

Moral Hypocrisy: The Antecedents and Outcomes

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Abstract: Moral hypocrisy refers to an act of having different moral standards for self and others (higher for others) and can also be manifested as showing good moral motives, but ultimately choosing to act more in one's own interest. In real life, these people are called "hypocrites". Starting from the literature of the past two decades, this article makes a systematic review of moral hypocrisy from the aspects of the definition, formation mechanism, influencing factors and consequences. Firstly, the concept, mechanism and manifestation of moral hypocrisy are discussed. Moreover, previous studies have found that the character of moral principles, emotions, individual traits, and cognitive components were the main influencing factors of moral hypocrisy. Moreover, moral hypocrisy also affects individuals' moral judgement and social justice. The discussion and analysis of the antecedents and outcomes in this article offer some implications for further research and practice. More systematic and thorough research with ecological benefits needs to be conducted.

Keywords: moral hypocrisy, moral judgment, emotions, cognition

1. Introduction

Moral hypocrisy refers to the fact that although individuals show good morality in front of others, they actually make immoral choices [1]. There are also studies based on another description for follow-up research: moral hypocrisy is considered to be a behavior that has different standards for self and others [2]. But no matter which kind of research is mentioned above, it refers to a kind of bad moral behavior. We often call such individuals "hypocrites". Individuals have certain selfish tendencies, but moral hypocrisy is more serious than the negative consequences of frankly admitting that one has selfish traits. Whether it is an individual or a group, there is a phenomenon of moral hypocrisy. For example, it is more difficult for an individual to accept the unfair behavior of other individuals or individuals in other groups. Then this consequence can be easily deduced, that is, moral hypocrisy will bring Come to the differences between groups [2]. Regarding moral hypocrisy, existing studies mainly focus on the causes and mechanisms of moral hypocrisy, as well as the influencing factors such as moral principles, emotions, personal characteristics, and cognitive processes of moral hypocrisy. Therefore, the integration and analysis of research on moral hypocrisy is also very important.

2. Methodology

Use the databases Web of Science, CNKI, and Google Scholar to search for literature. The search keywords are as follows: moral hypocrisy, hypocrisy, hypocritical morality, immoral behavior, and so on. The screening criteria were: (i) included one of the keywords above, with moral hypocrisy at the core. (ii) In addition to the classic literature, the time is controlled within nearly 20 years.

3. Literature Review

3.1. The Concept, Mechanism and Manifestation of Moral Hypocrisy

The earliest empirical study of moral hypocrisy began with a classic experiment. This study is the first to demonstrate the existence of situations of moral hypocrisy. This is a moral dilemma that can fully reflect the conflict between one's own interests and the interests of others, but is very real, effective, simple and easy to understand, and allows every subject to have the same understanding of morally correct choices. By asking participants to assign fun stimuli and neutral-to-uninteresting games to themselves and others, the following results were obtained: In the experiment, only 17 of the 80 participants assigned other participants to the positive-consequences task. Of the 18 participants in Study 2 and Study 3, who satisfied morality by tossing a coin, 17 of them ended up completing the positive consequence task [1]. It is worth mentioning that individuals with moral hypocrisy tend to behave ethically in the eyes of others, but in fact, choose immoral behavior. In Batson's experiment, the subjects of moral hypocrisy were not those who directly assigned themselves better tasks without flipping a coin, but the other half who flipped a coin and 90% claimed to have done better. In all three studies, the results clearly indicated the presence of moral hypocrisy, not moral integrity [1].

Moral hypocrisy also has its many manifestations in real life. A situation similar to moral hypocrisy exists in environmentally sustainable tourism [3]. Through interviews with members of environmental organizations, the researchers found that environmental activists are aware of the environmental consequences of tourism and can also capture the potential negative impacts of tourism on the environment. However, during the interview process, environmentalists also showed a clear attitude - Behavioral gaps, manifested as downward comparisons, that is, the perception that one's own behavior is more acceptable than one's own or that of others [3]. In addition to the application in tourism, there are similar behaviors in enterprises. Moral hypocrisy in business is when a business pretends to be more noble than it really is. For example, the masses claiming to cheat on emissions claim to care about the environment, and Wells Fargo claims to do everything ethically but secretly cheats on its customers [4].

Researchers believe that for moral hypocrisy, it is more important for us to explore its psychological process-being able to clearly identify morality, make one's own motives appear moral, and, when possible, still consider serving oneself [1].

Regarding moral hypocrisy, some researchers are devoted to exploring its formation mechanism. Because the external manifestation of moral hypocrisy is immoral behavior, and immoral behavior is often associated with moral judgment. Therefore, some scholars investigate the mechanism of moral hypocrisy based on the dual-processing theory of moral judgment and believe that moral hypocrisy also has two processing processes: intuition and cognition. The researchers conducted two experiments by manipulating time pressure and activating different ways of thinking and found that moral hypocrisy is jointly affected by the two systems of reasoning and intuition, and analytical thinking plays an important role in activating moral hypocrisy, thus providing a basis for moral hypocrisy. The dual-processing model provides an empirical basis [1].

We often judge people with moral hypocrisy negatively. So, what is the reason for the public to judge morally hypocritical groups negatively? Some studies believe this may be related to the theory of false signals produced by moral hypocrisy [5]. The researchers found that when no other conditions were available to judge a person's moral behavior, the behavior of condemning others' morality was more indicative of a person's moral character than the behavior of directly stating moral values. Furthermore, this also proves that what moral hypocrites actually give is a wrong signal, which will win them more improper reputation benefits and is also more misleading [6]. Follow-up studies have also proved that this is also manifested in the evaluation of moral hypocrites will be lower than that of liars in moral behavior and direct wrongdoers who have no attitude expression [5]. By exploring the validity of the false signal theory, the researchers also introduced honest hypocrites' individuals who criticise others for the behavior they engage in but admit that they sometimes commit the behavior they condemn [4]. Negative judgments of honest hypocrites were largely eliminated, the study found, demonstrating that negative judgments of moral hypocrisy disappeared when condemning others for their moral behavior was no longer a false signal and not because of disclosure. To offset the negative evaluation by increasing credit for one's own bad moral behavior, it is necessary to let the exposure negate the wrong signal represented by the previous corresponding condemnation. This also proves that when people judge hypocrites not only because of their inconsistent words and deeds, but also by the influence of signaling theory [5].

But at the same time, not all moral hypocrites are judged negatively. Studies have shown that there are no perfect people in the world. Expressing one's moral attitude will be more encouraged by the public than silence, but most people do not have a perfect moral record. If one wants to reduce others' negative evaluation of oneself, individuals need to maximize the reputational benefits directly brought about by one's moral participation and minimize the reputational costs brought about by imperfect moral behavior [7].

Some scholars have studied the physiological aspects of moral hypocrisy behavior: Since self-centeredness and concern for others play an important role in the deceptive decision-making of moral hypocrisy, the researchers modulated right temporoparietal junction (rTPJ) brain activity and Brain stimulation with cranial direct current stimulation (tDCS), and via dictator games, found that enhanced rTPJ activity reduced impression management-induced deception, but not moral hypocrisy and unfairness, by promoting attention to others and attenuating nonmaterial egocentric motivation self-deception [8], so moral hypocrisy is not the same as the deception induced by impression management, but is related to some kind of self-deception.

The researchers further explored the mechanism of moral hypocrisy in the 1999 experiment on moral hypocrisy, which correlates with the results of physiological studies. Researchers believe that moral self-deception is a prerequisite for moral hypocrisy [9]. However, the researcher further defined self-deception. By considering the different manifestations of self-deception, he found that self-deception in moral hypocrisy does not misunderstand that one's behavior is moral but avoids comparing one's own behavior and moral standards. In comparison, the researchers suspect that these people who take morally hypocritical actions are likely to be in a state of "cognitive suspension" [9].

Some scholars have also explored moral hypocrisy and its manifestations and believe that moral hypocrisy is likely to be one of the reasons why apparently moral people fail to act morally, but it cannot be ruled out that it is the role of excessive integrity, that is, self-interest and moral integrity produce conflict. Even if a person sincerely intends to practice moral behavior, the moral cost cannot override self-interest, leading to immoral behavior [10].

3.2. Factors Affecting Moral Hypocrisy

Therefore, what factors influence moral hypocrisy? Many scholars have conducted research on this. First, it may be relevant to examine the character of moral principles in moral hypocrisy experiments.

An early study found that the more general and abstract a moral principle is, the more susceptible it is to rationalizations, thereby increasing manifestations of moral hypocrisy [1]. There is also research evidence, whether it is to directly adopt a more abstract point of view to judge the immoral behavior of others and oneself, or to indirectly induce an abstract point of view to make a judgment by manipulating the time distance from the experiment, or to induce abstract or concrete ways of thinking (completely independent Judging after experimental materials), abstract views on moral issues will increase the degree of moral hypocrisy [11]. Even, further research found that the impact of abstraction on hypocrisy is moderated by the degree of moral flexibility [11].

Second, emotions can also affect moral hypocrisy. It can be reasoned, because there will be a process of moral judgment in moral hypocrisy, and emotions will have an impact on moral judgment. Therefore, some researchers have studied the two discrete emotions of pride and gratitude, using scenes involving achievements in a team environment to elicit pride and gratitude, thereby providing relevant practical meaning, and found that pride increases the performance of moral hypocrisy, while gratitude will not [12]. This once again demonstrates that moral hypocrisy is related to assessable self-other similarity, as research has also found evidence that pride (as opposed to gratitude) is associated with lower levels of self-other similarity [12]. Studies have also explored the effects of anger, guilt, and jealousy on moral hypocrisy, and concluded that anger increases moral hypocrisy, guilt eliminates moral hypocrisy and jealousy reverses moral hypocrisy. Research further shows that specific emotions affect moral decision-making even when real money is at stake, while emotions of the same valence have opposite effects on moral judgments [13].

In addition to emotional factors, individual traits can also influence moral hypocrisy. Based on the theory of social value orientation, scholars have studied how individual differences affect deception in moral hypocrisy through the dictator game. The results show that people with selfish tendencies are more hypocritical than those with prosocial tendencies, especially when faced with social image problems [14]. Analysis by establishing a Bayesian framework shows that the presence of selfish motives does increase the inference of hypocrisy, independent of changes in behavior itself [15]. Self-awareness also has an impact on moral hypocrisy, but the mechanism of the impact is more complicated. Some studies have shown that the moral hypocrisy effect will be eliminated by letting the subjects make moral decision-making behaviors when they face themselves in front of the mirror [9]. Therefore, individuals with high moral hypocrisy may have a high tolerance for differences in behavioral standards [9]. However, the clarity of moral standards will have a moderating effect: when moral standards present a certain degree of ambiguity before action, self-awareness no longer increases the consistency of behavior and standards. On the contrary, it will in turn, increase the consistency of standards and behavior, and produce less moral behavior [9]. There have also been studies examining the impact of narcissism, a personal trait, on moral hypocrisy. Through a questionnaire survey of 200 employees in the financial industry, it is found that individual narcissism can positively predict the level of moral hypocrisy, and it is the level of machismo rather than impression management that plays a mediating role between narcissism and moral hypocrisy. Further analysis also found that dialectical thinking moderates the relationship between narcissism and moral hypocrisy-for people with low levels of dialectical thinking, narcissism positively affects moral hypocrisy; Love does not affect moral hypocrisy [16]. It has also been shown that power also increases moral hypocrisy. Those with power condemn others for cheating, but they also cheat more on themselves, and the powerful judge the moral behavior of others more strictly than they judge their own moral behavior [17]. An interesting finding is that the effect of power on moral hypocrisy depends on the legitimacy of power: when power is illegitimate, holders of illegitimate power judge their own behavior more strictly than they judge the behavior of others [17].

There are also studies that focus on the cognitive component of moral hypocrisy. When a number string memory task was used to change the cognitive constraints, the researchers found that moral

hypocrisy disappeared under the cognitive constraints [18], which shows that moral hypocrisy requires more cognitive resources and it is a will bias rather than an automatic bias [18]. So, will the subjects have different perceptions of different situations in the experimental site and thus affect moral hypocrisy? In discussing the influence of the presence of strangers and their behavior on individual moral hypocrisy, the study uses the method of experimentation, setting up a donation situation with college students as the subjects, and the results show that: the mere presence or hypocrisy of strangers cannot inhibit the donation situation. The moral hypocrisy of the individual and the true and kind behavior of stranger's present can effectively restrain the moral hypocrisy of the individual in the donation situation [19].

3.3. Consequences of Moral Hypocrisy

It can be obtained from the definition that individuals with moral hypocrisy will be negatively affected by others, but moral hypocrisy can also affect many fields. Studies have shown that the moral hypocrisy of enterprises will increase the negative behavior of the enterprise by increasing consumers' negative emotions [20]. Previous studies have also proved that the abstract expression of morality will increase the behavior of moral hypocrisy. So, the researchers reasoned, people who regularly think about moral issues in an abstract way are more prone to hypocrisy. This can have very bad consequences, as those who often base themselves on a set of abstract rules, such as judges or police officers (those whom we expect to behave ethically), are themselves the most susceptible to hypocrisy [11], which may affect social justice.

Studies have also shown that moral hypocrites with higher general ability receive negative evaluations than hypocrites with lower general ability, and the perception of ability is an important factor in determining how much moral anger is held against moral hypocrites. Impressions of competence may lead people to apply different standards of justice to the same form of moral hypocrisy, predicting that this effect could have implications for a range of social settings, such as those compared in courtrooms or other judicial judgments [6]. This requires the relevant personnel to constantly reflect on whether their trial has been affected by the ability of the subject and how to use facts to assist judgment more objectively. For researchers, the continuous exploration of moral hypocrisy is also the impact of the phenomenon of moral hypocrisy itself.

4. Implications

To summarize the findings in the study: Some studies found that people with high social responsibility did not exhibit less moral hypocrisy than socially responsible people, but the attribution of responsibility significantly predicted moral hypocrisy [3]. Does this prove that the sense of social responsibility measured by the scale tends to be explicit, and even the superficially high sense of social responsibility (showing one's own high moral standards in the group) is the prerequisite for moral hypocrisy? Nevertheless, what about the part measured by the responsibility attribution scale that tends to be more consistent with the implicit measure?

Measures for reducing moral hypocrisy: In the previous research on individual differences in moral hypocrisy, scholars also proposed measures for reducing deceitful behavior in hypocrisy. First, identify whether the individual is selfish or prosocial. Second, for prosocial inclined individuals, there can be a cost of emphasizing moral principles or deceiving others. However, for people with selfish tendencies, it may be more effective to emphasize the importance of others' opinions or behavioral impressions of their behavior [14].

Limitations of the above studies: among the studies conducted with the experimental method, except for the study that assigned two tasks in 1997, other studies may only allow participants to study moral hypocrisy in hypothetical rather than actual behavior, which may cause certain problems.

Reduced ecological effects. There are also many research tasks that compare with the experimental materials of the predecessors, tending to public moral speeches and private violations of morality, and have not studied the degree of violation of morality. In the future, the selection of moral materials can be more diversified.

5. Conclusion

Moral hypocrisy is very common in various fields, and scholars all over the world are curious about it and have conducted various research on the causes, characteristics, mechanisms, influencing factors and consequences of moral hypocrisy. However, the current research on moral hypocrisy could be better, the research angle can be expanded, and the ecological benefits of research experiments need to be improved. In the future, with the efforts of researchers, research in the field of moral hypocrisy can become more systematic and thorough.

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