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Obligation as a Mediator in the Relationship between Moral Conviction and Activism

A Thesis in Psychology

by

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I dedicate this thesis to my parents, Earl and Sherri Kerr, for continuously supporting me in all of my endeavors and for teaching me the value of hard work and perseverance.

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ABSTRACT

When people feel morally convicted about an issue (i.e., when they see an issue as related to fundamental right and wrong, good and bad) they are more likely to engage in activism relevant to that issue. Researchers have found that obligation—the belief that one should or must take action—plays an important mediating role in this relationship. The goal of the current research was to further examine the nature and the role of obligation in the relationship between moral conviction and activism. This study was conducted with 308 participants using an online survey. Participants were presented with a list of issues and were asked to choose their most important issue and least important issue. Participants completed the remainder of the survey for either their most important issue, their least important issue, or a randomly assigned issue. The survey assessed participants' issue-specific moral conviction, attitude strength, obligation to the self, obligation to others, and activism intentions. Results indicated that moral conviction predicted low and high cost activism intentions, as well as obligation to the self and obligation to others. Obligation to the self and obligation to others also each predicted low and high cost activism intentions and obligation to others also predicted behavioral activism. Mediation analyses indicated that obligation to others mediated the relationship between moral conviction and low cost activism intentions as well as high cost activism intentions, and obligation to the self mediated the relationship between moral conviction and high cost activism intentions. Implications of these findings are discussed.

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INTRODUCTION

In May of 2013, Edward Snowden leaked classified information revealing the National Security Agency's (NSA) comprehensive surveillance of United States citizens' internet and phone correspondence. As a result, Snowden incurred great personal cost. He was branded a traitor and was forced to leave his country for fear of losing his life. He left behind a girlfriend, a home in Hawaii, and a job with a yearly salary of $200,000. At the time he leaked the information about the NSA's surveillance programs, Snowden was fully aware of the possible consequences of doing so (Gellman, 2013). Why, then, did Snowden take action? Snowden explained that when working for the NSA, he had an "awareness of wrongdoing" in the agency which made him feel "compelled to talk about it" (Greenwald, MacAskill & Poitras, 2013). Snowden's language suggests that he likely perceived the NSA's behavior as immoral and that he felt obligated to take action against that immoral behavior; Snowden seems to have acted in the name of his moral beliefs.

Moral conviction is, indeed, a powerful predictor of activism. When people feel morally convicted about an issue (i.e., when they see an issue as related to fundamental right and wrong, good and bad) they are more likely to engage in activism relevant to that issue (Morgan, Skitka & Wisneski, 2010; Skitka & Bauman, 2008; Van Zomeren, Postmes & Spears, 2010). Researchers have proposed several mechanisms underlying the relationship between moral conviction and activism, and found that obligation—the belief that one must take action—plays an important mediating role in this relationship (Morgan, 2011). In other words, when people feel more morally convicted, they are more likely to feel a sense of obligation to act in the name of their beliefs. In turn, when people feel like they have an obligation to take action, they are more likely to engage in activism. Nonetheless, researchers

do not yet understand the nature of moral obligation. It is unclear whether this sense of moral obligation is focused on the self, the individual's group, or both, and whether it is an obligation to help, avoid harm, or both. The goal of the current research was to further examine the nature and the role of obligation in the relationship between moral conviction and activism.

Moral Conviction

Attitudes vested with moral conviction (i.e., moral mandates) reflect people's fundamental beliefs about right and wrong. Moral mandates are typically strong attitudes (e.g., people perceive their moral mandates as extreme, certain, and important). However not all strong attitudes are moral mandates. For instance, a person might have a very strong but non-moral attitude about a sports team, believing that their favorite team is the best team in the league. Even if the person's attitude about their favorite sports team is extreme, certain, and important to them, it most likely will not reflect their fundamental beliefs about right and wrong. In other words, moral conviction is a dimension of attitudes which is considered independent of attitude strength.

Accordingly, moral mandates differ substantially from two other types of attitudes: personal preferences and social conventions (Skitka, Bauman & Sargis, 2005; Turiel, 2008). People perceive their personal preferences as matters of taste, meaning they believe it is acceptable for a personal preference to vary from person to person. Examples of common personal preferences include favorite foods, favorite colors, preferred movie genres, etc. In contrast, people perceive their conventional attitudes as social norms which most people in their social group should partake in, but which do not apply to people in different social groups, time periods, geographic locations, or cultures (Nucci, 2001). An example of a social

convention is which side of the sidewalk people typically walk on. In the United States where people drive on the right side of the road, people also typically walk on the right side of a busy sidewalk. In other countries where people drive on the left side of the road, this trend is reversed and people typically walk on the left side of a busy sidewalk. Because of the difference in setting, it is acceptable for this social convention to vary. In contrast, moral mandates reflect people's fundamental beliefs about right and wrong. People perceive their moral mandates as objectively true and universal, meaning they are not perceived as varying from person to person, regardless of the setting. I now review the associations of moral conviction with objectivity and universality as well as several of its other characteristics.

Objectivity and Universality

People perceive their moral mandates as objectively true as well as universally applicable. In other words, people believe that their moral mandates are more factual than opinion-based and that their moral beliefs should apply to all other people as well themselves, regardless of time, place, or cultural context. Specifically, people perceive moral beliefs as more objectively true than personal preferences or social conventions, and similar in objective truth to scientific fact (Goodwin & Darley, 2007; Wright, Grandjean, & McWhite, 2013).

Furthermore, it may be a perception of objective truth that leads people to believe their moral mandates are universally applicable. In a study (Morgan, Skitka & Lytle, invited revision) that looked at four different issues including abortion, the HPV vaccine, global energy resources, and same-sex marriage, the relationship between moral conviction and perceived universal generalizability was mediated by perceived objectivity In other words,

people perceive their moral mandates as objectively true and as a result of their perceived objective truth, moral mandates are also perceived as universally generalizable.

Emotions

In addition to being perceived as objectively and universally true, moral mandates also have strong ties to emotion. Emotions, particularly the emotion of disgust, influence moral judgments (Haidt, 2001) and may play a role in the development of moral conviction (Graham, Haidt, Koleva, Motyl, Iyer, Wojcik, et al., in press). Furthermore, when thinking about beliefs held with moral conviction, people are more likely to feel strong emotions than when thinking about strong but non-moral attitudes (Skitka & Wisneski, 2011; Wright, Cullum, & Schwab, 2008). These findings suggest that the experience of moral conviction is associated with a strong affective response.

Authority Independence

Moral mandates also appear to be authority-independent, meaning people's moral beliefs are not determined by the dictates of their authority figures. For example, people who felt morally convicted about their position on physician-assisted suicide were less likely to trust the Supreme Court's ability to make a decision regarding the issue than participants who did not feel morally convicted about physician-assisted suicide (Wisneski, Lytle, & Skitka, 2009). In a related vein, people who felt morally convicted about the issue of physician-assisted suicide were more likely to perceive the Supreme Court's ruling as illegitimate when it contradicted their own beliefs than participants who did not feel morally convicted about physician-assisted suicide (Skitka, Bauman, & Lytle, 2009). In both cases, participants' moral conviction overrode their deference to authority figures.

Peer independence

Moral mandates are also peer-independent. That is, they are resistant to social influences. For example, people who felt morally convicted about enhanced interrogation were less likely to conform to opposing majority opinion than those who did not feel morally convicted about the issue—a finding that was true for both publicly and privately held beliefs (Aramovich, Lytle, & Skitka, 2011).

Furthermore, findings suggest people whose beliefs are held with moral conviction are not only less likely to conform to majority influence, but are also more likely to exhibit counter-conformity. College students who felt morally convicted about a social issue relevant to their university were more likely to speak out on behalf of their beliefs if they thought their opinion was held by a minority of students on campus than if they thought their opinion was held by the majority (Hornsey, Smith, & Begg, 2007).

In summary, beliefs held with moral conviction reflect people's fundamental beliefs about right and wrong. Such beliefs are perceived as objectively true and universally applicable. They have the ability to elicit a strong emotional response and emotions likely play a role in the development of moral conviction. Furthermore, moral mandates are both authority- and peer-independent. Importantly, moral mandates differ from non-moral attitudes in these ways even after controlling for various measures of attitude strength.

Moral Conviction as a Motivator for Activism

Of particular importance to the current research, moral conviction is also a powerful motivator for activism. Activism is typically referred to as any type of effort meant to improve the status of a relevant group (Zaal, Van Laar, Ståhl, Ellemers, & Derks, 2011). For

the purposes of this study, the definition of activism will also refer to any type of effort meant to prevent the status of a relevant group from worsening.

Moral conviction, for example, predicts voting intentions. In two different studies examining participants' intentions to vote in a United States presidential election (Morgan, Skitka, & Wisneski, 2010; Skitka & Bauman, 2008), participants who felt morally convicted about their positions on relevant issues-of-the-day and political candidates were more likely than participants who did not feel a sense of moral conviction to indicate that they intended to vote in the upcoming election. This was true even when controlling for political party identification, candidate preference, and attitude strength.

Moral conviction also predicts protest behaviors. This trend has been observed across a variety of different issues. Participants who feel moral conviction about issues as varied as tuition costs (Van Zomeren et al., 2010, Study 1), the use of genetically-modified meat in commercial food products (Van Zomeren et al., 2010, Study 2), and gender equality (Zaal et al., 2011) are more likely than participants who do not feel morally convicted about these issues to engage in protest relevant to their positions on these issues. This relationship holds true for measurements of action intentions, as well as measurements of actual behavior.

Potential Mediators of the Moral Conviction-Action Link

Although a growing body of evidence supports the role of moral conviction as a predictor of activism, the underlying reason for this relationship is less clear. Research has explored several potential mediators of the relationship between moral conviction and activism including perceived efficacy, emotion, ingroup identification, and a sense of obligation. These studies have yielded somewhat mixed results.

Efficacy

There is considerable evidence to suggest that a sense of efficacy motivates activism. Efficacy refers to the extent to which people believe they can actually make a difference with their actions. In particular, perceived efficacy has been demonstrated as a motivator of collective action in the context of tuition increases and students' reactions to additional course requirements (Van Zomeren, Spears, Fischer & Leach, 2004). Furthermore, cross-sectional data indicates that efficacy predicts collective action cross-nationally (Corcoran, Pettinicchio, & Young, 2011).

The notion that efficacy mediates the relationship between moral conviction and activism has received inconsistent support. When examining people's reactions to genetically modified meat in commercial food products, perceived efficacy did significantly mediate the relationship between moral conviction and activism (Van Zomeren et al., 2010). However, when examining people's reactions to tuition increases at their university, efficacy did not mediate the relationship between moral conviction and activism (Van Zomeren et al., 2010). This suggests that efficacy may mediate the relationship between moral conviction and activism in some contexts but not others.

Emotions

Several studies have examined the role of anger in the relationship between moral conviction and activism—suggesting that moral conviction might predict anger, which, in turn predicts activism. In two of the studies discussed above regarding tuition increases and the use of genetically modified meat, anger was shown to significantly mediate the relationship between moral conviction and activism (Van Zomeren et al., 2010). Furthermore, opponents of the Iraq war who felt morally convicted about their position were

significantly angrier and more anxious about the war than participants who either supported the war or did not feel morally convicted about opposing the war (Skitka & Wisneski, 2011). These negative emotions (anger and anxiety) partially mediated the relationship between moral conviction and activist intentions in this context. The finding that this was a partial rather than full mediation suggests that something other than emotion alone likely accounts for the relationship between moral conviction and activism.

Group Identification

The role of ingroup identification as a mediator in the relationship between moral conviction and activism was also explored in the context of tuition increases and genetically-modified meat (Van Zomeren et al., 2010). A sense of politicized identification with like-minded others fully and significantly mediated the relationship between moral conviction and activism in both contexts. A possible explanation for this trend is that as people feel a stronger sense of ingroup identification, they begin to experience more group-based emotions and group efficacy. This notion was supported by the findings that politicized identification predicted group-based anger in both contexts and group efficacy in the context of genetically modified meat. Additionally, anger and group efficacy both predicted collective action tendencies. Both variables were also found to be significant mediators in the moral-conviction action link; however, their effect was less extreme than that of politicized identification.

To summarize, efficacy, negative emotions, and identification have all been tested as mediating variables in the relationship between moral conviction and activism. All of these variables at least partially mediate the moral conviction-activism link in some contexts. However, none of the above mentioned studies tested the role of obligation as a mediator in

the moral conviction-action link. As described below, when participants' sense of obligation is taken into account, the effect of the above mentioned variables is less significant or even non-existent.

Obligation

The Motivational Role of Moral Obligation

The experience of "moral obligation" predicts activist intentions across several contexts, including willingness to donate blood (Ortberg, Gorsuch & Kim, 2001) and willingness to consume genetically-modified meat (Sparks, Shepherd & Frewer, 1995). Unfortunately, much of the previous research on moral obligation does not distinguish between moral conviction and obligation. Rather, it asks participants about their sense of "moral obligation" (Ortberg et al., 2001) or "ethical obligation" (Sparks et al., 1995). With such a measurement method, it is unclear whether it is a sense of moral conviction, a sense of obligation, or both that predicts increased activist intentions. The current research measured moral conviction and a sense of obligation as distinct psychological constructs.

Obligation as a Mediator in the Moral Conviction-Action Link

Across three different studies that discretely measured moral conviction and obligation (Morgan, 2011), moral conviction predicted activism. Furthermore, obligation—not efficacy, emotion, nor ingroup identification--was the variable that fully and consistently mediated the relationship between moral conviction and activism. Emotion was the only variable beside obligation that mediated the moral conviction-action link but did so in only one of the three studies. In short, evidence suggests that when all potential mediators are simultaneously tested, obligation robustly mediates the relationship between moral conviction and activism. A number of questions, however, remain.

Obligation to the Self vs. Obligation to the Group

It is unclear whether the obligation associated with moral conviction is more self-focused or group-focused. Some evidence suggests that people may feel a sense of moral obligation to the self rather than to their group. In the above research (Morgan, 2011), the effect of obligation was significant even when controlling for identification with other activists—a finding that suggests obligation to act in the name of a moral mandate may be more self- than group-motivated. People chose to take action regardless of their sense of identification with an ingroup, suggesting that their decision to engage in morally-motivated activism was made independent of a concern for a relevant group. If obligation had been more group-based in this case, it would be expected that identification with other activists would play a stronger role in the relationship between moral conviction and activism. Despite preliminary evidence, strong conclusions about the nature of obligation associated with moral conviction cannot be drawn because self-based and group-based obligations were not measured separately in previous studies. The current research accounted for this limitation by measuring self-based and group-based obligation separately.

Approach-Based vs. Avoidance-Based Motivation

Previous research assessing the relationships among moral conviction, activism, and obligation also has not addressed whether the sense of obligation is more approach-based or avoidance-based. Approach-based motivation leads people take action to achieve some sort of gain (Janoff-Bulman, 2009; Janoff-Bulman & Carnes, 2013). For instance, contributing a charitable donation to a homeless shelter would be considered an approach-based action if the effort was focused on improving the conditions of the shelter and the people who the shelter benefits. In contrast, avoidance-based motivation stimulates people to take action in

an effort to prevent some sort of harm or transgression. Contributing a charitable donation to a homeless shelter would be considered an avoidance-based example of motivation if the effort was meant to avoid the surrounding neighborhood from deteriorating or to prevent the suffering of the homeless.

Approach-based (prescriptive) moral action is generally perceived by the individual as more worthy of credit and commendation than avoidance-based (proscriptive) moral action (Janoff-Bulman, Sheikh & Hepp, 2009). Furthermore, a lack of engagement in avoidance-based moral action is more likely to be subject to blame and condemnation than a lack of engagement in approach-based moral action. The approach-based regulatory system is more likely to respond to positive moral behaviors while the avoidance-based regulatory system is more likely to respond to immoral behaviors. In short, approach-based moral action is perceived as discretionary, focused on benevolence, and subject to praise while avoidance-based moral action is perceived as mandatory, focused on transgressions, and subject to blame.

It is yet unclear as to whether the relationship between moral conviction and activism is mediated by approach-based or avoidance-based obligation. It is possible that moral obligation is approach-based, such as in cases where an individual's goal is to improve his/her moral self-concept or to improve the lives of others. On the other hand, it is also likely that moral obligation is avoidance-based, whereby people act out against a perceived injustice in order to protect themselves and others from harm. Furthermore, it is also possible that moral obligation is approach-based in some contexts, yet avoidance-based in other contexts. The current research attempted to address these questions in order to provide a clearer picture of the motivational underpinnings of moral obligation.

Goals of the Current Research

The primary goal of the current research was to explore obligation as a mediating variable in the relationship between moral conviction and activism. The current research attempted to replicate the results of previous studies which suggest obligation fully mediates the moral conviction-action link. More importantly, the current research also explored the nature of moral obligation in an attempt to determine if it is more self-based or group based, and more approach-based or avoidance-based.

Previous research exploring obligation as a mediator of the link between moral conviction and activism has used self-report measures of future action intentions. The current study will expand upon this methodology and extend the literature by integrating a more behavioral measure of future action intentions.

This study has four main hypotheses. First, I hypothesize that moral conviction will predict both self-report activist intentions and behavioral action tendencies. Second, I predict that obligation will fully mediate the relationship between moral conviction and activism. Third, I predict moral obligation will be more self-based than group-based. Finally, I predict that participants' sense of moral obligation will be both approach-based and avoidance-based, (Janoff-Bulman et al., 2009).

METHODS

Participants.

Participants were 308 adults recruited through Amazon.com's Mechanical Turk (MTurk). Mechanical Turk is a secure online service where people sign up to complete surveys and other online tasks for small sums of money. Participants were each compensated $0.75 for their time. Demographic questions indicated that participants ranged from 18-79 years of age with an average age of 32.75 years. There were 181 participants who identified as male, 124 who identified as female, and 3 who identified as "other." Additionally, 231 participants identified as White, 30 identified as Asian/Pacific Islander, 22 identified as Hispanic or Latino, 20 identified as Black or African American, 2 identified as Native American and the remaining 3 participants identified as "other."

Procedure

The study was conducted online. For all measures see Appendix A. Participants began by answering basic demographic questions. Participants were then presented with several issues-of-the-day. Participants chose the issue that was most important to them and the issue that was least important to them. Participants were then randomly assigned to one attitude importance condition; that is, participants answered questions about their most important issue, their least important issue, or a separate issue that was randomly selected for them. Participants completed measures assessing their issue-specific attitude strength, moral conviction, proscriptive obligation, prescriptive obligation, intrinsic obligation, extrinsic obligation, and willingness to engage in activism. At the end of the study, participants were debriefed and thanked for their time. Unless noted otherwise, all subsequent measurements

were taken on a five-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (not at all) to 5 (very much). For multi-item scales, responses to all items were averaged.

Measures

Manipulation check: Attitude strength. To ensure that attitude importance differed for the three attitude importance conditions, participants reported the extent to which their position on their selected issue was "important to you," "something that you care a lot about," and "important compared to other issues they you're dealing with right now."

Moral conviction. Participants reported their levels of moral conviction about their selected issue by indicating the extent to which their position on the issue was "a moral stance," "based on a moral principle," "a reflection of their core moral beliefs and convictions," and "connected to their beliefs about fundamental right and wrong."

Obligation to the self. Participants reported their levels of self-based obligation by responding to eight items that tapped into the extent to which they felt they should take action for themselves. Examples include asking participants when considering whether or not to take action the extent to which they felt they had an obligation to "yourself," "your future self" and "to your own code of ethics."

Obligation to the group. Participants reported their levels of group-based obligation by responding to eighteen items that assessed the extent to which they felt they should take action primarily for other people and external influences in their lives. Examples include asking participants when considering whether or not to take action the extent to which they felt they had an obligation to their "country," "community," and "friends."

Avoidance-based obligation. Participants reported their levels of avoidance-based obligation by responding to ten items that assessed the degree to which they felt they had an obligation to take action related to their issue to "prevent things from getting worse."

Approach-based obligation. Participants' levels of approach-based obligation were assessed with twelve items assessing the degree to which they felt they had an obligation to take action related to their issue to "improve things."

Activism. Participants' levels of activism were assessed in two ways. First, participants' reported their activist intentions by indicating how likely they would be from 1 (very unlikely) to 5 (very likely) to engage in various activities ranging from low-cost actions such as "sign[ing] a petition," and "discuss[ing] their position with a family member" to high-cost actions such as "organiz[ing] a protest" and "spend[ing] a weekend going door-to-door asking for donations."

Second, I included a behavior measure of participants' willingness to engage in activism. Specifically, participants read a list of eight action-based websites, and checked the boxes corresponding to websites which they would like to be redirected to after the study. Participants had the option of selecting 0-8 websites and the more websites they checked, the higher their behavioral activism was considered to be.

RESULTS

As described below**,** results indicated that participants did distinguished between self- and other-focused obligation items, but did not distinguish between approach-based and avoidance-based items. Furthermore participants distinguished between low and high cost activism intentions. More importantly, and as can be seen in Figure 1, moral conviction predicted obligation to the self and others, low and high cost activism intentions, and the behavioral measure of activism. Obligation to others also predicted all three types of activism, and obligation to the self predicted low and high cost activism intentions, but not the behavioral measure of activism. Finally, mediation analyses indicated that self-based obligation mediated the relationship between moral conviction and high cost activism intentions and obligation to others mediated the relationship between moral conviction and low cost, as well as high cost activism intentions.

Manipulation Check

To begin, a one-way, between-subjects analysis of variance (ANOVA) tested whether attitude importance differed for participants who answered questions about their self-selected most important issue, self-selected least important issue, and randomly assigned issue. As expected, attitude importance differed for the different attitude importance conditions, $F(2, 05) = 244.51$, $p < .001$. Participants in the most important issue condition reported greater attitude importance ($M = 4.32$, $SD = .67$) than those in the random issue condition ($M = 2.97$, $SD = 1.11$), and the least important issue condition, ($M = 1.66$, $SD = .75$). In summary, analyses indicated that the manipulation was successful; importance condition was therefore included as a control variable in each of the following analyses.

Factor Analyses

Obligation. Next, I tested whether the obligation items loaded on the four predicted factors (i.e., approach-based obligation to self, avoidance-based obligation to self, approach-based obligation to group, and avoidance-based obligation to group). Results of a principal components factor analysis with direct oblimin rotation indicated that this was not the case. Instead, items grouped on only two factors (eigenvalues > 1). Specifically, items related to group-related obligation loaded onto one factor, eigenvalue = 10.20, and items related to the self-related obligation loaded onto a second factor, eigenvalue = 1.52. Contrary to expectations, participants did not distinguish between approach-based and avoidance-based obligation. Therefore, all subsequent analyses were conducted using the variables of obligation to the self and obligation to the group, collapsing across prevention and promotion items.

Activism intentions. An additional principal components factor analysis with direct oblimin rotation tested whether the activism intention items loaded onto separate factors depending on the level of cost associated with the items. Results indicated that items loaded on two different factors (eigenvalues > 1). High cost items loaded onto one factor, eigenvalue = 10.94, and low cost items loaded onto a second factor, eigenvalue = 2.09. Therefore, subsequent analyses distinguished between low cost activism intentions and high cost activism intentions.

Analyses of Predictor Variables

Did moral conviction predict activism? To test the association between moral conviction and activism, I entered moral conviction, importance condition (coded as -1, 0, +1), and the interaction of moral conviction and importance condition into separate

regression analyses to predict the three activism variables (low cost activism intentions, high cost activism intentions, and the behavioral measure). As is evident in Table 1, participants who indicated higher moral conviction about their issue indicated greater intentions to engage in low cost activism and high cost activism than participants who indicated lower moral conviction about their issue. Furthermore, participants who indicated higher moral conviction engaged in more activist behavior (i.e., clicked links to more websites) than participants who indicated lower moral conviction about their issue. Moral conviction predicted activism for participants in the high, low, and randomly assigned issue conditions.[1]

Did moral conviction predict obligation? To test of the relationship between moral conviction and obligation, I entered moral conviction, importance condition, and the interaction of moral conviction and importance condition into two regression analyses to predict (a) obligation to the self and (b) obligation to the group. Participants who indicated higher moral conviction about their issue reported a stronger sense of obligation to themselves and a stronger sense of obligation to others to take action than participants who indicated lower moral conviction (see Table 2). Again, all results were consistent across participants in the high, low, and randomly assigned issues.

Did obligation predict activism? To test whether obligation predicted activism, I conducted two separate sets of regression analyses. For the first set of regression analyses, I entered obligation to the self, importance condition, and the interaction of obligation to the self and importance condition to predict (a) low cost activism intentions, (b) high cost activism intentions, and (c) the behavioral activism. As indicated in Table 3, participants who

[1] Although the moral conviction by attitude importance interaction was significant for low-cost intentions, follow-up analyses indicated that moral conviction did indeed predict low cost intentions for participants in the most important, least important, and randomly assigned issue conditions.

indicated a stronger sense of obligation to themselves were more likely to indicate willingness to engage in low cost activism and high cost activism than participants who indicated a weaker sense of obligation to themselves.[2] Obligation to the self did not have a significant effect on the behavioral measure of activism.

The second set of regression analyses tested whether obligation to others predicted activism. In these analyses, I entered obligation to others, importance condition, and the interaction between obligation to others and importance condition as predictors for (a) low cost activism intentions, (b) high cost activism intentions, and (c) the behavioral measure of activism. Results are displayed in Table 4 and indicated that participants who reported higher levels of obligation to others indicated stronger intentions to engage in low cost activism and high cost activism than participants who reported lower levels of obligation to others.[3] Unlike obligation to the self, obligation to others had a significant effect on the behavioral measure of activism. To summarize, both obligation to the self and obligation to others predicted low cost activism intentions and high cost activism intentions, and obligation to others also predicted behavioral activism.

Mediational Analyses

Next, I tested whether the relationship between moral conviction and (a) low cost activism intentions, (b) high cost activism intentions, and (c) behavioral activism was mediated by obligation to the self and obligation to others. Specifically, I conducted a series

[2] Again, although the obligation by attitude importance interaction was significant for low and high cost intentions, follow-up analyses indicated that obligation to the self predicted each type of activism for participants in the most important, least important, and randomly assigned issue conditions.

[3] Although the obligation to others by attitude condition interaction was significant for low-cost intentions, follow-up analyses indicated that obligation to others predicted low cost intentions for participants in the most important, least important, and randomly assigned issue conditions.

of mediational analyses known using bootstrapping. For each of these analyses, I entered moral conviction as the predictor variable and obligation to the self and obligation to others as the two proposed mediators. I entered low cost activism intentions, high cost activism intentions, and behavioral activism as the outcome variables. Attitude condition was included as a control variable. As can be seen in Table 5, the lower and upper bounds of the 95% bias corrected and accelerated confidence intervals for obligation to the self did not include zero for high cost activism intentions, indicating that obligation to the self significantly mediated the relation between moral conviction and high cost activism. As evidenced in Table 5, the confidence interval for obligation to others did not include zero for low cost activism intentions nor for high cost activism intentions—indicating that obligation to others significantly mediated the relation between moral conviction and both low and high cost activism. In summary, and as can be seen in Figure 1, moral conviction predicted obligation to the self which, in turn, predicted high cost activism. Furthermore, moral conviction also predicted obligation to others which, in turn, predicted both low and high cost activism.

DISCUSSION

Taken together, analyses provide strong evidence that moral conviction significantly predicts activism, even across different levels of attitude importance. Additionally, factor analyses indicated that participants did not distinguish between approach-based and avoidance-based obligation, but did meaningfully differentiate obligation to the self and obligation to the group.

Of more importance, the current study indicated that moral conviction predicted obligation to the self and obligation to the group. In turn, obligation to the self predicted low- and high-cost activist intentions. Furthermore, obligation to others predicted low cost activist intentions, high cost activist intentions, and activist behavior. Although, obligation to the self did not mediate the association between moral conviction and low cost intentions, it did mediate the association between moral conviction and high cost intentions. Moreover, obligation to the group significantly mediated the relationships between moral conviction and both low and high cost activist intentions. Taken together, these findings suggest that contrary to expectations, the relationship between moral conviction and activism may in some cases be due more strongly to obligation to act on behalf of one's group, rather than to a sense of obligation to act on behalf of oneself.

Theoretical Implications

The finding that approach-based and avoidance-based obligation did not load onto separate factor analyses was somewhat unexpected. The obligation factor analyses distinguished between items related to the self and items related to the group, but did not distinguish between approach-based and avoidance-based items. This finding can be construed as inconsistent with a body of research on proscriptive (avoidance-based) and

prescriptive (approach-based) moral regulation (Janoff-Bulman et al., 2009). Such research typically manipulates approach-based and avoidance-based motivations, and finds different downstream consequences. However, the current study suggests that when approach-based and avoidance-based moral action are measured (rather than manipulated), they are so closely intercorrelated that people perceived them as equivalent. Nonetheless, the finding that approach-based and avoidance-based obligation were psychologically indistinguishable is consistent with previous findings that suggest both types of moral regulation are similarly important for moral action.

The current research also suggests that obligation to the group may be a more consistent mediator than obligation to the self in the relationship between moral conviction and activism. Although unexpected, this finding is consistent with previous research that suggests a sense of identification with one's ingroup mediates the relationship between moral conviction and activism (Van Zomeren et al., 2010). It may be the case that identifying more strongly with one's ingroup creates a stronger sense of obligation to act on behalf of that group, perhaps in an effort to maintain a morally upstanding status within the group. The premise that people take moral action on behalf of their group is also consistent with the Social Intuitionist Model (SIM; Haidt, 2001) and the Moral Foundations Theory (MFT; Graham et al., in press),. Both theories suggest that morality in humans evolved, in part, to facilitate communal living. Both theories argue that human beings are predisposed to recognize certain moral scenarios due to their implications for group living. For example, according to MFT, human beings are predisposed to recognize situations involving cheating as morally relevant because earlier in the evolutionary history of humans, cooperation between group members was especially important for the group's survival. If the group did

not distribute resources in a fair manner, the group's cohesiveness would suffer. If humans are a product of their evolutionary history, it follows logically that human beings should still possess an innate desire to maintain a positive moral image within their ingroup by taking moral action on behalf of the group.

Nonetheless, the pattern of results that emerged from the current study does not suggest that people are not self-motivated to take moral action. In fact, the finding that obligation to the self mediates the relationship between moral conviction and high cost activism indicates that obligation to the self is also an important part of the moral conviction-action link. It may seem counter-intuitive that obligation to the self mediates the relationship between moral conviction and high cost but not low cost activism. However, it is possible that low-cost activism does not have a strong enough effect to meaningfully impact people's moral self-concept. For instance, engaging in high-cost activism like going door-to-door asking for donations to support one's position on a moral issue may make a person feel as if they are a morally-upstanding individual. On the other hand, engaging in low-cost activism like signing a petition or having a discussion with a friend might not have the same self-validating effect because such actions require little self-sacrifice or energy. Such an explanation is consistent with research that suggests that people engage in moral actions in an effort to improve moral self-worth, and that high-cost moral action exerts a greater influence on perceptions of moral self-worth than low-cost moral action (Sachdeva, Iliev & Medin, 2009).

Practical Applications

The findings of the current research have a number of practical applications. For example, these findings can be applied to campaigns meant to motivate positive forms of

activism such as political and social engagement. Findings of this study indicate that people whom design such campaigns should especially focus on trying to foster a sense of obligation to the group. Obligation to the group not only mediated the relationship between moral conviction and high and low cost activism, it also predicted the behavioral measure. Such findings suggest that campaigns meant to motivate activism will likely be more effective if they not only focus on convincing people to act out of self-related interests, but also convince people to act out of a sense of duty to their community, friends, and country. Because the activism measures in this study were quite varied, the pattern of results applies to many forms of activism including voting, protesting, and volunteering.

Future Directions

The findings of this study, though robust, suggest many directions for future research. For example, the current study was correlational in nature. Future studies should use an experimental design to try to replicate the finding that obligation to the self and obligation to the group mediate the relationship between moral conviction and activism. Such a study might attempt to manipulate a sense of obligation to take action in order to (a) provide stronger support for these findings and (b) determine if it is possible to fulfill or manipulate a sense of moral obligation. It may be the case that when people feel morally about an issue, they feel obligated to take action on behalf of their position on the issue regardless of what actions they have engaged in regarding their position in the past.

Future studies might also refine the obligation measures used in the current research. The attempts to capture approach-based and avoidance-based motivation in this study may have included items that were somewhat too focused on material outcomes because they include the word “things” (i.e. Participants were asked how much they felt “an obligation to

prevent *things* from getting worse" and "an obligation to improve *things*"). For some of the questions, particularly the obligation to the self items, this may create a frame that signaled material self-interests. For instance, the question "when considering whether or not to take action to support your position on [the issue] how much do you feel an obligation to take action to improve things for yourself?" may make the participant feel as if engaging in activism would be a self-serving material act. Future research should address this limitation by attempting to replicate the findings with items that capture obligation to the self and obligation to the group without reference to improving or protecting "things."

Conclusions

In conclusion, the current study re-affirms the finding that obligation matters in the relationship between moral conviction and activism—and that obligation to both the self and the group motivate people to engage in moral action. Although Edward Snowden's true motives for leaking information about the NSA's surveillance programs may never be entirely clear, it seems likely that he was acting out of a sense of moral obligation. On one hand, he may have been acting out of an obligation to uphold his moral self-concept. On the other hand, Snowden may have been acting out of a sense of duty to his country and to his fellow citizens. Though it is impossible to ascertain Snowden's true motives, this study provides evidence that morally motivated actions do occur due to a sense of self-based obligation, but occur even more consistently due to a sense of group-based obligation. In short, a sense of group-based obligation may be the most robust underlying factor in the relationship between moral conviction and activism.

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Table 1

Moral Conviction and Activism

	Low Cost Intentions				High Cost Intentions				Behavior			
	B	*SE*	*t*	*p*	*B*	*SE*	*t*	*p*	*B*	*SE*	*t*	*p*
Moral Conviction (MC)	**.28**	**.04**	**6.36**	**.000**	**.30**	**.04**	**6.84**	**.000**	**.14**	**.06**	**2.53**	**.012**
Attitude Condition (AC)	**.41**	**.07**	**5.83**	**.000**	**.39**	**.07**	**5.70**	**.000**	.09	.09	1.00	.317
MC X AC	**-.14**	**.05**	**-2.71**	**.007**	.00	.05	.09	.932	.03	.07	.42	.674

Note. Significant effects are in bold.

Table 2

Moral Conviction and Obligation

	Obligation to Self				Obligation to Others			
	B	*SE*	*t*	*p*	*B*	*SE*	*t*	*p*
Moral Conviction (MC)	**.37**	**.05**	**7.76**	**.000**	**.42**	**.05**	**9.26**	**.000**
Attitude Condition (AC)	**.77**	**.08**	**10.21**	**.000**	**.51**	**.07**	**7.05**	**.000**
MC X AC	-.03	.06	-.52	.604	-.06	.05	-1.19	.235

Note. Significant effects are in bold.

Table 3

Obligation to the Self and Activism

	Low Cost Intentions				High Cost Intentions				Behavior			
	B	*SE*	*t*	*p*	*B*	*SE*	*t*	*p*	*B*	*SE*	*t*	*p*
Obligation to Self (OBS)	**.36**	**.05**	**7.56**	**.000**	**.39**	**.05**	**.50**	**.000**	.09	.06	1.46	.146
Attitude Condition (AC)	**.25**	**.08**	**3.29**	**.001**	**.22**	**.07**	**2.89**	**.004**	.11	.10	1.07	.284
OBS X AC	**-.20**	**.05**	**-4.00**	**.000**	**-.14**	**.05**	**-2.97**	**.003**	-.12	.07	-1.78	.08

Note. Significant effects are in bold.

Table 4

Obligation to Others and Activism

	Low Cost Intentions				High Cost Intentions				Behavior			
	B	*SE*	*t*	*p*	*B*	*SE*	*t*	*p*	*B*	*SE*	*t*	*p*
Obligation to Others (OBO)	**.47**	**.05**	**10.40**	**.000**	**.46**	**.05**	**10.05**	**.000**	**.14**	**.06**	**2.24**	**.03**
Attitude Condition (AC)	**.24**	**.05**	**3.60**	**.000**	**.25**	**.07**	**3.73**	**.000**	.09	.09	.91	.36
OBO X AC	**-.16**	**.05**	**-3.15**	**.002**	-.00	.05	-.03	.976	-.04	.07	-.57	.57

Note. Significant effects are in bold.

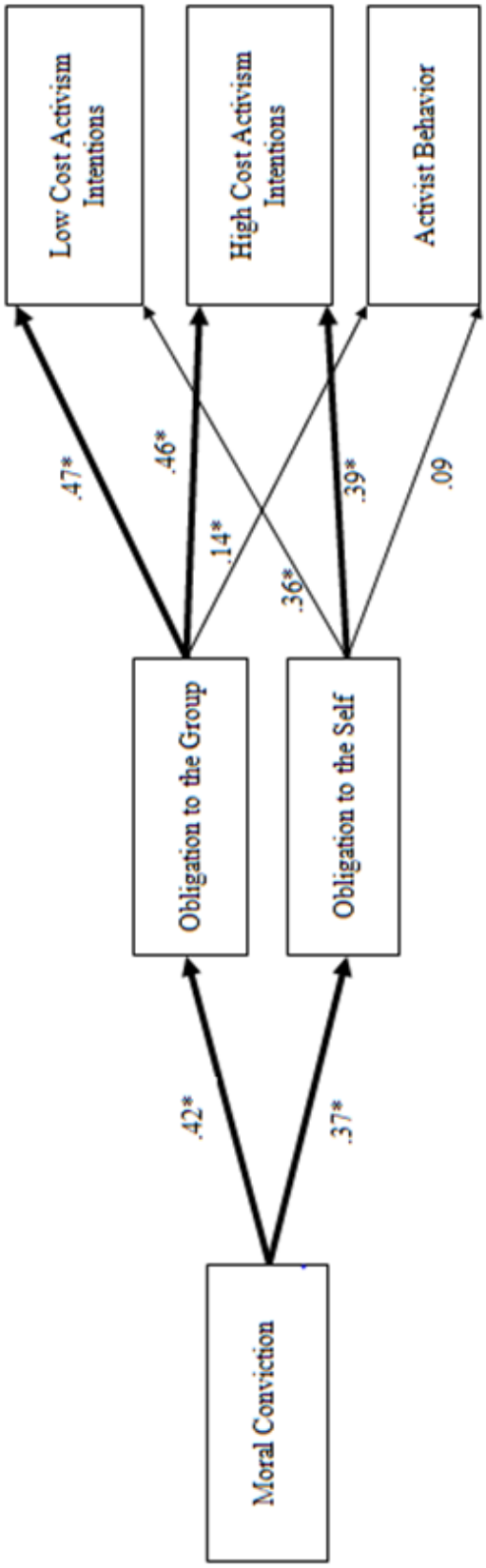
Table 5

The Bootstrap Coefficients and Lower and Upper Bounds of the 95% Bias Corrected and Accelerated Confidence Intervals for the Indirect effect of Moral Conviction on Activism through Obligation

	MC → Obligation → Activism					
	Low Cost Activism Intentions		High Cost Activism Intentions		Activism Behavior	
	Obligation to Self	Obligation to Other	Obligation to Self	Obligation to Other	Obligation to Self	Obligation to Other
Boot Coeff.	.0343	**.1627**	**.0622**	**.1258**	-.0006	.0375
Lower Bound	-.0063	**.1056**	**.0212**	**.0752**	-.0662	-.0270
Upper Bound	.0789	**.2303**	**.1161**	**.1927**	.0586	.1127

Note. For bolded columns, the confidence interval does not include 0, indicating a significant indirect effect.

Figure 1



Note. *Indicates significant regression coefficients. Significant mediation pathways are indicated by bold lines.

APPENDIX

What is your gender?

❍Male
❍Female
❍Other _____

How old are you? _____

Do you have children?

❍Yes
❍No

Are you a United States citizen?

❍Yes
❍No

What is the highest level of education you have completed?

❍No schooling completed
❍Nursery school to 8th grade
❍Some high school, no diploma
❍High school graduate, diploma or equivalent
❍Some college credit, no degree
❍Trade/technical/vocational training
❍Associate degree
❍Bachelor's degree
❍Master's degree
❍Professional degree
❍Doctorate degree

What is your employment status?

❍Employed for wages
❍Self-employed
❍Unemployed and looking for work
❍Unemployed but not currently looking for work
❍A homemaker
❍A student
❍Military
❍Retired
❍Unable to work

What is your ethnicity?
❍White
❍Hispanic or Latino
❍Black or African American
❍Native American
❍Asian / Pacific Islander
❍Other

Which of the following ***best* describes your household situation?**
❍My household has a hard time buying the things we need.
❍My household has just enough money for the things we need.
❍My household has no problem buying the things we need and sometimes we can also buy special things.
❍My household has enough money to buy pretty much anything we want.

What is your political identification?

Strong Democrat	Democrat	Moderate Democrat	Moderate/Other	Moderate Republican	Republican	Strong Republican
❍	❍	❍	❍	❍	❍	❍

[Participants who report identifying as either a Democrat or Republican will respond to the following]
How strongly do you identify as being a [Democrat or Republican]?

Slightly	Somewhat	Very
❍	❍	❍

[Participants who report identifying as moderate/other will respond to the following]
Please select the item that best describes you:

❍ I am closer to being a Democrat
❍I am closer to being a Republican
❍I am close to neither

Below is a list of issues currently facing the United States. Please choose the ONE issue which you consider to be the MOST important to you as well as the ONE issue which you consider to be the LEAST important to you.

- Abortion
- The Economy / Unemployment
- Education
- Energy
- The Environment
- Gun Control
- Healthcare
- Immigration
- Social Security
- The War on Terror
- Legalization of Marijuana

[Participants will complete the following set of questions for either their most important issue, their least important issue, or an issue randomly chosen by the program]

To what extent is your position on [X]...

	Not at all	Slightly	Moderately	Much	Very much
…important to you?	❍	❍	❍	❍	❍
...something that you care a lot about?	❍	❍	❍	❍	❍
...important compared to others issues that you're dealing with right now?	❍	❍	❍	❍	❍
…connected to your beliefs about fundamental right and wrong?	❍	❍	❍	❍	❍
... a reflection of your core moral beliefs and convictions?	❍	❍	❍	❍	❍
... a moral stance?	❍	❍	❍	❍	❍
... based on a moral principle?	❍	❍	❍	❍	❍

When considering whether or not to take action to support your position on [X], how much do you feel…

	Not at all	Slightly	Moderately	Much	Very Much
...an obligation to improve things for yourself?	❍	❍	❍	❍	❍
…an obligation to improve things for your future self?	❍	❍	❍	❍	❍
…an obligation to improve things for the person you want to become?	❍	❍	❍	❍	❍
…an obligation to improve things for others?	❍	❍	❍	❍	❍
…an obligation to improve things for the rest of the world?	❍	❍	❍	❍	❍
…an obligation to improve things for your country?	❍	❍	❍	❍	❍
…an obligation to improve things for your friends?	❍	❍	❍	❍	❍
…an obligation to improve things for your community?	❍	❍	❍	❍	❍
…an obligation to prevent things from getting worse for yourself?	❍	❍	❍	❍	❍
…an obligation to prevent things from getting worse for your future self?	❍	❍	❍	❍	❍
…an obligation to prevent things from getting worse for the person you want to become?	❍	❍	❍	❍	❍
…an obligation to prevent things from getting worse for	❍	❍	❍	❍	❍

others?					
…an obligation to prevent things from getting worse for the rest of the world?	❍	❍	❍	❍	❍
…an obligation to prevent things from getting worse for your country?	❍	❍	❍	❍	❍
…an obligation to prevent things from getting worse for your friends?	❍	❍	❍	❍	❍
…an obligation to prevent things from getting worse for your community?	❍	❍	❍	❍	❍

When considering whether or not to take action to stand up for your position on [X], to whom do you feel a sense of obligation to take action? Please rank them in order from 1 (most obligated) to 8 (least obligated).

____yourself
____your family
____your friends
____your community
____your spouse
____your children or if you have none, children in general
____the entire world
____your country

How likely would you be to do each of the following actions to support your position on [X]?

	Very Unlikely	Unlikely	Somewhat Likely	Likely	Very Likely
Sign a petition	❍	❍	❍	❍	❍
Attend an event focused on the issue	❍	❍	❍	❍	❍
Distribute flyers or information about the issue	❍	❍	❍	❍	❍
Volunteer to collect signatures on a	❍	❍	❍	❍	❍

petition					
Attend a protest	❍	❍	❍	❍	❍
Vote for those whom agree with your position	❍	❍	❍	❍	❍
Discuss your position with a friend	❍	❍	❍	❍	❍
Discuss your position with a family member	❍	❍	❍	❍	❍
Discuss your position with a stranger					
Discuss your position with a coworker					
Organize a protest	❍	❍	❍	❍	❍
Post about the issue on social media / send an email about the issue	❍	❍	❍	❍	❍
Contact your representative in government	❍	❍	❍	❍	❍
Form a club focused on the issue (at school, work, library, etc.).	❍	❍	❍	❍	❍
Join a club focused on the issue	❍	❍	❍	❍	❍
Spend a **weekend** going door-to-door asking for donations in your neighborhood	❍	❍	❍	❍	❍
Spend an **hour** going door-to-door asking for donations in your neighborhood	❍	❍	❍	❍	❍
Speak out in a group	❍	❍	❍	❍	❍
Post signs in front of your home	❍	❍	❍	❍	❍
Place a bumper sticker on your car	❍	❍	❍	❍	❍

Below is a list of action-based websites which you will have the opportunity to visit after the completion of this study in order to support your position on [X]. Please check the boxes for websites which you would like to be redirected to after this study. You may select as few or as many as you would like.

- ☐ Change.org online petitions Sign or create petitions about the issue!
- ☐ Facebook.com "Like" our Facebook group!
- ☐ Follow our page on Twitter!
- ☐ Gofundme.com Make an online donation to support your position!
- ☐ Votesmart.org Choose political candidates who agree with your position!
- ☐ Govtrack.us Keep tabs on your representatives in Congress and learn about pending legislation!
- ☐ Takeaction.com Find ways to volunteer in your community!
- ☐ Actioncallers.org Make phone calls to support your position!