Case Report

Not all egalitarianism is created equal: Claims of nonprejudice inadvertently communicate prejudice between ingroup members

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ABSTRACT

Caucasian-Americans' manner of expressing egalitarianism may inadvertently communicate racial prejudices to ingroup members. Despite most hypothesizing the contrary (Preliminary Study), Caucasian-American perceivers were able to infer ingroup targets' underlying racial attitudes using only targets' written claims of being egalitarian (Experiment 1; $N = 256$) and regardless of whether targets had the goal to be honest or as unprejudiced as possible (Experiment 2; $N = 456$). A Brunswikian lens analysis identified several linguistic cues associated with perceiver accuracy. Language humanizing African-Americans was especially strongly associated with both targets' underlying attitudes and perceivers' inferences of targets' underlying attitudes. Experiment 3 ($N = 811$) revealed that Caucasian-Americans' egalitarian statements communicate racial attitudes in an epidemiological sense: Perceivers reported higher racial prejudice after being exposed to egalitarian statements from targets higher, versus lower, in underlying prejudice, regardless of whether perceiver and target had congruent or incongruent political identifications. Therefore, egalitarian declarations may ironically perpetuate inegalitarian attitudes.

In American society, assertions of egalitarianism have become so common that declarations like "There's not a racist bone in my body" are part of the public lexicon (Petrella & Gomer, 2019). A paradox of modern prejudice is that although Caucasian-Americans' avowal of egalitarianism has become nearly unanimous (Hopkins & Washington, 2019; Ostrove & Brown, 2018), prejudicial attitudes and behaviors against African-Americans persist. Caucasian-Americans conform to egalitarian social norms (Crandall, Eshleman, & O'brien, 2002), wish to see themselves as non-biased (e.g., Devine, Plant, Amodio, Harmon-Jones, & Vance, 2002; Plant & Devine, 1998; Uhlmann & Cohen, 2007), and even attempt to behave in overtly egalitarian ways, such as by participating in social justice movements (e.g., Mallett, Huntsinger, Sinclair, & Swim, 2008; Radke, Kutlaca, Siem, Wright, & Becker, 2020). Yet, Caucasian-Americans continually report less favorable views of African-Americans (e.g., Bianchi, Hall, & Lee, 2018; Craig & Richeson, 2014; Outten, Schmitt, Miller, & Garcia, 2012) and preference for greater social/physical distance from African-Americans relative to Caucasian-Americans (e.g., Dovidio, Kawakami, & Gaertner, 2002; Fazio, Jackson, Dunton, & Williams, 1995; Goff, Steele, & Davies, 2008; McConnell & Leibold, 2001; Milkman, Akinola, & Chugh, 2012, 2015;

Smith, McPherson, & Smith-Lovin, 2014; Word, Zanna, & Cooper, 1974). Many Caucasian-Americans therefore simultaneously hold racial prejudices alongside egalitarian self-concepts (Dovidio & Gaertner, 2004; LaCosse & Plant, 2019; Sommers & Norton, 2006). The present article explores how Caucasian-Americans perceive both their own egalitarianism and that of other Caucasian-Americans. Specifically, we investigate whether Caucasian-Americans' claims of egalitarianism inadvertently reveal their racial prejudices to ingroup perceivers and subsequently affect perceivers' own racial attitudes.

Studying the juxtaposition between egalitarian self-concepts and underlying attitudes is vital to understanding how contemporary prejudice persists in society. Critically, defining oneself as egalitarian provides cover for expressing prejudice. People often believe themselves to be less biased than they actually are (Pronin, Lin, & Ross, 2002) and utilize egalitarian self-concepts to convince others, and themselves, that they are not prejudiced (Crandall & Eshleman, 2003; Merritt, Effron, & Monin, 2010; Monin & Miller, 2001). But despite best intentions to be nonprejudiced, racial prejudice often "leaks through" (Dovidio & Gaertner, 2000; Penner et al., 2010; Saucier, Miller, & Doucet, 2005). Although past work has primarily focused on the nonverbal signals of

underlying prejudice (e.g., reduced eye contact and smiling or greater anger, disgust, and seating distance; Goff et al., 2008; Hebl, Foster, Mannix, & Dovidio, 2002; Hendricks & Bootzin, 1976; Jacoby-Senghor, Sinclair, & Smith, 2015; McConnell & Leibold, 2001), emerging research suggests people also inadvertently express such attitudes via verbal content (e.g., Bergsieker, Leslie, Constantine, & Fiske, 2012; Perry, Murphy, & Dovidio, 2015; Rosenblum, Jacoby-Senghor, & Brown, 2020). For example, letter of recommendation writers tend to extol female mentees as communal and male mentees as agentic (Madera, Hebl, & Martin, 2009). Similarly, politically liberal Caucasian-Americans often "dumb-down" their language when communicating with African-American counterparts by using lower competence vocabulary (Dupree & Fiske, 2019). In line with this research, we posit that Caucasian-Americans inadvertently express prejudice via the language they use when claiming to be egalitarian.

To the extent that expressions of egalitarianism inadvertently communicate racial prejudice, they may also increase the prejudice of ingroup members. Social learning (Bandura & Walters, 1977) and shared reality theories (Hardin & Higgins, 1996; Skorinko & Sinclair, 2018) suggest that attitudes and behavior are in large part determined by one's social context. More directly, Caucasian-Americans infer the racial attitudes of ingroup members from their intergroup behavior (Jacoby-Senghor, Sinclair, & Shelton, 2016; Jacoby-Senghor, Sinclair, Smith, & Skorinko, 2019; Shapiro, Baldwin, Williams, & Trawalter, 2011). In turn, one's level of prejudice adjusts according to the apparent racial attitudes of those they view (e.g., Huntsinger, Sinclair, Kenrick, & Ray, 2016; Sinclair, Lowery, Hardin, & Colangelo, 2005; Skorinko et al., 2015; Weisbuch & Ambady, 2009; Willard, Isaac, & Carney, 2015). In the same way, exposure to egalitarianism that unintentionally communicates negative underlying racial attitudes may increase prejudice, while exposure to egalitarianism that communicates positive underlying racial attitudes may reduce it.

Across a preliminary study and three experiments, we explored whether Caucasian-Americans' egalitarian statements inadvertently communicate *in*egalitarian attitudes to racial ingroup members. Preliminarily, we gathered Caucasian-Americans' lay perceptions of our hypothesis. We then tested whether Caucasian-American perceivers can detect an ingroup target's underlying racial attitudes when provided with only the target's description of how they are egalitarian. We next tested whether perceivers' ability to infer a target's underlying racial attitudes occurs even when the target has the explicit goal of appearing nonprejudiced. Using combined data from these first two experiments, we then identified the linguistic characteristics to which perceivers attend when inferring targets' racial attitudes. Finally, we tested whether exposure to claims of egalitarianism from ingroup targets with relatively higher versus lower levels of racial prejudice would cause perceivers to also report higher levels of racial prejudice.

We preregistered all stimulus collections, manipulations, materials, sample sizes, exclusion criteria, and analyses, and all data and materials are available online.[1]

1. Preliminary study

To test the premise of our hypotheses, we first assessed whether Caucasian-Americans commonly avow themselves to be egalitarians and whether they believe others can detect prejudice from their egalitarian avowals. Preregistration: (https://osf.io/rmhw6).

1.1. Method

1.1.1. Participants
We preregistered recruiting 100 Caucasian-Americans, providing

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95% power to detecting a small-to-medium effect size ($d = 0.36$). In total, 103 adults from Amazon's Mechanical Turk (MTurk; 65 males; $M_{age} = 43.95$, $SD = 11.15$) completed the study in exchange for $0.40.

1.1.2. Procedure and measures
Participants indicated their agreement with two randomly-ordered questions: 1) "Do you believe that all people are equal and should have equality of opportunity?" ("Yes"/"No"), and 2) "Are you prejudiced toward Black people?" ("Yes"/"No"). These questions addressed two crucial dimensions of racial egalitarianism: general egalitarian attitudes and specific prejudice toward African-Americans.

Participants next answered two randomly-ordered questions: 1) "When someone states that they are not prejudiced, are others able to tell from just this information the degree to which that person is prejudiced or nonprejudiced?" ("Yes" / "No") and 2) "If you explained that you are not prejudiced, would you be surprised if others thought you were more prejudiced than the average White person?" ("Yes" / "No").

1.2. Results

Ninety-three participants (90.3%) self-identified as egalitarian, indicating that they support equality of opportunity *and* that they are not prejudiced toward African-Americans. Of these self-identified egalitarians, 75% of people said others would not be able to infer whether a person is prejudiced from their egalitarian statements. Similarly, 86% said they would be surprised if, after explaining that they were non-prejudiced, others thought they were more prejudiced than the average Caucasian-American. In sum, Caucasian-Americans overwhelmingly described themselves as egalitarian and did not believe that one's underlying racial attitudes are detectable via egalitarian statements.

2. Experiment 1

We tested whether Caucasian-American perceivers, when exposed to ingroup targets' written declarations of egalitarianism, would be able to detect targets' underlying racial attitudes. Preregistration: (https://osf.io/9ncy4).

2.1. Method

2.1.1. Egalitarian stimulus collection
We preregistered collecting statements from 100 Caucasian-American targets. One hundred seven Caucasian-Americans (57 males; $M_{age} = 35.37$, $SD = 13.36$) completed the study on MTurk in exchange for $1.25. Targets first provided demographic information and then answered two open-ended questions in random order: 1) "Do you believe that all people are equal and should have equality of opportunity? Why or why not?" and 2) "Are you prejudiced toward Black people? Why or why not?" By collecting targets' written statements, we ruled out the possibility that nonverbal or paralinguistic signals influenced perceivers' judgments, as in previous prejudice detection research (e.g., Dovidio, Hebl, Richeson, & Shelton, 2006; Fazio et al., 1995; Richeson & Shelton, 2005; Vorauer & Kumhyr, 2001). Finally, targets responded to two racial prejudice measures, presented in random order.

We removed targets who provided unintelligible answers or copied responses from a website ($n = 14$), or wrote responses indicating animus toward African-Americans or did not believe in equality of opportunity ($n = 16$). Finally, we removed spelling/punctuation errors. This produced a final stimulus set of 77 targets (38 males, $M_{age} = 36.30$, $SD = 13.98$) describing in writing how they were both egalitarian and non-prejudiced toward African-Americans.

2.1.2. Participants
We preregistered recruiting 250 Caucasian-American perceivers to read targets' statements, giving us an average of 3 unique participants per target. In total, 256 Caucasian-Americans (143 males; $M_{age} = 35.63$,

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$SD = 11.63$) completed the study on MTurk in exchange for $1.25, providing 80% power to detect a correlation of $r = \pm 0.07$.

2.1.3. Procedure

Perceivers read both statements from one randomly assigned target. Perceivers then estimated targets' racial attitudes.

2.1.4. Measures

2.1.4.1. Racial attitudes. We collected Modern Racism (McConahay, 1986; 6 items) and Internal Motivation to Respond Without Prejudice (Plant & Devine, 1998; 5 items) for both targets and perceivers, but with different instructions. Targets were asked to indicate agreement with all items ($\alpha_{MRS} = 0.91$; $\alpha_{IMS} = 0.79$) while perceivers were asked to estimate the target's responses to all items ($\alpha_{MRS} = 0.91$; $\alpha_{IMS} = 0.75$; 1 = *strongly disagree*, 7 = *strongly agree*). Higher scores indicated greater racism toward African-Americans (MRS) and greater internal motivation to be nonprejudiced (IMS).

2.2. Results

2.2.1. Perceived target prejudice

Bivariate correlations revealed that perceivers' guess of targets' MRS was significantly correlated ($r = 0.142$, $p = .023$) with targets' actual MRS. Perceivers' guess of targets' IMS was marginally significantly correlated ($r = 0.115$, $p = .067$) with targets' actual IMS. Thus, Caucasian-American perceivers detected the racial attitudes underlying Caucasian targets' claims of egalitarianism.

3. Experiment 2

We next tested our hypothesis that self-avowed egalitarians inadvertently, as opposed to intentionally, signal their racial attitudes. We thus instructed targets to answer the open-ended statements either honestly or in the least prejudiced way possible. We also collected a new sample of egalitarian target statements. Preregistration for stimulus collection (https://osf.io/85rv4) and experiment (https://osf.io/4h2cn).

3.1. Method

3.1.1. Egalitarian stimulus collection

As preregistered, we recruited 231 Caucasian-Americans (117 males; $M_{age} = 36.22$, $SD = 11.07$) on MTurk in exchange for $0.90. We randomly assigned targets to receive instructions to answer the prompts "as honestly as possible" (i.e., *honesty instructions*) or "in the least prejudiced way possible" (i.e., *nonprejudice instructions*). Targets then responded, in counterbalanced order, to the same open-ended questions from Experiment 1. Afterward, we instructed all participants to provide their "true opinions in the way that best represents their actual self" before completing the MRS and IMS.

We removed targets who wrote answers that were incomprehensible or were copied and pasted from websites ($n = 9$) or who wrote that they held racial animus or did not believe in equality of opportunity ($n = 21$). We also removed targets who did not correctly identify the instructions they were provided ($n = 48$). We again removed spelling and punctuation errors. This produced a final stimulus set of 153 (81 females; $M_{age} = 36.34$, $SD = 11.80$) written egalitarian and nonprejudiced statements.

3.1.2. Participants

We preregistered recruiting 459 perceivers to obtain an average of 3 unique perceivers per target statement. In total, 456 Caucasian-Americans from MTurk (219 males; $M_{age} = 38.17$, $SD = 11.83$) completed the study in exchange for $0.60, providing 80% power to detect a correlation of $r = \pm 0.06$ and to detect an interaction of $R^2 = 0.02$.

3.1.3. Procedure

Perceivers read the egalitarian and nonprejudiced statements of one randomly assigned target. Perceivers then estimated the targets' responses on the MRS and IMS, in random order.

3.1.4. Measures

3.1.4.1. Racial attitudes. Targets ($\alpha_{MRS=0}.86$; $\alpha_{IMS} = 0.83$) and perceivers ($\alpha_{MRS} = 0.89$; $\alpha_{IMS} = 0.85$) responded to MRS and IMS using the same instructions as in Experiment 1.

3.2. Results

3.2.1. Perceived target prejudice

Bivariate correlations again revealed that perceivers' estimates of target MRS and IMS significantly correlated with targets' actual MRS ($r = 0.118$, $p = .012$) and IMS ($r = 0.143$, $p = .002$), respectively.

We next tested whether the instructions provided to targets (i.e., honesty versus nonprejudice instructions) moderated the relationship between perceivers' guesses of target MRS and IMS responses (mean-centered) and targets' actual MRS and IMS responses. As shown in Tables 1a and 1b, instruction condition did not significantly moderate the relationship between perceivers' guess and targets' actual prejudice for either MRS or IMS. Instead, target MRS and IMS significantly predicted perceiver estimates of MRS and IMS when controlling for instruction condition effects.

Thus, perceivers inferred targets' underlying attitudes even when targets had the explicit goal of appearing as nonprejudiced as possible, suggesting that targets inadvertently signal their racial attitudes.

4. Linguistic meta-analysis

We coded the content of statements used as stimuli in the first two experiments to identify which linguistic cues perceivers utilize to infer targets' underlying racial attitudes.[2]

4.1. Linguistic analysis

4.1.1. Coder ratings

Three independent coders (2 females; 1 non-Hispanic Caucasian-American, 1 East Asian, 1 Hispanic), blind to hypotheses and target attitudes, rated the content of targets' statements (see Table 2 for definitions of each code). Codes for the prejudice writing prompt were informed by existing literatures linking prejudice to dehumanization ($\alpha = 0.87$; Haslam, 2006; Haslam & Loughnan, 2014), intergroup contact ($\alpha = 0.99$; Pettigrew, 1998), mindsets ($\alpha = 0.95$; Dweck, 2008; Sassenberg & Moskowitz, 2005), moral obligation ($\alpha = 0.96$; Monteith & Walters, 1998), and colorblindness ($\alpha = 0.91$; Apfelbaum, Norton, & Sommers, 2012). Authenticity ($\alpha = 0.87$) and Defensiveness ($\alpha = 0.91$) were included as a priori dimensions of interest. All codes for the egal-

Table 1a

Instruction condition predicting perceivers' MRS guess.

	B	95% CI	SE B	β	t	p
Target MRS	0.147	[0.010, 0.283]	0.070	0.145	2.108	.036
Condition	0.172	[−0.206, 0.550]	0.192	0.085	0.897	.370
Target MRS x Condition	−0.060	[−0.214, 0.093]	0.078	−0.081	−0.773	.440

Note: *Target MRS* signifies targets' true attitude. *MRS Guess* signifies perceivers' guess of targets' attitude. Model statistics: $R^2 = 0.013$, $F(3, 455) = 1.94$, $p = .122$.

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[2] As requested by reviewers and thus not preregistered.

Table 1b

Instruction condition predicting perceivers' IMS guess.

	B	95% CI	SE B	β	t	p
Target IMS	0.159	[0.027, 0.292]	0.068	0.160	2.361	.019
Condition	0.036	[−0.976, 1.047]	0.515	0.018	0.069	.945
Target IMS x Condition	−0.014	[−0.179, 0.152]	0.084	−0.042	−0.164	.870

Note: *Target IMS* signifies targets' true attitudes. *IMS Guess* signifies perceivers' guess of targets' attitude. Model statistics: $R^2 = 0.024$, $F(3, 455) = 3.64$, $p = .013$.

itarian prompt were developed through a grounded coding approach. Blind to targets' underlying racial attitudes, we reviewed a test set of ten randomly selected prompt responses and identified the most prominent dimensions of variance. These dimensions included Inequality Exists ($\alpha = 0.87$), Equality Support ($\alpha = 0.94$), Equal Opportunity Support ($\alpha = 0.92$), Equal Opportunity Exists ($\alpha = 0.85$), Personal Responsibility ($\alpha = 0.94$), and Equity Focus ($\alpha = 0.79$).

4.1.2. Characteristics utilized in attitude perceptions

To determine which linguistic cues informed perceptions of targets' underlying racial attitudes, we employed Brunswik's (1956) lens model of human perception (for examples see: Anderson, Brion, Moore, & Kennedy, 2012; Rogers, ten Brinke, & Carney, 2016). In this model, perceivers accurately utilize a cue if there is, first, a correlation between targets' actual attitudes and coder ratings and, second, a correlation between a cue and perceivers' guess of targets' racial attitudes. See Figs. 1 & 2 for full models, including coefficients and significances.

Several linguistic cues were indicative both of targets' MRS and IMS:

Authenticity, Learning Orientation, Humanization, Moral Imperative, Defensiveness, Inequality Exists, Equal Opportunity Exists, and Equal Opportunity Support. In addition, Personal Responsibility and Equity Focus language uniquely indicated MRS while Equality Support uniquely indicated IMS. Interestingly, Colorblind language and mentions of Outgroup Contact were *not* indicative of targets' attitudes.

For the most part, perceivers utilized these cues to accurately infer either MRS or IMS. However, only Humanization language was accurately utilized by perceivers as a cue of both MRS and IMS. Notably, perceivers *failed* to utilize Learning Orientation language as indicative of either MRS or IMS.

Ironically, perceivers *incorrectly* interpreted Authenticity cues: Lower MRS and higher IMS predicted more authentic language as rated by coders, but perceivers inferred that authentic language was indicative of more negative racial attitudes.

5. Experiment 3

Finally, we tested whether exposing a Caucasian-American perceiver to the egalitarian statements of a racial ingroup member communicates prejudice in an epidemiological sense. Specifically, we tested whether exposure to targets with higher, versus lower, underlying prejudice would cause perceivers to express more prejudiced racial attitudes.

We simultaneously tested whether the apparent level of similarity between perceivers and targets moderated the influence of targets' egalitarianism. One possibility is that greater perceived similarity will amplify the influence of targets' underlying prejudice on perceivers' racial attitudes. For example, a perceiver may be more likely to mirror
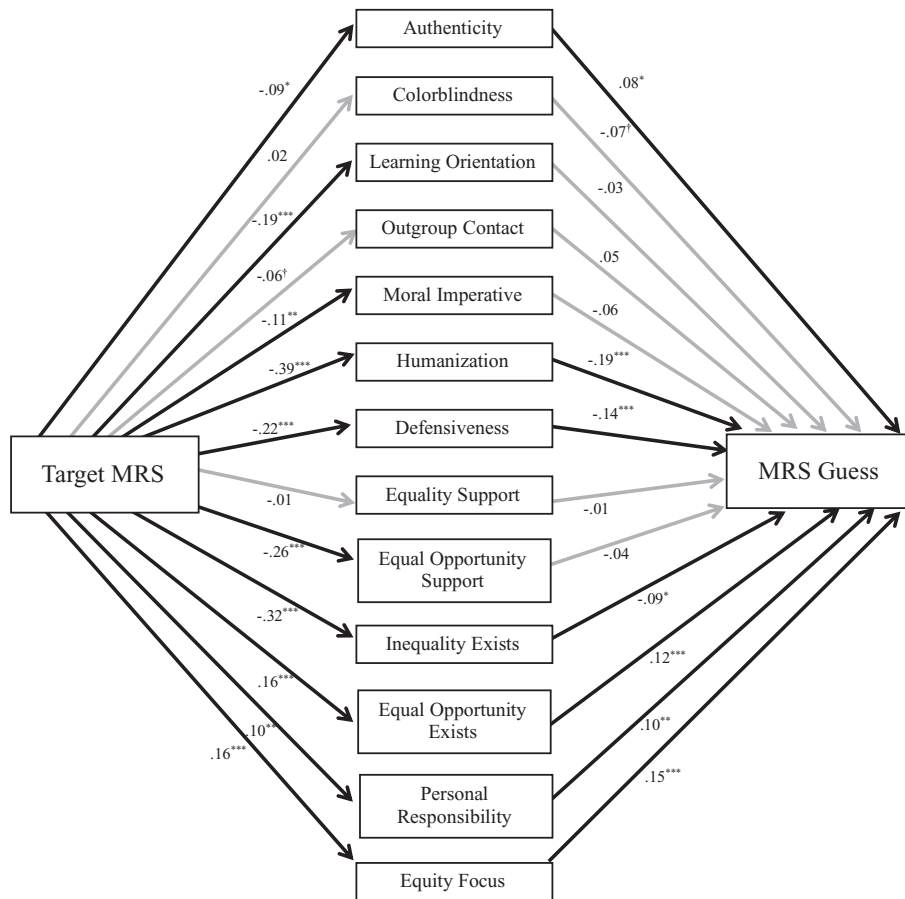

Fig. 1. Brunswik lens model for MRS using combined data from Experiments 1 and 2. Correlations between targets' MRS (left), coder ratings (center), and perceivers' MRS guesses (right). Black lines indicate significant relationships and gray lines indicate nonsignificant relationships, ps > 0.05 ($^{†}p < .10$; *p < .05; **p < .01; ***p < .001).

Table 2
Definitions of rater codes.

Code label	Definition	Scale anchors
1. Authenticity	Did Target's words seem to match what they really believe?	1 (*Inauthentic*) to 5 (*Authentic*)
2. Colorblindness	Did Target express being colorblind (i.e., not paying attention to race)?	1 (*Not at all*) to 5 (*Strongly*)
3. Learning orientation	Did Target express trying to learn to be less biased/more about African-Americans?	1 (*Not at all*) to 5 (*Strongly*)
4. Outgroup contact	Did Target mention contact with African-Americans?	0 (*Does not mention contact*) to 1 (*Mentions contact*)
5. Moral imperative	Did Target express moral or injunctive rationales for non-prejudice?	1 (*Does not moralize*) to 5 (*Strongly moralizes*)
6. Humanization	Did Target humanize African-Americans?	1 (*Least humanizing*) to 5 (*Most humanizing*)
7. Defensiveness	Did Target exhibit defensiveness?	1 (*Not at all defensive*) to 5 (*Very defensive*)
8. Equality support	Did Target express support that people are equal?	1 (*Not at all*) to 5 (*Strongly*)
9. Equal opportunity support	Did Target express support for equality of opportunity?	1 (*Not at all*) to 5 (*Strongly*)
10. Inequality exists	Did Target express that inequality exists?	1 (*Not at all*) to 5 (*Strongly*)
11. Equal opportunity exists	Did Target express that equal opportunity exists?	1 (*Not at all*) to 5 (*Strongly*)
12. Equity focus	Did Target support equity more than equality?	1 (*Not at all*) to 5 (*Strongly*)
13. Personal responsibility	Did Target express personal responsibility/choice matters?	1 (*Not at all*) to 5 (*Strongly*)

the underlying racial attitudes of a target who ostensibly shares the same political ideology than of a target who ostensibly holds an opposing political ideology. Alternatively, it is possible that the signaling of prejudice via egalitarian avowals is subtle enough that it affects perceivers' attitudes regardless of the similarity perceivers feel to targets (e.g., Willard et al., 2015). In this case, targets would mirror the underlying racial attitudes of ingroup targets who apparently share their political ideology and of targets who are ideologically dissimilar.

In Experiment 3, we manipulated whether Caucasian-American perceivers were shown egalitarian statements from ingroup targets who were either high or low in racial prejudice. We additionally manipulated

whether targets were ostensibly similar or dissimilar to the perceiver in political ideology. Our dependent variables assessed perceivers' evaluations of the targets they viewed and perceivers' own racial attitudes. Preregistration: https://osf.io/rcwny).

5.1. Method

5.1.1. Participants

We preregistered collecting 800 participants to have ~200 perceivers per condition. In total, 811 Caucasian-Americans (403 males; $M_{age} = 37.33$, $SD = 11.55$) completed the study on MTurk for $1.25,
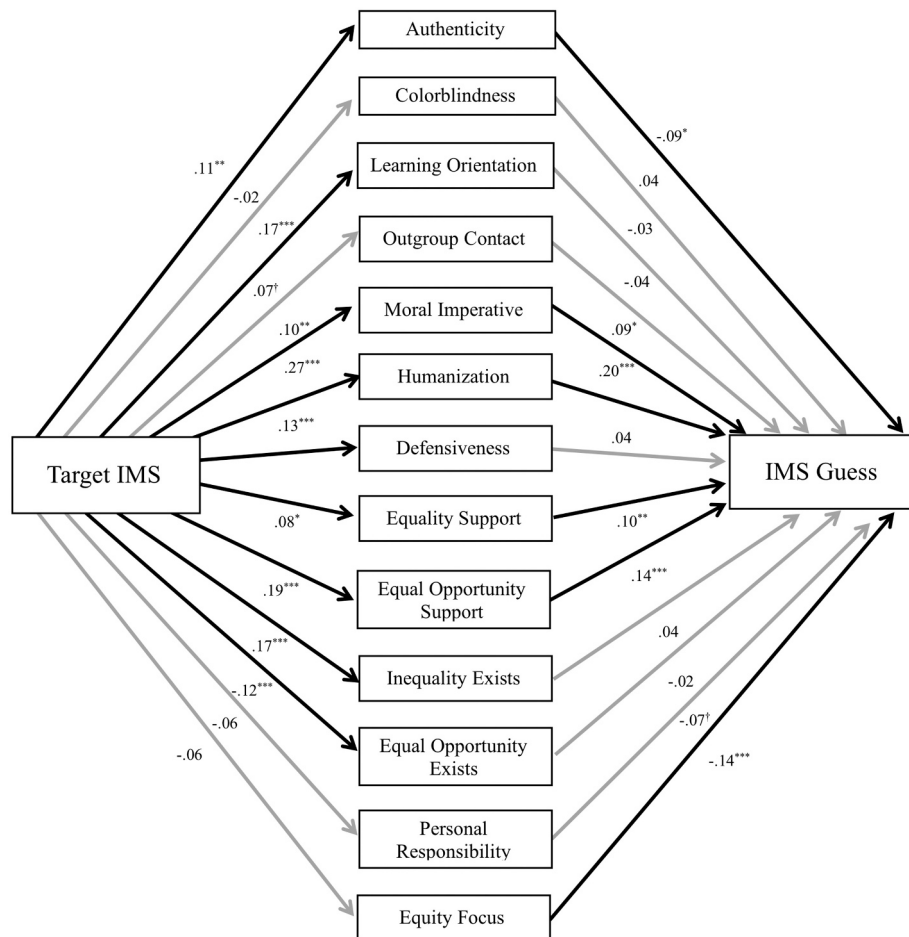
Fig. 2. Brunswik lens model for IMS using combined data from Experiments 1 and 2. Correlations between targets' IMS (left), coder ratings (center), and perceivers' IMS guesses (right). Black lines indicate significant relationships, and gray lines indicate nonsignificant relationships, *ps* > 0.05 (†*p* < .10; *p* < .05; **p* < .01; ***p* < .001).

providing 80% power to detect an effect size of $d = 0.28$.

5.1.2. Procedure

This experiment involved a 2 (underlying prejudice: low vs. high) x 2 (ideological similarity: similar vs. dissimilar) between-subjects design. At random, perceivers were told that the statements they would see were written by people who identified as either politically liberal or conservative. Thus, perceivers were in the *similar condition* if they were told that targets had the same ideological orientation as them (e.g., $n = 422$) or were in the *dissimilar condition* if they were told that targets had an opposing ideological orientation as them ($n = 389$).

Perceivers were also randomly assigned to a high ($n = 404$) or low ($n = 407$) prejudice condition. To create these conditions, we median-split the 77 Caucasian-American targets used in Experiment 1 by both MRS and IMS scores. We then selected the 55 targets whose scores were below the median on MRS and above the median on IMS (i.e., *low prejudice egalitarians*; $n = 27$) or above the median on MRS and below the median on IMS (i.e., *high prejudice egalitarians*; $n = 28$). Each perceiver in the present study read the statements of four randomly selected targets who were all either relatively high or relatively low in underlying prejudice.

After reading each targets' statements, perceivers evaluated the target and completed the similarity manipulation check. After reading all four sets of statements, perceivers indicated their own racial attitudes and reported whether they identified as liberal or conservative.

5.2. Measures

5.2.1. Manipulation check

For each target, participants answered: "How similar are you to the person whose answers you just read?" (1 = *not at all similar*, 7 = *very similar*).

5.2.2. Target evaluation

For each target, participants answered: "How much do you like the person whose answers you just read?" (1 = *dislike a great deal*, 7 = *like a great deal*) and "How much would you get along with the person whose answers you just read?" (1 = *not at all*, 7 = *get along very well*; $\alpha = 0.94$).

5.2.3. Perceiver racial attitudes

We presented MRS ($\alpha_{MRS} = 0.91$) and IMS ($\alpha_{IMS} = 0.85$) to perceivers in random order. Unlike in Experiments 1 and 2, perceivers indicated only their *own* agreement with each item in both measures.

6. Results

6.1. Manipulation check

There was a significant effect of ideological similarity, $F(1, 811) = 24.18$, $p < .001$, $\eta_p^2 = 0.03$, such that perceivers rated targets with the same ideology as them as more similar ($M = 5.11$, $SD = 1.19$), than targets with an opposing ideology ($M = 4.71$, $SD = 1.19$).

6.2. Main analyses

We conducted a 2×2 ANOVA to test the effect of underlying prejudice, ideological similarity, and their interaction on target evaluations and perceiver MRS and IMS. The interaction was nonsignificant for both target evaluation and perceiver racial prejudice ($ps > 0.391$).

6.2.1. Target evaluation

There was a main effect of underlying prejudice, $F(1, 811) = 24.25$, $p < .001$, $\eta_p^2 = 0.03$, such that perceivers rated targets with higher underlying prejudice as less likable ($M = 4.93$, $SD = 1.00$) than targets with lower underlying prejudice ($M = 5.28$, $SD = 1.04$). There was also a main effect of ideological similarity, $F(1, 811) = 19.21$, $p < .001$, $\eta_p^2 = 0.02$, such that perceivers rated ideologically dissimilar targets as less

likable ($M = 4.94$, $SD = 1.06$) than ideologically similar targets ($M = 5.26$, $SD = 0.98$).

6.2.2. Perceiver racial attitudes

For MRS, there was a main effect of underlying prejudice, $F(1, 811) = 5.52$, $p = .018$, $\eta_p^2 = 0.01$, such that perceivers who saw statements from targets with higher underlying prejudice reported their own racial prejudice as being higher ($M = 2.62$, $SD = 1.53$) than perceivers who saw targets with lower underlying prejudice ($M = 2.38$, $SD = 1.38$). There was no effect of ideological similarity on perceiver MRS scores, $F(1, 811) = 0.43$, $p = .514$, $\eta_p^2 < 0.01$.

For IMS, there was no main effect of underlying prejudice, $F(1, 811) = 0.85$, $p = .358$, $\eta_p^2 < 0.01$, or ideological similarity, $F(1, 811) = 0.60$, $p = .603$, $\eta_p^2 < 0.01$, on perceiver motivation to be nonprejudiced. This finding comports with prior research showing that internal motivations around prejudice may be particularly hard to change (e.g., Devine, Forscher, Austin, & Cox, 2012; Legault, Gutsell, & Inzlicht, 2011).

Taken as a whole, these findings suggest that perceivers may attune to the underlying racial prejudices of ostensible egalitarians, even regardless of their liking of these individuals or their relative similarity on the ideological spectrum.

7. General discussion

Across three experiments, we investigated whether Caucasian-Americans' declarations of egalitarian values unintentionally signal inegalitarian racial attitudes and how such signals affect perceptions and attitudes of ingroup perceivers. In line with our predictions, Caucasian-American perceivers were able to infer ingroup members' prejudice against African-Americans and motivation to be nonprejudiced based solely on their claims of egalitarianism (Experiments 1 & 2). Notably, we provided perceivers only with written statements in which the writer avowed their egalitarianism. By utilizing Caucasian-American targets who actively attempted to emphasize that they were egalitarian, and allowing them to express themselves in a deliberative manner, our design provided an especially conservative test of our hypothesis. Likely reflecting this approach, the observed effects were small ($0.143 > rs > 0.115$), suggesting considerable variation in perceivers' inferences. Future research should explore how more naturalistic and spontaneous expressions of egalitarianism are perceived and whether perceivers' inferences are more accurate under these conditions.

An analysis of data combined from Experiments 1 and 2 showed that perceivers utilized numerous linguistic cues to infer ingroup members' racial attitudes (see Figs. 1 & 2). Three results stood out in particular. First, language that humanized outgroup members was strongly associated with perceptions of underlying attitudes, and it was the only cue that was accurately utilized to infer both MRS and IMS responses of the target. The salience of this cue to perceivers is consistent with research on the fundamental link between humanization and prejudice (Haslam, 2006). It is also consistent with anecdotes of public scrutiny around avowedly egalitarian statements that are contradictorily dehumanizing, such as a politician's statement that "I have a great relationship with the blacks" (Milbank, 2020).[3] Second, language indicating an openness toward learning more about how to be unbiased was significantly associated with more positive racial attitudes and yet perceivers did not utilize this language to infer either MRS or IMS. Therefore, Caucasian-American perceivers appear to undervalue the extent to which a learning orientation is commonly associated with egalitarianism (LaCosse & Plant, 2019; Neel & Shapiro, 2012). Third, although targets with more positive racial attitudes were rated as more authentic, perceivers ironically misinterpreted authentic language as being indicative of more negative racial attitudes. This finding appears consistent with

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[3] The exact statements used in the present work are available in online materials.

prior evidence showing that individuals with more, versus less, egalitarian attitudes sometimes exert less effort to appear egalitarian (e.g., Shelton, Richeson, Salvatore, & Trawalter, 2005) and may even "choke" when their level of egalitarianism is being evaluated by others (Vorauer & Turpie, 2004). Therefore, targets with more positive underlying racial attitudes may simultaneously come across as earnest in their beliefs and also be less emphatically persuasive of their egalitarianism. Future work could explore whether perceiver utilization of these signals can be motivated. In particular, perceivers' intergroup ideologies and working definitions of egalitarianism may explain the signals to which they attend. Furthermore, future work should explore whether information aside from racial attitudes can be inferred via egalitarian expressions, for example the diversity of one's social network or one's implicit racial associations.

Our findings suggest that Caucasian-Americans inadvertently signal underlying racial attitudes. The vast majority of Caucasian-American targets across studies self-identified as egalitarian. Between 81% and 90% of Caucasian-American respondents across our samples stated both that they believed in equality of opportunity and that they were not intentionally prejudiced against African-Americans. Our preliminary study further revealed that an overwhelming majority of Caucasian-Americans think that when they express egalitarian attitudes, others will believe them. In reality, Caucasian-Americans clearly signal their racial attitudes via egalitarian self-avowals (Experiment 1), even when they have the explicit goal of appearing nonprejudiced (Experiment 2).

The current work also suggests that Caucasian-Americans' egalitarianism may communicate group prejudices in an epidemiological sense. We found that perceivers reported greater prejudice toward African-Americans after being exposed to statements from self-avowed egalitarian targets with relatively higher levels of underlying prejudice compared to exposure of statements from lower prejudice targets (Experiment 3). This result suggests that attempts to communicate egalitarianism may be an unwitting avenue through which racial attitudes are perpetuated. Past research has shown that perceivers' biases shift to align with clearly negative nonverbal behaviors (e.g., discomfort, seating or standing distance, and cold vocal tone; Goff et al., 2008; Palazzi et al., 2016; Willard et al., 2015) or the unequivocally bigoted or egalitarian expressions of others (Castelli & Tomelleri, 2008; LaCosse et al., 2015; Sinclair, Dunn, & Lowery, 2005). The present work demonstrates that the communication of racial prejudices can occur even when the target is explicitly declaring egalitarian values. That said, the present research is limited by its inability to specify how perceivers' prejudicial beliefs changed compared to baseline. Future work should investigate the precise drivers and direction of the observed attitudinal change and explore whether such changes have downstream consequences for perceivers' behavior.

Experiment 3 also found that communication of racial prejudice did not depend on perceivers' ideological similarity to, or liking of, the targets they saw. One possible rationale for this result is that subtlety facilitates the transmission of racial prejudices (e.g., Willard et al., 2015). For example, Weisbuch, Pauker, and Ambady (2009) showed that exposure to more racially biased nonverbal behaviors in television shows increased viewers' own racial biases. However, viewers did not recognize the nonverbal behaviors as biased. Similarly, egalitarian self-avowals may be deemed normative enough by perceivers that they do not monitor the influence the statements might have on their own attitudes. Another possible rationale is that people often feel uncertain regarding how they should act in intergroup contexts (Gudykunst, 1993; Pettigrew, Christ, Wagner, & Stellmacher, 2007; Stephan, Stephan, & Gudykunst, 1999; Vorauer & Turpie, 2004). When uncertainty is high, perceivers are likely to attune to others' attitudes (Lun, Sinclair, Whitchurch, & Glenn, 2007; Mazziotta, Mummendey, & Wright, 2011), particularly those of ingroup members (Choi & Hogg, 2020). Therefore, perceivers' uncertainty regarding the ideal manner of expressing egalitarianism may have made them receptive to the example provided by targets. Future work should more directly investigate the role that subtlety and uncertainty play in the transmission of prejudice.

Finally, our research expands the conversation about the intentionality of prejudice expression. Scholars have viewed verbal expressions of prejudice as primarily controllable (e.g., Dovidio et al., 2002). As bigotry has become an increasingly unpalatable social norm (Iyer, Leach, & Crosby, 2003; Miron, Branscombe, & Schmitt, 2006; Moskowitz & Li, 2011; Swim & Miller, 1999), popular models of prejudice expression highlight that individuals downregulate controllable displays of prejudice in order to demonstrate egalitarian values (Monteith, Ashburn-Nardo, Voils, & Czopp, 2002; Monteith, Mark, & Ashburn-Nardo, 2010; Plant & Devine, 1998; Vorauer, 2006). Therefore, self-avowed egalitarians are thought to display prejudice mostly through more automatic behavioral channels (e.g., nonverbal behaviors; Devine et al., 2002; Dovidio et al., 2002; Hebl et al., 2002). In contrast, the present research suggests that egalitarians may indeed express prejudice unintentionally via more controllable channels, such as written language. One possible reason for this result is that individuals are especially prone to express prejudice when ambiguity makes one's prejudice more difficult to label (Crandall & Eshleman, 2003; Effron & Knowles, 2015; Kaiser et al., 2013). The explicit goal of appearing egalitarian might therefore blind individuals to the possibility that they could be communicating and perpetuating prejudicial attitudes.

Open practices

All experiments were preregistered. All data and materials have been made publicly available via the Open Science Framework and can be accessed at https://osf.io/k2p67.

Acknowledgements

Appendix A. Supplementary data

Supplementary data to this article can be found online at https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jesp.2021.104104.

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