i.e., because of anticipated punishment from others) (Higgins et al., 1986; Strauman & Higgins, 1987).

There are good reasons to suspect that high-prejudice individuals’ discrepancies may stem from pressure from others or general societal norms to temper their prejudice. Survey research concerning attitudes toward Blacks has revealed a marked decrease in the expression of prejudiced attitudes (e.g., Greeley & Sheatsley, 1971; Schuman, Steeh, & Bobo, 1985), so that high-prejudice individuals may find their prejudiced tendencies to be at odds with at least some individuals whose opinions they value. In addition, people appear to be very much aware that expressions of prejudiced sentiments are socially undesirable (e.g., Crosby, Bromley, & Saxe, 1980; Gaertner & Dovidio, 1986; Sigall & Page, 1971). Thus, the powerful influence of social norms and important referents may cause even high-prejudice individuals to believe that they should moderate their prejudice (Monteith, Deneen, &
Past research and a preliminary investigation regarding standard basis. Past research has not produced findings that were consistent or strong enough to yield confident conclusions about the basis of high-prejudice individuals' personal standards. In past research, patterns of affective reactions in relation to people's violations of their personal standards have been examined to infer the basis of the standards (e.g., Devine et al., 1991; Monteith et al., 1993). That is, this research examined how people feel when they generate feelings, thoughts, or behaviors that are more prejudiced than their personal standards suggest are appropriate. In the case of people who hold low-prejudice attitudes, such discrepancies between actual responses and personal standards give rise to strong feelings of guilt and self-criticism (e.g., Devine et al., 1991) and motivate subsequent efforts to respond in low-prejudice ways (Monteith, 1993). Such findings clearly suggest that low-prejudice individuals' personal standards are based on a sense of moral obligation that they should respond in low-prejudice ways. However, the findings have been much less clear in the case of high-prejudice individuals. High-prejudice individuals experience modest levels of guilt in relation to responses that violate their standards (Monteith, 1996a), suggesting that their standards may be somewhat related to feelings of moral obligation. However, Monteith et al. (1993) found that high-prejudice individuals' violation of their standards was associated with anger toward others. This proclivity to direct negative affect outward rather than inward suggests that the standards may be derived from others' expectations. Further complicating the matter, this latter finding has not always emerged across studies.

In sum, past research has taken an indirect route to examining standard basis by attempting to make inferences based on affective reactions to standard violation, and this research has yielded inconclusive findings. Thus, we took a more straightforward approach in the present research by assessing feelings of moral obligation and pressure from important referents to temper prejudice directly, and by determining whether these measures are related to the belief that some high-prejudice people have that they should temper their prejudice.

As a precursor to the research that we report herein, we conducted a preliminary investigation to assess the likely success of examining the basis of high-prejudice individuals' standards in this way. In this research, 284 non-Black participants completed the Should-Would Discrepancy questionnaire (e.g., Devine et al., 1991), which assesses the extent to which individuals believe they should respond in ways that are less prejudiced than their actual responses in relation to Blacks. For example, one "should" item asked participants about the extent to which they should think, "How typical," after seeing a young Black woman in the grocery store with four small children. In the corresponding "would" item, participants indicated the extent to which they would have such a response. Subtracting the "should" from the "would" rating for this and other conceptually similar scenarios thus indicates whether participants' standards are less prejudiced than their actual responses.

Feelings of moral obligation to temper prejudice were assessed by presenting the "should" scenarios from the discrepancy questionnaire again, but this time telling participants explicitly to make each rating based on their own personal sense of moral obligation. Likewise, pressure from important referents was assessed by having participants respond to the "should" scenarios based on their important referents' views—or the views of people in their lives whose opinions participants valued. So that individuals who were relatively high versus low in prejudice could be identified, participants also completed the Modern Racism Scale (MRS) (McConahay, Hardee, & Batts, 1981).

We reasoned that if a personal sense of moral obligation causes high-prejudice persons to be prone to discrepancies (i.e., to establish standards that are less prejudiced than their actual responses), then people who report a greater obligation to temper their prejudice should be more prone to discrepancies than people who report less of such an obligation. Alternatively, if pressure from others causes high-prejudice persons to be prone to discrepancies, then discrepancies should be greater among people who report having less, as opposed to more, prejudiced important referents. Our findings supported the moral obligation explanation. That is, relatively high-prejudice participants who were prone to discrepancies reported a greater moral obligation to temper their prejudice than high-prejudice participants who were not prone to discrepancies. In contrast, the relation between discrepancies and important referent ratings was not significant among the high-prejudice participants.

These findings provide initial support for the notion that some high-prejudice individuals believe they should temper their prejudice because they feel morally obligated to do so. The present research seeks to provide a conceptual replication of these findings, using different moral obligation and important referent measures to predict personal standards directly (rather than predicting discrepancies). Moreover, the present research addresses the theoretical argument that commitment to egalitarian values leads some high-prejudice individuals to feel morally obligated to temper their prejudice and, in turn, to establish relatively less prejudiced standards than other high-prejudice persons. We turn now to a
more thorough consideration of the potential influence of egalitarianism on prejudice-related standards for responding to Blacks.

Egalitarianism and Its Potential Influence on Prejudice-Related Standards

Consistent with classic theorizing about the nature of prejudice in American society (Allport, 1954; Myrdal, 1944; Rokeach, 1973), some high-prejudice persons may experience a conflict between their prejudiced tendencies and their egalitarian values. This conflict may evoke a sense of personal moral obligation to temper one's prejudice, causing even prejudiced persons to believe that they should be less prejudiced than they are.

Although this logic seems reasonable, it is in some sense at odds with an assumption found in both the classic and the contemporary literatures on prejudice—the assumption that (all) Americans cherish egalitarianism (Allport, 1954; Gaertner & Dovidio, 1986; Katz & Hass, 1988; Myrdal, 1944; Rokeach, 1973). Specifically, if high-prejudice individuals typically value egalitarianism and if egalitarianism gives rise to feelings of moral obligation to temper prejudice, why do some high-prejudice persons' standards for responding to Blacks remain extremely prejudiced, whereas others' standards do not?

One possibility is that egalitarianism is not equally important to all individuals. Although this contradicts the thinking of numerous, prominent theorists in the area of prejudice, it is nevertheless possible. This is because the assumption that people are concerned with maintaining an egalitarian self-conception has not (as far as we are aware) been investigated in previous research. Thus, to the extent that we find variability in individuals' egalitarian self-conceptions, we may also find that such self-conceptions are ultimately related to feelings of moral obligation to temper prejudice and to personal standards for responding to Blacks.

An alternative possibility, which seemed both reasonable and highly likely after we conducted relevant pilot research, is that people generally think of themselves as egalitarian, but some people may construe egalitarianism in a way that can coexist comfortably with prejudiced tendencies. Specifically, egalitarianism has been characterized as a broad and multifaceted concept within American society (Feldman, 1988; Lipset, 1979; McClosky & Zaller, 1984). Although pure egalitarianism entails equality of outcomes, support for this notion is uncommon in the United States. According to Feldman (1988) and Lipset (1979), this is because equality of outcomes is in some ways inconsistent with a different value that Americans strongly endorse—individualism (i.e., the belief that people should get ahead through hard work). Some Americans resolve this inconsistency by endorsing equality of opportunity (i.e., equality exists when people have equal resources and opportunity, so that competition can be fair). Other Americans do not endorse the notion of equality of opportunity and instead seem to believe in an individualistic interpretation of equality (i.e., equality exists when hard work and skill account for people's success and standing; see also Kluegel & Smith's [1986] notion of meritocracy). For example, in pilot research in which we asked participants to answer an open-ended question about what egalitarianism means to them, some participants wrote statements such as egalitarianism means "you should work hard for what you receive," "survival of the fittest," and "not giving a job to someone because of his race."

Thus, some people may define egalitarianism in terms of equality of opportunity, whereas others may define it in terms of individualism. Importantly, defining egalitarianism in terms of equality of opportunity seems to conflict with prejudiced tendencies (i.e., because such tendencies restrict opportunity and resources), so that people who espouse such definitions may experience a moral obligation to temper whatever prejudices they may harbor. In contrast, viewing equality in terms of individualism is not inherently incompatible with having standards that call for negative responses toward Blacks.

Given the possibility that all participants would view themselves as egalitarian but might define the concept differently, we also assessed people's definitions of egalitarianism and examined whether these definitions were related to the nature of participants' standards for how they should treat Blacks. To the extent that different interpretations of egalitarianism emerged, we expected only the equality of opportunity definition to be related to feelings of moral obligation to temper prejudice and, in turn, to relatively low-prejudice standards for responding to Blacks.

Summary of Goals of the Present Research

One goal of the present research was to determine whether high-prejudice individuals who report less prejudiced personal standards for responding to Blacks than other high-prejudice individuals do so because they feel a moral obligation to temper their prejudice or because of pressure from important referents to temper their prejudice. Thus, we first tested whether feelings of personal moral obligation or pressure from important referents is a stronger predictor of participants' personal standards for responding to Blacks. Our second goal was to examine possible relations among egalitarians' values, feelings of moral obligation, and prejudice-related standards. Related to this goal, we investigated the highly influential but previously untested assumption that people (including high-prejudice individuals) typically think of themselves as egalitarian (Allport, 1954; Myrdal, 1944; Rokeach, 1973). In addition, we investigated
whether different participants defined egalitarianism in different ways, with some construing it in terms of equality of opportunity and others in terms of individualism. Finally, we used a mediational approach (see Baron & Kenny, 1986; Judd & Kenny, 1981) to test the possibility that egalitarianism defined in terms of equality of opportunity gives rise to feelings of moral obligation to temper prejudice, which, in turn, prompts high-prejudice individuals to establish relatively low-prejudice personal standards. In addition to establishing that feelings of moral obligation are related to personal standards, this mediational approach required that we test whether (a) egalitarianism defined in terms of equality of opportunity is related both to personal standards and to feelings of moral obligation to temper prejudice and (b) the relation between egalitarianism defined in terms of equality of opportunity and personal standards is reduced substantially, if not entirely, when feelings of moral obligation are statistically controlled.

METHOD

Participants

The participants were 244 non-Black undergraduate students (230 Whites, 3 Hispanics, 9 Asians, and 2 who marked an "other" category) who participated in return for extra credit applied toward their introductory psychology course grade.

Materials and Procedure

Participants took part in groups consisting of up to 15 individuals. They were informed that the study examined sensitive social issues, and the experimenter emphasized the importance of being open and honest. Participants’ anonymity was emphasized by explaining that they would place their materials in a box containing other completed questionnaires at the conclusion of the study. Participants were given a questionnaire and asked to complete it at a pace that was comfortable for them. When finished, each participant placed his or her completed questionnaire in the box and was given a written debriefing form and credit slip before leaving.

The questionnaire included five sections. The important referents and moral obligation sections were always presented consecutively, due to their similar format. This combined portion of the questionnaire and the other three sections were counterbalanced using a Latin square design. Also, the order in which the important referents and moral obligation measures were completed was counterbalanced within the Latin square design.

Self-concept and egalitarian definition measures. The instructions noted that people have certain ideas about their self-concepts and the type of people they think they are. Participants were asked to consider 30 statements and rate the extent to which they believed each statement was true of them. Ratings were made on 7-point scales ranging from 1 (definitely false) to 7 (definitely true). Two statements were of interest: "I am an egalitarian person" and "I believe in the principles of democracy." The remaining statements were filler items (e.g., "I am anxious much of the time"). The egalitarian and democratic ratings were added to form an index, \( r(242) = .35, p < .001 \).

The second part of the self-concept questionnaire asked participants to think about what egalitarianism meant to them and to rate the extent to which eight statements corresponded to their own definition. The statements reflected one of two types of definitions. Four statements reflected egalitarianism defined in terms of equality of opportunity, and they were developed based on the items found on Katz and Hass’s (1988) Egalitarian-Humanitarian Scale. Each statement began with “Egalitarianism means . . . ,” and the four completions were “that one should find ways to help others less fortunate than oneself,” “acting to protect the rights and interest of all people,” “that those who are unable to provide for their basic needs should be helped by others,” and “providing for equal rights and equal treatment of all people.” The other four statements were designed to reflect egalitarianism defined in terms of individualism, and they were developed on the basis of relevant items from Katz and Hass’s Protestant Ethic Scale. Again, the statements began with “Egalitarianism means . . . ,” and they were completed with “that people get what they deserve and only what they work for,” “that anyone who is willing and able to work hard has a good chance of succeeding,” “that people who work hard enough are likely to make a good life for themselves,” and “people work for what they get, rather than having things handed to them.” The two types of items were randomly intermixed, and ratings for each item were made on 7-point scales ranging from 1 (definitely false) to 7 (definitely true).

Personal standards measure. The measure of participants’ personal standards for responding to Blacks was the “should” portion of the Should-Would Discrepancy questionnaire that was originally developed by Devine et al. (1991). Participants were told that people often set up guidelines for their behavior, or standards for how they should respond in situations. Then, participants imagined themselves in five different situations involving Blacks. For each situation, participants indicated the extent to which they should have a particular negative response (e.g., thinking, “How typical,” after seeing a young Black woman in a grocery store with four small children). Three of the scenarios were phrased in terms of whether participants should have the negative re-
response, and the two remaining scenarios were phrased as "should not." Participants recorded their agreement with whether they should (or should not) have the response described on scales ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 7 (strongly agree). Later, items were reverse scored as necessary so that higher numbers always indicated more prejudiced personal standards.

**Important referent measure.** The first section of the important referents measure defined important referents as "the people in participants' lives whose opinions were important to them (e.g., parents, peers, significant others, etc.)." The instructions then explained that people's important referents often hold beliefs about how people should behave and that people may sometimes feel uncomfortable or even fear punishment if they let their important referents down. Next, participants were asked to think about whether they value the opinions of a particular person or a group of people in relation to their donating behavior. Participants then rated the extent to which their important referents believe they would be obligated to engage in four donating behaviors (e.g., donating a kidney to a close relative who needs a kidney transplant and donating money to a needy organization). These donating items were included simply to provide participants with practice at making rating about important referents.

Next, participants were asked to think about whether they value the opinions of a particular person or a group of people concerning their reactions to Black people. Participants then answered four questions. The questions began with "To what extent does your important referent believe you should . . ." and were completed with "have the use of negative stereotypes about Blacks?" "have positive feelings and beliefs about Blacks?" "treat Blacks and Whites as equals?" and "have positive interactions with Blacks?" Ratings were made on 7-point scales ranging from 1 (no obligation) to 7 (strong obligation).

**Moral obligation measure.** This measure paralleled the important referent measure. The instructions initially stated that people have things that they think constitute moral obligations and that make up their set of moral beliefs concerning their personal responsibilities in life. Next, the instructions stated that sometimes people's beliefs about their moral obligations become important to them and that they feel guilty if they do not act consistently with such obligations. Participants were then asked to consider their personal moral obligations concerning donating, and they completed four items that paralleled the donating items used with the important referents measure. Then, participants were asked to think about whether they feel a sense of moral obligation to respond toward Black individuals in particular ways. They then answered four questions that began with "To what extent do you feel morally obligated to . . ." and ended with the same completions as appeared on the important referent measure. The 7-point rating scales also were identical to those used for the important referents measure.

**Prejudice measure.** The MRS (McConahay et al., 1981) was used to measure prejudice. Ratings were recorded on scales ranging from -4 (strongly disagree) to +4 (strongly agree). Later, ratings for items were reverse scored as necessary so that higher ratings always reflected greater prejudice, and an index was formed by summing the ratings (Cronbach's alpha = .82). A constant of 28 was added to participants' scores, resulting in a possible range of 0 to 56. This full range was represented in the sample (M = 19.20, SD = 10.78).

**RESULTS**

**Predicting Personal Standards With Important Referent and Moral Obligation Ratings**

A main question in the present research is whether participants' personal standards for how they believe they should respond to Blacks stem from feelings of moral obligation or from the influence of important referents. Before addressing this issue, however, it is important to establish empirically that participants made meaningful distinctions among the race-related "should," moral obligation, and important referent items. That is, given the inherent similarity among these types of items (i.e., they all concern how participants should respond toward Blacks), were participants able to distinguish among them?

To answer this question, a principal components analysis using varimax rotation was performed on the race-related "should," moral obligation, and important referent ratings. The analysis yielded three components, all with eigenvalues above 1, together accounting for 68% of the total variance. Using a loading criterion of .50 or higher, all of the important referent items loaded on the first component, all of the moral obligation items loaded on the second component, and all of the "should" items loaded on the third component. None of the items had secondary loadings greater than .35. (The same findings emerged when an oblimin rotation was used.) These results support a distinction among the three types of items. Thus, the relevant items were averaged to form personal standards, important referents, and moral obligation indexes (Cronbach's alpha = .74, .91, and .89, respectively).

A hierarchical regression analysis was used to test whether the personal standards of participants at various
levels of prejudice were related to important referent or moral obligation ratings. Specifically, MRS scores, important referent ratings, moral obligation ratings, and the interactions between these variables were used to predict participants' personal standards. This analysis yielded a significant main effect for prejudice that, not surprisingly, indicated that personal standards became more prejudiced as participants' MRS scores increased, $F(1, 240) = 20.09, p < .001$ ($\beta = .30$). More important, the main effect for moral obligation was significant, $F(1, 240) = 21.03, p < .001$ ($\beta = -.32$). This result indicated that feelings of moral obligation to respond in relatively low-prejudice ways were associated with less prejudiced personal standards. The fact that moral obligation ratings did not interact with prejudice ($F < 1$) indicates that feelings of moral obligation to temper prejudice are associated with less prejudiced personal standards, even among high-prejudice individuals. In contrast, none of the findings in relation to the important referent ratings was significant. Therefore, consistent with our initial investigation, some high-prejudice people apparently establish personal standards that are less prejudiced than they might otherwise be because these individuals feel morally obligated to temper their prejudice and not because of pressure from important referents to temper prejudice.

Egalitarianism: Relation to Self-Concept and Definitions

The theoretical reasoning guiding the present research is that some high-prejudice individuals may value egalitarianism more than others, which leads them to feel morally obligated to temper their prejudice. However, a long-standing assumption in the prejudice literature is that Americans typically value egalitarianism—presumably even people with highly prejudiced personal standards. In this section, we report the results of our test of this assumption. We also examine whether people differ in their definitions of egalitarianism. Investigating how people define egalitarianism is important because, even if people uniformly view themselves as highly egalitarian, perhaps only certain definitions of the value will conflict with having prejudiced personal standards for responding to Blacks.

Our initial examination of scores on the egalitarian self-concept index suggested that participants viewed themselves as very egalitarian and democratic ($M = 10.05, SD = 1.72$). In fact, the mean score was well above the midpoint of the scale (i.e., 7.5). As shown in Table 1, participants' egalitarian self-concept ratings were not related either to their MRS scores or to their personal standards. Thus, consistent with long-standing assumptions about egalitarianism, participants at all MRS levels who held more as well as less prejudiced personal stan-

| TABLE 1: Intercorrelations of the Egalitarianism Measures, Modern Racism Scale (MRS), and Personal Standard Scores |
|-------------------------------------------------|---|---|---|---|
| 1. Egalitarian self-concept | — | — | — |
| 2. MRS | -.09 | — | — |
| 3. Personal standards | -.09 | .50** | — |
| 4. Egal-opportunity | .32** | -.32** | -.24** |
| 5. Egal-individualism | .17* | .08 | .04 | .07 |

NOTE: Numbers in bold are of greatest theoretical interest.

* $p < .05$. ** $p < .001$.

ards for how they should respond to Blacks thought of themselves as quite egalitarian.

We next examined participants' definitions of egalitarianism, as reflected by ratings on the eight items asking participants what egalitarianism meant to them. To test for evidence of different construals of egalitarianism, these ratings were submitted to a principal components analysis with varimax rotation. The analysis yielded two components, both with eigenvalues greater than 2, which together accounted for 59% of the total variance. The four items related to the equality of opportunity definition of egalitarianism had loadings of at least .70 on the first component. The remaining four items, which reflected an individualism interpretation of egalitarianism, had loadings of at least .67 on the second component. None of the items had secondary loadings greater than .20. (The same results emerged when an oblimin rotation was used.) Given this support for two definitions of egalitarianism, we averaged the relevant ratings to form an egal-opportunity index (Cronbach's alpha = .75) and an egal-individualism index (Cronbach's alpha = .76).

One might argue that the two indexes do not reflect alternative definitions of egalitarianism but that one index reflects what people believe egalitarianism is and the other reflects what people believe egalitarianism is not. However, the overall level of agreement between both indexes was reasonably high (egal-opportunity index $M = 4.69, SD = 1.12$; egal-individualism index $M = 4.96, SD = 1.04$). Also, scores on the two indexes were not correlated (see Table 1), suggesting that participants were not merely agreeing with one definition and disagreeing with the other. Thus, two distinct interpretations of egalitarianism were identified. Importantly, the opportunity-based and individualism-based definitions of egalitarianism showed different patterns of relations with participants' race-related attitudes and standards (see Table 1). As expected, as agreement with the opportunity-based definition increased, participants' MRS and personal standard scores became less prejudiced. In contrast, agreement with the individualism-based definition was unrelated to MRS and personal standard scores.
Altogether, these findings suggest that although most people may think of themselves as egalitarian, this self-conception is unrelated to racial attitudes and standards unless one also takes into account the way in which individuals construe egalitarianism. In subsequent analyses, egalitarianism thus was operationalized in terms of the egal-opportunity and egal-individualism variables.\(^4\)

**Egalitarianism, Moral Obligation, and Personal Standards**

The reasoning guiding the present research, in line with classic arguments in the prejudice literature, is that high-prejudice individuals who hold egalitarian values (defined in terms of equality of opportunity) will feel morally obligated to temper their prejudice, which, in turn, will prompt them to establish standards for responding to Blacks that are relatively low in prejudice. This reasoning suggests that the effect of egalitarianism on personal standards is mediated by feelings of moral obligation. Support for such mediation requires that we test several specific predictions (see Baron & Kenny, 1986; Judd & Kenny, 1981): Egal-opportunity ratings should be related to high-prejudice participants’ personal standards and to their feelings of moral obligation, such that greater agreement with the definition should be associated with less prejudiced personal standards and greater feelings of moral obligation to temper prejudice. In addition, feelings of moral obligation should be significantly related to personal standards when egal-opportunity is controlled, and in the case of perfect mediation, egal-opportunity should no longer be significantly related to personal standards. In contrast to the crucial role we are positing for egal-opportunity, we do not expect egal-individualism to be associated with either moral obligation or personal standards. This is because egalitarianism presumably can be construed in terms of individualism without creating an inherent conflict with prejudiced tendencies.

**Relation between egal-opportunity and personal standards.** Hierarchical regression was used to test the first data-analytic requirement for validating the predicted mediational process, which is that egal-opportunity ratings be significantly related to personal standards among high-prejudice participants. Specifically, participants’ personal standards were predicted using their MRS, egal-opportunity, and egal-individualism ratings, along with the interactions among these variables. This analysis revealed a significant main effect for prejudice, \(F(1, 221) = 60.06, p < .001 (\beta = .48)\), such that personal standards became more prejudiced as MRS scores increased. Importantly, the Prejudice \(\times\) Egal-Opportunity interaction was also significant, \(F(1, 219) = 7.98, p < .01\). As shown in Figure 1, low-prejudice participants reported personal standards that were uniformly low in prejudice, regardless of their egal-opportunity ratings. This lack of relation is not surprising: Because low-prejudice individuals tend uniformly to hold very low-prejudice standards (see Figure 1), there is little variance to be accounted for when predicting their standards. Furthermore, as a whole, the low-prejudice participants reported very strong agreement with the egal-opportunity items (e.g., for the lower third of the MRS distribution, the egal-opportunity \(M = 5.19\) on the 7-point scale). In contrast, high-prejudice participants who more strongly endorsed the egal-opportunity items (and thus scored higher on the index) reported less prejudiced personal standards than those who scored lower on the egal-opportunity index. Simple slope analysis (see Aiken & West, 1991) indicated that the effect of egal-opportunity on personal standards was significant for the high-prejudice participants only, \(t(221) = 2.98, p < .01\). This finding is consistent with our contention that egalitarian values play an important role in prompting high-prejudice individuals to establish relatively low-prejudice standards. In addition, the fact that none of the effects involving the egal-individualism index approached significance indicates that egalitarianism construed in terms of individualism has little bearing on individuals’ personal standards.

**Relation between egal-opportunity and moral obligation.** The next step in our analyses was to examine whether egal-opportunity was related to moral obligation. The regression analysis using prejudice, egal-opportunity, egal-individualism, and the interactions among these variables to predict participants’ moral obligation scores yielded several significant effects. The main effect for prejudice was significant, \(F(1, 221) = 81.72, p < .001 (\beta = -.51)\), such that feelings of moral obligation to temper
prejudice were greater as MRS scores became less prejudiced. The main effect for egal-opportunity also was significant, $F(1, 221) = 11.94, p < .001$ ($\beta = .20$), such that moral obligation to temper prejudice increased as agreement with the egal-opportunity items increased. In addition, the Prejudice $\times$ Egal-Opportunity interaction was significant, $F(1, 219) = 22.03, p < .001$. As shown in Figure 2, low-prejudice individuals reported strong feelings of moral obligation to respond in low-prejudice ways, regardless of their egal-opportunity ratings. This pattern mirrors the pattern summarized above in relation to low-prejudice participants’ personal standards. In contrast, the effect of egal-opportunity on feelings of moral obligation was highly significant among the high-prejudice participants, $t(221) = 5.90, p < .001$. Thus, supporting the second requirement for a mediational process, we found that feelings of moral obligation to temper prejudice increased as endorsement of egal-opportunity increased among the high-prejudice participants. Again supporting the idea that people’s definitions of egalitarianism are important to take into account, none of the effects associated with egal-individualism approached significance.

Path analysis test of the mediational hypothesis. Thus far, we have established that egal-opportunity predicts personal standards and moral obligation among our high-prejudice participants. The remaining test for our mediational hypothesis entails conducting a path analysis. Specifically, if moral obligation mediates the relation between egal-opportunity and personal standards, then (a) the moral obligation–personal standards relation reported earlier (see the Predicting Personal Standards

With Important Referent and Moral Obligation Ratings section) should remain significant after controlling for egal-opportunity and (b) the egal-opportunity–personal standards relation should be reduced substantially, if not entirely, when moral obligation is partialed out. Note that it is appropriate to test our mediational hypothesis with path analysis among our high—but not low-prejudice participants, because egal-opportunity was related to personal standards among high-prejudice participants only. That is, one can test for mediation only when an initial relation between the predictor and criterion variables exists. Therefore, we dichotomized the range of prejudice scores and performed the path analysis among those who were in the top half of the distribution (MRS scores 19-56, $M = 27.67$, $SD = 7.88$).

As shown in Figure 3, the results of the regression analysis in which egal-opportunity and moral obligation were used to predict personal standards supported the mediational hypothesis. Moral obligation was a strong predictor of personal standards even after controlling for the egalitarian ratings ($\beta = -.49, p < .001$). Furthermore, the direct relation between egal-opportunity and personal standards was no longer significant when moral obligation was included as a mediating variable. In fact, the inclusion of moral obligation reduced the direct effect of egal-opportunity ratings on personal standards from -.28 to .005; approximately 97% of the effect of egal-opportunity on personal standards operated indirectly through moral obligation.

We also performed a path analysis among high-prejudice participants that included their MRS scores as an exogenous variable. Inclusion of these scores did not alter the pattern of findings shown in Figure 3. However, unlike the relation between egal-opportunity scores and personal standards, the relation between prejudice and standards was direct (i.e., the relation was significant even when moral obligation scores were included in the model; $\beta = .27, p < .01$). These findings suggest that (a) the relations among egal-opportunity, moral obligation, and personal standards were not artifacts of participants’ degree of prejudice as reflected in their MRS scores and
DISCUSSION

Previous research investigating the nature of prejudice-related standards has focused primarily on people who hold low-prejudice attitudes and standards, whose actual behavior sometimes stands in contradiction to their standards for how they should respond (e.g., Devine et al., 1991; Monteith, 1993). In contrast, little has been learned about the basis of high-prejudice individuals’ personal standards, and, in particular, why some high-prejudice individuals believe they should be less prejudiced than they actually are. Thus, the main goal of the present research was to determine why some high-prejudice individuals have established personal standards for responding to Blacks that are less prejudiced than the standards of other high-prejudice individuals. This question was explored by examining the basis of high-prejudice persons’ standards directly and the relation between egalitarianism and such standards.

Because our research interests centered on prejudiced individuals, we focus primarily on the results for the relatively high-prejudice participants in this discussion. It is important to keep in mind, however, that what we call high-prejudice individuals is based on comparisons relative to individuals who score lower in prejudice on the MRS. This fact raises two issues. First, are individuals who score relatively high on the MRS actually prejudiced, or does the MRS assess something other than prejudiced attitudes? In the debate surrounding this question, some researchers have argued that the MRS has little to do with prejudice and instead is more related to political ideology (Fazio, Jackson, Dunton, & Williams, 1995; Sniderman & Tetlock, 1986a, 1986b; Tetlock, 1994). Although a full discussion of this debate is beyond the scope of this article, we maintain that the MRS is very much related to prejudiced attitudes. If it were not, MRS scores would not be so strongly related to politically irrelevant indicators of prejudice such as spontaneous stereotypic associations measured at the implicit level (Wittenbrink, Judd, & Park, 1997) and to social distance indicators and affective reactions to Blacks (Monteith, Spicer, Dicke, & Lombardi, 1997). In addition, although the MRS is correlated with political ideology (i.e., conservatism) (see Fazio et al., 1995; McConahay & Hough, 1976), this may be because prejudice and conservatism share a common underlying factor (e.g., antiegalitarianism) (see Sidanius, Pratto, & Bobo, 1996).

The second issue concerns the extent to which our participants who scored relatively high on the MRS are truly high in prejudice. To our knowledge, the full MRS scale has not been employed in nationwide surveys of racial attitudes, so we cannot compare the distribution of scores from our college sample with national norms. However, because the MRS has been included by the first author in many other data collection efforts among college students, we can compare the present distribution with that of other college samples. The MRS distribution in the present research is similar to distributions that have been obtained in numerous other college samples drawn either from Kentucky, Texas, or Arkansas, and the distribution of the present sample is negatively skewed relative to samples drawn from Wisconsin. These patterns suggest that our participants who scored relatively high on the MRS are truly prejudiced, in that they are as prejudiced as other southern samples, and they are more prejudiced than more northern samples. However, our participants may not be as highly prejudiced as would be observed in some noncollege student samples. At even higher levels of prejudice, we suspect that feelings that one should temper one’s prejudice may not be as common as in our sample. Keeping this potential limitation in mind, we turn now to a discussion of what our findings reveal about the basis of standards among our high-prejudice-scoring participants.

Standard Basis

We reasoned that some high-prejudice persons might believe they should temper their prejudice because they feel morally obligated to do so (i.e., personal standards are based on a sense of moral duty) (e.g., Higgins, 1987; Schwartz, 1977). An alternative possibility was that some high-prejudice persons have important referents whose own relatively nonprejudiced tendencies encourage the establishment of relatively low-prejudice standards (i.e., personal standards are based on the views of others or social norms) (e.g., Higgins, 1987; Schwartz, 1977). Our results provided strong support for the moral obligation explanation and no support for the important referent explanation. These findings do not imply that friends, relatives, and society in general exert little influence in the domain of prejudice. Social learning via important referents no doubt is crucial in shaping racial attitudes and behaviors (Ehrlich, 1973; Katz, 1976; Proshansky, 1966), and salient societal norms no doubt modify people’s expressions of prejudice (e.g., DeFrieze & Ford, 1969; Fendrich, 1967; Monteith et al., 1996; Pettigrew, 1958, 1959; see also Duckitt, 1992). Nevertheless, high-prejudice individuals’ beliefs that they should not be as prejudiced as they are apparently do not result due to pressure from important referents to be less prejudiced. The present findings also do not suggest that feelings of moral obligation provide the sole basis of high-prejudice individuals’ standards. Indeed, our finding that MRS
scores predicted personal standards even after feelings of moral obligation were controlled (see last paragraph of the Results section) points to the unique, additional contribution of attitudes to personal standards. Other factors (e.g., realistic group conflict) (Bobo, 1988) may also influence personal standards for responding to Blacks. Nevertheless, our results do point to the powerful role of moral obligation in shaping individuals’ notions about how they should treat Blacks.

We view the finding that moral obligation provides the motivational basis for high-prejudice individuals’ standards, rather than pressure from important referents, to be encouraging with respect to the prospects of prejudice reduction. Although people are likely to behave consistently with standards based on pressure from others in the short run (e.g., in the presence of the influencing agents), long-term, consistent moderation of prejudice is less likely (see Ausubel, 1955). In contrast, as discussed in greater detail below, inroads for encouraging attitudinal and behavioral change may be more likely when standards are based on feelings of personal moral obligation. Before turning to these practical considerations, we first address our findings concerning the relation between egalitarianism and prejudice.

The Egalitarian Self-Image and Implications for Prejudice

The assumption that most Americans believe they are fair, democratic, unselfish, and egalitarian is widespread among those who study prejudice (Allport, 1954; Gaertner & Dovidio, 1986; McConahay, 1986; Myrdal, 1944; Rokeach, 1973), but apparently, this assumption has escaped empirical investigation. The present findings provided validation of the assumption, indicating that participants believed they were egalitarian. More surprisingly, however, we found that not all participants conceptualized egalitarianism in the same way. Specifically, two distinct interpretations of egalitarianism were observed: one based on the notion of equality of opportunity (i.e., providing for the needs of others and acting to protect others’ rights and interests) and another that was more consistent with the tenets of individualism (i.e., hard work and skill should account for people’s success and standing). The value of egalitarianism is conceptually and psychologically distinct from individualism, but some participants nonetheless defined egalitarianism in terms of individualism. Perhaps a process of motivated distortion is at work, such that individuals who are highly motivated to view themselves as egalitarianism but who are opposed to equality of opportunity come to conceptualize egalitarianism in terms of individualism (see Feldman, 1988; Lipset, 1979).

Regardless of the process by which particular conceptualizations of egalitarianism are acquired, our findings highlight the important relation between these conceptualizations and feelings of moral obligation to moderate prejudice among our high-prejudice participants. Whereas the individualistic interpretation of egalitarianism was unrelated to moral obligation, participants who defined the concept in terms of equality of opportunity reported a greater moral obligation to temper their prejudice. Furthermore, the results of mediational analyses were consistent with a model suggesting that the relation between egal-opportunity and personal standards is mediated by feelings of moral obligation. In other words, the findings suggest that egalitarianism leads to relatively low-prejudice personal standards through individuals’ feelings of moral obligation.

Overall, these results indicate that the implications of egalitarianism for prejudice are more complex than once thought. Having an egalitarian self-image will not necessarily create the sense that prejudice should be tempered, as a number of theorists have suggested (e.g., Allport, 1954; Myrdal, 1944; Rokeach, 1973). The egalitarian self-concept must be defined in terms that call for equality of outcomes and opportunity for it to compel one to feel morally obligated to temper one’s prejudice. In addition, although researchers have previously posited a link between an egalitarian self-conception and people’s evaluation of their beliefs in terms of moral guidelines (Ball-Rokeach et al., 1984; Rokeach, 1973), the present findings empirically establish that the relation between egalitarianism and personal standards is mediated by feelings of personal moral duty or obligation. We turn now to a discussion of the implications of these findings for prejudice reduction.

Implications for Prejudice Reduction

Our findings suggest that if egalitarianism is conceptualized in certain ways, messages designed to appeal to this value orientation in an effort to reduce or control prejudice may fall on unresponsive ears. For example, Myrdal (1944) speculated that the coexistence of a fair and tolerant self-image with prejudice leads to an “ever raging conflict” among Americans. High-prejudice persons who think of themselves as egalitarian but define the value in terms of individualism do not appear to be prone to conflict, much less to an ever-raging conflict, because they feel no moral obligation to temper their prejudice. In addition, Rokeach’s (1973; Ball-Rokeach et al., 1984) value self-confrontation treatment may not be effective for reducing prejudice among these individuals. Rokeach’s treatment involves encouraging participants to realize the inconsistency between their presumably egalitarian, fair, and tolerant self-image and their prejudiced tendencies. Research examining the effectiveness of this treatment suggests that it is, overall, associated with a subsequent increase in the degree to
which participants value equality and in more favorable racial attitudes and behaviors (for a review, see Grube, Mayton, & Ball-Rokeach, 1995). Despite this support, not all participants change under Rokeach's paradigm, and those who do not may be individuals who do not view egalitarianism in terms of equality of opportunity or outcomes. Finally, a number of contemporary theories of prejudice (Gaertner & Dovidio, 1986; McConahay, 1986) assume that people have developed subtle and indirect ways of expressing prejudice so that their egalitarian self-image will not be threatened. This may be the case among individuals who view egalitarianism in terms of equality of opportunity or outcomes; in contrast, those who more blatantly express their prejudice may conceptualize egalitarianism in terms of individualism. In sum, people may think of themselves as egalitarian, but if they do not conceptualize it in terms of equality of opportunity or outcomes, such a self-conception apparently does not conflict with prejudice, and it is not likely to provide a motivational impetus for prejudice reduction.

Can prejudice be more easily curbed among high-prejudice individuals who maintain an egalitarian self-image and define egalitarianism in terms of equality of opportunity? Because such an egalitarian view apparently gives rise to relatively low-prejudice, morality-based standards for responding to Blacks, people ought to regulate their behavior so as to respond consistently with their standards. Specifically, transgressions from such standards give rise to guilt (e.g., Higgins, 1987), which should serve as an internal mechanism for self-regulation and control (e.g., Freud, 1930; Wertheim & Schwartz, 1989) and should instigate reparative action (e.g., Ausubel, 1955; Ball-Rokeach et al., 1984; Lewis, 1971; Lindsay-Hartz, 1984; Rokeach, 1973; Tangney, 1993; for several relevant works, see Tangney & Fischer, 1995).

This line of reasoning paints a hopeful picture for the likelihood of prejudice reduction among high-prejudice individuals whose egalitarian self-images include ideas related to equality of opportunity. However, the actual route to change is likely to be more complicated. This is because high-prejudice individuals' feelings of moral obligation to temper prejudice are not so strongly internalized that powerful feelings of guilt arise when their actual behavior violates their personal standards (Monteith, 1996a). That is, only modest levels of guilt result from standard violation, which apparently are not strong enough to motivate efforts to control or reduce prejudiced reactions in the future (Monteith, 1993). For high-prejudice persons to be compelled to change, their feelings of moral obligation to temper prejudice must first be strengthened.

With the feelings of moral obligation in place, certain strategies may serve to increase the sense of obligation and, ultimately, encourage prejudice reduction. For example, among individuals who have the requisite understanding of egalitarianism, tactics similar to Rokeach's (1973; Ball-Rokeach et al., 1984) value self-confrontation technique may encourage prejudice reduction. Specifically, communications emphasizing that prejudice and discrimination are fundamentally inconsistent with the notion that one is an egalitarian and fair person may strengthen high-prejudice individuals' sense of obligation to respond in low-prejudice ways. This, in turn, may result in greater guilt following transgressions and greater motivation to respond in low-prejudice ways. Such an approach seems sensible in light of the present findings and most likely will be associated with positive change.

In sum, the present results indicate that the belief that prejudice should be tempered held by some prejudiced individuals stems from a sense of moral duty or obligation to be less prejudiced. This obligation appears to originate from an egalitarian self-image that defines egalitarianism in terms of equality of opportunity. The challenge for future research is to determine how to increase this sense of obligation, so that the motivational properties associated with the experience of internal conflict will prompt individuals to do and be what they say they should do and be. In addition, research efforts must be focused on those high-prejudice individuals who do not believe they should temper their prejudice. These individuals maintain that they are egalitarian, but they do not define egalitarianism in a way that conflicts with their prejudice. Thus, another challenge is to determine how these people can be encouraged to achieve greater consistency with a value they supposedly prize.

NOTES

1. Although both males and females participated, information about sex was inadvertently omitted from the questionnaires. Readers interested in possible sex differences may find it useful to note that previous research has suggested that males and females do not differ in the extent to which they are prone to discrepancies or in their reactions to discrepancies (e.g., Devine et al., 1991; Monteith, 1993; Monteith et al., 1993).

2. In all regression analyses reported herein, main effects were entered simultaneously on the first step, so that the unique portion of variance for each variable could be assessed. Two-way interactions were entered on the next step, and when three-way interactions were possible, they were entered on the third step. For significant interactions, predicted values were computed by using values 1 SD above and 1 SD below the mean of the relevant variables in the regression equations (see Cohen & Cohen, 1983). Following Aiken and West's (1991) suggestion, predictor variables were centered in all analyses.

3. A total of 19 participants indicated that they did not know what egalitarian means and thus did not provide an egalitarian self-concept rating. These participants also did not respond to the items asking what egalitarianism means to them. The lower ns for analyses involving the egalitarian-related measures resulted due to these missing data.

4. Another way to operationalize egalitarianism in the present research is to take into account simultaneously participants' egalitarian self-concept ratings and their definitions of egalitarianism. Specifically (after standardizing all relevant variables), an index can be formed by adding participants' self-concept ratings to their opportunity defini-
tion ratings. Likewise, another index can be formed by adding participant’s self-concept ratings to their individualism definition ratings. In this way, the opportunity and individualism indexes reflect not only the extent to which participants viewed themselves as egalitarian but also the way in which they defined the value. Analyses in which the egalitarian indexes are defined in this way do not yield findings that differ in their pattern or significance from those reported herein.

5. If we define relatively high-prejudice participants as those who score in the top third of the prejudice distribution instead of in the top half, we obtain results that are virtually identical to those that we report herein.

REFERENCES


Received August 15, 1996
Revision accepted October 15, 1997